

Interview with Yvone Maitin

J.L. This is Jane Latour on April 19th [2005] interviewing Yvonne Maitin.

Yvone, why don't you tell me a little bit about your background, and where you were born and what neighborhood you grew up in and your parents;--things like that.

Y.M. Okay. I grew up in Manhattan, in Chelsea, in the projects, the Elliot Housing, in the projects there. I'm one of five children. I'm the eldest. I ... I had an interesting and somewhat scary childhood. My mother was not a very nice person. You know? My Dad used drugs. You know? In the end my mother went to school and did her thing, went to college and got out and graduated and my father got off drugs, but that wasn't until I was ... became an adult and I had already left home and left their lives. So we don't communicate. But at that time,--you know-I went to parochial school. I was a very shy young girl, little girl, teenager. I moved around a lot once I left Chelsea. I lived ... I went to junior high school in Puerto Rico. I lived with my grandparents there. And then I left there and I moved out to San Diego, California with my parents again and went to high school and my first year of college out there. And when I returned back to New York I returned with a little boy who was two weeks old when I came to New York ... came back.

J.L. And his name is?

Y.M. His name is Maicia. Um-hum.

J.L. And so you went to New York City Technical College?

Y.M. I did.

J.L. And was that program part of Access For Women, or that program came later? What program were you ??

Y.M. You know, I'm not really sure if it came before or after. Access For Women is part of ... Tech,-right?--New York Tech?

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. Yeah. No, then it came before it. It definitely came before the Access For Women. Hmm. You know what? Now that I think about it, 'cause I wasn't very conscious at that time, I was just, like, ?? ahead. You know? As a matter of a fact, you know what? It might actually have been a part of that.

J.L. Okay. I just have always been so impressed with their work.

Y.M. Yeah. They did do some really good work even back then they did some pretty good work.

J.L. Now, I know this seems a little like--you know,--but what I'm doing is I'm filling in a lot of the blanks because ...

Y.M. Okay, not a problem.

J.L. And I'm interested in ... You know, you're such a political person. I mean, you look at everything politically and what's the source of that? ... How did you get your politics?

Y.M. You know, when I was a very young girl,--it was very interesting to me,--my mother used to go on Ban the Bomb marches. Yeah. But,--you know--I think that ... I don't believe that she really was very conscious at the time. I think that there was probably some part of her that knew that she agreed with those ideas, but I don't think she really understood them and I don't--you know--I don't blame her. She was a young woman with five small children who ... who was beginning to see these things in the world. And so I went with her. I went on those marches. She always dragged us around. Wherever she went, we went. And from that was the beginning of my knowing. And it's a very interesting story that I have from back then, what really helped, in some strange way, even back then, helped me to understand the world on a much more political level. One day I was at home and my brother and I were drawing pictures, 'cause that's what we did back then instead of going on play dates. You know?

J.L. Right. ??

Y.M. That's right. You made your own play date. You know? Get outside and make friends or else. You know? But anyway, we were in the house and we were drawing, and we were drawing bomb shelters. And I remember this woman,--I guess ... I don't know who she was but I'm imagining that she must have been one of the women who was recruiting my mother for the Ban The Bomb kind of marches and issues because I was drawing this elaborate--we were drawing these elaborate pictures of what an underground bomb shelter would be, complete with grocery stores and playgrounds and swimming pools and parks and hoses and, I mean, a whole world underground. and the young woman looked at what we were doing and she asked what ... what were we doing and I said: Oh, I'm drawing an underground shelter. And she says: Oh no. That's not what they look like. You know the basement downstairs in the projects? That's what a bomb shelter looks like. And I said ... I just took a deep breath. I had no idea. And that was the first time that I was smacked with this reality. You know? And,--you know--I don't remember feeling resentful of her telling me, or angry at her saying it to me. Actually, I remember feeling a little bit scared when I ... not that she had told me, but afraid when I actually thought of what it would be like to be in a shelter like that with a lot of people, scared--you know--in the dark. And I was glad

that she had told me because I had no idea. And I, even at that age, I really appreciated being told the truth about what was the reality so that I could be more prepared. And I must have been, Oh, six years old or something like that.

J.L. So I'm going to jump over to your apprenticeship. And I was thinking about, just, the week that I was supposed to come and interview you the first time,

Y.M. Um-hum.

J.L. And I was thinking about your route and how you had to ... You said you were living in the Bronx at that time,

Y.M. Um-hum.

J.L. And then you would have to go all the way out to LaGuardia Airport. Then you would have to go to school in Richmond Hills and then you would have to go home to the Bronx.

Y.M. Right.

J.L. So that was, I mean, in addition to a really long day, that was a lot of traveling. I mean, what was that like for ...

Y.M. Well, you know what it was ... You know, I ... I've always been a very physical person so I didn't ... it didn't bother me. I was young and full of energy and had the stamina to be able to do that without it being a major, major problem. The worst part was when it was time for me to go home. You know? And--you know--quite frankly, that would happen is that I would be ... it would be time for me to go home, it would be nine o'clock at night and so what I would have to do is,--and I remember this very clearly,---I would have to try to hustle to get somebody to give me a ride back. And there were times when one fellow gave me a ride back and he'd drop me off on the highway. He didn't take me off the highway. He dropped me off on the highway and told me, okay, walk home. You can walk from here.

J.L. What? Just being nasty?

Y.M. I have no idea. All I know was that he'd just drop me off on the highway and I walked off the highway in the dark home. He dropped me off on 138th Street exit off of the ...

J.L. Oh. So he wasn't going to go out of his way, sort of ??

Y.M. He was going in this direction and this is as close as I'm going to get.

J.L. I see. Yeah.

Y.M. Yeah. And he dropped me off on the Major Deegan, 138th

Street,--you know?--where the Major Deegan and the Cross Bronx Expressway meet ... Not the Cross Bronx. I forget the other highway. Anyway, that's where he'd drop me off, right there. And I remember feeling like ... there was part of me that I was glad I didn't have to ride my bike all the way home or get on the train 'cause it wasn't an easy ... it wasn't an easy way home. I ... It was on the M train all the way out there in Jamaica and it would mean getting off the M to the F to the D to the ?? to get up in the Bronx. You know? So I would hustle quite often to try to get somebody to give me a ride. And,-you know--I ... I think to myself and where I was at, at that time and I think that I ever had to ... I had to do it again I would probably just get on the train because the things that I put myself through to endure to try to get home without ... and not be so tired were something that I shouldn't ...

J.L. Yeah. And you had to get up early the next day. Plus, you had your son at home when you got home.

Y.M. That's right. And that was the other thing that would really bother me. That was a big, major thing,--you know--that I had a kid at home and he was home alone all day long and he was a teenager and he was going through ... He was a new teenager and he was going through a tremendous amount of hormonal imbalance. (laughs) and all of what that means. Oh Jeez.

J.L. (laughs) Oh yeah.

Y.M. Uh-huh.

J.L. How old were you then, '83 to '86?

Y.M. '83 to '86 I was thirty-three to thirty-six years old so--you know--

J.L. So ... Okay. You talked about a suit that you and the other female apprentice undertook. Maybe that was just---you know--not literally like a law suit but in order to take the test. It didn't go through an agency or anything. It went through the union.

Y.M. Yes.

J.L. And so it wasn't really a ... a suit. It was an action kind of thing.

Y.M. It was actually a grievance.

J.L. A grievance. Okay.

Y.M. That's what it was.

J.L. A grievance. Yeah. And what was the name of that test?

It's the Journeyman Test. Is that what you'd call it?

Y.M. Well, actually, it was the test to become a mechanic

J.L. Okay.

Y.M. In heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

J.L. Okay, HVAC.

Y.M. HVAC. That's right.

J.L. Do you remember the other woman's name?

Y.M. Yes, Margaret McMann.

J.L. Oh.

Y.M. Margaret Vertil, and then she let go of her married name and became McMann...

J.L. Okay. And, okay, now I was joking before I came here today and I was joking about how stationery is a stationery engineer and how much does a watch engineer watch and ...

Y.M. (laughs)

J.L. But could you define some of these terms for me, like a stationery engineer. What ...

Y.M. Well, a stationery engineer, the reason,--you know--the reason why ... Let me just go back just a little bit, like, just as a tiny bit.

J.L. Okay.

Y.M. We belong to the International Union of Operating Engineers. The reason why Operating Engineers and Stationary Engineers are part of the same union is because the Operating Engineers operated the big crane and the big ... those big buckets. You know? And those vehicles were fired up by a small boiler--steam boiler in it. And do you remember that ... the children's story about that steam engine?

J.L. Yes.

Y.M. Yeah?

J.L. Mike [Mulligan] or something.

Y.M. Yeah, right. Yeah, right.

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. ... the steam shovel?

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. Right, and that's the reason why, because they used a small boiler to operate those ... that machinery. You know? And that's why they were called Operating Engineers because they operated those big cranes and they moved back and forth. Well, what happens is that we need to use hearing ventilation in buildings and they ... and now you're not moving around from place to place. You're not ... we're not part of construction any more.

J.L. Right.

