

NORTHWEST WOMEN'S HISTORY PROJECT
1850 S.E. 45th
Portland, Oregon 97215

Or Hi Cassette
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1981
Nos. 1-2

INDEX TO INTERVIEW

Name of narrator: Betty Niederhaus
Marie Schrieber
Date of interview: 17 May 1981

Name of interviewer:
Barbara Whittlesey-Hayes
Location of interview:
4025 N.E. Garfield Ave.

TAPE & SIDE:

MINUTES

SUBJECT DESCRIPTION:

Tape 1, side 1

Introductions. Description of NE Portland heighborhood which was German/Russian. Family was 3 sisters, 1 brother, mother & father together in house on Garfield St. Father worked for streetcar co. & then B.P. John & Dornbecker Furniture. Mother stayed home. They picked berries and hops in the summer and lived in the fields. Children went to Albina Homestead School.

5 min.

Betty went to Highlands School (now King). Brother went to Benson, Betty to Jefferson. Others only finished grammar school. Mother couldn't read because girls in Russia didn't go to school; they wove. The family lived day to day and didn't express long range goals.

10 min

Proud of making it on their own. Their neighborhood spoke only German. Father went to citizenship school. Betty was 17 when war broke out had to get permit to work. Marie was 29 and married at the time and lived with her parents. Her husband was also German. He earned about \$18 per week.

15 min.

Marie hadn't worked before. Had 12 year old daughter. Betty always single. Found out about work as Marie's husband worked at Oregon Ship. Marie applied first. Betty started a year later. They worked swing and rode the bus. Later carpool. Often no days off. Mother did most of housework. Went to the beach on days off. Traded to get gas ration coupon. Got special coupons for work shoes. Spoke * of shipyard as men's world. Tools, language very different from religious home life. Not used to black people. Marie thought she'd never walk on a scaffold. Description of how engine sits in hold of ship.

20 min.

<u>TAPE & SIDE:</u>	<u>MINUTES</u>	<u>SUBJECT DESCRIPTION</u>
Tape 1, side 1	25 min.	* Betty got burns because many people were working together & sometimes got careless. They wonder now about safety, breathing insulation, etc. Had safety crews. Wore special shoes; had helmets; didn't have to wear leathers. Wore bandana, overalls, jacket. Marie has metal shaving *in her arm; she also had broken toe. Marie's husband also marine machinist. Not worried about being unfeminine, glad to make so much money. Marie & husband bought house with earnings.
Tape 1, side 2		Other relatives in shipyard tried to scare them by telling stories of accidents. Easy to get job; went through union. No special training; taught by leadman. They drilled holes in prefab grating which was then taken to ship by crane. They moved from way to way as each ship was ready. Worked on outfitting dock occasionally when there was error to correct.
	5 min.	They worked as a team - by accident. Had their own burner & welder. Alternated between tent and ways. Many people played cards at lunch. Spoke of women's counselor ✓ Saw other women as welders & in tool room & as burners. Contradictory discussion about Marine Machinists Union and end of war procedure.
	10 min.	Would have stayed at end of war if possible because of wages. Betty was in beauty ✓ contest. Were many bond drives. Worked with minimal supervision, no pressure. Sometimes slack time if they caught up.
	15 min.	They had to drag heavy kickplating through hole in side to ship. They worked from blueprints. Tried to keep dry but got shocks in wet weather. Suffered from "weld burns" from bright welding arc.
	20 min.	✓ Detailed description of how the sisters worked. First drilled holes in grating on way 1 then parts disassembled and taken by crane to proper ship. It was sorted for them and scaffold put up. They put in catwalk. They were followed by handrail crew. At least 4 levels of catwalk.

