

Sidonia Levine
Brooklyn Navy Yard Oral History Collection
Interview conducted on November 18, 2006 at Levine's home in Florida
Transcript edited by interviewer

Sidonia Levine

Birthdate: 2/12/19

Began working at the Navy Yard November 1942 Nickname "Sid."

Buildings worked in: 4, 34 (maybe) 77 (visited a lot), 18 (also visited. She refers to it as "the 18th.)

Ships worked on: Can't remember names. Remembers # CB42

TAPE 1 SIDE A

Q: How did you come to work at the Navy Yard?

I was working in New Jersey at Western Electric. And that was a defense thing too. I don't know what they were making, but we had to put things together...

Q. How old were you at that time?

22, 23. My husband was in the service. We got married January 19, 1942. He went into the service about four months after that. I had a hard time getting into Western Electric. They had little groups, ten, twelve of us, and they took us into a room and they gave us some piece of work to see how fast we were. Factory work. And so I did it and I was very fast—I was first of course [inaudible] and then we had to go out and talk to the interviewer. So we go out and I sit outside, and people are going into the interview and going out, going in, going out. Finally there's hardly anybody left. I'm looking around and I see there's another woman sitting and she also looks Jewish. I don't look Jewish, but my name is "Levine." So when I went in, [the supervisor] said, "I'm sorry. We don't have anything for you today, but if you come back some other time maybe we will. So I very very nicely said to her, politely, "When I come back tomorrow, there better be a job for me. Because I know what you're doing." Next day, pffft! Right through. Something like 50-odd cents an hour, mind you. I used to come home late at night—I had the 3:00-11:00 shift—and I'd run into the house and the lights are on: "He made supper for me!" He was in the Army but he was at Governor's Island.

It was line work. You built something up and it went down, I don't remember anymore. And I was there for a while, maybe two or three months, and the Navy Yard came through in September. We had taken the test quite a long time prior to it. And I was told that I ought to come and make the application out. And I wanted to get out of the electric company; I had to work in Jersey from Brooklyn, the 3:00 to 11:00 shift.

Q: How did you get there and back?

I couldn't remember, you know. I don't know if I took the Lokamona (?) train or not. Or maybe it was just the tubes...you remember the tubes? It's a subway. When we got off at 11:00 [pm] I didn't get home until 12:30 [am] or so.

We all took the test; there were about 500 people or so. I was 15th on the list. [inaudible] I did very well. It was all mechanical work, to show that we had to take inches and screws, and all sorts of mechanical things. I was always mechanically inclined. We took the test a long time ago and then the grades came out and they asked us to come and sign up. So we came and we sat in the lobby. [shows picture from the Shipworker] They watched us being fingerprinted, and you can see I'm being photographed there. They picked Audrey Turrell and myself. They thought we were pretty. But they asked us if we had college and we said "No." Neither one of us had, so they went and got two more. They're in the background most of the time, though. It was very flattering to a certain extent, but I was thrilled because my husband was already overseas. I sent him all the pictures that came out. I had an interview with the Brooklyn Eagle; they came to the house and there I am, my hair is all up in pin curls. I don't think I ever saw [the article]...My memory is a little bit off.

Q: What kind of work did you do at the Navy Yard?

After that they sent us to school. It was for blueprint reading, drafting, that type of school. And we were getting along quite well...that's the last picture, is the school [showing pictures], down there. In the Navy Yard, when they give you an order, it's as of this moment. Cause when you turn your back, you no longer are in charge. The supervisor, whatever his name was, went down along the East Coast...by the time he came back, he was no longer there. So what happened, it broke up the group of us. I don't know how many of us went to the mold loft. Some of them moved down to the steel [loft?] I was very fortunate; I went up to the mold loft. That's the elite. That was where the blueprints were interpreted into patterns—we call them templates—and they were wood, and we worked on the floor, which that's why my legs are not what they should be anymore. We had a table. We were standing; come to think of it, there wasn't a chair in sight.

Q: What did you do exactly?

I made templates. I read the blueprints. I went to Pratt at night to further blueprint reading.

Q: What does it mean exactly to make a template from a blueprint?

