

# WORK THROUGH TIME

*Cape Breton Stories of Land & Sea*



**T – 2652 a**  
**Rose Grant Young**  
**64 Taylor St., Whitney Pier**  
**January 3, 1991**  
**Interviewed by Elizabeth Beaton**  
**The Beaton Institute**

NOTE: Interview interrupts frequently with a persistent cough.

E: This is an interview with Mrs. Rose Grant Young who lives on 64 Taylor Street in Whitney Pier, Sydney. The date is January 3, 1991. The interviewer is Elizabeth Beaton. Mrs. Young, Rose is going to talk about her experience in working at the steel plant during World War II. She was born in 1921 and lived most of her life, a great deal of her life, in Whitney Pier. She grew up on Henry Street.

Now. Rose, this tape will be used for research purposes at the Beaton Institute. Anybody can come in and listen to it. And perhaps students or perhaps your grandchildren might find it interesting to have a listen to it. Is that O.K. with you?

R: That's fine.  
[Extraneous discussion]

E: Rose, what I'd like you to tell me if you would: about your experience at the steel plant. Perhaps starting with how you got on at the plant.

R: Well, I have to start before that. I was again -- [?] mixed up with the Nathansons and the Levitans [?]. (Extraneous discussion) So, when I discovered that they wouldn't take me for training to... because I was too young after me leaving school to go in nursing, and discovered how much it was going to take to get me into there, I decided to go to work. So, I didn't look too hard really first. But one day I got a call on the phone and it was Anna Levitan, Mr. Levitan's wife. She said, "Rose, do you want a job," she says, "to get the uniforms and everything you need to go into training." I said, "Oh heavens, yes!" She said, "Well, go down to Laurier Street. Tomorrow morning at eight o'clock." And she said, "The boss'll be there," she said, "He wants to see you."

So, eight o'clock in the morning, next morning, I went down. And as I was going in the office, he was sitting at a desk like this [Who was this?] Mr. Levitan. And I came through the door and there was something on the floor. There was a big brown bag on the floor. And I stooped down and I picked up the bag and I put it on his desk as I was coming through. And he said, "I hear you're looking for a job." I said, "Yes." And he said, "Well, you came well-recommended." [laugh] I started to laugh, cause I knew that Anna had been talking to him. And I said, "That's good. I went to the highest authority," I said, "I figured that would be the easy way in." And he started to laugh. And he asked me a couple of questions. And he said, "O.K." He said, "Pick up uh... you're going to work at Number Five store." That was the one across from the playgrounds. This was the smallest of all his stores. He had five stores. [At the Pier?] At the Pier. No, he had five stores all over Sydney. He had one at Ashby, he had one on Charlotte Street, he had... Number Six was on

Victoria Road, the vacant lot that's there now. And the other one's across from the playgrounds. On --[?] they made apartments out of the place there [that was in 1939?] Yeah. Around May, yeah, around May.

E: What was his first name? [repeat question]

R: Jake. That's what they called him. She always called him Jack. He didn't like "Jake." So, anyhow... And I said, "I got the job?" or something like that. He said, "Yes." No, I said, "Aren't you going to give me a test of any kind?" So I never ...what I expected... to be a...he'd ask me questions or something. He said, "You passed the test." "What test?" "That bag," he said, "that was on the floor, and you picked it up, and put it on my desk." He said, "If you hadn't, you wouldn't have got the job." Imagine. He was that careful over even small things like paper or bags or anything like that. I worked for him for ten years. [Ten years?] Yeah, I left there and went to the plant. Came back and went into the dry goods end of it, not the groceries. And I worked for that man for ten years because I picked up a bag off the floor.

E: So you left Levitan's store to go to the plant. How did that happen?

R: Well, they... somebody told us in the store that they were looking for people to work at the plant. We all thought it was comical, anyhow. But there was five of us. There was Diane Mingerelli [?], and my girlfriend, Margie, and myself, and a Jewish girl that worked on the other side. She worked in the dry goods, while we worked in the groceries. Honey Rusikow was her name. And do you know Boomy [?] [Oh, yeah] She was a teacher. Yeah, well, ... Boomy's sister. There was four and myself, the five of us. It was a Wednesday afternoon, the store was closed.

