

Interview with Joi Beard

J.L. this is Jane Latour on December 21st, 2004, interviewing Joi Beard.

So, Joi, after a very long day, we're doing an interview on a week night,--after you've worked all day, taught the electricians. So anyway, tell me a little bit about your background. Where were you born and when?

J.B. I was born ... born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky. I was born in 1958,--I'm not telling my age,--so that means that I'm forty-six now, forty-six and a half. Again, I was born and raised there. I went through my apprenticeship program in Kentucky, in Louisville. I was ... I got into the apprenticeship program there in 1979. And back then, when I got in, there was only two women that were in the trade down there, and in my class there were five of us total. And really, I was a last minute type of thing because--you know--it had to do with percentages. And two African-Americans dropped out,--two African-American men dropped out,---so they had to pick up two more people of color or some type of minority, one way or the other. So in this case they were able to pick me up and then they picked up another white guy because I filled two minority spots. So ...

J.L. So now, what was the name of the Local?

J.B. Oh, down there it was Local 369 in, of course, International Brotherhood of Electrical workers. So ...

J.L. Right. And did ... did all the five women make it through?

J.B. Yes, of our class all of us made it through. We basically stuck together. You know? We did our homework together and stuff like that, so ... and we made it all through. We all made it through. So ... but the next class they brought in, like, eleven women and within the first year, like, half of them dropped out. So ...

J.L. So how did you hear about it? What drew you to that?

J.B. Truthfully, to get into the apprenticeship down there, I was ... I just happened to be looking for something else to do so I was at the State Building and on the directory they had Apprenticeship and Training. So I went in there and I ... I was just inquiring about what is Apprenticeship and Training? So the person in there, they were telling me, Oh, well,--you know--this is what it is. This ... It's in construction and--you know--these are the different trades. And, of course, he asked me--'cause he asked me did I know any ??, like, I had no clue of any of these trades. And he said: Well, what was your best subject and I told him math. He said: Well, since your background--your best subject in school was math, then you should consider going into the electrical trade. So he said just call back periodically and then, once the apprenticeship program opens up,--you know--then you should apply for it. And also he recommended that I seek out the Urban League and which, once I found out about the apprenticeship program ... I was application 701 and they were only taking fifty in, then I went to the Urban League and we went through the mock interviews. They ... That was my pre-apprenticeship. the Urban League provided me with pre-apprenticeship information and training.

J.L. And how ... how did that apprentice program go? Was ... were the instructors helpful? Were the ...

J.B. Oh, no. The program was really good. We had ... We had very good instructors. You would think that they were truly teachers and I guess--you know--since it's been so long ago, I think they all--they were all workers in the trade and stuff like that but they taught at night because we went to school one ... one night a week for four hours. The apprenticeship program is a little bit different in other cities than it is here. So ...

J.L. How many years did it run?

J.B. Back then it was four years but now it's five.

J.L. Okay.

J.B. And, of course, you know her it's five and a half. So ...

J.L. So did you start working almost immediately?

J.B. Let's see. I ...

J.L. As an apprentice?

J.B. Well, I didn't get into the apprenticeship, of course, until, if you remember, about the ... the two guys dropped out and I got in. But once I got in, I think I was working within two weeks. I started working in November of that year. And,--you know--the class started in September so I got in, in October and I started working in ... Well, I started working the end of October. And I was working another job, a second shift, so--you know,--I was able to swing it for a little while and (end of sentence inaudible)

J.L. So how were you received on the job (both laugh) back then ??

J.B. Well, the first year--the first year it just so happens--and--you know--and I'm not trying to glorify anything or anything like that,--but it just so happens my first contractor was Link Electric, a little old German guy wit his Mercedes Benz. And it was a small shop and truthfully, it was probably one of the best things that ever happened,--well, yeah, when I look back at things,--you know--of course it was one of the best things that ever happened. And I remember I worked wit this guy--I think his name was Sturgeon or something like that,--and I remember us going out on the job because he was like a service call guy so we was--I was riding in the truck with him every day to a different job, and stuff like that, and I saw a Greenfield or BX and I was, like, Oh, well-- I think it was BX, and he said,--you know--"There's Greenfield and BX." And I said: "Well, how do you tell the difference?" And he said: "at least twenty-five years of experience." (laughing) I was like .. I was like, All righty then, so ... so,-- you know-- ...

J.L. What does that mean, Greenfield, BX?

J.B. Green--Greenfield? Oh, it's ... it's basically a raceway in the trades. It's ... You know, Greenfield is an empty, flexible conduit, and of course BX is a flexible conduit, but, of course, it has wires already installed in it. And of course,--you know--it's a ... it's a pre-wired raceway.

J.L. 'Cause I thought it was something on the freeway.

J.B. Oh no, not quite. So ... and,--you know--well, considering his answer, that's about how I felt about it too, because I was like, what's the difference? So ... But as time went on, when I was working for him,--you know--when things got slow we would work in the shop and I was able to learn material and stuff like that. But--you know--for me back then, you was a more hands on apprentice. I mean, you basically, wherever your mechanic was, that's where you were. So ...

J.L. Um-hum. And do you think he took pride in teaching you? It was hard to tell.

J.B. Yeah, right, I know. It is hard to tell. I think ... You know, I think that ... Well, I was ... I was only with him a short period of time, but it's not that ..I can't say that he was happy about it, but at the same time--you know--he did ... he did maybe kind of, sort of help a little bit, so it wasn't that he was just totally, totally against it. But at the same time he could tell you ?? favor. So ... but,--you know--that's how it goes.

J.L. Um-hum. Now, were ... they must have really had a push on if they told you about the electrical program when they ...

J.B. Well, back then, that was when they ...

J.L. That was the time.

J.B. The mandate came down, and--you know--they were looking to now get into affirmative action,--you know--were more stringent on ... on the affirmative action.

J.L. Real affirmative action.

J.B. Yeah, exactly. Yeah, real affirmative action. So ...

J.L. The will.

J.B. Exactly. So ... and I know, like, up here in New York, the first year that they took women in was in '78. But I know down there they have one woman that was in ... I came in ,in '79 and so they had one woman that had came in, in '77. And there was another one that was in but she was the daughter of one of the tradesmen so--you know--she .. she got in probably ...

J.L. She had inside ??

J.B. Yeah, exactly. She got in, Lord knows, early,--you know-'cause she was ... I think she may have been the champion when we got in, so it means that she had to have been in at least in '75 or '74. (phone rings ) Sorry.

J.L. Now, tell me about your family? How many siblings?

J.B. I have three sisters and two brothers. I'm next to the youngest. And they're ... we're all scattered almost ... I have a brother and sister in ... Well, my older sister's in Charlotte, my oldest brother's in Cleveland, the next sister is in ... the next sister and brother's in Louisville, and then, of course, my little sister's in Cincinnati, so we're spread out.

J.L. So did ... did you come from a working class family? What did your folks do?

J.B. Well, my father worked in the foundry. He worked in a factory. He worked for International Harvester. So ... and, of course, he was a union person until he got supervisor. He ... he was a supervisor for International Harvester so he got out of the union per say, because once you become a foreman in places like that you're not in the union any longer.

J.L. But he was pro-union? You grew up in a pro-union home?

J.B. Yeah, more or less. Yeah, in the union. And my mom didn't work until my little sister went to school so ...

J.L. Um-hum. Yeah.

J.B. So, yeah, it was somewhat of a union family.

J.L. And how much education have you had?

J.B. Of course, graduated from high school. I've had a couple of semesters of college, and then, of course, the four year apprenticeship training. So ...

J.L. Right. Um-hum.

J.B. But that's it.

J.L. Okay. So tell me, did you ... did you feel that you were able to really master your skills in the apprenticeship program? Were you able to get the training that you needed?

J.B. I got some of the train-- ... I could have ... I could have learned a lot more. You know?

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. And then again,--you know--I can blame other people and stuff like that, I guess, but I also have to blame myself because I wasn't ... I'm not a truly pro-aggressive type of person. I am ... I am somewhat passive, I really am, and--you know--and I'm not going to lie about that. So,--you know--I was one of those. And then also,--you know--it's like, you just go with the flow. You know? You try not to make waves 'cause because of you being a woman in the trades you ... you want to make sure that you're able to get through without--you know--not being labeled as somebody that's a rabble rouser or something like that. So I was ... I was somewhat passive. So ... But we ... we all stuck together so it was sort of like we ... it worked more for us in numbers than us individually, so--you know--whatever we did, we all did. You know? Whatever we wanted--you know?--that type of stuff. But at the same time we was out on the job, we were truly never really on the same job with each other,

J.L. Right.