You have to figure out how long it is, and then width, and then you have to also imprint on a template all the information, which is: a bulkhead goes here. A [chuck?] goes here. This is the waterline. All the information that they'll need. This is the center line, how far you are away. And we worked in wood with nails and a hammer.

Q: And how big would a template be?

Well, the largest one that I took into the back yard was over twenty feet. That was the longest one I handled.

Q: Is it a model of the whole ship?

One section. One little tiny piece. It's that wall, let's say. It's the pattern from which they will make the steel. Or not only that, but with that being steel or whatever it is, a certain place something joins it; a [indirect?] line that's gotta go on. There's a waterline going this way...it has all the information they need to build.

Q: A blueprint is not enough for them to build? This is a middle step?

It's not only the middle step, it's all the steps, because do you know how many blueprints there are? [inaudible] Your blueprint can only go for part of a wall; there could be three of them for that. Every inch of the way.

Q: Would you be interpreting a number of different blueprints to make one template?

Sometimes you have to get another one to see where something crossed it or met it, so I would go down to the other building. I was the gopher, which I loved. I got to go all around the place. I had to go to one of the other buildings, and bring back certain—if they had them, and sometimes they didn't even have them. I was able to walk around. Not that I walked around; I was on an errand.

Q: Do you remember what building you worked in?

Yes. Building 4. And where they kept the administrating or something was in 77. That's where I had to pick up the blueprints. They had a mold loft in building 18 also. I went back one day maybe ten years ago. So different.

Q: How?

I don't know. To me it seemed sterile. There was no activities, no people, no movement. In fact out of the window we used to watch the soldiers, the marines, through their exercises, their roll calls and things. I was wearing one of their...actually they did have a uniform for the girls. I made my own. I took a marine overall. We were dirty all the time. Something had to be four feet instead of five feet, and eight inches. So you pulled out a plank and you sawed it off. We used a band saw. And to be proficient at it, I was able to make a French curve [with pride]. It was a band saw; do you know what a band saw is? We used it all the time.

Q: Was it dangerous?

Anything is dangerous. Look at a hammer. In fact as a matter of fact, I used to love to use a hammer on...see, where this eight inch thing, on this [flint saw?], there was a corner [difficult to understand]. They would put lines and lines...we'd put nails in. And as I was going around later on, after I was doing...from the [bill bladings?] to see if they had made for each...for instance you had to have fourteen or fifteen from this particular blueprint, I had to check them out, see if they worked or they weren't, so they [inaudible, laughing]. So you put a, they called it a clinch pad, it went underneath the nails, and when you hit the nail in, it hit the metal and turned. It was fun. But one thing I liked very much there was, on the floor, in one of the other lofts, the whole shape of the bow. It's on the floor...for instance here's the one side, the next one would be about a quarter of an inch off because as it gets smaller it's different sizes. And you come there and you put a very thin strip of wood, and you'd hit it in so that it went around the curve, and wherever there's certain...you'd hit it here...you'd mark the band, the wood that you just—the strip—that you were working on. And then you took that strip back, and it was flat. And you could work on it.

Q: And was it the bow of the ship that you were looking at?

On the floor, yeah. A picture. Like for instance...your bow is this way [demonstrating], so every place it turned you had to change markings where they went. I loved it. I learned to mark off where certain things were. It was great. I always liked hammers and tools.

Q: Had you done a lot of that sort of work before you married?

Probably in the house. I was mechanically inclined...that was about all.

Q: Did you think you would have a chance to do that sort of work?

No. What I really wanted to be was a gym teacher. Never made it.

Q: How many years did you work at the Navy Yard?

2 ½ years.

Q: Did you stay in the same building that whole time?

No. Later on I was transferred to the...I forget what it's called. Where they worked with the steel. Some parts were welded. I wasn't a welder.

Q: Why were you transferred?

I don't know. A whole bunch of us...it wasn't only me. It wasn't because our work wasn't good or anything like that.

Q: And how was the new work different?

Noisy, noisy noisy! You're hitting hammers against metal and things.

Q: What did you actually do?

I didn't do too much, come to think of it. I don't remember much about the work there. Of course we had to interpret...whatever was on a template...I don't remember that part.