E: You all worked in the store?

R: Yeah. So we all went over and put our names in for at the plant. We had no idea what it was all about at all. It was just an afternoon out in a walk, really. It was a beautiful afternoon and we walked over to the general office and all put our names in. Two of us were called. Diane Mingerelli was called and I was called. Still didn't know what we were going to do or anything at all. Diana was a mail boy. The only reason I could figure out that we were called, [How were you called?]. Notified by phone. We gave our phone numbers. And we both went over. The only thing I could figure out afterwards, thinking about it, well, why Diane and me? I was so big and hefty looking at that... perhaps that's why. But Diane was small and dainty and everything. Why was she called if that was the reason? And vice versa, we were going... trying to figure it out. Why weren't the others called? And afterwards it dawned on me. Well, I had no father and Diana had no father. So perhaps that's why we were called. Well, anyhow, Diane worked till the boys came home, same as I did. You know.

E: Where did she live?

R: I was picked and we didn't even know what job we were going to go on. But Mr. Moffat, Bob Moffat, was the super in the rail mill, and I think he took one look at me and he said, "Well, she looks enough like a man." So, [laughs] he took and he put me on a crane over in the plate mill. And the plate mill was wide open, and they used it for scarfing. Now, I know you won't know what that is. It's slabs of steel that have flaws in them. Great big chunks of steel perhaps that... [What's that, about 4 feet by 3 feet] But it has a flaw in it. They scarf it with a... like a torch, and they take the bad spots out, and they fill them in, you know, later. And then you would turn them over, and if there's any flaws on the other side... I don't know what they used those things for. I never did find out.

E: Was it a flat plate?

R: Yeah, it was a flat plate about that thick [about 3-4" thick] Perhaps that... perhaps thick. 'Cause

I was never that close to them. I was always --[?]. But then they used a magnet and you flipped them over for the men. But there was lots of room and everything there, but it was just to learn the gears and everything. So when I learned that, he came and put me on another crane.

E: What were you doing, were you way up high?

R: Oh yeah. Oh, it's all up in the air.

E: And would you be the one that flipped it with the magnet?

R: With the magnet, yeah. The magnet was attached to my crane. [Yeah] See, you would hold them up and the boys would give them a flip, and then I'd put it down again, and it would be flipped over. So then he put me on a smaller crane which did totally different... it had no magnet or anything like that on, and it was a carrying cage move, not just the crane. The first one was just the crane that moved, but the next one he put me on, it was the cage that moved. [On a rail, like on a mono rail?] Yeah. Oh, yeah. Well, they all have to go on the rails. [Above?] Oh, yeah. It was all up in the air. There were no cranes on the... that I had to use anyway...

So, anyhow there was a French fellow there, and I learned more French than I did anything else, when I worked with him. But anyhow, I was only there a couple of weeks till I got the idea of a carrying cage. And then one day he came to me, "You come with me." And this great big, massive man, very... [Who was that?] Bob Moffat, he was the super of the... all the big mills. So, I went with Bob, and we walked across the ah... I didn't know where we were going. I thought we were going back to town, because we came from one side way over to another side. So, I went with him anyhow, and he got to the foot of the ladder in the rail mill, and he looked up and he said to me, "Well," he said, "you're going to have to go the rest of the way by yourself." I said, "The rest of the way?" He said, "Yeah," he said, "I'm going to give you to this man," he said, "that's running the crane." He said, "He's one of the best," he said, "that I ever ran across." He said, "So, he's going to teach you how to run this crane." And I looked and there was hardly two inches that there wasn't something in the way, and I thought to myself, "How in the name of God can I do any work in this place!" because the housing was... this was the rail mill, where they roll the rails. And this great big housing, it's like a house but, like a jigsaw puzzle. You take it apart and you put it together for different size rails and all this. And there was about this much room to walk [About two feet?] Ah, perhaps three. Up and down on... on this side.

