Interview with Jeanne Finnegan

Aleutian World War II National Historic Area
Oral History Program

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Transcribed by Shannon Apgar-Kurtz; edited by Greg Dixon

This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Jeanne Finnegan was recorded with her permission on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav and wma formats and are on file at the Regional office of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.

The transcript has been lightly edited.

Jeanne Finnegan, March 30, 2000. Photo courtesy Theresa Osborne

Janis Kozlowski: Okay, is this Mrs. Jeanne Finnegan?

Jeanne Finnegan: Yes, it is.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. And I'm Janis Kozlowski in Anchorage Alaska. And Mrs. Finnegan is it okay if I tape our conversation today?

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:00:15] Yes you may.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay, thank you very much. And you can still hear me okay?

Jeanne Finnegan: Yes, hearing is one thing that's not too bad.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh good, good. [Both laugh]

Jeanne Finnegan: Sometimes it's a little too good: I can hear three tables away.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh. [Laugh] Well, I wanted to ask you some questions today about, ah, what you remembered about, ah, growing up and working during WWII.

Jeanne Finnegan: OK.

Janis Kozlowski: And, let's see, do you … first of all, do you remember, ah, when Pearl Harbor was bombed? Do you remember where you were, and what you were thinking at the time?

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:00:53] Well, I don't know as that I remember what I was thinking, but it was one o'clock and we were having Sunday dinner.

Janis Kozlowski: How did you find out?

Jeanne Finnegan: Well, I was; let's see in '41, I was 21. So it came over the radio.

Janis Kozlowski: OK.

Jeanne Finnegan: We, of course we had known since … we had known the war was more or less on its way. But we had no idea how it would start, because there was a lot of controversy. As I was, I was graduated from college in June of '41, and the last year we almost didn't pay as much attention to what subjects we should [have]. There were lots of us that did not think we should bail Britain out of a mess.

But anyway, so when the bundles for Britain started, and the … we were losing ships, because the Germans were sinking U.S. ships they thought had ammunition on them; it caused quite an uproar. One member of our class, let's see, in the fall of '40, he joined the Canadian Air Force. And he was among the first people killed when the British ordered night bombing, because the Canadian Air Force went immediately to England to be trained. And so, he had been killed before we were graduated.

Janis Kozlowski: Hmm … were you …?

Jeanne Finnegan: It was a rough time; because people, among my uncles -- especially the ones that had been in the war - the First World War, in the Italian Army, and then got out of Italy as soon as they could after the war was over, they were bitter at the way … I think both of them had been prisoners and they had been treated horribly. One was a cook and one was a medic. In other words, they were almost non-active, as far as firing a gun. And they never got over it. They subscribed to the Italian paper, which I can't [Chuckle] tell you what title it had. They thought Mussolini was the best thing that ever happened. Of course, as far as Mussolini went, when he, domestically, he cleaned up Venice canal so that travelers didn't have to hold their nose when they went down it. That was a beautiful site, but it would smell horrible because it was the end of every, every bit of waste that was generated.

Janis Kozlowski: Hmmm…

Jeanne Finnegan: So that, it [the bombing] was not, it was not, as you know … where it happened, was a surprise. But, the war itself was not a surprise. Because … England and … and yeah, England had been attacked; the Germans had done a fair amount of damage. And it was.…

[0:04:11] I'm trying to think when [Charles Augustus] Lindbergh came into it; it must have been nearer to '43, I guess. He wanted to join the service … and FDR [President Franklin D. Roosevelt] told him to go home and stay there. Because, Lindbergh had been to Russia … shortly before … shortly before we entered the war. And when he came back and told what he had found: that they, … he hadn't been to Russia, he had been to Germany.

[Lindbergh] told that he had found that the Germans were gearing up; that they had planes, they had; you know, he was telling what he found. And many people were not believing him. Anything he said, was more or less rejected. He made the mistake of saying -- and his wife had pleaded with him never to repeat it, but he told it to a reporter. I don't remember which one, or anything; he blamed the Jews for the onset of the war, which, of course, never went down very well in the United States. And FDR was furious.

So, that, when Lindbergh was able to convince an Air Force officer in … umm, I'm trying to remember whether it was the Philippians or further east than that? They were losing so many planes that were Navy planes, you know; they'd take off from a carrier, and then … And then some of them were taking off from land, and they were exceeding the limit of their fuel supply. So it was a suicide; every time they took off, it was a suicide mission. You were not only losing the men, but you were losing very, very expensive equipment. And he said, "You let me fly those planes a couple of times and I'll tell you how to maximize the length of time this fuel will last."

Well, one officer decided that he couldn't risk losing many more men, or they would be out, not only out of planes, they'd be out of men. And of course, it had taken time to train these men; not only time but, it was disheartening. If that continued, you couldn't expect anyone to want to fly that route. So, he flew two, or three times and finally prevailed upon them to allow somebody to fly with him.

Whoever that was, was really courageous, because they went and [came] back and they had a little bit of gas left over. And he showed them how and what to do. And of course, it had to be very q.t. [secret], so that it wasn't revealed until much later. I think he may even have died before that was revealed, because he had been reviled continuously. One of my brothers wouldn't allow his name to be mentioned, he was so angry. But, [clears throat] that was a question of, partly politics and mostly very poor judgment, because he left the United States mainland anyway, to… It was before Hawaii was a state. And that's where he, he decided he would go to die, and [where] he was buried.

See, his wife had been the daughter of … oh, I can't remember the first name … Morrow, I'm pretty sure the name was.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hum. Yeah.

Jeanne Finnegan: Well, her father was the American ambassador to Mexico during the time, in 1927, when Lindbergh flew to Paris. And one of places … [Chuckle] because he was meeting, … people wanted to meet him, you know, all these … fellows [Laugh] that were in politics wanted to meet him. And he went to the embassy in Mexico City, I assume it is. And he met this family. And he came back later on and asked her [Anne Morrow] to marry him. Well, she was as outgoing as he was. Just … Lone-Eagle was the best word for him; because he was always alone. But, she was a navigator when he set up the route for Pan-American Airways. And she was not only a navigator, but she gave birth within weeks after they got back from that extended trip. Nobody knew where, because there hadn't been a route mapped until he did it. He couldn't do it alone, and she was willing to go with him. Now, that, [Laugh] to me, was what you call, "Far beyond the duty of any wife." But, she never got a medal for it. But, anyway that's my….Excuse me a minute, I'm going to take a drink of water; I'm losing my voice.

Janis Kozlowski: Sure, go right ahead. [Pause]

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:10:11] Now, that was off the topic. If you, you know, anytime I get off, just tell me … and I'll quit.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh no, that's fine. It's always good to hear what, what, ah, people remember and what was influential, ah, during that time period. So that just; that was great.

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:10:32] Well, of course, you know, we had … I'm trying to remember the name.

But, anyway, once the war was underway, then, of course, we found that … I'm not sure how soon afterwards we knew that, but, take the 7th Avenue "L" [elevated commuter train track.], it was knocked down, and they called it, [Chuckle] "The Avenue of the Americas." I don't think anybody ever uses that [name], but, that's the sign in Manhattan. And the Japanese had bought all this scrap [from it]. They were the only ones, at that time, that were willing to pay anything for scrap metal. Because it was, [the] depression, and things were not being manufactured at a great rate.

So we got the 7th Avenue "L" back at us in the form of bullets. And [Chuckle] they kept repeating that. I don't know how many bullets the Japanese got out of the 7th Avenue "L", but, they got what they wanted out of it.

And then of course, when it came to constructing; Kaiser built some ships. [Laugh] I have no idea of the dimensions of the ships, but they bounced around in the [Chuckle] ocean, more or less like a rubber ball. And my husband happened to be on one of those when he went to work in Alaska for one of the construction companies. And he said, "The ship would come up out of the water, so that the propeller in the back - I know that, it must have a name - would be going around real fast, beating at the air and shaking the ship. So that these fellows that had never been on a ship [Chuckle] like this, a lot of these men, were terrified. When they finally got to Alaska, they had lost so much weight they were almost gone. But, they got there.

Now, Kaiser built those ships so quickly that it was a wonder they stayed, you know, that they stayed in one piece. But, that's where, one of places, where he [my husband] got started in the industry. I'm not sure that, that company still exists. But, I'll never forget the stories about it. It was quite a feat to get those ships able to get people where they wanted to go.