Q: So in the first job you were creating the template, and in the second job you were implementing the template?

Yes. I preferred to make them. I loved the blueprints. In fact, that's why we were learning drafting, so that we could see a pyramid slashed off...and they get the fitters out [inaudible]...I have beautiful draftings. Can't find them.

Q: You learned that in the Navy Yard school?

I started there. And then I picked up some more of it in Pratt.

Q: Did the second job take place in a different building?

I think we were in 34. I can't remember. And I had the night shift. The first one was 8:00...ten hours a day. And a half-hour for lunch. The reason I liked the overalls: they had millions and millions of pockets. And my mother made little rolls, like butter rolls. Each pocket had a roll in it. I love to eat when I'm working. One day the big boss comes along—I also had a desk in the office, that was where I would get my [bill of ladings?] and things like that. He sneaks up at me: “Caught you that time! Didn't I?” Didn't mean a thing. I still kept eating. She would make the sandwiches for me, and I would put them in the pockets.

I'll tell you one thing: the camaraderie. We'd work together. You'd work with one of the male mechanics; [the women] were actually mechanic helpers. That's what we were called. And when we'd come in in the morning—most of us, with husbands that were in the service or overseas or something—so first thing we'd come in, like with Pearl: “Did you hear from Jack?” “Did you hear from Murray?” That was the first thing. We were changing in the dressing room.

Q: Did Pearl work with you?

She was in the mold loft also with me. In fact after a while I think she was partners with me with the bill of ladings.

Q: What is the “bill of ladings”?

I'm trying to think. This is the blueprint here, what to do. There are certain things that you have to put on there, certain little templates you have to make, for instance you make

them with the chucks, some of the chucks that go in. I don't know. I do know that I have to check with the numbers and make sure that they were what they were supposed to be. And then I used to take them to the storage. And this was a big loft, a big, big loft. But I did learn how to square a corner...three, four, five. That stayed with me.

Q: How long would you generally work on one template?

I haven't the faintest idea. It was a lot of work on it, because aside from—you wouldn't just make a frame. You had to have diagonals, [inaudible], all kinds of diagonals. You had to make sure that there was space for you to write what you had to put the information on. I still have friends...Pearl. In fact her husband and my husband looked alike; it seemed like it from the pictures anyway, it doesn't really mean that they were. But we didn't know each other at all before. We didn't socialize later on. My husband came home in '45, January of '45. That was very strange.

Q: How so?

My brother was also in the service. He was in [Newfoundland?]. And I came home one night, I'd worked that day...I was calling in sick that night because my brother had come in. He was in on furlough. I gave my name, or I gave my number; one or the other I gave and he gave the other. I didn't say my name and my number. But anyhow they gave me the number, and I said, "Well, I'm calling in because my brother came in from the service." "It wasn't your brother, it's your husband that came in." I said, "No, it was my brother came in," and they said, "No, it was your husband." I said, "Well, I'm not coming in to work anyway." I hung up and it dawned on me, I called back immediately almost, couldn't get the person I spoke to. And my husband did come in.

Q: And not your brother?

Both! It was really something. First thing I did was run to have my corns cut. Cause I knew if my feet were all right, I would be all right.

Q: And you hadn't seen him at that point for...

30 months. He loved food, he loved apples. So I sent him cans of apple sauce. I also wrote him a letter one day—I used to write almost every day. But this particular day I got crazy, and I started the letter one here, one here...you know, crazy. And the other one, I started at the top and I went around in a circle. In the middle I said, "I love you, of course." But he has such a wonderful sense of humor. He said to me, "I didn't break my head reading it. I stuck it on the wall and spun it around." [inaudible]

TAPE 1 SIDE B

God forbid they should send us to Bear Mountains. They sent us down to North Carolina for two weeks' furlough. The hotel they gave us had twin beds. All these guys that came

back, married ones...the others had double beds. Every night we would push them together. But we had a lot of fun anyway.

Q: So you never went back to the Navy Yard?

No, no. Never went back to the Navy Yard. But I had another friend, Rita [Schuman?]. I didn't call her. I don't even know if she's even still alive or not. She had cancer of all sorts of things.