J.B. Us women. I think there was one job that we were doing down there--it was the Galleria,--and me and my friend Beverly, the first black woman that got in that we ... Beverly Bachelor, she was the first black woman that got into the trade down there, and she was--we were on the same job site, but of course, different contractors so we weren't really working together. But because we were just, like near each other was ... that was enough in itself. Like yes,--you know?--yeah--yes,--you know?--we could at least meet up for lunch or

something. You know? So,--you know---and that's...that's really where it was. You know? Every once in a while we would run into each other, but overall it was, like, I was on the east side of town; they was on the west side of town; the other one was on the north or on the south;--that type of stuff.

J.L. Yeah. Um-hum.

J.B. You know? Only on the big jobs did we maybe see another one, but overall it was ... you could count us on one finger.

J.L. So tell me about ... When you went to work as a journeyman ... First of all, did you have a graduation ceremony?

J.B. We did. We had, like, a little ... a little graduation awards. Wait a minute. Did we? No, only when we got out of school. Once we finished our apprenticeship program we had, like, a little dinner. But because of--because you ... you get your J-your J-journeyperson status,--JA, journeyperson status, after school and work hours,--you know--

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. It all depended on the work hours also so I finished school in June of '84 and I didn't get my card until, like, September or October of '84. So ...

J.L. So then you went to work as a journeyperson.

J.B. Yeah. I went to work as a journeyperson.

J.L. And was there a difference between seeing ... I mean, I realize this isn't New York City that we're talking about. What town were you in?

J.B. I was in Louisville.

J. Louisville. Okay.

J.B. Yeah, yeah, the biggest city in Kentucky.

J.L. So ... but it still ain't New York.

J.B. No, it's not. It's like Staten Island. (laughs)

J.L. So you know ...

J.B. One of the boroughs.

J.L. So was there a big difference between trying to get work as a journey person versus apprenticeship?

J.B. Well, again, the thing of it is, that's the good thing about the union apprenticeship program and the union, being in IBEW is that you don't have to go looking for work. You go to the hall, you sign the book and based off of where ... You know, if I'm number ten, they got nine jobs, they ... I don't get called that day. So basically, it's based off of you being a position on the book,--wherever position you are on the book unless there's a special skill or something.

J.L. It was pretty fair. It wasn't like, ?? discrimination?

J.B. Yeah. No, no, no. You know? Once you got to the job is a different story, but--you know,--but ...

J.L. Okay. So how was that once you got to the job?

J.B. Well, ... Well, it was in a way ...

J.L. Various experiences. Right?

J.B. Well, you have to remember because I turned out in September, October '84 and I went to work with Henderson Electric.

J.L. Is that a big company?

J.B. They were one of the biggest companies in Louisville. Yeah. And, like, they were formed in, like, 1919 or something.

J.L. Oh yeah.

J.B. Well, I remember because the little things that I got from the job. That's the only reason why I know that. But they were a fair shop per say. You know? I worked for them and I was working on the job and--you know,--they. They were the type of contractor, as long as they kept you,--you know--you always had a job. But you weren't ... you did not leave their company 'cause if you left their company it was like you were stabbing them in the back. So,--you know--they could stab you in the back but you couldn't stab them in the back. So that was the ... that was the ... the perception of that company. But the company was somewhat fair. I didn't have any ... You know, I can't ... I didn't have any real issues with them,--you know?--not the company per say, 'cause--you know--it's ... You can't always blame it on the company. It's usually the knuckleheads that you're working around. So ...

J.L. So you ran into some knuckleheads?

J.B. Yeah. Please.

J.L. Now ... now what was ...

J.B. Oh, every year I had a knucklehead.

J.L. When you look at it, I mean, what ... what was the biggest problem, I mean, race versus gender, or both?

J.B. (unintelligible) Exactly. It all depends on what day it was,--you know?--because of who I was dealing with.

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. Because I had this one guy that I came on the job and, of course, he had worked with a woman before--one of the women before,--and he was, like .. and, of course, he didn't like the woman so, of course, since he didn't like her and he didn't like her work ethics and stuff like that, he ... he automatically categorized me as her. And I said what was her name, and he said her name. I said: What is my name? And he said my name. And I said: that's the first difference right there. So,--you know--you can't ... you can't hold me accountable for how she was,--you know?--good, bad or otherwise, 'cause I can be a bad mechanic and she was a good mechanic, and now, all of a sudden, you're

going to say that, Oh, all of them are bad because I'm bad? Or then, of course, it would have been all of them are good until you run into a bad one so ... But ...

J.L. Did you penetrate? Did he ... did he understand then?

J.B. Well, no, no. oh yeah. That ... that caught on. That caught on. And then, of course, we were working a little while longer, and then, of course, he said that he was working in a certain neighborhood and, of course, somebody stole his tools. And I was like, Well, what neighborhood was that? And, of course, he told me the neighborhood. And I said: Well, I don't live over there, so what's that got to do with me? Here we go again. So then, of course,--you know--I tried to explain that one to him and, of course, that ... we went on for a couple of more hours or something like that, 'cause this is all in one day. And then, of course, I was left--I'm left handed so, of course, I must have did something backwards and whatever, and he was like: Oh my God!--you know? First you,--you know--and I was like,--you know--I can't ... I can't win for losing with you because first it was because I was a woman, then because I'm black, and now because I'm left handed. So,--you know--what's next? So all you need--all you're looking for is a reason not to ... to give me credit for what I can do or to blame me for something. So what is it? What is it? So I was like ?? moving on.

J.L. But that's the kind of approach you would take, a logical ... try to argue it out with him?

J.B. well, no, not argue, 'cause I ain't trying to argue nobody. I ... I'm like, I would try to reason with them. And if you don't listen to reason, you know what? Who's the stupid one here? And that's really my--you know-for, like, our industry: who's the ignorant?? so .. 'cause it's not ?? ignorance. So ...

J.L. So you worked pretty ... pretty consistently.

J.B. Yeah. No I was ...I worked pretty consistently for the .. Yeah. It took me four and a half years to finish a four year apprenticeship program, four and a half-almost five years.

J.L. And then when did you come to New York City?

J.B. I came here in April of 1985.

J.L. And what led you to the big city?

J.B. My ex-husband's work.

J.L. Okay.

J.B. So it just so happened that I had met my ex-husband when I was on vacation. And things had slowed up. Truthfully ...

J.L. I mean, he wasn't your ex then, though.

J.B. No, he ...

J.L. He was your ...

J.B. He was ... Yeah. I hadn't married ... I hadn't married him then. I had met ... I had met him when I was on vacation and things had slowed up in Louisville so ... and I knew people that were already here, that was already working here from Louisville.

J.L. From your local?

J.B. Yeah, from my local. Right, and they said: Oh, you should come up here. You know? They people so desperately.

J.L. I'm trying to remember what the economy was like in '85. That was right after a big down--depression 'cause the economy ??

J.B. Yeah. Yeah, 'cause the town was, I think, in '79 ??

J.L. and '81 and ...

J.B. In ... Yeah, around in that time.

J.L. But that was ??

J.B. Yeah, '85. Well, 'cause the first job I had was the Jacob Javits Center. So ...

J.L. Oh wow! Oh, that's interesting.

J.B. Yeah, exactly.

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. You know? 'cause I didn't even ... I didn't think I would get on ... It was because my ex-husband's sister's husband, his brother-in-law, was on that job and he was, like, oh, it would be great if you ... 'cause he was a tin\*--a sheet metal worker. [\*tin knocker/sheet metal worker]

J.L. Oh yeah.

J.B. He said: Oh, it would be great if you could get on this job. And I was like, Yeah, right. I'm going to come up here,--you know? Of all the jobs, of all the places,

J.L. All the jobs ...

J.B. They're going to send me to Jacob Javits Convention Center. Sure! So, of course, I was, like one of the first ones in the hall that morning,--you know?--because you had to request to come up here and Local 3 had to say that you could come up here. They would have to basically approve .....

J.L. A limited number of ...

J.B. Um-hum. 'cause ....

J.L. Number of ... number of travelers or ... did they call you travelers?

J.B. Oh, you know what it was? Yeah, travelers. The reason why they did that,--and I underst--I have ... I have no problem with what they did,--is because what they would do is that they would look at the record of the people



that came from your ... from your local and if they didn't have any issues with them,--you know?--as long as they weren't ... well, again, this is an unwritten,--you know--just in case.

J.L. Uh-huh. Yeah. Right.

