

WWII

() No training, you just went in. If you'd been in the Depression and never worked, and then started raising^N kids at seventeen like I did it was an entirely different world, believe me, when I went into the shipyards. None of^{us} knew anything, half the men didn't ~~with the women~~ either.

() Most of us were just labourers. Women that were welders did go to training, but I never went to that. They had six weeks training. Alot of^{of} them were welders, they did light welding. 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.

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WWII

I was put out on the water on the boats right away. My job was with the sheet metal. First I worked with a fellow that was called Frank. He used to be embarrassed because my name's Jonnie. We worked below the rivetters and we used to put the cowvents in. He was a real old-fashioned sheet metal worker, mechanic, ~~and~~ 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.

Then I got shifted ~~over~~ over to Kenny Sherry, 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 ~~he~~ he didn't like to work with women; he was really snorty when I came up. I said, "Well, here I am; you can take it or leave it." So we used to argue all the time about politics...neither of us knew a damn thing. But I like Kenny because he was tempermental and it was more suitable to me; we'd work hard one time and not hard the next. He put me on one job---we worked out on the water and we had to hammer these screens around the cowvents and then hammer things around them and I couldn't hammer. I hammered my hand and mashed up the screen. I finally threw it across the deck. He should have fired me, but 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. He was very nice.

When I ~~work~~ worked with Kenny, sometimes we ~~put~~ played tricks on each other. He was a hard worker but he didn't ask anybody to do anything that he wouldn't do. A lot of men would ask you to lift ~~them~~ their eighty pound tool kit. I remember, one kid, he was young, he said, "Pick it up". I said, "I'm not gonna pick it up, I'm not strong enough." He said, "What're ya workin' for?" I said, ~~you~~ "You just get a gitney." We had some real fights with some of ~~the~~ them. Some of those girls tried to lug it, they thought they had to, but I was one of the fiery ones, I

NWII

JONNIE RANKIN Work Experience 2.2.2.

just told them off. But Kenny never ~~did~~ did that, he never asked anybody to do anything that he wouldn't do, and he never asked us to do things that we weren't physically capable of.

I was quite slim then, and we used to have these long cowvents, 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'd put me in. I'd buck up inside and then they'd haul me out again.

One time they ~~did~~ played a trick on me. Everybody ate their lunch and they just sat there and threw mw a cigarette. ~~I sat there~~ I sat in that vent all lunch hour yelling at them. So, the next day Kenny was having his damned tea that he always used to have, so I got the welders to weld his lunchkit on the deck. He came for his tea and there he sat for his lunch hour-it was a half-hour that we had. He never left me in there again.

As soon as we were in there we were accepted and pals. It was an education to them too, the ones that fought against it, like my little Kenny Sherry. I got yellow jaundice and I had to leave 'cause I was quite sick, practically orange. I said, "I'm going to quit." Kenny 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." We were very much accepted after they got used to the idea. They liked to work with women.

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WWII

~~131~~ PAGE 3. Work Experience

I had to quit for three months and when I went back I went in as a passergirl 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. They're big rivets. She works with a bucket on one side; the rivetter works on the other side. You've got to catch the rivets and feed the bucket. I worked on those ~~big flat~~ great big flat decks for the bombers. The British sailors were all afraid to fly them back because they were all welded in the Kaiser shipyards and they split in two in the North Sea. They wouldn't go down below deck. They finally brought them into us in Vancouver. We would burn them out and then rivet the decks. I worked on those underneath the deck; the rivetters were on top and we were underneath.

I didn't mind how dirty and how rough it was. I just felt ~~great~~ great. When I first was a passergirl going up that shell...it was all staging! The first day, the rivetter I was working with was up the shell. They (continue next page)

Shoved this bucket in my hand and started throwing hot rivets at me. I was just terrified. I saw everybody else doing it and I thought, "Oh God, I'll never make this." The heaterboys pitched the rivets with two tongs. Some of them are so good that they can lay them in that bucket, right up, as high as this house (thirty feet)-it was high! And this kid starts throwing to my face to scare me, and he sure did; he scraped my cheek with this hot rivet. I was down that ladder and after him; I was gonna kill him. I thought I was scarred for life. And he ran! They took me to first aide and he said, " It's a surface burn; it will go away." That kid kept out of my way for a long time. The rivetter that I was working with said, "Jonnie, if you can't go up there don't worry about it because alot of people can't. We'll get another job for you in the yard. He says, "You try it but if you're nervous, don't do it." I went up and I was terrified but I did it. I just couldn't go down again and face everybody, You work with a bucker. I stood it out and hung on to the bucker. The next day I went up and I felt alittle better. All of a sudden I wasn't afraid at all. The bucker showed me how to catch, how to move my bucket. 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. That was the highest egoism I ever had.