Y.M. We're part of building maintenance, and we became stationary in one building. Now, you can have several buildings that you're working in,---you know?--

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. But still you're in one ... one area. You're not moving from location to location, from construction site to construction site. You're there and that's why.

J.L. Okay. Now, the ... what about the Watch Engineer? What is a Watch Engineer?

Y.M. Well, the Watch Engineer is the engineer that actually works--and you probably ...--or she, because there are women,--they're ... they're ... Watch Engineer is actually just another term that they use for Stationary Engineer.

J.L. Okay. Okay.

Y.M. And usually when you're on watch,-not all the time but usually you're on watch because they have a high pressure steam or a high pressure boiler or steam and you need licenses. And so you're on watch and usually the watch person is the one that works the rotating shift because they will oftentimes, wherever they have a watch person they will oftentimes also have a day crew. And the day crew takes care of the major mechanical problems and the watch's job is to be on watch around the clock in case there should be an emergency that they have to deal with.

J.L. You mentioned a refrigeration license.

Y.M. Um-hum.

J.L. Do you have ... What kind of ... Have you gotten licenses for different kinds of things?

Y.M. Yes. I actually got my refrigeration license. I never

... I don't have my steam license. A steam license is a completely different thing. But I have my refrigeration license. In order to be able to work over ... above a certain tonnage you need to have licenses, and above a certain pressure you need to have your steam license.

J.L. Now, you had mentioned that you got some help from a West Indian man way back a long time ago. Do you remember his name?

Y.M. Yeah, Neville Holloway.

J.L. Neville Holloway.

Y.M. Yeah.

J.L. The ... You had talked about pornography and how you would remove it at night and then people would come in and they wouldn't know who, and then they'd put it up, and then you'd remove it, so finally they stopped. Was that your strategy throughout with pornography?

Y.N. Well,-you know-in a sense, yeah. I think that that really ... that became my strategy. It became a very expensive habit for them. (both laugh) If they wanted to have porn they would bring it in and I would throw it away for them-you know what I mean?--because I was ... it's not ... You know, different people tolerate different things and that was one of those things that I wasn't going to tolerate. So I wasn't going to get involved in constantly having to argue with them about it. So if they brought it in and I threw it away and they would come back and look for it and it wasn't there, then they would have to bring it in and I would throw it away again. And they would have to come back and look for it, and then after a while, they'd get kind of tired of spending so much money on a magazine that was going to disappear and they kind of figured out (chuckles) and then they didn't bring it back.

J.L. Tell me about--because this is an issue with a number of--you know? I mean, it's kind of a constant issue. And from your point of view, I mean, what message does that send to you in the work place that ... what is the experience like of having [the] workplace plastered with this?

Y.M. With pornography? Well, I guess the reason why I--the reason why I ?? and the message that it sends to me is one of total disregard and disrespect,--you know?--one in which the men are willing to demean women. You know? And it doesn't feel sexy to me at all, actually. It actually feels very disrespectful to me. I think that a lot of women that I've spoken with anyway, feel this way, which is that it's okay if you're into porn. Personally, I'm not into it. It's okay if you are into it, but if you're into it then you need to keep it personal. I don't want to know. Just like

I don't want to know ... I can't stop somebody from being a Ku Klux Klan member but I don't want to be around it. I don't want them to bring their sheets to work. I'm not ... I don't find that funny. I don't find that entertaining. I don't find it interesting. You know? There's a certain amount of bigotry among the men that I will tolerate. I can't tell you exactly what it is that I won't tolerate it but--and I know when I hear it,--and I'm not going to tolerate it, I'm not tolerating it. And that's it. You know? And I had, actually, a fellow, my shop steward, one time tell me that he drew a swastika on a [table]?? He told me that that was him. It described him to a T, exactly what he was like. And if he's a Nazi, that's his business, but don't tell me. I don't want to be a part of it. I think that those are your private issues. I don't want to know.

J.L. Okay, very well said. You told me about that you had a huge rift with one of your bosses and that this was the reason for your wanting to work the midnight shift.

Y.M. Oh yes.

J.L. Okay.

Y.M. Well, ... Okay. Go ahead.

J.L. And...I'm wondering is that the guy whose son, years after, like in 2001, came back and was revisiting harassing you?

Y.M. Oh yeah, absolutely.

J.L. Okay. So tell me about these ... this family? (both laugh)

Y.M. I know. It seems to be genetic. Right?

J.L. You know? Yeah.

Y.M. Something in the genes somewhere.

J.L. It must be.

Y.M. I think it's the jeans, like the ones that you wear that come up to the waist.

J.L. They're ... they're too tight.

Y.M. (laughs) Yeah, right.

J.L. So tell me about this boss and where was this ... and tell me the details.

Y.M. Well, this was in two different locations, and the first one ...

J.L. Yeah. Tell me about Dad first.

Y.M. Okay. The first one was the father. He was my first supervisor. He actually was not my supervisor. He was my supervisor's supervisor but he was into micromanaging.

J.L. And this was at LaGuardia.

Y.M. It was at LaGuardia.

J.L. Okay.

Y.M. And he was a micromanaging kind of supervisor. And he was ...

J.L. And you were an apprentice.

Y.M. I was a Project Provisional Apprentice. I was a maybe, maybe, maybe worker, but I was getting a real check though.

J.L. (laughs)

Y.M. That was what counted. You know what I mean? And he just had ... he had a lot of issues. I don't ... You know, a lot of the guys didn't particularly care for him, the white men as well. You know? This fellow was white. He just had a lot of issues, a lot of issues that had absolutely nothing to do with me. You know? But he was willing to visit that on whoever gave him the opportunity and whoever he thought would be an easy target. I was an easy target in ... only in that I was a Project Provisional Apprentice and I couldn't really say much to him. You know what I mean? I couldn't really do much. But in my own way I fought him ... fought him back and kept him from really--you know--crossing the line with me up to a certain point. You know? He never yelled at me. You know? He tried to humiliate me in front of people but not too often. But he was just really a nasty snide kind of guy and he was like that when ... what he did ... the biggest thing that he did to me was to keep me for those three years, from getting truly ... truly trained because I could have been. You know?

J.L. And so he was the one who was responsible?

Y.M. He was the one ... Yes, because my boss would often give me a work order to do ... to work with a mechanic and to do work that had to do with the field that I was about to be involved in, and every day--I mean literally every day--he would come down and he would take that work order, put it to the side and say no, no, and he would have myself and the other female apprentice cleaning, moping, sweeping and dusting for three years.

J.L. So when you got the union to come in and say that you

could take the test, was that what you had the rift over, the huge rift?

Y.M. Yes, right. Exactly.

J.L. And he just could never forgive you or something? He just was ...

Y.M. No. He never was ... You know what? It's really interesting because I think that he was never able to forgive me. And it's very interesting that he focused it on me because there were two of us, myself and the other female apprentice.

J.L. Now, you're ...

Y.M. And in fact, she was the one who went to the union, not myself.

J.L. Really? Okay. Now, what race was she?

Y.M. She was white.

J.L. She was white.

Y.M. Yeah.

J.L. So you think that there was a racial element in this?

Y.M. I think there was a racial element, but I think also the other thing was that he was never really able to get to me. You know?

J.L. Oh, I see.

Y.M. Yeah... There was always a part of me that was reserved and would not allow him ...

J.L. So was it, like, a control thing?

Y.M. Oh yeah. He ... So when he lost control, he did not blame her at all. You know? He focused his entire [___] on my being the enemy in that situation and--you know--problem. (laughs)

J.L. So then ... so what happened?

Y.M. So then, in 2000 ...

J.L. 2001 or '2 ...

Y.M. No, no, no. 2000, actually, this was in 2003 or ... I think it was 2003. I think it was 2003, yes. In 2003 I was working in 42nd Street bus terminal and his son was my shop steward, -you

know?-and I went to him because I needed to get some information that I wasn't going to be able to get except to go to my shop steward to get it. And what had happened--what was interesting was that, in fact, I actually did not approach him. I actually had not asked him for what I wanted. Someone else spoke on my behalf without my giving them permission and told him that I was needing this information. And then I had no ... I said: Well, the cat's out of the bag so I might as well go ahead and ask him myself. And I did, and I had a feeling that he was ... he held resentment towards me the whole time that I was there, before I ever talked to him about anything. It was just the way that he would either ignore me or the way in which he ... the tone of his voice whenever he would speak with me, which wasn't very often. But it was ...--you know,-it let me know that I knew I was going to have trouble with him so I didn't really want to approach him unless I really had to. And at this point, since the cat was out of the bag, I did. And when I did, he made it very, very clear. He left no stone unturned about it, and told me that he was going to pick up where his father left off and he--you know-drew a swastika on the table and told me that that described him and told me that he was a mean son of a bitch. And he just rattled on. And I was sitting there and I was ... and it was him and I alone in the room and I was standing there looking at him as he's drawing this and talking to me, totally and one hundred percent stunned. It was like, this is not happening! He's not really going there. But he really was! He was going there. And I had to ... When I left there I called ... I talked to a friend and my friend said: that's really serious, Yvone. You need to go to the police. So I went ... First I went to the union and the union suggested that I go to the police, and I filed a police report. And what's interesting,-and this is one of the little ...