J.B. This is how I looked at it. I'll just put it that way. As long as they didn't have any issues with them; they didn't have any problems with them,

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. They ... not a problem. But if you had somebody from your local that gave them problems then they probably would not ... would not accept you to come up here. And so the people ... there was only, like, for or five guys up here from Louisville and they didn't have any issues with them. Everybody was doing what they were supposed to do, doing their work and stuff, and they didn't have no problems or nothing like that,--you know?--no fights on the job, nobody--you know--jumping off buildings, anything crazy, so they ... they accepted me. They said sure you can come up here. So ...

J.L. So you got to work at the Javits ... and what were you doing there?

J.B. When I first got on the job,--Bob Jones was my foreman,--Oh, couldn't ask for a better foreman---we were on the roof.

J.L. And what com--company was it?

J.B. Comstock.

J.L. Okay.

J.B. And we were working for L.K. Comstock. We were working on the roof. We had to install forty-five thousand feet of pipe for AC controls and all that type of stuff, all the pipe work on the roof. I was in the crew that did all of that. So from May until October we was on the roof just doing pipe work. It was a really nice--you know-- ...

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. And we,--you know--we would get there early. We would work from ... You know, we basically would do the physical work from like, seven in the morning to, like, twelve--until lunch time,

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. And then ... because after that it was hot. It was hot up there, so then we would prep for the next day. So we basically would do all our measurements and stuff like that, do our racks and all that type of stuff and then ... so the next morning we could blitz and blow with the pipe and then by twelve o'clock we could now prep for the net day because after twelve o'clock you didn't ... you didn't want to be trying to put no hot pipe together.

J.L. Hot tin roof.

J.B. Yeah. Hello? You know?

J.L. And how many people were in your crew about?

J.B. Basically there was like a crew of ten and ??

J.L. And you were the only woman?

J.B. Yeah. Yeah. I think I was ... Yeah. I was the only one in the crew. Every once ... Every once in a while we would get help from another crew or something they would come up. But that job was a great job because we had, like, at the peek we had, like, nine women electricians working.

J.L. Wow!

J.B. Just women electricians alone. That's why I ???

J.L. Evan Ruderman, I think, worked ...

J.B. Evan was there. The first ... when I got there Melinda Hernandez was there. I was, like, Oh my God. And there was two apprentices, a Debbie and Naomi. I know Naomi's not in the trade any more but I don't know about Debbie. But there were two apprentices and then Melinda and they ... and then I came to the job. But,--you know--there was people there before ... There was women there before I got there because Veronica was on the job, Veronica Wills from Aurora Electric?--she was on the job before--you know? She was off the job before I came on. But we were there. And Evan was on that job and we had a couple of other ... we had, like, three women out-of-towners from Portland, Oregon, and Dallas, Texas there, Brenda, Joanne and Donna, they were there also. Then we had Beth

J.L. Goldman?

J.B. Gold ..... Is it Goldman?

J.L. Golder or ....

J.B. Goldberg .. Goldberg .. I think it was Goldberg.

J.L. I think it's Goldman.

J.B. Okay.

J.L. Goldberg. Beth ...

J.B. Well, Beth [Goldman] was on the job, Beth, Evan, Melinda, me, Donna, Joanne, Brenda, Debbie, Naomi and who else from there? Right now those are the ones that I know right off hand.

J.L. And did you see each other? Did you have lunch together? Did you ....

J.B. Oh yeah, girl please. (both laugh) That was like ... Once we all .. we all had lunch to-- .. we all went to the women's shanty for lunch,--you know?--because we didn't see each other on the job because you know how big the Jacob Javits convention Center is.

J.L. It's huge.

J.B. So,--you know--we was spread out all over the place. But overall at lunchtime we was there. You know? Of course, in the morning, in the evening and at lunch. You know? Maybe if you'd get close enough ....

J.L. so you had your own shanty. So I have a wonderful picture of Evan in a shanty with two other women. One, I think, is Bruni Hernandez. Did you know Bruni?

J.B. Yeah, I knew Bruni. Yeah.

J.L. And so did she work on that job, Javits?

J.B. I don't think so. I don't ... Was Bruni ...

J.L. But three women are in a shanty and they're reading the newspaper. It's ... it's ... [Evan Ruderman; Brunilda Hernandez, and Evan Ruderman are in the photo taken at Battery Park City.]

J.b. Yeah. No. I don't ... I don't think Bruni was there.

J.L. So it probably wasn't the Javits.

J.B. Yeah. I don't think she was there.

J.L. Okay. So ... Yeah. So there was a lot of overtime connected with the ...

J.B. After ... It wasn't ... In the beginning it wasn't, but I know that it could ...

J.L. But as the deadline came ...

J.B. Yeah,

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. After October; after it was in the wintertime it was ... Yeah. It was in the wintertime we was working 7/11 on that job, seven days a week, eleven hours a day. So ...

J.L. So it was exhausting.

J.B. And I made ... I made sure I made every ... I was there every day for that, every day. I didn't miss a ... I missed maybe two hours the last day of that, but ... After that whole stretch of overtime I was there every day. But, yeah, there was ... there was a little bit of time on the job. It was a nice job.

J.L. Now, there ... I know there was a lot of corruption associated with ... but you,--you know--that wasn't part of--you know ...

J.B. Oh, I don't ... I have no idea,--you know?--

J.L. You don't know. You don't know.

J.B. 'cause I'm just working.

J.L. You're a working electrician.

J.B. Yeah. You know? Of course you would hear stuff, but at the same time I .. I didn't ... didn't ...

J.L. Doing a job.

J.B. Exactly.

J.L. So now, let's see where we are. Tell me about, in terms of satisfaction of being an electrician. What are the sources of satisfaction? What do you like about it? Yeah.

J.B. What do I like about it?

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. When you hit the switch, the light comes on. Seriously, when you hit the switch, the light comes on. You know? When you-- you know,-- when you turn ... when you ... when you hit the circuit breaker, the circuit works. It's wired correctly.

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. You don't hear a pop. You don't hear a boom. (laughs) When you hear pops and stuff you've got issues. But as long as you don't hear nothing,--you know?

J.L. Yeah. Uh-huh. And it's the feeling that you built something.

J.B. Yeah, exactly.

J.L. You did something pride ...

J.B. It's ... it's just a satisfying feeling of being able to put it together from scratch and it works when it's all over. And that's really one of the biggest things is, like, I did this. You know? 'Cause now--you know--you know--I don't have any children but I worked on this job, I worked on Battery Park ... I worked on two of the buildings at Battery Park. I worked at North River. I worked at Red Hook. You know? I worked at City College. I worked at Bronx Lebanon Hospital,--you know--all of these places. I could just say,--you know--I did ... I was here ... I was here ... exactly. You know?--all kinds of stuff.

J.L. So when you were growing up did you ... what did you used to think that you were going to be?

J.B. Huh?

J.L. When you ... when you were growing up,--when you were a little girl?

J.B. You know, truthfully, what I wanted ... what I wanted - and this was after I gotten older, I wanted to be a teacher.

J.L. Oh yeah.

J.B. I wanted to be a teacher.

J.L. Now you are.

J.B. Exactly. I really am. I am. You know? So to a degree I still feel able to do what I wanted to do and I'm still doing what I like to do, so I'm ... I'm able to do both.

J.L. Tell me about membership in the IBEW. Now, as a contractor, you're still a member?

J.B. Yeah. I shelved my card. Once I get my ... my license. I shelved my card but I still pay union ... union dues to the International so I'm able to carry this (unintelligible)

J.L. And what's the benefit of that?

J.B. I can always go back into it if I ever want to.

J.L. ?? Yeah. Uh-huh.

J.B. And the benefits that they carry, the International carries, for each individual worker, like death benefits and some types of insurance and that a type of stuff,--you know?--all the little perks that they have.

J.L. You know, one of the issues ... well, what about ... Let's, just let's, before we switch from that 'cause I just thought of another question.

J.B. go ahead.

J.L. But membership in the IBEW in terms of women? And how would you rate the union's responses to issues that women have had over...

J.B. Over a period ...

J.L. Have you been involved with ...

J.B. I don't ... I'm not as involved as I ... as I used to be. Especially now, being a contractor, I'm not as involved as I used to be because--you know--being an electrician being involved and being a contractor being involved is two totally different things.

J.L. Right. But you have been?

J.B. I used to be. Yeah.

J.L. You used to be.

J.B. And,--you know--of course things didn't happen as quickly as they could have happened. But at the same time,--you know--they did happen. But there's still things that they--you know--that they could still work on. You know?

J.L. Uh-huh. Such as?

J.B. It ... it all boils down to the benefit system. It all boils down to benefits, rally, 'cause the working conditions basically, they are ... they're ... Here, New York,--'cause I can't speak for Kentucky anymore or Louisville,--

J.L. Right.