[0:13:11] And, of course, I was graduated in '41. And it was almost the middle of '42 before I was able to find a job. Jobs were few and far between. And that particular part of the depression lasted, in the east anyway, first in the northeast, until after the middle of the 1950s. So, when they talk about the depression, there were many people that have different impressions of the depression, as such.

Of course, in the northern part of the northeast, the depression started at the end of the First World War. And, in parts of that northeast section, that depression really has never ended. Because, what they lost, has never been recouped. They're in different businesses now, and they have a more even economy; it doesn't fluctuate wildly. It's apt to be on the low side, it will go up a bit, but it never jumps. And sometimes it never goes down very far. I'm not too familiar with it right now, because, the only daughter I have in New England - her husband is in a field that didn't exist years ago. He's in the manufacturing for medicinal -- not medicinal, medical use - like, the machine they use if you've got diabetes: the Dialysis Machine. They make parts for the different machinery that's used. And, most of that, not all of it, but a good part of that machinery, is plastic.

And the Worchester-Green Field-Leominster part of Massachusetts is where the plastic industry started. It's roughly, oh … I guess … close to; it's a little bit over a hundred years ago that it got started. And it took a long time to take hold, [and] lots of money was lost in the very beginning. Because it took a lot of money, there's no way of manufacturing.

Jeanne and her graduating class, Queens College, 1941. Photo courtesy Theresa Osborne.

And in parts of the country, New York City, especially, it was subject to combustion. I don't know just why, because I know nothing about the process. But, New York City reached the point where they wouldn't allow any of those factories within the city limits. At the time, warehouses around the city…. Of course, this is the first time you haven't had to have inventory that would last for days. The transportation; and the use: it's one place where they save money. If they plan to use something on January 10th they don't want it; [don't] have to store it more than, let's say, two days. So, these buildings that used to be warehouses have to be filled. Of course, now they fill them with other things.

[0:16:52] But, when they had these big warehouses, let's say you were manufacturing something that required painting before it was ready to leave the factory floor. Well, you'd store paint. But, it also might need welding. Well, in those days, welders didn't [weld] the way they do now; the welding came in acetylene and oxygen. So, the acetylene was supposed to be stored in one place, the oxygen a goodly distance away

from it. And if they brought what they needed to make paint, the same thing happened there: you had to store the products separately. But, they never had enough inspectors to make sure of that.

So after two, or three, I'm not sure how many warehouses actually burned; but, when I was probably 10 or 12, a humongous, a very big warehouse, burned. And a young man down the street was a fireman on that firehouse [sic]. I forget how many firemen were killed. That marked the end of that; New York [City] decided they weren't going to stand for that. So they had those warehouses locked for a while, while they went through and made sure that the regulations were put in place; I mean, the regulations in place, were put in force.

And of course, that meant many industries just left the city. They just went across the river to, New Jersey. And of course, some of them probably went south. But it's still … welding is still a dangerous thing to do. But, it comes; the acetylene and oxygen, [Unclear word, sounds like "for it,] in a tank. And they are pretty well managed.

Of course, the other thing is; the men that use the welding torches have these hoods, or masks; I'm not sure what they call them, to protect their eyes and protect their breathing. Which, they didn't have before. These guys, after they'd been doing that for a while, their lungs were shattered. But, that's another story.

Janis Kozlowski: Did your … was your husband working in that industry?

Jeanne Finnegan: Oh, no; that was my father.

Janis Kozlowski: Your father. Okay.

Jeanne Finnegan: He didn't work in the industry; he worked for the city of New York starting right after the First World War. And he was clerk in charge of fire prevention for the Borough of Brooklyn, or King; [Chuckle] it's called Kings County, if you're talking to State, and it's … Borough of Brooklyn if you're talking … city. He started by working in Manhattan and then he … in the Manhattan office of fire prevention. But then, Brooklyn became an industrial site. So they built a new, put up a new building. And he was in charge of fire prevention.

[0:20:03] And there were so many… [Chuckle] See the, scrap became necess…. A lot of things turned into scrap after they'd been used for a while, you know: old cars and things like that. And so, many of the scrap dealers had junkyards; and most of the junkyards were run by recent immigrants from Italy. And my father [Chuckle] could talk Italian. So they [Chuckle] came to him from all over to read the directions, you know, read the regulations. And he ... and he finally had a, a couple of people in other departments. See, there were several departments involved in this fire prevention: The Building Code, The Fire Code, and something else, I don't remember. Actually, [Chuckle] guys that couldn't; they could talk enough English, and they knew about, you know, they knew the

value of money; but they couldn't read. They might not of [have] even been able to read in their own language! I don't know.

Jeanne D'Antonio, Jones Beach, May 1933. Photo courtesy Theresa Osborne.

So, anyway, they would [Laugh] come to him in such numbers that at one time, his whole department was under a very serious investigation to find out what the Sam Hill was going on. And there wasn't one person that had gotten, to; could say, my father ever got

a dime from any of these guys; because, he never did. And he, [Chuckle] when the firemen … got wounded and couldn't get back on the job, let's say, for six weeks, or something like that; they'd be sent to this office, to my [Chuckle] father, who was, had to … you know, he was more or less running it. And they; many of them, were just so angry that they couldn't stay home and go to the races, or something. [Chuckle] They refused to do any work; absolutely refused. Some of them were willing to do some things like filing, or something, where you didn't have to be, you know; you had to know what you were doing with the alphabet, but you didn't have to know much else.

But, some of the younger ones that it would be more, or less, a minor injury, but they couldn't get back to work, would … do what they could do to help. And so, he, he got a reputation [Laugh] even among the, among the uniformed guys that were always crabbing: that they didn't think the uniformed men wanted this; this particular job. They didn't think it was a good idea to have white collar guys running things.

[0:22:44] And of course, the uniform men got periodic raises. And these fellows that had worked from the end of the First World War, they were greeted with: first a 10% cut during the war, and then a 20% cut. And, [they] never got it back until [Chuckle] … prob…. Let's see, ah … you could retire at 65 [years old]. Or, you could wait; if you were in pretty good health, you could wait till you were 70. So my father decided to wait until he was 70.

And [Laugh] the, oh, gosh; there was a union…. Anyway, the drivers, I can't remember the name of the union off hand, got wind of what was going on: that these men had never been repaid this twenty percent. And here it was, 19… late 1960, and the [Chuckle] war was over in 19 … 45. Anyhow, this union got [Chuckle] to looking into it; they asked for a certain amount of money to do the investigation. So by this time, most of the guys had died. Of course, there were men and women. But, most of them … were long since dead. So, when they came, [and] finally … got to the city council and made such a lot of noise about it, this council [Chuckle] gave them some money; which was a pittance in a way. But, it was a moral victory. So, [Chuckle] my father [Chuckle] got this check; and a day, or two later he retired.

But, [Laugh] it, you know it's; you wonder sometimes, why [you] have to go to such…. You worked every day; in fact, they worked long hours - and, many times, when they weren't being paid a full salary. And, lots of people thought, "Everybody that worked for the city was a Jimmy Walker," I guess; "that took every dime he could." But, they weren't.

Anyway, they had the moral victory of not being able to bring charges against the whole unit. Plus, they finally got their money back.

[Chuckle] Things that go on, you know. They're talking about these Ponzi deals. Well, the Ponzi deals went on for years and years. But they were, you know, small …

comparatively speaking. So that, now, I don't know how people fell asleep, giving money away.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. [Clears throat] What was your husband doing during the war? You were married, right?

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:25:38] No, I wasn't married. I, no, I wasn't married until the war was over. And in fact, he was old enough; he was eleven years older than I. And, which made him old enough, so he wasn't subject to the draft, until toward the end. Toward the end of the war, they started taking people between thirty-eight and forty-two, something like that. And that hit pretty hard on some, some people. Because, some of them had not been called up because of age, or some minor reason, you know, [like a] health reason that wasn't considered. As long as you weren't going to be in the Air Force, you didn't … they were taking people at the age of around forty that had trouble with hearing and trouble with eye sight, and things like that. At one point, they wouldn't take anyone with flat feet. But, of course, they gave that up, after awhile.

But, he was called up. But, he wasn't OK'd by the draft board. And then, he decided he wanted to do something; so that's when he answered this add, to work for Bechtel in Alaska. But, you had to get yourself there; which cost a little bit. But, you weren't actually hired until you set your feet in Alaska, on, [Laugh] you know, firmly on the ground in Alaska. They, I'm pretty sure; they didn't pay a dime toward getting [men] there. You might have been reimbursed to a certain extent.

