

BlaggLucinda1

Video 1

Sun, 4/17 1:15PM • 17:14

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Shipyard, people, football, lived, portsmouth, working, trades, christmas parade, called, college, walk, elementary school, long, machinist, test, husband, electrician, uncle joe, proud, junior high

Interview Particulars

Date:	January 19, 2022, Wednesday
Time:	10:58 AM – 11:51 AM
Location:	IC Norcom High School TV Production Set
Interviewee:	Lucinda Blagg
Interviewer:	Jaysha Johnson
Camera:	Jermaine Smith
Tech:	Nakiyah Naftali-Jones
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Instructor:	Jasmine Painter

Interviewer 00:20

Good morning, and thank you for participating in the oral history project. I am Jaysha Johnson and today I'll be interviewing you about your life and what it was like working at the Shipyard. Could you please tell us a little bit about where you're originally from?

00:35

I'm originally from Western Maryland, a small town called Frostburg up in the mountains. Most people don't realize Maryland's got three sections, but I lived up in the mountains in a little tiny town.

Interviewer 00:48

What was life like as a child in Frostburg?

00:52

Actually, it was pretty wonderful. It was a very small town. We had one high school. Football ruled. Best memories of growing up or when I was your age, every Friday night riding a bicycle or walking to the football game. Best ones were in the snow. Everybody in town went to

football. It wasn't like what I've seen other places in the country but it was football was King up there.

Interviewer 01:19

Can you tell us about a memorable moment in elementary or middle school?

01:24

Well, we didn't have middle schools. We had Junior High and High School, which was seventh and eighth grade was the junior high. Used to have that here as matter of fact. But elementary school. Let me think. Dodgeball, I heard some giggles, yes dodgeball was King in elementary school. And we also were very fortunate to have Outdoor School in sixth grade. All of us went to an outdoor camp for a week everybody went and we love that. I had been before but for a lot of them it's the first time and the only time they had ever gone out camping for a whole week somewhere. So that's was Elementary School. Junior High is a mixture because it's mixed right into high school. It was a big deal to be changing classes just like it is for y'all when you go from elementary to middle school is a big deal to change classes and move class to class and learning foreign languages. That was cool.

Interviewer 02:21

We you went to college what was the original plan for your future career.

02:26

From my future what?

Interviewer 02:27

Career

02:28

Well, my original plan was to be a librarian. I went to a small college in southwestern Missouri, a very special college called School of the Ozarks. It is now called College of the Ozarks. It was a free college. You worked. You were assigned a job on campus for 20 hours a week and it paid your room, board, everything but your books. So I went there for library science but they put me as a math major. Why? I don't know but they did. And library science minor because I found out they only had a minor in it. As it turned out. I like math and I ended up as a math major. And towards the time I was getting up my third year, I had pretty much decided that school teacher which is what I wanted to do was out because the money was in industry at the time. Working for AT and T or Verizon as a mathematician was good money. So that was the plan.

Interviewer 03:26

While you were there, how did you meet your husband?

03:29

Actually, I met him the day he walked in on campus. I volunteered with the freshman orientation. The day they came in, well not really orientation, but the day they came in to sign up for classes and stuff. And he and his parents were walking across in front of the building and I was standing there waiting for him and he was just as cute as could be.

Interviewer 03:54

Can you please describe [the] day you moved to Portsmouth and what it was like?

03:58

So we moved, we move separately. My husband came five weeks ahead of me and lived with my uncle in Portsmouth while he worked long enough to get a couple paychecks and find a place to live. So he rented an apartment in Lee Hall Apartments, which is I don't know what the name of it is now but right down here on George Washington Highway. Little brick apartments there. We lived in one of those townhouses. And he told me he's like it's not all that. I love the place. He came to get me from my parents and in Frostburg and we came down with a truckload of everything. We left everything behind but minor stuff. And we came in and I loved it. It was just I loved I loved Portsmouth. It was and we were there right by Cradock. We liked Cradock, I really enjoyed the area.

Interviewer 04:52

How did you feel when you first arrived?

04:55

Oh, I was ecstatic. I hadn't seen my husband for five weeks. I was just happy to be alone with [him].

Interviewer 05:09

Did you originally want to move to Cradock?

05:13

Actually yes. Well we want went from Lee Hall and I love Cradock. And the thing that was wonderful about Cradock is it was a planned community. I thought it was just so amazing that they had the elementary school at one end, the middle school at one end, the high school at the other end, the fire department and post office side by side. Everything was central. They had at the time they had several restaurants and stores in Cradock and everything was walkable. It was a quite a beautiful little community.

Interviewer 05:44

What was the neighborhood like during this time?