J.B. They're up to snuff. You know? Basically they're up to snuff. But, of course,--you know--you still have your prejudices. You still have your inconsistencies here and there. But overall, when you're dealing with the bigger jobs and stuff like that, you don't have as many issues. You know? And with ... when it really comes down to ... it's all ... it still boils down to each ?? job because they're the ones that make the job.

J.L. That's right.

J.B. So ...

J.L. An issue for electricians, I would think, would be safety.

J.B. Always, the main ... main issue. So ...

J.L. Big, big issue. So ...

J.B. And,--you know,--and of course,--you know--you have your contractors,--of course I'm excluded from that (laughs)--you have your contractors that want ... that want you to get the job done. They aren't worried about you and stuff like that. But the thing of it is, is that,--and which is what I ... what I teach in school,--it's like,--you know,--of course they can ... they can make life hard for you if you ... if you don't do it the way that they want to do it. But you know what? They cannot bring you ... bring your life back to you. They cannot bring your ... a limb back to you. They cannot bring your ...

#### Side Two

J.L. So we were talking about safety.

J.B. Oh, but the ... the bottom line is that if something happens to you on the job,--you know--safety is ... a job is as safe as you make it. You know? So if you don't get what you need to get the job done in a workman-like, in a safe manner, then, if something goes down ... You know, of course, they have the benefits and stuff like that and all that, but can it really--it will never really bring back what you've lost.

J.L. It's real dangerous stuff, like you said?

J.B. If ... if something minor, that's exactly what it is. But if something major happens,--you know--it's your life. So ...

J.L. So you have a feel--you ... you feel confident working with electricity?

J.B. It's all about respect. You learn to respect it.

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. You know, of course, when something blows or something, I jump just like the next person.

J.L. Yeah. Yeah.

J.B. I may not jump as far but I still jump because it still ... You know, when something like that happens it's still a surprise.

J.L. Yeah. Yeah.

J.B. But ... but at the same time, when it comes to working around it and stuff, you just have to learn how to respect it, and--you know--and know the know the properties ... the basics of what will happen and how to do things. And that's really ... that's one of the biggest things about the IBEW, that they basically teach you how to do it safely and right, and which really ... it sort of like hands you. And they're ... Well, and what I teach my students is that learn how to do it right and then you learn how to do it fast. You don't learn how to do it fast, then you learn how to do it right 'cause no matter how fast you are, if it ain't right, how fast were you? But as long as you learn how to do it right and do it in a safe and workman-like manner, there's no--you know--shouldn't be a problem.

J.L. Right.

J.B. Then it goes into the area of the manufacturer or conditions or something like that. But as long as you do what you're supposed to do then you don't have to worry about it. I mean,--you know--not to ...

J.L. Right.

J.B. Then ... then those outside factors come into play. Then,--you know--it's .. that's ... it goes back to ... that's a God thing then.

J.L. So I wanted to talk about breaking through the glass ceiling for women. And have you ... were you a foreman? Were you ...

J.B. No. No.

J.L. You've never been a foreman?

J.B. Well, that was because I'm not from New York so I would never expect to be a foreman up here.

J.L. Okay. So do you still have your book from Louisville?

J.B. Well, I have a withdrawal card so basically I ...

J.L. But did you ever get membership in, because you've lived here a long time?

J.B. No. No.

J.L. No?

J.B. No. I've ... I lo-- ... I always pay my dues to-- my Local dues through my Local in Louisville.

J.L. Wow. Okay.

J.B. And, of course, the International is the International.  
So ...

J.L. Right. So now, how did it come about that you set up Derby Electric and you became a contractor?

J.B. Truly, really, to tell you the truth, I was really ... I was ... I was an electrical inspector for the city,--you know--the post ...

J.L. Oh, you were?

J.B. Yeah. What happened is that I was working for Local 3 and things were starting to get slow. Or before they started getting slow I was, like,--you know--eventually ... 'cause,--you know-- everything's in cycles. Everything's cyclical.

J.L. Sure.

J.B. So I was, like, let me try to find something else now, so I started working for City College as a maintenance electrician. And then, of course, ... but I just used to ...

J.L. And did you have to take a civil service ...

J.B. I had just missed the city test so ...

J.L. Oh, okay.

J.B. But,--you know--up at City College up in Harlem it was hard to get people up there because--you know--nobody wanted to go to Harlem back then. So, of course ...

J.L. Such a nice campus!

J.B. Yeah, right. Exactly,

J.L. It's ... Yeah.

J.B. And that's ... that's why I started ... I went ... started off going back to school again, too, for teaching so ... 'cause they ... they have a very good teaching college. So I went to work up there. But when the next test came around people took the test ... I didn't take it or .. No, the results from the test that they had just given, now they were starting to call people and, of course, people started picking City College so I got bumped out. So I got bumped out of there. And then I wrote a letter back to Local 3 and that was when things were starting to go back down. I wrote a letter to Local 3 but, of course, I didn't really expect to go back to work because things were back on the down slope now where unemployment was starting to pick up. And, of course, the unwritten rule in the IBEW is that--you know--you make your jurisdiction first and, since I'm not from this jurisdiction, I shouldn't be--I didn't expect to work here. So ... but they--you know--because with Local 3 they--you know--if you are on the book they will put you to work so they don't have a book--two book system like other cities. Other cities you have book one, which are the local people side, and then you have book two, which are the ... all the travelers on the out-of-towners side. Here in New York they don't ... they only have one book per say but it's all computerized so ... And so I wrote the letter, telling them--you know--I would love to be employed with them again because I wrote a letter when I left, and they ... they sent me back to work, which I was surprised about 'cause I was like, I didn't think they would send me back to work. So I started working again and that's when I was working at Bronx Lebanon for--who was I for?--Lowy & Donnath. And then I was working there for Lowy & Donnath, Daidone, Fishbach & Moore, Mass was the last job before I became the inspector. So I was working for them still but I was, like,--you know--I really



need to get out because things are slow. Local 3 guys got to work, and I'm not trying to get in the middle or that type of stuff. You know? And also it's, like, you're an out-of-towner. We got people employed. What are you doing here? And I was, like, I got to get out 'cause I ain't trying to get busted up. You know? So ... so I used ... I was going to Mechanic's Institute and this guy, one of the teachers, Mr. Amos ??

J.L. What were you studying there?

J.B. Drafting. Drafting: Engineering drafting.

J.L. It's a wonderful place ...

J.B. So, yeah. Oh yeah, great school. Great school for ... You wouldn't believe how much you learn from that school,--you know?--and back then it was only, like, fifty dollars a year so ... but anyway, but you had to be in the trades to get into the school. So Mr. Amos, Peter Amos, he used to work for Con Ed, he retired,--he told me: Oh, well,--you know--you should join the Electrical Inspectors, the ... their organization, the Association, and I was like, Well, okay. So I ... he brought me in,--you know ... He was like, Oh well ... He brought me the paper work and--you know--of course,--you know--of course,--you know,--?? recommended you and I put his name down.

J.L. Uh-huh.

J.B. So ... so then I became Ele--I ... I joined the organization. And so I was going to the meetings and stuff. And then one ... one year, ninety--'90, '90-'91, January of '91, they have a dinner for the election of officers and, of course, the head people from ... from BEC, Bureau of Electrical Control, Morris Khame, Frank Coloccio and--was Mr. [Jack] Bunk there? I don't know if Mr. Bunk was here or not, but still--you know--they were at the meeting: John Kenny, of course. So they were at the meeting. They was like: Oh, well, you should ... you should try to become and an Electrical Inspector, and I as like, Oh, okay. And they said: well, come down tomorrow. And of cour-- ... They said: come down and fill out an application. So I was there the next day. I went there the next day and, of course, they were like, who are you? Oh ... Oh yeah. And,--you know--because when I went in, I went to see ... and the first person I saw was Kenny and he was, like, Oh, how are you doing? You know? You know? ?? So, I was like, here ... I'm here to fill out an application. And of course they was slightly surprised, well, not Kenny, but they ... they was surprised that I came down the next day. So ... so I put in my application and ... and then,--you know--as time went on they ... their test came up.

J.L. Okay. And you took it?

J.B. And, well, really the test was basically based off of your experience. They graded you off of your experience and stuff like that. So ... so since that came up I filed for that and made sure I put in for that, so I was able ... then this way I was now on a list. I was really, really on the list.

J.L. Uh-huh.