But, seasick; oh my…. See they, the ship went from Seattle … and I can't tell you what city in Alaska. And then, another ship took them from Alaska to one of the Aleutian Islands. And then they went from that island to Adak. So, most of the time, he was on Adak. And I don't remember, for sure, the name of the other island. And what they were doing on Adak was, they were putting a tar roofing on the, where the airplanes are - hangers. And then they were building a hospital. He worked nights most of the time. And according to him, it's very; it was never really full daylight, at that time. But you could see the … these mountains that … blow up…

Janis Kozlowski: Volcanoes?

Jeanne Finnegan: Volcanoes. He could see the volcanoes better at night, and they were spewing sparks all over the place. So that; you've nev… it was never fully dark. And the other thing was, they were tar; it was tar, hot tar they were putting on these roofs. So, he wore three or four pairs [of] overalls, or coveralls; or whatever you want to call them. And after the first layer [Chuckle] had burned through, you know, he put; the next day, he put on a fresh layer, I guess. I don't know how he did it, but, [he put on] about four pairs of coveralls on so that they [sparks] didn't burn all the way through to your skin. Occasionally, of course, there'd be sparks that would come from some place or other; and you would get burned.

[0:29:28] But, usually … and then, you see, the place was on two, twenty-four hour shifts; I'm pretty sure; two, twenty-four; [laugh] two, TWELVE hour shifts. And they had one tent that was devoted to the gambling, and those guys would gamble all [the time], you know - whenever they weren't working. And some of them, I don't know whether they ever did go to sleep; or else, they just would go to work one day…. And so, [Chuckle] they, some of them won so much money; they would stay up drinking coffee and wait for the post office to open. That's the only the money they got off the island. And money disappeared occasionally; if a guy didn't stay awake, he woke up to an empty bag - the money was gone.

And so, [Chuckle] one of my cousins who was up there; and fortunately, betting more than you should, is not a contagious disease. Because, he had to send, he had to send home for money to get away fro… to leave the Aleutians when the jobs were over. And of course, my husband had been sending money home regularly to his family. He wasn't interested in gambling; he tried it a couple of times and he lost whatever he bet. So [Chuckle] he didn't come back.

But, the guys that were running the gambling tent, were licensed, or had permission from Bechtel to do it. So that, they, the company knew who was in charge. And there was always a group that was [were] … they probably were subcontractors. [And] like, they [there] were Chinese that had their game. And John said, "You never saw the dice, or the money handled any quicker." It was like, slight of hand; you, [Chuckle] would have to know [Chuckle] what you were looking for to see what was going on.

Janis Kozlowski: Huh.

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:31:40] So that, if you were a greenhorn, it was a no place for you at all. And my hus… my cousin, is one of these smart alecks, that, as he finished school, the principal of the school, high school, said, "Well, he's just smart enough; so he's either going to be a complete failure, or he's going to be a, a complete," [Laugh] you know, "he's going to earn a lot of money and be up top of his game." He married, and remarried several times. But, he never wound up with any money. No, he never … held on to it long enough. And finally, he was wanted for something, or other; [he] disappeared, and his family didn't know where he was. Until, eventually, they heard from him once in a great while, but never really knew where he was; which is a sad thing when you stop and think about it - that anybody, more, or less, literally, throws his life away.

So fortunately; [Laugh] and, my mother used to get some weird telephone calls, claiming to know where he was, and trying to get money out of her. And she never replied, thank god. But, you know, some people, just … it's a little scary; but you just have to be careful.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:33:09] Yeah. Yeah. Now, how, how long did your husband work up in Alaska?

Jeanne Finnegan: Well, it was roughly a year; because, they had a year's contract. And of course, the contract started, as I say, the day you got to Alaska. Well, it took; by the time he was able to … get passage across the country; that was the New York State Liimited, I guess they call it. Or, the New York Limited, [that] went from New York to Chicago and then from Chicago to Seattle. And it got to Seattle, and they had to wait … I don't know, what [it] was, a couple of days, until the ship was ready to take them to Alaska. So, I think it was almost a week he was on his way. [Laugh]

And of course, being an Irish, he always liked to have a [Chuckle] nip of…. Anyway, he, he had a heck of a time [Chuckle] trying to find a bottle of hooch. And in Seattle, it was a dry state, or a dry town; I don't remember which. And [Chuckle] I don't remember how much it cost. But, of course, the whole United States was under prohibition. [It] was prohibition. When it, yeah, when it went into effect; I can't even remember when it went to effect. But, prohibition itself was over.

But, it, [was] state by state; and in some places, like the tow… like, the state of Vermont, it was town by town - you could be in one town, go five miles, and you couldn't get a drink. So, that, it, [Laugh] the whole country was like that; you had to know where you were before you asked for a drink, [or] you could put, you [Laugh] you could be put in jail. [Both laugh]

But, and of course, the [Laugh] bootleggers were thriving all this time. Some of those bootleggers were vicious, and others where just kind of cute; they liked getting away with, you know, breaking the law. And others didn't know that you shouldn't put … anything acidic in something metal; … that you could be, you could blind a person drinking that, can be blinded. Or, else, he could even, if he had enough of it, it would kill you. So, lots of people, in the beginning of this moon shining business, were blinded. And they just didn't associate it for awhile.

So, that … that put, at least; you see, there was no such; in other words, you had to use glass, at that time; if you didn't use metal. There was no such thing as plastic. And on a job many years after the war was over, my husband was on a job … constructing … the construction was below ground, because it was going to have to have lead doors; it was to get ready for storage of radioactive material for this radiation treatment [facility] in this hospital. And it was about a hundred and ten degrees in this below ground area. And somebody thought to … somebody working in the hospital, decided these fellows should have a cold drink. Well, by George, I don't know what position they had in the hospital; they must have been mopping the floors, because they put lemonade in a metal container. And my husband noticed, and he told the guys "Don't drink that; that's a metal container, and there's too much acid in this." And, of course, at that time, it was the beginning of using … the substitutes for … instead of lemon - and it; [which] was more acidic than a lemon ever was. And these guys got sick. And if … you'd wonder, here it is, many, many years after the hooch, no, the bootlegging, was found to cause blindness. And this guy, or woman, or whoever it was, didn't know the difference. So all these guys on that

job, not all of them, but a good number of them, got sick. Fortunately, I don't think anyone died. But, a couple of them were blinded.

Janis Kozlowski: Boy; that was a high price to pay.

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:37:36] Yes. But the thing is; it is. I think some people … don't seem to take health as anything serious until they break a toe, or, you know, do something where they have to go to a doctor. They're more afraid of a doctor, than they are of getting hurt. And it's an odd situation. And even in this day and age when people are more, more or less educated; there are a lot of people who have no conception of what it takes, they're annoyed when they're reminded to wash their hands. And that's the first defense against anything and everything; making sure your fingernails are clean.

And of course, [Laugh] we had to go through that when we went to school; the very first thing in the morning, the teacher was checking our hands and our fingernails and … making sure. And if she didn't like what she saw, the next time she saw it, you went home. You were allowed one infraction, and that was it. And we were walking to school in those days, so that if you lived a pretty [Chuckle] good distance from school, you didn't like walking home; because you would; expected that you'd come back.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, things were stricter then. [Laugh]

Jeanne Finnegan: I find that the schools were … I don't know if; yes they might have been stricter. But, they were there to teach. They didn't have all of this extraneous stuff that's been added in the last 25 or 30 years. Teaching [now] is the lowest thing on the teachers schedule, they're hounded by different groups and different … I don't know just how to explain. And their days … the unions managed to get the days shortened, so that the children … and what they're learning is the last thing that's being considered, lots of times.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Jeanne Finnegan: So that, we need longer days. We need.… And we have to, tea… [Have] younger teachers. And some of them have gone into private schools; some of them have gone trying to make a difference in public schools. Hopefully, these younger people … have a way of engaging the students. Because, these old circ…. The most serious thing is, the, curriculum has been slow to change. They [teachers], they're caught flat footed as far as TV went. The Radio was a completion, but not as much as TV. Because your radio, didn't have a…. [Chuckle] Well, of course, one thing; it didn't have a picture. We used to love to listen to ballgames, and there were other things [on the] radio. But, after they had radios that you could walk around with … that … made a difference. But now, if there is something you like on TV; of course you can't carry a TV around with you. And some people have them in the cars. But, it's not … it's just more distracting. And they'll … lots of children can almost read and write before they get to school, now.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

Jeanne Finnegan: Because there is equipment that you can buy that isn't very expensive; you can go to the library, and preschoolers can learn right there at the library, if they, you know, if there's somebody that will take them [there]. And some mothers do. So, the teacher's, *See Spot Run,* is no place to start. I think most schools have caught up there. But, for years, my youngest daughter, I think, would still [read] *See Spot Run* when she got to grade school; which was ridiculous.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Let me ask you about, ah…. I assume that you were communicating with your; um, he wasn't your husband, then. But, you were communicating with, ah…

Jeanne Finnegan: No, I hadn't even met him.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, you hadn't…. Okay.