05:47

It was somewhat integrated. I don't know it's just family. So it was just a lot of families. We lived there for we lived in Lee Hall apartments for two years then we moved to Cradock for two years. It was just families. a lot of them worked at the Shipyard and they worked different places. It was just a small like its own small community within Portsmouth.

Interviewer 06:13

Do you remember attending any local Portsmouth events?

06:19

Well, we spent we attended a lot of them but you're talking about a specific time period. Okay. We did the Sea Wall Festival, the Arts Festival, the Gospel Festival. I love that one. That was my favorite when we had that. Don't have that anymore I think. Any of the festivals downtown we used to go to. Christmas parade. We used to have our own Christmas parade. With football, we decided to make a float for that. The boys were playing for Olive Branch Football. And we built a float in one of our friend's garage. And the kids rode on that and that was a great event. Everybody got to ride or they marched and we really really liked that. So we missed the Christmas parade. We've gone to Memorial Day parades. You name it. We probably know about it or went to it. We even now the St. Patrick's Day thing. We go downtown and raise a glass for that. We do a lot of the Portsmouth stuff

Interviewer 07:23

What was one of your favorite memories of all time living in Portsmouth?

07:27

It has to be, once again, you're gonna get a theme here, football. My kids played for Olive Branch Football. I was probably the only female football coordinator they ever had. Because I loved it. I love grew up with football, love football, the boys played football and we were there every Saturday. Followed them wherever we needed to go. My husband will say probably say the same thing about baseball. But that wasn't my sport. But when you have young boys, that's the thing to do on the weekends. You were out playing sports somewhere with somebody.

Interviewer 08:02

Before moving here, what had you heard about the Shipyard?

08:07

Nothing. Honestly not a thing. My uncle, it came out of the blue. We were in Missouri and in the mail, my mom and dad sent the application from my uncle and we're like, I don't know what this is. What's a machinist? I don't we didn't know what any of those things were. But it was a good job. And where he was working at the time was pretty dead ended and we saw the writing on the wall at that that factory wasn't going to make it much longer. So we went for it.

Interviewer 08:36

Why was Uncle Joe Griffith such a huge inspiration for you to start working at the Shipyard?

08:41

Well, I don't know that he was an inspiration. But we knew that by the time we came, we'd learned a bit about it. But he was at the top of his game. He was a group superintendent, which is one of the very top people in the Shipyard at the time. There were only what maybe six group superintendents. So we're up at the very, very top of the blue collar workforce, which is the waterfront workers. And he went there when probably, I don't have the exact dates, but he went there shortly after World War II himself and worked up from an Apprentice all the way up. So he was an inspiration and he started at the bottom and worked his way up.

Interviewer 09:24

How did you get accepted into the program?

09:27

Well, at the time you had to take a Civil Service exam. They held them at what was Willet Hall, I think it was. A thousand people at a time went. If you can imagine that, a thousand people at a time went in Willet Hall and they did it day after day after day for weeks. And you had to pass this test. This test was the equivalent of an SAT. Very close to an SAT. For anybody could apply. But you then they took those and they graded those tests and you had to make -- it wasn't quite an SAT but you had to make a score of I think, I don't remember, but it was like basically 100. Veterans got like five points bonus, so they could get over 100. And then those scores were turned into the were turned into the Shipyard and then they filtered through them, then they went through an interview process. Did I answer the whole question? What was the question again? See, I screwed that up.

Interviewer 10:27

How did you get yourself into the Shipyard?

10:29

Okay, so my husband was already in, but that there, they have no influence. The people that are already there have no influence. So you got to get in there on your own. So I got 100 on

the test, but I had some college. So there's an excuse for getting a good score. I had a good high school education as well. So I did well on the test. Then they do an interview. And when you go into the interview, there was a blackboard, if you remember those. It was a big blackboard. And on it, they had a list of all the trades that were still open, it said a trade still available. And it had a list of what shops slash coats, you know, whatever that trade might be on the wall. When you walked in, and you're registering, you're looking up, because you've already decided what you want to be. I want to be an electrician. I want to be a machinist. I want to be a metals inspector. And you went in and all the the higher end or what may be easier, I don't know, more elite trades were already taken. What most people wanted. So they had them all crossed off. And I was like, Oh, heck, now what? So I call I picked up the phone I called Well, I didn't pick up the phone. I had to go dial a phone somewhere. And I called Uncle Joe and I said, Joe, I said I can't get electrician or this. I said what should I pick, I don't know, these trades. And he said be a pipe fitter. I was like, okay. He said, no you'll do fine. Be a pipe fitter. Okay. So when they called us up from the interview, they took in 20 people at a time. I think it was 20. And they sat us all in a row. We're in a row here. And all the managers on the other side, and they asked us questions. And when you went inside, those jobs were open. But I saw many a person walk in, look up, take their name off the list and leave. So they wanted people who wanted to work. They didn't want just anybody that only wanted to be this. They wanted people who wanted to work no matter what. So I think that helped a lot with getting a job there.