J.L. That's interesting that the union said that you should go to the police.

Y.M. Yes, it was a very interesting thing. But, you know, when I went to the union and they asked me if I thought that he would try to--you know--if I was afraid that he would try to do something and take it to the next step and I said: I think he's capable, yes,-you know,--then they told me to go to the police. And when I told them the police?--'cause I was, like, not really wanting to go there; I wanted to go through the union,--and they said: Well, if he does anything further and the police come and ask us any questions, I want to tell them that I suggested to you that you go to the police. So you either go to them or not. It's your choice. But that's what I'm going to do. And so then I went to the police. You know? And this is the ... the part of it I ... that I really would like women to understand, if I may,

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. ... is that,--you know--I went through that whole fight with this guy and there was something that I wanted to try to get

out of me. So I wasn't ... I didn't approach him to try to get anything, but once we went there ... the reason why I had approached him: My union said, well, then, you know what? If that's what you want, why don't we try to get that for you. You know? And I said: Well, sure. Why not? You know? Okay. You know And I didn't get that.

J.L. What did you want?

Y.M. I wanted to get a transfer to a location closer to where I lived. That's a whole 'nother story. But anyway, and I didn't ... I wasn't able to get that, and this is, I think a really important thing for us as women, and for anybody to really understand and ... is that-you know,--I could have felt defeated because I didn't get exactly what I wanted. But in the end, actually, I won. And the reason why I won was because he was very much like his father. He was a real racist pig. You know? And ...

J.L. And he was a steward.

Y.M. Yeah, and he was a shop steward. And a lot of people told me that when they talked to--when he talked to them, a lot of people--a lot of people of color that worked at 42nd Street, cleaning staff and other people, they said to me that he was real--he treated them really nice. They were shit, like nothing,--you know?---in a really kind of racist nasty kind of way, subtle but very clear to them. You know? And after this whole thing, he just changed a new leaf because seeing what had happened ... One of the things that had happened was that he was embarrassed and ashamed to tell his wife of what had happened so he didn't tell her. And eventually, I guess, he got so up tight because the police actually, the detectives, the Port Authority detectives, wanted to investigate. And he was so, I guess, so bothered by this that he eventually told his wife what had happened. And I heard this from ... from some of the guys that were ... that worked around him and were listening to him. He got really, really, nervous. My point being this: is that I didn't win what I wanted, but I won. And the reason why I say that I won is because his attitude towards everybody changed because he knew that he was on notice, people knew what he was doing, people knew what he was saying because I went around and I told everybody, as many people as was listening to me, I told them what he did,--you know?--and he was really ashamed to have been exposed like that,--you know?--because he exposed himself with being an ass. And the second thing that I won was that he left me alone. He didn't bother me. And thirdly, one last thing that I did win was that even though I wasn't able to prove what he had done, my boss had already had a few words with him about his attitude in the past and he, at that point, he told ... he approached this fellow and told him that he'd better watch his step.

Side Two

J.L. No, it's ... I roll it ahead so you can ...

Y.M. Okay. I think that it's really important for us as women and as people of-you know-to recognize that winning something ... You know, You have to really be able to be flexible and to recognize that, hmm, a victory doesn't always come in the way that you think that it might come. It doesn't always come in the package that you want it. If you are able to see that, like I was in this instance, that I was victorious because I was able to not only ... not only get him off my back but get him off of everybody's back,--you know?--

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. And expose him. I think that was ... You know? I was very happy with the outcome.

J.L. Sounds like a victory to me.

Y.M. Yeah. You know?

J.L. Tell me about ... Because this puts me in mind of--you know--you have these, like, as you referred to them, assholes,--you know--

Y.M. (laughs)

J.L. and--you know--really, I mean, this whole idea of you being a black woman working in a white man's trade. Largely it has been a white man's trade. But how do you see that question of race in this union? I mean, because here's a jerk, a guy who's a jerk, but--you know--there are racial attitudes, and--you know--you ... the union did back you up.

Y.M. Well,--you know--you ...

J.L. How do you cast that question of race in that ... in that local, in that ...

Y.M. There are ... You know, I think they have one black teacher and I don't even know if he works there any more. I think he retired. I don't think they have ... I'm not really sure. I'm not really involved in the union. But I can tell you that what when I'm there and I was inside and I look back there where the Union Reps are,

J.L. Everybody's white ...

Y.M. Everybody's white and almost everybody is male except for the secretary and those people; I mean, office workers. You know what I mean? All the Business Reps, all the people in the higher ups in the union are all white males. You know? I'm in the middle of a major or kind of major struggle at my job right now.

The union is being very helpful. I feel, though, I personally feel, that just like any kind of legal action that one is going to take ... Now, this is kind of a legal action except it's not going through a lawyer; it's going through my union, but it still has legal ... legal ramifications, whichever venue I take. You know? And I think that whichever venue we take, or whatever issues, whether they're job related or not,--and I say this even to my son,--I think that you have to be really clear about what it is that you're doing and you have to be willing to build your own case and not depend on the union or your lawyer to build your case for you. I really, strongly believe that the Business Rep, the union people and the lawyers, are really people to help you ... to represent you with the legal mumbo jumbo that they need in order for you to say it, and the,--you know what I mean?--'cause they need those people to put it in that lingo to make it legit.

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. But I think that you have to be clear about what it is that you're doing and you have to be willing to do the work that it takes. And you have to ... the other thing that is really important, is you have to be really straightforward and as honest as you can stand to be in relationship to whatever the ... whatever it is that the case that you're bringing forward because you need to recognize that if you're not, and something comes--something disparaging comes up about you, you could lose the whole case. So anything that has to do with that, you have to be really straight up and straight forward. So I try to be very careful with that. I'm saying that to say that that doesn't necessarily mean that I don't think racism exists within the union, but I can tell you that I personally cannot ... I can't name a particular person or name a particular thing or thing that was done in-I actually could but I won't (both laugh)--because I think that these subjects and these things are very, very complex. There are portions of these things that have to do with racism. I mean, it is clear to me that if ... if you look at the work force, everybody in the work force is not white and ... and if they are they shouldn't be,--and everybody in the work force should not be male,--obviously, I'm there,--you know,--so there's a problem to me if I go into the union hall and all the higher ups are white males. That being said, I think that a lot of what happens in unions is a reflection of what happens in the larger world in that it depends on who you know,--you know?--it depends on who you're related to,--you know what I mean?--it depends on whether they like you or not,--you know? There's a lot of things that it depends on. You know what I mean? And so I have not really been involved in the union, and so, because I'm not actively involved in my union, it keeps me from really being able to say--you know--names and particular situations. But also because I think that right now I know I'm in the middle of a struggle at my ... with my job and I'm using the union and they are coming through for me. You know? So I want to be careful, but I don't want to paint a picture of everything is cool and everything is okay and: Oh no,--you know?--

we're all ... we're all friends and we're like a big happy family, 'cause it's not true and I would be lying.

J.L. Have you seen changes over time? I mean, you've been in that union a long time.

Y.M. No, (laughing) quite frankly.

J.L. Do you want to speak about the struggle you're involved in now or not?

Y.M. Well,-you know, the struggle that I'm involved in, I can just speak--you know--briefly about it, if at all possible, and that is that the struggle that I'm involved in now has to do with ... It's a little bit complex because it has to do with a supervisor who said something disparaging about me in front of a group of other people, and what he said was that he did not want me at that particular location. You know? And whatever his feelings about me and why he would say that has no basis in reality. I've never written up ... written him up or he's never written me up. I never filed a grievance against him when I worked there. He's never written me up for insubordination or any such thing when I was working there. I worked there briefly. I just wanted to return. And so whatever it is that was staying ... that is making him say he doesn't want me to work there and is blocking me from going there...

J.L. And this is the Brooklyn docks ??

Y.M. Yeah. Yeah, this is something that is personal and in his head. You know what I mean? But what's happening is ... and also that I have proof that he said that because there was a shop steward that was there, not my shop steward but a shop steward, from International Union Of Operating Engineers and he said it in front of him. And that guy wrote a letter saying that this supervisor said that at that meeting and these people were involved in it. But the thing is, is that it ... it's much more complex than that because the people who are involved in keeping track of the transfers ... I put in a transfer and now they're saying that I never did and they're switching--you know--the story around and they're covering things ... and,-you know--so everything that I've had documented ... so it's a long, protracted struggle. I don't know if I'll ever get back there. Its not,--you know--a major issue in terms of I'm okay where I'm working. But what is major about is that I have heard from many people that I'm not the first person where they have manipulated the ... the transfer list. They've done it before.

J.L. It's supposed to be on the basis of fairness not--you know--favoritism and that's ...

Y.M. Right. And that's what they're doing. They're twisting things around so that they could get who they want to. And ... and

no one ... but no one has ever said anything.

J.L. Challenged it. Yeah.

Y.M. Yeah. Nobody's ever challenged them. So I[']m the first person that's challenged them on this. So,--you know--I'm willing to take my time. I'm glad that I have ... I have a job. I have three more years before I retire. I've been doing this for a long time so ...

