

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Lou Annie Charles and Eva Vassar

Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front Oral History Project

*This interview series was funded in part by a contract with the
National Park Service, and with the support of individual donors.*

Interview conducted by
Robin Li
in 2012

Copyright © 2013 by The Regents of the University of California

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and Lou Annie Charles and Eva Vassar, dated May 16, 2012. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. Excerpts up to 1000 words from this interview may be quoted for publication without seeking permission as long as the use is non-commercial and properly cited.

Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to The Bancroft Library, Head of Public Services, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should follow instructions available online at <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/cite.html>

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Lou Annie Charles and Eva Vassar, "Rosie the Riveter, WWII Home Front Oral History Project" conducted by Robin Li in 2012, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2013.



Lou Annie Charles



Eva Vassar

Table of Contents—Lou Annie Charles and Eva Vassar

Interview 1: May 16, 2012

Audiofile 1 – Lou Annie Charles

1

Lou Annie Charles born Muskogee, Oklahoma in 1922—Life on the farm and segregation—Roosevelt and changes in farm life —Church and politics —Encouraged by mother to be self-supporting—Recruited by the National Youth Association out of high school to work at Boeing—Mixed but separate training program in Oklahoma—Choosing to become a riveter because it was the highest paid job—Training with Boeing in Oklahoma—More training and working in Wichita 1943—Integrated workspaces and the work of riveting—Sending money back home—End of the war—Working as a bucker and mechanic—Returning to Boeing in 1950—Wartime work made it possible to help family get out of the Depression

Audiofile 1 – Eva J. Vassar

23

Born Muskogee, Oklahoma in 1922—Father a minister, mother a teacher and both parents small business owners— “One day I’m going far, far away” —Training in Muskogee with National Youth Administration—Life in NYA factory dormitory—Shipyard in Bremerton 1943—End of the war and workplace tension—Arc and acetylene welding and the benefits of NYA training—Repairing damaged ships, working on the USS California and Arizona—Attending USO dances—Watching the repaired ships depart—The pride of earning her own money—Finding a church in Bremerton—Wartime Jim Crow—Meets husband at Marine Hospital—Going to work at Boeing

Audiofile 3 – Eva J. Vassar and Lou Annie Charles

44

USO dances and Chaperoned life in the NYA dormitory—Working conditions, segregated wartime unions

Interview 1: May 16, 2012
Begin Audiofile 1 05-16-2012.mp3

Li: This is Robin Li, speaking with Lou Annie Charles, on May 16, 2012, in Seattle Washington, as part of the Rosie the Riveter, 2010-2012 Oral History Project. And Eva Vassar in the room, as well. Thanks for sitting down and talking with me today.

01-00:00:27
Charles: You are welcome.

Li: For the purposes of the transcript, can you tell me your full name and when you were born?

01-00:00:33
Charles: Yes. Lou Annie Charles, born in 1922.

Li: Where were you born?

01-00:00:42
Charles: Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Li: Muskogee. You're name's a little unusual. Where did it come from?

01-00:00:49
Charles: I think it came from a grandmother, I think; I don't know right now.

Li: What was your family doing in Oklahoma?

01-00:01:02
Charles: We were on the farm. Lived on the farm.

Li: What kind of farm? What were you farming?

01-00:01:09
Charles: Yes. Everything. Vegetables, corn, cotton, everything.

Li: Did your parents both work on the farm?

01-00:01:24
Charles: Yes. I grew up on the farm.

Vassar: She went to school in {inaudible}.

01-00:01:31
Charles: Yes. We left the farm at a certain point. People stopped farming.

Li: Had both your parents been born working on a farm, as well?

01-00:01:43
Charles: That, I couldn't answer. I don't know. That, I don't know.

Li: Did you have much family in Oklahoma?

01-00:01:51

Charles: Yes. It's five girls of us. It was five girls.

Li: Where are you in the—?

01-00:01:59

Charles: Middle. Two older than I am, two younger than I am. I'm in the middle.

Li: Were you all close friends?

01-00:02:06

Charles: Yes, we were close.

Li: So what was it like growing up in a farm in Oklahoma?

01-00:02:16

Charles: I'd say we had fun. We did most of the same things that the kids do now. We played ball. We just did just everything, swimming and all that stuff, just like today, really.

Li: Did you work at all? Did you help out on the farm?

01-00:02:40

Charles: Oh, yeah, I worked. Yes, I did.

Li: What kind of things would you do?

01-00:02:46

Charles: I did everything that you do on a farm. You feed the chickens, you gather the eggs, you chop the cotton, you pick cotton, and you plant the vegetables and you pick them. Just everything that, really, you do on a farm. I did some of all of it. Because it was five girls of us, so there were no boys, so we had to do everything, just like a boy would do it.

Li: So that was your first job?

01-00:03:18

Charles: Yes, yeah. That was my first.

Li: From an early age?

01-00:03:21

Charles: Right, right.

Li: Was there a school near your house?

01-00:03:28

Charles: Yes, school was, I'd say, two miles or something from our house. We went by miles, not blocks. Yes, we had a school.

Li: What was the school like?

01-00:03:44

Charles: The school was an all-black school that I attended.

Li: It was segregated in Oklahoma.

01-00:03:52

Charles: Right. During that time, yes. Yes, it was.

Li: Was it a big school?

01-00:03:59

Charles: Well, for grade school, it was a small school. As you say, a country school, two-room school. A white building, two rooms. It went to the eighth grade. Then after eighth grade, you went to the high school.

Li: Was the high school in town?

01-00:04:24

Charles: Yes, it was in the town.

Li: What was Muskogee like as a town?

01-00:04:34

Charles: Well, I would say it was like maybe Tacoma.

Li: So it was a pretty big town.

01-00:04:45

Charles: Yes, it was then, yes.

Li: Was it a nice place to grow up?

01-00:04:52

Charles: I thought it was. Yes. We got in no trouble or nothing. I thought it was a nice place to grow up.

Vassar: It was cold, though.

01-00:05:02

Charles: Yes. It's cold, yeah.

Vassar: We walked. We used to live on South Second, and we'd have to walk all the way through, down to Fondulac.

Li: So you remember the Great Depression, then. You were old enough to remember people struggling?

01-00:05:25

Charles: The President I really remember was Roosevelt. So then I think that was coming out of the Depression, because Roosevelt, when he got in, he stopped people from having big farms, a lot of cotton and stuff. He stopped all that. So that's when you really got out of the cotton fields and things, when Roosevelt came in. Because I think the big, Great Depression was when Hoover—like that. I don't remember Hoover; the President I remember was Roosevelt, starting with him.

Li: And things were getting better—

01-00:06:21

Charles: Yes, they were getting better and different, yeah.

Li: Were your parents very political? Would they talk about politics?

01-00:06:28

Charles: Yes, my parents voted during that time. I think, looking back on it, when someone was running—it mostly was a white person—they would come and do speeches and things at the school, and we'd go hear them. Then when time to vote, they would come and pick all the people up and take them to vote. But then I think that they were moreso Republican people. That's what I think they were then. So everybody voted, like that.

Li: Would they talk about politics at home, your parents?

01-00:07:16

Charles: Yes. Yes. They did. They voted during that time, too.

Li: Did they subscribe to any papers that you remember, newspapers?

01-00:07:26

Charles: No.

Li: Just radio?

01-00:07:28

Charles: Yes, we had a radio. Yes.

Li: Did you attend church, growing up?

01-00:07:35

Charles: Oh, yes. We always went to church. Sometimes we had to walk to church, quite a ways. But we always went to church, and for Sunday school, we used a school. We'd have Sunday school in the school.

Li: Oh, in the public school there?

01-00:07:55

Charles: Yes. My mom was a church person. My father wasn't, but my mom was.

Li: But he would go along?

01-00:08:06

Charles: Sometimes. Not very often. Not very often. But my mom did. We went to church every Sunday.

Li: What was the name of your church?

01-00:08:17

Charles: My church was First Baptist Church, in—

Li: Was church segregated then, too? Was it an all-black church?

01-00:08:26

Charles: Yes, yeah. It was an all-black church, yeah. Yes. In fact, that whole little town right there was Summit. Everybody in there, mostly, was black, in that town.

Li: Had they been in Oklahoma a long time, most of the people there?

01-00:08:48

Charles: Yes. Most of them was born there. Yes, that was there.

Li: Could you tell me a little more about your mother, what she was like? Did she work outside the home? I guess she was working on the farm.

01-00:09:04

Charles: No, my mom didn't—when I was in Oklahoma, no. My mom didn't work outside the home no more than I said. But my mom used to raise lots of chickens and gardens. Oh, she had so many chickens. I can remember that in the evening when you feed them, how they all would line up for the feed, for the food. She had lots of chickens. And she always had a big garden. Raised vegetables and stuff. She always had a big garden. Now, she just took, mostly, care of five kids. [laughs]

Li: Did she talk about what she wanted you all to be when you grew up or things that she wanted for you as you got older?

01-00:10:03

Charles: Well, she always told us, "You get an education and some skill, where you could take care of yourself and not depend on no man or nothing to take care of you," and like that, yeah.

Li: So she would talk about that.

01-00:10:20

Charles: Right.

Li: Did she put a lot of pressure on you to do well in school and do your homework?

01-00:10:27

Charles: Oh, yes. She did. Yes. She was the one that really got behind you. My father was the easy-going person. Whatever she said was okay with him. You have to ask your mother. If you go ask him, can you go someplace, he'd tell you, you've got to ask your mother.

Li: So did you enjoy school, growing up?

01-00:10:55

Charles: I did. Yes, I did.

Li: Did you have a favorite subject or a teacher that you liked, in particular?

01-00:11:03

Charles: Well, I think my favorite subject was really reading. I like to read. Now I've got a lot of books. I've still got a lot of books now.

Li: Did you have a favorite book or a favorite author, when you were growing up?

01-00:11:20

Charles: Well, everybody, I think, had Hemingway.

Li: You liked Hemingway?

01-00:11:28

Charles: I did then. I don't have nothing of him now. That was what you—but I don't have nothing. No books of him now.

Li: So what year did you graduate from high school?

01-00:11:46

Charles: In 1943.

Li: 1943. What were your plans when you finished?