Interviewer 12:29

How long did the process take?

12:33

From the from the beginning of the time where you apply to were you actually on board is about, I think it was about a year. Might have been less than. I'm not sure, It might have been less then. But now it's certainly a year. It takes a long time.

Interviewer 12:52

What was the day in the life like at the Shipyard?

12:56

Well, you got up in the morning early, obviously long before you guys probably get up. And there were a couple of ways to get in the Shipyard. You could drive. If you were manager, you could park inside. Most of us rode, most people rode Eddie buses. We were fortunate. The only other way to park inside the Shipyard, assuming you were three years in, you had to have at least four people and you had a carpool pass. You got a carpool path and that allowed you to park inside. But when I first started there we couldn't so we parked in a mud lot, somebody's yard across from the Shipyard, and slogged through the mud. And then you had to

walk and then you catch a bus inside to get to where you need to go. So the Shipyards about two miles long. So it's a bit of a haul if you're carrying your lunch bag, tools, whatever. So you had to be at work and clocked in, with old timecard, by 720. And you, maybe if you were working on the boat, you go on the boat you'd work and they would not let you off till the whistle blew. They had whistle. Sill blows today. 1120. They, the whistle would blow you could get off the boat. You could go eat your lunch, usually you carry lunch, you didn't have time to go anywhere because you had to be right back on at 12 o'clock. And then at four o'clock that whistle blew and it was a free for all because everybody's running. 'Cause they might not run all day. They might not a run to get in but they sure know how to run out of that place. You can go today and you will see when that whistle blows or around 3:30 or 4 o'clock you will see the people hauling butt out of there.

Interviewer 14:30

As a woman, what do you ever treated differently?

14:34

Absolutely. Yeah, that's not necessarily the nicest thing to say. Good and bad. I was denied a promotion because the supervisor said we would have promoted you except you might get pregnant again. Yeah, I was. And I did get work leader position. And finally, I was so proud of that because I figured my college education, the years of college I had, helped me. And I was very proud. I was the first woman work leader in Shop 51. Was as a Marine electrician. And I was proud of it. And I guess I probably brag too much. And finally, my supervisor says you wouldn't nobody wanted you. We weren't going to take you. He says I was the only person who would take you. So you need to shut up. It's like, okay. On the, on the other side of the coin, I think some of that, so that was a promotion I got because I was a woman. Not in spite of it. So I saw both sides of it. And I saw other women that were very badly. One of my friends had to leave the Shipyard because she was sexually harassed so much. And there was a lot of that. But things have changed so much in there. It's so so much better and different than when we went through. So we were kind of trailblazers and putting up with it, not putting up with it as case may be. But yes, I was definitely treated different because I was a woman. There was, okay, so there's one case where we had to pull cable and pulling cable in the Shipyard is, these [pointing to television cables in the recording studio] are little tiny things. Anybody can do that. So there was this one cable you pulled, it's called 440. The cables this big around solid metal. Weighs about, I think it weighed like 40 pounds per linear foot. So they have to take a whole gang of people to haul this cable. It's not it's done by hand. They just get it. Everybody grabs on and they carry it. Well I was called, my name came up, so I went to do that. And I did my best but darn, it was too heavy for me. I just couldn't do it. And the guys finally said, Honey, you just need to step back. Let's do it. You're gonna get hurt. And it hurt my feelings. But he was right. I knew I couldn't do it. But I was determined to try. And then there was another case where there was something in a switchboard that I had some guys were working, were working

in there and they said something couldn't be done. Well, nothing really gets me quite like somebody telling me it can't be done, because that makes me really, really determined to do it. So there were three of us women and we got it done. We were determined.

BlaggLucinda2

Video 2

Sun, 4/17 1:17PM • 17:14

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Shipyard, retired, job, project, carrier, waterfront, work, left, fiber optics, electrician, ship, overhaul, portsmouth, big, early, urban homesteading, week, overcame, submarine, tight spots

Interviewer 00:00

Never afraid to speak up.

00:03

That's right.

Interviewer 00:06

I was just gonna add the question you mentioned the three women were trailblazers and got it done. Can you describe those three women?

