The Baltimore Rosies: Disc One, Session 2

The Real Rosie The Riveter Project

Interview 5

Interview Conducted by
Anne de Mare & Kirsten Kelly

April 16, 2010

Baltimore, Maryland

For The
Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives
Elmer Holmes Bobst Library
New York University
De Mare: I know that, um, most of you were very young women when you went to work, um...

Yingling: Yes.

De Mare: Uh, very early on, and I’d like for you to talk a little bit about what it was like to come out of the Depression, and to be earning your own money, and what that was like for you as young women. How it affected you when you entered the workforce. Which I… whoever would like to start. Don’t be shy. (Laughter)

Brawner: Well, I, I really don’t remember anything, uh, about the Depression. I know how it affected my parents and how they saved and everything, you know, but I don’t personally remember anything about the Depression.

De Mare: So what was it like...
Brawner:  And...

De Mare:  ...when you got your first paycheck, though?  What was it like to be a young woman earning your own money?

Brawner:  Well, I thought it was a lot of money but, you know, forty-five dollars is not a lot of money by today’s standards, but, you know, I thought that was pretty good. My father didn’t, he’s “That’s not any money and all that education and...” But anyway, I was happy with that.

De Mare:  Yeah.  How did the rest of you feel?  Do you remember how much money you made and what... Go ahead...

Yingling:  Well, no.  Working at Martin’s wasn’t my first job.

De Mare:  Okay.

Yingling: ‘Cause I came to Martins when I was nineteen. But I had... my brother was... went in the service.  So my mother said I had to quit school.  I was in the tenth grade.  So I got a job working downtown in a department
store. So, that sort of brought me away from my neighborhood and the life that I didn’t know, but I knew I didn’t want to work in retail. It was ungrateful job. I didn’t have the patience with the people. So they put me in stock, and then I heard about Martins. My neighbor next door said they were hiring.

And so, my sister and I, we both went there, and to see about gettin’ a job. And she was two years older than I and, uh, they hired her immediately. But, see, I wasn’t old enough. To come here you ha… ha… I was seventeen years old. And they told me to come back when I was older. So, and then… Prox… ‘bout ‘proximately I was nineteen when I arrived and they hired me. And I wanted to be Rosie the Riveter ‘cause my neighbor was Rosie and I was… I wanted to do something for the government. ‘Cause prior to that, I wanted to get in the Army. I wanted to get in… I wanted to serve and I wanted to do something ‘cause my brothers were in… But it didn’t work out. But anyhow, I got back to Martins, got my job at Martins, and I stayed there for five years. I loved every day of it.

De Mare: Wonderful.

Yingling: And the pay was wonderful.
De Mare: How much did you earn compared to what you earned at the department store?

Yingling: Oh, well, in the department store was forty-two sss... 'bout forty-two cents an hour, it amounted to. And it was sixty cents here.

De Mare: Yeah. Yeah.

Yingling: Here it was rich.

De Mare: Yeah. What... What about you, Mary? How did...

De Shaw: Well, I was working in Pittsburgh, at the Republic Banking Company, and I had an uncle that was in the service, and his wife was living in Baltimore, by herself in an apartment. So he ttt... asked me- he wrote me a letter- and asked me to come out and, uh, stay with her so she wouldn’t be by herself. So, I came out, and I thought I was gonna make a lot of money here, but I was making more money in Pittsburgh. Then when I started at
Glenn L. Martins, but, uh, I came in here between forty and forty-one. We were among the first women riveters in Martins. And I worked in C Building, I worked in final assembly; we worked on the fleet ships that came back from the service, and, uh, it was exciting work. It really was. And like the one lady said, when I first saw the building, with all the camouflage and all, it’s kind of scary, but then...

De Mare: Can you describe it? Can you just describe that camouflage?

De Shaw: Well, the camouflage... You’d seen the soldiers with the green and, uh, uh, I don’t know... light green/dark green outfits. That’s exactly what the camouflage was. The whole parking lot was camouflage.