J.B. But they hired me anyway, before ... they hired me in November of '91. I went to work for them in November of '91. So ... and that was ... that was a really great job,--you know?--all the people on the job and stuff. And I really loved that job. I loved being an inspector. So being an ...

J.L. What was great about it?

J.B. Well, one, because you ... you were somewhere ... Because, basically, as an Electrical Inspector what you do is that you go to different jobs that contractors ... 'cause every--everything done electrically in the city has to be filed for.

J.L. Okay.

J.B. You have to put in an application with the city and we come out and inspect it. So every day I was in a different ... on a different job site at a different job, looking ... 'cause basically what I had to do was make sure that they did what they said they was going to do, and based off the national-or -in this case, the New York City code. So ...

J.L. So you were reading that code?

J.B. Yeah. So between reading the code, interpreting the code, going through the Electrical Inspector's Association and--you know--doing my job, and with the training and stuff like that--I went through training and everything,--that's how I got to know the code more so. And then, of course, with being on the job. So ... and every day, like I said,--you know--every day ... every day it was ... I would be on union jobs. I would be on non-union jobs. I would be on big jobs. I would be on small jobs. It was just a great thing. It really was. It really was. So ... So I met these guys that were in business and they were, like, Oh, well ... they had an older [man] that was ... that likes to see me, he was, like, Oh, well--you know--maybe you should take the license test and ... and you could be licensee for our company. I said not a problem. So I signed up to take the class. You know? They have a prep class for the license. So I signed up for that, and that licensee,--he was an older gentleman and he was ... he was on his last legs 'cause he died. He ended up dying in November of the year that I started taking the class.

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. So, unfortunately, they weren't able to sustain the business because if you don't have a licensee you can't do business really so ... and, of course, you renew every December, so ... for the next year. And, of course, he died in November so they could not renew for the next year so they really couldn't stay in business 'cause, like, they could only finish what they had started. So they weren't able to ... to stay in business. So since they weren't able to stay in business,--you know--they ... they did what they had to do to just to keep working and stuff, so when that happened I was, like, well, now I got to start my own business so that's how I started my own business.

J.L. So how was that a test? Was it ...

J.B. (non-verbal exclamation)

J.L. Okay.

J.B. Well, when I took it, it was ... it was a two-part test. It was a ... it was a written test and a hands-on test. And, of course, the written test was fifty questions, multiple choice, and five essays, and if you didn't pass the fifty multiple choice they didn't even grade the five essays. And Cynthia [Long] took that test with me. Me and Cynthia, we went to the class together so ...

J.L. Did Cynthia pass?

J.B. No. No. I don't know ... Yeah. She didn't ... she didn't pass the ... the written for some reason. I don't know why 'cause-you know--we was ... like I said, we were there together. We were studying together. So I don't know what happened.

J.L. So you put a lot into studying for the ...

J.B. Oh yeah. No. Yeah, about three thousand hours. (laughs) So,--you know? but I did most of ... See, I'm .. I'm one of those where I ... I really only study when I'm in class because, if I'm not in a studying environment then I really won't study. So ...

J.L. Right.

J.B. So I did that. I did the multiple choice ... You know? And at first, when I first started the class I was like, Oh yeah. I'm going to ace this, yada, yada, yeah. By the time I got through that class I'm, like, please just let me pass! So ... and I passed the first half and then, of course, you go through ... now you go into the second half to practice for the hands on, which was fi-- another five part test, which was stop/start station, lights, three way .. two way ... three way switches, panel connection, blueprint reading and something else. I forget: start/start job, blueprint, the lights, the panels, and something else. I forget what it was.

J.L. So how was that?

J.B. (sighs) Thank goodness I studied at the school 'cause if I hadn't went through that electrical course with Lenny--what was it?-**Lenny Feinberg** ...

J.L. At what school, IBEW?

J.B. It's ... No, no, no. This is a personal deal, a national electrical training course which is ?? industry.

J.L. And you have to pay for that?

J.B. Yeah. But it's ... it's like a prep course for the license,

J.L. Uh-huh. Yeah.

J.B. And they do very good, though; very good. Oh my gosh. So I ... truthfully, if you're going to take the test I would recommend that you take the course 'cause--you know-- ... but you know what the thing of it is, is that we had engineers and stuff in there and you would ... you could tell by the people that went through the course and the people that didn't go through the course because when you went into the test, the people within the first half an hour, the people that got up and walked out were the people that didn't take that course. You could tell because they would look at that test and, like, Oh, forget it. They just threw it up in the air and just walked out.

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. And the people that took the course were ... were basically the ones that stayed. But the people ... engineers and the ... and those type of people, they tend not to pass because it's very ... they kept it very basic,-you know,--

the KISS system: Keep it simple, stupid? Just keep it simple, just--you know? And they wanted to be so technical about it. It's not technical. It's very basic, and that was the thing. So ... But after all of that and I went through the class so I started the business.

J.L. And what year did you start it?

J.B. I incorporated July 7th, 1995, and I got my license September--what did I get my license?--September the 26th of '95. Yeah, September 26th of '95.

J.L. And did you have ... did you take a lot of classes or courses or try to find out about business?

J.B. Yeah. I took an estimating course through the same class that I took the training. I went to different agencies,--you know-'cause every ... every ... so many agencies out here. You know? The city alone has so many different types of agencies that you can go and learn about business. You know? Like, of course, one of the first ones is the SBA, of course,--you know,--the Feds SBA.

J.L. Right.

J.B. I went to them.

J.L. The Small Business administration.

J.B. Um-hum. Exactly. I went to them. I went to ... Let's see. Who else did I go to, 'cause--you know--that was really one of the major ones was SBA. And then, of course, I deal with ... I went to the different agencies like SCA, the School Construction Authority, Port Authority, MTA ... [Metropolitan Transportation Authority] Who else am I basically missing?--you know,--just the State,--you know--everybody 'cause--you know--the city has, like, the Jamaica -- Business Resource Center. You have ... then you have Manhattan Resource Center up in Harlem. You have .. Queens has one, Jamaica, on Jamaica Avenue. Brooklyn ...

J.L. And what's the function of all of these places?

J.B. Basically, they ... they also help you with your start up ... and there was another one 'cause I used to go over to what was that? Was it Hunter College? I went to ... over here on Madison Avenue where I did my business plan and all that type of stuff,

J.L. Oh yeah.

J.B. I went through them for that. I forgot who it was. I think ... I think it was a City agency also; part of the SBA. I forget,--you know?--'cause it's been ten years now. I'm supposed to forget all this now that it's ten years. So ... but they basically assist you with business plans, different types of financing that you can get, like the Women's Venture Fund. There's one ... there's ... they can ... You can get money from them,--you know--just women businesses.

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. You can get small mi-micro loans from them and stuff like that just for business start up. And just different agencies and stuff like that where you can just--you know--just all the resources of business and how to say in

business and how to do business with this entity and stuff like that. So,-you know-I went through a bunch of them. I went through a few of them.

J.L. So then how ... you started putting your services out and contracting so ...

J.B. Yeah. Well, yeah. On-- But, see, once I ... once I went and got the license I had to start. I had to start. And then I went into business with somebody else that was in the class that were in a class behind me. He has his own company now, TMF Electric. And then, of course, the ... the twins that I went into business ... that I was in business with also. You know? We were in business. It was not, like, really formal but still ... It was ... It was semi-formal. They have a ... a company also here. So I think it's Power Source, I think, is the name of it, Reg and Rich. They're very good. ?? But Jay gave that one up, just those guys. That was ... that was one thing that really worked out really well.

J.L. Uh-huh.

J.B. Thank goodness.

J.L. Tell me about ... what are your biggest challenges as a contractor?

J.B. Getting paid. Getting paid, because--you know--since I'm a woman and, of course, I'm not one of those that's going to go in there and start cursing and stuff ... 'Cause, see, I'm not a curser. I ... I've never been a curser. I've never been somebody that ... You know? I ... I just ... that's just not my MO. I just can't do it. Well, I could but I would feel so bad about it so I just don't do it and I ... 'cause my mentality is, if I do the work, give me my money. I shouldn't have to ask you for nothing. Once I send you my invoice you should write my check and ??

J.L. But it's a problem. It's a problem for all contractors.

J.B. But it's a problem. It's a contract. Yeah. It's a problem for all contractors.

J.L. And on top of that, being a woman it's even harder.

J.B. But because ... Yeah. Exactly. Because I'm--you know,-I'm not going to be one of those that come in there and, like,-you know- like a man that come up in there and, like, pull ... pick you up by the collar and shake you until the ... the money fall out of your pockets or something.

J.L. Right.

J.B. But I have considering hiring somebody like that so ... I'm serious. You just don't know.