00:14

Well, one of them was a one of them was a black woman about my age. Trying to think who the other and love and it was another woman with it might have been might have been Trina. Trina was a little tiny thing. Both of them were pretty small. But they were stronger than me. I'm I may be big, but I'm not strong. I'm not terribly strong upper body strength. But Vera was very strong. She's She's, she's retired too. But she was she was a go getter. And she was one that said I couldn't we couldn't do it. I said, Yes, we can. We can do this, we're gonna get this done. And we did get it done. But I mean, it goes both ways. There were times when women could get into small spaces that guys couldn't get in. Because we had we had to deal with it. We had to deal with guys said you don't belong in here. There were some definitely some men who said flat out, you don't belong in here. I don't know why you're here. You can't do the job. But there were times when you'd had to get somebody behind that little thing in there or you need a little tiny fingers to get in that you needed a small woman for. And we use the small and they hung one girl by her feet to get behind something because a submarine we worked

submarines a lot. Submarines are tiny. I mean, this is a huge room compared to anything on a submarine. And so yeah, you'd have to slide somebody behind the curtain and it's all metal. And yeah, we did. We did get in some tight spots that the guys couldn't do or do some fine manipulations with our fingers that the guys couldn't do. There was advantages to it.

Interviewer 01:43

Could you describe the jobs and duties you had at the Shipyard?

01:48

Okay, so I had a number of jobs. I started as an Apprentice marine electrician, which is not your house wiring, it's strictly for ships. So a four year Apprenticeship. And when you go in the Apprenticeship, you go through all different areas of the Shop. So Shop 51, I did different things. One of the first jobs I had, you know, you guys are getting lost stuff I didn't say before. One of the first jobs I had was I was assigned to the rubber room, the rubber room, you take rubber, raw rubber, and you kind of cut it and put it in a mold. It's a metal mold, two-part mold. And then you put the you had a press that came down and it baked it until it made something. After it's baked for hours, then you'd open it and then you get get the stuff out and sand it down to finish it. I believe they still do that there. So one of my first jobs was making rubber balls. For Family Day. I did that for like two months, made like 2000 rubber balls about that big. The things that you get to do. I got paid good money for that I was proud of that. I got paid real good money, make rubber balls. But as a Marine electrician, I generally excelled in the connector section, which was making connectors about that big or smaller. And with hundreds of connections in it. We did solder. We did crimp connections. And then before I left that portion of Shop 51 I, we had gotten into fiber optics. And we were doing we were very early in fiber optics we had just started splicing but we were making fiber optic connectors, when a lot of the country didn't have fiber optics. But the ships did. The ships did. So we did that. And then I went from there to I did some kitting, which is just putting together kits for say, you're going to put a box up there I'd have everything they needed for all their wire markers, their wire, their lugs, that kind of stuff. Pre-kitting stuff before kitting actually existed. I was doing it by myself. And then I worked on the on these projects for carriers, carrier team projects for I don't know, maybe a year or two. So I learned the whole process of how a carrier comes in for an overhaul. One section of it was my bosses. And he took me through everything and showed me everything that needed to be done to establish an estimate for a project, to plan the project, to man the project, to do workload forecasting. And then from there, he got me a position, a temporary position planning where we track the material. So I had 1000s and 1000s of pieces of material that I was responsible for plus anything that the waterfront wanted. And this may be question you'll ask in a minute, but one of the most my favorite job was that job. A guy would come in and he'd say I need one of these. He just handed it to me. It'd be a pipe fitting or something. Well I'm an electrician. What do I know about pipe fitting. I did, I learned how to order specific pipe fittings. I learned how to order anything that anybody needed that was

working from my from the area that I was in. I had vendors I could call. I it's very, but it was very, there was a lot of gratitude in that job because I could get something I could find a vendor, have it made, have it shipped, have it expedited, get it in the yard and get it in his hands, usually within a day. And it would be they would just be so amazed by that. But that was a very good job. And I went to a QA in Shop 51 and I worked with checking the work of the people and any issues they had and working them out. Then I went to IT. So I went down to IT as an IT trainee, I took a step back, in order to go forward. I took a demotion in order to go forward. And they had a training program, three year training program. And I was put in a web office. Like I don't know, what or anything about the web? Nothing. This was 19..., 2000, actually 1999 2000. So they gave us a book, we read about it. And eventually they gave us a computer. And so we went to work and my expertise turned out to be web design. I learned programming and web design from that. I'd already done programming earlier in my life in different places. Became the Webmaster eventually, and then I ended up as a Branch Manager over the Server Group over a couple 100 servers running everything in the Shipyard. So a variety of things. You don't have to have one career in a Shipyard you can have more than one.

Interviewer 06:47

Were you ever given an award for your work after ship?