De Mare: Can you...

De Shaw: Plus the building.

De Mare: Right.

De Shaw: Mm-hm.
De Mare: And what was your experience with the finances in the beginning when you were a young woman and earning your own money?

Podolsky: Well, when I first graduated from high school, I lived in a small town in Western Maryland. And there really wasn’t much to do, so I decided to come to Baltimore to see what I could do. And I got a job in a dime store, and while I was there, uh, this word came out about the defense work. And I signed up, and then it took training, then they sent me to Martins. And as far as the camouflage, it… the whole place was camouflage, and, and it looked like trees. When you looked from the air, it was supposed to look like brush and trees…

De Mare: Light green or dark green?

Podolsky: It was brown and black and all. And whenever we had a, a, a raid, then all the… everything went black in the plant and everything. I mean, that was scary. It was kind of fun, but it was scary, too. And, um, I loved
working. I did, uh, I was sent from, uh, C building down to D building in order to train the other girls. It just came in because there wasn’t any workers in D building yet. It was very... Very few women that was there.

De Mare: Can you talk a bit, bit about that? About how the dynamic changed? Because I know there were a lot fewer women working in the beginning and more meh... men. And as the war progressed, there were more... less... more women and less men. Can you talk about what the dynamic was, working alongside of men, and how the relationships were?

Podolsky: I tell you, the men were just wonderful. Uh, I think they were warned to not, you know, make any waves, or, you know, harass us or... any way. They were all very helpful, especially the older men. And, um, it, it was great working with them.

De Mare: Did you... Uh, anyone else wanna talk about that experience?

Yingling: Well, the members in my department, they were all fifty years older or older. There was only one young man who was about nineteen or twenty, and, uh, he was
handicapped, so that was the reason why he was, you know, he was there. But, uh, they treat us like, you know, we could do anything and I loved it because I like to be waited on.

Yingling:  It was nice.

De Mare:  Mary.

De Shaw:  Well, we worked... we had, uh, kind of a group- seven of us in a group- when we went to work in D building. I started out as a riveter in C building. And I was on the midnight shift, then when they put me on the day shift, which I wanted, uh, then they put me in D building, which was final assembly, and we still riveted a little bit but we were trained more for the outside. For the ships that came in from the service, they were called fleet ships. And uh, we worked in the gasoline section and the... it was... it was five men and two women. We got along beautiful, no problems, everybody was fine. I don’t think you heard anything bad as far as Martins was concerned at that time. Nothing.
Yingling: No.

De Shaw: There was never any, any gossip or anything.

Yingling: You never heard any swearing.

De Shaw: No. Uh-uh.

Yingling: No.

De Shaw: The men were fine.

Kelly: Do you... someone mentioned raids... what... ‘cause... Can you talk about what happened when a raid happened, or a, you know...

Yingling: I don’t remember any of that.

Simon: The, the sirens went off.

Yingling: Do you?

De Shaw: No, I don’t, uh-uh.
Simon: And all lights went off. Even out on, um, highways. If you was in a car you were supposed to pull over and turn off your lights. And, and, um, like the theaters, or any, uh, building that... that might shed light out on the street, they had these, oh, boxes covered with, um, black material and anybody walking along the, the street was supposed to go in there. I mean off the street. It was weird.

De Mare: Wow.

De Mare: What was it like... did you have... did you have family in a, in the service, any of you?

De Shaw: I had two brothers. Two brothers in the service. One in the South Pacific and one in Germany.

De Mare: And, can you talk a little bit about, um, about how working at Martin... how that... how did that, um... did that make you feel more connected to the war effort and...?
De Shaw: Uh, it made you feel like you were doin’ something, you know. Yes.

De Mare: Great. Do you wanna talk more about that?

Yingling: To me it was very scary that... to know that our country was at war. And then when my brother, he signed up in 1942. And he left. Then that’s what I guess we all had... There was such great patriotism in this country. Which we don’t have today. And everyone wanted to do something. You saw no young men on the street. The majority of them were gone, you know, in the service. And what you saw was just teenagers, who’re wishing they were older.

