

Peggy Kennedy Her own marital status, work i.d. 1.1. POST-WAR

I stayed home with the babies up to the time that they were about three and four. I really didn't go back to work because I wanted to go back to work, I went back to work cause we were broke.

At first my husband didn't like my working, but he accepted it as a reality. Stewart has always been unusual in that as long as we were both working, we shared the work at home. It wasn't the fact that I had to do the full load at home and the full load at work, like most women did, even progressive women. My family viewed women working as a matter of course. At the time I was raised it wasn't that unusual, maybe just a little before my generation. Women were raised with the idea that you're gonna have a career, that you're not gonna just be at home and a mother, this is the first women's lib movement, that I came just after, but my mother was really affected by it. She was a very independent woman. It was the Depression that made her work full-time for a living, but she always thought it was a very respectable thing to do. Although in my youth, when we had a fair amount of money, she used to fantasize about my being a lady of leisure. I doubt if she ever really believed it, but then she used to make up all kinds of things.

It was just awful finding someone to look after the kids. There was just no daycare. The kids were three and four and I had a succession of inept people. Once I had a young fellow that was in from the logging camps, and he was a really nice boy. He used to come and get the kids in the morning, and dress them and change them and wheel them up to his mum's for the day. (Laughs.) So that was an emergency operation. I had a bunch of young girls; I'd put an ad in the paper, and try to pick the kindest of the people that applied, that I thought would be nice to the kids. Even if they left the house a mess! The kiddies' clothes were all dirty, the kiddies were all dirty when I came home.

So long as they were happy and they were kind to them.

Eventually, I got good at this and I found a very nice woman, who's raised her own family, a middle-aged woman, who was an ~~o~~^sbsessive-compulsive woman. I told her, "Your job isn't to tidy, not housework, just keep the kids busy and happy." But she tidied everything, the kind of person who couldn't walk into a room without tidying it up, and cleaning it. She was a gem.

Peggy Kennedy Marital status of women in Boeing Aircraft 1.1.
Impact on work i.d.

Women were single and married, about fifty-fifty, as far as I can remember. They were mostly quite young. There was a lot of married women who had no idea of making a career, but whose husbands were overseas or whose husbands were working in the shipyards, in Boeing's, and thought, "Well, this is one way we'll be able to get ahead." Having lived through the Depression. Now their husbands finally had a steady job, and they could get a job to get a stake and buy a house. This was the dream of a lot of women, who went to work during the war. It wasn't the idea that this is women's lib, "We've got the right to work and we're going to work." People thought that, "We've got the chance to work, and we've been poor for so long, we'd just like to get ahead, get a bit of money put aside."

During the war women left children with relatives mostly. Most of the women I worked with were younger, they didn't have kids. I think it was still general that people with families stayed home.

During the Depression, when I worked in shops, the women who worked did have a certain amount of independence, and a lot of women who worked in the war effort didn't do it for independence. They wanted to go home and be housewives again. Whether they found they could do that after working, is another thing. I think a lot of them, perhaps found that they couldn't.

Peggy Kennedy Her job in plant 1.
Shifts

I started as a stores clerk, and I changed to being a shop clerk very early, which is a kind of secretary to the foreman. ^(You?) do the typing and send out the memos and draw up the shift-change lists, and so on.

Boeing was shift work, it was three shifts. But being a shop clerk I had two shifts, morning and afternoon. It was nice in a way, because I got to know all the people on all the shifts. I'd be with one shift for dayshift and I'd change along with them for afternoons and work. When they went to graveyard I'd get with another different group of people for days, so I was with different people for two months at a time. They were monthly swing shifts.

There were swing shifts because people didn't want to stay on afternoons or graveyards. They couldn't get steady workers to go so Boeing just swung them all, they all had to take their turn. Monthly swing isn't as bad as weekly or two-weekly swing shift. I don't know why industries still do that, it's devastating to the constitution. It took about a week to recover, to get your body rhythm in order. And three weeks later you were going through it all again.