06:49

Yeah, absolutely. That Shipyard is generous sometimes. During the RIF. I don't know if you want to put this on tape. But during the RIF, which is a reduction in force? Have you heard that term before? During the mid 90s? I think it was. There was a reduction in force at the Shipyard and probably 25% of the Shipyard was put out the gate. They reduced the size of the Shipyard considerably. The way you stayed was if you had high evaluations. Well, I always gotten outstanding evaluations and that saved my job. And I got. And at that time, if you got an outstanding evaluation, you got to 2% of your income as a That was a big award then. It was like \$2,000 award. Still to this day, the biggest award I ever got in there. Back in 1990 that was a huge award. So yes.

Interviewer 07:49

What's your most memorable project ever?

07:52

Kind of already covered that. Like I said, we worked on I don't remember the name of the carrier. But the nice thing about working on the carrier projects is that boat leaves. And then there's another one. Most... The waterfront projects have the benefit of you work a project, it's like high school, there's an end to high school. If you can imagine your job is to go to school the rest of your life. It's just you kind of get boring and monotonous. But being on a carrier

team, your objective was to finish that carrier and get that carried going down the river off to the base or off to wherever it's gonna go. And then you get a new one. But it's a different project, a different thing. So that was one of the benefits of working a carrier or a waterfront project because you saw the beginning and the end of the project.

Interviewer 08:42

Why was this project so important to you?

08:45

Because it's just more it's a Navy mission. We were all about the Navy mission. And we understood how important it was to get those ships out.

Interviewer 08:55

Can you remember any difficulties at the Shipyard and how you overcame them.

09:03

Kind of mentioned it. Any difficulties. Well, okay, so there was there was a time that some of the ladies that worked for me, I was work leader, although they technically worked for the supervisory -- work leader and you know, there's not a direct relationship, but they were having problems with sexual harassment. And they came to me and as far as overcoming it, I went over the manager's head I went over the supervisor, I went down to the main office and complained. It fixed the problem, but I didn't gain any. I gained a few enemies from it. But that's the only that's the only thing I can think of that really fits that bill.

Interviewer 09:57

Was there ever a time that you wanted leave the Shipyard

10:00

The day that I left, I really wanted to leave. I retired a little under duress. I was ready to retire. I had a few months to go, but my boss pushed me over the edge. And I quit.

Interviewer 10:19

Are there any other Shipyard memories or stories that you wish to share?

10:23

I want to go back to that quitting the Shipyard. My first waterfront job in the Shipyard was about five weeks after I started the Shipyard, and they put me on a boat. So they took me to a carrier. Carriers are huge. It's the size of this school. It's lots of metal, lots of noises, lots of smells, lots of dirty, nasty places, sometimes especially under overhaul and this was under full overhaul. So the first job I was taken to was where they'd had a fire the night before. And, or

well maybe not the night before, cuz it probably still been hot, but it was a fire damage. And we were told to grab a cable and then follow it back to its where it was, wherever it went get it disconnected and pull it out. Well, they're burned so it's soot. I was covered from head to toe, black, when I left. Every day. And we were carpooling at the time. So I had to walk. It was about at least a mile from where the boat was. All the way out through the front of the Shipyard across the road and into the mud lot. It was raining. The guys were all waiting, my husband and his brother, another guy. They were all we're waiting to neighbor laughing at me. And yes, I hated the Shipyard then. Those first three weeks of that. I despised that place. But it got better. You just have to hang in there because it was it was tough. It was tough work. I wasn't used to physical labor and it was nasty. And guys were laughing at me it was tough.

Interviewer 11:56

What made you decide to retire from the Shipyard?

12:02

The rest of my life? What made me decide to retire? I was done. I guess when you when you work a job or you're in a position anywhere you work. Or even in volunteer work. You know when it's time it's just it's not really a planned thing. You might think you have a plan. But I think you know when it's time to turn over the, hand off the torch to the next generation you just know. You know that they aren't listening to you anymore. They don't need you anymore. They want to do their own thing. They want to make their own mistakes. They want to do their own thing their own way. It was time for me.

Interviewer 12:44

What do you miss about working there?

12:46

The people. I know everybody says that. And it's cliché but absolutely the people. I really, even to this day, I was even thinking about them this morning. I miss the daily interaction. I had some great people that worked for me and that worked with me and I really do miss them. We still see some of them on the side. But...

Interviewer 13:08

What have you been doing since you retired?