Well, I thought the man must be a magician. But...and he said to me, "Don't worry about his language." That was the first thing he said. "Don't worry about his language." So he called a man. He said, "Maynard, come down here." So, Maynard came down. He was only a little man about that high. So he came down, and he said, "I'm going to give this girl to you," he said, "and I want you to make a crane... man out of her." "O.K." Maynard said, "I'll do my best." "O.K." he said. And I looked at Maynard's face and he looked as he thought, "Well, this is an impossibility." [laugh]

But anyhow, he said to me...but no warned me that the billets were charged, and I didn't know enough... [What do you mean, the billets were charged?] Well, where did the electricity come from, -- to run the crane? Never, ever dawned on me, you know. Course, there was so much new and so much coming at me so fast and everything. First thing I did was put my hand on one of the billets and, course, I was caught, you know, with one hand on the, what do you call it, couldn't get my hand off. So they ha... he hollered up to me. He said, "Take... Pull, pull, pull! till your hand comes off." Well, of course I was shaking all over.

E: Electrical charge?

R: Yeah. Nobody ever explained anything like that. [What did you put your hand on?] On the

charged billet as I was going up to get into the crane. See the... now, how can I explain this? The rails are charged to keep the train running in other words, and you... the levers may go up or down, but the electricity is there all the time, see. [--rail] No, that runs the train in, never... but nobody ever explained that to me. And the first thing I did was a boo-boo, I put my hand on the, what do you call 'em. I tell you, I never did it again. So, I often thought afterwards, so perhaps it wasn't such a big boo-boo after all 'cause it taught me, keep your hand away from that. You know.

E: How many volts would there be?

R: Oh, I don't know. But, as luck would have it, I only put the one. But of course I had one on the ladder going up. [Oh, so it'd go right through you?] Yeah.

But, anyhow, the man was very quiet the first day and everything. And he showed me a whole lot of things. But anyhow, the longer I was with him, the more I realized what a fantastic operator he was. [What was his name?] Maynard Young, was his name. And the others, course, they started razzing him. "How come he got the only woman in the whole outfit?" And he got her, and all the rest... this little man... and all the rest of... oh, the razzing was something awful. But I soon saw that he went along with it too, you know, and nothing fized him. But ah... he was a fantastic man. And oh, what he could do with that crane! He could do things that nobody else will ever be able to do. See, on the three to eleven shift, you had a hole as big as, I suppose, the size of this house. And they used to cut the rails and en... a certain length. Now, if they rolled a rail that long, and they only needed this long, there was a saw came and cut off that piece. So that piece dropped. Well, then, there was a bunch of men there. They will pick up that with... with... like scissors, or gripes... that, and they'd dump that in a big hole. So on three to eleven shift in the rail mill, you had to clean out that hole and get it clean for the next day. See, that was part of it.

And then on the back shift and on the three to eleven, ah... for a while there was no double rolling in the rail mill. It... I worked with the crowd from the billet mill, which was a totally different thing altogether. They were rolling billets which were [About 4" by 4"] Yeah, but they would come through, perhaps be... a mile long. Now if that went through the machine and went right and went through the cutter, they came out perfect. But if they didn't they were like a worm. --[?]

E: Did you call it a cobble?

R: A cobble. That's just what it was, a cobble. But, I had to take that cobble and press it with the magnet. And before it got cold, I had to make that as small as I could, because I had to take that up past the rail mill where all this stuff is hanging and... And make it small enough to go in a car, a boxcar. So it would go back to the open hearth and be re-melted so they could use it again. And I had to do it fast, I'm telling you, I had to do it fast. And that -- [cough covers word] three to eleven and back shift was for the billet mill. Where the day shift was for the... for the other. And it was totally different kind of work.

There was an awful lot to learn at the billet mill. An awful lot. But there was no men in my way in the billet mill. They just got out of my way, where the rail mill, I had to watch out for not only the men, but I had to watch out for the housing. I had to watch out that I didn't bump into anything that would throw anything off, or... thing like that.

