

Jerre Kalbas

The Real Rosie The Riveter Project

Interview 1

Interview Conducted by

Anne de Mare

February 17, 2010

New York, New York

For The

Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives
Elmer Holmes Bobst Library
New York University

Interview: Jerre Kalbas
Interviewer: Anne de Mare
Date: February 17, 2010
Place: New York, New York

De Mare: So if you could just introduce yourself?

Kalbas: My name is Jerre Kalbas. You don't want me to, uh, put in that my real name is Emma, and...?

De Mare: You can do whatever you want. You can say it however you want.

Kalbas: Well, Jerre Kalbas. My name is Jerre Kalbas, and I'm 91 years old. Uh, I was born, uh, March 3rd, 1918. I was born in the Harlem Eye and Ear Hospital. At that time, Harlem was a very Jewish neighborhood, and my mother was visiting her mother, and I wanted to see the outside world. And, uh, so I was born in Harlem Eye and Ear, and we were living in Bronx - South Bronx - uh, 136 Cyprus Avenue. Yeah, we lived all over the South Bronx - different places.

De Mare: Have you been back up to Cyprus Avenue?

Kalbas: Uh, no, a long long time ago. I would love very much, but, uh, it's so different.

De Mare: Can you talk a little bit about what your life was like at the time?

Kalbas: That's the hard part. Um, well, uh, it wasn't a very happy childhood. Um, uh, I didn't know that I was creative, but I was making airplanes out of cardboard, using flour and water as glue, not knowing any different. And of course it would dry and peel apart. And, uh... the reason it wasn't very happy is because my father drank. And when he was sober, he was a great guy, and uh, he helped my mother, he did almost everything in the house. And he was an iron worker, and he had a lot of buddies who drank too, so... they got paid, and they drank, and then we didn't have anything to eat. So we, so it wasn't, uh, very happy.

And of course, going to school, uh, the teachers were unaware of what I was going through - days where I was hungry, and uh...And we didn't have counselor...counselors at that time, even to talk to, and they didn't care. And I

was a very shy, uh, frightened person, and so if they called on me, it was just, uh, horrible, y'know...I, I couldn't uh... And I wasn't aware that I was also "dilexic", which I just found out from my social worker, and I'm aware of it now, that I am. And I have to be very careful when I write numbers, and uh... and reading is very difficult. Um, even though I read a lot, um, I don't think I understood much at that time. And, uh, I had to leave school, and my first job was, uh, at artificial flowers, with like, uh, 20 women at one sitting.

00:03:06:21-----

And, uh, and I was ve - I was very... very boyish and very manish at that time, at a young age. And, even though we didn't wear pants, I wore a skirt, but a man's shirt...haircut very short...couldn't put lipstick on, but had to going to work, or I thought I did. And, uh, couldn't carry a bag...everything was in a paper bag...until I learned about the folding manilla envelopes. And that was, that was really wonderful. Uh...and then as I got a little older, I had people, that uh, that were going to co- uh, to high - uh, high school, and... I had to drop out. And I took my equivalence exam, which I passed.

De Mare: Did you do that close to when you graduated...when you left school, or did you do that years later?

Kalbas: I think a few ye- um...not too many years later, be- uh, um...in fact, I wanted to, uh, join the army, but they wouldn't take me, because I didn't have a high school diploma. And I wanted to join the army, because I knew they gave you schooling...after you're...you were out. And, um...you know, as my social worker tells me, even though I, I, uh, didn't have the smarts to school learning, I was able to figure things out, which today is amazing, with what I'm doing. I see the difference in myself, because I didn't know how to spell...I now know how to spell. Uh, I'm watching a lot of game shows, and uh, y'know Jeopardy... And I struggle with the Times crossword puzzle, but I don't do the one in the New York Magazine, so um... I can't learn how to do, uh...to play the other games...like Sudo-... Sudah-... I ca- I can't do it. I try, and I can't do it. Uh...

De Mare: Now, let's go back for a minute. Can you talk about... 'cause you said that the...the flower factory was your first job...Can you tell me a little bit more about that? Do you know the name of the place?

Kalbas: Yeah! Kaplan Brothers, 18th St., near 5th Avenue...
oh yeah. I know the building...I don't know the address, but
I know the building. I don't know why I still remember
that...maybe because the first job. And um...I don't remember
anything being different. Most of them were married women,
or s- or um, and all Italian women. All Italian women.
And uh...oh yes, and I was very interested in photography at
that time, but didn't have the money to really pursue it.
And so, um, they we- uh... the wedding, or some feast day,
where they have a whole bunch of bread, and um, so they
asked me to come and photograph it, which I did.

00:05:58:14-----

Uh...these g- these things are gone, because when I had the
fire, uh on Jones St., somebody took my kneehole desk stuff
to hold for me, and a few other things, and he never would
return it. So all these papers and pictures are, are gone.

De Mare: So were you actually, um, were you actually
making the artificial flowers?

Kalbas: Yes.

De Mare: And how, how...just explain to me how you did it.

Kalbas: Oh, ha, not very well. No, not very well, because, uh...I was very handy, but it's something I didn't like, so I really had to be shown a few of times. Well, you get these metal stems, and you wrap the green, uh, paper around it... but the one flower that I remember... very, very important... I'm sorry I didn't...I don't have that...that was in the desk...uh, and you don't see it today at all... um, Roosevelt was running for the first time. We made the Roosevelt flower - the rose with a piece of velvet, V - E - L - T, which was fantastic. It was a fantastic flower. And, of course, I got one. And, uh, I once passed a store, and they had a lot of ca- uh, ca- uh, old, uh, campaign buttons...not one of these. Not one of these. And it was a campaign button. But, um, yeah that one flower I know. I don't remember the others, and I don't know how long I was there. But I do know it was nine dollars a week... and five cents a card there, and ten cents for cigarettes, or, uh, or 6 for a nickel, y'know, so, uh, you were okay. I didn't drink at that time, uh, so uh...

De Mare: Do you remember how old you were when you worked there?

Kalbas: Yeah, 16. Yeah, that's right. Ooey. I was sixteen once. Ha ha...Yeah...

De Mare: And do you remember where you worked from there...?

Kalbas: No, I can't remember what my next job was, but most of them were factory jobs for a while, and, uh, when I was sixteen what year was that...? Uh let's if I have to know the, uh...

De Mare: 1934? Yeah...1934.

Kalbas: 1934. Mmm. Can't remember where I...

De Mare: So, so you were still at home when you worked at, uh, Kaplan Brothers...?

Kalbas: Oh, yes, I lived at home until the age of 21. My mother was 4'11", weighed 98 pounds. I was the only one in the family that looked liked this. Um...they used to call me the Russian peasant, the Muzhik.

00:09:00:14-----

The, uh... well I was, uh, I had a brother who was 6'3" and weighed 139, and an older sister who was tall and very thin. And my kid sister was very thin. I was the only one...my father was normal, with a beer belly. They, uh, so uh, I was the only one...yeah, and I was a 38D. I was very big. My sister was flat-chested...and she used to put socks...and I was binding mine.

De Mare: And...so you were living at home... working at the flower factory...

Kalbas: Yeah.

De Mare: ...working the other factory jobs...

Kalbas: Yeah.

De Mare: You don't remember what else you might have done...?

Kalbas: Well, uh, yeah, I worked, uh...I worked in machi- in a sewing machine job...uh...where I ...what was I making? It was

something very...something with glue...I can't remember. Oh, bindings, I think. Bindings...coming out of this machine. Um...I can't remember...

De Mare: So you basically...you basically left school around 16 to go work in the flower factory, right?

Kalbas: Yeah.

De Mare: That was like the way...that was the way...

Kalbas: That was my first job. Yeah, my father wanted me to be a nurse, which I ...(shakes head)...had no desire...or go to, uh, business school, which I had no desire. So...so, jobs were the only thing I could do. And no the having the education, so uh...