J.L. When did you leave the Port Authority?

Y.M. No. I've been working ...

J.L. Well, I mean, when did you leave the George Washington Bridge? Sorry.

Y.M. Okay. After ... Actually, the way that I traveled through the Port Authority was I started at LaGuardia. In '86 I left there and I went to 42nd Street.

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. I was there for about two years. So probably in '88 I went to the GW Bridge. In two thousand--two thousand--2002, I think, early 2002 I left the GW Bridge and I went to work briefly at the Brooklyn Piers. And then I thought that I would like to work the day shift, a straight day shift, not a rotating shift 'cause I had been doing it for many years, so I went to work back at 42nd Street in 2002. I worked there until September until 2004 and since then I've been at JFK. And I've been trying to get back to the Brooklyn Piers now for, oh, probably in early 2003 I put in a transfer to go back 'cause I realized the day shift didn't really suit me. So I wanted to go back and put in a transfer to get ... to go back as soon as a position became available, and there the, quote, problem started.

J.L. Okay. So now, I'm trying to see what I wanted to ask you next. Well, you're not involved in the union now too much so I ... I saw this thing in "The Chief" saying thanks, guys, and it was about people being elected to the Executive Board. And I know there's a lot of internal rank and file politics going on there, but you're not involved so it doesn't really make sense to talk about it.

Y.M. No. I'm not really involved with the union because ... I'll tell you,--I'll just tell you very briefly that the reason that I'm not involved in the union is because, number one, I work a rotating shift and that makes ... that makes things a little bit difficult for me. Number two, because I work around men all day, eight hours a day, sometimes longer, sometimes eight days in a row, and when I get finished I've had it. That's why I've got a female dog and a female cat. (both laugh) I like you guys but--

you know--enough is enough. I've had enough testosterone. And then to go out there I just ... I just made a decision, and so I tried to get involved politically in the kind of work that I do, in non-traditional work, with women, women in non-traditional. That's what I ...

J.L. Okay. Now, do you know anything about how many women are in Local 30 now? Do you have any idea?

Y.M. No. I have no idea and I don't think that they make that information really available.

J.L. Available... and they don't ... I mean, they're not helping women that work ... or any active women's committee or ...

Y.M. You know what? They ... when I was there, right after I finished my apprenticeship,

J.L. We had a ??

Y.M. We had attempted to start something like that.

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. and part of what the problem was, was that most of the women were on rotation. Part of what the problem was, was that the women were working ... many of them were working out on the Island and scattered all over. You know? And part of what the problem was, was that there was internal struggle with the women. You know? And part of the problem also was that I personally did not always want to meet at the Union Hall, personally myself,

J.L. Right.

Y.M. because I .. I felt that--you know----

J.L. You had talked about that in your [earlier interviews] ... and I ... can understand that. And you weren't able to win that.

Y.M. No.

J.L. Well, let's switch over to organizing with tradeswomen. I'm interested in ... You've only spoken to me a bit in the past about United Tradeswomen but I'm very interested in your experience with them. And we had, when I was at AUD, we had that event at the Municipal Art Society and you came in a little bit late and you saw Lois Ross and it was very moving. And you talked about the day that you called her on the phone and you were on the street ... And so you've told me that story, but could you talk a bit about the work you did with United Tradeswomen and what it meant to you and what kinds of things did you do?

Y.M. Well, it was a life saver actually, for me because I was new to the trades and I was ... this was completely a new field for me and I couldn't go back. You know? I had left my job and I had committed myself to this. And I had a kid at home that depended on me getting up and going to work.

J.L. You had mentioned that you were working at the Board of Ed. What were you doing there?

Y.M. When I worked for the Board of Ed I worked there with a para-professional and I worked as a travel trainer with the physically handicapped and disabled people. And I enjoyed that job but I wasn't getting paid enough money. And I was a single parent and I needed more money. And,--you know--this was something that I wanted to do, not necessarily this field but non-traditional work was something that I wanted to do. And so,--you know--it was paying me ... the money was right--you know?--so I ... I took it on. You know?

J.L. Why non-traditional? What ...

Y.M. Well, you know--when I was a kid, I could just tell you I grew up in Chelsea, like I had told you earlier, and I grew up near the ...

J.L. And you talked about ... near the docks and you found it fascinating.

Y.M, Yeah. And that was the reason why.

J.L. And you just saw yourself ... and was there ... I mean, so okay. So let's talk about United Tradeswomen, since we don't have all night. And I could ask you a million questions but tell me about United Tradeswomen.

Y.M. Well,--you know--what happened was that when I started working for the Port Authority and I started working around men,--you know ... More than working for the Port Authority, when I started working around men I--you know--it became really clear to me that it was ... this was something that was really foreign to me. It was really scary. I didn't know ... I didn't know what I was going to do. I felt really alone, isolated. It really was scaring the bejesus out of me, (laughing) I'll tell you. And one day I came home and I was just full up to my eye balls. And I had heard about United Tradeswomen and I had been given Lois's phone number and I called her and I just completely unloaded and fell apart over the phone. I must have cried--Oh my God!--Do you mind if I cry, Oh! I still remember it. You know? I was just a mess. You know? I needed to talk to someone that would be able to understand, and she told me come on down. You know? And it was a life saver for me to be around other women that were experiencing the same thing; that were saying things that I was saying;--you know?--that I didn't feel crazy any more. You know? And it just

really ... it really was strengthening to me. You know? And I did as much as I could to try to help the organization in whatever it was doing. I went on marches and I remember we ... we marched in the Gay Pride Parade. That's ... [was] always a highlight for me. I did enjoy that. See, that's one of my favorite parades, but--you know--it was great to be there with this group.

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. And ... and one of the things that I did--was it with United Tradeswomen?-I don't know ... I don't know if it was for United Tradeswomen or for the New York Tradeswomen,-I know that we worked on a newsletter.

J.L. They had a newsletter.

Y.M. We ... but myself and this other woman ...

J.L. And you worked on it because I've seen things that you wrote. In fact, you wrote this wonderful poem which I really love.

Y.M. And I think that that, if it's the same newsletter that I'm thinking about, that's the newsletter that myself and this other woman worked on,

J.L. Oh, okay.

Y.M. It took a lot of work and effort to really put that newsletter together and do all of the ...

J.L. It was wonderful.

Y.M. It was really ... what an experience! You know? It was really great. It takes a lot of work to put together a newsletter with all of the photos and--you know--how are you going to lay it out ... and I never knew that it took that much work, but it was a lot of work. You know? It took us a long time.

J.L. So you worked on that.

Y.M. Yeah. Yeah. So,--you know--it was a life saver for me. I ... I ... I can't give it enough kudos and I can't say enough about it--about the group. Whatever ... whatever the contradiction was, the one thing was that they were really a big source of support for me.

J.L. Well, let's talk a little bit ... Because you said-you mentioned that "internal contradictions that were never dealt with." Do you want to ... Can you speak a little bit about what were some of the internal contradictions?

Y.M. Well, I think that one of the things that was happening, I ... I remember now, Cynthia Long had helped me to refresh my

memory,--one of the things that was happening with the United Tradeswomen was that the women of color felt that they didn't have a real voice in it;--you know?--that they were not able to be a part of the leadership; that the leadership was primarily white females. And--you know--that had ... that's not an unusual thing. You know what I mean?

J.L. Right. It certainly isn't. But,--you know--when I talked to the white females about this, I mean, one of the things that they say about United Tradeswomen is that if you wanted to see something happen, you could make it happen. You could say, like, Okay, we want to do--you know ... I want to be--you know ... and that ... so that you could make something happen. So I think that their ... they saw it as kind of this open thing, but that it didn't feel that way to you.

Y.M. Well,--you know--I think that it was ... I think that it was many things. You know what I mean? I think that it was ... I ... I have to say personally myself, I enjoyed United Tradeswomen. It was a good experience for me personally. You know what I mean? But I was new and young,--you know--at that time, young to this whole idea. You know? And I knew that a lot of women of color were complaining about it. You know what I mean?--that they felt that they weren't--you know--reached out to. And I think that ... and I've heard that over the years,--you know?--not just with United Tradeswomen but over the years in other little groups,--you know--I've heard the same thing. You know? And I think that ... and let me just say that I think that it is true. I think that it partly is ... You know, United Tradeswomen, New York Tradeswomen, any of the groups that I've been a part of, what I can say about them is that--you know--the union ... is that these are all microcosms of a larger society. You know? They reflect the larger society and there's no way possible that we're not going to see the same kinds of contradictions and that working through those contradictions are not simple and easy. They take a lot of work. And a lot of the work that they take--a lot of the work that they take to get through that is work that is ... that--how do I say this--is work that ... that most groups don't--this is not just the United Tradeswomen,--most groups don't really want to deal with it because it means crossing from the political--you know,--from the political out ... external arena to the political internal arena. It means dealing with personal contradictions. It means dealing with personal stuff. You know? And most people don't want to do that because they want to separate that because they feel that, Oh, we can't be talking about what happened to me when I was growing up and what my experience was in my home, you know?--and what my experience was in X, Y,Z.