13:12

Well, we started traveling before we retired. My husband and I did. And we've continued that and expanded that a little bit. We've done two cruises two or three cruises. Another one coming up. We've done some road trips. We did a one month road trip after my husband retired. We did some overseas travel. So we've done some traveling. I've picked up more

urban homesteading projects, if you know what that is. It's kind of like, like living out in the woods but at home, but making things from scratch. So I make all my own bread. I do. I picked up weaving this last year learning how to weave. I can if you're familiar with that. I do a lot of preserving, dehydrating. And right now we tapped our maple trees where we made maple sugar today. Just because. Just a variety things. And I do some artwork work with the library. The Friends of the Portsmouth Public Library. Do volunteering for them. They do coloring and painting, all kinds of stuff. There's a whole lot to retirement

Interviewer 14:23

All right. What was your favorite place to travel since you retired?

14:29

I think my husband I will agree on Italy. We went to Rome and Florence each for a week. It's a wonderful country.

Interviewer 14:40

I'm jealous now if you went to Italy?

14:42

Yes, we did. We did Italy. We went to Paris for a week. And we did Scotland and Scotland and just a little bit of London and little Iceland.

Interviewer 14:54

What are your hopes and dreams for the future of the Shipyard?

14:58

I hope the Shipyard can become productive, more productive, and they can get their costs under control. And that they can remain there for another 200 years. I really do. It's a good place to work. It's a wonderful place to work. Federal government anywhere, it's a good place to work. But it's, we need the Shipyard because we need jobs. And it's a good place to start from the ground up. As you know, or probably know, my both of my sons work there and they swore they wouldn't work there. And they both work there and they don't regret it a bit. I don't think. You'll have to tell me when I see their interview. don't know what they said. But Ben in particular, he did not want to work at Shipyard. he was determined not to work at the Shipyard.

Interviewer 15:47

What is some advice for people interested in working there.

15:51

Get in early. Get in young. Keep your options open and continue your education on the side. The Shipyard will only get you so far. If you get a college degree, that's one way. But there are some internships. Look for those. But yeah, get in early and keep your mind open. There's jobs in there that you never dreamed of. So don't go in and saying I want to do this and only this. Go in there saying I want to work and see what's available. And as you're there, you'll find out there's a whole world of of careers in there that you've never heard of.

Interviewer 16:28

In your opinion, do you think Portsmouth has evolved over the years?

16:35

Portsmouth has definitely evolved. Trying to think of what way that one we might have to do some takes on. Portsmouth has changed. This is this is a prime example. Who thought you'd ever have a TV studio and a high school. That's pretty awesome. You guys have some nice tech things here. Downtown has changed when I was first came here. I was told not to go downtown and it wasn't safe and we didn't know we didn't go downtown. The sidewalks were concrete then they weren't these pretty brick sidewalks that you have [now].

BlaggLucinda3

Video 3

Sun, 4/17 1:13PM • 15:10

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Shipyard, work, blue collar, portsmouth, smurfs, shop, waterfront, section, family, week, shift, women, year, job, room, left, holidays, hire, higher, shoe factory

00:00

And now I love downtown. It's safe I feel safe there anytime day or night. We have some wonderful restaurants down there. The Waterfront has changed a lot. I still miss the Holiday Day, however. but it's changed in so many ways. Tower Mall is gone. Bradley's is gone. Like we talked about before. Bradley's is gone. Some of the some of the things are gone that used to be here but new things have come in to take their place and I see the housing improving.

Interviewer 00:37

If you could bring one thing that from the past what would it be?

00:41

One thing back from the past. That's kind of hard to say. That's very broad. Can you narrow that a little bit?

Interviewer 00:56

Just something that you had in the in the past that you wish you had now.

01:04

Maybe a beta recorder, so I could play my tapes. I have a lot of videotapes that, eh. You can't get a... I think there were... we had betas and we had VHS-C recorders and they didn't, all of them didn't translate.

Interviewer 01:22

Lastly, where do you see Portsmouth and the Shipyard 20 years from now?

01:27

Well, Shipyard has gotten a lot of money and for infrastructure, so I expect to see a lot of new buildings in a Shipyard. I know they've gotten the money for him. I don't know if they're gonna build them. Portsmouth, I don't know. 20 years from now. You're assuming I'm gonna live that long. I'd like to see downtown revitalized a lot more. I think that's what would be my wish is I love the downtown area. And I think there's a lot more to be done there. If they ever opened Cure coffee shop, I will be one of their first customers. I have been dying for that place to open. I hear there's a distillery come in. I think we could become a little bit more like some areas of Richmond. For example, I was down at the Friends Saturday book sales, Friends of the Portsmouth Public Library. I put this put the sign out by the street. They were having their Farmers Market and a couple followed me back. They said we're following you. They saw booksale they followed me. They had come to Portsmouth they'd never been to downtown Portsmouth. They're from Chesapeake. And they were in love with it. What we have down there is precious. And the cobblestone streets are perfect. The trees are perfect. They just really need more businesses in there and we got we got a gem right there. 20 years from now. No tolls.