J.L. Really, it's ... it's a big problem ??

J.B. Yeah. Well,-you know-I had a couple of people that even asked if I needed them to do that so ... 'cause there was ... there's this one person that still owes me money that ...

J.L. And we're talking a lot of money. Right?

J.B. Well, back then it was a lot of money. Now it's nothing.

J.L. Yeah. Yeah.

J.B. but,--you know-- .. but at the same time

J.L. Still you have to lay out the money, yeah, to do the job.

J.B. Money ... Yeah.

J.L. And then ...

J.B. Exactly.

J.L. So it's very frustrating.

J.B. So I just look at it: what goes around comes around. I just have to put it--you know--God take care of him;--(both laugh) just take care of him. Right?

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. I ain't going to both with him no more. So ...

J.L. So tell me about how ... how you find doing this work as a woman? I ... I understand that you bid on a job at the World Trade Center and you did some work there at the new ...

J.B. Yeah. I did ... I did on 7 World Trade Center, -7 World Trade ...

J.L. Uh-huh. Number 7

J.B. Where I was a sub under a ma--under the prime contract with Five Star Electric.

J.L. Five Star Electric?

J.B. Yeah. They were the prime ... Well, they were the prime for the Con Ed part of 7 World Trade Center 'cause another contractor had the rest of the building.

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. But from fourth floor down they basically ... so basically, they were like the starter--they were the starter contractor of that project. And I subbed under them. I did the cable ?? and lighting for them in that ... on that job cable ?? lighting the light system. So ...

J.L. So how long did that job last?

J.B. We started in ... when did we start?--August or September and we left ... and the last ... the last time we was there was, like, June. And it was ... Really it was supposed to have been over, like, December, January.

J.L. This is last year?

J.B. Yeah. Yeah.

J.L. So this past year, 2004?

J.B. 2003 to 2004, yeah. So ...

J.L. So, now, do you have people that work for you? Do this ... I mean, how does the work get done?

J.B. Well, yeah. That's ... that's the only way the work's going to get done (laughs) 'cause I'm not doing it! Well,--you know--now--right now it's ... things are really slow so I have very few people now. But once--you know--I have a contract that the State is supposed to be signing with a prime contractor, the GC, in January, so once they sign the contract then I'll sign a contract with them.

J.L. Over there?

J.B. No. This is ...

J.L. Something else.

J.B. This is out in Jamaica, Jamaica, Queens?

J.L. Uh-huh.

J.B. Yeah. This is in ...

J.L. What project will it be?

J.B. New York State. It's the Department of Environmental Conservation,

J.L. Oh.

J.B. Yeah, out in Jamaica, Queens, out ... 180 Street and 108th Avenue or something; right in that area.

J.L. So what will you be building? What will you be ...

J.B. We'll be supplying power for ... it has to do with ... again, it's environmental so conservation, so we'll be bringing the power from Con Ed in for all their equipment and stuff like that. It's ... it has to do with clean up,-- soil clean up so they need serious power to do that kind of stuff. It's amazing what they need. It's amazing. So ...

J.L. So that ... that's something to look forward to.

J.B. Yeah. That ... that will be in the middle of January; end of January.

J.L. So its cold. Is it cold where you work? I mean, ??

J.B. Well, that's going to be a cold job. That's going to be a cold job because that's going to be, basically, outside.

J.L. Yeah. But, like, once again, you won't be doing it.

J.B. No. No.

J.L. You're ... you're going to be inspecting and making sure people do it right.

J.B. I'll be outside. But I'll ... exactly. But I'm not going to be trying to be out there.

J.L. And what is it like being a boss? I mean, do you have ... do you make any effort to hire women or you try to find the best ....

J.B. Well, because ... because I'm Local 3, basically, I ...

J.L. They send you ...

J.B. I put a call in and I get who I get.

J.L. Uh-huh. Okay. Yeah.

J.B. So ...

J.L. I see. Yeah.

J.B. If,--you know ... really, what ... what I'm going to try to do is I'm going to try to get women. I'm going to try. But at the same time, again, I put a call in and I get who I get. So ...

J.L. Uh-huh. Yeah.

J.B. But I tried to get a woman foreman, but unfortunately, you have to have certain cla--you have to have already taken certain classes like OSHA and safety and a foremen's class for you to be able to be a foreman. And unfortunately, she was missing one class so I wasn't able to pull her. So ... But,--you know-- ...

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. And,--you know--that ... that was for the Trade Center. So we ... we ... I did have one woman working for me a while back up when I was at the Bronx ... in the Bronx, the School of Law. But besides that, no. So now the next time ... I figured ... the way it's running, most likely when I pull ... when I pull in a few people, I'll get another woman again. So ... If she ...

J.L. Now, you were talking about ... You teach in the IBEW, Local 3, Apprentices Program. And how long have you been doing that?

J.B. I've been doing that almost ten years,

J.L. Wow!

J.B. Almost as long as ... Well, I started that basically right about the same time I started the business so ...

J.L. And ... and do you like teaching there?

J.B. I love teaching. I ... Well,--you know--I like teaching. I like teaching there. I like ... I like ... because, see, I teach first year, first half,



J.L. Okay.

J.B. As soon as they come in. And really ...I really would rather not teach any other year because this way, when they come in, ...

J.L. You set 'em straight.

J.B. They already know ...

J.L. Right.

J.B. You're going to see women on the job ... You know? And ... and the first year they teach sexual harassment. And, of course, some people may blow through it. I spend a whole night on it and ... because really that's something that you can go through in ... in no time if you choose. But ... and, of course, I bring it up all the time and ... but I also tell them my experience, how I am, and how other people may be, so don't expect that everybody's going to be like me,--

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. You know?--because I'm not saying that I'm easy, but I'm not saying that I'm really tough either. So,--you know--it's sort of like, take everybody,--again, take everybody individually. And that's ... that's anyone because everybody's different.

J.L. And do you ... do you sense any kind of sea change in the young men coming in? Do you ... It's just too hard to tell.

J.B. Well,--you know--the only change is just because of the change,--you know--just because of the days and the times.

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. You know?--the times so,--you know--it's a little bit more ... it's more inde--women are more out there and stuff like that. So, of course, they're a little bit more knowledgeable. But at the same time, there's still misconceptions. So,--you know--I try to get rid of most of the misconceptions and tell them,--you know--that just because I'm a woman, I can work circles around you. You know? So don't you give ... And I tell them ... I'm, like, you know what? Because we got to be better than you. We got to be better just to get ... just to ...--you know?--'cause no ... It's really just goes back from being a woman, being a person of color, I got to do twice as hard to get half the credit so I kept that ... I kept that in my mind. It's like, the forefront for me because that's how I was ... that's how I was raised because that's how it was back then. And to a degree it's still that way.

J.L. Um-hum. um-hum.

J.B. Don't ever think that we ... we got it made. It ain't like that. It's not. I wish but ...

J.L. A lot of people

J.B. Yeah.

J.L. saying we have a ...

J.B. Yeah. Yeah, we get ...

J.L. A race blind, gender blind society.

J.B. Oh yeah, sure. Um-huh. Right. Okay.

J.L. Yeah. What world do they live in?

J.B. Um-hum.

J.L. Okay. So now what about being a model or a mentor for other women? What do you have to say about that?

J.B. Well, I also do consulting with NEW. I also teach classes at NEW. Yeah, so ...

J.L. What do you teach there?

J.B. Me and Darlene Messinger, we do a shop class. We do an electrical shop class. They have a night program where we do an electrical shop class every ... every cycle that they have. So the women get to do one day of electrical work. So ... And,--you know--I used to teach some of the classes, but--you know why?--a lot of shee-- ... Oh, please! What's her name there? **Helicon. Helicon, Inc.** She's ... She has this math curriculum that is, like, off the charts. And we used to teach math and they picked her up to do that, so now basically what ... what we were doing ... we was doing math. And then the shop ... the disadvantage is that I don't get to see the students, like, when I ... when I had the math class. But because of her ... her math class is just, like, it's .. it's so good. I even ... I even take it. (laughs) I'm even tak-- I took it. So,--you know--and I'm good in math and I took her math class, and it was ... it's a really great class. But ... so we teach shop. But,--you know--Darlene, she's teach ... she teaches, I think Introduction to The Trades. But besides that, that's where ... and then, of course,--you know---I'm ... I try to be there on every third Friday to hang out stuff like that.

J.L. Um-hum. For the coffee house?

J.B. Yeah, exactly. So ...

J.L. So, because you were never in Local 3, you really didn't organize with Women Electricians. Or did you?