TAPE & SIDE	MINUTES	SUBJECT DESCRIPTION
Tape 1, side 2	25 min.	Sisters were only crew, only shift to do this particular job. Other women machinists worked on handrailing and ladder in same tent. Also women painters & scaler It was honest living. Betty gave wages to support family. People at yards were friendly & glad to be working; togetherness
Tape 2, side 1		
	5 min.	People returned home after war. Cut in pay hurt. Sisters worked at Sears. Sears' policy forbid relatives working even if not at same locations. Betty got cashier job at Roger's variety. Marie later worked at Penney's. Women's wages again. Took 2 people just to manage. Marie was out of work then got job at Meier & Frank warehouse.
	10 min.	Hard to find work for a time. Neighborhood changed from German to black as many blacks stayed in Portland after war and moved into Albina. Betty went to Jantzen after Roger's closed; worked there 26 years.
	15 min.	*Comparison of Jantzen and shipyard - yard less pressure to work every minute, more respect. Jantzen policies changed when company bought by Wrangler. Betty lost position as knitting department eliminated. Jantzen has no union as organization effort failed.
	20 min.	Management anti-union. No advancement. Betty does final inspection. This is piece work and pays minumum wage. Time for inspection is cut constantly, lowering wages. Betty now wishes she had taken severance pay but was afraid to change jobs at her age.
	25 min.	Men get the breaks in the working world. Why is their time more valuable? (Dogs bark). Hard to make an honest living. Marie laid off at Sears. Next job, at M & F, was union & paid better but heavy work. Men got away with alot & women had to prove themselves; also women paid less.
		Women have same bills as men but must struggle to pay them. "In the shipyard *they didn't draw no line, they needed your help."

END OF INTERVIEW

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Betty Niederhaus/Marie Schrieber
Tape 1 side 1

Interviewer: It's May 17, 1981. You two are sisters?
So you lived here with your parents, and what kind of work did you
do?

Voice 1 [not clear which of the two voices this is]: Well, I
didn't...

I: You stayed here.

V1: I didn't work until, until I got in the shipyards, when my
daughter was 12 years old. She was 12 when I started workin'.
Well I was home with her, helped mother and everything, you know.

I: And you only had one daughter.

V1: I had one daughter.

I: You were single.

V1: I'm still single, I never did get married.

Voice 2: She had to get a permit to work.

V1: I started when I was 17 and I never did get married. I'm
still single.

I: So for both of you that was your first job.

V1: That was our first job.

V2: Yeah, right.

V1: Gettin' out right?

V2: Uh huh.

V1: Yeah, that was our first job.

I: So which shipyard was it you worked in?

V2: Oregon.

V1: Oregon Shipyard. Your husband, he come home and said that
there was quite a few women workin' down there and they were makin'
pretty good money, so why don't you go down and try, and so she
went first and then there was more opening, they come home and they
said "Gee, there's young children there workin' down there too,
they're takin' just about anybody: the older people, the younger
ones, why don't you apply". Well I'm not old enough. I went down
and got a permit and I think you had worked there for...

V2: Almost a year I think.

V1: A year before I started.

I: So, the whole, at that time the whole family moved here in the house?

V1: Right.

I: So what was, what was a typical day, a work day. You got up, what would happen?

V1: Well, we had swing shift, so we got up early enough to go to work at swing shift and we worked, what was it, after 12?

V2: Yeah, and at that time gas ration, so you either car-pooled, and people that had car pool, they had, I don't know how many riders, and they'd get a C-ration coupon and they would get more gas, so they could go back and forth to work. And we had an old bus that come down Union Avenue and then we'd all catch the bus and they go to the shipyards. And then later on when we got into the carpools, and rode in the car, the man would come by the house here and just pick us up and take us to work. We worked swing, I think it was from 4 to 12, wasn't it?

V1: I believe so.

V2: We left around 3:30 and at three the bus come, and by time we got down there we'd work from 4 to 12...

V1: Something like that.

V2: 3:30, 4, to 12.

I: And the bus ran late at night to take you home?

V1: Yeah, the bus would come, or a car pool, right. They worked days, swing and graveyard, around the clock. And I believe there was even Saturday and Sunday we worked, we had no weekends off.

V2: Yes.

I: Seven days a week?

V2: Yeah, because they were like tryin' to get in, boy I don't know - breakin' records here - I don't know, a hundred days or [so] - we were tryin' to get 'em out, you know. They needed them. Then they would work around the clock, no days off.

I: Did you help your mother with things like the laundry, and the cooking.