J.L. Going through the papers of United Tradeswomen-- I wasn't there, so just looking at the papers, they had some really creative kinds of things. I know they had some sessions where they tried to talk about racism and there was ... Marty Pottenger wrote this piece about ... there was, like, this whole big ... Well, one

of them is--one of the newsletters dealt with the whole ... a whole issue was, like, about racism. But there was some kind of get together. And then in the newsletter you printed excerpts from what people said,--I guess you all tape recorded it,--and then--you know--there was ... It seemed to me that there was a grappling, trying to at least get at it or some ... to deal with it.

Y.M. I think that there were because I was there at that point. You know? And I know that in talking with one of the other tradeswomen, one of the other women of color in the trades, I know that she ... she felt that she kept telling them,--you know--about this problem. You know? She kept working and hammering away at it. And by the time they came to grips and tried to deal with it

J.L. It was too late.

Y.M. It was too late. It was already falling apart. You know? The women were already not ... And,--you know--and it's this kind of power thing--you know what I mean?--that was going on.

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. Because I remember talking with the women about it and I remember saying: Look,--you know?--we have to do this,--you know what I mean?--and their attitude was always: Yeah, but--you know--we've done that and they don't want to come. You know? But you know what? The thing about it is that these are old, on both sides,

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. These are old, long held ...

J.L. Right. Right.

Y.M. ... views that go beyond our birth. They are ... They're a part of this society and your roots,--you know?

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. And so we need to be more patient and more creative in how we're going to confront these things. And,--you know--recently I have a friend of mine that said something to me that, this white woman that I ... that I know said something to me that I've never heard a white person say and it really was what said ... You know, I said to her,--you know--that's why I stayed her friend even though sometimes she can get on my nerves, like I'm sure I can with her,--you know?--but I really, really appreciated it. And she said to me that she had ... she was in the Church and she was taking a course on race relations and she was ... and there was a group of them and they were sitting around and they were talking, and she said: You know what? It never occurred to me that some of

the things that I take for granted, like being able to walk into a store and go shopping,--you know-- I took that for granted. You know? And she said: It never occurred to me that someone else would go into the store and would be followed around. You know?

J.L. Yeah, exactly.

Y.M. That walking down the street,--you know--in a nice store, in a nice neighborhood, it never occurred to me. I was--- you know,--it's normal. You know? And it's not normal for a person of color. And she said: I never even thought about it. And it was at that ... that gathering that she first kind of really got what it really meant to have to walk in that skin every day, all the time. You know?

J.L. Yeah. That's great.

Y.M. And it really is, I think, going to have to take that kind of serious consciousness and that's not easy, because then it means taking responsibility. You know? One thing that I always ... that I say to my son, an older woman said to me is that you can't un-know what you know. Once you know it, then you have to take responsibility for your knowledge. And it takes a tremendous effort to not pay attention to what you already know. You know? And so I think that--you know--the internal contradictions within United Tradeswomen was not only on the side of the white women. It was multi-dimensional. It was--excuse me,--it was multi-dimensional. Excuse me. I'm sorry. It was multi-dimensional and it was something that everybody needs to take responsibility for their part of it. And it's deep. It really ... it's deep.

J.L. And that was as ... From your point of view, that was, like, the central contradiction, the rock that foundered them.

Y.M. I think that that was the biggest contra-- .. I think that was the thing that made it fall apart because the women of color were not coming,--you know,--and little by little they weren't coming. And in the trades, quite frankly, a great majority of women in the trades are women of color. You know? and,--you know-- I mean, we have our own contradictions that we have to deal with,--you know--and ... and not getting together ... You know, I think that it's beginning to happen,--you know--now with Sisters In The Trades, this new group that we're trying to work on,--you know,--but who knows where it's going to go. You know? And it has to be that the convergence of forces--that the timing is right; that people are really ready to take responsibility for making some change; for wanting to make change.

J.L. So now talk a little bit about the void after United Tradeswomen fell apart. Did you feel a void?

Y.M. Well,--you know--after United Tradeswomen fell apart,--you know--it was very sad to me. I didn't want to see it because it

was the group that really helped me through a tremendous, tremendous amount of problems at work. You know? I felt that it was my life saving,--you know-like a life saving line. You know what I mean? I,--you know,--I felt sad about it,--you know,--but by this point I had already begun to establish relationships with different women--you know what I mean?-in the trades and I think I was ... there were other things that were going on in my life. I was ... I was really ... I was a much stronger ... I was on a much stronger footing. And also, most importantly, the most important thing that was going on for me at that time was that there was another woman working for me-with me, not for me. She came on the scene six months after I started. And,-you know-whatever her contributions were ...

J.L. As an apprentice?

Y.M. ... as an apprentice,-whatever the contradictions were that she and/or I had, the thing was is that we had a good working relationship and she took some of the weight off of me and some of the pressure off of me and some of the focus off of me.

Tape Two

J.L. Okay, Yvone, we're talking about ... that the United Tradeswomen collapsed and you were talking about what was going on with your life and the other apprentice who took the pressure off and ...

Y.M. Yeah.

J.L. But what I want to concentrate on now is I want to go through some of the different organizing things that you've done. You worked with New York Tradeswomen?

Y.M. Yes.

J.L. And I actually found the flyers. And there's the brochure "Know Your Rights,"

Y.M. Um-hum. Yes.

J.L. And you put out a flyer to meet at AUD. And so talk a little about New York Tradeswomen. How was it different from UT and ... and what kind of things ... the mentoring project ... Did that ever get off the ground?

Y.M. I don't think it did, not with them. I think it did with Non-traditional Employment for Women. I think that's where it really kind of more took off was with NEW. You know? But United Tradeswomen came along at another time and ...

J.L. You mean New York Tradeswomen?

Y.M. New York Tradeswomen. New York Tradeswomen came in another time and I forget the year that the ... it was developed. But I always enjoyed being involved with these groups with women. You know? It really was--for me, it really was a balance from working in this very male environment, so I always enjoyed that. The thing with New York Tradeswomen was that we ... one of the things that we did was we ... we really were involved in finding places for us to meet,--you know what I mean?--and we really were ... we really--we pulled together a little bit of dues here and there from whoever would play them to do the mailings and that's--you know--that's a very ... When I think about that I think to myself--you know--we did a lot. We did a lot of work. You know? We really tried to make these things work by doing what we needed to do for ourselves. You know? We'll pull money together to buy stamps, to do the mailings; get together to organize and do the mailing; do a telephone train,--you know?--getting people to call small groups of other women to come to the meetings. You know what I mean? Pulling ... deciding what the next meeting was going to be about and trying to get whoever it was that we needed to address the issues that we were trying to focus on for that particular meeting; doing--you know--leaflets and that kind of stuff was ... and also to--you know,--calling the meetings,--you know--and making sure that these meetings--you know--came to be,--you know what I mean?--and came to be in a place where people .. where we could meet. You know?

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. It was ... it was different from United Tradeswomen because I think United Tradeswomen was developed for a lot longer. New York Tradeswomen didn't last as long. You know what I mean?

J.L. It was also at a different point in time.

Y.M. It was a different point in time ...

J.L. I mean, there was much more of a sense of organizing with--you know--the earlier organization.

Y.M. United ... Yes, absolutely. Right. I think that--you know--it could have happened with New York Tradeswomen. It didn't happen. Had it lasted longer I think it would have lasted ... I think it would have taken that turn. You want to turn it off for one minute because I[m]

J.L. Yeah. Well, United Tradeswomen. You want to talk a bit about the role of Barbara Tress in United Trades--I mean, in New York Tradeswomen? And she also helped to organize the second National Tradeswomen's Conference in 1989, which you attended.

Y.M. Um-hum. Yes. Well, she was the founder. She pulled it together,--you know--and I have to give her credit--you know--for

doing that. You know? She got together the phone list of women to call--you know--to come to these meetings. She came up with the concept and the idea. You know? That was her baby, so to speak, and she saw it that way. And in some ways it was what--I guess what helped and motivated her to move forward and I think it was the demise of the group. You know?

J.L. 'Cause resting too much on one person instead...

J.L. People feeling vested in ...

Y.M. Right. Yeah, right. That's what, I think that's ??

J.L. Now, you attended the second National Tradeswomen's Conference in Chicago in '89, and I actually met you right after you had attended it because you wrote this really nice article for "The AUD" which I don't think we ever printed. Do you know if it was ever printed?

Y.M. I don't think so.

J.L. ... because that was the whole struggle about--you know--the pages of the AUD publication and what they were for so I think it ... But I was rereading it and I thought it was ... I actually have a copy ...

Y.M. I haven't seen it since then and that was a long time ...

J.L. And you raised some really interesting issues in there. And why don't you talk about that Tradeswomen's Conference. Do you remember going to Chicago?

Y.M. Well, the thing that I ... Yeah. I do remember it. Yeah. I remember it 'cause it was my first time in Chicago. You know what I mean?

J.L. And was it your first tradeswomen's conference?

Y.M. It was my first Tradeswomen's Conference.

J.L. And there were, like, five hundred women there from all over.