De Mare: And then...and then you were basically home until you were 21...and your mother passed away...can you tell me that story there...?

Kalbas: Uh, yeah. Um, when, um, I could never leave the house - I wanted to leave the house before, but I could never leave the house, because of my mother, and my father

would abuse her. So, when I... when she died, I um... uh, that was a rather painful part of my life, because she was a very sickly woman, and of course, being a drunken husband, uh, the abuse of, uh...only now I know how abusive it was, because she had so many miscarriages. And, um, four of us survived. There was another little girl, uh, who I never...a one-year-old who died from pneumonia. Um...and, you know, this was a toll on her, and, uh, was in the hospital with, um, uh, hernia operations, which I've already experienced. Um...and when she died, they came and, uh re- revived her, so, um, so she was alive for awhile again...and then she died.

00:12:08:09-----

And we had no burial...that was the other thing. I had to go across the street, and they- dry goods store, to get something to wrap her with. And they must have used an egg something...it's a glue, like, whites or something...uh, to close her eyes, because for years, every time I would break an egg, I would go out of my mind. I smell that smell. And, uh, and uh, when they were putting up the headstone... or, or after I left the house, my brother and sisters were a little angry at me. They wouldn't talk to me. And I had

no place to go. I was a scared kid, even though I was 21, I was scared. And, but I had the [Nayah Judah] Movement, where this man knew that, uh, Palestine and the Jews would not get along, and...so we were going to have a homeland, in, uh, Alaska. And the United States government gave people 4 acres of land - that's how Alaska was built up. The doctors and, uh, nurse, and teachers...and we, as a whole big group of girls and boys, were going to go. And were even going to go out in covered wagons. Ha ha. Uh, I have his book somewhere. My friend, Jeanie, who just died, dug it up for me, so I have the book somewhere...I don't...uh, after all these years. He was a great man...wonderful man. And so here was a place for me to stay, and a place for me to go - a farm. My father always talked about going on a farm. So I want to go on the farm.

So we went up to Livingston Manor. A man gave us some property. Um...uh, away from his, uh, summer place, where people used to come up. And so we had tents put up, uh, ten for 20 of us - me and the guys. We couldn't get any women to stay. And, uh the boys thought they were going to have me cook for them and wash their clothes. I had other ideas - there I am, very masculine, and... So, I, I was building the roads and chopping down trees, trimming them, and making chords of wood. I went up there 139, and I came

back 165, solid muscle. It took years for me to lose it - my back used to ripple with my... And of course, I became a waitress at one time, and pulled out a...uh, the booth, and uh, I doubled up. That was my first operation - the hernia.

00:14:59:09-----

Well, from that work, I guess...and my...the walls were weak, I guess I took after my mother there.

De Mare: That's fascinating...

Kalbas: I'm rambling...I'm rambling on...

De Mare: No, no, no! You're actually... I, I'm letting you ramble, because it's fascinating. Um...and thank you for talking about your mother. I know that's difficult stuff.

Kalbas: Yeah, that was very difficult.

De Mare: I know it's tough stuff. I think it's...I, I think that there's something that I really um...one of the things - you can turn off the camera for a minute. (break) Um, so

I just want to be sure that I have it clear. So you, with, you moved...you went to the farm with the [Nayah Judah] Movement.

Kalbas: Uh, yeah, this was a farm at the Livingston Manor. I don't know how it came about, but then we went to Connecticut with uh... to a farm owned by Fanny Holtzman. She was the lawyer that, uh, broke the Rasputin case...many, many, many years ago. Anyway, I should talk about her, but ...and she also, at that time, when the UN, uh...the Jewish problem started, she was very active in that. And so, she had a very beautiful house up there, and we of course had our tents. And, uh, and she had work for us to do for her too - like clearing some of her property. And she would come up weekends, and she would see how much we did. She'd have a carton of cigarettes. Instead of leaving a carton, she'd figure out how much we did, and leave a pack...y'know...until the point where I had to smoke a pipe, because I wasn't getting any cigarettes. We were doing our own...our own work.

De Mare: And now, what was the end...how did that...how did that [turn your life around]...

Kalbas: Oh yeah, yeah, how... how did it, uh...

De Mare: You mentioned-

Kalbas: Oh they had a- yeah, yeah, of course! Uh, it was me and 20 boys. They were boys, and I was a girl, y'know we were very... Um, and uh... this was 19, uh, th- uh 31- uh, 39. Yeah, 1939 when I went up to the farm. Um...and the war broke out. You know, we had, we had meetings here. There, there was...I slept at...before we went up to the farm, I slept at, uh, um...the uh, the office on 34th, off Lexington. Uh...and I think I told you about hiking up the...to the farm...in the boots. With the...

De Mare: Tell me again. You can tell me lots now.

Kalbas: Oh boy. Okay. But that time, you know, you were able to hike. You were able to pick up trucks, and they would give you lifts. I mean, that, that's the way we... we traveled a lot at, at that time, and we were kids. A lot of my friends did that too...to get to Orchard beach, you know...We, we would pick up cars...and everything was safe at that time.

And, um... oh yeah, I think I told you about my fa- my sister taking piano lessons? This is important to the, uh... And um, I wanted very much to play the violin, and, uh, he wouldn't give me lessons, because he thought I wouldn't practice. And I wanted them.

00:18:02:19-----

And I think I told you I made a violin out of a cigar box, and a bow with rubber bands, and I used to squeak... And uh, and I would never get compliments, uh, of what I was doing. I was drawing. I was doing all kinds of stuff with my hands, and...nothing. No ever...no encouragement...no, uh... except I had teachers in junior high - the first year, I think - sisters. And one of them seemed to be interested. Now I go back and I realize they both had very manish haircuts, you know, and that's how I mighta...you know, I wasn't aware... I was worried about myself, you know, and... being attracted to the teachers, you know, and all that nonsense. Um...and so...where was I with the...um...

De Mare: You were going to, um, going to, getting up to the farm.

Kalabas: Oh yeah. And so, uh... we decided to hitch up, to - the secretary and I - decided to hitch up to, uh, Livingston Manor. There were 6 guys there, and we were going to stay for the weekend. And I borrowed a pair of boots. And I had two pairs of socks on, and they were still big. And here I am walking...and I had the violin case that Joseph [Hefter] gave me...with a violin in it. I was gonna go, y'know, play. And, of course, when the truck stopped us, I hadda open the violin...y'know...the machine gun. Ha ha. And, I think I told you this before.

Uh...and so we got up there, and um, the boys immediately said - she was a woman, and here I am a girl - and there was one boy up there that I was friends with, Charles...very good friends...and he knew, he knew about me. And um...but the boys wanted us in the middle of the bed. So we slept in the middle. And one of them was getting a little fresh and kept moving his hand. And so I woke up in the morning, and I told Charles. And I said, "Charles, I want to sleep in front of you." And he said, "Okay." I said, "But we have to say something so that the boys won't think anything...I don't want anybody to..." So I said that they were accidentally...oh, yeah, I had big blisters on the bottom of my foot, which they hadda open...and they bandaged. So I told them that they were kicking my foot and they

hurt. So I slept on the outside. And at that time... Today, I realize that I was able to take care of myself - all these different things - and I'm doing more of it today than I ever did. And my social worker, y'know, pointed it out. He said, uh, y'know...because I can't read and understand...I have to be able to do...to be able to ... I mean, you can tell me, tell me from now, or show me...but I have to DO to learn...and he says, "Yes, yes you would. You are. I mean, you have to do it, and then you learn." And I do.

00:21:04:16-----

And, so, um, that was that story.