J.B. Oh no, no. We had our own little organization,--you know--because ...

J.L. Women Electricians with Cynthia Long?

J.B. Yeah. Yeah, with Cynthia, Melinda, Beth ...

J.L. And what do you have to say about that work that you did? I mean, how .. was it important? It was ...

J.B. Yeah, of course. You know? It was important because--you know--no matter what people may think, if the ... if they didn't do and we didn't do that we did back then, you would not even be where you're at now. You know? You would not have ... the conditions would not be in place the way that they are now if we didn't do what we did back then. You know? Me being my little passive self,

Melinda being her little (claps) in their face, Cynthia being in the face to some degree ... Beth was like that. You know? Of course,--you know--they're New Yorkers. They got the New York attitude going on so. But still, again, if we didn't do what we did, then they wouldn't have what they got. And ... and ... and,--you know? But that's always. People don't know what they got ... You know? You never know what you got until you lose it.

J.L. They don't know what went before.

J.B. Yeah. Exactly. Exactly. Go back when I came in and deal with the mentality that I had to deal with. You deal with the mentality that I deal with maybe one every ... maybe five or six guys. But me, I was dealing with one every two. So,--you know--just think about it. So ... so don't even ... There's nothing they can say that's ... You know? And,--you know--of cour--there may be something that they can tell us, but overall there's not much they can tell us.

J.L. Right. So it was essential.

J.B. Yeah.

J.L. So I'm ... do you affiliate with any .... Like, I know that Lenora Janis ...

#### Tape Two

J.L. Okay. So I was asking you ... this is tape two of Joi Beard, and I was asking you about networking with other women in construction groups like ... like ... or NAWIC,--there's another group ...

J.B. Yeah. There was NAWIC [National Association of Women In Construction]. There's PWC, Professional Women in Construction ... I ... I go to some of this stuff periodically. And of course, I'm ... I have to join a couple of them. I have to, so that's one thing: I have to. But, of course, I ??

J.L. And you have to, why?

J.B. Because now, I guess, it's ... it's sort of like ... I've been out here for so long and it's ... it's been a struggle and, of course, maybe things could have been better with the other groups. But one of the reasons why I never really got into the ... in to the groups and stuff like that is because, truthfully,

J.L. Um-hum.

J.B. I looked at most of the groups as very superficial, somewhat,--you know?--not that they don't do things and stuff like that, but a lot of the women,--and--you know--I hate to say this but this is my perception of it,--a lot of the women are fronts for the businesses.

J.L. Oh.

J.B. There's very few women that are truly business owners. You have, like, Janis; she's a true business owner. You have, like, Aurora Electric. You have the lady with Commodore Electric, and then Cauldwell/Wingate,--you know,--but here's very few. You know? so then .. And then there's some. There are some that are true, true to the game, and then there's some that aren't true to

the game. And because I've seen so many who are not true to the game, I guess I'm like, yeah, right, chill;-whatever. So I'm ... I'm not going to get involved because I don't want to hear the BS. I don't want to hear the ... You know? You're coming in, you're hanging out,--you know?--you're just here for show and if I ask you a technical question you're, like, Okay. Well, I'll talk to my estimator tomorrow. What's up with that?

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. So ... and there's ... You know? And I don't want to talk against anyone but at the same time, that's how I saw it. That's how I look at it.

J.L. Right. Now, you just got a call before ... during ... during our interview from another woman contractor,

J.B. Oh yeah, ??

J.L. So will you offer, like,--you know--support to her women when you can ??

J.B. Oh yeah. No, no. See, she's the second black woman to get her license for New York City--electrical contractor's license ...

J.L. And what's her name, Gwen?

J.B. Gwen--Gwendolyn Reeve, NYBEC Electric. She ... you know, because she calls me: what's up; how you doing, and really that's what--she was only calling me just to see what was up,--you know--and--you know--because of the holidays and stuff like that. But,--you know--she would call me and I would ... I would tell her: Oh, you know what? This is what you should do. This is what you should do. You know? If I have any types of questions or something like that, or if ... what ... what ... because I'm a union contractor and because she's just starting, she's not union yet, if I get a small job that I know I'm not paying forty-two dollars an hour for,

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. I will swing it her way,--you know?--or something like that. Or another guy, another black guy that I know that has a contracting [company] out in Queens, if there's a job out in Queens I usually call him for the smaller stuff, and we would just swing stuff,--you know--that way,--

J.L. Right. Yeah.

J.B. You know--because it ... it has to be done, so why not you?

J.L. Absolutely. Yeah. Right.

J.B. And then this way somebody called me, I was able to get the job done for them. They don't care how it's done as long as they get that job done,--you know--and in a workman-like manner, that's all that counts. And we're all ... we're all,--the people that I'm talking about,--we're all union electricians that own businesses so, of course, we're going to do it in a workman-like manner because that's our mentality.

++J.L. Right. Now, how ... how is the situation for minority men? Are they, I mean, making the gains ...

J.B. Well, they're ... they're doing okay. It's just as hard. It's ... but, you know, right now it's hard for everybody.

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. It's hard for everyone. But, of course, for people of color, women and people of color it's, like, it's ... it's real tough because--you know--usually we're the small contractors and, of course, we need to get paid on time and people don't want to pay us on time. And, of course, with us not getting paid on time, then, of course, here we go ?? the insurance industry. Ridiculous! Totally, totally ridiculous. I pay thirty-six thousand dollars last year just for liability insurance for the company so,-you know-

J.L. You have to get paid.

J.B. Yeah. Exactly. I mean,--you know--that's'... that's some--that's ... that's one person working in the office, thirty-six thousand dollars.

J.L. Wow.

J.B. You know? And that was only based off of--how much was the payroll for that,--you know?--'cause it's based on payroll. You're talking maybe like five hundred thousand dollars a payroll; six hundred thousand dollars a payroll; something like that. So,-- you know? And I have to look forward to that every year. If my payroll ... You know, this year because it was a slower year, my ... my insurance, of course, is going to be lower. But once my payroll goes back up to five hundred thousand dollars again then I'm going to be putting out thirty-six, forty thousand dollars ?? insurance, liability insurance alone. That's not including workman's comp. So I got to get paid on time.

J.L. You got to. Yeah.

J.B. On time,-you know?--in a timely fashion. You know? And I can't be ... I can't be bankrolling jobs, not like the big contractors. You know? They got credit lines up the wasoo. I'm not in that position. You know? I'm not in that position. You know? The mistakes we make early in life is ... we pay for them eventually, so it's just a matter of when you pay for 'em. And in my case ... so, the sacrifices we make ... But that's ... that's one of the things with .. with us is that we got to get paid as soon as possible. You know? And, of course, they want to ...

J.L. Right. It's a whole lot of pressure ...

J.B. And of course, they don't want to pay us as soon as ... We're the little guy. You know? We're the last ones to get paid. So ...

J.L. You know, one thing ... this isn't on the ... But before I ask you the last question I want to ask you another question, which is:--you know--we go to all these meetings about trying to get women jobs, and the big problem seems to be that people aren't hiring women and they can't get on the jobs, and the other ??

J.B. You're talking about as in, like, as in shapeup or something like that?

J.L. It's in New York City work,--you know? Yeah

J.B. Um-hum.

J.L. And some women have tremendous problems like, with the Plumbers and,--you know--and it's not fair like the Electricians. They don't have the same kind of system. But one thing that never seems to happen is that with the Office of Federal Contract Compliance they never seem to withhold any payment because somebody's not in compliance. I mean, it seems pretty clearly easy to show that, well, I did this; I did that, and therefore good faith, and therefore ... You know?

J.B. Right. I know one of ... Like, DASNE is cracking down on that very hard and the SCA is starting to get into that also where they ...

J.L. What is DASNE?

J.B. The Dormitory Authority of the State Of New York.

J.L. Okay. Um-hum.

J.B. They're ... they're cracking down on that. SCA is getting pretty good at that also.

J.L. And what's SCA?

J.B. School Construction Authority.

J.L. Oh really? Okay.

J.B. Yeah. They're starting to pick up ...

J.L. 'Cause I've heard people over years say that they ... this was going to.

J.B. Yeah. No. Well, yeah. See, this was ...

J.L. They [SCA] had this Project something and ... Project whatever  
....

J.B. Yeah. they .. Yeah. They have a mentor program, which I belong to.

J.L. Oh, okay.

J.B. And basically,--you know--the major contractors pick you up and they mentor you; show you the ropes and stuff like that, which, of course, I should have been in a long time ago, but don't get me started. (laughs) But they're picking up on that. They're ... Now, if you don't comply, you don't get your money. You don't get those,--you know--??