But I did a wrong thing too there, you see; how you learn! I used to like to work fast. Sometimes you'd work two passers and sometimes another passer wouldn't show up. I'd say, "I'll do it, I can do it" because I was pretty fast. They had this big thing going on, which at that time I didn't understand at all. They ^u used to work for piecework, the whole rivetters' gang worked that way. If the head guy was in favour, or if he got the job, he'd get the whole surface, and he'd make quite a bit of money. Then some other person would do the pick-up, that's everything that's missed. They'd maybe do fifty rivets and he'd do

five thousand. So the workers wanted to put it on wages and not piecework.

~~It did not take me long to go in those yards.~~

It was a whole education to me to go in those yards. I was about twenty-five years old and I'd known nothing but just going to school, or raising kids, or struggling in a depression. I already had a lot of feelings about society. I had a ~~good~~ idea that something was wrong someplace. I was too left, left-left, because I hadn't related anything together, ~~When I went in the yards it was a total education to me.~~ *in those two years I got more of an education than you could get in three universities.* 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 helped organize the union.

JONNIE RANKIN WOMEN'S Attitudes Towards Working Shipyards 3.3.

WW II

They were much more dedicated than I was, and kitchens were immaterial. 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. The whole crew was bringing it in and there were alot of women on this boat. We were 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. All of a sudden they women would come up and they'd all have these fancy kercheifs they were putting on their hair. I said, "Do you notice the fancy kercheifs coming up on deck on women's hair? Maybe they aren't so much in love with the tanks after all."

That ship was there quite awhile; they had to dredge her out, They had alot of little children on it. I used to go punch in and finish fixin' my hair and dressing down in the ladies' toilet. I was taking pin curls our of my hair with bobbie pins, About four or five of the Soviet crew were down there and they were watching me. They had perms but they looked frizzy; they weren't set. So this woman who knew a few words of English asked me. I said, "Bobbie pin", and I showed her the one curl I knew how to make. We went out at lunchtime and I was giving them lessons on the pincurl.

It ~~turned~~ turned out that this woman was the doctor on the ship. She learned English quite well. I used to talk to her about things; I asked her one day about the children. It was '43, '44 at that time. She said that there were so many bombings that they just had to pick up the ~~orphans~~ orphans and put them on farms, or behind the Urals, or on boats ~~and~~ and hope they could get them through

JONNIE RANKIN Women's Attitudes Towards Working Shipyards 4.4.

WWII

the convoys, anywhere where they could be looked after until they could find places for them. They had a school there.

We got quite friendly with them, with our boats ~~so~~ so close.

We never thought about it too much that it was war industry and is this the kind of big business that we should be in? It was an anti-fascist war in our mind, It wasn't like the question of Viet Nam which has opened up a new idea ~~of~~ about war ~~to~~ to the general public. We ~~didn't~~ didn't understand big business or monopoly capitalism. We just wanted peacetime jobs. But there was no feeling against the war.

Continue ~~with~~
with lay-off
Sector

JONNIE RANKIN Women's Attitude To Working; Post_war Fear
Shipyards 5.5.5.

alot

WW II

One of the issues we talked about was after the war and developing industry and a chance for jobs to continue. Alot of women were concerned with that. As I said, alot of women were buying back their self-respect, some were able to pay off stuff and alot of them had made better arrangements with their husbands. You had a new status(as a woman); it was the beginning of the change actually in tis decade. We really had alot of worries about work.

At that time we thought we were going to build a merchant fleet. The government, of course, sold ours to Panama and we don't have one, which is to me unthinkable with two big coastlines and all our raw materials that we're dishing out. We even wrote a column once about the secondary industries, like the aircraft factories; we could be making other things. That was quite a concern, of both men and women actually, was the continuation of jobs that weren't just wartime jobs. We didn't need a war to work. We used to talk about it alot because everybody remembered ten or twelve years with no work. 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. We talked about industrialization of the country and raw materials. Women didn't want to go back and beg for their living, we wanted to keep working, we wanted daycare and we wanted some independence and equality.post-war. It was alot talked about amongst the women.

When I got a job at the yard, I had a lady come and live with me, a Mrs. Stewart. That's how I could work there. Mrs. Stewart had been working in Shaughnessy as a maid. She had a room downstairs and she got fifty dollars a month and her board. She said, "Jonnie, if you can get a job in the yards, I'll come live with you for twenty-five dollars a month", because with me, she was like part of the family. She kept house and looked after my children for me.