And, um, I can't remember what year it was, but I also worked at the U.N. at the last year that they were a great success. Um, and that was, that was really pathetic, because Russian was my first language. And, they didn't teach me how to read or write, um, and, uh, I refused to speak it. After I went to school, that was the only language I spoke at five years old, and they were making fun of me, so I had to learn English. And I tried to teach my father and mother English. Uh, my father was an iron worker...uh, oh yeah, and Jewish - they spoke Jewish when they didn't want ... to know what they were talking

about...until I met a lot of Jewish friends, and then I started to understand what they were saying. So, y'know, so who is, uh... So I could n- uh...

So at the UN, it was just...y'know, you had all nationa- it was just so wonderful, uh.. But I wasn't learnt enough to speak the Russian, uh...I was, I was an escort. I was delivering message into the assembly hall. Y'know I, I'd call in and give it to Pearson, the English, uh... ah... I'd help [Gramiko] on with his coat. Y'know, it, it was just, uh, a wonderful thing, but I was still very nervous and very shy, and... And I made the mistake of taking the kids into the delegates lounge, and all of a sudden, on the loud speaker, came, "Get outta there!" y'know in nice words. And then I got friendly with this woman who made the, uh... and she...because nobody taught me where places were. And then they wanted me to, uh, use the phone...and delegate rooms to the delegate... to the delegates. Well, I, I didn't know how to the phone thing...I mean, "hold", and ... I would...I would... I mean, what a mess I made. I couldn't do it. I could ... secretarial things, I just couldn't learn. Didn't want to. Didn't want to. Because I always worked with my- yeah I had a lot of mach- machine shop experiences, and, uh, and this is what I, uh, liked better.

De Mare: So, so talk about...so the boys all got drafted..

Kalbas: Oh yeah, the boys got drafted, yeah.

De Mare: Uh, and then, what did you do...? ...next...? Do you remember what, what you did?

Kalbas: Yeah, yeah I went to California, and that my first defense job...in 1940, I think. 1941. Yeah, uh, Frankie and Myra, these friends of mine, invited me. And so I... there was a Cafeteria called Life, which was very gay... and a few straight people, but mostly gay. And this major from the Salvation Army was very friendly. And, uh, I mentioned, I guess, that I wanted to go to California, and he gave me the ticket - the price of a ticket.

00:24:05:21-----

And I sat up on this bus, 6 days, all the way to California. And, uh...and we went into this store, a machine shop, where they were making these sidewalk breakers, which they have these elegant ones now...nothing like this one. And also the handguns. And, uh, at that time I wasn't

aware that my friends were collecting parts of a handgun. And they put one together for, uh, Ralph Faulkner, who was teaching, uh, fencing to the actors...and so we got free fencing lessons. So that's when I first started to fence, and then when I came to New York, I had more, uh...and that was gone - my foils and my masks - when I had the fire. This guy kept those too. I had a pair or two...you know, jacket and everything. So, uh, you know if I took a lunge today, I wouldn't be able to get back, but... ha ha ha. But it was great, uh, great sport.

De Mare: So you worked at [Thor...]?

Kalbas: So I worked at Thor..., and um...and I like California very much...I, I w- oh yeah, so I wanted to stay, and we were looking for property, but they would not sell women property. They would not, at that time, sell women property. A woman could not buy real estate, or...in California anyway. That was in the 40s, early 40s. So we couldn't buy anything. We couldn't, uh... So, uh... Oh they wanted to come back to New York. SO I came back in the rumble seat, because I couldn't drive. So I was in the rumble seat, and they were dri- taking turns driving. And that took us about five days, I think. We hadda stop and

buy a rug...I was freezing back there. But blankets were too expensive. But it was fun. And then my...

De Mare: What do you mean that women couldn't buy real estate? Was it a law, or was it just no one would deal with you? Do you remember?

Kalbas: They just didn't sell to women. Women were nothing. You know, even...at that...at that time. You know, even though we were in the...defense plans, y'know? They um... No, I wasn't aware that uh, we just...they would not sell to us. I don't know whether it was all over or what. I'm sure the more wealthy women were able to buy it...I don't know...what went through their- I don't know. And, uh, we, we didn't bother looking into it, I don't- no, I know that we were very angry, and I'm sure we did something, but I can't remember the details.

De Mare: It's fascinating.

Kalbas: I c- ... I know. I know.

De Mare: It's amazing, because that really was not very long ago, you know what I mean? Like it was a long time

ago, but in terms of the way things have shifted between then and now...I just...I've never...

00:27:00:07-----

Kalbas: Well, when did we get to vote? I mean, uh ...

De Mare: 1920

Kalbas: I know. Without...yeah, without voting...without, uh, yeah.

De Mare: Did your mother used to vote? Did you...do you remember?

Kalbas: Oh I...I don't know...cause I know they were citizens...I don't know.

De Mare: I'm just curious. 'Cause my mother took me...

Kalbas: My mother didn't do anything outside of take care of us. She loved to take care of babies, or take care of us, you know, and, um...but she didn't do anything. She was a very meak- very lovely woman, but ... And I liked my father

very much...when he, uh, was sober. But when he was drunk, it was just awful. I really had to stay up and protect her. I mean, I didn't realize until many years later, I was my mother's protector. And this, uh... my relationships were pretty bad, um, because of that...many years...because I saw...I didn't let women breathe, you know... I just wanted to do. And, uh, I realized...it took me many years before I realized what was happening. And when I see today the way kids are, I just can't...can't believe it, you know? They're so free, and, and it's, it seems so easy. But, uh, it wasn't easy growing up. And, yeah, I had a lot of fun...you know, I...uh...and I guess I always wanted to laugh, you know, and uh... I made sure I was happy. And uh...and I loved the work on the farm. The harder it was, the better I liked it - as long as I didn't have to cook and wash their clothes. Bad enough I had...I mean, we were doing it on the rocks! And our, yeah, and our only means of bathing was these wonderful, beautiful falls...up at Livingston Manor...it was just beautiful. I mean, you were able to sit under the rocks there, with the water coming down. And when the women would come up, uh, visiting during the weekend...of the boyfriends...the girlfriends of some of the boys, and then some of the girls... And I would have to go with them...watch them bathe...to keep the guys away. I was playing chickie.

I was going out of my mind.. And of course, they would leave over the weekend. So.. y'know.. nobody, uh... And they left me up on the farm all alone, up at Livingston Manor. Um...yeah, how did they get to...Maybe they had been up at Connecticut first...I can't remember now...that's terrible...because I wound up at Livingston Manor. Yeah, uh, and this tent for 20 people - it was a huge thing. And, uh, it was getting very cold, and the rain and the snow was beating down, and it was beginning to tear. I had to shimmy up that thing and get it loose...get the ring off...to get that tent down. So...it was very...I think that's why I'm strong today...the uh, outlasting, you know...

00:30:20:02-----

De Mare: I'm glad! Whatever it is.

Kalbas: Yeah, and I have family now too.

De Mare: So let's go, let's go back...let's go back to the Defense job for a minute. So you, so you worked out, you worked out in Thor Industries you made the, the sidealk breakers, and then you

Kalbas: Yeah...I came back to New York.

De Mare: ...and what did you do next?

Kalbas: I think it was the Lafayette one next. And that was, um, a number two lathe - huge lathe. Warner and Swasey lathe. And we would machine parts. And, but that was a hand crank thing...it wasn't a...the good lathes that I went to Ford instrument...that were...those were beautiful. These were very, uh... they had, they had belts from the ceiling coming down to keep... to work them. It was weird.

De Mare: ...and what did you make there?