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:42:01] No, it was an odd situation. [Laugh] I probably should tell you, it would explain a little bit. My mother is one of eight. And she had … five sisters. One of her sisters was married to a Finnegan. And then, one of her sisters was married to my mother-in-law's brother. So, that was a Dyer. So, she had never been to Vermont, but she was the only one in the family that didn't visit there. Because … with; one was married to a Dyer, which was the mother, up there. And the other one is married to a Finnegan, who is the father. And that family had seven children: six girls and one boy. So that, this fellow I finally met, he was the only man in the … you know, he was the only boy; in other words, only son.

And … the war was over in '45; in, a…, 'course, that was August, I'm pretty sure. And I was the, I was just not going to go in; well, if I had to, go into Manhattan to work, I was not going to Manhattan on a hot summers day to work. [Laugh] My father was furious. I said, "I've worked long hours, and I've worked here." And it was fairly close to home; I could have walked home at times. I said, "I'm not going into Manhattan to work. And I'm taking time off 'till it cools off a little." It was a very hot summer; oh it was hot. So, one of my mother's sisters, the one that was married to the Dyer; decided she was going to Vermont, because her husband was making life [Chuckle] miserable. He wanted to go see his sister, and he didn't want to get on a train and go; he wanted to be driven up. OK. So, she asked me to go along so she could have somebody beside; somebody to talk to. I don't know what her reason was. But anyway, so, I jumped at the chance.

I get to Vermont … and this, his name is John, had come home from the Aleutians the week before, I think it was; I think he'd been home a week, or two - less than a month, let's put it that way. And he [Chuckle] again, he was on the roof; he was roofing the porch - the front porch had developed a leak. Of course; there wasn't anybody that was doing anything around that house as far as keeping it up to date as long as he wasn't

home. Well, of course, the… his version of the story was, "She got out of the car and climbed that ladder; she was bound [Laugh] … she must have been [Chuckle] looking for a man." But anyway after we met … somehow, or other, it's just one of those things you just don't explain.

When we were on our way home, my aunt said to me, "Now, you know, you've just met John, and I would say to you, 'don't throw your heart away yet.'" Because she had had several disappointing things happen to her. And, so, anyhow, she was trying to tell me to forget him. And I wasn't so sure about that. But, anyway, that's how we met. So, I was 26, and he was … let's see, 37, or 38 - by the time we got married. I was … I was 46 when we got married; ah, 26 when we got married in '46. And he was … 37, or 38, depending upon what time of year…. I can't … my arithmetic isn't too good.

[0:46:12] But it flabbergasted everybody. My brothers were sure I was going to be an old maid. And I was; I guess I was a difficult; I was stubborn as a mule about a lot of things. But, we lived in the largest city in Vermont; we lived in Burlington, Vermont the first four years - along Lake Champlain. And he hated the city. And, of course, I was not, especially; I wasn't crazy about the City of Burlington. Because, there were a lot of people, that; if you didn't belong to the country club, or you didn't belong to the "such and such" a club; you weren't … you weren't the type they wanted to [Chuckle] speak to. Because, my sister-in-law, was involved in every social club that ever came down he pike; and she had a, she generally had a hard time. Because, I never was like that; my mother was never like that. We had friends, but they weren't, they weren't [social] climbers, I guess you'd call it.

So anyway, we had three children, and an awful lot of…. We got to the farm, and of course, that had been allowed to run down to the point where it was unbelievable. And I had no idea it was in such bad shape. But, as soon as he could, he [my husband] was able to fix it up.

So it was a rough go, for a while. But it was one of those things that; I was called a Flatlander, coming from New York and Vermont; because it's mountainous. Most people just didn't pay much attention. I didn't get out an awful lot. And I got home about once a year; I made sure I got back to see my folks. And in the mean time, of course, we; any traveling we did, was to see his folks.

And we … he was one of these people who are very hard working. We bought cows, and we tried farming. But, we hit farming just as the bottom fell out in New England. So that, we had what they call, "The New England Compact," no … taxes involved. Each farmer was; contributed a certain amount for each hundred weight of milk that he shipped to the processor. And the processors added a coup… let's say, one third as much as the farmer to this same pool. And when the price of the milk went down below a certain point, this revolving fund would pay the farmer. And then as soon as the price came up, the farmer was back contributing to the pool. And so, it was a year; they based it on a year round average. So, up until that time, farmers were paid … just during the full milk

season. So, anyway, they had some income year round; they weren't paid just twice a month.

So then, the guys in the Midwest decided; they lied consistently about; and they had more money behind them. So, most people in the cities thought that these farmers that had this fund, were using tax money; we weren't. There wasn't a dime of tax money in any of it. So, of course, we lost out; not only lost out on that, but; the farmers in the west were shipping milk into the east … for less than it could be produced in the east.

Well, of course, the hand writing was on - not only on the wall, but, we had milk to sell. But, what you feed the cows cost more than they were earning. So, we had to sell the cows, and … and John went to work as a carpenter.

So, he was on jobs. He had belonged to the union under some circumstance or other. And, so anyway, he continued to work for … and he was under the union in the Burlington Local … and worked throughout the state of Vermont. So, that, there were times when he came home once a week, and there were other times when it was close enough, so that he came home a couple of times a week. And other times, if he was, if the job happened to be closer - which at one point it was … about thirty-five minutes away - it was unbelievable, he was home every night.

But, he [John] was … he was home most of time when the oldest of the girls were growing up. So, that, he was a very, very good influence on all of them; but, mostly on the oldest ones. Because, he had a very … comparatively, even temper; [if] something that wasn't fair, would [happen]; really, he'd blow up at that.

[0:52:06] But, he [John] worked, he volunteered for things to do in the town. They were paid peanuts for the different jobs he had. So, in the winter time, when there was nothing to do as far as work went, he'd be working around the farm. And at least, [Chuckle] two of the girls, learned quite a bit from him.

Janis Kozlowski: Well now, let's, let's, um, ah, maybe can go back for a minute to WWII.

Jeanne Finnegan: Oh sure! I, I, when I get off track, just, just nudge me, or whatever.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay, that's alright. [Chuckle] What did you do during the war years?

Jeanne Finnegan: [0:52:47] During the war, I worked for an outfit they called, "Fairchild." Now, there were three, three Fairchild Corporations. I worked for the Ranger Aircraft Division of Fairchild. And I think it was Fairchild Instruments, but I don't know. I really, I call; had to call my brother. And he said, "Well, there were three of them, and I don't really know." And as I remember it, it was Fairchild in Hollis New York; it was either Hollis, or Jamaica. Because, they had a, they bordered each other. And I lived in Richmond Hill, and I could walk to the plant. So, that it was in an area

were you'd go a few blocks and you were in a different, you were in a place with a different name; but, you were still on Long Island, and you were still a very short distance from everything else. It was, that part of the city, or that part of Long Island, was the only part that was, had a dense population. Because, the potato fields were still all around us, as I was growing up.

So, that, let's see, Fairchild had a plant in Farmingdale. And the planes came off the … I guess, you know, they came out of the factory, anyway; on to what had been a potato field. And they'd only just smoothed it up. They didn't really do anything that made it a regular, what you'd call a regular airfield. But, they did that all over the island. I think there were five corporations manufacturing airplanes; airplane parts. And the ones that finally put the planes together - put the fuselage and everything together - were nearest [to] these improvised airfields.

Now, Mitchell Field was active, the fields in Farmingdale were active, and of course, parts of … in Connecticut they did a lot of construction. But, whether they had an airfield up there, I don't really remember. They had Colt Firearms where they manufactured the best firearms. But, then they finished making … putting the engines together at Ranger Aircraft.