I was fortunate that I had Mrs. Stewart come, otherwise, I just have gone. My boys were about four, five and six. They were little. I had three by the time I was twenty-one. When Mrs. Stewart left me I got another lady, we called her Bobbi. She wasn't as good a housekeeper, but she was sweet with the kids. I didn't care anyways; I was big and strong and could do it all. 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.

We tried to organize childcare. We were the first at that time, because that was a tremendous problem for us. Sometimes women would have relatives and sometimes the kids would just be left indiscriminately around, or they had to worry about them when they came after school.

[I was on the committee that started Strathcona Day Nursery, the only one we had in Vancouver, down here on Povel and Cordoba. They were started after the war because we had been petitioning the government. We had many committees, petitioning and sending letters and delegations to City Hall and to Victoria to get funded.]

It was a terrible problem for women. Lots of women had to quit and they badly needed the money. They just couldn't leave the children,

WWII

JONNIE RANKIN-SHIPYARDS CHILDCARE 2.2.2.

Its still a terrible problem. They talk aboutt women having all this independence and careers. Somebody has to raise the kids. There are very few [redacted] men who are gonna take on that role [redacted] while the woman works. It's still your [redacted] main job; its always been my main job; I always had to raise kids.

should we include this? - it has a sense of her present perspective?

I was on the committee that started Strathcona Day Nursery, the only one we had at that time in Vancouver, down here on Powell and Cordova. Daycares

[redacted] were started after the war because we had been petitioning the government. We had many committees, petitioning and sending letters and delegations to City Hall and Victoria to get funded.

The Marine and Boilermakers Union backed us up. There were other women that worked in aircraft and other women that just worked,

[redacted] the committee wasn't necessarily in [redacted] the [redacted] shipyards.

We kept at it and kept at it. It would pop up and then die down and then pop up again, We'd have halls, and we'd send in resolutions to governments and documents and data and we did research. The necessity of it just [redacted] seemed to go on and on and on.

Shipyard Unionism: Piecework 1.1.1.

(This is part of
union section) 17.

WW II

I never did understand about piecework, but I went to the union. I was in the Marine and Boilermakers' Union at that time. That was my first union meeting. I'd changed unions and in that union women had a vote. It was a much more progressive union, not a craft union. I went to vote for piece^ework because I wanted to work fast up the shell. But boy, I tell you, I sat through the meeting, it was a Saturday and a Sunday. I went back on Sunday and I listened. I had a real education. Some of those fellows that worked on heavy construction had bad arms. They told about piecework, about the profits that the company made out of you. They told how they formed the union; the basis of the union; how hard they fought and worked to keep this union and how they were fighting against piecework and contract work of any kind; that we should have the profit of the whole and not cut each other. In two days I probably learned more than I'd learned in twenty years. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ Then I went out and I fought against piecework ever since. I never worked 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 do the work.

~~■~~ The Working Class Cultural Milieu 1.

While I was working in the shipyards I got this 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. FTNT

I talked with a woman, 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. I think that Kitty orchestrated, wrote the music for it. 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 Somerset from UBC came down and finally pulled it together. She knew how to produce it. They say that it was as clever as anything, as Pins and Needles, has we carried it on. 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 unfurled" to (the tune of) "Victory anyway". That was our theme of the whole thing. So I worked on that. [date] ? locate in intro

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, ~~■~~ ~~■~~ I quit the yard ~~■~~ when ~~■~~ 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 for about a year. That was still during the war. include in intro

1.

Jonnie Rankin HREU Post-War Women's Leadership of the Union

I remember a lot of stuff going on with the Hotel and Restaurant Workers because women led that union. I knew 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 ~~UNITED STATES~~ States and we were affiliated with the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union. You know 'cause I worked in a restaurant for awhile too. I did a lot of little things. I know that when ~~that day~~^{we} sent our 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 that one woman was shot at, this is in Chicago. That union was raided and I think they even came up with guns. We were raided ~~and~~ and our executive was thrown out.

Organizing for the HREU WWII

I worked in the Hotel and Restaurant Workers, still during the war. We had some struggles in there we were working for. At that job I was a busboy; I had ^aseparated from my husband and I had these kids and I was in a terrible state of insecurity. Really incapable of working on the paper any more, because I had to think and write. I just had to have a job where I didn't think, ~~just~~ just slug it out.

if this is in a different part of the book, refer back to it

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 them 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. 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 sitting there giving everybody else advice. They had the same damn problems with their husbands and kids and insecurity as I did, One thing, there's no harm in work, it's a great therapy. 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," ⁴and 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 Jannie in there who made the pie, and we were supposed 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 piece of pie out and I sat down-and they're all watching. I said, "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." 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, I sat outside and ate this damn pie.