Kalbas: There, at Lafayette, I don't know what I made. I don't even think they let us know. But at...there was a small machine shop on, um, on Waverly Place? Or...the street where um, where um...that bar? The 1969...Stonewall. There was a street there that had a small machine shop. I worked there...and there we were making the silver parts for the, uh, the whatcha-call-it ships...the, uh, the ships that went up in the sky. The uh, the uh... no no, the uh, space, the spaceships. We made the silver parts, and, and we had a box there to share the silver shavings, and people would

come around to make sure you weren't taking any silver.
And, uh...and that was for the uh, space... uh... um...when it was,
h- the what's the word I want? The space industry...would it
be...? Yeah...yeah, that they told us. And, uh...that was very
strange, because I received um, a Christmas card, and it
was K-A-L-B-A-S-S. and...the first name...and there was an
address, and I called my sister, and I said "This is weird.
I mean, I don't know any..." And we didn't know what the
first name was - which I can't remember now. And, so, uh...

00:32:57:09-----

...oh I made the phone call...I don't know how I got the phone,
but I made the phone call. And I spoke to this woman...I
can't remember the name of the shop on the street, but she
said "Do you work there?" I said, "Yes." She says "Well,
that's my husband who's a foreman there." I didn't even
know his last name. And so, she, they had sent out the
cards. Yeah...it was, it was another letter missing...but it
almost like my last name...Kalbas.

Um...so that shop. And I think from there it was, uh,
um...Ford Instrument, out in Queens.

De Mare: Can you talk to me about the job at Ford Instrument...? What did you do there?

Kalbas: That...uh, I was an inspector first. I was inspecting things. And then they let me run the lathe, because I told them I did it at this place...but the lathes were so different...that's when I started to run the lathes again. And uh...set them up and everything. And, uh...and I was a very careful worker...very careful. Like my friend, Maya, had a job running a lathe, and she accidentally left a [chuck] key in, and then she leaned over...and I caught her, you know...and she was being pulled, but she stopped the machine. And I saw some terrible accidents in California too. I mean, the...the woman refused to wear her _____ hat...and operating a drill press. So...she lost her eyesight. It was...uh...really bad...

De Mare: When you were at Ford Industries, was it a lot of women working...was it some women working? Can you talk about...?

Kalbas: Yeah... There weren't as many women as men, but uh...oh Ford Instrument - there were a lot of women. Yeah, uh...inspectors...and uh... In fact, uh, my friend - the woman I

was living with then - uh, got a job there. And, I think I told you about her...Patty? Uh, she was 10 years older than me. Uh...that's when I started to...that's when we had to put the socks on...liquid form...because the wall...we couldn't buy silk stockings...couldn't buy cigarettes. You hadda stand on line for that. And um...she wanted to put the seam, but I wouldn't allow that. Putting the stocking on, the cream was enough. I mean it was...because you're wearing a skirt...you're not wearing slacks yet. And even in the, uh...and then we started to wear overalls. But not slacks. Not yet. I don't even know when that started. I can't remember when it started, but it was great. Yeah...

De Mare: So you and Patty worked at Ford Instrument.

Kalbas: Yeah, and she, uh, she was able to learn everything very quickly. She had been a dancer...she never worked, uh... she danced all over the world, and uh... And so, so she went out to the shipyards. Well, we hadda go out there, because her mother was going out there...her grandmother... She was visiting her grandmother. So we went out on the Sante Fe, uh, train. Patty and I were up at the deck...upper deck... And then...her mother was downstairs. And her mother just didn't stay away. It was just...very bad. Vera was a very... But,

uh...me, I respected mothers. Um... where the woman with me prior to Patty used to yell at her, and...have fights. Um...and so we went into the shipyards then...and she went into the office. And I was on the boats.

De Mare: ...if you could just talk about the job...? So you went out with Patty and Patty's mother on the train...

Kalbas: Right.

0037:03:14-----

De Mare: And then you got out there...and you got the job. Can you tell me the story of working at ... she worked at the office, and you worked on the plant... so...and let me know what you were working on...

Kalbas: Uh, yeah...uh, I got a job at 95 cents an hour at Cal Ship - uh, Shipyards out in California. And, um...I was told that after 4 months, I would become a journeyman at a dollar twenty, after I learned... And the union was collecting our dues...I had a union card, and everything. It was a 50 dollar initiation... I can't remember what we were paying monthly...or weekly... I can't find my card. So, uh,

uh what I was doing was I had this big big big box, and it had all electrical equipment in there. And I was dolling the electrical equipment out to the electricians. Uh, I got to know all the parts, and ...by the serial numbers... and I would give em to em.

And, um...this was a week away from four months... this man came up, introduced himself... "Pat," he said. And I said, "Hello." And he said "I'm going to be your journeyman, and you're going to be my helper." I said, uh...uh..."Pat, I don't think so. But I have nothing against you. Will you just..." He had no idea what the job was. He had no idea what the parts were, what he had to do, and he was going to be my journeyman. So I said "Just wait. I'll be right back." So I went down to the office, and I was livid. It takes me awhile to get angry...I mean, I don't get angry. And um...uh...Patty said she didn't recognize me. And I even remember my boss's name...uh, Palo...Mr. Palo. I said, "Mr. Palo, this is so-and-so. Is this right?" He said "Yes." I said "No."

And my lead man - the one I really get orders from - was in the hospital getting an appendicitis operation. So I had to wait til he came back. I said, uh..."I, I'm not going...you want me to teach Pat? I will show him around for one week, then I want...uh, my...the week is up, and I want my

dollar twenty, and I wanna become a journeyman. I wanna start putting the lights up in the, uh, in the bunk rooms." And he said, "No." I said "Yes." So I waited the week. I was teaching Pat the symbols and everything - very, very nice...very comp- And the week was up, and my lead man still isn't back. I can't remember his name. Um...I went to my boss again, and I, and he said "No." I said, "Well, I'm going to the Superintendent."

00:39:58:14-----

And I knew that they could not fire you, because you had to have availability...certificate of some kind...during the war, you can't get fired. I don't remember why. And uh...but I was still paying my dues...and the union people wouldn't see me. And so, I was sitting outside the Superintendent's office. He would come out, and say "Good morning." I said "Good morning." He wouldn't speak to me... wouldn't, uh...nothing... just sitting there. And I was getting bored, you know, 'cause I have to be active. And my lead man fi- came back, and I told him what was happening. And he couldn't do much about it. Finally, the Superintendent...I said "I, I, I wanna go to Union. I want to see the Union."

So I went to the Union...I think it was Mr. Graham...I'm not sure...and, um, I said "Look what's happening," I said. "This is not true. I was supposed to be journeyman - a dollar twenty an hour. You're still taking my dues." He said "We don't want you women here." I says "Oh, you don't?" I said "Why do you think we're here? I mean, are you aware of why we're here?" And I really laced it into him. And he saw that I was...wasn't easy to uh... And he, he got it for me. I said "Oh...no...not enough. But you're gonna get it for all the other women. These women are wives and girlfriends of, uh, men who are fighting..." and they were from Oklahoma, Kansas City, and they couldn't really fight for themselves...and so we got it. We got it, and we, we were okay.

And then we left...I don't know why, I think that...Patty and I. We were going back and forth from California a few times...and, uh...the grandmother was still alive, the money was in escarole...I don't know what was happening.

And, uh...I don't know what my next - oh yeah, I came back to New York. And, I wanted to resume, uh, the electrical work... Oh yeah, the electrical work was in the State rooms. There were ten of us in one state room. And the boats were very cold - this is wintertime. And the steel...they were very cold. So we had this big can, with a

fire going...and ten people in one state room. There were two- one overhead light, two bunk lights, two desk lights. And it didn't take ten people to do this. Took one person to...to hook up the wire. But this is what they were doing. They were hiring people, and getting the money for the union - they didn't care. It was really a farce, uh...because uh... Also the welders, when you needed a welder to put the brackets up before you could put the boxes up, the light, uh, uh materials... uh... you had to follow their hose, and you would find them asleep. Uh...oh yeah, it was very bad. Very bad.