01-00:11:42

Charles: Was to get me a job, like I did. When I was in high school, the NYA gave a—when you got in high school, you went to a training. They gave you a training. That's where I took riveting.

Li: Oh, so the NYA provided training for you.

01-00:12:13

Charles: Right. And they sent me from Oklahoma to Kansas, to work for Boeing.

Li: How did you get involved? Did they come to your school?

01-00:12:25

Charles: Right, yes. Yes. Yes. They did. And if you wanted to do it, you did it. And I wanted to get away, get me a job.

Li: And NYA stands for the—?

01-00:12:44

Charles: The National Youth Association.

Li: So they came to your high school and they offered training?

01-00:12:53

Charles: Yes.

Li: Were there a range of—

01-00:12:55

Charles: Kids? Yes.

Li: —kids?

01-00:12:57

Charles: Yes, a lot. It was a bus full of us that went and took this training, yeah.

Li: Were they mostly African American?

01-00:13:04

Charles: Oh, they all was African American at that school, at my school. But when you got to the place, it was different. All mixed races in the training program.

Li: Was that the first time you'd been in a mixed environment, like a mixed school?

01-00:13:21

Charles: Well, yes. They were on one end; we were on the other. [they laugh]

Li: Not a lot of mixing.

01-00:13:28

Charles: No. Not a lot of mixing. No.

Li: Did you have a choice about what you were going to be trained to do?

01-00:13:36

Charles: I think so. Because I know I wanted to be a riveter, like I was.

Li: What made you want to do that job?

01-00:13:45

Charles: I don't know. [laughs] It was okay. I liked the job. Even when I started working at Boeing, I liked—I never changed from it. You could change to

different jobs. But my thing was—I'm going to tell you the truth—when I started to work, I wanted the highest pay for the job. Riveting paid higher than mechanic and all that, so I chose to be a riveter because I wanted the highest pay of money. That was my reason.

Li: Had your older sisters done the same thing?

01-00:14:28

Charles: No. Didn't any of them work for Boeing?

Li: When you went to the training, where was that?

01-00:14:37

Charles: That was in Oklahoma. Where we finished school.

Li: Was the training enjoyable? Did you enjoy it?

01-00:14:50

Charles: Yes. Because the same kids that I went to school with, we all worked together in the training.

Li: Did they give you housing?

01-00:15:01

Charles: Oh, no. You go home at night. No, no. You just go to it like a job, and then nights, you went home.

Li: How long did the training last?

01-00:14:13

Charles: I don't know, maybe six weeks.

Li: And then they gave you an assignment?

01-00:15:24

Charles: Uh-huh.

Li: Or they helped you get the job?

01-00:16:26

Charles: Mm-hm. You had to go to another training. My training was in Wichita. Which I think a lot of them went to Wichita from the training, but then they transferred other places. But I stayed in Wichita for my whole thing, job.

Li: Had you been there before? Had you been to Kansas?

01-00:15:55

Charles: I don't think I had, when I first started, no. I don't think so. No, I know I hadn't.

Li: So can you tell me where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor? Do you remember that day?

01-00:16:14

Charles: I was at Boeing, I know. At work.

Li: So you were already working at Boeing, at that point.

01-00:16:19

Charles: Yes. Yes.

Li: When did you move to Wichita?

01-00:16:28

Charles: In 1943, when I finished the training.

Li: So was that the summer of 1943?

01-00:16:33

Charles: Yes.

Li: So when you arrived in Wichita, did they put you to work right away as a riveter?

01-00:16:43

Charles: No. We'd go out there to some more training, I think. We had to go back—they had a place for more training, then, before you could go to the plant.

Vassar: Do you mean Georgetown?

01-00:17:03

Charles: Oh, that was here. I was in Wichita.

Vassar: Oh.

01-00:17:07

Charles: I was in Wichita. You guys went to Georgetown; I was in Wichita.

Li: But they gave you more training, and it was still—

01-00:17:13

Charles: Yes, about a week or—get you familiar with what you were really doing. Because there, in the training in Oklahoma, you're just doing small parts. You wasn't working on the big plane. So you had to get familiar with the big plane.

Li: Did you find it difficult to do, the work?

01-00:17:36

Charles: No.

Li: It came pretty—

01-00:17:38

Charles: Yes, it came easy. Yes, it did. There was some hard jobs, but you—when you go on a job, you always try to find an easier way to do it. Maybe somebody trained you to do a job, but you always try to find an easier way to do it.

Li: So you started working at Boeing before the war, before the US entered the war.

01-00:18:08

Charles: I started working at Boeing in 1943.

Li: Oh, 1943.

01-00:18:12

Charles: Yes. So the war started in what?

Li: Well, we went in in, was it '42?

01-00:18:21

Charles: I think so. Yes, must've been something like that, yeah.

Li: So did you have family serving in the war? Did you know anyone in the military?

01-00:18:29

Charles: No, I didn't have anyone in the military.

Li: Because some of the Rosies I've talked to, the women I've talked to said that they felt a strong sense of patriotism, and that's why they wanted to work in the factories; and some women just said, "This is the best-paying job I could find."

01-00:18:46

Charles: Well, that's me. It was the best-paying—

Li: It was the opportunity.

01-00:18:50

Charles: —right, opportunity. That was the first real job I ever had, that paid money like that. So that was me. I liked the job, but I didn't have anyone in service that I know.

Li: Did you like the idea of leaving Oklahoma, that the job would take you to a different town?

01-00:19:24

Charles: That was good for me, yeah. Just to have a job, I didn't care where it was.

- Li: Where were your sisters at this point? Were they still in Oklahoma?
- 01-00:19:40
Charles: Two of them, the two younger ones was with my mom, because they were young; and the other, two older ones was married, with their own family life.
- Li: Were you married when you were in Wichita?
- 01-00:19:59
Charles: No. I just married since I've been out here.
- Li: What shifts did you work at the plant?
- 01-00:20:10
Charles: When I first started, I worked graveyard. From 10:00 to 7:00, I think it was. We worked ten hours a day, when I first started for Boeing. They had two shifts, and it was ten hours each shift.
- Li: Did you get paid overtime?
- 01-00:20:31
Charles: No. That was just the shift.
- Li: Do you remember what your pay was at that time, when you started?
- 01-00:20:37
Charles: Sixty cents an hour.
- Li: Relative to other jobs that were available, this was good money?
- 01-00:20:46
Charles: That was good money. The other job—well, no, that was after I got out of the war, that I worked at Kress's. No, that was the best-paying job you could get. But I made sixty cents an hour, and ten hours a day. That was good money.
- Li: Where were you living?
- 01-00:21:11
Charles: In Wichita.
- Li: Did you have your own apartment?
- 01-00:21:14
Charles: At first when I went to Wichita, they had a special place they sent you, like a dormitory. Eventually, yeah, we got our own rooms. We lived with people, but you had your own room.
- Li: Did you like living on your own?

01-00:21:39

Charles: Yes. I did. I did.

Li: Did you have facilities to cook for yourself?

01-00:21:44

Charles: Yes, you had to cook for yourself. Yes. Yes, we did.

Li: So would you usually have a meal at work? Would you bring something with you or was there a cafeteria?

01-00:21:54

Charles: Cafeteria. Well, they had a cafeteria, but they had food carts, what you call. When lunchtime come, the carts would come out with all the food on it, in the plant. You didn't go to the cafeteria, because you wouldn't have time, a lot of times. The cafeteria was a long ways from your shop. But they had food carts, with all the food, hot food and all kinds of food on it, so you'd go and buy the food off the cart.

Li: Where would you eat? Where would you sit down?

01-00:22:28

Charles: In your shop, at your table or anyplace in the shop.

Li: Would people chat and socialize, during—?

01-00:22:34

Charles: Yes. During that time, yeah.

Li: Was Boeing segregated? The work spaces, were those segregated?

01-00:22:43

Charles: No, no.

Li: Did they split people up? No?

01-00:22:44

Charles: No, they wasn't.

Li: Were there any problems or difficulty of people working together, that you remember?

01-00:22:51

Charles: I never had any working together, but I'm sure there were. But I never had any. Because when I first started, as I remember, me and this girl, one that came to the thing with me, we worked with two kind of older ladies, and we never had no problem with them. We helped them; they helped us. We'd work with them.

Li: You all were riveters?

01-00:23:23

Charles:

Yes, we were. Then, you did more than just riveting, because you had to drill the parts first. Put them together, drill them, before you could rivet them. Well, in that part, when I first started, we did all of that first and then rivet them up. Then they had some parts, what they call— you had to take the skin and dimple it. It had to be dimpled for the rivet to fit down in it. So we helped do all of that kind of stuff. It wasn't all just riveting, when I first started.

Li:

What airplane were you working on?

01-00:24:11

Charles:

B-29s when I first started. In Wichita, it was B-29s.

Li:

What was your work area like? What was your shop like?

01-00:24:26

Charles:

It was a shop, just a space. You had tables, a benchwork, where you'd lay your work on. Then you had machines, all in there, tables and machines. Then a place for air holes and plug-ins and all that stuff. Most of them was in the floor then.

Li:

And you worked with the same people, the same shift?

01-00:24:53

Charles:

Yes. On the same shift, yeah.

Li:

Were there any men working in your—?

01-00:24:59

Charles:

Oh, yeah. There were men there. During that time, I never worked with no men; I only worked with those ladies, during that time.

Li:

You said you started off as graveyard, but did you change shifts while you were there?

01-00:25:13

Charles:

No. During that time, no, we never did change. It was only the two shifts, days and the night. During that time, people moreso on days, people with kids or something, and they wasn't going to give it up, so there wasn't no opening on days.

Li:

Did you make friends at work? Was it pretty easy to—?

01-00:25:43

Charles:

Oh, yeah. Made friends at work, yeah.

Li:

Were there some people from your high school that were at the same factory?

01-00:25:50

Charles: Yes. It was some there, but only this one girl and I was in the same shop. The rest of them was in different shops, doing different things.

Li: Did you have time or energy to socialize at all outside of work?

01-00:26:06

Charles: Oh, yeah. Lots of time, yeah. We did, yeah.

Li: What kind of things would you do for fun?

01-00:26:12

Charles: Well, they had a café place down there. Then they had juke boxes, and you could go in, you could dance, or you'd sit and talk or listen to the music and all that kind of—there was always something you could do, yeah.