The boss sat down right next to me 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, and he didn't know what to do."

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, fifty-five cents and hour, or some terrible thing. We were getting a few cents more than that, but it wasn't very much. So they read the thing and they said, "Look, we're already getting over the money; they don't have to pay us any more." I said, "That's the lowest they can pay you, it doesn't mean that they can't pay you any more." And I give 'em my speech.

So I went to the union, her name was Emily Watts, and I said to Emily, "Have you got any copies of the Minimum Wage Act?" She said, "Sure, take as many as you want." So I brought about a hundred down; when I had my split shift I started handing the dumb things around. I said, "Here's one 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." "You be the shop steward." I said, "Well. alright." So I signed

'em all up, into the union.

But it takes three months to ratify it, through Victoria. Anyways, 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, ^hading them this thing, saying, "It's alot of baloney." I signed up just about every shift. I didn't sign them up quietly; they were all gonna sneak around the toilet. I just signed them up and let them look.

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So one of the bosses, 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. She did it alone because she needed more money. I was hollering and I said, "Look, that should be across the board." "Well, she said, ^{Many?} you're not gonna get it." He gave her a little bit 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? I went by myself, that's how it was. ^{They} They said, "You can't get anything." I said, "We'll get it, even if ~~we~~ haven't been ~~ver~~ertified." I couldn't explain to them about collective bargaining. So I said, "Alright, this is a dumb job anyway, who care^s about being a busboy?" I went down and I said, "I'm going up in there and I'm going to negotiate for wages for the busboys^g across the board for all three shifts." 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."

[Mary]
 - this is confusing

Everybody's watching me and I went up there and he was nervous and he said, "Jonnie, you're smart enough to be a waitress." I said, "Look, I'm smart enough to run this restaurant. if I ^ohd the money, so are alot of people." He said, "If I give it to you I'll have to give to everybody." I said, "Naturally, that's why I'm here." You could look through the window to downstairs and

RANKIN Organizing for the HREU 4.

everybody was just stopped, waiting. ^e He knew that if I walked out, that whole crew would go behind me, because it was sort of dramatic, and they kind of liked me, because I called this poor Mary who sneaked around. M?

It was during the war, so he says, "After th^e war there's gonna be a line-up and [?]up you'll be in that line-up." I said, "Why, if after the war there's no money you'll be in that line-up too, because who'se gonna eat in your restaurant?" So we had this big fight. He says, "Alright, how much do you want?" So I put it up and I said, "I want equal with the waitresses. I don't care if you ^{who is speaking here?} take the [?]pates out full or take 'em back dirty, it's just a job." 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.) Then they knew. I said, "Now that's collective bargaining."

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." 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 twenty-four hours a day. You've got to work. You can't just walk in from the outside. You've got to work with people. They've got to accept you, you have to be a part of somebody.

Anyway, I went to San Fransisco, my mother lived there. I took my children with me to see my mother who was quite sick. I worked down there in a restaurant and had to rejoin down there. I wrote back and we lost it ^{where?} because in that three months the turnover changes.

LAY-OFFS and POST-WAR CONDITIONS ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ and ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN
Shipyards Rankin 1.1.1.

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The women would go first when there were lay-offs. Before that we were frozen on ~~in~~ your jobs, when you worked you couldn't go from job to job. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

We were fighting for unemployment insurance about that time. That had started a little bit before when everybody got a box of groceries or their kids were put ~~in~~ out in the camps. During the war it was one of the big fights through the unions, for unemployment insurance and security. Some people went to jail on picketlines for unemployment insurance. I was on some demonstrations ~~and as there were~~ ~~in~~ and at big meetings on the question.

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There was a whole change of attitude. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ They weren't accepting anymore; it was both men and women. People ^{had} work and there was a different attitude in general about being shoved into a depression with no work. Unions really developed during the war and were able to organize. That's when most of them got so much strength.

After the war there was a lot of problems. The kid had been sleeping with the mother for four or five years. ~~in~~ One of the problems that was quite prevalent was how to get the kid out of the bed. You've been sleeping with mama and you don't like this stranger. There was really a lot of problems with these men coming back and a four or five year old kid who ~~do~~ didn't like him and didn't want this stranger around. The mother and father hardly knew each other anymore, never mind the little brat that wasn't gonna have this guy around.

ORGANIZATION 2.2.

It wasn't funny. You really struggled to adjust the man to the kid and the kid to the man and yourself to the man and move the kid. It was very hard. A lot of women were almost torn in two, ~~and~~ emotionally just stuck. The man never knew the kid, it may be his, but...it was a really serious problem. Of course, my husband wasn't in the army and I had already left him, anyways.