De Mare: How do you think... Can you talk a little bit- and I’d love to hear from all of you on this- about why do you think the... going to work at that young age and earning your own money- how did that affect you, you for the rest of your life? Like what do you think you brought from that?

Yingling: Oh, it was very...
De Mare: Because obviously you’re here, talking about it, you know, as a big in time in your life.

Yingling: Right.

De Mare: So.

Yingling: It made me independent. Although I had to contribute at home because of my brothers weren’t there, I gladly did that. It was more than enough money because I considered myself to be rich. I, I just wanted ev... every... every Friday, the payday where I worked- wherever I was, at Martins or wherever- I was free to go out and shop.

00:10:15:21-----------------------------------

De Mare: Do you want to say something? About...?

Brawner: Well, I was the oldest child, so, I mean, there... I didn’t have any older brothers in the service. Uh, my boyfriend, he was in the Air Force; of course, I married him when he came home. But, um, I remember experiences he told me about, you know, when he was overseas and all, but I... I guess it impacted everybody’s life. You know, it... it...
it would... had to be different for everybody than it would’ve been had we not had the war, you know.

De Mare: What do you think it gave you? Mary?

De Shaw: I would like to say one thing.

De Mare: Yes.

De Shaw: About Glenn L. Martin. He used to come out on the ramp in D Building, when we worked right on the ramps, he would come out and he’d give a speech. And he would tell everybody what a wonderful job they were doing and that was... that was good. That was really nice. And he’d tell us, you know, the progress, as far as war and everything was concerned. But he would come out and talk to us and praise us, which was real nice.

De Mare: It sounds like it was a very good place to work.

De Shaw: It was.

De Mare: It really does.
Yingling: It was.

De Shaw: It really was. Mm-hm.

Yingling: I got paid in cash.

De Mare: Do you remember how much you earned every week? What it was?

Yingling: I started with sixty cents an hour, and then one time they came through and they were givin’ out raises, and I got the most in the whole department. I got sixteen and a half cents, and I went home and I felt like I was a millionaire. Yeah, it was wonderful. Everybody just got along. And course, once the war was over, then the situation changed. But, uh, no, I would...

De Mare: Can you talk about that?

De Shaw: What? Well, people would

De Mare: When the war was over, yeah.
De Shaw: Well, as soon as it was over these people, I mean, from out of Maryland, they wanted to go home right away. Why, I was hoping they’d tell me I didn’t have to leave because I was home. You know, I was within an hour home… ride from home. And I just loved it. It was a…

00:12:18:04-----------------------------------------------

De Mare: And did you have to leave after the war? Did you...

De Shaw: Oh, no. I stayed to forty-nine til I was, um, I became preg... I got married and then I got pregnant, and you weren’t allowed to work so I had to leave. And I would...

De Mare: So how long did you work after the war?

De Shaw: Oh, I... I worked to, uh, to four... to, uh, February... Mar... March of forty-nine. I came here in 1944 in the winter months. I walked from, uh, wh... the end of the bus line to come on over, ‘cause I didn’t have a ride. And I did see the camouflage when the, uh... The first time it was like I was startled, “What was that?“. But not long
after that, then it was all removed because it was coming down anyhow.

Kelly: Now what...

De Mare: Um, can you... can you talk a little bit, 'cause you brought up an interesting thing. Like when you first... when you first started working... I know women wore pants for the first time and you... you... you shifted over into a... you know, it was a different life then... then... Can you talk a little bit about what that was as a young woman?

Yingling: I did not wear pants 'cause I worked in the office. I worked in the payroll.

De Mare: Ok.

Yingling: And one of my jobs as with before... I had a... was, uh, I made the checks up for the executive and I had to go over it and hand deliver them to the office where Mr. Martin was. And he was, to me, the most handsome man I have ever seen. (Laughter)

De Shaw: He was.
Yingling: And so very mannerly... The department I worked in was in was tabulating and we did all the ttt... the time cards. And we had these trays and we worked on the IBM machine. It was the beginning of the computer age. And they were just getting into it slowly, and I was there. That’s the real...