Li: What kind of music did you listen to at that time? Did you have a favorite?

01-00:26:36

Charles: Oh, a lot of fast music. Right now, I don't know what the name of all the records was.

Li: What were you doing with the money you were making? Did you have to send some home?

01-00:26:48

Charles: Yes. That was my thing. I helped my parents, yeah. I sent money home. Every payday, I sent money home.

Li: Did it make a big difference, do you think?

01-00:27:00

Charles: Oh, yeah. It made a big difference with them. Yes.

Li: How did you feel about the work you were doing, building these airplanes for the war? Did you feel proud of the work?

01-00:27:17

Charles: Oh, yeah. I always felt proud of my work. Knowing you were doing something to help, it'll always make you proud.

Li: Yes. Were you very political at this time?

01-00:27:34

Charles: No. Not at all. No. No. Really, after the war was over, when I came to Seattle, then—I came to Seattle in 1946. That's when I registered. But other than that, no. During that time, I did not.

Li: You were at the Boeing plant in Wichita for two years?

01-00:28:07

Charles: Yes, for two years.

Li: Why did you leave?

01-00:28:12

Charles: Why did I leave Wichita? Because after Boeing laid off and all, I started working at Kress's ten-cent store. Well, that wasn't paying too much money. Then all my family was out here, so I just decided I'd pull up, leave.

Li: Had your family come out here for work?

01-00:28:40

Charles: My mom and them came out here in 1944, I know. Yes, had to be '44. My father got killed on his job. Then, as I said, my mom's family was out here. So she came out here. My mom and my two younger sisters came out here. So then after, as I said, the war I came out here in '46. Jobs wasn't paying that good back there.

Li: Do you remember when the war ended?

01-00:29:24

Charles: Yes. Yes. The day when the war ended—it was funny; we went to work, and they laid everyone, mostly, off that day, when the war ended.

Li: That day.

01-00:29:39

Charles: That day. Yes. They did. Yes, I remember when it ended. They laid everyone off. The ones that just, like me, been there two years. I'm quite sure they kept some people that had been there a long time; but all of us that came there on that NYA thing and all, they laid them all off.

Li: Were people upset about being—?

01-00:30:10

Charles: You know, I don't know if they were. They hated to leave their job; I know I did. But it was just one of those things. Yes.

Li: You mentioned when we talked earlier that you had worked as a mechanic and a bucker also.

01-00:30:28

Charles: Right, right. That's what I'm saying. You have to drill the hole, and you put one person use the rivet gun, and the other one get behind and buck the rivet. You have a bucking bar, a steel bar that you hold and buck the rivets on that side, to keep them from coming through. Other than that, they'd come right out. They're showing you that on that picture there, too. Yes.

Li: Did the work feel dangerous?

01-00:31:03

Charles:

Well, some parts of the work was dangerous, but I was working in small parts, so mine was not dangerous. When you're drilling a hole in stuff, you've got to watch where you drill, and you can't put your hand behind there to feel the hole or nothing. Yes, there's a lot of people got hurt, drilled their hands and all that kind of stuff, or hit their hand with the bucking bar or something. But yeah, it's dangerous work. You've got to watch what you're doing. Yes.

Li:

What were the small parts that you were working on? What part of the plane were you working on?

01-00:31:41

Charles:

Well, a lot of them went on the inside. Most of the ones I did went on the inside, because—I forgot what you call it now. You did the part that went clean across the plane, to hold the skins together. After you did, you know how you have just the frame? So I know during the time in Wichita, we did those frames. Like that. They put—the inner jig, what they call the jig, where you drill them up, is shaped like the part, the thing. So you would have to drill them, clean them, and then take them out and rivet them up. Yep, I did it all, some of all of it.

Li:

Did you have a supervisor?

01-00:32:38

Charles:

Oh, yeah, you had a supervisor. During that time, I think all supervisors, mostly, was men. I couldn't tell you his name now at all.

Li:

So he didn't leave a strong impression?

01-00:32:51

Charles:

No. He didn't bother [you] or nothing, but they just walked around and if you had a question, you asked them and like that.

Li:

Did you like working for Boeing? Was it a good company?

01-00:33:05

Charles:

I did, yeah. I liked working for Boeing. Yes.

Li:

Did you have health care at this time?

01-00:33:15

Charles:

When I was in Wichita? I'm quite sure we did, but, you know, I don't remember. I'm quite sure we had health care. During the war, I'm quite sure. I don't remember.

Li:

When you're young and healthy, I guess you don't think about it.

01-00:33:36

Charles:

Right, yeah. Yes. I don't remember.

Li: How did you get to work every day?

01-00:33:41

Charles: Bus. They had special buses at a certain place, to pick you up, carried you to work. Number of bus that take you to a certain part and like that. Boeing had those yellow buses, I think. Yes, Boeing had those big yellow buses, during that time.

Li: What were your plans once you got laid off from the factory? Did you have an idea of what you wanted to do for work?

01-00:34:17

Charles: Well, right then, I just wanted to get another job. I still had rent to pay and things, so I just got another job.

Li: But then you came out to Seattle in—

01-00:34:35

Charles: I came out to Seattle in 1946, yeah.

Li: Did you have a job lined up here?

01-00:34:42

Charles: I didn't. But it didn't take me long to find a job when I went looking for one.

Li: Was the economy pretty good in Seattle at that time?

01-00:34:57

Charles: I don't think it was that—right now, I don't know how much I made.

Li: What did you do when you got here?

01-00:36:07

Charles: The first job I got here was I worked at a toy shop. Stuffed animals, you know? That's where I worked when I first got here.

Li: You said that you went back to work at Boeing.

01-00:35:26

Charles: Yes, in 1950. I went back to work at Boeing in 1950. They gave you your two years; I regained that. Yes, I went back in 1950, and I worked till 1988. Then I stopped.

Li: Were you seeking out a job at Boeing in 1950?

01-00:35:55

Charles: No. All at once, Boeing started hiring people. They had this big overflow of hiring. Because I remember they had it in the paper and on the radio, everywhere, and we went out there. And Katy went to Boeing. I knew Katy then. We were all friends. So we went out there and got hired that same day.

Li: What were you doing there?

01-00:36:34

Charles: Same thing, riveting. Riveter.

Li: Were you happy to be back doing that work?

01-00:36:39

Charles: Oh, yeah. I was. Yes, I was. Yes, I was. I went back as a riveter. But when you first go back like that, you're a riveter assistant. Which you have a person that's doing all the riveting; you're their assistant. You're bucking or you're drilling holes or you're going to a room, getting what they need or something like that. So I was this assistant. I'd say for maybe six months or something.

Li: Then you got promoted up to riveter—

01-00:37:23

Charles: Right.

Li: —and you did your own. But you said your two years counted, that you'd done in Wichita?

01-00:37:27

Charles: Yes.

Li: Towards your retirement?

01-00:37:29

Charles: Yes.

Li: Did you stay riveting till 1988?

01-00:37:34

Charles: I did. I wasn't riveting anymore out on the big planes; I was doing small parts at a machine, what they call {lot tie?}. I went into {lot tying?} and doing small parts. But I was riveting, still riveting, just wasn't out on the plane.

Li: Can you compare for me working at the Boeing factory in Wichita versus here?

01-00:38:09

Charles: Oh. Yes. Versus here, was more real work than there, and the people was different. Now, when I really started to work here at Boeing, I mostly worked with men. Sometimes I'd be the only woman in the area, the group. Most of the time, I worked nights, though, because my kids were small and I worked nights. My husband was here at night; he worked days. The two hours in between, my mom would come over and take care of the kids.

Li: So Boeing didn't offer child care at that time?

01-00:39:01

Charles: No. No. Do they offer it now? I don't think so.

Li: I don't know.

01-00:39:06

Charles: I don't think so, no.

Li: So what was the work environment here like, compared to Wichita, in terms of men and women working together or people of different races working together? Was it more of an issue here than it had been in Wichita?

01-00:39:24

Charles: Yes, in a sense, yeah, it was. I guess the people here was more friendly. You got along better, I guess, than those in Wichita. As I said, I didn't work with young people in Wichita. When I worked in Wichita, as I said, I worked with kind of older women than I was. So they were okay to work with; I didn't work with the young generation.

Li: Do you think they would've been more difficult?

01-00:40:01

Charles: I think so, yeah. They probably would've been, yeah.

Li: Did the men you worked with give you a hard time, working here?

01-00:40:13

Charles: Not really a hard time, but some of them—well, I had one or two, wanted to tell you jokes. I didn't listen to their jokes. And there's one always put his hands on women. He put his hand on me once, and that's all, because I tried to knock the devil out of him. He didn't touch me no more. He'd always go put his hands on you somewhere he shouldn't. But he didn't do me that but once. No more. [Vassar laughs]

Li: When you had an assistant riveter, was it a man who was your assistant?

01-00:40:58

Charles: Yes. Yes. Yes. When I first started? Yes, I worked with a man. But he was a black man, so I had no problems out of him. That was {Bryant?}. I worked with Bryant.

Vassar: Oh, did you?

01-00:41:15

Charles: Yes. Bryant was my riveter when I first started.

Vassar: Really?

01-00:41:19

Charles: Yes.

Vassar: You mean the black that worked the—.

01-00:41:24

Charles: Yes, Bryant that was at your church, with Sunday school and all. Yes, I worked with Bryant.

Li: So you still know him now?

01-00:41:32

Charles: He had passed, yeah. But we still was friends, yeah. Yes.

Li: Wow.

Vassar: Yes, he was wonderful. I liked him a lot.

01-00:41:40

Charles: Yes, I worked with him, when I first started in '50, at Plant 2. He was my riveter.

Li: And then when you became a riveter, was your assistant a man, like the one who rebuffed you?

01-00:41:53

Charles: Sometimes, yeah, I did have men bucking for me. Yes.

Li: Did they ever have a hard time getting—?

01-00:42:00

Charles: No, no. Every person I had liked working with—we worked good together. Yes. But they were mostly younger people. Then I worked with the mechanic, where we did the mechanic work, and then he would buck the rivets for me, men and a mechanic. That worked well, very well. I never really had too many hard people to get along with. If they wasn't working with me, we may have been working in the same area.