Q: Where was she living?

She has a place out on...you know on the Belt? She was living there until her husband died.

Q: This is in Brooklyn?

Yes. I meant to call her and I didn't.

Q: When did you last talk to her?

Weeks and weeks and weeks ago.

Q: How did you and Pearl stay in touch all these years?

Pearl and I didn't go out socially. We had a reunion I suppose—we had a reunion I think, once. It was those of us that were left. There was some that passed away.

Q: Who organized the reunion?

I don't remember. I had a card for my anniversary. Everybody wrote on it. I don't know if you've seen the time cards—yellow, green, whatever they were, and they have a picture of me sitting on the side in the overalls. I was going to look for it yesterday, and I didn't. They had that for my birthday. And of course every time, "Hope Murray's home next year," and stuff like that. There was really a lot of camaraderie there.

Q: You mentioned coming to the yard and going to change...

In the ladies room. It was a locker room where we changed into our uniforms.

Q: And uniform was overalls?

I don't remember if everybody wore it or not. They were blue...I don't know. They didn't have enough pockets. [laughs] They have a side pocket where you put pencils in, you know in high school...they have a ruler or something. And of course it was lunch and my friend and I were sitting; Rita was there and I was there, and of course you hop up, so you lean on it and hop up. [showing a scar on her arm]

Q: Look at that!

Lead poisoning. Lead. And that's there...since '43, we'll say. I can still see the table and Rita sitting there. I used to call her pumpkinface; she had space between her teeth. Don't put that down, it's not nice—not nice!

Q: Think about a typical day at the BNY

We had our time card. We punched in and then we went and changed our clothes. And then we came out. The loft itself was that very large...from one end to the other, you'd come in...I'd go to my table. Building 4 is right near the gates. We came into Sands Street...4 should've been right near it. The Eighth Avenue subway was there...you'd come all the way up...

Q: Is that what you took to work? The 8th Avenue subway?

Yeah. But when I went to the other buildings, I was going by trolley. But all the tattoo places there...

Q: On Sands Street? What was it like?

It was just store after store. They had food stores. I think they also had photographs, because I remember a photograph I was going to send to my husband overseas. The tattoo places...I can't remember all of it. He's dead twenty five years, and we were married thirty-nine. It's been a long time.

Q: Were there people around at Sands Street?

Oh, always people. Always mobs going in through the turnstiles. Like a ballpark. And then you would walk to your building. We didn't have much of a walk to get to Building 4.

Q: Was the locker room in the building?

Oh, it's in the building, yeah. It's in the loft. Downstairs was the shop, and then we had to take the elevator up, of course. And fifth floor was I think the schools and stuff.

Q: The school was in the same building?

Yeah, same. And then the floor above it was the loft. It was very very long and very large. High ceiling, probably, because we had big things [inaudible] storage space, verticals, and they had to go up high, because they had to hold some of the templates and things. We'd bring them to the back and there was somebody in charge there who would put them where they belonged.

Q: And that was on the same floor?

The very end, yeah. And then I went around one time signing them all up for giving blood. They asked me if I wanted to do it, so I did it. Most of them gave blood. But I kept bugging them, "Please don't drink the night before. We don't want any alcohol in our blood." [laughing]

Q: Did you give blood also?

They could only get a half a pint from me. And that was the second time, so I never gave again anyplace. Very embarrassing. I don't know what they did with half a pint, they couldn't use it for transfusions. I think they could use it for plasma; they could break it down or something. [talks about pain and medication and various injuries she has]. It's really poison, but look, I can move.

Q: And you said that something about your legs was affected by the work at the Navy Yard?

You see you're squatting all the time because you were working on the floor. You put the wood down and you measured everything on that wood. You joined it, you straightened it with the side things, and then you had to put information on it. You take a long string and as you pull it out, you're chalking it. And one person stands here at the spot that we need the long line, and somebody [stands?] the other. And you snap it. You've got a line. It was very interesting.

Q: Did you attach the string to the template?

No no. The line was where they needed for information. Something met it or something crossed it, or the particular line, I don't remember exactly what; I don't have a blueprint.