De Mare: That’s very exciting.

Yingling: It was very exciting.

De Mare: Did you... Now, did you work on the line itself? Did you work with anyone on the... What did... what did you do here then, like after...?

Podolsky: Uh, mostly I... I took care of the other girls, trained the other girls. But then when I didn’t, I did, uh, in each wing, uh, assembled a center wing, it was a great big thing.

De Mare: Right.
Podolsky: And put all the parts on it to be riveted. Then it went from me to riveting.

De Mare: Okay.

Podolsky: That was interesting.

De Mare: Yeah. Mary?

Podolsky: It was fun.

De Mare: What did you... What did you do?

De Shaw: I riveted and, uh, I riveted for a year and a half. And then when I went on the day shift— that’s when I went to D building— but we, uh, still riveted. You know we... we worked in a lot of the parts of the plane that the men couldn’t get into. We were small and we could get into some of the tighter spots.

Brawner: Spaces.

De Mare: That’s very interesting.
De Shaw: Mm-hm.

De Mare: So, you mean like in the nose of the plane or in the wings back?

De Shaw: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

Unseen: (Unintelligible)

De Shaw: We had these great big ladders that we would, uh, you know, the riveter would, uh, get up on these real high ladders. I riveted and, of course, the bucker, the girl that bucked the rivets, was inside. And these places were real small and real tight to get into.

De Mare: It must have been really loud, too.

De Shaw: Oh, yes.

Brawner: Very.
De Shaw: Oh, yes. It was fun though. Going to work, we use to go by bus, and we were on the midnight shift and we would all sing, “Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition.” Did you ever hear that one?

De Mare: No.

De Shaw: Oh, yes.

Kelly: That’s great.

De Mare: Can you sing it for us? Do you remember it?

De Shaw: Oh, no.

Yingling: (Singing) Praise the lord...

De Shaw: I...

Yingling/De Shaw: ...and pass the ammunition. Praise the Lord, we’re on a mighty mission.

De Shaw: Praise the Lord, and pass the ammunition, and we’ll...
Yingling/De Shaw: ...all be free.

De Shaw: We did all the way down from where we got the bus all the way down to the plant.

De Mare: That’s wonderful. That’s wonderful.

De Shaw: There were some good, happy times, too.

00:16:13:14-----------------------------------------------

De Mare: Let me just ask very quickly, because we’re... we’re gonna have to... we’re gonna... we’re almost out of tape. Is there anything when you look back at yourself as a young girl, um, at that time, is there anything you’d like to say to her? After, you know, is there any advice you would give her? Or, um, anything you wish you’d known when you were a young woman doing this work? I mean, anything just to reflect back on? I’m just curious.

Yingling: Well, I had, um, being my... I quit... had to quit school, and I... it was always at back of my mind, I needed education. So, as, when my youngest daughter was a year
old, I went back to high school and got my high school diploma, and then I went to B.C.D.- B.C.- down at- it was our community college then. And, uh, I got my A.A. and it... it... that’s what brought me on because I didn’t have the education I wished I would’ve. I wish I would’ve gone further then.

De Mare: Uh, since we’ve have a new tape and I wanna go back and just ask you- if there’s any, um, particular anecdote that comes to mind, a story, or any particular struggle that you may have had along the way, that you’d like to share, um, with us about that time of your life. So, think about it for a minute, but is there any, any particular story or particular struggle that you’ve had that you would like to talk to us about?

Kelly: It could be humorous,

De Mare: Yeah...

Kelly: Or...
De Mare: Or serious.

Kelly: Or it could be serious.

De Mare: Yeah. You look like you have a...

De Shaw: There was the time I fell asleep in the plane.