And Ranger Aircraft had bought at least two buildings that were connected with a walkway on the second floor, I think it was - that had been a doll factory. And I had worked in that building when it was a doll factory. I couldn't [Chuckle] believe that this was the same place I had worked earlier!

I know I started in '42, but I don't really remember what month it was. Oh, it; yeah, it wasn't '41, it was late '42. It might have even been early '43. But, we had to be; see, once I applied for the job, I had to be investigated - I had to be OK'd by the FBI. So, I had applied … for the job at Ranger Aircraft several months earlier. And I had also applied for a job at what they called, "Atlantic Beach." Well, the Atlantic Beach job came up first, and I had gone out for an interview. And the next thing I knew, I went back for something; I guess I went back for a second interview. And she [the interviewer] was furious. She said, "Why didn't you tell me you'd been hired by Ranger Aircraft." And I said, "I haven't been hired by Ranger Aircraft." "Well how come the FBI was here and tell [told] me you'd been hired." I said, "Well, they know something [Chuckle] I don't know, then." [Both chuckle]

But, [Laugh] they went in and gave her my name; and of course it had my picture. Three of them [FBI Agents] had blanketed the area where I lived. And of course, to get out to it, Atlantic Beach, I had to; I wasn't crazy about taking that job, because I had to take the rail. I had to get on the Long Island Railroad to get there, and then walk a bit. So, [Chuckle] she was just so furious. I didn't realize that; that they had just…. Anyway, they must have said they had hired me, but [were] just waiting for the FBI to give its approval. So, they couldn't tell me. But, I must have been the last one [Chuckle] that they interviewed.

And so, I was still using a bus to get someplace; I don't remember just why. And the guys on the bus said, "What in the world have you done? The FBI is asking everybody about you. We didn't know your name, or anything." And, of course these guys on the bus had no reason to [say anything]; but I rode the same bus for eight years. [Laugh] And finally, people in the neighborhood that never spoke to me were asking me the same thing, "Are we going to see you in headlines going to jail?" [Both laugh]

So, [Laugh] finally, I was told I was hired. And I went out for that final interview. And I was to work for T. and E. Alphonsus O'Rourke, and, of course, [Chuckle] another Irishmen. So, [Laugh] I, he was offering me, you know, he told me how much it was going to be for; the: $18 a week. And I get home and tell my father. [And] he said, "You went to college to start work for $18 a week!" Well, [Laugh] it's a wonder he didn't show me the door. And [Laugh] I said, "Well, he said I'd get a raise every thirty days for the first ninety days, and after that it was up to me to do a good job." By George, he was as good as his word: end of thirty; end of ninety days, I had had three raises. And he said, "You don't want a…." I'd been hired as a stenographer, and I knew very little about stenography, because I'd only taken it for three months. He said, "You don't want to be a stenographer. You can get a better rate if you're a clerk." I said, "Okay."

So I was a clerk in charge of five people. [Laugh] And the thing [Chuckle] about that job that always made me smile, was [that] nobody, but, nobody, that was working for me, seemed to have learned the alphabet. They were forever coming to me wanting to know, "Does it; which goes first?" And you wouldn't believe [it]; you go to the, [Laugh] alphabetical file, and it would be a mess; absolute mess. People just didn't pay much attention when they were filing. So, fortunately, we had a; now… we had a numerical file. And, so, if you knew the name; and of course, usually, we knew the ... at least we knew the name. Then, we could go the numerical file.

Yeah, I don't know how we did it. But, eventually, I kind of memorized … After a while, I memorized the names and the numbers. So, that [Chuckle] when I was looking for something, I first went to the numerical files. And then, if I needed the alphabetical file to bring something up to date, then, I'd have to go searching. But, it was ridiculous.

And we had a; St. Auburns Hospital was … oh, about half… about a mile, or, probably two miles along the coast. And people; some of the young men were assigned to St. Auburns Hospital as; I cannot remember what they called them. But, they were medics of some sort. And so, a couple of those men had wives that worked for us. And a [Laugh] couple of times, the wives would forget where they were, you know; we were in New York City and they had come from other states, or even other countries. And they'd come running in and [say] "It's a long distance call for Mr. O'Rourke." And I'd say, "Are you sure it's long distance? Where is it?" They'd be calling from Manhattan. And these young [Chuckle] women were thinking it was a long distance call. I'd say, "You probably better take a message. And tell 'em, 'he'll call back'." And I said, "That isn't long distance, that's [Chuckle] just off of the river in Manhattan.

So, it was quite an experience; because some of these women were very good. But, a lot of them, the alphabet just defeated them. And, it got so, that I wasn't, I guess, I must have been not paying attention. Everybody went to lunch at the same time, except for me. I'd wait until at least two people were back, and then I'd go to lunch. Well, one day the, my boss's boss, was trying to figure out what was going on. And he came in and he gave me, holy whatever. He said, "Don't you ever have so many people out! We're getting complaints; they can't get through to this office." Well, of course, I was taking the calls as fast as they; as fast as I could. But, I thought, "If they all went to lunch at once, it was easy to keep track," I guess. I don't know. Well, after that, we had to have them go every fifteen minutes; or, at least we had to have at least two people [working]. And, of course, I guess, after awhile, at least three people answering the phone.

And we were on this walkway that connected the two buildings. So, in the winter time, I wear [wore] two pairs of socks and a pair of ankle high shoes. [Laugh] And my feet would be freezing all-day-long. In the factory building, the windows never completely closed; so that you always had some fresh air. And the snow would come [Chuckle] in on these steam radiators; and the snow would sizzle. And I'd be taking off my jacket, you know, I'd have on two or three layers on top, as well as on my feet. Well, I would take off the jackets; and maybe I had a scarf on. You almost needed mittens; but, of course, you couldn't type with mittens.

And [Chuckle] then in the summer time, [Laugh] we weren't allowed to go to work without any clothes on. But, oh my god it was hot! And [Chuckle] what I found was, that if I wore something as light as I could kind find, that was long sleeve, I was cooler. Because if you wore something light, of a light color, it would deflect some of the sun and you weren't as hot as if your arms were bare. It was very, very hot. And, of course, anything…. If there was a breeze, you couldn't take full advantage of the breeze, because, the next thing you know, everything was blowing off your desk. And if the door was open, it was blowing down the hall. And of course [Chuckle] you couldn't … [Chuckle] we were supposed to be the records keeper; we weren't supposed to be the ones who were throwing them away. [Both laugh]

[1:05:22] It got to be what you'd call, kind of; it was never, a "Circus," but, we had to have a sense of humor, because, it was not; these were not the best conditions. And, of course, the paper pushers were considered the last thing that was necessary. So, we were paid the least of anybody in that building. Each shift; the day shift was paid, I think they started out at; they came up to 65 cents an hour before the war was over. But, I don't remember what they started at. Anyway, the day shift was [paid] a flat rate … of let's say, 65 cents an hour. But, they got over time if they were on a machine.

Okay, and then the next shift got a premium. I think it was 20 cents … it might have been 15 cents an hour. Then the night shift got a premium that was more than that.

The swing shift was really the most popular with many of the women, because, that way they could get home in time to put the children to bed; and their husbands would be home to take the children to school.

And then the, then there was what they called the tool group. And these were the fellows that were making the parts; anytime there was a change in a part, or they got new parts, they had to … to make copies. They were locked in the tool crib. And these copies; they were following a template - I think they call it: T-E-M-P-L-A-T-E.

If we're making a dress, you call it a pattern. And that was name for a pattern. And they were very conscious of the fact that they wanted these patterns to not be available expect to the company, and of course, except, to our own country. And of course, there was a little rivalry between companies. But, I, I don't think it was, ah, I'm not sure how serious that was. Of course, now, something like that between companies is considered very serious.

[1:07:55] And of course, they were limited … and on paper, they were limited to not more than 50% profit on what they manufactured. So, in some cases, you had more people than you actually needed. And … in other cases, they gave the title of "Supervisor" to a fellow that worked twelve hours; because he was actually supervising. But, it meant he was working the twelve hours for less than the guys he was supervising. And in some cases, it was, it was really unfair. Because, some of those inspectors … did work that was up and beyond the call of duty. And it was really unfair. But, if you weren't working there, you might be picked up by the Army; or … or you just wouldn't work; because there was still a problem with jobs, for many of the men. The women were able to work for less in many cases. And, of course, then, there were some people just that didn't want to, as usual, just didn't want to work.