But I finally got through it and I learned it and... And it was all thanks to Maynard. He was fantastic. And he used to show me tricks. And we had an old... an old crane chaser. Every crane is supposed to have a crane chaser. Well, ours was 82 years old. I remember, this was during the war, so they took anybody... But he was quite a rigger. He was an old Newfoundlander. Half of what he said I didn't understand, 'cause he used Newfoundland expressions and everything. But, when it came to rigging, he knew it all.

E: What does rigging mean? [repeat]

R: Oh, how to put the knots on it and how to rig it up so that they... would be level. And how I could tilt it easy and get it past the housing to get it up to the, what do you call 'em. That's what... all the different knots and everything that's used. The chains and... how you put the chains. See, you couldn't have it heavy on the other side, or too heavy on the other side. Oh, and you had to have it so that you could put it like that when you were going up past the housing. So none of those ends that were stuck out would catch into anything, you know.

E: That's what a crane chaser did? [repeat]

R: That's what a crane chaser did. But to save old Tom having to walk... oh it's about from here up to the top of Taylor Street, from one mill [about a mile?] Oh, not that (far)-- yeah. And he to used to have the carhart [?] overalls and he had, um, what was kind of rope, I don't know what kind it was but it used to be like hairy rope, and he had the pants down and that en he would put that around so that that it wouldn't trip or catch -- see.

Well, the man had no feeling in his legs and every time I'd look down perhaps his pants were afire, and they'd be burning, a-burning, and I'd be pounding the bell with my foot and pointing down and he'd look down and he'd -- take his glove off, he had great big gloves, and he'd put the fire out and he'd keep on with what he was doing. [Why does he have no feeling in his leg?] I don't know, unless there was no circulation at 82, that's only thing I could I could think of. Oh, he was a character, I'm telling you.

But anyhow, to save Old Tom... He was always on with Maynard, see. Well, by this time, I was by myself and Maynard was gone to help somebody else in a different mill. They were beginning to have confidence in women, in other words. So, a few more ladies were taken on and they were put on different crane... But none of them as hard as the rail mill. I thought that wasn't fair. They should have started with the smaller cranes and the easier cranes, but he started with the hardest ones. However, what was I going to tell you now?

E: You were on the rail mill and Tom was always on with you.

R. Yeah. Oh yeah. To keep Tom from having to walk from the billet mill all the way up to the car where it shipped out, Maynard devised, or concocted...I don't know what you'd say, a way of doing it so that Old Tom wouldn't have to walk all the way up and take the chains off and then come back and then do it all over again two or three trips, he figured... would do it, tell Tom it's got to go in the big... I'm getting ahead of myself in my mind and my mouth's not catching up. So, anyhow, he taught me to do what he did. Well, the fellows that worked in the yard, they used to have to come through the rail mill to get to the yard to find out where they were going to yard... going to work. Because in the yards you never knew. The jobs may be in the open hearth, may be almost anywhere, may be clean up jobs, anywhere on the plant. But they used to stop and watch me all the time and this used to make me nervous cause I was scared that one of them, especially if they were real young and, of course, they were taking anybody that would... by this time. And they'd stand (and) watch me and watch me and... --get out of the... I'd bang the bell and bang the bell for them to stand back, because you never knew if something would happen or not. But anyhow, this was what it was all about, Maynard having Tom this and saving Tom... Everything he learned to do was to save Old Tom. Because... scared stiff something was going to happen to Old Tom. And this is how I became such a good crane operator was to save Old Tom.

E: How did you save him, the walk?