Q: Did you draw on the template?

Yeah, we wrote on the templates, of course. We wrote the information that we found on the blueprint. We'd translate all that information onto these wood things.

Q: And it involved squatting on the ground?

It was the only place—unless there were very small things, and you could do them on the table. You know, a chuck here...some of the smaller ones, you could cut your wood and mark it up, you know. But you had to put signs all over these templates. Otherwise, when they cut the steel to it—they had to also transfer all that information onto the steel, so that the next party, whoever was supposed to weld it or whatever, or maybe cut out a doorway for a hatch or something; it would all have to be on the template.

Q: Did you go on ships?

No. No. No. I never got to the ship.

Q: Did you see ships?

Oh yeah...not really too many. I don't think our work ever got to the ship, except in that form. The steel form, of course.

Q: When you were working, did you know what ship it was for?

Yes. We made CB42...

Q: That was a ship?

It was one of the numbers on the ships. I forget the names of them. At one time I knew all the names.

Q: When you working on a template, did you know which ship it was for?

Oh yeah, we know which one we were working on, yeah. Because the blueprint had the name on it.

Q: Were you repairing ships, or building ships?

We were building. But they did a lot of repairing. And the men [who were repairing ships] would come up and work in the mold loft, because we had all the [inaudible]. That was the mold loft. It was quite an important place. Usually they came in...I don't know, nighttime or something maybe. I doubt they had a night shift in these shops, I don't think we had a night shift per se.

Q: What were the other women like?

Miriam, Audrey; those are the ones that came in with me. Rita was a schoolteacher; she had college and stuff—or she was an accountant, excuse me. Maybe she was teaching, I don't know. She was a little older than me, I think. [laughs] I was going to say a nervous [hilaria?] Don't put it down! If you had somebody who was forever very anxious or something, what would you call her?

Q: A nervous Nellie? An anxious person?

Something like that. But I think she was always [on her own?]. But Pearl; Pearl was always very very jolly. She was doing dialysis today, yesterday, whatever it was. She never called me back. [some discussion of reaching Pearl Hill]

When I was seventy already, I had my ears pierced. I said, "no more Sid. I'm not a tomboy anymore."

Q: What was the ethnicity of the other women you worked with?

[inaudible] wasn't Jewish? Evelyn and the other two...Rita was Jewish, Pearl is Jewish. I don't know the names of the others. It was mixed. I don't know if we had many black people, African Americans. In the shop we did because I was there for New Years, and we were all drinking out of the bottle, and I remember telling my friend Ria[not sure of spelling; this seems to be a non-Brooklyn Navy Yard friend]—[and she said] "How could you?" [presumably: how could you drink from the same bottle as a black person?]

Q: Was this in the shop?

We weren't drinking-drinking—we had a drink, I suppose. We all kissed each other, because it was Happy New Year, Happy New Year. Selma was the lady in the bathroom [presumably African American].

Q: Did you socialize with any of the women outside of the Navy Yard?

We didn't have any time. We worked ten hours a day, six days a week. I had a very very close friend [hard to hear] Ria was my...when I got married by the justice of the peace. I think she signed my paper, and when she got married I signed her papers. You know, witnesses. So I mean, I didn't have to go anyplace else; we'd go out and have a drink—soda, I'm talking about—they didn't live near me, any of them [the Navy Yard women]. Pearl lived out on the island, and that was too far for me. And pumpkin face, Rita, lived on the way to Long Island, off the Belt. Ria's husband was also with the service, so...we really didn't have time for anything else. I couldn't read books like I'm reading now; I fell asleep too quickly. And I couldn't get heavy books, because if I fell asleep they would hit me in the face.

One of the men—Bill?—he would sit there with his tail practically on the floor, and he was very very thin, and his feet were up his chest; I said, "How do you do it? How can you do it?" But he was a very good worker.

Q: Was he doing the same thing you were doing?

There were many of us doing the very same thing.

Q: Men and women mixed?

We were the helpers. We weren't in charge of any of the blueprints. Although I did make first class mechanic. For a whole big sum of \$1.26, I believe it was. Either that was the beginning one, or that was the third one and you worked it up. \$6 I think more for the three steps, or something like that.