Sub-Assembly:

Sub-assembly might do a blister, or Lucite housing for the cockpit. Although I never worked in the main plant, I worked in the sub-assembly plants right down on Georgia Street. We used to have our main concert hall in Vancouver with the Georgia Auditorium, concert hall, sports hall, everything. That was converted into Plant 1-A at Boeing, and they had a plant which isn't there now. It was previously a ship-building place and it went back to being ship-building right after the war. Plant 1-that's the main downtown plant, Plant 1-A was the Georgia Auditorium, and the main plant was out on Sea Island.

The lead hands, they got from the foremen what they were supposed to do, what sub-assemblies were needed, and they'd go and draw out the parts from the store and assign the jobs to the different workers, and see that they did it properly and see that it got done. They worked too, they didn't just supervise. The whole plant was divided into shops, and each shop had a foreman and about three assistant foremen within three shifts.

Workers got along with each other. The main sort of relaxation after hours was bitching about what an awful foreman we had. We had some really awful ones. (Laughs.) I think they chose quite poorly what kind of foremen they had. Our foreman, was a former shoe salesman. You would expect to be able to respect your foreman, because he's in the Machinists' Union he'd know something about machine work and something about assembly. But he just knew something about brown-nosing (Laughs.). Licking the boots. Our foreman, I know, got very little respect from the people who knew the job, because they knew they knew it better than he did. It actually wasn't the foreman's job to teach anybody. He just had to administer, and I suppose it wasn't really that much of a drawback if you didn't know anything about machine work. But it didn't promote good feelings in the plant.

Peggy Kennedy Women in Boeing Aircraft 1.1.

It was about two to one: women to men, in the plant. The women in Boeing did a lot of sub-assembly work. They worked on the same jobs up to a point, until they got to the higher, more responsible jobs. I don't remember them working in the machine shop or the heat treat. There was a lot of work that men did that women didn't, like the real machinist work. The wages were exactly the same as those of men. They received equal benefits, equal wages, but not equal promotion. Men and women were on the same seniority list. And there were automatic raises, they were equally distributed to men and women. That is, if you were hired on as a beginner you got forty cents an hour whether you were a man or a woman and after ^{six}~~six~~ months you got raised to fifty cents an hour. But on the other hand, I never heard of one woman ever being promoted to a foreman and there were a lot of foremen, there. I don't remember a woman being a lead hand, there may have been one or two, but every crew of six or seven had a lead hand, and they were always men; they got ten cents an hour extra. They did have a training set-up where they trained women and men for sub-assembly and assembly work.

The reason that there wasn't a women's consciousness-raising group is that men and women were exactly the same in the union. I don't remember the union asking for women in certain kinds of jobs.

There was a one hundred per cent growth in the numbers of workers in the Boeing plant, they didn't have any previous to the war. Some people came from the Prairie provinces, from Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, A lot of women whose men were in the army came. And they worked for a stake.

Peggy Kennedy Lay-offs/Post-War 1.

Peggy:

There were just massive layoffs after the war. Women were anxious and they felt unemployed. (Laughs.) I always thought that I would get another job. Stewart and I took off for Port Alberni; he was quite sure he would get a job in the mill because of his past experience in the woods. And I did, in fact, get a job.

The unions did in fact organize; we had lots of desperate plans to prevent layoffs: doing pre-fab houses, shipyards doing ^{hypocrite} peacetime ^{SD?} ships and so on, but it didn't prevent layoffs.

An interesting thing was, that spring, a lot of people ^{who} went out to the Okanagan to pick berries and fruit were ex-Boeing employees, and the pickers had never been organized. They organized a union of pickers. All the pickers start at a certain time; they stopped and had rest periods at a certain time. They're not formally unionized yet, are they?

It was quite stimulating working in Boeing, there were a lot of women working there. I went to work first as a stores clerk, which meant I was handing out little, numbered parts in the sub-assembly shop. One of the first things my fellow workers said to me is, "We've got a union here. You'll be expected to join." I was preconditioned for that, that was one of the reasons I wanted to work there, I wanted to join the union and take part in it. I accepted the fact that if you worked in an industry you joined the union.