R: Well, he'd put the chains on a certain way so that I could take the chains off without Tom having to come up all the way up to the rail mill, see? When I disconnected that and got rid of the load, all

I had to do was pick up -- of chain. The chain would be on my... on the hook. And go back, all I had to watch for was the chain didn't hook on anything on my way back. And it would save Tom perhaps four or five trips a night, see? It was amazing what Maynard could do with that chain (thing?). I used to say he could almost make it talk, what he'd do with that... But see, he had hours there by himself, and he was there for forty years. And everything was a challenge to him. He'd see if he could do this or do that when there was nobody around. So if he did make a boo-boo, nobody'd laugh at him or anything. But he'd practice and practice and practice and practice. He had the patience of Job with that... I used to go down with Archie, down... he was the roller, down in the billet mill, and I'd go down and talk to Archie down the... He had a bench there, and he used to have to sit there watching that the steel went in, that the billets went through the cutter. And I'd go down instead of learning, you know, how to do it. But I knew it was only a temporary thing, so I wasn't as interested, I suppose, as Maynard was when he was a crane man.

But the day came then when the boys started coming back. So, I went right back to the Cosmopolitan and I went to do dry goods then, 'cause Honey, in the meantime, had gone to McCurdie's, so I just took Honey's job when I came back. In fact, I was there till Mar-- till I was carrying Marva, the second one.

E: You were married then?

R. Oh, yeah. Oh yes, in the meantime, I married the operator's son. He went-- the fellow who I replaced, see, he was... they gave him so many reprieves that was one that Moffet didn't want to let go cause he had nobody trained, see? So the government gave him so many chances to get somebody, but they didn't work out or something. [This is Maynard?] No, the government gave Mr. Moffat, you know. [But to replace Maynard?] No, no, to replace Roy, his son. His son was on the crane. [Oh, Maynard's son?] Maynard's son, yeah. Well, he was good, but he wasn't as good as his father, cause he didn't have the patience. But, -- the army wanted him and they took him, see, and this is how I got the job. See, I replaced him. And that's where I got the name. --it was from him. [What do you mean, that's where you got the name?] Well, it was "Young." [Yeah, you married him.] Right.

E: Well, when did you marry him?

R: I married him in '42. [When did you start at the plant?] Wait now, I went to Cosmo in '39, and the war broke out in the fall of '39. I went there in '40 I guess. [So you met him at the plant?] Oh yeah, there's one time... Somebody told me... You know the over... carhart overalls, the backside of them were right loose and everything. Well, all the woman had the carharts on. They were zippered front -- but the bottoms were always hanging down, and evidently when you go to get paid, we all had to stand in line and go up to get it, and Roy, oh he was a proper devil! He used to get behind the girls and, you know, make faces at the men. And he'd pull on the slack of the overalls. But my mother went and fixed mine. So there was no slack, it was all me. (laughs) So this day we were standing in line and we could see all the men giggling and everything. We knew he was doing something, but we didn't know what he was doing. But this day in particular he was behind me, and he did it and I turned around and I smacked him. (laughs) Right across the face. He got such a shock! (laughter) But he --- I was still with Maynard at the time, but I had been at his home because Maynard wanted me to meet his wife 'cause he, evidently, he used to go home and say, "Y' kn... tell everything that we did everyday, and the jokes we used to play and everything else, so I was invited down to their house. [Where did they live?] On Ferry Street. --on Ferry Street there. So...

E: So that's how you met his son?

R: Yeah, well, he was on the opposite shift. I'd be going home, he'd be coming, see. So, it lasted, anyhow, and he went in the army and that's how... They had to look for another operator and... They got Maynard back for a while and then they had to take Maynard for another crane and...

stuff like that.

E: Well, that's really interesting.

R: It's nice to look back at. But it amazes me how few men are left that I did work with. [Yes] Yeah. They were older men, because you know, all the young men were gone. There was no young men there, unless they were cripples in some way, you know, at that time... Yeah.

E: So, did the women that worked at the plant, did they get together for lunch or anything like that?

R: Oh no, well, see most of the time I was all by myself. You had your own lunch you brought, of course, with you. But you ate it... perhaps if you were on the levers. The mill didn't stop for lunch, that's for sure. The steel was still coming, so you ate while you were doing your job at the same time, you know, unless there was a breakdown or hold up in the steel. If the steel wasn't hot enough, they were waiting for it to hit a certain degree... see, to come up. But, there's nothing like that. [So it was... how many hours shift would it be?] Eight hours, yeah. [So it was non-stop eight hours] That's right. And sometimes there was a double shift, because they were... needed the rails so badly that were running a double shift. And then there were so many breakdowns because they were pushing the mills so much that even the third shift was trying to fix up and mend. Yeah -- something.