Q: You got more money as a first class mechanic?

Yeah, sure.

Q: Were you tested to become a first class mechanic?

No, we never had a test I don't think. I worked very hard. The guys used to say, "What're you trying to do? Win the war by yourself? "No, I just want to bring my fella home sooner." I had a good rapport with the men.

Q: What were they like?

Some of them were young—not really young-young. I remember just a few of them. One in particular who I told not to drink before he gives blood.

Q: Were they younger than you?

No, no, no. The apprentices were younger; we couldn't go in at 77c an hour because the apprentice wouldn't allow it. They started with less apparently too, or something, so we had to start with around 56c, or something like that.

Q: Less than you were making at the electric company?

Just about. But that didn't matter. I didn't want to be there.

Q: What was the highest that you went for your wage?

I think it was \$1.26, when I was first class mechanic. We were helpers for three steps; then you became...from 56c to 77c—I think the mechanic was 77c already—and from there, you went three steps to be third, second and first. There might have been three more steps which I can't recall.

Q: And a pay raise each time?

Yes. I can't remember if we were paid twice a month; I'm not sure. I think so. We used to play poker on our checks. Every check had a number. The last four numbers: if you had two of a kind, two pairs, one pair...I think we chipped in a quarter, and then whoever [inaudible] collected it. I won once, I remember. But it was fun. What was his name...tall, Lincoln-type man. Blackwood. He was a supervisor. They had three or four supervisors on the floor. In fact, when I went for an exam or something, I met his wife.

Q: Were the supervisors older?

Yes. Oh yes. They didn't take anything over 28 [in the service, explaining why these men weren't shipping out] at one point. Because my husband just about made it. When he went in he was almost 28. I was 23 and he was 28.

Q: Did you visit other parts of the yard? Do remember the physical space?

Who had time for that? I don't remember the barracks. The Navy Yard had housing for some of their people

TAPE 2 SIDE A

We went through a whole year of weather. Sometimes it rained, sometimes it was cold; sometimes we all came in bundled up. But once you got in it was warmer. We had a latrine...you ever seen these...big circle...and that was the sink line, you know. And in the middle the water came. It was like a fountain. It was very cute, very interesting.

Q: And that was where you washed your hands?

I don't think we had sinks, come to think of it. Don't quote me, please!

Q: I'm not going to hold you go it.

I'm just kidding; I don't care if you do. By the time this gets worked out, I'll be pfffst! If I get five or six [years] I'll be happy. Thank God I believe the heart's good. I have emphysema too, but I don't have the [COPD?] Chronic Obstruction Pulmonary Disease.

Q: Did you smoke when you were at the Navy Yard?

I don't know that I was smoking then yet. But I did smoke plenty. A lot of people did smoke. You couldn't smoke...I don't know where we smoked if we did. I know a lot of people went out for lunch; they would go out through the gate again, pick up their food and come back in.

Q: What did you do for lunch?

I always had sandwiches. My mother made all kinds of sandwiches for me.

Q: Did you go out through the gates though?

Of course. I went out and had lunch. Not the lunch I brought; it never lived that long. I ate all the time.

Q: When you had your half-hour for lunch, what would you do? Do you remember?

We'd gather with one or two girls or so and we'd sit and talk. I don't know what we had for drinks, though. I don't remember seeing any kind of a vending machine.

Q: Were there soldiers mixed in with the people coming in through the turnstiles?

I don't think there were soldiers. Maybe they had to come in that way too, I don't know. I'm not sure. But, the men and women, oh, [mlancy plancy?] Like I say, like they were going to the ball park. You had your badge. I have my badge somewhere still.

Q: Do you remember any events when the whole yard was involved? Like sending a ship out...

That's the time they did, yes. But we worked anyway. Probably they had more tourists—not tourists, but personnel—I never went to see any of the ships go down. We were working. They didn't give us time off.

[tape stops, then resumes]

Q: When you think of that time, are there other things that cross your mind that we haven't talked about? Any random impressions?

I used to watch the Marines go through some of their routines.

Q: Were they near your building?