Soon after I joined we had a protest about the lack of rest periods, because we went through from seven-thirty to eleven-thirty, and half an hour for lunch and then right through from twelve to three-thirty. A lot of these union people looked up the research that showed that people worked more efficiently if they had rest periods. So one morning everyone sat down and had a rest period. Management figured that if we were going to sit down for ten minutes every morning and afternoon, they weren't coming in, so that led to a lockout for two weeks. The strike came back with a rest period.

I guess I was interested, intellectually, in the progressive movement, and I'd met people in college who were interested in it. My older brother was pro-union. Mater was interested in everything we were doing; if we came up with an interesting idea she'd be interested in it. She herself had never thought of being active in the union, or had never considered what would happen if one of her family got involved in the union. I don't know if you'd call her pro-union; she was pro-us.

I wasn't very involved in the union when I first started. I was a union member and glad to be one, and I went to the meetings which is more than most union members do in any organization. SEE ADDITION: END OF PG.4

The first time anybody noticed me is when they wanted some news for the union paper from the plant and so I said, "I'll write it," I guess I was at the general meeting. I wrote just a little article, a funny one, from our plant, from the union viewpoint, and then everybody from the plant was surprised. Because they they thought that the shop clerk, who was the foreman's secretary, would be pro-management and anti-union, So many people came up and said, "Did you really write that? I never thought you'd write something like that!" After that the union executive, noticed, "There's someone who's at least interested in the union", and they asked me to be shop steward. You didn't have to be elected as a shop steward, the chief shop steward just came out and tried to dragoon somebody into taking the job. I didn't care if everybody else in the shop had turned it down. I still thought it was a great honour to be a shop steward, and I was really glad to accept.

** maybe more pg. 4 last par. here? yes*

As a steward, I would interpret the union policy to the people on the floor, at that time there wasn't a check-off, so I'd have to go around and ask all the new members if they'd become members, and if they said, "No!," to persuade them otherwise, and keep up the old ones' dues--that was the worst job! Then there were grievances-like people had been refused a raise when they were due for an automatic raise. Or people had been hired at the wrong rate; someone with experience in another shop was supposed to be hired at the improver's rate instead of the beginner's.

What they did was fill out a grievance form, and I would march into the foreman's office--there were only two foremen in Plant 1-A, and one of them was quite nice and one of them was quite awful. So I'd march into their office and just show them

Peggy Kennedy Her Unionism 3.3.

the grievance form and immediately the face would go purple--I don't know what management did to foremen who came in with grievance forms, it must have been something awful! (Laughs.) They'd react to these grievance forms as though I was murdering them! It was an emotional experience to bring a grievance form to a foreman. I was in my teens, and you must remember, that these foremen, they were ^{at least} quite a bit older than I was.

I wasn't used to walking into people's offices with demands. But I found it interesting. For one thing, it made me more likely to speak up on issues, not so much for myself, but because I had to understand what people's grievances were to explain them to management, to interpret them in union meetings. I got to know a lot of the women and a lot of the people--I knew everybody in the plant because it was a small plant. Whenever an issue came up, I would always get up and speak on it, so they'd know what my position was, because sometimes when you're thinking about something, you want to know what someone that you know about, what their position is. So I got used to getting up at a big meeting and speaking, which wasn't easy.

I was in the International Association of Machinists, local 756. I became editor of the newspaper. ^{It was The 756 Review.} I first wrote for this paper and the then-editor of the paper was a very progressive person with whom I had taken Honour French at UBC--so it was an Old Boys' Club, Old Persons Club, I mean. He left to edit the Fisherman's Union paper, and he stayed there for many years. He was a good writer and good at the technical end. I learned everything about how to publish a small newspaper singlehanded from him. That's about what it was: different officials wrote columns and the editor wrote all the news, all the editorials, it was only monthly.