SIDE 2

R: -- four hours without a stop [Really] Yeah. [So you'd go off to the bathroom and...] No, no you wouldn't go off anywhere. [Before you started your shift?] That's right, because once I hooked onto something, when it started the changeover, I couldn't get back down. There's no way. I was hooked on and I had to stay hooked.

E: What did the levers do? You talk about moving the levers with your hands... with your feet too?

R: Yeah. That's the old fashioned one... they haven't got any of them there today. I often thought I'd like to see what's there. It's box type they got now, like this... But ours, this one... you're too young to remember the coa... the tram cars. [Ooh yeah. They'd swing around in a circle] That's right! [There'd be a handle coming off ... or something?] Yeah, yeah! There's a knob. [A knob?] And you'd go like that. [Swing it around] Yeah. And you can hear it clicking in every little bit you turn, you know. And this is why you were changing rolls with all those men underneath you. You didn't just turn it. You went... (indicating) ... [very slowly] But the old fellow that used to give me the signals, Mr. Phillip from Westmount, he used to say, "A blue hair!" (shouting) Well, that meant that I was to touch that lever and that's it. Just... touch it! "Blue hair" was the signal that was -- "God help me if I went further." (laughs) He was a Frenchman and he used to swear like a trooper. One time Mr. Moffat asked me, he said, "Don't let it bother you, because," he said, "If he didn't swear he couldn't talk." (laughs) I could see his mouth going, but I couldn't hear what he was saying. [There'd be a lot of noise, eh?] Oh heavens, yes!

E: What were the signals like?

R. Oh, the signals were all by hand. You had to read the signals. [Yeah?] Yeah. But that "blue hair" -- he'd holler that. [Yeah?] That meant that... just that much difference, see. You'd have to see the housing to understand. The housing was perhaps wider than this kitchen, and they were like blocks. The kids' blocks when they're building things reminds me of it, in miniature, you know? The roll had to go in here. You had to have one block like that, that'd make room for the roll. Then you had to cover that roll. Then you had to put a piece on top, and you had to screw that down so tight that it wouldn't give a bit, an inch! An inch, what am I saying!? A twentieth of an

inch! Because that twentieth of an inch would throw that rail out, see, when the pressure came down. That rail would be scrapped. It had to be exact. They all had to measure -- It was amazing. [Yeah] And some of them were... all they did was this... like that, and eye it and they'd know exactly where... They had little... like, sticks or something or steel like that [Calipers?] and they'd... Calipers, that's it! And they'd put it like that. Or perhaps they'd put it over here -- or perhaps another caliper --

E: And it was your job to place the rolls... ?

R: All the rolls, uh umm. And with all those men around me to make sure I didn't touch or come too near any of those men. I often think of it. I'm glad I was so young, 'cause I didn't have the fears. I don't think I could do it today. I'd be too scared of hitting this one or too scared of...

E: You never hit anybody?

R: No, thank God! Oh, one young fellow got hit but it was his own fault. It was a hot chain. We were taking hot steel off and he was from the yard, he wasn't belonging to the mill. [What do you mean by hot steel?] Was -- red hot. [Was it a bloom or what?] A bloom, yeah, it was a bloom. It was like a leveler, like that. A chain on it here, and a chain on it here. And the bloom was here. And that bloom was either yellow or red hot. And I could take that and go over, put it on the pile, take the hooks off, take them away. But the bunch from the yard didn't know that. And I used to tell them, "Get out of my way. Go sit down. If I need your help, I'll ring the bell." But this young fellow -- from Langan Road -- and I said to him several times, but he thought he was helping me. And he had a great big long hook, with a hook on it... like what was on the, what do you call it... And this time, all I have to do, you know, to get out of trouble, was to either go one way or the other way, and I'd be able to rock it [and unhook it] Yeah, and he came over with his hook and unhooked it and, of course, the chain flew, and it caught him on the side of the face. Well, I almost fainted. And I was so mad at him, because if he had done what I told him, to get the heck out of my way, it would never have happened. But see, he wasn't work... used to working in the rail mill.