V1: We all chipped [in] together on the meal.

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V2: Now she would, or us, do the laundry for us, and do some of the cooking, and we'd just get up and have maybe like breakfast and make our lunch and get ready to go to work; then come home in the evening, they would be sleeping. And then we'd stay up a little while, and go to bed - couldn't make too much noise cause the rest of them were sleeping in the house, and we'd come home and go to bed.

I: Then they had to be quiet during the daytime.

V2: But we slept upstairs here, and this used to be the bedroom, so my folks slept down here and then we slept upstairs, so therefore they could still come and go, and not hear too much noise upstairs where we were sleeping.

I: You had days off every now and then.

V2: Yeah, oh yeah. Unless they wanted a ship out in so many days

V1: Had off during the week. We never got off weekends.

I: Did you do anything special, when you had a day off?

V1: Oh, gosh, well, there was so much to do, catching up, you know...

V2: We'd go down to the beach though, Cannon Beach, sometimes. You'd save your ration coupons.

V1: Yeah, we did.

V2: And sometimes, they would get butter ration coupons and some people wouldn't use them, and they'd trade 'em for gas coupons; then they'd get enough gas coupons accumulated that they would maybe want to take this long trip, go down the beach...

V1: We'd stand in line for cigarettes, we'd stand in line for nylons, to give to others to get butter stamps, or gas stamps.

V2: And also shoes.

V1: Yes, you had to get special shoes for the shipyards.

V2: Yeah, they would even give you coupons with those special shoes.

V1: Yeah, we went many a times down to Cannon Beach where we could just use the dim lights, and the homes in town, they had black shades on the windows. That was before...

V2: All along the coast that you would have to, yeah, no lights, because they had blackouts, because they were afraid the Japanese you know, would maybe come bomb or something during - so they kind of had blackouts. [It was a] restricted area.

V1: Yeah.

V2: You had to have a cover over your lights, and blinds put in.

V1: My husband, he was sickly, and that's what the doctor told him to do, was get down to the coast as much as you could. To breathe, to inhale that salt air. So that's why we made that many trips as much as we could. Go down and...

I: Was the wartime routine a big change from your normal routine? Did it - it changed your life quite a bit?

V2: I imagine. I don't know, a person isn't really mechanically inclined, I mean, you never, we had tools - we did more sewing and crocheting. And then you get a job down there and you have to learn the different tools, and go to the tool room and get different tools, and it seems like it kind of, you get into a man's world where, you know, the tools and the big heavy equipment, and you're not, kind of not feminine anymore. I mean, here you're home, you're sewing, and embroidering, and doing dainty little things, and the next thing you're in man's clothing and you're doin' a man's work, and you're amongst the men. And then also their language. We had to, you know - it was quite a difference. I mean 'cause, at home here there was never any [bad] word got spoken; I mean, nothing, 'cause they were kind of religious. I mean my folks, they went to the church, we all had to go to the church, Sunday School, and the whole thing, I mean, you know, and baptized and got confirmed from the German church, and there was no swearing or anything, and no smoking, no drinking, no dancing. I mean the folks were rather strict. Then when you get out there, I mean amongst people that come from all parts of the world, all over the United States, from the South, North, to get these jobs at the shipyard. And there was quite a different, a lot of different languages spoken, and kind a, I don't know, just kind a made you kind a wake up. And then also, you were amongst the other colored people. I hadn't seen too many of them either, before. And I guess Kaiser brought quite a few of them up to work in the shipyards. So it was quite a different experience. I mean, work amongst men, and also all people from all parts of the United States.

I: Did you like it?

V2: Now, I think, it was real - once you get on to it, you know what I mean. I thought I'd never walk on a scaffolding. Well, we had to get out on, after leaving the ways - the ways wasn't bad. You worked in a tent. And we'd run our air drill, but after a couple years later, then the prefabricated ships came in so that we had to work on all the ways, and to work on scaffolding and oh, I thought I'd never - the height just scared me. But we just got so there, that in time there, it -

I: It didn't bother you anymore.

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V1: Yep.

V2: Didn't bother us any more.

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