Brawner: Now, I was really young when I worked down in the training school, so it was an experience to get to know so many young men. And, of course, later on in life I realize, all them were leaving to go overseas when they left there, and I wonder sometimes how many of them came back. I do think about that. And I did write to a lot of them when they left, you know, get their name and address and write to them when... when they went overseas. So, it was a whole different experience for a kid, you know.

De Mare: I wanna hear about the time you fell asleep in the plane, Mary.

Yingling: Yes, tell us.
De Shaw: Well... well... when... when our job was all completed, you know, with the gas and tanks and everything were in and everything was completed, we took turns staying... One would stay behind in the plane and wait for the company inspector, and then you had to wait for the Navy inspector. Well, the company inspector came, and it was my turn to stay in the plane. I was on the midnight shift. Well, and that was on the day shift because I didn’t work in D building on, uh, day shift. Um, on midnight shift, rather.

Well, anyway, I sat there and waited and waited, and sometimes it took the Navy inspector a long time to get to the planes, you know, they go all through the... all through the D building ‘til they got to the ramp. We were the last ones. Well, I fell asleep. And finally the inspector came, and was shaking- I was near the steps as you go in the plane- and he was shakin’ me like this. I thought the plane was movin’. I got so scared. And that was my big time. Yep, I fell asleep.

De Mare: Go, go ahead and speak.

Yingling: I remember one incident when everybody was announcin’ ‘Mr. Martin is coming through.’ I said, “I’m going to see him and I’m gonna have him say hello to me.”
They said, “You can’t do that.” I said, “I seen pictures of him, and I seen him before as he passed through,’ and he came by and I looked at him from head to toe, and I noticed he had a button missing off of his jacket. And I said, “Hello, Mr. Martin.” And he turned around, “Good afternoon, young lady.” That meant something to me. To see Mr. Martin himself and he spoke to me.

00:20:25:00------------------------------------------------

De Mare: And... and would you like to... you got a story for us?

Podolsky: Speaking of Mr. Martin, they had a... a baseball team and we all went to the game one night, and Mr. Martin sat right by me.

Yingling: Oh, wow.

Podolsky: I beat you.

Yingling: I knew it so. You got close.

Podolsky: I even got his autograph.
Yingling: Wow. That was really nice.

De Mare: I think it’s interesting, I mean, I… I bet it made a difference, ‘cause everyone talks of him so fondly. And working for someone you feel so fondly about, it must’ve made a difference in the energy in the plant. I mean, it really must’ve. I mean, it seems like… can you talk about the energy in the plant, was it, you know… it seemed like it was a happy place to work. Were you…

Yingling: Oh, it was.

De Mare: Is there anything you can tell me about it?

Yingling: You never heard anybody say, “I can’t do this” or “I’m tired of this” or... it would… you’d have nothing negative. I never did.

Brawner: It was so noisy in there and I often wondered if anybody that worked in the drop hammer department could hear...

De Shaw: Terrible noise.
Yingling: Oh.

Brawner: ...when they got through working in there...

Yingling: Oh.

Brawner: ...'cause it shook the building when you went through, didn’t it?

De Shaw: Oh, yes. Matter fact, when you have riveters in front of you and behind you and all sides of you, you can’t talk. I mean, it’s just all work.

00:21:39:20-----------------------------

Yingling: I hear all these things about the... those riveting, you know, I was very glad that I didn’t become a riveter. I was... it was so noisy because some of the machines made the noise but when they transferred me away from the machines, and then they put me on the addresser graph, and you had the plates with the things... person’s name, and you had to hit the to lower... each plate would come in, and put a check in and make a low noise, but
nothin’ like you people had out there. I’m so glad I didn’t have that. It was noisy.

De Mare: Thank you, ladies, so much.... You heard about the sale... the... the soldiers leaving notes in the planes?

De Shaw: Oh, yes.

De Mare: Yes. Okay, okay! Go on.