I suppose I had a lot of influence. I don't feel I ever set policy, because I was a member of the executive too, I was Plant 1-A representative. Again, I was the only woman and the youngest person on it--I was always in that position in those days. I got so used to being the youngest person in the room that it's taken me years to realize that I'm not anymore.

There were women's bits and pieces in the paper. There wasn't a regular women's column. Lots of women were shop stewards and wrote their views on things. Anybody that wanted to write about anything could put it in.

It was pretty well organized by the time I got there, but it wasn't a closed shop. It later became one. You paid your dues; it wasn't really a condition of employment but you had to pay dues.

I think any union that has a good shop stewards' body that's active, there is a really solidly based union. I used to walk down the shop, and people would ask me things, and I would say, "Well, why are you asking me?" And they'd say, "'cause you're the union." I wasn't the union, I was the shop steward, but that's what a shop steward means to the person on the job.

It was a stimulating time and a time of growth, and a time of learning a lot of things. A lot of people who'd never heard of unions or never considered joining one, were drawn into the union movement, and it changed them!

ADDITION TO PG. 2: Like most unions, there was a small percentage turned out to the regular meetings. It swelled considerably during negotiation months and perhaps during election months too.

Could
move
up to
p. 2
as
noted

PEGGY KENNEDY Union Issues 1.1.

It was a good eight-hour day, not counting the lunch hour. Rest periods was a question, and wages. The fight for rest periods was the only real upheaval we had the whole time the war was on. We had a no-strike pledge.

The employer expressed the usual doom doubts...pretty antagonistic. From time to time there was some harassment of workers. They used to transfer fractious members away from their sphere of influence to another plant.

I think the union really was more interested in production than the management. The management was interested in profits, but that's not the same thing. There was a feeling of solidarity (between unions); they all wanted to win the war.

Stewart: We stressed a right attitude of supervision. One shop increased production fifty per cent, in two months. We pounded this for three months before management listened to us. We said, "Get rid of the supervisor, and we'll show you what production's ^{all} about." And they got rid of him, put him somewhere else and we increased the production by fifty per cent, unbelievable. Everybody dug in and worked, like fiends.

Peggy: It's very subjective, but my attitude was certainly very supportive of the war effort. I used to eye these signs: "What have you done for the war effort to-day?" And I'd take it very seriously, "What have I done?" We were allowed to sell war bonds right on the shop floor; we were allowed time to have a little meeting and get out our kits; we were allowed time off work to sell war bonds. The company sponsored an inter-shop competition of who would buy the most war bonds, per capita. We'd have goals and a pledge too;

we had a little ceremony when we reached our goal.

Then it was considered that my union activity was part of my war work. I used to think, "...if I've done something constructive in my union to-day," eyeing the sign very seriously, (Laughs) "then I've done something for the war effort."

I used to think, "It's really hard being a member of the Armed Forces, and if we don't do anything to make Canada a little better than the Depression-wrecked place that they left, then we've been wasting our time." I'm not sure if we accomplished it, maybe we did.

One of the things I remember was the women always complaining about the style of hat they had to wear. No Veronics Lake hairdos, which were the "in" thing at the time. The women had to have^{all} their hair tucked under these turbans, and overalls. Women had to wear things that covered their hair, they resented it. The management ended up giving us three kinds of hats to try out. One was a sort of turban with a little peak on it; the other was just a plain triangle that you wrapped around your head. Everybody started out with those: a great big triangle, you just wind it around your head and keep all your hair under it. Everybody complained about them, but when we got all these fancy hats to wear, everybody went back to the tringle, 'cause it's easier if you lost yours, you just tore up another piece of sheet or something. That was a minor issue but women did talk about it alot.

I was on the women's committee; it wasn't a very active committee.

Stewart: As far as women's dress is concerned, the union didn't take it up, but we had a committee established, for women. To deal with, "what was a right approach to the question of what we do and do not wear in the plant. Let the women determine what they wear on their head. They had to wear hats, but they could have said, "To hell with it!"