00:43:00:20-----

And uh...the tanker, and some of the liberty boats, split in half in mid-ocean. Um...because the welding was so bad. Oh yeah, at that time it was, uh... And of course the E Bonds were being sold, so you had, uh...you had the actors and actresses and politicians coming down to talk to you... Clark Gable, Helen Hayes... And one of the gals got out, and got a hold of Clark Gable, and of course she was pulled back. Uh...I shook hands with Henry Wallace...the uh... Yeah, it was, uh...it was interesting. And the work was so easy. And, uh, and I developed, uh... Now my doctor tells me - and

I've had MRs - I have asbestos in my lungs. But they're not bothering me...it's not bothering me. I mean...my breathing...my lungs are very good. I think that's what's keeping me alive, because everything...I've had so many operations.

De Mare: Can you talk a little bit about the energy around the war? Because you were all...you were all, uh... So you were all working in the factory, and people would come down, and [do presidents] and...

Kalbas: Yeah, they...yeah, we were reading the papers. We were listening to the radio. And, um...the women would talk to me about the letters they got from their husbands or boyfriends. I mean, it was a very friendly, uh...I was, I was a very friendly...I got along pretty well. And, uh, I think I told you, my lead man took me up to the crow's nest, and we found two guys up there. And I was a little bit afraid of coming down, because it's a moving, uh, rope ladder part of the way. But it was fun going up. And I know what the crow's less- nest is now. I, I watch, uh, Cash Cab, and they had that answer, and nobody could answer it.

So, uh, so it's...I realize then, it's, uh...my experience - and so many jobs, and meeting so many different people -

which has given me the education that I didn't have, you know. But I miss, I missed for the longest time...I would regret it. There were, you know, a lot of people me told me "Stop regretting. 'Should have', 'Should have'...You shouldn't use it anymore." But I felt that way, because with an education, I wanted very much to be a Phys Ed teacher, you know... And I would have made it to travel, and do a lot of other things which I wasn't able to do because my salaries were always so low. And, uh, I never thought I would have to come into a Section 8 - it was very, very hard for me when it happened. Uh...I was on, uh, 15th St., between 7th and 8th, a, a walk-up. I had just had my hip replaced, so it was not very easy.

00:45:57:16-----

And uh...I had met the social worker then, and he had a client in the building, and he told me about the...uh, the empty. So I went for it. But, uh...I didn't want to move from there. Even though it was 3 flights up, I walk it every day. In fact, I felt much better than I do now taking the elevator, and I keep saying I'm gonna walk the stairs, but I don't.

De Mare: So, um...when you...you...when you left Cal Ship, what...you came back from New York, and what happened...what happened then? You...

Kalbas: Well, I, yeah, I tried to get a job as a journeyman again, but they asked me if I knew the panel board, which I didn't. Nobody taught me - I didn't. So, I'm not a journeyman, you know. But it was the dollar twenty that I was looking for, and uh, I did have the journeyman card, and they were collecting more dues. But uh, but I certainly didn't learn it, and I didn't lie about it.

And I guess then I got these, uh, horrible waitress jobs. I could never be a waitress. I couldn't imagine carrying these dishes on my own - I just couldn't. So I was a counter person, and uh, that was horrible. I hated it. Until, uh, um...a f- a- what was it? Oh, Bruce, and uh - Bruce and Bunny, these two friends of mine...this married couple...um...he was a magician, and he knew, uh, he knew Lou Tannen, this big magic, uh, place on, on 42nd St. And he got me, uh, work that I did at home...like sewing cards together and making... making little tricks.

And then I opened this machine shop on McDougal St. Um...and I had a small lathe, a drill press, a band

saw...um...Ford Machines, I can't remember. And these 4 kids - these 4 boys - who were...3 boys...? 3, I think... and they knew nothing about mechanics or machines, and I came from the war, so I knew, uh... And they put holes in my drill press...uh, uh, the band saw hadda be built low, and he sat, and cut his foot. One cut his thumb off... I mean, it was horrible. I, and I'm not a teacher. That I learned a long time ago. I just cannot, uh... I don't know what it is... I can't tell someone how to do something. I have to show- again, there it is... I have to show.

00:49:00:09-----

Yeah...yeah, there it is. I realize now. That's why...yeah, I just couldn't, uh... So I could never be...you know, I could never be a boss, or...uh... And so, uh, I had to sell all the machinery for 25 dollars... well, because every- every one of the tricks I made fell through. Because they never told me that there was...there were two kinds of, um, of uh, soder flux - the acid, and the other. And I bought the acid soder, and uh...used it on wires, which came apart. You know, this was the, uh, the razor-blade-swallowing trick.

De Mare: You have to go on...

Kalbas: I know...ha ha ha.

De Mare: You have to tell me this...

Kalbas: The, uh, it came from England, in a question mark - this big metal box - a big metal frame question and a box. And we couldn't use that, so we made an exclamation point. So I went to a tin smith shop and got all the parts, and soldered... those things were fine. I soldered...I made a box box...a question mark with a box on the bottom, all soldered together. And, the back was, the back - was it open? No, I think it had a cover, but I can't remember how the cover went. But the box was open to begin with, and what you did - and you had holes in front. Oh, this was the electric light bulb...the razor blade was something else, but the same system. Uh, electric light bulb.

So, there were holes, and electric lights were soldered...the wires, and the wires came through your sleeve. And you had a little box here that was flesh colored. And at the end of that box, you had the copper, and...in the back pocket, he had the other box which all this was attached to. And that's...that's attached to the box at the bottom of the question mark. All the lights are lit, because it's all wired. And with this box he has in his mouth, the

magician is able to have it in, uh, with all the bulbs soldered together, and 'squozen' into this box. And then, the lights are here too. And as he's on the stage, he's talking, the lights are on, and he pushes one through... pretends to swallow it...pushes the other...pretends to swallow it, and so forth until they were all gone. Then he pushes out the- pulls out the whole string of lit lights.

00:52:00:09-----

So...that was with the flux. That was acid, so the lights came apart. Then, I made the breakaway wand, which was the first plastic that came out - Catalin. Catalin plastic.

And the man who I got the plastic from wanted me to work for him, but I couldn't stand the smell of, uh, the burning plastic. I just couldn't ... that was terrible. Um...also got an offer to work on neon lights, which I turned down. I was afraid. I had to...and selling dickies...I was afraid to take chances. And so, uh...what job was that? Oh, the breakaway wand...was black tubing Catalin, and then some white. And, which I...no, I'm sorry...the white...it was a white wand. And you got the chord from the men's hats. The men, uh.. I was told by...where to go...you know, so I was able to buy this stuff. And so you got this chord. And with my

lathe, I was able to drill - that's right, this was solid plastic - I drilled the holes, and on each one of them I left little steps so that they would fit in until they became the right length. And then, the black - it was black...it was black, the wand - and the blank plugs...and the white plugs at the end to seal the knots. And then the last one had a slit, which I changed my drill press into a milling machine, and made a slit in the - and that was on the rope. So, when he had the wand, which was absolutely stiff...he'd hand it to you, and it would collapse, because he would pocket the slit one.

So, they had to be polished, so I took 'em up to the polishing place, and I said "Look at...this is how they fit. They can't...you know, this is how they have to be. They all came back rounded. Ha ha. So that was...I mean it was just unbelievable what was happening. I couldn't do that anymore. I stayed in touch with him a long time, you know, and I did little card sewing at home.

De Mare: I'm really struck by a couple things that you've said that really, um... Can you talk more specifically about what it was like being a woman in that world - and particularly about being a lesbian in that world? You said that they didn't think much of women, and [that they knew

nothing]. Can you just...can you talk a little bit about that time? 'Cause I don't think people understand how...I mean, what the expectations were on you...and how you...