De Shaw: This was final assembly in the D building, I’d say, you know, we worked on the tanks after our work was all completed and... Well, the fleet ships came in. They have these, uh, this, uh, service men that would came back from the service. Slept- oh, they had their beds or bunks or whatever they call them- on top of the gasoline tanks. And they had these little pockets in little curtains almost like, around the... the tank. And we would leave notes in the pockets, you know, and we would find notes when we would come back. Not... not in... you know, not bad notes. Nice notes.
Yingling: Nothing (unintelligible)

De Shaw: Yeah.

De Mare: That’s really awesome. And there was an explosion, that I…?

De Shaw: Oh yeah, that was at Strawberry Point. You remember Strawberry Point?

Yingling: Strawberry Point.

De Shaw: Yeah, they used to take us by boat from, um, D building to Strawberry Point. We went by boat. And they had an explosion. A plane, believe it or not, was ready to take off, and why it happened, nobody knows, the motor were… or something- was supposed to have dropped right off and it was an ex… Oh, the explosion in day b… in D building, right in D building. Yes. We have… the center of the ship… the plane… is called a kilson. And this is like about that wide and it’s all open in the center and it’s hard walking on it. But when the gasoline, uh, when the tanks were filled with gasoline, somehow or other, must’ve been gasoline that had dripped
inside the kilson. We were on our way home from work—we had just worked on a plane, and, uh, we heard a loud explosion. What they did when they vacuumed the plane, they had to use all rubber. No metal. And whoever was on... doin’ the job... had a metal part on the... the vacuum and it must have sparked and exploded.

De Mare: Wow.

De Shaw: Uh-huh. And it was only one man... yeah. He was working in the office. They gave him a job in the office after that. His face was kind of disfigured.

De Mare: Were there a lot of accidents or was... was it... was it... I mean, that sounds... That was a big accident (unintelligible).

De Shaw: That was the only one I can remember.

De Mare: Yeah.

Brawner: Um, there were a lot of accidents down the point. My grandfather worked down in the shipyard when they were building ships. And one time his pants got caught in the
slip where the ship goes down and it ripped his whole leg off. That was (unintelligible).

De Shaw: Oh, my.

Yingling: Oooohhh.

Brawner: So he had a… a miserable last year of his life. It was all way up in the top part of his leg and they could never really fit him for a prosthesis. So… and right after that my grandmother had a stroke, she was so upset about it. So, there were a lot of horrible things to remember, too.

De Mare: Oh, yeah. Well, I don’t think you can… you can push that hard… that much production that fast with a work force… sometimes it didn’t… hadn’t done that work before. And not have that kind of… I mean, that’s a horrible story.

Brawner: Right.

De Mare: A horrible story.
De Shaw: Well, it’s a wonder we didn’t have more accidents. Because we had to get up on these ladders— you know how high the nose of the plane is— we’d have to get up there and rivet. And somebody’d be on the inside, you know. That was high and...

De Mare: Yeah.

De Shaw: It was kind of scary.

Yingling: Tell ya’ about stupid accidents. Well, I was workin’ on the sorter— I got this tray— over three thousand cards in there— IBM cards— and you gotta get it right into the right slot. And, of course, if you missed, well, there went three thousands cards on the floor and you had to go and pick ‘em all up. Now, that was an accident, but it was... to me it was funny.

De Mare: Well, there was no... no injuries.

Yingling: No injuries.

De Mare: Exactly.
Yingling: It injured my pride because I was caught... It happened to me.

De Mare: Awwww.

Yingling: But, no.

De Mare: Oh, wonderful, thank you...

Podolsky: We had a experience, too. Uh, about four astronauts come over to our department because they couldn’t believe girls were workin’ in the planes. And I think, but I’m not positive, I think that John Glenn was one of them. Because it was the first astronauts actually, so I... I never could find out if he was among them. But, um, I got the names of some of the others- but I forget who they were- we was always wishin’, you know, we really knew if it was John Glenn or not. They just came through and... and I had a paper and they signed some but I lost the paper, so. It was neat.
De Mare: Wonderful. Unfortunately, we have to wrap it up because we have six more women to talk to, but thank you so much.