Li: Looking back now, how important was that first job for you in Wichita, that wartime work?

01-00:42:58

Charles: That was very important to me, because during that time, as you say, the Depression was going kind of over, and I needed to help my parents. That was really good for me, to have a job so I could send them money to help them.

Li: Because there was probably no other way.

01-00:43:26

Charles: No, it wasn't. There was no work for them. As I say too, my father got killed on his job, and then there was my mom and the two younger children, so I needed a job to help them.

Li: So were you supporting them then?

01-00:43:54

Charles: I was helping. Yes, yeah. Helping.

Li: Are there any other experiences from that war time that I haven't asked about that you remember being particularly memorable? Working in the factory or friends from that time, with the war?

01-00:44:17

Charles: I don't know.

Li: Did people in the factory talk about the war, talk about where the B-29 was being used?

01-00:44:27

Charles: I don't remember them talking too much about that kind of stuff.

Li: Did you ever get to see or go inside a finished B-29?

01-00:44:41

Charles: No, not during the war. As I said, I worked in a section— I didn't even work in final assembly, where they assembled the plane. But no, during the war, I never went in a finished plane. But in Seattle, I worked in some of them that was practically finished. But after a certain point, it has to be something special that you're doing there, to let you go in the place, because they're getting that plane ready to ship out. You can't just walk anyplace in it.

Li: When you read about the history and how important the B-29 was or when you see it at the Museum of Flight, do you feel a sense of pride?

01-00:45:36

Charles: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. But I have not been out to the Museum of Flight. I have not been out there.

Vassar: The one back in Massachusetts?

01-00:45:50

Charles: Huh? No, the one out on the field.

Li: The one down at Boeing Field.

01-00:45:53

Charles: Field. Did you guys go out there?

Vassar: We went to one there in Massachusetts, not out there at Boeing, no.

01-00:46:03

Charles: I left one year, and you had a thing to go out there. I think Ruby—

Vassar: Oh, yes.

01-00:46:16

Charles: Yes, Ruby went with you. Because I was leaving, going to—

Vassar: Yes. Where were you going?

01-00:46:25

Charles: To the convention, {Ursha's?} convention.

Vassar: Yes, they let us go.

01-00:46:29

Charles: Right. I could not go. And I know you guys went.

Vassar: Yes, we went in there and went on the plane and everything.

01-00:46:36

Charles: Right. That's what I thought, you went. But I didn't go, because I was leaving town that same day that they had it. I know Ruby went with you. Ruby Taylor went. Okay. I didn't. No, I have not been out there.

Li: Was Ruby Taylor another woman who worked at Boeing with you? You said Ruby Taylor. Did she work at Boeing?

01-00:47:04

Charles: Oh, no, she never worked at Boeing, no.

Li: I wanted to ask, how'd you meet your husband?

01-00:47:11

Charles: At church. And now he doesn't go.

Li: What church did you attend? The same church?

01-00:47:20

Charles: Yes, the same church I attend to now, but where we lived, every Sunday evening they had church in a building over there. Different preachers would preach and—

Li: At Boeing?

01-00:47:41

Charles: No, no, where we lived. In Georgetown. That's where I met him, over there. In church.

Li: Did most people who lived in Georgetown at that time work at Boeing?

01-00:47:58

Charles: You know, I don't know. A lot of them did, yeah. A lot of them worked at Boeing, and some of them didn't. But yeah, a lot of them did. But he never worked for Boeing, no.

Li: Did you raise your children in Georgetown, then?

01-00:48:18

Charles: No. My daughter, when we moved here, she was seven; and my son was born here. So they was raised right in this house here.

Li: What year did you move into this house?

01-00:48:36

Charles: In 1950. Fifty? Yes. Fifty or '56. Maybe it was '56, 1956.

Li: Do you remember what year you were married?

01-00:48:52

Charles: [chuckles] 1948.

Li: 1948. You'd be surprised how many people forget. [they laugh] Especially the men I interview. 1948. Was your husband a veteran? Did he serve?

01-00:49:03

Charles: Yes, he's a veteran, yeah. But I didn't know him then.

Li: What branch did he serve in?

01-00:49:12

Charles: All I know, he was in the Army.

Li: He was in the Army? Okay. In Europe or in Asia?

01-00:49:17

Charles: He went somewhere over there; I really don't know.

Li: All right. Well, thank you so much for talking to me.

01-00:49:29

Charles: You're welcome.

Li: I really appreciate it. Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you can think, if you want to share?

01-00:49:34

Charles: I don't think so. Because some of them I've forgot about.

Li: Well, maybe I can talk to both of you in a little bit. Thank you.

Begin Audiofile 2 05-16-2012.mp3

Li: This is Robin Li, May 16, 2012, speaking with Eva J. Vassar in Seattle, Washington, in the home of Lou Annie Charles, part of the Rosie the Riveter 2010-2012 Oral History Project. Thanks for talking to me today.

02-00:00:28

Vassar: Yes.

Li: Nice to meet you. So for the tape, could you tell me your name?

02-00:00:37

Vassar: My middle name, was Lenore, and I didn't like it, and I just put—my maiden name was Jones and I just put Eva J. Vassar, because I don't like—

Li: You didn't like Lenore?

02-00:00:54

Vassar: I didn't like it.

Li: And when and where were you born?

02-00:00:58

Vassar: I was born in Oklahoma.

Li: When? what year?

02-00:01:04

Vassar: 1922.

Li: And what was the name of the town you grew up in?

02-00:01:11

Vassar: We had a house in the country and one in the city. Muskogee was 903 South Second; we had a house there. And we had a house in the country, too and a store in the country.

Li: What kind of store was it?

02-00:01:33

Vassar: It was a grocery store and everything, because it wasn't any stores there, so my dad and my mom, they ran a store there. In the country.

Li: That's a pretty enterprising idea. It's a good one.

02-00:01:51

Vassar: Yes. My dad was a minister and my mother was a schoolteacher.

Li: What was the name of your father's church?

02-00:02:04

Vassar: Mount Zion Baptist Church.

Li: Your mom was a schoolteacher, you said?

02-00:02:13

Vassar: Yes.

Li: Did she work when you were growing up?

02-00:02:16

Vassar: Oh, she taught before—it was other children that were born before me. And my dad was married before, and she reared five of his children. And she taught them. Since I've been out here—I don't know who they were, but there was a lady came to the house where I live now and said, "Your mother used to be my schoolteacher." She told me that. I don't know who she was, but she came. She found out I lived here, and she came by and told me that. So I don't know.

Li: How did your mom become a teacher? Did she have to go to teaching college?

02-00:03:05

Vassar: Yes.

Li: Did you have other family in Oklahoma?

02-00:03:11

Vassar: Oh, yeah, I have a lot of family live there now. I have nephews and nieces that live there in Oklahoma, and I have a niece that lives in Oklahoma City now.

Li: And were your parents born in Oklahoma?

02-00:03:35

Vassar: I never did ask them, but I know that they were there, so never did ask them whether they were born there or not. I think my mother lived in Eufaula. Have you ever heard of that? Eufaula, Oklahoma. It's down close to a lake they call Eufaula Lake. I think that's where most of her family lived, Eufaula, E-U-F-A-U-L-A, Eufaula, I remember.

Charles: It was still Oklahoma.

Li: Did you have any brothers or sisters, growing up?

02-00:04:09

Vassar: Ooh!

Li: So you said your dad had five kids from his first marriage.

02-00:04:14

Vassar: And oh, it was so many of us! [they laugh]

Li: How many kids in your family?

02-00:04:22

Vassar:

I had how many brothers? Let me see. {There were bees?}. They had Todd and Augusta. I think four sisters and three brothers. Because I have two brothers left now, that wasn't half-brothers. I had them others; they were half-brothers and sisters, the five.

Li:

Okay. So five, and then eight from the second marriage?

02-00:04:58

Vassar:

Five and I think nine, besides the five.

Li:

So there were fourteen kids altogether?

02-00:05:08

Vassar:

[laughs] That's why he better had a store and everything else, so he could feed the family. But I never do remember being hungry or anything. We always had just a lot of food and everything to eat.

Li:

So what was your mom like, to raise fourteen kids?

02-00:05:36

Vassar:

Oh, she was real nice. She used to play for the church, and once in a while—I remember the first time she was teaching me music; and I still went on to take music since I've been out here. But she let me play for a funeral, when I was kind of young. She was teaching me the song she wanted me to play for this particular funeral.

Li:

So did you play piano? What instrument did you play?

02-00:06:14

Vassar:

Piano. I still do now; but since I broke my wrist, I don't do it too much. But here until about, oh, maybe a month ago. Then the other day, I went back and played a little bit, but it kind of bothered me, since I broke my wrist. But ooh, for years, I played for the Sunday school, just volunteering. They wasn't paying me, but I just did it. Played for the Sunday school children. And the church was People's Institutional Baptist.

Li:

Did you live in the town house or in the country house? Where did you grow up?

02-00:07:00

Vassar:

In the country house. We had a house in the town, too, in Muskogee. I remember the number was 903 South Second, in Muskogee.

Li:

But the house in the country was the one you spent most of your time at?

02-00:07:15

Vassar:

Yes.

Li:

What kind of games did you play? Or what would you do for fun, as a kid?

02-00:07:21

Vassar: Oh. The brothers and sisters, they more or less played baseball, stuff like that. Games like that.

Li: Did you have an idea of what you wanted to be when you grew up?

02-00:07:41

Vassar: Oh, you know what I said when I was young? I used to tell one of my sisters—didn't have a nickel—I said, "One day, I'm going far, far away." I don't know why I said that, but I used to say that, growing up. One of my sisters—she's passed now, but she said, "Now, how are you going far, far away, when you don't have any money?" I said, "I don't know, but I'm going far, far away." Which I sure did, didn't I? I came out here on the NYA, the National Youth Administration.

Li: You went to high school with Lou Annie Charles.

02-00:08:36

Vassar: Yes. Yes.

Li: You guys were in the same high school.

02-00:08:38

Vassar: I finished high school, and then I took the training in Muskogee, with the NYA. After I took training there, they send me to Wichita, to take more training. But I took training not as a riveter; I was a welder.