Interviewer 02:54

Do you see yourself still in living in Portsmouth 10 years from now?

02:58

Absolutely. This is our home. We live here both boys live here. Unless they move, we're not going anywhere.

Interviewer 03:08

Is there anything else you would like to share?

03:12

I don't know. Is there anything I said another interview you guys want me to repeat?

Interviewer 03:19

I think there are two items. might have missed. Meeting in college and everything like that. Well,

when did you guys first decide to move to Hampton Roads or just decide or why did you think this Shipyard move would be beneficial for your family?

03:37

Okay, well my husband will probably cover that a little better. But he was working at Florsheim shoe factory in Poplar Bluff, Missouri. And they that summer they usually closed down for Fourth of July week. Well, that summer, they closed for two weeks. And they didn't get paid. When they didn't work they didn't get paid. There was no getting paid holidays. There are paid vacation. You had to be there a year to get a week off. I tried working there I failed after three days. I couldn't take it. But anyway, we knew that the factory was probably going to close. So when that application came, he had to make a horrendous trip. Please ask him about that. But he had to make a trip out here to take the test. Then he had taken a trip back home. So it was like three months later you come out from the interview. And then he was supposed to go back home. Uncle Joe arranged for him, did help him, arrange for him to get his physical the same night. Because normally you go home and then three months later you get your physical and then three months later you'd come aboard. But it wasn't really a choice about time when they when they have a report date. That's the date you got to be here. So the timing was what it was. So he just we've made the decision. We were going to do this. And yeah, he left his whole family to come out here. So it was hard for him. It's easy for me it was closer to my family.

Interviewer 04:54

When you guys first left work, the boys were already here or you had them after you started working at the Shipyard.

05:00

I had them after I started working with Shipyard. Yeah, I was 23 when I started the Shipyard and Ben was born when I was 25. And that's probably how I ended up in that what we call the plug section, because that's one of the places that pregnant women could work. And there were probably at one time, six of us in there that were pregnant. They called it called it Jackie's harem. Because there were so many women because there's no... There were only maybe 10

or 15 women in the Shop that were ...period. Out of a couple hundred people. So it was like 10%. Our shop was one of them had some of the most women out of any of the Shops. At that time, maybe five to 10% women worked in the Shipyard. I think that number is probably up 25-30 maybe higher now. In the blue-collar trades. White collar trades. That's a different story.

Interviewer 05:50

What was the name of your shop?

05:53

Plug section?

Interviewer 05:55

And you said it was six of you guys pregnant at the same time. What was it like in that room?

05:59

Well, I will tell you there was a lot of drama. That we even had the who's sleeping with whose husband going on. We were all young in our 20s. And there was some single one there were not single ones. And yeah, there was a it was a mess. It was a large section at the time. We probably had 30 or 40 people in a section. But yeah, we had a lot of pregnant women at the same time.

Interviewer 06:23

Now when you went on and had a baby, went on maternity leave, when you came back where were you working? Were you back in that same place?

06:30

Yeah. So I went through, I mean it's a four year Apprenticeship. So I spent, because I got pregnant. That meant I spent almost a year in that one section. And but I did waterfront tours where I'd be three months, I did three months on night shift on subs, I did at least two or three stints on waterfront. I did I talked about the rubber room, that section. I didn't get a lot of in-shop sections. Mostly it was waterfront. That's a majority of our work was on the waterfront. So different supervisors, different boats. So from carriers down to submarines, I spent probably a year on submarines. We did have one time period where you were you're mandated we had three shifts then. We have first second third shift. And you had to take your turn. Well, we had a problem because they tried to get both of us on second shift at the same time. And we couldn't do that. Well, for one, I didn't have transportation. But I think that was after Ben was born. Yeah, it was right after Ben was born. So we had to go and beg and then threaten, because we just couldn't both be on second shift. So I think I was on second shift right after, after I went back to work after Ben was born. And Richard was on first shift. So we didn't see each other for the most part till the weekends because he'd come in after I left for work. So I'd

leave for work and he'd come home and he you know, there might have been somebody watched the baby in between there a little bit. And then I'd come home and go to bed. We'd sleep in same bed that was about it. We wouldn't see each other weekend. That was a tough time. For us. It was very hard for me because I had a bit of that postpartum depression. I didn't know it at the time. But I was I had a hard time with that time period. It was very hard for me, but not because of work. Because work was fine. It was just me.