I don't know if their barracks were not far away or something, but the barracks were within the Navy Yard too. Here was our building, and we look down, and there they are in the walkway there. There were no cars inside the Navy Yard I don't think. Not that I can think of.

Q: When you see Pearl or Rita, do you talk about those days?

Sometimes, but not too much.

Q: Do you remember the same things, or different things?

I asked Pearl about, "What did we used to do when we got into the locker room?" Or one of the first things we did. I don't know, I don't know. "Pearl. Did you hear from Jack?" Then she remembered. We got together as a group where you went out once in a while in the group after work. We went to one of the restaurants. I don't remember where.

Q: Were any of the girls not married?

Probably. I don't know. Audrey was married, I was married; Evelyn and the other one, the two Jewish ones, they weren't. I remember I used to sit in the office at my desk; I'd watch the elevators. Maybe one of these days Murray's going to walk through there. Never happened.

Q: Were there rules about dating or socializing?

They could do what they wanted. I had offers. I said, "I know what I have. I don't know what I'm going to get." I'm still very much in love.

Q: Do you mean offers from the men you worked with?

Some were younger, some were older. They didn't really bother us. You got whatever you wanted. If they wanted to go out with the men, fine; then you had to put up with that. It was their business. But we used to wisecrack at each other. We'd always have some kind of a retort. But they accepted us. The only ones who objected were the [apprentice? Printers?] but then that was because of the money. At first we were supposed to [get paid the same amount], but we didn't. We ended up three below.

I had one fellow, Charlie Burke. Good Irishman. We were friends. He came up to my house when Murray came home. I went to his house. His mother made—first time I ever tasted baked ham. He also was the nephew of the quartermaster. [I picked a good one?]. Charlie wasn't married, but he was a nice guy. We were really really friends.

Q: Did you keep in touch with him?

I invited him up when Murray came home. We never went out together. We never had a date or anything like that. But we always talked. Mostly in 18th there wasn't any bosses around, so we could loaf a little bit. I had to sometimes go to 18th to pick up...not to pick up, to—I don't know, to check out something. I don't remember. I went to 18th many times.

Q: Did Charlie Burke work at 18th?

He must've been, because that's where I saw him. He didn't have to worry about his job. He wasn't a smart Alec. He was well brought up. Nice family, I met them.

Q: Where did they live?

Out on the island someplace. Or something like that.

Q: Did you meet women who worked in other parts of the yard?

If they were working in the electrical, I never saw him. If they were working in the shops, we never saw them. The only time I got to know some of them was because I did some of their [bank work?] in the shop. They break up every once in a while; a new boss comes in. As a matter of fact, we used to leave notes for each other, you know [the boxes and the chalk?] I'd always tell them, You know why you sleep so long last night? Because I was standing and pushing the handles around faster! [laughs]

Q: You would leave notes for each other in the chalk boxes?

Yeah, in the chalk boxes

Q: And that was still in the first job?

The same. I was no longer part of the mold loft then.

Q: And what you meant was that that person got to sleep because you were awake, on the night shift?

No, I was pushing the handles, making time go faster. So they didn't sleep so long [laughs]. And of course they'd answer me back [inaudible]

Q: Did Rita and Pearl move over to the new building also?

Rita and Pearl already had left I think by that time. They normally left when the husbands came home. Rita I really kept in touch with after. I was at her wedding with Stanley.

Q: What was the mix of men and women in the yard?

It was a mix. I think the majority were men.

Q: Did everybody come in at Sands Street?

Not everybody, no. Otherwise you could come in the other gates.

[looking at map, studying different gates, and buildings 4 and 77. Decides that building 4 must have taken a new number, because it was near Sands Street, but now seems not to be]

Q: But 77 is in the same spot you remember?

Yes, definitely. In fact, 77 was a building without any windows. Not up until a certain height, and the rest of it had windows.

Q: Do you remember how it smelled in your building?

I can't remember where the elevator was. I remember when they came...I can see the elevator on the sixth floor when I was sitting at my desk...I used to sit and eat my sandwich. This is where the boss caught me eating. I wasn't prejudiced. I ate it anywhere. She wouldn't let me take stenography anymore because [inaud] I ate there. And I didn't like steno; I didn't want to do it anyway. This is way back in high school.