Li: Why did you choose welding?

02-00:09:07

Vassar: Because it paid more money. [they laugh]

Charles: She's telling the truth. Paid more money.

02-00:09:23

Vassar: Then they sent me from Wichita, out to Georgetown. Georgetown, here in—

Li: In Seattle.

02-00:09:38

Vassar: Seattle.

Li: So were there other girls or women from your high school that also did the training to become welders?

02-00:09:50

Vassar: Yes. I found out after I went to Bremerton, it was other women that were taking welding, because they were over there with me on the ship, welding.

Li: Can you tell me about the training in Wichita? What was the training like?

02-00:10:20

Vassar:

Oh, the training there was still for welders, in Wichita. So they thought maybe Boeing would have the welders and we wouldn't have to come this far to be a welder; but they didn't, so they said, "Well, we'll send you where you can, because we didn't give you this training for nothing." So they sent me out here to Georgetown.

Li:

How did you feel about getting sent to Seattle?

02-00:11:00

Vassar:

Oh, when I first came to Seattle, oh, my goodness, it was cloudy, raining. We was on the train. Ooh, it was misty, like it is. We've gotten used to it now. But oh, we were on the train, and most of us went to crying. When we were in Georgetown, we saw how it was raining and everything, because it was—I was on the top bunk, and it was a white girl on the bottom bunk. She was crying, and I was crying, and I said, "You might as well stop crying, because we can't go home." We didn't have no money to go back. We just had enough money to last until we got our first pay, there on the job.

Li:

Was she from Kansas, also? Had she come with you, from Wichita?

02-00:12:04

Vassar:

I don't know where she came from, but I know I met her. We were in Georgetown together.

Li:

What year was that, that you came to Georgetown?

02-00:12:15

Vassar:

Oh, I think that was in '43.

Li:

1943.

02-00:12:21

Vassar:

Oh, we hated that so bad. We were just crying. Then I peeked down, and I remember I said, "You might as well stop crying; we can't get home." Which we didn't have no money to go home. I think you just had to have, I think it was twenty-five dollars, until you could get a paycheck on your job. I think that's what it was. Was that what it was, Lou?

Charles:

I forgot. I know the money was given to the head people.

02-00:12:55

Vassar:

I don't know how much it was, but you had a certain amount, and they would keep it until you got ready to be placed on the job. Then they would give it to you.

Charles:

I don't remember how much it was.

Li:

So these bunks, then, these were in a dormitory owned by Boeing?

02-00:13:12

Vassar: Where?

Li: Well, you mentioned you were in these bunks.

02-00:13:14

Vassar: Where we were living in Georgetown?

Li: Yes.

02-00:13:17

Vassar: I don't know who they were owned by, but I don't think they were owned by Boeing, because we wasn't working for Boeing.

Li: Who were you working for?

02-00:13:28

Vassar: Oh, I don't know who it was, but—

02-00:13:31

Vassar: All I know is we lived there, and we had a matron over—we had this great big, tall fence, and we had to be back. If you went out on the weekend, you'd have to be back before 12:00 o'clock, or else you do extra KP, just like in the service.

Li: So was this run by the NYA, then? The National Youth Administration, did they run the—?

02-00:13:58

Vassar: Yes, NYA.

Li: Yes, so that's who you're with, that's who was running the—

02-00:14:01

Vassar: Yes. That's who was running it, the NYA. That's what it was. That's who was running it. Yes, and you had to be back in. I remember it was a girl, her name was {Corinne Love?}, and a guy from Oklahoma, he was going to take all of the girls down to a club. I was laughing when I told my son this. He said, "Yes, you had no business going there, Mom." Oh, it was on Madison. It was a club; he was going to take us there. Because he was paying the money; we didn't have no money. But this girl and I, we missed the group some kind or another; I guess they were on the floor, dancing. Then we didn't have no money to get back to Georgetown. We were wandering on the street and saying, "What are we going to do?" I said, "We'll have to go to the police." She said, "No, they might put us in jail." But it happened to be—it was an older man driving a car, and he must've thought we lost. He said, "Are you girls lost?" We told him yes, and we told him we were staying in Georgetown on the NYA. So we asked him, did he know how to take us there? He was a nice man. I don't know who he was, but he took us there. But we were a little

late getting back. We had to do extra KP duty. But he took us, and didn't even try to bother us. I don't think I'd do that now.

Li: Did you know anyone in Seattle when you came? Did you have any family or friends in Seattle, when you came?

02-00:16:00

Vassar: No. No, I didn't have no family here. No.

Li: Did you have any friends from your training in Wichita, who came with you?

02-00:16:11

Vassar: I think there was some came with me; I don't know whether they went to Bremerton with me or not, because instead of staying here at Boeing, I went to Bremerton.

Li: So how long were you in Georgetown, before they sent you to Bremerton?

02-00:16:27

Vassar: Oh, we wasn't there too long. We just stayed there until they could find a place for us to work. We had more or less finished our training as a welder and everything. Then when they called and found out that they needed us in the shipyard in Bremerton, well, then they sent us over there to work.

Li: What was Bremerton like?

02-00:16:59

Vassar: Oh, we lived in a dormitory and had a matron over us. You couldn't have any boys, not in your room or nothing. We had a lobby, and you could entertain, if you had a friend or anything. And she was sitting right there, to watch and see everything. They could not dare to go into your room. You could entertain them sitting in the lobby. We could walk from the dormitory to the Navy yard.

Li: Bremerton is pretty, right? It's a pretty place to live. Was it pretty then?

02-00:17:53

Vassar: Yes, it was pretty.

Li: Compared to Georgetown.

02-00:17:57

Vassar: Yes, it was nice. I enjoyed it. The matron—I don't know if she would tell; I thought she was just telling us this. She might've been telling the truth. But she said, "I want you girls to stay together and do not go anywhere by yourselves." [She] said, "Because they take women underground, and I don't want that to happen to you. So stay together, and don't go anywhere by yourself." That's what she used to tell us. I thought she was just talking. But that's what she used to—

Li: What did she mean, they take women underground?

02-00:18:42

Vassar: Taking women off and you never see them again, that's what she meant. I don't know if that was true or she was just trying to scare us, so we would stay together when we went anyplace. But that's what she told us, and I don't know; maybe that's true. Might not have been.

Li: So this is 1943; 1943, you go to Bremerton?

02-00:19:12

Vassar: Yes. I stayed over there and worked until the war ended. Like she was saying, they laid a lot of people off, right after the war ended. But I stayed six months after the war ended. The supervisor told me, say, "I don't want to let you go now, Eva, but I kept you as long as I could." So he kept me. I remember there was a guy, it was a man. He got his slip the first day after the war, and you stayed about three days, most of them. He said, "Did you get your slip to get laid off?" I said, "No, I didn't." "Well, you'll get it tomorrow." I said, "I guess so." So the third day, and I still hadn't got it. He said, "Didn't you get your slip?" I said, "No, I didn't." He said, "Let me see your work." Ooh, he was fierce! He said he had a family—let me tell you this—and I was black, and he was white, and he had a family, and I didn't have no family, and yet I was—
[laughs]

Li: But he checked your work? He wanted to check your work and make sure you were good at what you were doing?

02-00:20:40

Vassar: Yes, he was saying, "Let me see your work. Let me just come over there." He was so furious, because he got his slip and he worked three days after the war. I said, "If he knew I stayed there six months, he sure—" [laughs] Oh, man, did I laugh!

Li: So do you remember how much you were making? How much it paid, working as a welder at that time?

02-00:21:10

Vassar: Oh, I don't know, but I know it was more than most of the other jobs; that's the reason I took it.

Li: But it's pretty dangerous work, isn't it, welding? With the sparks and—

02-00:21:24

Vassar: Oh. I guess because I liked it, I didn't think so. You know what? The men—I remember it was another lady working, and they would rather work with me and the lady more than they did other men, because some of the men did not know what they were doing. If you don't know how to set your machine up—we did both kinds, arc welding and acetylene. We did both kinds.

Li: Okay. Can you tell me the difference between those two?

02-00:21:58

Vassar:

Well, one, you strike an arc; that's arc welding. You have like a rod sticking in the point of the machine; that's the arc. You strike that and make a bead and weld like that. Acetylene, you're holding and you're using a torch, like that. You use that for more or less thinner material that you're working on. Arc welding, you weld overhead. Some of the men, if you're working overhead and you're working with a ship fitter, you will burn them up, if you don't know what you're doing and know how to fix your machine at a certain temperature, working. They would always—because they knew we had taken a lot of training and we knew what we were doing—they would be happy to work with me and this other lady that was working there. So they were real tickled to work with us, because like I said, we could do a lot better than the men, because we had had so much training.

Li: Some of the other men you worked with were not trained by the NYA?

02-00:23:29

Vassar:

No. They were not trained by this NYA group that we were in. They just more or less, I guess, was picking it up on their own, didn't know what they were doing, and they would burn them up. The sparks would really come down on their heads and everything. Then I was telling Lou, too, that when you were working as a welder and it was raining, if you were working outside, well, the ship fitters or the supervisor would say, "Go on and get in or go upstairs or something," because you could not be working in the rain and working with that electricity like that. You can't do that. So we could go—and we were still getting paid—we could still go upstairs and sit down, rest while it was raining.

There was a lady that was over some of the workers that did janitorial work. But with working for a welder—X-26 was the badge number, X-26. She knew when she saw that badge on our shirts that she didn't have nothing to do with us. We could sit there, if we wanted to, especially if it was raining. She didn't have nothing to do with us, so we were so happy about that. We used to kind of laugh. She'd look. [Makes a motion] She did like that.

Li: So what shift were you working? Were you working days or nights?

02-00:25:23

Vassar:

Yes, I was working days.

Li: Did they have night shifts. Did they work night shifts in Bremerton? Was there a graveyard?

02-00:25:29

Vassar:

Oh, I don't know, but I was working day shift the whole time when I was working in Bremerton. I stayed on over there until after the war was ended and all that.

Li: What kind of ships were you working on?

02-00:25:45

Vassar: I was working on the California and the Arizona, I think it was. Because all the ships that would get damaged, and they would bring them in to Bremerton, for you doing the repair. I was working on them.

Li: So you would do repairs on ships that had already been damaged.