Y.M. Yes. There were a lot of women and for me it felt like beaucoup women. You know? (both laugh) You know what I mean? And we did a little construction and we did a little show and it was interesting,--you know?--the roommates that we had and--you know--it was just a very ... You know, all of these things to me, these different kinds of events with women, are just really ... for me they're really very strengthening and reaffirming,--you know--about who we are as women, and each one of these instances and these projects and these things that we put together and conferences

that we ... that we put together, each one moves it ahead just a little bit more. None of them have really broken out and resolved the issues, -you know, -but each one takes it to the next step. Each one moves it a little bit further along. I don't think that we could do without these things. You know? I think that we need these conferences-I think that we need these groups in order to regroup, reaffirm, re-inform ourselves or further inform ourselves with where we are and where we're going and what is the point ... what is our goal; where are we at? I mean, I remember when I went to that little thing that you put together at the Wagner Archives.

J.L. Uh-huh.

Y.M. I was standing there afterwards ... I really, really enjoyed it. It was so much fun to me and ...

J.L. That was March 8th, 2001.

Y.M. Right.

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. And there was a woman there--I think ... I'm not sure if she was a carpenter or an electrician, -I don't remember which, --but she was from out west, maybe San Francisco. And I was talking to her about something that was going on for me at work and I said: You know, this asshole, and she said to me ... I swear it was the funniest thing, she said to me: Oh, you know him too? (both laugh heartily) I thought that was ... that was great. What a line!

J.L. That is great, yeah.

Y.M. What a line. You know And it's those kinds of things, those kinds of alliances, those kinds of connections that you make with another human being that lives all the way on the o-- ... You know, let me tell you something. You don't know this. But one day I'm on my computer and New York ... Non-Traditional Employment For women has a ... has a Web site called New York Tradeswomen at Yahoo groups or something.

J.L. Uh-huh.

Y.M. Anyway, one day I'm on my computer and I got a letter from a woman in Singapore in the trades

J.L. Wow!

Y.M. and she was ...you know--we talked to each other for a few minutes. She couldn't talk English too well and I think that it scared her a little bit, --you know--so she didn't write back. You know? She wrote back once and then she didn't write back any more. But that momentary connection, to me, was like heaven. You

know what I mean?

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. And that's what it really is all about. It's about making those connections, one step at a time, one person at a time, a little bit each time. You know? We have to do this. You know? It really is important for women to get in the trades. One time I was at home, not living here;-I was living some place else,-and this fellow knocked on my door and he was selling me I don't know what it was. I forget right now what he was selling me, or he was trying to get me to give him ... donate money for something. It was some political something that he was doing. And-you know-he comes down and he was talking to me and he ... Well, I don't remember why exactly it was that he asked me what kind of work I did and I told him-you know--I'm a mechanic. You know? And he said: Oh, wow! That's great. And I said to him: No, that's not. Great would be that you would not have to say that it was great because then we would be normal in this job and it wouldn't have to be great. That would be really and truly great. And he said: You know, I didn't think about that.

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. And I said: Yeah, because as long as it's great that we're here, we're a novelty and we have to put up with a lot of crap. You know?

J.L. Yeah. Yeah.

Y.M. And--you know-there's money to be made here. That's why you guys like to do this. You know? And there's no reason why we can't do this. We have done this. You know? I mean, I ... where I work the men that clear the building and use those mops to mop the floors, one day I grabbed a mop to mop the floor and this guy pulled the mop away from me and says: Oh, no, no. I don't want you to hurt yourself. I said: I've done this all my life. What? Are you kidding? (laughs) What's a little bit bigger mop. No big deal. You know what I mean? Really!

J.L. Well, you raised ... In the article you wrote from the Tradeswomen Conference back in '89 you said: "are we going to have to prove ourselves forever."

Y.M. Yeah.

J.L. Okay. So here we are, 2005, a long way from '89, and still having to prove yourself?

Y.M. Oh, absolutely, absolutely, still having to ... You know? But older now,

J.L. Older now ...

Y.M. So now older, I'm able to say when someone asks me to prove myself,--you know,--I'm able to--you know--use a few choice words. You know? (laughs) You know? And I'm also able to--and fortunately this is really true,--I think that good training is absolutely critical. This is not the kind of work that you do from your head up. You really do have to use your body. You really do have to do it and practice it and do it over and over on different kinds of machines, even though it's a pump each one is configured slightly different. You know? It has a little bit different whatever on it ... that you need to put on it and onto it. You know? They all are basically the same but each one is slightly different and it's easy to get confused and not know it. Really, training is of ... really of absolute importance. And,--you know--I think that the men suffer from this as well as the women but the women in particular suffer from lack of training or mis-training. And here I am at going to be fifty-five years old, and this is now for twenty-two years, and at this point I'm not interested in learning any more about this. I've got three more years and I can retire and I'm more than happy to do something else that I would really enjoy. And really, it's a shame to me--it really is a shame because I spent a lot of time here. And,--you know--while the money is really good, I would have liked to not have to have been only about the money because there is really nothing to replace the feeling that you get when you're really and truly a good mechanic.

J.L. Satisfaction.

Y.M. When you're a good mechanic and you know that--you know--that if you're a good mechanic and you're a responsible person and you're a person of integrity, they can't take that away from you. And there's only so much really--you know--messing with your head that they can do. There's only but so much,--you know?--'cause I see it with the guys. And there's no reason why as women, we can't be in that same position.

J.L. Right.

Y.M. And it really is infuriating to me that we're still not there. You know?

J.L. One of the issues that you raised in your piece that you wrote for AUD that we never printed, was about--and this is interesting tonight speaking to you,--about women in the trades and aging. There was a workshop on that and you found that interesting.

Y.M. In aging?

J.L. On aging tradeswomen.

Y.M. Oh yeah.

J.L. And,--you know---

Y.M. Oh, wow.

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. That's interesting.

J.L. And here we are ...

Y.M. Here we are all these years later.

J.L. You know--aging,

Y.M. Yeah.

J.L. And it's a real issue for women. But I thought I'd just let you know that you were thinking about that.

Y.M. Well, you know what? It is true. And I'll tell you,--you know,--as you grow older, 'cause I see this with the fellows,--you know,--as you grow older in the trades, if you really know your work in a way where you are really able to feel enough confidence about yourself,--you know--the younger boys will do the muscle work and you can just think the problems through. You know what I mean? And unfortunately, I'm not at that place after all these years. And,--you know--if I think that I, unfortunately, I'm just not able to really overcome my absolute anger and disappointment in this trade is the lack of training. It--you know? I have to ... I have to put responsibility for that in the hands of my employer and in the hands of the union. They share equal responsibility for what ... for how that happened because there's ... I'm not a stupid woman and there's no way on this planet that this should have happened, none, for me or anybody,--you know?--for the women, for the men ... It just really ... Every time I think about it, it just makes my blood boil. So I can't do anything about it. I wish that as mechanics,--and this is really true and this is historical within the trades,--you know,--and in craftsmanship and in trades, it's been this way since the time of Jesus Christ,--you know,--the guy that has a skill is busy protecting his little turf and so he doesn't want to show the new guy what he knows. And, you know--if I... --you know,--if they shit on me, now that I have the power and I know ... I have the information that you want, I get to shit on you and you get to be the gofer.

J.L. But,--you know--you ...

Y.M. It's just ... (claps hands)

J.L. You have a very different kind of model, I mean,--you know?--collective, work together, change the world,--you know?--a very different way of looking ... and it's got to be frustrating

to be in that situation.

Y.M. You know, there are a few men that I have worked with that their ego is not so invested in it and they're willing to allow you to share their experience and knowledge and allow you to know. You know? But I have to say that in my twenty-two years I have come across one, two-I can count on one hand how many of them--one hand in twenty-two years,--in one hand I can count how many mechanics I've worked around that were not ... not needing to feed their ego at my expense. You know? And that really is a shame. It really needs to change. I don't know how to change it but I think that that's key. I think it is critical--critically important to women work in this trade,-you know?--because I would like to be able to retire like many of the men that I worked with, and continue to maybe work part time in some boiler room, sit back, kick up my feet,-you know-while somebody goes on vacation and work two or three day out of the week and get a nice little piece of change. You know? And I can't do that. I can't do that because I don't have the kind of training that makes me feel confident enough to do that,--you know?--and it really is ... it makes me angry. You know?

J.L. Understandably so. Okay. Now I just want to talk to you a bit about ... Let's skip ahead to [the] NEW and the coffeehouse. You've been working organizing the ... the monthly coffeehouses.

Y.M. Well, you know what? Actually, Cynthia has been the one who's doing that.

J.L. She's been ... okay.

Y.M. I ... I go to them. I've gone to them over the years. You know? Sometimes more often than others, but I've always ... what I've always done is I've always kept in touch with Non-traditional Employment for Women, with NEW,--you know?--because NEW oftentimes wants ... have asked us and has asked me to come and speak with the women about what it's like being in the trades or to go to schools and talk with young people, particularly young women in high schools, about a woman being in the trades and I've always been more than happy to participate in that. You know? And there's a few other things that I have done,--you know--in terms of giving classes and working with young folks that are interested in going into the trades. You know? So I've always, throughout the years, sometimes more often than others, I have always, though, throughout the years worked with the women in the trades.