So that … parts of the depression were caused by the fact that the unions started to become rather strong. And in order to undermine that.… Well, the guys that worked, wrapping, let's say, wrapping cigars - the U.S. and New England was raising tobacco. But the kind that they call the "Wrapper," in other words, the cigars that came from Cuba, were completed with a wrap from Massachusetts.

There was a series of valleys where the, the tobacco was raised. And, and it was an interesting area to drive through. Because, there was ... sleet and hail stones would damage the tobacco plants. So, these tobacco plants, were in field after field that were covered with cheese cloth, to protect the, the leaves from the, from these ice crystals. And it [Chuckle] it was a very…. And then, as these; as the tobacco was harvested, there were; these tobacco leaves were hung in barns that had the sides … were allowed to be opened. In other words, it would be like, the slats in a … well, like the slats in a vertical blind, let's say: you'd pull it out a certain distance so that the air could circulate through out that barn. And if a rain storm, or something was forecasted, of course, they'd close up the slates.

And my mother had relatives in Massachusetts. And it was usually early fall - late summer, early fall we made that trip. And it was just in time to see all these fields with these cheese clothes. And then if you went a little later in the season, it would be all these barns that had the sides open. And I don't remember.… It was parts of Massachusetts and probably parts of other states in that general area, but I think Massachusetts was mostly that.

[1:12:16] And of course, the Mohawk; my grandmother, Murphy, was born and raised in the, along the Mohawk, where the … there were very few east west roads. In fact, I think, it's almost none. The rivers ran north and south. And the rivers were the chief mode of transportation for many, many years; so that the roads were apt to follow the rivers. So this road from Greenfield, Massachusetts to Albany, New York, was called a, "Plank Road." It was put down, heavy, heavy wood, of some sort … was put down. But, I don't know how wide it was; wide enough to accommodate what cars they had.

But, it was a way of getting over the mud between the time [Chuckle] the snow was melting. See, they didn't plow the roads; they "rolled" the roads. So that the road; in an area that had plenty of snow, the snow would be as high as, let's say, the second story window. So these [Chuckle] guys going by rolling the roads, would be wearing, would have …. What's [Chuckle] that place that they call them? Well, the rugs were made out of anything that was a pelt - bear skins, deer skin.… But, bear skin was preferred, I guess.

And then they'd have, at their feet, they'd have these … bricks, or stones, that had been heated. And they'd put some cloth around it, so, to hold some of the heat, and to also to transmit it to their feet. And [Laugh] anything they were carrying, of course, would be frozen. And the story was, that they; at that time, they could buy, oh, a fair amount of alcohol for about 10 cents. Well, of course, [Chuckle] it would be 100% alcohol; so they would add water to it. And they called it, "The original 10 cents worth," [which] was considered medic… for medical reasons. So, they'd have, a [Chuckle] doctor would write the prescription. And then they, [Laugh] they'd get to where, or, whoever who had ordered the alcohol. And they'd just tear [Chuckle] this wooden box open that would be just full of these small containers of alcohol. And I guess it disappeared about as fast as the box was broken. [Both laugh]

But, [Laugh] they, [Chuckle] I don't know; I think most of these stories had a, had a bit of truth in them. But, one story that kept, that was repeated for many years was: the fellows that were rolling the roads, many times there would be more than one, but, often it was just one person on the, on the roller; unless he was meeting, you know, meeting a train. And then, of course, whoever was on the train would get on and roll it with him. They were; [Chuckle] the ones with the … they'd be going by a window, and some smart-aleck would be mooning them. [Chuckle] They always had great stories about what was happening along the roads. Here they were, up second story height, rolling these roads.

And of course, then, when the snow was melting and the roads were breaking up, there was little or no travel, because, you'd be up to your knees in mud. And that was the time of year that they were supposed to be getting out the … getting in the sugar bush to get out the syrup; or, to get out, yeah, getting out the maple sap to make into syrup. And then, the horses would be up to their, you know, almost up to their bellies in snow.

[1:16:52] And that's where the snow mobile.… Now I can't remember the name of the original snow mobiles [that] were invented … so that they could get into the sugar bush. And they were big, big machines. And they, they really could run. They were; of course they had a … they were the kind that had the tracks. But, they; of course, they were perfected. And now, of course, they're every… all; those kinds of machines are used in, for sports. But, in the, the original ... of course, they were … came from Canada. And I cannot remember.… That corporation didn't actually convert, but they expanded into making subway cars … transit cars; they made subway cars for New York. And they made rapid transit cars for places around the world. And at one point, they had, they were putting the cars together in a town in Vermont - I think it was Rutland.

So that was one place where agriculture was a little ... in some things…. Of course, the west had big machines long before the east did. But, they had these big fields of wheat, where many fellows from the east would spend the time of the harvest season in the west, or in the Midwest, because they … it was the time of year where there was very little to do in the east, when it came to farming. And, [Chuckle] the guys that went from the town - this small town that I was living in, there in Vermont - they were terrified of snakes. But, in the Middle-west, a snake was something that they really liked to have around to keep the rat population down, and the, you know, the other vermin; they need these snakes. [Laugh]

One guy, woke up, and this snake is right with him, and he took the snakes head [Chuckle] off. Anyway, he says, [Chuckle] "I'm getting out of here; right off." So he, [Chuckle] I think he got to the train and went home. But, see, they'd be given … something with water in it, and a spoon and a dish. And somebody would come out and feed them, would come out with the water and the food; [and] in mid-day, they'd all stop at the same time. And I guess it was a rough thing, but, they were pretty well paid. And then they'd take the train back home. And of course, at the time, the trains were wooden cars.

And they heated them with wood stoves; I think they called 'em pot belly stoves even then. And a few women that was [were], that were starting to go west in, oh, I think it was … shortly before the Civil War, this started. And probably, some of them continued to go during the war. But shortly after the war, it [there] was more of them. And … so the women, of course, would wear hats; they wore hats for every reason. But, if was comparably warm weather, they wouldn't have the stove going anymore than they needed to just heat some water, or heat some food to eat. The sparks from the wood that was being burned to propel the train, would cause the hats [Chuckle] to burn. So, they had to be really careful. And the sparks would hit the wood cars. And they had to have

water on hand to combat all of the damage the sparks could do. I don't remember what in the world … they had for.…

[1:21:11] There were very, very few movies [Chuckle] about this particular era; and very little written about it. But, one of the … one of my husband's cousins, he knew a lot about it; and I was always fascinated to hear him tell about these cars that…. And, I'm pretty … not sure, he'd been … west. But, he knew people who had gone west and come back, and their stories about it. The train … in fact, the railroad went right through his farm. And the railroads at that time were connected from out, the western part of Canada. [They] came into the eastern part of Canada, down the east coast of the United States. And you could take a train from a point in Vermont that was just south of the border, I mean, just south of the Canadian border; take a train to Boston, get on an overnight, get on a ship. They called it, "The night…." I forget what they call it. But, anyway, it would go down the Hudson to New York City. You could do that on a Friday night, and you could be back Monday morning. And that's something that you couldn't do by the time I got to Vermont, there was no such thing. Those overnight ships, and overnight trains, were gone; and the boats were gone too. I can't remember.…

Of course, I traveled that … the Hudson River, going from New York to Bear Mountain, several times. But, I can't remember what they called them, then.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, I don't want to keep you too long on the phone, but could I ask you a couple of questions?

Jeanne Finnegan: Sure. Just a second, and I'll get a dash of water; I'll be right back.

Janis Kozlowski: OK.

Jeanne Finnegan: OK.

Janis Kozlowski: Um, what, what did your company, ah, ah, produce? The company you worked for during the war; what did they produce?

Jeanne Finnegan: [1:23:42] Aircraft engines.

Janis Kozlowski: The Ranger Aircraft engines?

Jeanne Finnegan: Yup.

Janis Kozlowski: And, and, what do you remember about them?

Jeanne Finnegan: Oh, well, of course, I don't know as [that] I never saw one; we weren't, we weren't allowed to go.… I think what we did, was, put all parts; get all the parts in line.… And I was on the second floor; I never got down to; in fact, I don't think we were allowed anywhere near where they were put together.

Janis Kozlowski: Okay. So you…

Jeanne Finnegan: So, I was on the same floor as the tool crib, come to think of it. But, you weren't allowed anywhere near it.