02-00:26:04

Vassar: Yes. They'd go back out to war.

Li: When you're working on the outside of a ship, are you on some kind of pulley, or how do you—?

02-00:26:15

Vassar: Oh, sometimes I would work outside. That's when I said if I was working outside, and especially if it was raining, they didn't want that. Sometimes I was working inside the ship. They would call it double bottom. I would go up and down the ladder and work way below. You could work anytime then. They called it double bottom. You would be working down below and welding beads. Wherever the ship needed repairing, you were working inside there.

Li: Was it small, the space that you had to go into?

02-00:26:57

Vassar: Yes, small spaces sometimes. Then you'd have to climb ladders and have your gear trailing down your back.

Li: Because it's pretty heavy, right?

02-00:27:07

Vassar: You could do all that. Yes.

Li: But the welding equipment's pretty heavy.

02-00:27:10

Vassar: Yes.

Li: Did you have to wear a leather bib or—?

02-00:27:12

Vassar: Yes, and then you had to have somebody to be your fire watch too, since you could not be welding and {not there with the fire?}. You had to have somebody there to be watching you, if some sparks got out or anything. But yeah, you went up and down the ladders with gear on and everything. I didn't think nothing of it. I just said I was getting paid, and I was supposed to do the work.

Li: Did you have to wear special protective clothes?

02-00:27:47

Vassar: You had a leather suit on, the welders, and the hood over your head, and you're climbing.

Li: So you're wearing a full leather suit, and you're climbing into little parts of the boat with the welding equipment.

02-00:27:57

Vassar: Yes. Yes. Yes, with the equipment. And you'd climb up and down the ladders, go up and down, do all of that, and overhead welding, like that.

Li: Did you enjoy it?

02-00:28:10

Vassar: Yes! I knew how to do it, because they trained us really well, and I knew how to do all of that. I just really didn't think nothing about that I was climbing up and down. I just said I'd go where I was supposed to go, where they're telling you to go to work.

Li: Did you hear about people getting injured on the job, people getting burned or having falls?

02-00:28:38

Vassar: Oh, I never did. I never was around anybody that got burned, I guess. I was around where people kind of knew what they were doing, I guess, and they didn't—I know I didn't ever get burned or anything.

Li: When you were working during the war, did men and women work together pretty well?

02-00:29:02

Vassar: Yes. Yes, they worked together.

Li: Were there many African-American welders where you were?

02-00:29:09

Vassar: Yes, it was quite a few. Like Lou was saying, a lot of times I'd be the only woman working. It wasn't too many.

Li: Yes. Did you have much time to socialize? Did you have free time outside of work, when you were in Bremerton? Did you have time to go out with friends or socialize?

02-00:29:39

Vassar: Oh, yeah. Yes, you could go out. But like I said, with staying in the dormitory, well—that's why she wanted you to stay together and don't be going out nowhere by yourself. It was quite a few women, because it was a women's dormitory; wasn't no men in there. Then you had a woman matron, and she

would warn you to stay together. Don't just go wandering off by yourself anywhere.

Li: What would you do for fun? Where would you go with the other girls?

02-00:30:19

Vassar: You know what? We went to USO dances. They would take us on a bus and go to different cities. You still have a matron or somebody over you there, and you used to go to USO. You couldn't just dance with one partner; you couldn't do that in the USO. You had to dance with different ones and not just act like you'd go in like one person and dance with them. No, no. That was not what you were supposed to do. But you had a matron over you, and you'd go to different cities, to USOs. We used to do that quite a lot.

Li: So were you employed by the Navy? Is that where your checks came from? Did your paychecks come from—?

02-00:31:18

Vassar: Oh, yeah. When I was in Bremerton, I was employed by the Navy.

Li: A civilian employee of the Navy.

02-00:31:24

Vassar: Yes, the government paid that.

Li: Were there many enlisted soldiers working in the factories, also? Were there people who were in the Navy, working in the factory?

02-00:31:37

Vassar: Oh, was it women and men, you said?

Li: No, were there people from the Navy—enlisted people, soldiers—were there people from the Navy working in the factory, also?

02-00:31:49

Vassar: I don't know. I didn't ever—

Li: People in uniform, no?

02-00:31:53

Vassar: —meet any there.

Li: Would you talk about the war much? Did people at work talk about what was going on?

02-00:32:04

Vassar: Oh, we didn't do too much talking about the war. We'd just go on and go to work and thinking about trying to really get the ships back out so the men could have their ship so they could do the job of fighting. When they would

destroy a ship, we would be trying to work hard to get it back into commission, so they could go back.

Li: So would you watch the ships sail out, after you had repaired them?

02-00:32:39

Vassar: Oh, yeah, we loved to do that. We'd stand there and watch. We was pretty proud of that, the fact that we had done something like that. I don't know who this president was, but one time he came and watched. He'd go back. We were just pretty proud that we had done work like that on a ship like that.

Li: Could you tell me about that? So where would the ships go out from? And would you be on the docks or where would you be?

02-00:33:12

Vassar: Yes. Bremerton, there's a lot of water there. We would stand there and watch and see them go, sailing way away, wherever they were going. We'd just watch the ships go. We were real happy that we had been part of the {inaudible} repair and stuff like that.

Li: Yes. Yes. So what were you doing with your paycheck? Were you saving the money?

02-00:33:45

Vassar: Oh, you know what? Funny you ask now. When we came out here, I had a sister that was teaching school. I asked her for the money we had to have—I don't know how much it was, but we had to have a certain amount, before we could come out here, when we was on {inaudible}. I didn't have no job, and I didn't have no money. I asked her for the money; she said no. Oh, I went to crying. I had another sister, she said, "Stop crying. I'll get the money for you." Said, "I'm going to tell my mother to get the money," like she needed it, "And I'll give it back." So she did, and she got the money for me, and I came out here. That particular sister that would not let me have the money, when I was working in the Navy yard, she asked me for money to repair her home or build an addition on it, and never did pay me all my money back. But I let her have it. Some friends say, "I wouldn't let her have it." But I did. Isn't that odd, that she wouldn't let me have the amount that I wanted, and she wanted a lot more than what I had asked for, and I let her have it? She had to come to me, because I was making money.

Li: Did you send other money home, as well? Did you send money to your parents, also?

02-00:35:37

Vassar: Oh, I didn't send money to them; I just kept the money I had. [laughs]

Li: So you had a bank account?

02-00:35:47

Vassar: Yes. I had a bank account. I put the money in my bank account. I was real proud. I just loved to think about how much. I think I've kind of got that as a habit now. I love to think about how much money I can accumulate.

Li: Because as a young girl, what did it mean for you, to see that bank account growing?

02-00:36:16

Vassar: Yes.

Li: What did it mean to you, as a young girl, to see that?

02-00:36:18

Vassar: Oh, I just loved to see that. Because when I was younger, I didn't have no job, and didn't have no money. So I just thought I was really doing a great accomplishment, to see me to have money in the bank. I really did. I just thought that was wonderful!

Li: What were your plans? Did you have an idea of what you wanted to use that money for? Were you saving for something in particular?

02-00:36:53

Vassar: No, I was just saving it, in case I needed it for something. I just wanted to have my bank account, so I could have the money. But that was really ironic, that this particular sister wouldn't let me have—I think I just wanted twenty-five dollars. She wouldn't let me have that. Yet, I remember I let her have over \$500. Isn't that something? She wouldn't let me. Oh!

Li: So did any of your brothers or sisters come out to Seattle, also?

02-00:37:40

Vassar: Yes. They come out to visit. Most of them did, but they'd all passed on. Even my mother came here. I think most of my sisters came, too. They came to Seattle to visit me.

Li: Did any of them come to work, or no?

02-00:38:00

Vassar: No, not to work. I just have two other brothers left. It's three of us, out of both sets of children. It's three left. Me, and I have two brothers that live in Wichita, Kansas. They're the only ones left.

Li: So your father never came to visit?

02-00:39:34

Vassar: No. He never came out.

Li: Did you attend a church in Bremerton? Did you find a church out here?

02-00:38:43

Vassar:

Yes. It was a church over in Bremerton. It wasn't very far from the dormitory. Mrs. Brown was our matron; she would always introduce us, say, "It's a church close by." She would introduce you to things, so you could go to church, and we went there. It was close to where the dormitory was. I don't know the name of the church, but it was one close by and we went there to church. I was used to going to church, and still go, because with my dad being a minister, we had to go to church. I was used to doing it. Even though I don't have to now, I still do. I'll go.

Li:

Was the church pretty friendly to your girls that were coming in to work in the factories? Were the people in the church in Bremerton welcoming to the girls who were coming to work in Bremerton?

02-00:39:52

Vassar:

Oh, yeah. Yes, they were happy that we would come there. I remember someone at the church wanted me to sing a solo or something. I still sing in the choir now, here. Yes, they would welcome you and wanted you to participate in the church functions and everything. You kind of enjoyed doing things like that. I remember it was another church, I think quite a few black people went there. They called it Sinclair Heights or something. But that was quite a ways away from the dorm, so we didn't go there. We went to one that was closer to where we lived.

Li:

So was this church mixed? Was it a mixed church, black and white?

02-00:40:57

Vassar:

Yes. Yes, it was.

Li:

Did you notice the sort of racial politics of Kansas and Oklahoma are really different than Seattle and Bremerton?

02-00:41:14

Vassar:

Oh, you know what? I didn't tell about this. I went to visit my mother. I knew I was going to leave to come to Seattle, so I went to visit her. I had to come through a little town in Oklahoma. Ooh, I never will forget it. With me being a young lady, and I had to come through this little town in Oklahoma, was called Perry, Oklahoma. We came through—I was on a bus—had to change buses there. It wasn't no business station, it was just a restaurant. I think I was about the only black person on that bus. I got off and everybody was going in this restaurant, because there wasn't no bus station. I went in there, too, with them, because I didn't know. When I went in there, the people that owned the restaurant, they politely took me by the arm and said, "We don't allow— [laughs] in here." It was cold, it was freezing, and it was midnight. Walked me outside and I said, "What—?" I didn't know nothing.

Li:

You're just a young girl, traveling alone!