That was the only near accident. But he went right down to the hospital and they put stuff on it right away. [hot (?) too I guess, eh?] Uh umm. But I was scared it would mark his face, but I saw him a couple of days afterwards and I asked him, you know, was it sore, and he said, "No, whatever they put on," he said, "took that sting right out of it." "Well," I said, "I had warned you and warned you not to go near that chain." And he said, "Well, I thought you were in trouble." "Well," I said, "This is what happens when they send somebody that doesn't know the mill." [Yeah] He was trying to be helpful and I was... didn't want him to be helpful. [Yeah] But... that was the only thing...

E: What was the worst cobble you ever saw?

R: Oh. Some of them had to burn because they were beyond anything, you know. [Caught up in things...] Oh... The mill was about as wide as this house across where those cobbles could get all wound. [How big is this house?] Twenty-four feet. And it would cobble, and cobble, and cobble, and cobble. Well, especially if I was tied up at the other end in the day shift. And it cobbled in the billet. Well, I couldn't disconnect the rail... the rail mill to go down and -- The cobble would have to be burned up. [Mmmm...] But it meant extra work for everybody, burning those. Well they were only blocks like that, but certain feet, you know, so it would fit right in. But that's no problem, you always can do it, but it's just that it's... it makes a heck of a lot of work for nothing. [Mmmm...]

E: Now when you were in, like, the rail mill, and then the billet mill here, was it the same crane?

R: Oh no. The billet mill had its own crane. But there was a wall. See, the rail mill crane could only come down this far. Then there was the door and an opening... there. Then there was this

wall, and the end of the blooming mill crane. This blooming mill crane started, like, down here and it could only go as far as there, and mine came down to just about here. [Yeah] See, we couldn't hit one another 'cause of the, the structure of the building would keep us apart. [Right] Yeah.

Tell you something funny about that. Big Archie, he was that roller on my shift in the billet mill. Great big, big thick man. 'Cause... Big Bill was, too. They were brothers. One was on one shift and one was on the other. But Archie was as crazy as the birds and right full of the devil, where Big Bill was old... not older, but a different type of men. He was a nice, very, very... how the hell do you put it... polite, and everything like that, but the other fellow was a proper devil. And him and I got along better. But there was a bunch and we could sit down at night when there was... when my work was done. I would bring my crane down to the ladder and I'd come down the ladder and I'd sit with Archie on the bench, and we'd watch... very pretty, you know, watching hot steel going through, and going through. And he could tell if everything was going good just by listening, as long there was switching -- switching had a certain sound -- he knew every thing was great.