Janis Kozlowski: OK.

Jeanne Finnegan: It was … the security was really tight. We had … badges; I think my number must have been … I think my number was, thirteen, or something, or other. But, if I came and approached the door in the morning and didn't have my badge visible, I had to go and get a temporary badge; I was docked for a half an hour, and I had to return the temporary badge before they'd let me off the property. So, that, they were really careful. You were limited in what part of the building…. As personnel, we were limited to what part of the building we could access. And ... of course, there was the cafeteria. We were able … that was open most of time - I think that was on, twenty-four hours. But, not all of it was accessible. There was a section of the cafeteria that we couldn't access. So, it was very closely monitored.

But, everything about it was, you know, it wasn't … we weren't threatened with anything. We just had; there were very few regulations; as such. The biggest one was: you had to have your badge. They'd say, [Chuckle] "Good morning," they know my name, but [if they] didn't see the badge, they'd direct me to where I should get the badge. It was, you know, it was, no if; you weren't arguing. Of course, there were some people [that] would argue about anything. But, most of them, didn't last too long. It was war, and it was: you do what you do, and mind your own business.

And we had; one day a … I think; yeah, one day a week, they had hired the use of a bowling alley. So, if they got off at … I think, the first shift that went was … it doesn't really matter, oh, yeah, the night shift went first. So [Laugh] we occupied that thing for … just, around the clock. And it was fun, because [Chuckle] it didn't matter which department you were in. Some departments stuck together and they would be the winners, but other departments, just, you went on your own.

Janis Kozlowski: So, the whole plant worked, ah, twenty-four hour shifts, even the records departments?

Jeanne Finnegan: The; twenty four hours? No. Most of the paper pushers didn't work twenty-f… didn't work twelve hours. But, we occasionally worked over time. But, what we'd do, we'd work eight … eight to four, I think. So, at four o'clock, we'd go bowling. We'd go bowling just about the same time as the swing shift got off. So, the swing; see the, twenty-four hour, that…. Let's see, now, the shifts were seven a.m., to three p.m.; three p.m., to whatever eight hours after that is: eleven. And then, they'd be eleven to seven; three to eleven, and then eleven to seven. I think, I almost think.… I don't think

that it was the way it is now, the half hour for overlap; I don't think we had that. But, I'm not sure. I don't remember that we did.

Janis Kozlowski: Now, I'm assuming that the, where you worked, there were probably, that was probably dominated by women employees; but, what about the plant? Do you remember, were there very many…?

Jeanne Finnegan: [1:28:33] Well, of course the men were in the tool, in the tool part. The men were, let's see, there were women on the line, but they were supervised by men. I don't think there were any women supervisors. And the thing about being on the line was, that's where some women got into difficulty. Because, these women; many of these women had young children, and they were used to being in charge. And some of them were going to be working, and their husbands couldn't find jobs. So, that … it was a little bit difficult for them at home, because they were the bread winners. And when they were told they had to wear hairnets, or cut their [hair], or have a short hair cut, they were adamant: they weren't doing some things like that - that's none of your damn business. But, the first one that got her hair caught in the line, fortunately, the supervisor was there, [and] turned off the whole line, immediately. And she had her hair pulled considerable, but it didn't remove much of her scalp; it removed some of it. Well, that was a terrifying experience.

Janis Kozlowski: I bet.

Jeanne Finnegan: And it was, I think, I'm not positive, but I think it was the swing shift. I'm not sure. It was either the end of the swing shift, or the beginning of the night shift. It wasn't day shift. But the word got around so fast, that within twenty-four hours, these women had, either cut their own hair; which [Laugh] you never saw such haircuts in your life! Or, they were wearing hairnets. There was never another murmur about hairnets, or cut your hair.

Janis Kozlowski: I bet! That was probably pretty gruesome. [Chuckle]

Jeanne Finnegan: Well, of course it was terrifying, absolutely terrifying. And of course, the; see, they had a routine that every certain number of minutes ... the line, that; each line would shut down for, let's say…. I don't remember how they worked it. But, I don't think the whole line was shut down … at any one time. Somehow they worked it out, that; they were limited in space for the ladies room. So, what they, they worked it out somehow, or other, that there was always…. I guess, that what they did do, come to think of it: they had extras that knew everything on a given line. And that extra, would take the place of a lady that was ready to go to the bathroom. And they were limited, [Chuckle] of course, in how long they could be gone. But, it was one of those things that they; the same people were on the line, the same one was extra, and they got to know their routine. So, that it worked; that they had, very seldom had an emergency to get to the bathroom. And if they did have one, they were able to take care of it. And then, of course, everything closed down for lunch.

And they had a minimum, they had people actually roving in that department - they were brought in especially for that. They had these guys that were shop inspectors. They would put an inspector in that had come from another state, to go through the area where the tool shed was - tool crib, rather. But, they would search everything. They wanted to be sure that something wasn't being slipped out, or slipped in, that didn't belong. And they were checking on the inspectors. The inspectors were subjected to quite a bit of surveillance. And they had long hours. But, there were slow times. And the inspectors, sometimes were given a couple of days off, while something that was being done that didn't require their presence [was going on]. Because, they had some very, you know….

[1:33:01] Hey, most people that were working realized why they were doing what they were doing. And they had somebody in the service. Most of us either had members of the family in the service, or we had close friends. So, that there wasn't any question about why we were doing something, or why we were there. And, and it was women that meet these planes as they got off the line and flew them where ever they were to go. And they had no maps, they had no; they didn't have official uniforms. They were women, who had loved to fly; had learned to fly on their own. Many of them had grown up near an airport and had watched these guys, [Chuckle] the ones that were advertised; I forget what they called themselves, to tell you the truth. But, they would go to these different areas where they were having a ... a fall festival. And they would offer rides to people. And then, in between that, they would, would … [there'd] be one guy flying the plane, and the other guy standing on the wing of the plane. They did some awful scary things. But, these were the sort of people. And they; I didn't realize how many women were involved, until I finally [found out there] were women taking these planes off the line.

And of course, there were WAC's [Women's Army Air Corps members] and there were RIN's I think they called them. They were women, nurses, of course, that were part of the service. And then, there were these women that were part of the Navy, other women were part of the Army. And I'm not sure how many different categories there were. And we had Oreta Culp Hobby. I'm not sure whether it was Hobby, or…. There was a low ranking … General. I think, I 'm pretty sure she became a General before she finished up. And she did a lot to help to establish the women.

But, these women that were taking planes off the line were never recognized by the service, as such. After a while, they were given … and I don't know if they even got.… I'm not sure what recompense they got. Of course, from the extended family that I'm part of, there's one woman, who has a fabulous story about what she did … in the Air f… as one of the pilots of those planes. Some of them were lost … because of fog, [a] couple were lost going overseas. But, very few of them had to fly over the ocean. I'm not sure, because they took a longer time to be delivered; they had to wait until they could get on a ship. Those planes would get on a ship, and then whoever would meet them, had been taught how to fly, somehow or other.

But see, the Air Force … was not involved in knowing how these planes worked; they were new planes. And when they, [Laugh] put a woman in charge of instructing the Air Force aviators…. Of course, they were either Army or Navy; there was no, there was no Department of Air Force - there was no Air Force Department, as such. But, anyway, these fellows were objecting - they weren't going to be … allow themselves to be taught by women, "I'm not going to have a woman stand up there and tell me how to fly a plane." [Laugh] Well, the general, or the colonel in charge of that particular unit said, "OK, you've got a choice: you can go to class and learn how to fly, no matter who's teaching it; and it's going to be a women. Or, you can, we will send you to the infantry." And of course, [if] you mention [Chuckle] a part of the infantry, let's say, The Battle of the Bulge, you know, it would scare the Dickens right out of them. Well, they finally decided they would … they would stand still for a woman teaching them. Those women did [Chuckle] such a good job, that, that's where they got … some of them were accepted by the Air Force for, to do, more or less, active duty. But, of course … eh, change takes a lot time. It, it's … none of us seem to like change. So, they [they're] going to bark, at the first end of a change.

Janis Kozlowski: Sure. Yeah. Well, how long did you work for, ah, Ranger Aircraft?

Jeanne Finnegan: [1:38:25] Well, I worked from, and I; as I say, I don't remember. I don't, I probably have my records someplace, but I've misplaced them. It was forty t…. It probably was early in … I think it was the fall of '42. It might have been; [I] almost think it was very close to the holiday season, before I was finally … hired.