02-00:43:12

Vassar:

Yes! I didn't know. It was a policeman saw them do me like that, and he came out and he said, "I am so sorry." Said, "But I don't make the rules," he said. "But oh, I am so sorry." Said, "Come on. I will take you down to—" There was a train station. Because I didn't know nothing about the place. It was quite a ways away. He brought me down to that train station and said, "You can go in there and stay, and when it's getting close to time for your bus—" He told me what time the bus would come to be taking me back to Wichita, and said, "Then you come back, so you can catch your bus." Said, "I'm so sorry." He walked with me and went with me and told me. Because he knew I would've frozen to death. I couldn't stay out in that cold for that long.

Li:

And a young girl traveling alone, in the middle of the night.

02-00:44:20

Vassar:

Yes, it was. I didn't know nothing. But ooh! Every time I think of that little town of Perry, ooh! It's horrible.

Li:

So were you glad to come out west then? Did it seem like things would be better—

02-00:44:41

Vassar:

Oh, yes.

Li:

—out west than they were there?

02-00:44:43

Vassar:

Yes. I was really glad to get away from— [laughs] Oh, I said, "That is too much."

Li:

Was Seattle better?

02-00:44:47

Vassar:

Oh, yeah, yeah. Yes, it was better.

Li:

Yes? Not as segregated?

02-00:45:01

Vassar:

No, they didn't do nothing like that. But I'll tell you, here, no. But ooh! But that was the first time I had ever been done like that. Ooh! That was really something. I said, "Well, well." I wouldn't be here today, I don't think, because I couldn't have stood out there in that cold like that for that length of time, till that bus came. But I'm so glad that that policeman saw the do that and he followed me and went with me. That was really nice of him, wasn't it?

Li:

Yes. Yes.

02-00:45:41

Vassar:

Yes. Told me when to come back to catch the bus. Ooh!

Li: That's awful.

02-00:45:49

Vassar: Say, that was really something.

Li: It's so awful. So when did you meet your husband? Did you meet your husband in Kansas, or did you meet your husband out here?

02-00:45:50

Vassar: Oh, no, I met my husband out here. Oh, it was after the war and everything, I met my husband out here, after I came from Bremerton, came over to Seattle to live. I lived on 21st Avenue, and I got a job at the Marine Hospital, as a nurses' aide. I worked there until I got—I think I met my husband there. Isn't that something, where I met him? As a nurses' aide, when I worked at Marine Hospital, that's where I met my husband. He was in the hospital.

Li: Was he a patient? He was a patient?

02-00:46:50

Vassar: Yes.

Li: So he was a veteran? He'd served?

02-00:47:00

Vassar: He was a veteran.

Li: Was he in Europe or was he in—?

02-00:47:04

Vassar: He was in the Navy. He was a bosun's mate.

Li: Was he on the ships that you were repairing?

02-00:47:18

Vassar: Oh, I guess he had been on one of them, but he wasn't on that {many?}. He was a bosun's mate in the Navy.

Li: What year did you get married?

02-00:47:43

Vassar: Ooh, let me see. I think it was '78, I think it was.

Li: Sorry, what year was it you said? What year did you get married?

02-00:48:01

Vassar: I think it was '78.

Li: '78? Okay.

02-00:48:03

Vassar: I believe that's when it was.

Li: So did you ever work as a welder again?

02-00:48:10

Vassar: No, I never did work as a welder again. No. When I came over here, when I went to work at Boeing, I really wasn't going—because my youngest son, he was young, a baby, and I wasn't wanting to go to work at that time. I was going with another lady, just for a joy ride, and my husband said—I had two sons, which I do have now—said he would keep the children, and we could go on a ferry ride to Bremerton. I thought that was something nice; we were going over there, just going for a joy ride, go on a ferry ride. We came by a place downtown. Boeing had an office down there, hiring people. It was a lady that was with me, and another lady, and I told them, I said, "Both of you go on because if they just have two jobs, well, so you can get the jobs, because I'm not really too particular about working at this time." They told them no. When they went through to try to apply for the job, they told them no. They said, "Let me see what you have." I had on there that I had worked in Bremerton as a welder, and they said, "Okay. Did you bring your Social Security card with you?" I said, "No, I didn't intend to come." Said, "Go home and get it." I went home and got my Social Security card, came back, and they said, "You're hired." Said, "Do you have anybody to keep your young son?" The lady that was with me said, "I'll keep him for her," and I went to work.

Li: So what year was that?

02-00:50:34

Vassar: It must've been 1950, because he was young. He was a young son. It must've been around that time.

Li: What were you working on then?

02-00:50:49

Vassar: Oh, I wasn't working nowhere at that time, and I was going to stay home and keep them; that's what I thought, because I had stopped working up at the hospital. Then when I went to Boeing, and she kept the children for me, well, then I went. Boeing never did lay me off. Instead of laying me off, they'd send me to Harbor Island, to make dustpans and everything else, to keep from laying me off. They never did lay me off.

Li: Which factory were you working at? Where was the factory that you were working on? Or the plant.

02-00:51:37

Vassar: Oh, I started at Plant 2, and I worked in all of them. I started at Plant 2. Then after I worked at Plant 2 for a while, they said they needed me in Renton plant. I went there and worked at Renton plant for quite a while, as a riveter.

Then when I worked there, they said, “Well, we need you in Everett to be a lead.” I just thought that that was ridiculous, going to Everett. You know what I did? I didn’t even punch my card or clock out or nothing. I was just so aggravated with them saying I had to go away to Everett, until I left and I came home. I came home and said, “I’m not going back.” It was a lady supervisor over there. I know her now; she lives still, in Washington here. She’ll call me sometimes. I can’t think of her name, though, now. Anyway, she called me and she said, “Eva! You have worked too long and too hard to throw it all away like that. Run yourself back in here. It’s not going to be that bad. Do you hear me?” Her first name was Barbara. I came on back, like she said, the next day. I went on up to Everett, which she was right. I enjoyed that better than I did at the other plants. It wasn’t that bad, because I don’t—right now—I didn’t mind freeway driving, because it wasn’t really bad. I would work overtime and everything up in Everett. In fact, Lou and I were working in the same shop sometimes, on small parts, up in Everett. It wasn’t bad at all. So I was glad that she did that, because I was so aggravated, because I thought it was going to be so horrible. But sometimes I would get a ride. I didn’t have to drive all the time; we would carpool and go to Everett. So if I had to work overtime, well, I had to drive myself. But I didn’t mind the drive at all. I still don’t mind freeway driving.

Li: How long did you work for Boeing?

02-00:54:41

Vassar: I think it was thirty-two years. Thirty-two or -three, because this is my thirty-year watch here. This is when I worked thirty years.

Li: They gave you that watch?

02-00:55:00

Vassar: They gave me this little dirty watch.

Li: “Eva Vassar, thirty years’ service, the Boeing Company. 1981.” Wow. So did you like working for Boeing?

02-00:55:19

Vassar: Yes, I enjoyed it.

Li: They were good employers?

02-00:55:21

Vassar: It was nice. It really was. I enjoyed working there. You know what? They were really nice when my mother was ill. She was very ill. She had breast cancer. She lived in Eufaula, Oklahoma. I went there on a vacation, and wasn’t nobody to take care of her. She was living with my sister that taught school, but she still wanted to work. I was still working at Boeing, but I was just on vacation. I wanted to take care of my mother, because she didn’t have

nobody—. You have to change the bandages and do all that. Wait on her and do all that. She was very ill.

So you know what? I don't know how, I happened to get my supervisor like that. I called from Eufaula, and I got ahold to my supervisor. I said, "My mother is very ill, and don't have anyone to take care of her, and I want to stay here and take care of her. Is it okay if I would get a leave to take—?" He said, "Stay." Said, "I'll give you ninety days at first, Eva. Stay as long as it takes. You take care of your mother, and you will have your job when you come back. Do you understand, Eva? Take care of your mother." That's what he said. And he meant it. I did. I stayed there and fed my mother, changed her dressing and did all of that, and stayed with her until she passed. I went back, I had my job. He never did lay me off.

When I left Boeing, they didn't lay me off. My husband had a very bad sore on his foot. He was a diabetic, too and everything. I had to go to Everett all the time and come back and see about—. He used to kind of cry and say, "Eva, I don't want them to amputate my foot," he used to tell me. He thought they were going to amputate it, because it was very sore. I had to quit to take care of him, keep him from getting his foot amputated and everything. Ooh, they hated to see me leave, but I had to take care of him, so I did. When he died—he didn't die from the foot, and the doctor said I did a marvelous job of taking care of him. Which I did, until he passed. So that was that.

Li: How important was that choice you made, back at the end of high school, to join the NYA and to get trained as a welder? When you look back on that decision, what would have done, if you hadn't done that?

02-00:59:10

Vassar:

Ooh, I didn't want to do what they were doing. Because I had a friend, she was working at a restaurant, and she was washing pots and pans and was getting a little measly salary, and doing all that work. That was in Muskogee, too. I looked and I said, "Ooh! Uh-uh. I don't want to do that." Oh, I'd look, and she had big old pans and pots, and she was doing that for little or nothing. I said, "Oh, no. Uh-uh. I can't." I can't even say I've tried to be so {choicely?}, but uh-uh. I couldn't see myself doing all of that work for that little money.

Li: So instead, you did what you told your sister you'd do, and you went far, far away.

02-01:00:17

Vassar:

Yes. That's why I guess I said, "I'm going far away," because I couldn't stand doing all that work. I guess she thought she had a real good job. But I didn't. That was terrible, to me. Because I went there to watch her one day. I said, "What do you have to do?" Then the principal at the school, Mr. {Sattler?}, he would get a job for you after school. He would ask around. So I decided one

day after school, I went and asked Mr. Sattler, the principal, to get me a little job after school. I didn't know what you had to do. He sent me to a family, and that lady had dishes piled all over the sink and everything. To do all that work, and she gave me one or two dollars. I said, "Ooh, no. This is not for me!" She said, "Oh, well, I'll see you tomorrow." I said, "I won't be back." Oh, no! I guess maybe people thought that I was lazy, because I wouldn't do that; but I didn't see myself doing all that work and then you wasn't going to get no pay. I didn't want to do that. I don't too much like to do that type of work, anyway. Now, to tell the truth, I'm a little lazy about doing my housework now. But I know I have to do it.