J.L. Do you see a generational difference between ... You see similarities and differences, I'm sure,

Y.M. Between the women that ...

J.L. Between your generation and the younger women?

Y.M. And the new ones, yes. You know, I ... I do. You know? And some of what I have found,--and this is, I think,--and this again we get back into how it's a microcosm of the larger society,--you know? And what I have found with the newer women, I think because of the times that we're in,--you know--also, is that there's not really a lot of organizing in this young group. "Cause I remember when I got into the trades and--you know--New York Tradeswomen, United Tradeswomen, it was a very exciting time. We were moving ahead. You know? We were--you know--taking on issues and issues that were not only issues about--you know--the tradeswomen but issues about being a part of the larger society and world, giving support to other issues and groups. And I don't see that happening right now. I would like to and it's part of the reason why Cynthia Long and myself have attempted to try to--are attempting actually, to try to pull together,

J.L. A new group.

Y.M. Yeah, a new group.

J.L. Talk about that group.

Y.M. Well, it... the group is called Sisters in the Trades and it was something that we all decided together that would be the name of the group. My vision, when I think of the group, is actually to be able to find a way, and I'm not exactly sure how, but to find a way for us to be able to really move on a deeper ... on a deeper, Oh, what am I ... political level; to be able to bring together, mesh together,--in some way; I don't exactly know how to do it, but to mesh together the personal political and the external political in terms of what we're doing. What I mean by that is that sometimes, 'cause this has happened already--there's certain, like, little struggles that happen, and its' natural--you know what I mean,--because we all are coming from our own places, our own history, our own baggage,--you know what I mean?--our own experiences, so we get together and there's differences of personalities and different ways of working and people have clashes. They don't necessarily agree with each other. And what happens it another. And other phenomena that happens right after we get together is that people sometimes will go into separate groups and then they'll talk about each other: (makes garbling sound)--you know?--and then they'll ... Well, she did bla, bla, bla. And I don't have a problem with that. I think that everyone needs to be reflected from their point of view. You know what I mean? But I also think that--you know--there comes a point in which you need to, like put that to the side and come together for something that is deeper, bigger and more important

J.L. uh-huh.

Y.M. and you need to be willing to take responsibility for being able to say you know what? I think I'm getting a little

catty, a little bit too much (meow)-you know?-a little bit too much that and it's time for me to put my personal issues and feelings about this to the side because it can't pos- ... If I'm having a reaction that big, it can't possibly be only that person. You know? Something about this has to be some of my own baggage. You know what I mean? And so, unless I'm going to really work it out with her,-you know-on a personal level, then I need to put it to the side and look at the bigger picture: what are we going to do here? Why did we come together here? And I would like the women,--and I always say this at these meetings,--I would like the women to really understand how really, really, important and truly important it is that we're doing this. This is not a little thing. It is a major thing. You know? It is a major thing on a big level because we live in a patriarchal society. They don't want to see women getting together, thinking for themselves about what they want and what direction they're going to move in. They're not interested in what we have to say and we're very threatening to them. You know? So when we get together and we do these things we needed to really,--you know-like, pat ourselves on the back and respect ourselves for moving forward and we really need to keep moving. Even if we have the contradiction that we have, we need to keep learning how to work together because, in fact, in the end it's us ... a friend of mind just finished saying that to me today, we are who we have,--you know--as women. We have each other and that's it. You know? And maybe we have a brother to come in and--you know-and pat you on the back and say wa, bom, ba, yeah,--you know?-but most of the time even that brother isn't willing to loose his spot over there with the fellows. You know what I mean?

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. He doesn't want to be seen. You know what I mean? Yeah. I'm agreeing. Don't tell anybody. You know what I mean? He's not saying that. You know? He wants to be over there in the in crowd. He doesn't want to lose his spot. You know? And so it's really important, like, for me, for us to recognize that and to keep moving. And then also to see that when we move in these directions, we need to look at the larger society so that we're doing things for and about tradeswomen but that we're also willing to support other groups: whatever groups we decide we want to,--other groups that will then support us when we want and end to make a stand.

J.L. Because one of the problems, I think, is, just watching this over time is the isolation of women in the trades and there's no reason why that should be the case.

Y.M. No!

J.L. And there's no reason why women in the Fire Department should be isolated and women in construction.

Y.M. But you know a little something, it ... to me,--you know--when we went to when we went ... when the Tradeswomen went down to the New York City Council Women's Caucus to appeal for some money for a con-to put together another conference,-right?-there were women that were there from battered women and women in jail and young women and teenaged women and women that--you know--in poverty, and all --and people, all ... immigrants,-you know?--all these women from all these different organizations pulling together asking together for money for their organization. And,--you know--I turned to one of the women that was talking and I said to her: You know what? You need to make a connection here ...

J.L. Absolutely.

Y.M. Because you want to know something, these sisters ...

J.L. Women need these jobs ...

Y.M. That's right!

J.L. Economics are women.

Y.M. Well, that's it. If she had a job making enough money--you know--

J.L. That's right, absolutely.

Y.M. She'd kick him to the curb. You know what I mean?
(laughs)

J.L. That's right.

Y.M. And that's what I'm talking to my ...

J.L. And did they make the connection?

Y.M. Yes, we did.

J.L. Very good.

Y.M. And so, when we put together the conference, what I would like this to see if we can get these people, and these women and these groups to come to the conference. You know? It really is important for ... for all of us to see that there's a connection here.

J.L. Absolutely.

Y.M. There's a connection between us. There's a connection between us and seamstress who doesn't get paid enough money.

J.L. And all the welfare issues,--you know--and all this ...

Y.M. Housing is-- .. I mean, it's all ... all of this is connected.

J.L. It's all connected.

Y.M. And that's what I would like to see. I don't know how to approach it so I'm willing and it doesn't bother me to move very slowly. And I'm willing and I'm wanting to move very slowly because all of our personal issues get in our way. And it's really important to move real slow and respect that, and respect that we've all got all this baggage,--you know?--and that even though we have all this baggage we're going to keep going and we're going to respect each other. And,--you know--if you move to fast on those kinds of things and just ... people just get angry at each other and they're ah, the hell with you! And then they go their separate ways. You know? And I keep wanting to--you know--you know?--'cause I've had a few of my own--you know? No, I don't particularly care for that personality over there. But,--you know--every time I walk away from that and I come home and I'm in my car and I'm thinking about, well, what ... how could I have better dealt with that? You know? And I don't know what the other woman is thinking--you know what i mean?--and I need to be careful because I think that--you know--I . I had this conversation with one of the men that I work with, is that--you know--truth is a every interesting thing and a thing you have to deal with carefully and gently. You know? Everybody's not ready for it all the time and everybody doesn't deserve it all the time so that when I'm having this contradiction with other woman who I didn't particularly care for and maybe I could have dealt with that a little bit better, the way that I'm going to approach that person is I have to be really careful and gentle about that also because the other person may not be ready to hear it. I may go and approach the other person and they may say: You know what? Get out of my face. The hell with you! So then I need to assess and I need to know: Okay, maybe I made a mistake, but it wasn't the worst place. The worst mistake in the world and when and if she gives me the opening again, I may not bring it up but I may find a way to---you know--to move forward--you know--and get beyond that. And if we talk about it later on in the future sometime,--you know--that day you really got on my nerves, that's okay. And if we never talk about it, it's all right. But most important for me personally is to try to move ...

Side Two

J.L. I want to talk to you a bit, if I can find this report, about how ... what are your ideas about how we can best capitalize on all the work that's been done, I mean, all the work ... You've been working on this issue for a long time and--you know--what are .what are some ideas about ... You're forming this new organization and you're getting ready to work on the conference,

Y.M. Um-hum.

J.L. So ... and we still see that--you know--the numbers of women in these jobs are very small. There's a lot of ... I mean, when we worked together, I mean, I can see so many areas that need to be worked on, like with the schools,--you know--with .. There's just so many areas. So what are your ideas about how we can push it forward to get to the next level?

Y.M. Well, I think that one of the things is that is really--that I've found really, really important and I found it by being at that ... that meeting where we were going to ... where we were going to appeal to these people for some money for this conference. It just came in a very vis-- ...

J.L. Was this the Women's Committee of the City ...

Y.M. Yes, right.

J.L. City Council?

Y.M. Yes, right.

J.L. It was the Women's Committee. Okay.

Y.M. Yeah. And,--you know--it was very interesting to me. You know, you find these things, these little jewels, in the places where you least expect it. And I wasn't expecting it. You know? And I think that that's one of the ... to me, is making connections, crossing those lines and making those connections, because by doing that ... It's like weaving a basket. You make it stronger.

J.L. Right.

Y.M. We need to be able to support each other and to see those connections, where they cross. You know? We need to see our similarities and not focus on our differences; understand them but not necessarily focus on them. And I think that that goes across the board. You know? I think that ... I ... I don't exactly know how to do this, but I really think that it's a critical and important thing, and that is, again, this whole thing about training,--you know?--apprenticeships,--you know?--really getting good apprenticeships; pushing these unions on good apprenticeships. Now, when I say that I know that it's not just women that didn't get that. You know?