00:54:57:09-----

Kalbas: Well, well uh, being a lesbian being very obvious, it wasn't easy, I mean walking down the street. Uh...I mean, the guys on the corner there would yell out "Dyke!" you know, and all kind of remarks. And, uh, but it just wasn't easy. Um...but I didn't pay too much attention to it, you know I uh... And then, um, then I had an incident when, uh, uh...there were open bathrooms at the L trains. I think I told you this? Well, I'm wearing a man's shirt, and a skirt, and uh...I paid my nickel and went through the turnstile. And I had to go the ladies room...I went to the ladies room...and a guy came outta the change booth after me and said "Sonny, you can't go in there!" So, I really looked kinda obvious, I guess - you know, I didn't think so at the time. So, uh, uh, it wasn't hard- it wasn't easy at all...it was very, it was very hard for me at the flower place, when uh...I could never go in the bathroom with anybody else, you know. And if anybody else was in there, I, I was very nervous, and very uh...

It's quite different, you know, it uh... I was a scardey. I was really, uh... So, I guess I didn't pay too much attention to, uh, being mistreated as a woman, you know? There was other problems. Uh...but I guess that's what it was. But we, but when I met my college friends, you know...we talked, and uh... And it was much, much easier then, you know... They were gay, even though they didn't look it. Uh...and I, you know... I would sit and wait for them at Hunter. I went to Hunter... I went to Brooklyn College. They, uh... I even went to a class...uh, opera...she was studying opera. And I had to book out, and it was almost becoming my turn - thank God the bell rang. Yeah, I was in tight.

De Mare: I think you were very brave...in many ways.

Kalbas: But, uh...but I knew that we were ... we were- weren't treated equal...you know, I knew as far as the pay went, and everything. Uh, but there- there's nothing we could do about it. I couldn't... at that time. Uh...and I didn't know who - I wasn't an activist then - I didn't know who...where to go, and uh... I was afraid to go to meetings, you know, and do any of that stuff...to be out in the open. So that's why it was hard for me to...

Oh, yeah, the machine shop.. I used to eat across at Joe's, and uh, Millie, his wife, was the waitress. And they had a boy who was 16 years old. Um...and after 16 years, she's pregnant, so they asked me if I would be the waitress. I said "Meee?"

00:58:05:12-----

I mean, and I knew everybody there...eating.. I mean, there was, uh, these were all kids then. Uh...Steve McQueen, uh, um...Ha- Harry Belafonte...they, they were all kids. Uh... uh... Paccino, I mean, the whole bunch of them were there. Uh...and uh...Liz is uh... Liz Maytag and her boyfriend, who looked like a bum...and after a while...after about 5 or 6 years, I would get calls from either her lawyer or something, her family...wanted me to tell about Mike, you know...what... I was friends of theirs. I mean, they were help- they started to help me. They knew I was afraid as a waitr- a waitress at the beginning, so they would do all kinds of things and help me...and stay and help me clean up and everything - they were great! And that's how I got used to it. 9 and a half years I stayed there. I worked breakfast, lunch, and dinner...I was, uh... That's how I finally learned to cook. Joe was upstairs sleeping, and somebody came in and they wanted liver dinner, you know.

"Okay...I...I'll make the liver." And I put the liver in the pan...I put the onions and everything...and I had this nice big piece of liver, and ... it's down to nothing! It shrunk! And there's a membrane on the outside, and you have to slice that. Who knew? That was my...but I became a good cook, because I was cooked up at Bonnie's for 3 and a half years...I mean, even there I was frightened, because I had never cooked, but uh, Angelo, who was at 17 Barrow... I don't know if... which is One by Land, One by Sea now. Um...and that was a great restaurant. And, uh, Angelo taught me a lot of stuff. And cookbooks... and I finally learned how to ... how to cook. I even made my own hollandaise sauce. And uh...Angelo showed me how you, you cook eggs. You just em...you just cook em...there like not cooked, but you take a...you take a strainer, and you put 'em in a long, long pan with ice cubes and iced water. You put 'em in the refrigerator, and in the morning you have your eggs ready to go for Eggs Benedict...Arnold. There are so many of those.

De Mare: Now when you were here last time, you told me a couple of stories I'd like for you to tell again about...I want...I'd like you to tell the story of the men putting the bolt in your tool box? The man who put the bolt through your toolbox? I'd like you talk about the- and you also

said something that was interesting where you said if you'd be cutting the wires, I'd put a little juice through? So can you tell those stories again, can you, can you...

01:00:57:04-----

Kalbas: Well, in the shipyards...when we were doing the wire, when we had to splice the wire, um...they would put the juice on from the panel box. But, luckily, they would know just know how much to put on, so we would get a shock. And you'd come out, and you know...nobody would admit it, you know, they would, uh... But they weren't treated, uh...but there was nothing you could do, because you didn't know who was doing it. And, uh, you ... you couldn't defend yourself.

I have this...because I took it... Uh...when I went to the bathroom, these guys at Lafayette machine shop - uh this was a brand new, uh, tool box - and they put a bolt through it, through the top of the box. I came out, and I saw this bolt, and I, I... "What the hell is this?" but then I looked at it carefully, and saw that they did...they took a bolt, and sliced it on the bias, and uh, glued it on. So... so I laughed with them...and then, then everything was fine. But prior to that, they put a little bluing on the handles of my lathes, and when I came out, I got all blue...and

that's not easy to take off - that bluing that you put on silver - on, uh, metal, to do the drawings.

De Mare: Do you think that kind of thing happened a lot?

Kalbas: Oh yes...I'm sure. Oh yes...yeah...some women were really abused, and uh... I mean, I'm not, uh... I was just told. I didn't see any... any of it. But, uh

De Mare: Why do you think it was? Do you think it was...? What do... why do you think...?

Kalbas: Well, these men didn't want me there, they said at the beginning. I said, "Well, what do you think I'm doing here?" And not only that...and I didn't know enough to say "Why are you here?" You know, I, I knew...you know, I knew that if they weren't in the army, they couldn't be, and I wouldn't have said anything. But, uh...but you know, I didn't know how to fight back. They uh... How do you fight back with something like that? And uh...I mean, there's a war going on, you know? You're doing what you can do, and unfortunately, it was the best paying jobs that I had. You know, that, uh, that didn't make sense, but it was.

De Mare: Do you think...? Now, after the war...were you, were you working at the... when the war ended? Did you get notice from someone when the war was over? Were you actually between jobs at that point? Can you tell me what happened?

Kalbas: Well, yes, I couldn't get a job in defense plants anymore. I tried the electrical, and I realized that you couldn't. And the men were coming back, and I realize they had to get back their jobs. And that's when I guess I got the waitress jobs, you know, the counter jobs. Yeah, I had a few of those, which were horrible, because, uh, one man wanted me to open up my shirt. At that time, I still had my breasts...wanted me to open up my shirt and expose myself. You know, I'm a, I'm a counter girl, and uh, they wanted me- you know, to cater to the men. Bullshit. You know... Even, even if I weren't gay, I wouldn't have done that. It wasn't me.

01:04:18:09-----

De Mare: Now, how did you get involved with the U.N.? Can you tell that story?

Kalbas: Yeah, there was a man who was eating at Joe's, and uh...and that's where I met him...and that, uh, when I had the machine shop, and it was getting over with, so he, he got me the job.

De Mare: And what did you do there?

Kalbas: Uh, yeah...I, I was, uh, escorting, uh, school kids into different rooms, and then they wanted me to uh...and so I became an escort, really. And then delivering messages to the assemblies. And I was able to, uh, to stay there and listen. And uh...they did it in English. They did it in Russian. And they did it in French. And, uh, I think I told you, if they left out "and" in one of the languages, they had to do it all over again. It was a little boring, I mean... Instead of getting to the meat of the, uh, the...what was happening, you know...?