Li: Well, I think welding ships sounds a lot more exciting than cleaning dishes.

02-01:02:23

Vassar: Yes. So I said, "Oh!"

Begin Audiofile 3 05-16-2012.mp3

Li: When you were working in Bremerton, did all of the people that you worked with live in the dormitory? Did all the women you worked with live in the dormitory?

03-00:00:15

Vassar: Yes, they lived in the dormitory.

Li: Yes? And they were all young, like you?

03-00:00:19

Vassar: Yes. That's why we had to have a matron over us. They wasn't going to let you stay in no dormitory like that, and young women and no older matron or something over you. Her name was Mrs. Brown, and she was really going to be strict with you, too. You wasn't going to be messing off or doing nothing like that. If you had company, you sat in the lobby, and her office was right there. She'd sit right there and watch every move.

Li: Was there much dating going on? Did you date at all, when you were in Bremerton?

03-00:01:01

Vassar: Oh, I went out sometimes with one guy I kind of liked pretty good. Then guess what? I found out later he lied and said he wasn't married, and he was.

Li: Was he a soldier? Did he work at the same plant that you did?

03-00:01:29

Vassar: No, he was in the Navy.

Li: He was in the Navy. Are there any stories from when you were in Bremerton that you remember particularly? Any things that happened?

03-00:01:42

Vassar:

Let's see. I don't know. Like Mrs. Brown said, we'd all go together, whenever we went anyplace. We'd go on different trips, going different places, like the USO and all that kind of that. That was kind of fun, doing things like that. That was a lot of fun, doing that.

Li:

So for the dances, you'd all get taken there on the bus?

03-00:02:30

Vassar:

Oh, yeah. The USO would take us to wherever they had the dances, entertaining. They would take you and bring you back.

Li:

Were they mixed dances, black and white?

03-00:02:51

Vassar:

They were mixed.

Li:

All right, well, thank you so much for talking with me. Is there anything else that I didn't ask about that you think would be good?

03-00:03:03

Vassar:

Well, let me see. I don't know nothing else that I had any difficulty with or anything. No, I didn't have any difficulties or nothing when I came to Bremerton, about anything. No.

Li:

Did you hear about people having a hard time? Would you hear stories about other people having a hard time?

03-00:03:29

Vassar:

No, I didn't hear them talking about they had a hard time with anything. No, they were all pretty well adjusted to everything.

Li:

Did the men and women get the same salary for the same job? Did you get paid the same?

03-00:03:50

Vassar:

Oh, I think we all got paid mostly the same, the men that was left, like I said, because we could do the job better than most of them. So we got paid, I think, the same thing.

Li:

When you were at Boeing, did the women get paid the same as the men?

03-00:04:17

Vassar:

Oh, I don't know.

Charles:

Yes, they got paid the same.

Li:

The same?

03-00:04:22

Charles: You got different wage levels.

Vassar: Did they get paid the same, Lou?

Woman: Yes.

Charles: They only had different grade levels. You had a B and a A.

03-00:04:33

Vassar: Yes, and I heard you say sometimes—

Charles: B got paid more.

Vassar: —you would be the only woman in there, and sometimes I'd be the only woman in a shop with men, too. But you know what they used to say a lot of times when I was in the shop? They would say—I don't know why they'd do that, but I didn't pay them no attention—they'd say, "Eva, baby." [laughs] I don't know why the men used to say—but they were real helpful, if there was anything they thought I needed. Helped with handling. They were very helpful, to help me with anything, and they were real nice. It was one that wasn't so nice. But he didn't try that anymore. He was being cute; he hit me on the hip. And I had steel-toed shoes, because we would wear them. I kicked him on the leg, and he said, "Eva, look what you've done. You got my leg bleeding." I said, "Well, you shouldn't have done what you did." He was afraid to go and tell the supervisor on me, because he knew I would tell what he did. So that was the end and that never happened anymore.

Li: Did you join the union?

03-00:06:01

Vassar: Oh, yeah. Yes, we joined the union.

Li: But not during the war. Did you join the union during the war?

03-00:06:09

Vassar: Yes, I know we had a union. Especially at Boeing. I don't know about Bremerton, whether we had a union or not.

Charles: During the war, at Boeing they worked with a permit.

Li: Oh, with a permit, during the war.

Charles: Yes.

03-00:06:29

Vassar: Didn't have no union, then?

Charles: The white people belonged to the union during the war.

03-00:06:38
Vassar: Oh. [audiofile stops, restarts]

Li: So I was asking about the union, and you were saying in Bremerton, you don't remember a union.

03-00:06:45
Vassar: I didn't remember no union over there.

Li: And Miss Charles, you remember. How did it work during the war?

03-00:06:51
Charles: Okay. During the war, I worked in Wichita. The black people had their own union.

Vassar: Oh, they did?

Charles: We had a union in Wichita.

Li: What was it called? Do you know what the— ?

03-00:07:06
Charles: I sure don't. I don't know what it was called. But we had a different union from the whites, in Wichita. That's where I worked. Here in Seattle, the black people had a permit.

Li: What was the permit?

03-00:07:26
Charles: Well, it's some kind of card that they had.

Vassar: To permit you to work?

Charles: Yes.

Li: So when you were working in Wichita, did you have a different contract than the white workers? Do you know if you got paid the same?

03-00:07:40
Charles: Oh, yeah, they got paid the same. Yes. But it was just that blacks couldn't belong to their union. That's all that was.

Li: Oh. The union wouldn't allow black people in.

03-00:07:51
Charles: Right, in their union. So the black people had their own union.

Li: But then in 1950, when you went back to Boeing—

03-00:08:00
Charles: Yes, you could join the union here, period. You could join the union in 1950, when we went back to Boeing. But during the war, they couldn't join the union. They had a permit.

Li: Did you feel like the union was fair to black people, white people, men and women?

03-00:08:27
Charles: Well, back there like that, as I said, in Wichita, I didn't know nothing about their union, the white people's union. So I don't know what the difference was.

03-00:08:41
Vassar: Because you didn't come in close contact with them about no union.

Charles: No.

Li: Was there anything that, while I was talking to Miss Vassar, that you thought of from that time period that you wanted to—?

03-00:08:53
Charles: Well, there was some things, but I forgot what they were now, I wanted to help her out with.

Li: And how did you meet? How did the two of you meet?

03-00:09:07
Vassar: We got to be in the same shop, didn't we?

Charles: Yes, I guess so.

Li: In Everett?

03-00:09:11
Charles: But it seemed like in Plant 2, at Renton. Plant 2. I really don't know how we got together here.

Vassar: Yes, but all I remember, it was another one with us, Irene, and she was—

Charles: Well, that was in Plant 2 then, but we knew each other before then.

Vassar: Yes.

Charles: Eva came out here along, or something, with my aunt.

Vassar: '42.

Charles: Eva did. She came out with my aunt. I think that's how I got to know who Eva was, through my aunt. Because she's a person that don't forget nothing. But I think it was Aunt Jo, where I learnt Eva, and that she was from Oklahoma and we lived close together and didn't know it.

Li: And you did similar work.

03-00:10:09

Charles: Yes.

Li: Because there normally weren't very many women, in 1950, doing the kind of work—

03-00:10:12

Charles: Right. But see, Eva came out here before I did. She was here with my aunt, before I did. So she took the training before I did. She finished her training before I did.

Li: But you graduated from high school the same year?

03-00:10:29

Charles: Yes, I guess. Did you graduate in '42? Or '3? I did '3, I know. You did '2?

Vassar: Oh, well, it must've been before '3.

Charles: Yes, '2, because she came out here before I did.

Vassar: Yes.

Charles: She took that training, she must've did '42.

Vassar: Because I had graduated and then came out here, because I didn't want to do that work back there.

Charles: Oh, I know that.

Vassar: Ooh!

Charles: But yeah, she had to be '42, because I graduated and took my training in '43, and then came to Wichita. But they had been to Wichita and left, and come out here, when I did.

Li: Were they training boys and girls, or men and women, through this school?

03-00:11:17

Charles: Yes. Men and women. Yes, they were. Yep.

Li: Were there people from your hometown that you kept in touch with when you came out here?

03-00:11:28

Charles: Still one boy that I send a Christmas card to every year. He sends me one, and I send him one. Well, he's a man now.

Vassar: Oh, you know who sent us to that club, that you knew? Remember a lady named {Daisy Bass?}? She lives in Seattle now. I think she's still alive. It was her brother, because he was from—he was taking all of the girls from Oklahoma to this club.

Charles: I wasn't with you.

Vassar: No, I know. But since he knew we were all from Oklahoma, he was going to pay all our way there. Which he did. It was Daisy Bass's brother. I can't think of his name.

Li: So was it a pretty tight community, that people from Oklahoma, in Seattle, kind of stuck together?

03-00:12:24

Charles: Oh, yeah, if you knew the person, yeah. Yes. But when I did my training and we went to Wichita, well, some of them stayed in Wichita.

Vassar: They probably didn't want to come this far, huh?

Charles: No, all those girls stayed in Wichita. And I still write to one, too, at Christmas time. I send a Christmas card to one that came from Oklahoma.

Vassar: Oh, you still know them, Lou? You still know them, huh?

Charles: Uh-huh. I send her a card, and this one guy. They both are still— No, the girl is in Wichita and he's still in Oklahoma.

Vassar: Oh, really?

Li: So you guys were the adventurous ones, who came all the way out here.

03-00:13:20

Charles: Yes. Yes, when I lived with all those other girls, when I came here. And they still stayed in Wichita, only just got their homes, some of them married.

Vassar: But Lou, when you came here, where did you live?

Charles: With my mom.

Vassar: Oh, your mother was here.

Charles: Mm-hm.

Vassar: Who's your mother?

Charles: My mom is dead now.

Vassar: Oh.

Charles: {Baby Joe's?} sister is my mom.

Vassar: Well, who was her sister? I didn't know her, huh?

Charles: No, you didn't know my mom.

Vassar: Oh. Look at me asking! I sure can ask questions, can't I?

Charles: No.

Li: Well, it's such a pleasure. Thank you so much, for both of you, talking to me today. It's been really wonderful. These stories are not ones that have been widely recorded, so I really appreciate you talking with me. Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]