Peggy: I'm conscious of how little aware we were of the kinds of things that women now become aware of in consciousness-raising groups. If we had a consciousness-raising group then, it would have blown our minds! We were aware that working people are exploited, and we thought that it was quite a step for equality that women were recognized as part of this working force. It just didn't seem to be an issue, that women did have special areas of exploitation; I think we just weren't conscious of it.

The first thing that I remember that really bugged me was, I was representative at a really big meeting of people from different unions, and one of the speakers was a woman. One out of quite a few, and that seemed quite natural to me, it didn't bother me in the least. But when they introduced her they said, "We're gonna put Mrs. So-and-So on first, because she has a pressing engagement, she has to leave." And she said, "I must admit, the ^{the} pressing engagement is the Sunday roast." I thought, "Goddammit, can't anyone else put on her roast for her while she's got something more important to do?!" It really bugged me.

I think some of the issues were that women who worked had two jobs, they had their home and they had their work, except for the odd exception. The men had the top offices in the union, and they expected their wives to stay home with the children. They could concern themselves in a passive way, while staying home, and keeping house and keeping the children. Whereas if a married woman with children was interested in the labour movement, she wouldn't dream of taking a position which would demand that she was working all hours of the day and night, because it was just not accepted that a woman would do that and leave her husband to look after the children and the house. I wondered about that too: why shouldn't she! But I never brought it up, and nobody else ever brought it up, to my knowledge. (Laughs.) Maybe we began to wonder about things.

The needs women did raise, in some ways they were divisive. When we went to Victoria, we went to various representatives' offices. We saw the Premier too. I got a chance to tell him that women had won the right to work. It never occurred to me, poor women have always had the right to work, it's not a right, it's a necessity. If it's necessary to work, women should be able to do it, I never thought of phrasing it that way. Because women work for the same reasons that men do, that they've gotta, not so much 'cause they love it!

peggy Kennedy 3.3. Women's Issues

Women's issues such as, 'we want a kind of equality that will give us an equal right to the top jobs,' it wasn't raised. If a woman had a home and children, she wasn't so involved. The women who made the going in the union were all single women. The union did draw women in, but not as a separate group. In many ways they thought that they were being very egalitarian, that they wanted both women and men to join, that they wanted both women and men as shop stewards.

Women were shop stewards, they headed committees: a special committee would be set up to investigate and report on something, well, they'd chair a committee. Barbara Bainbridge was on the executive, Betty Griffin was active, with people on the floor. No women sat on the negotiating committee.

Every committee I was on, and I seemed to have been on quite a lot of committees, like the shop stewards' committee and the plant committee, I was always asked to be the secretary. I was young and eager and I thought it was a great honour. I always accepted and did all the secretarial work. But now I realize that it's a bit of a 'put-down', that women are the most suitable people to do the fiddly kind of work of a committee instead of the broad thinking.

The women activists were quite left-wing women who didn't have the consciousness about women that their sort of women have today. Men encouraged them and accepted them, but they didn't encourage and accept their wives to go out and do it while they stayed home.

People may have worried about what's going to happen at the end (of the war); the men are gonna come home, and the women will have all the jobs, then who's going to get squeezed out.

Peggy Kennedy CP/Union 1.1.

For alot of women unionism was part of their political activity and vice versa. You did have to be careful about bringing your political activity overtly into the union, because, alot of the rank and file members were very wary, saying: "Am I joining the union or am I joining the Communist Party?" They wanted to be very sure that there was a distinction between the two.

For every issue in the union we had long, long talks in the party. Although I must say that I never found the party very ~~women~~^{women} oriented. Should have been the most conscious of women's exploitation, but it wasn't.

Peggy Kennedy Union Social Life 1.1.

I was on afternoon shift, for half my life, and there used to be dances for people who got off work at ^{twelve} 12 o'clock, which was great! You're getting off work at twelve and you go home and everybody's asleep. You get up in the middle of the morning and everybody's gone to work. So you never have any social life on afternoon shift, unless you get together with other afternoon shift people. What we used to do was go to each other's houses for coffee, or else go to these dances that the women organized.