De Mare: Did it feel exciting to be with/...how did it feel to be around...

Kalbas: /Oh yes, it was very-

De Mare: What was going on there? Like, what was actually being decided at that point?

Kalbas: The Jewish problem, at that time, mostly. And a few other of the... You know, I haven't been able to get myself to the UN here? And I wanted so much to see it. I just haven't been able to do it. I don't know... it, uh... would bring back... I don't know... That was a wonderful experience, and I just wasn't experienced enough to make it a better job. That's what bothered me. And having, you know, Russian abil- Russian, you know, knowledge, and... But not enough. You know, I couldn't read.

De Mare: How do you think, um... How do you think life is different for women now, you know, in the, in, in the working world?

Kalbas: Oh, I think it's much easier. And I think they're being recognized for their work more. And, uh, it's still not enough, but I still think...I still know, from reading, that they are getting a little more money. Um...um... and different kinds of positions that they can go for and get, which at one time was absolutely impossible. Um...and of

course, the men are a little different too. Some of them are staying home, and uh, which is good.

De Mare: What d- when you look back at that time, when you were, you know, first out in California and..

01:07:00:16-----

...what, what is your...what is your most vivid memory from that time? Do you have a story or anything? Something that you really remember - doesn't even have to be about working, but I'm just curious as to what you...

Kalbas: Oh, just that Patty and I met this woman who was, uh, giving us rides to different places. And, uh, and she also was taking things home from the, from the shipyards, and she was building a house - a boat house for her father. She had all parts. I mean, the uh...of course, she was going to use wood, but she had all the lights, the fixtures, everything. I was afraid to be with her. I...it was scary.

But it was fun, you know. Taking the uh...the fencing lessons...being in the studio. But then, I came back, and I continued with it, with uh, George Santelli, for a while, and uh...til.,..til the fire, I guess, and..

I think in ways it was much easier, even though there wasn't much money, or... um... I don't think we should have taken away the factories as much as we did. That is, uh... that is terrible. That was a terrible thing. Absolutely, I mean...uh...because there was work. You know, there was, uh... I mean... Building was one thing, but, uh, the making of things... I mean, why can't we still have it here? I mean, that's, uh... I don't understa- you see, I don't understand business that much, and I don't eat- read the business reports. I don't read some of the things maybe I should. I just don't want to anymore. I mean, it uh... I don't want to make myself sad.

De Mare: How do you think it... You know, you said a couple times that, like, the work that you did in the factories was the first time you ever did work that you really liked. And you obviously liked hard work, and you obviously liked to make things. Um...do you think that... do you think, in a way, that the war allowed you to... like how did you as a person...

Kalbas: Well, I learned much more, mechanically. And, uh...and I learned to stand up for myself, especially with that union thing. I think that did a lot for me. Um...and

Patty being 10 years older than me... you know, she even taught me how to walk. I was walking like a truck driver, she told me... and how to order food and stuff. But I'm sort of getting back...uh, I don't want to do those things anymore. Ha ha.

01:09:50:04-----

De Mare: I think you're wanting to do what you want...

Kalbas: And yet, I don't want people to take care of me. You know, I um... And uh...I haven't been thinking about it until lately, uh...I'm 91...how much longer, I don't know... But if it goes on longer, what condition will I be in? You know...will I be able to take care of myself? And the people, the help that you get, is just...I mean, I could NOT accept the help that they send me. When I was home recuperating the first day, it was just terrible. I decided to just do things by myself - which I did. And maybe that - you know, that didn't help me much, because I overdid, I think. I mean, like the second day, I was getting into the shower... uh, with the bench, of course. I had the, uh...

De Mare: I think it's good to be feisty.

Kalbas: Well, uh...ha ha. Yeah, but, you know... I'm beginning to wonder... I should slow down a little bit, and yet I can't.

De Mare: So, what was your favorite job you ever did?

Kalbas: Hmmm...I think the...I think the cooking up at uh...until, until the kids refused to, uh, uh, take care of the food and the...you know, alter the food, change the food around in the walk-in, and in the refrigerators. I was worried about poisoning anybody. And, uh...yeah, that was... that was kind of fun.

De Mare: Do you think that...uh, you, you say a couple times that the other women who you worked with in the - I'm jumping around a little bit - but you that something- that the wom- the other women that you worked in the factories with were wives and um...they were from the Midwest, and do you...do you have an idea... I mean, we talked a little bit about this last time, but I don't think that you had a- I don't think that it clicked in with you... I was trying to understand, you know, being a young woman on your own back

then...what life was open to you. When you were younger, how you felt...what you felt you could do... and what you thought you couldn't do.

Kalbas: Well, I didn't think I could do very much, because I didn't have the education. And so, I was afraid to take chances, uh... a neon job, I passed up - neon lights. And, you know, that would have been inetersting. Um...the selling of the dickies, which are coming back. I mean, not that I would wear one today, but they're coming back. Um...not having the education bothered me a lot. Very much. And so it held me back. I didn't know how to, uh, forge ahead. And there was nobody around, and I wouldn't ask for help. You know...

01:13:00:00-----

De Mare: I mean, it's interesting, because.. So you - I'm just trying to get it straight in my own head - so you kind of... you wanted to be a...you thought about being a phys ed instructor. Your father wanted you to be a nurse, but you were not interested in that.

Kalbas: No.

De Mare: Um... you went back and you did get your high school diploma a few years later. Um...did you have a dream of something that you really wanted to do, or was it more...?

Kalbas: Yeah, I wanted to be a Phys Ed instructor.

De Mare: That was the dream...that was the dream..

Kalbas: Yeah...because I knew I would be good. I was very athletic... I played all kinds of games. The uh...um...yup.

De Mare: I want you to show me your silver. I wanna...um...I actually wanna...I would love for you to show me on camera, your stuff.

Kalbas: I don't have too many pieces.

De Mare: That's okay.

Kalbas: This is my favorite now. Ha ha.

De Mare: So can you tell me how you made that?

Kalbas: Yeah, the clear blue. I just, uh, got some dowels and cut 'em, and got this piece of wood...cut it in shape...painted...and um... Got on the internet and got a picture of the spider. Went to the copy place and reduced it, and got some pictures of bugs, and cut them out...uh...outta paper, and then glued them to the silver, and cut it out - the silver. And uh...then I put the rubber band underneath with the clips, that I made. And...he's moving. Ha ha. It's crazy. Oh, I made a slot in there, so the rubber band stays in place. Why I made this, I don't know. Ha, I mean...still don't know. And I polish it every once in a while, 'cause it gets oxidized.

01:15:58:09-----

De Mare: Do you want to show me what you're working on right now?

Kalbas: Oh that thing? That Santa Clause? No.

De Mare: Whatever you want to share...whatever you want to show...

Kalbas: No, what I'm working on is...where'd I put 'em...?

Well, I'm gonna cut these out. I'm gonna cut a fish outta this. I put things away, and I don't know where I put 'em. No...that's it.

De Mare: So, what is this? Is this actually...? What are these?

Kalbas: This is a piece of silver...and these are cut outta paper. I have a whole bunch of animals cut out that I'm going to put and cut it out, cut it out. This is the elephant...but you can't see it. Maybe it's in the desk drawer. Nope...I'm really not working on anything right now.

De Mare: Can you show me your...the little...the fish?

Kalbas: Except I have the, uh... Oh, Yeah. That's...I don't know whether you should ta- that's the uh...the logo on the Sage, uh...Newsletter. It's the only pin I have left.

De Mare: I think it's wonderful.

Kalbas: Yeah, it came out very good.

De Mare: I think it's beautiful.

Kalbas: Yeah, you see what you have to do? You have to drill a hole, and uh, then you cut it out from the hole. Look at that! Ha ha. It's fun.