Interviewer 08:18

And last thing on the on one woman-side of the ship. I know you already gave advice for future generations who want to work at the Shipyard. But I guess for the girls specifically, if there's a girl interested in working at the Shipyard, what advice would you give her, or what jobs, maybe, you know, should she prepare herself for, I guess, you know, so she can excel. Any advice specifically for girls?

08:43

Well, it would be, okay. I understand what you're saying. But it depends on what you want to do. Like I said, I went into the blue collar and the reason I went into the blue collar is I was over educated. I tried to get a job at High's Ice cream over on Effingham and they wouldn't hire me. They said, "You've got too much education, you're gonna leave us". I'm like, I just need a job. They wouldn't hire me. No place in Cradock would hire me. No place. Because I had too much education. It's like, what does that have to do with my ability to do the job, I just needed a job. I would probably never gotten the Shipyard if anybody would have hired me. But there was high unemployment back then. Quite a bit higher than then you've probably ever seen really. Even even during, I don't know, maybe not during the pandemic. But, yeah, I couldn't get a job. So when Richard went and got this job, and he came home and he was had all this energy and I'm like, I can do that. There's not a job in there that a woman can't do. Not a single job in there that you can't do. So don't limit yourself to think and I can only do things that require me to type at a computer all day. You can be a rigger which is a person who gets stuff because it's not lifting and carrying the stuff it's not. We have machines We have they have robots in there that will help you lift 200 pounds now, they have come a long way you don't see everything they have, they have a lot of really unique ways of doing things, that there's not a job in there women can't do. So don't limit yourself. And so one of the best ways to move up to a managerial position and further is to go into the blue collar work force because there's a large group of people, there's maybe 800 people in a Shop. Well, there's, there's 800 People in the Shop, there's, you know, I don't I can't do the math, 30, 40, 50 supervisors. So that's 50 opportunities to move up. And it's a pyramid. But you know, you can you can move up quicker in some of the larger Shops than you can going into a small area that only does one thing. Just don't limit yourself. And if you can get that college education ahead of time, then by golly, do it.

Interviewer 10:57

That's great. So we're gonna move back into just events that were at the Shipyard. Just other memories. Can you remember what Christmas time or different holidays were like on the Shipyard?

11:12

I don't recall any other holidays other than Christmas at the Shipyard and, and I'm not old enough to remember the big ones that some of the previous generations that I hope you get to interview will remember, Christmas at the Shipyard simply was the last day of work. Everybody brought, we usually brought in and did a cover dish supper to die for. Everybody brought in something we had food from one end to the other end of the room, especially in our section. And we're not going to talk about the liquor that they had, but there might have been some somewhere I'm not sure. I might have known people that might have partaken, But generally speaking, it was. It was it was frowned. It was absolutely not allowed. But what can I say? The same thing probably goes on today is went on then.

Interviewer 12:05

And what about any family and sports events? Throughout the year?

12:10

Oh, Family Day? Yeah, well, we didn't always have Family Day. Obviously, we had it when I was making rubber balls and Family Day was huge. It's the one day of the year that you could bring in your family to go right where you worked. And we cleaned for weeks. Before that. I mean, we cleaned we painted every line in the Shipyard was repainted. It was kind of a lot of work. But we were so proud because usually there was a ship that you could go on. And it was the first time you could take your kids and so they can see where Mommy and Daddy worked. That was awesome. My parents came down for it. My brother and his wife came down for it. And I know I was not alone. Even up to a few the last one they had, you know, we tried to go in for. But they opened up all the shops were open. I don't think engineering got near as much out of it as we did. When I worked in IT, as a matter of fact, last family day we had, I convinced the IT department to open and we took them through the computer room which 95, well probably 99% of the Shipyard has never seen our computer room, so we convinced them to let us escort them through the server room and people were so amazed. And I so enjoyed doing those tours. I enjoyed it a lot and it was nice for them to get an opportunity to see what we did. So yeah, we had Family Day was great.

Interviewer 13:35

So how did your boys react to that and do you think that kind of inspired them later on?

13:40

Well, I think they enjoyed Family Day because there's a lot of free stuff. We had rubber balls. The machine shop made little little Smurfs. Back when Smurfs were big, the foundry made a mold and they made Smurfs and somebody painted them. I don't know who painted them but we all got metal Smurfs. I've got little tiny candle holders at the machine shop made. There was a lot of free stuff and there was they were impressed by the ships. Nobody's not impressed by ship and so if you haven't been on one. You will have to ask them if that inspired them. You really will because I don't know. He's shaking his head. Is that good or bad?

Interviewer 14:27

Right, anything. Thank you so much.

14:32

Hopefully I didn't bore you too much. Or said too much.

Interviewer 14:38

It's never too much. Yeah, you definitely have a unique perspective.