After you left the Navy Yard, did you work again?

Q: I don't remember. Yes, I did work elsewhere. But I'll tell you where I was before I came to the Navy Yard: playing baseball in Madison Square Garden. In 1938. Where

my junior high school was, in that yard we used to play baseball. The Mirror had a...not a contest...you played other teams. A league. They had a league for us. He got us in there or something; it was him who did it. And we had uniforms, and Mr. Kilpatrick could've paid us six or seven dollars when [we'd still have?] an amateur standing. He gave us one dollar. On account of him I got a black mark on my records. My husband came back from overseas. [she seems to have made a leap here from high school baseball to her life immediately post BNY]

[phone rings]

My brother.

Q: Is he [in the same retirement community] too?

Yeah, that's one of the reasons I'm here. He's good to me. I'm his older sister; I've got fourteen months on him. That's a long time!

The black mark...when Murray came back from the army, after we had our vacation and we were in Newport News in...I think it was Virginia [later she says Maryland]. Anyhow, I was working there for the army, and doing—who the hell knows what I was doing? Clerical work I suppose. He'd been overseas for thirty months, and I would see him between his work and stuff, and one day we all got into the auditorium: “Everybody into the auditorium! General Kilpatrick is going to talk to us. He's leaving.” I have to be up in the front; why, I don't know. And he starts to talk and I hear that my husband's going back overseas again. So I picked myself up and walked out. And I met the lieutenant that was in charge where I work. “Are you sick? What's the matter?” No; I told her what I was going for, like a dope. A big black mark. I don't know if I got blackballed, but I had a black mark on my records. Walking out on the general. How could you do something like that? But my husband was a little more important. He'd spent thirty months overseas and they were sending him back.

Q: Did he go back?

No, because he fought it. Some way or other he didn't go. And we started a baby.

Q: Where did you live while you worked in the Navy Yard?

I went to my mother's house. But I had my own apartment after we were married. We were married for six months or so [before her husband shipped out and she went to work at the BNY]. It was tricky.

[tape interrupts, then resumes]

I don't remember finding any Jewish men there, I don't think. I'm not sure.

Q: What about black men? African Americans.

No blacks upstairs. In the management, I don't think so. The people I knew were not. I don't even think we had any women [in management]. But down in the shop I remember plenty. That was the elite. I was very fortunate and lucky to get up there. I felt like it was a special place. We weren't treated like cattle or anything like that. We were treated very nicely. There were no kid gloves or anything like that. We all worked. But all of us were good workers, I know. Lillian Zimmerman—I paired her off with my friend's brother. They had a nice marriage. He died early. She now has Alzheimer's. But the sister's still a friend of mine. And her name used to be Levine. Now it's [Leviton?]
[tape interrupts for a moment, and resumes during a discussion of duvets at someone's house]

I used to go there and sleep over in the house, and oh...in fact, I was in the house for the first time and they took her brother to a house of ill repute. His father took him. I was in the house when they came back.

Q: How did you know that's where they'd been?

I don't know. They must have said something. That's the one I introduced to my friend Lillian. I mean, rather than have him go around to anybody else, the father took him. Felt that that was a better way. This way he wouldn't be so anxious to take anybody. I was in high school already, and he was the older brother.

What else can I tell you about my life? We played baseball in Madison Square Garden in 1938 and 1939, both years. And we were [inaud] a team that represented the Garden. We were the Rangers. And we played on marble...no sand or anything in the Garden. Not concrete, but it felt like it. I had a bad toe or something from that. The place was called "International Center," "International Café..." when I caught the ball—you know, we used to practice there, or play—and it blew up. And I needed ice. So I went in there and they gave me a bag of ice.

Q: What was your position?

Third base. I really wanted first base, but I wasn't a lefty. We played indoors. We played softball. But I enjoyed it, we had a good time. I'm not sorry with any of my growing up. We had a team in junior high school called the Thracians. It was like a gym suit with elastic, the bottoms are like bloomers. I think it was one piece. We played in Manhattan Beach.

TAPE 2 SIDE B

[looking at pictures] tape ends.