De Mare: Can you show me the, the paint- the framed picture?

Kalbas: Oh...yeah.

01:19:00:02-----

De Mare: So can you tell me the story here?

Kalbas: Um, yeah, uh...Jeannie, uh, brought me to the restaurant, Pearl's Oyster Bar. And, uh...and this woman in the white chef's suit, would come out and look at me...go back...look at me...and I didn't recognize her. And then when we sat down to eat, she came over and told me that she used to wash dishes for me at Bonnie's when I was a chef there. And, uh, then I, then I realized who it was. And, uh, every time I go there I get free oysters and free wine, and

so I decided I, I would say thank you by doing this for her. And I had a lot of fun doing it.

De Mare: Can you tell me what each of the things are?

Kalbas: Well, there's a fish with orange eye. There's a lobster with turquoise eyes. And there's an oyster, which, I got the shell from her...and it's very thin silver, so I was able to mold it...and then cut out a piece of silver to look like the meat in the oyster...and then put the pearl in the center. And then painted the, uh, board, uh, the ocean, and I thought it would look good with a little bit of a shadow box, so...

De Mare: It's beautiful.

Kalbas: Yeah, and, oh yeah...when I drew the lines in - I scratched the lines in - um...if you didn't, if I didn't oxidize- if I didn't, uh, spray it with a fixative, it would get very black...from the air. And so, you can't polish these things, uh... So, I, I put the fixative on, and now you'll be able to see the light and dark of the marks...which is important, otherwise you wouldn't uh...

De Mare: Can you show me...can you show me the tool box? And can you tell me, you know, the story of it...how long you've had it?

Kalbas: At Ford Instrument, is when they demanded it. Yeah, Ford In- no, I had it at the Lafayette. I don't know when I bought it...I can't remember. But uh, when I lived on, uh, Jones Street, I made friends with a carpenter. So I had these things built around it, but he wouldn't build the way I wanted him to...the wood in between...so I can take these boxes out, so... I have fun every time I want a box.

01:22:00:00-----

De Mare: So what do you actually have in the tool box here?

Kalbas: In here?

De Mare: In the, in the original one?

Kalbas: In this...? Oh now I have pieces of silver and wire and more tools... all kinds of tools. Some drill bits, pushes...all kinds.

De Mare: So how long has that been following you around the world? Let me think about it...Ford's Intstruments would have been 19-

Kalbas: No, this is, this is Lafayette - that small shop before I went to Ford. So, is it when I got back, from uh...no, before I went to California. I guess it had to be 40...

De Mare: 69 years.

Kalbas: Ay...that hurts when you say it like that. And then I have pieces of - I didn't make this - just pieces of jewelry lying around.

De Mare: Did you enjoy it, when you used to make...you didn't talk about...

Kalbas: Oh yeah, that...that's one of my favorite jobs too. I also worked for Paul Lobel, an art smith on West 4th St. in the village. I was doing part-time work for them and worked at home on making things...

De Mare: What kind of things did you make?

Kalbas: Uh...hoop earrings...uh... At Lobel's, I just cut things out. He wouldn't let me solder or anything. He had somebody doing that. I did polishing. Where are my...I can't...hmm...oh, I think I know. No... That's bad, you know? Now, when I put things away, I don't know where they are. That's very bad. Don't let it happen to you gals. Oh, this is a flexible shaft. Oh, it's heavy.

De Mare: What do you use it for?

Kalbas: Um, this you use for drilling, polishing, um...burring... You use it for everything. And it has a foot, uh... a foot pedal, which I don't think is hooked up right now.

01:25:00:00-----

No...

De Mare: Is that the only piece of equipment, like electrical equipment, you have right now?

Kalbas: No...no, no, no...

De Mare: What else do you use on a regular basis?

Kalbas: Well, I use a lot of this. This is what I cut the things out with. But not having a jeweler's workbench...what I did... I cut the- I put this up here...oh...facing this way... And that's where I do my cutting. You don't want me to hook it up?

De Mare: No that's okay, I can see what you're doing. So you do this completely by hand.

Kalbas: Yeah, and then you just uh. It's gonna move...you can't uh...you have to really hook it up... And you cut it that way. That's's how I cut this pin out. That, I like doing very much. And then you have wax that you wax this with. And then I...

I have other motives. I have...etching tool and...I ha- do have a book of some of the work I did. My, uh, my friends in Holland are, are sailors. You know, they have their own boat, and everything. So I made this for them, which is on a piece of um...uh...you know what they use for ceilings...? That, uh, tin...? That's what the background is.

And then the silver boats - different sh- uh, uh sailboats
- with the nautical chord around it.

De Mare: Show me what else you've got there?

Kalbas: It's nothing... All my animals. My kangaroo. Oh
that's...that one I made for the doctor, who's also a sailor.

01:27:56:16-----

And I made this sign for a friend of mine, in South
Hampton. Oh, the one, the uh, the one who does the
collage. And that's my strong lady... with red hair -
copper. Those are some of my animals.

De Mare: They're wonderful, Jerre.

Kalbas: Yeah, you see, I can't solder anymore. I soldered
the water run, and the stick pins. And I can't do it. And
that's a picture where they took...in the jewelry class. I
think I have one of the t- ... and a bracelet I made...some
earrings... That I can still make...but I don't like to,
because I can't solder the... I made a spoon for a baby. Oh,

yeah...this is my favorite. I dropped a rubber band on the floor once, and it took that shape. So I had the rubber band, and then I put a paper clip on it, and I put it on an elastic and wore it around. And I was able to pull that off. I was going to manufacture them, you know, and sell them on secretary day, but... See, I don't, I don't want to make money on this. I just give it away. Oh yeah, there, there it is, on the elastic.

De Mare: That's really wonderful, Jerre.

Kalbas: And then, I used to make buttons. Um...well, this somebody brought back from uh...Israel, and they wanted me to box it for them. So, I did that. But I used to make buttons by doing that... by putting... which it has to be soldered. Oh, that's what I can't do for you, because I don't have the long...oh yeah, that's my class of exercise people. Oh and that's my [clawfish]. And her husband was a photographer, so she decided to do this. And my horse... Alligators were wonderful. They were wonderful. They were all pins. That's...the alligator.

01:31:00:00-----

That's it. Oh...this is the paper mache. That's Christmas decorations I used to make ... and then, that's also made out of paper mache. See, it's so much nicer than that stuff. Isn't that nice? Better.

De Mare: Very sweet.

Kalbas: I like that... I like sitting down and painting too. I may start doing that again.

Yeah, with all the work that I did, in the factories - the defense plants and the shipyards, I feel that I am Rosie the Riveter. And, uh...I think that we should be put out in public more, and, uh, really recognized...not just as, uh, defense workers, but as people who were...were making the, uh, doing the livelihood for our families and our um...while our, the husbands, and the, uh, boyfriends were away. Uh, I mean, I didn't have a husband or a boyfriend, but uh, I still feel that it should be recognized, very much so. And it isn't. They keep, they keep ignoring it - even that, uh, Tom Brokaw and, uh, that show. I was very...I, I really want - I didn't know how to call. I wanted to call that station and tell 'em right then and there. I really did, I was, I was angry, because it should be recognized and brought out. We weren't just playing there.

The guys were sleeping. We were working. We really were.
The women took their jobs seriously.

De Mare: I think it's so interesting how you talk about being so shy, and yet you were the one, of all those shy women, who fought for what was right, and I think that's extraordinary.

Kalbas: Well, that's only because I was very angry. I mean, someone has told me that I was going to get more money, and then, uh - and I was doing a good job - and not being paid for it, yeah I got very angry. Um...I, I couldn't understand...you know, it was beyond me. I mean, I just knew that I...I didn't even think twice, so I must have been very angry. I don't, uh, I don't really fight that much. Uh, had I fought more, you know...