

## AUDREY LYONS ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

**Interviewee:** Audrey Garbers Lyons

**Interviewers:** Sady Sullivan, Jennifer “Jenny” Egan, and Daniela Romano; Susan Lyons (daughter)

**Archival Processor:** Patricia Rana

**Copyeditor:** Cameron Vanderscoff

**Date:** May 2, 2008

**Location:** Essex, Connecticut

**Session Number:** 1

**Project:** National Home Front Project

**Interview Contributor:** Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation Archives

**Accession Number:** LyonsAudrey\_HFN-OH\_050208

### ABSTRACT

#### *Biography*

Audrey Garbers Lyons (b. 1924) grew up in the Cyprus Hills neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Audrey attended Brooklyn College before she left to work at the Brooklyn Navy Yard to help support her family after her father's business closed. Unlike some of the other workers at Navy Yard, she was a federal employee. Audrey worked as a parts inspector and used a micrometer to measure ship parts at the Yard from 1943 until World War II ended in 1945.

#### *Summary*

During this interview, Audrey recalls that the women on the Yard mostly tested the smaller parts of ships. She also remembers talking and singing with the women she worked with, who were mostly college educated and worried about their husbands in the war. Audrey describes her section of the Navy Yard as a little village, explaining that she recognized everyone in her own building, but no one else at the Yard. She speaks about witnessing many historical events, such as christening of the U.S.S. *Missouri*, the appearance of President Harry S. Truman, and V-J Day. Audrey also remembers the smells from a nearby chocolate factory and the jumpsuit she wore at work.

#### *Keywords*

*Brooklyn Navy Yard, New York, women, Navy, mechanic, Rosie the Riveter, air raids, U.S.S. Missouri, D-Day, V-J Day*

### INDEX

00:00 – Talking about pictures of U.S.S. *Missouri* and other ships at the Brooklyn Navy Yard

05:51 – Security on the yard

08:43 – Transportation as a college student  
14:58 – Shipbuilding location on the yard  
18:20 – Seeing a ship during her lunch break  
20:15 – Men gone due to the war draft; lunch on the Brooklyn Bridge  
22:01 – Many college girls working on the yard  
24:33 – Building 77 serving as the factory building  
27:04 – Married women going through hardships  
34:08 – Nearby chocolate factory  
34:45 – Jewish coworker who brought food to work  
37:51 – How things changed in Brooklyn due to the war  
40:45 – Belated introductions (narrator told her story from the beginning of the recording)  
45:07 – How the narrator began work at the Brooklyn Navy Yard  
46:47 – Preparation for work training, including an aptitude test  
47:05 – Parts inspection with micrometers; broad discussion about work and life at the yard  
54:12 – Proximity of workers to one another at work stations  
57:44 – Wearing a jumpsuit uniform  
1:00:01 – Early shifts at work; salary  
1:04:18 – Picnics with friends  
1:06:11 – “Village” community at the yard  
1:10:24 – Seeing the U.S.S. *Missouri*  
1:19:07 – Remembering D-Day and V-J Day  
1:22:41 – Doing a good job at the yard  
1:23:06 – Inspector song sung by women during work hours at the yard  
1:24:06 – Men who came back from the war  
1:26:34 – Work after the Brooklyn Navy Yard  
1:28:46 – Political climate at work; most did not favor Franklin D. Roosevelt  
1:34:47 – Damaged ships brought to the yard for repairs  
1:36:16 – Cypress Hills Home during the war  
1:37:27 – How her parents met  
1:41:48 – Air raids in New York City  
1:45:11 – Bad neighborhoods in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn

1:50:54 – Best friend at the opera

1:53:47 – Conclusion

## **STORY TRANSCRIPTS**

### **Story 1: Lunch Break at the Yard**

**[18:40 – 20:04]**

DR: *Did you ever get out to any of the dry docks? Did you ever try and do any exploring?*

Well, the one story that I have to tell you, which I think is funny— It was very casual, you know, and people—I think we had a half hour for lunch—everybody brought their lunch because there was absolutely no place to buy food. Maybe there was a truck that came for coffee in the morning, but it was usually you brought your lunch.

So one day, I knew a man who was out in the shop, and he had a bicycle. So I asked him if I could borrow it, and he said, “Sure.” I took my lunch hour and I got on the bike, and I went out. And I think it was out toward where you showed all those bays, and there was a ship in there that was actually a working ship, and huge.

All these sailors were up there. Of course, as I’m going by—I was only eighteen at the time—and they’re all whistling and, “Woo, woo!” and saying all kinds of funny things. And I got so nervous that I wasn’t paying attention, and I went through sand and fell off the bike. *[laughter]* So then it was even worse because then they were saying, “Oh, too bad!” You know? I felt like a fool. I had to get up; I had scraped my knees. So I don’t think I did that again.

### **Story 2: Getting the Job at the Brooklyn Navy Yard**

**[44:52 – 46:12]**

JE: *Can you tell us how you came to work at the Yard?*

Well, as I told you before, my father had closed his business which he’d had for over forty years because his help was being drafted. And he had to stand on long lines to get the food, have the plants *[phonetic]*, and whatever that you needed.

So he just overnight closed the business. And I was at the time going to Brooklyn College in the daytime. So then we decided that we had to have some income, so my mother went to work and I went to work. My brother was still in high school, and then he was drafted in—not drafted, he joined the Marines in his senior year.

So that’s how I started to look for a job. I think I read about the job in the newspaper or something. And you had to go downtown and take a test to see if you had mechanical aptitude. Which I’m not sure I had. *[laughs]* Anyway, so that’s how I got the job. But it was a good job for the time, really. I think I made about \$40 a week, something like that.

**Story 3: The U.S.S. *Missouri***  
**[1:10:24 – 1:11:19]**

JE: *How much of the actual ships did you see? Did you have a sense of how your work connected to the ships? What ship you were contributing to or working on?*

Well, we knew the *Missouri*. That was the main one that they were building at that time. And everybody was very interested in that because it was a big thing to get that built—in the middle of the war in particular.

We were all invited to the christening. We were able to take time off and we went down. We had a very good location, and I remember that I was able to look up and there was a platform built for where they were going to christen the ship. So I was down here, and here was this platform up here. And it was Truman's daughter, Margaret, who was the person who christened it. And she had to hit it three times before it [the bottle breaking] happened.

**Story 4: The Inspector Song**  
**[1:23:06 – 1:23:36]**

JE: *And what was the inspector song you mentioned?*

I can—Susan knows it, too. We'll both sing it.

SL: *All right, ready?*

SL and AL: *[singing in unison]* “We’re all inspectors and shudder to think, without our anchors, the Navy would sink. We stamp it here, we stamp it there. But in a rush, without a blush, we give it a stupid stare.” *[laughter]*

**Story 5: Air Raid Drills in New York**  
**[1:41:46 – 1:42:41]**

Well, one thing that I remember so well of those days—and a lot of it had to do with the fact that I was going to Brooklyn College and then home late at night—we would have air raid sirens, tests. And everything would go black. The buses, everything had to stop. The buses would stop right where they were; everything went black and everybody would have to get off the bus and stand in a doorway.

And it could be anywhere. I mean, we went through some really bad neighborhoods to get to where I lived. And all of a sudden, it would go off, you’d have to get out of the bus and stand in these doorways like this for about five minutes, until we’d had the all clear.