J.L. Yeah.

Y.M. But I think that it's okay sometimes for women and men to work together on issues that are going to be beneficial to both groups. And I think going into the schools is a really important thing. I think respecting the process and moving along slowly and not having these--to me anyway, not having these ideas of a major

explosion that's going to change the whole thing all the way around because that's not going to happen. And I think that .that if you tart looking at it that way and it doesn't happen then you get disillusioned and you get discouraged. But if you can see that each step that we take is important, is critical,-you know-and is going to ... is going to take it to the next level, I think ... You know, I personally ... Personally, I have a hard time working with the political machinery that is set up in the larger society so for me personally I prefer to work on a grassroots level. And grassroots level to me, which is what I was trying to say before, works in incremental movements. It works ... It means working on a really grassroots, ground level,--you know-guerilla warfare kind of thing, talking to the women,--you know-for where we are, having these meetings continuing to move forward each step at a time--at a time. You know? I don't necessarily thing that ...that hose people who prefer or who like to work with the larger society, I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing in and of itself,--you know,--but I don't see real action taking place as much on that level unless, at this grassroots level, we're pushing them. They're not going to do it because they're about image. You know?

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. They're about which ...

J.L. Which sexy issue will get them in the paper,

Y.M. Yeah, right.

J.L. News coverage and bla, bla, bla.

Y.M. That's right. And--you know-I think that it's okay sometimes if--you know ... The tradeswomen's issue is a sexy issue, but it's only sexy until it gets them to wherever they want to go. Once they get there, they're not really interested in getting more women in the trades. You know? They're not really interested in doing anything about it. So then that means that we have to assume those women and sisters and brothers that are wanting to work on that level, to push the lobbyists and the political machinery to do the right thing, those of us on the bottom have to keep doing that work, keep moving forward and keep--you know-changing minds, one at a time. And personally I'm okay with that. That's me. That's my forte. That's what I-you know--am better ... that's what I'm better at. I'm not interested in those people.

J.L. Now,--you know--there's so many women working in the trades in New York, and, I mean, I see them, like, lots of ... I see them on the subway. Usually I find a way to talk to them. You know? I've only been rebuffed once,-you know?-but I usually ... You know? Just the same way I talked to tradesmen. But, I mean, wouldn't it be amazing if we could find a way that there could be a place and a way to get women so that they know that there's an

organization for them that ... You know?

Y.M. Absolutely.

J.L. I mean, I met a black woman going uptown. One day I was going to the doctor's and she was going uptown on the train and she had just been laid off from Building Number Seven at the World Trade Center and we had an amazing conversation in the train. But,-you know-she told me the way that she was treated on the job ... but she was a skilled journeywoman. I can't remember ... I think she was a Laborer, but-you know-she wasn't treated well on the job but she said: But I've got my paycheck. And she had so much dignity. And just the way she carried herself ... and, I mean, we had a wonderful conversation. But I was just ... I mean, every time I have these conversations I think wouldn't it be great if there was a palm card that you could give somebody to say here's an organization that--you know--and--you know--that tradeswomen could give to each other and even to men who are--

Y.M. That's a great idea.

J.L. You know?--men who are ... We tried it with the Plumbers and it didn't work, but I still think that it's a good idea,--you know?--something to ...

Y.M. I think so.

J.L. ... be able to give it even to the men who are sympathetic,--you know? Who are, like ...

Y.M. One at a time.

J.L. ... who get it. You know? And then, Oh, you meet a sister on the job: Hey,-you know?-here. Why don't you take this? You might be interested in this.

Y.M. Absolutely.

J.L. But I think there's so many good ideas; that we haven't ... we haven't exhausted all the good ideas.

Y.M. Oh no, we have not. We haven't even gotten to them.

J.L. We have a long way ... We haven't even ...

Y.M. Oh, you're kidding. Oh, that's ... Yeah.

J.L. So you said to me, back when, you talked about that the void ... You were ... you were so prescient. In 1995 we were talking about how things were going to the right and getting more and more conservative, and you said something like: the void is filled with possibilities.

Y.M. Oh yeah?

J.L. And--you know,-I think this time is filled with possibilities.

Y.M. This is a very exciting time to be alive. It's a very dangerous time. It's a really scary time. But,-you know-right along with that is also a very exciting time because all of this--all of this muck and contradiction and all this garbage that is going on, all of this ... all of this rage that is going on ... You know, sometimes people really need ... just need to be angry in order to move ... And I always tell my son that,--you know?--anger and fear is okay if it helps to move you forward, if it gets you ... If it consumes you it's not such a great thing.

J.L. Um-hum. Now,--you know---there's a big part of this ... this rightward backlash ... I heard something during the election that white men see the Democratic Party as the party of blacks and women. You know?

Y.M. (both laugh) And ... You know? But, I mean, talking about bridging things,--you know,--and trying to find a way to be able to have fair world without everybody being pissed off, I mean, this is a tall order. But ...

Y.M. It is. It is, because there's so much ... I think there's so much going on ... You know? I keep saying this, and I think that this is really true, is that each of these groups--you know?-United Tradeswomen, New York Tradeswomen, Sisters in the Trades and

J.L. TNT ...

Y.M. and also groups outside of this,--you know?-and groups that are doing other kinds of things,--you know?-are all reflective of the larger society that we live in. We don't live alienated from them. We are a part of that society and what we bring to this group is part of what we bring from out there. You know what I mean? And so I don't think we're going to be able to get away from it--away from that, but I think that we can--you know--there are many possibilities and we can keep going and move beyond where we are right now. This, to me, I think, this is one of the most exciting times in my life, just a really exciting time. It's a really frightening time but, Oh Jeez, there's so much happening. There' so much that-you know--people are ... I really am ... there's a part of me that really is glad that people are finally getting angry about something;-you know?--that getting the fire in their belly and saying this is bullshit! You know? This is not working! You know what I mean? The only thing is that sometimes it boils over into some really crazy,

J.L. Yeah ??

Y.M. Acting out things. Yeah.

J.L. Okay. So let me see what else I can ask you about before I let you go. Okay. So the future of women in the trades. Is there a future?

Y.M. I absolutely think so. First of all, that I think that probably the majority of the population on this planet (laughs) ... I think, personally speaking, I think that we are ?? and I think that the men, when they are really being lucid, (laughs) agree that we are the stronger of the two--you know-what I mean?--on many levels. You know? Building muscles is not just a guy thing, not any more. You know? Women can build muscles. You know? We can stand up ... And--you know,--anybody with enough training can hold a nail gun to the ceiling and pop in the sheet rock,--you know what I mean?--if they do it long enough. At first you get tired, but with time you build the muscle and you--you know-bing, bing, bing and before you know it, you pulled it, put together a whole room before you're tired. You know? Every[one] ... including they, get tired in the beginning, the first few times that they do it.

J.L. Um-hum.

Y.M. So,--you know--I think that absolutely women will continue to be in the trades. I don't think they[re] going to give it up. You know? I think that they wish: You wish! (laughs) Dream on, brother, not happening. And as long as I have a breath in me ... in my chest, I will continue to tell women--you know-go in the trades. There's money there. Get in the trades. You can make some money there. You know? I will! I'm not going to ... That doesn't make me tired. I will continue to ... As long as a woman wants to hear it, I'm going to tell her that that is also a possibility. There's nothing wrong if you want to be a secretary, but if you don't want to be secretary,--you know-then go for it. Go all the way. You can do it.

Y.M. Yvone, how tall are you?

Y.M. Five feet. (laughs) Not very ??

J.L. Not very. Yep. The first time I met you I was surprised 'cause I knew you over the phone and I just saw you as such a giant person. And you are but you're not tall. That's all.

Y.M. No, I[m] not. (laughs) I'm not.

J.L. So any other thoughts?

Y.M. You know ... You know, you just said that thing about not being tall (laughs) and I have to laugh; I have to laugh--you know--because the guys on my job, they know that I'm not tall but they don't treat me like I[m] short.

J.L. Okay.

Y.M. (laughs) They know better. You know? And when they ... and when one of them says something out of line you see all these eyes coming back at me, like did she hear that? You know what I mean? I mean, it happened today. We were sitting down waiting for the ?? to come in and they were watching ... they like to watch Channel Eleven News in the morning. You know? Channel Eleven News in the morning is TNA news. It has nothing to do with the news. You know? It's all on these women with makeup and hair that they swing around and ... --you know--the dress, and the ... You know? And so one guy all the way on the other end of the room says: Oh, they must have said something to Linda. Before her ... she had a shoulder thing going. The blouse ... the top of her blouse, her where her shoulder is was down below her shoulder so you could see her shoulder and now she lifted it up. It must be--you know--like, they must have said something to her because she was looking very, very sexy before. And I just pulled ... poked my head up from behind the guys that I was sitting behind and I said: You're really pathetic. (laughs) You got issues, brother. And all the guys looked at me and laughed,--you know,--because I've now come to that point in my life ... I mean, I'm fifty-five years good. (laughs)

J.L. Okay. So, well, thank you. Keep on keeping on. (both laugh)

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