J.L. Now, do you think that has anything to do with the new Chancellor, the City ... do you have any idea?

J.B. Of course. Of course he has something to do with it. Bloomberg has something to do with it. It's just he ... the times because they--you know,--because when you have set aside programs and stuff like that, and when the contractors, they're like: Oh, but we can't find anyone. Why can't you find anyone? And that's the reason. We ... we don't want to work for you. Why would we want to work for you if we can't get paid? You know? And we have no recourse.

You want us on ... You have set asides for us, but at the same time, they are ... they're holding our ... our monies back and you aren't doing anything for us. So why would we come and work on your project if you aren't doing anything for me. So ...

J.L. So you see a little progress. And this is a mentoring program ...

J.B. they're (unintelligible) the mentoring pro--it's a ... Oh my gosh. Yeah. I just went to a meeting

J.L. Okay.

J.B. with them just last week, and what they're ... and they're going ... they are allocating a hundred and fifteen million dollars for this year's budget for just MWD's, MWD, SL--all the ....

J.L. What does that mean?

J.B. M, of course, is minority, W is women, D is disadvantaged, L is locally based,

J.L. Okay.

J.B. So all of those different type of companies, they're ... they're setting aside a hundred and fifteen million dollars on the SCA ... for SCA work just alone.

J.L. Okay.

J.B. And ... and the thing of it is, is that they're really-- they're really going out there braking it up, to ... to distribute the moneys so, so much.

J.L. And these contractors that will come in, might this be a source of employment for some women who can't find work elsewhere?

J.B. Well, when you're talking about women, you're talking about contractors or you're just talking about women in general?

J.L. No. Talk about, like, trying to shape for these contractors.

J.B. Yeah. Well, they ... Well, remember, shaping is ... it's not ... they don't do that in electrical. Okay? But still again ....

J.L. I'm just thinking of the poor Plumbers.

J.B. Yeah. No, I know. Yeah, I know, and the Carpenters.

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. There's ... there's a possibility for it, because, again, they have the companies where you have the percentages for the ... for the set asides and they also have them for the ... the workers themselves because 7 World Trade Center was the same thing. I had to ... the forms I had to fill out just for that was tremendous, but--you know--fortunately, me being a black owned company and basically, my .. my work force was, like, ninety--I think it never went

under eighty-six percent of people of color or women, so I ... I ... They all ... they loved me.

J.L. Yeah.

J.B. But overall they ... the potential is there but at the same time,-and I'm not trying to be a smart Alec or nothing,--but if you don't--if you ain't performing, then I don't want you on my job anyway, whoever you are. So don't be going out there trying to shape a job and you don't have any skill, talent and ability to back it up. And that's ... and that's really the bottom line,--you know?--because I've always been,--you know ... And like I said, I'm pro-women, pro-black, pro--you know--left handed, but if you don't have the skill, talent and ability, I don't need you. I really don't need you. Yeah. I'll ... I'll drop you in a heartbeat. Okay, maybe I'll give you a little bit of leeway, but overall--'cause I have given a couple of people a little bit of leeway, but overall if ... if you're not performing, you got to go because the bottom line is the bottom dollar. So ...

J.L. That's right.

J.B. So if you can't make money for me then I don't need you.

J.L. Tell me about your thoughts on equal employment opportunity and affirmative action now in 2004 and ... what are your thoughts?

J.B. Well, they've gotten rid of a lot of it. They've gotten rid of a lot of it. You know? The City's just now bringing it back. The Feds, they got rid of a lot of it. You know? There is advantages and disadvantages to Republicans. so,--you know,--don't get me started. But,--you know--there's advantages and then there's a disadvantage to that. But the thing, if it is because so many people have abused it, this is the reason why they basically tried to get ... tried to get rid of it because a lot of people have abused it. Like ... like I said, there's a lot of ... there's a lot of women-owned businesses where these women don't have a clue, so you have women-owned businesses, but where's the woman? She's sitting in the office ...

J.L. Not like you who came up through the trades ...

J.B. Exactly. Exactly.

J.L. And have skills and took all these courses and built it.

J.B. You know, exactly. You know? You ... you're just somebody's wife or somebody's girl friend or somebody's daughter or whatever, and you're just sitting there looking cute. (phone rings) I forgot to turn it off.

J.L. Joi, I just want your thoughts on where you think women are at? We've made improvements but ...

J.B. Oh, no. Of course,--you know--of course we made improvements, and of course, I may be a little bit of an optimist. We made improvements. Of course we have. The thing of it is, is that you still have people that are narrow minded,--you know?--because,--you know--People say that there's--you know--we live in a--I don't know who says this 'cause I can't understand why they would say anything like-we live in a color blind,

J.L. Gender blind...



J.B. Yeah, gender blind... and they must be out of their mind. So, of course ... Yes. Of course we've done better, but then, of course, there's still things that have to be done, because--you know--there's still things like ... when it comes to benefits,--you know--they still are ... aren't fair with the .. with the total benefit package. And other trades are worse ... truthfully, the Electricians are really the best trade, I think, when it comes to improvements and advancements and all that type of stuff. Really, I think ... I'm the wrong person to talk to because the Electricians are really, like, the best trade when it comes to all that type of ... I ... But of course, I'm an electrician so I would think that. You know? But ...

J.L. I agree. I think ...

J.B. I think we have ... when it comes to IBEW, they have basically done more than any other trade out there when it comes to that: when it comes to women, people of color or whatever. So ... but, of course,--you know--there's still things that needs to be done 'cause ... and really, it's really education when it comes to the workers, because those are the ones that you still have the issues with. Of course, you still have your contractors and stuff, but the people on the job, that's what they're out there for is to tell the company who the best people are; who aren't the best people;--you know?--who we should keep; who we shouldn't keep and stuff like that. So ... You know? And that's where you got to start with the education there.

J.L. Well, speaking of education, you know, it seems to me that young girls--it's hard for them to visualize a career; that they don't really have any sense that women are out there and women are succeeding in the ??

J.B. Yeah. And --you know--that's one thing I--that's one thing I can say about NEW. They had ... they had been reaching out, like, at junior high and high schools--you know?--junior ... 'cause really you got to catch them early. You got to get ... You got to at least give 'em the information early so then, when they start making the hard choices, then that can be one of the choices You know? That can be an option, one of the options of, well, I can always do this too. You know? You don't have to be--you know--like hard core or how the guys think in the trade, like, if--you know--you could ... you could only be in the trade if you're a lesbian and stuff like that,--you know?--'cause a lot of guys think that in the trades. They'll think, well, you ... you got to be a lesbian to be ... to want to be in this trade, and stuff like that. But you don't have to have that type of ... that type of mentality; that type of life; that type of lifestyle or whatever. You don't have to be that/ You could just want to do,--you know--work with your hands and build and do whatever you want to do,--you know?--whoever wants to do it and however you want to do it. You know? So you don't ... you don't have to be in same little box that people put you in for you to be able to do this.

J.L. And ... Yeah. So when you look at your career and the satisfactions of your life and your accomplishments ... You said you don't have a daughter but if you did, do you think this would be a good path for her to ...

J.B. She wouldn't have a choice. (both laugh) Somebody would have to manage this business so,--you know--whoever ... whatever child I had would be inheriting this. You know? Let's ?? them before they got big. But, no, no. they wouldn't have ... Well, no. Life is about choices.

J.L. Right.

J.B. Life is about choices and ... and that would be their choice. But I would hope that that their choice would be to continue on to what I had ... what I had started.

J.L. For so long it's been a father/son trade,

J.B. Exactly. Exactly.

J.L. And it's about time it's a mother/daughter ...

J.B. Why can't it be daughter/daughter or even daughter/ son or I mean, mother/son or mother/daughter?

J.L. Or mother/daughter...

J.B. I don't care. Whatever. You know? Whoever ... whoever is there to carry it on, this' who needs to be there. So I have no problem with that because now--you know--it is becoming a father/daughter trade. So ... don't get me started. And,--you know--it is ... it has been that way so ... But still, true daughter that know the trade,--you know?--that type of stuff, not just I got my daughter in this. You know? I sent her to college and how she can run the business. You know? And I'm not saying that that's not right, but at the same time--you know,--I guess because I'm one of those ... Do you know what you're really doing? You know? An engineering degree can only show you what should happen on paper. It doesn't tell you what happens out in the field. So,--you know ... and of course, I'm a little prejudiced when it comes to that point. Just overlook that part, so--you know--because--you know?

J.L. well, I thank you very much for taking your time and sharing.

J.B. You're welcome. Happy holidays!

J.L. Happy holidays!

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