Janis Kozlowski: And then you worked there 'til the end of the war?

Jeanne Finnegan: Yeah, [to] the day the war ended. Of course, the plant closed down. But, another…. To get things ready to completely close down the plant, and take things to Farmingdale, to.… [And] you were, you were allowed to apply, and according to your seniority, you'd be considered for transfer to another department. So I was allowed to transfer to payroll, because, it was still [Chuckle] warm enough, that I didn't want to go into Manhattan looking for a job. And I worked in payroll for a while. And then I was laid off entirely.

I took a pay cut to go in payroll; it was a lot cheaper than … trying to go out and find a job. And I don't; I didn't … qualify for unemployment then; you had to be out of work for a certain length of time. So, I was getting the unemployment; by the time I got back from Vermont, I qualified for unemployment.

And then, of course, [Chuckle] I had to go into Manhattan. And my father was a fast worker; he found a job for me … with [Chuckle] the state of New York. So, I finished up by working for the state of New York for about year and a…. I didn't work very long for the state of New York. I was a very poor employee; [when] I finally realized that I was not good at what I was doing, I was ready to quit. And in the mean time, they didn't fire me; they let me quit. [Both laugh]

But, I got married in June of '46. And of course, some people that are still alive are wondering, "What the heck happened to her!" [Both laugh] But, anyway…. [Laugh]

Janis Kozlowski: Well, I've had you talking for almost two hours, and that's a very long time. So, I don't want to keep you on the phone anymore. Are there any other memories of WWII that you wanted to tell me about?

Jeanne Finnegan: I'll tell you what, if you want any questions about the war itself, of course … that, that would be about it. Because, that, that's where I spent my time.

[1:41:28] And of course, we used to be; if [in] the off time; we could, you see, we had more money than we could possibly use; so, most of us were saving money; war bonds and stuff like that. But, we could go into Manhattan to a play for six-bucks, or $6.50. So, I loved to go to plays. We would go about once a month, or so, depending, I don't know.…

I went in to the circus; [I] went into plays.… Ah, if you wanted to take a train…. I took a train to visit some of my mother's relatives. And of course, I had relatives in different parts of New York and New Jersey. I'd go to Asbury Park, or someplace. I had enough relatives and enough friends, so that [Laugh] I didn't want….

At one point, I belonged to a sorority; which was another thing - I never expected to be invited to join a sorority. And we stayed together, we had meetings.… I'm trying to think. It didn't last much after the war, and of course, partly, because I left the state. And I didn't get back to New York on a regular basis until the children were pretty well grown; 'til they were able to travel.

And my husband was no [Chuckle] great lover of New York, anyway. He [Laugh] came in on New Years' Eve one [year], and he was bound, you know; and I said, "If you want to go into the New Year's, [to] the New Year's-eve celebration in New York, you go by yourself." And I said, "Make sure you don't have your wallet in your back pocket, because you won't come back with it." I said, "No way, [Chuckle] am I going into New York on New Years' Eve." Because, [Chuckle] you'd be smothered, at [it]. You know, I suppose it was fun, but, to me … it was almost terrifying. I was not much for crowds, I guess, even then. I didn't enjoy … getting on the subway and going under the river; it was the longest [Chuckle] part of the trip, 'til you got out … [on] the other side of the river. And the wheels on the subway would squeak, and if it was summertime, you'd be SO hot, you couldn't believe it. And wintertime, it would be hot, because we'd all be wearing fur coats in those days. And they were steamy [Chuckle] in the wintertime.

But, it, as I said earlier, we had money. And of course, at the end of the war, some of us made the mistake of buying things … almost right away. And nothing … stayed together. Everything was thrown together before they [Chuckle] put it on the market. And [Chuckle] the first fellow that bought it, it fell apart. We happened to make the

mistake of buying a car, because we were going into the country part of the state; [and] we thought we better have a new car. Well, that car fell apart so fast [Laugh] it wasn't funny. So, we had, we lost that money, really.

[1:45:00] But, then … it's like anything else; getting used to … what's happened afterwards. And then of course, once the war was over; see it was over in forty…'45 - it had worn down. So that, we knew it was coming. But, there wasn't much you could do about it. See, different corporations and companies, hadn't geared up yet. And the tools; I'm not sure whether they mention that, or not, but, the tool and dye plants, they had "A" number one tools that were well known around the world. And one center for that was Springfield, Vermont.

And … the Americans, wanting to help both Germany and Japan to get back on their feet; one of the things they did, was try to train them how to make tools. And they made some of the worst tools, [and] injured a lot of American workers. And my husband was injured using those tools. You couldn't get the American tools. I don't … I still, to this day, don't understand why the… I think what happened was, the war taught them.… And these tool cribs; some of those men, were able to improve on the, not only on the … what they were making, but on the tools they used to make these things. And instead of introducing these new tools to the U.S. companies, U.S. companies were slow to accept the fact they had [to] retool. In other words they had to tear out the old lines that they had in these buildings, and you had to put in a more efficient … line. I can never remember [Chuckle] what they call a line. You know, you thought, Charlie Chaplin movie, where you're moving the same thing.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle]

Jeanne Finnegan: Anyway, ah.… So, that they brought; you know … what happened was, they killed their own companies. They would not cooperate. They had some of the very best. All they had to do was realize, that they were past tense. And of course, it's like anything that's right now; like, part of the economy, part of our problem [is], we are using 1930 methods to correct a 2009 problem. And we've got to wake up pretty soon, or we're not going to. Ah, but anyways, that's another story.

But, you see, there are.… And when it came to the tobacco, of course, when they couldn't hire, when they couldn't get the … wrapping tobacco from Massachusetts, Cuba stepped up, you know. Cuba; there are a lot of bright people that live there. So they found out how you raise the wrapping. And they just told the Americans … they just shut down those plants. And those people were looking for work, at the same time.

Jeanne Finnegan: But, thank you very much for calling. That's very nice.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, thank you for participating. I, I hope I didn't wear you out too much. This has been a long call.

Jeanne Finnegan: Well, of course, I had no; what you call it, no appointments today.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, Good.

Jeanne Finnegan: [1:48:47] So I can pace myself. But, it; I think one fairly good session is a good way to go. And don't hesitate, if you have more questions. I, [Laugh] there are parts of my memory that might come back, later on. You know, remembering the name of that corporation in Farmingdale, took a lot of doing. And I couldn't remember it. But fortunately, my younger brother is still alive and he was able to help me with that. So, he and I are the two out of the four; there were four of us growing up [in my family]. He's the youngest and I'm the oldest, which ... [Laugh] I think we are both stubborn Irishmen. But [Laugh] anyway, we are surviving for a while.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, I really appreciate you giving me a chance to talk with you. And I'll go ahead and transcribe your interview, and I might have some questions later; I'll probably send them to you in the mail first, and then maybe we can talk about them over the phone.

Jeanne Finnegan: You know, that, I think that would be a very good idea. And, and, so that … I have an idea of what your questions might be, you know, it, when you mail them. When you mail the questions, and mail the; not mail the questions, but when you mail … the, what you've come up, it might occur to me that something isn't clear. And I can always; I live in a building, where I am one of the very few that didn't have a husband in the war. But, I lived [live] among so many that were, in the war. And, of course, a father that had been in a war. And, of course, I've met people who were not only in the Second World War, but were in the Korean War and the Vietnam War; and of course, currently in this… So that, I've, I'm aware of what some things are. And if some of the names are repeated….

But, thank you, I, [for] your putting up with my gabbing. So, were, were…? [Chuckle]

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, I really, I really enjoyed it. I appreciate it, and I will be back in touch with you. It will probably be about a month, though, I think.

Jeanne Finnegan: Well, that's fine.

Janis Kozlowski: OK.

Jeanne Finnegan: Oh, yeah; if it takes awhile. And as far as that [questions] goes; if you have an address on it, I pro… it, it might be the time of year that I can't get back as easily. But, I'll be sure to let you know, so I don't leave you hanging fire.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. Well, thank you again, and I hope I didn't wear you out today; I appreciate it.

Jeanne Finnegan: Oh, no, I can [Chuckle] take care of that. But, thank you, too.

Janis Kozlowski: Alright, you take care now.

Jeanne Finnegan: OK.

Janis Kozlowski: Bye, bye.

Jeanne Finnegan: We'll see you. Bye.

[end 1:51:38]