But anyhow, there was a friend of mine and I worked with his sister, and he was a crane repairman. And all of a sudden Archie and I looked up and the crane repairman was telling the craneman, next-door craneman, Little Joe... Little Joe what... it was a French name, but anyhow, Little Joe they called him. And told Little Joe to come in underneath the lights, that he was going to grease the top of the crane. So Archie and I were sitting, we were watching. So Little Joe brought the carriage in, right underneath the, what do you call 'em, and this friend of mine was underneath the what d'ya call 'em and the first thing we notice... here comes the drip, steam. [Of what?] Guess! (laughs) He forgot all about being in the mill, and he couldn't ... didn't want to come all the way back down stairs to go to the bathroom, so, he just stands underneath the light and there it was. (laughs) Well, I looked at Archie and Archie looked at me. The two of us roared! Just roared! And Phil looked down and saw us and it shut off as fast as it started. Well, that even put us into convulsions, because how he could start... stop after starting! Well, oh my God, I never... And everybody was looking at the two of us. The fellow that was on the shears, he looked at us. Everybody looked as if we were insane, but they didn't know what was going on. But then it got around somehow what happened with the crane, and Little Joe, what the hell was his name... he was a cartoonist. And it was an operator, I suppose that's how it got around was -- him 'cause he could see it, too, see. And then when he saw us laughing he knew damn well what it was we were laughing at. But the next day when I went to work at three o'clock, they said, "Oh, go and have a look. Go down and look at the bulletin board." I went down. There was a great big picture. Joe went home and drew the whole thing. Came out and put in on the bulletin board. (laughs) Phil used to go with and married this girl that I knew. She worked at Cosmopolitan, but at a different store. Dorothy Delaney. Married her and we used to often meet at parties because all the Farrell family used to always invite me to their parties, because we all worked together. So this night we were at a party and I don't know what it was... Phil was standing up and he was half cut and he was bragging and bragging... I said, "Phil, you'd better keep because I'll tell exactly how much you're exaggerating the size of it." (laughs) I said, "Don't forget, I saw it!" (laughs) And all of a sudden he knew what I was talking about. And everyone else said, "And how did you know?" I said, "You tell them Phil, you tell them!" I'll never forget that night! (laughs) I often wonder what happened to the picture. I would love to have had it, you know, to keep it. Oh, the funny things that used to happen.

E: What did the women wear on their heads? They didn't wear hard hats, did they?

R: No. We didn't have hard hats. We had kerchiefs, which were... knotted them in the front. [Was that a requirement?] Yeah. [And you had the overalls?] Oh yeah. [And you wore cotton shirts or... what?] Oh you could wear anything you liked down underneath, you know. [Yeah, yeah. And then you wore heavy boots?] Well, we bought the boots from the company and they had the steel toe. But I didn't see any need for a crane... craneman to have them. But... I suppose if you were walking somewheres, somebody else dropped something down, it would save our toes. But, you know, but

underneath the overalls we could put on anything we liked. But I found the carharts were so thick and warm, especially when I handling the hot steel. I could feel the sweat running down. I never seemed to lose any weight over it. No, I was wishing I would. (laughs)

E: You said you operated something with your foot?

R: The bell. [The bell] Oh, the bell of warning. [?] You had to tell people you were coming and to get the hell out of the way. Uh umm. And some of those younger ones they were just taking on, especially from the yard, they had to go through our mill. And when they saw a woman, they'd... They'd stand there gazing at you, and I'd be banging that ball for them either to hurry up and go, or get the heck back, you know. That's just the way we were.

E: So even with quite a few women on the plant, it was still unusual, eh?

R: As far as the crane was concerned. But they did all other kinds of jobs too, you know. There was the... they even piled the bricks. They... oh, they cleaned up the lumber yard, they... oh, there was dozens of places they worked... worked the lab. Even... you know, it was amazing how much. [Worked the coke ovens too, I guess?] Umm.

E: So, how did they feel when the end of the war came?

R. Well, we knew all along that it was only a temporary thing. I don't know why anybody would feel bad about getting a notice about it. You know. Course, they were as lucky as I was. I knew that my money was coming the same way and I wasn't going to have to work for it. So, you know, it was totally different for me. I was glad. I was glad enough. In fact I was happy that he was coming. I didn't know why the hell they took him, cause he couldn't pass the... he was 4-F. All they used him for was running the trucks from Halifax to Sydney. And every time he came home on leave, I couldn't get him to go back. He was more trouble to me 'cause he was here than if he was further away. But the MPs were always looking for him because... There was an old sergeant major, made up with this old sergeant major, and when this sergeant major found out he was from Cape Breton, he asked him right away, "Do you know anybody that makes Cape Breton Shine?" " Oh," Roy said, "Yes, I know all kinds of people that make it." "Well, the next time you're going home, I'll give you the money. You bring me back some Cape Breton Shine." "Sure I will," he said, "Captain." He was a captain too. So, after that he came home practically every weekend. Sometimes with permission, most of the time without. Now this time they weren't going to let him go. They said, "No, you had too many. You were gone practically every weekend. So you're not going this weekend." So the captain spoke up. He said, "Look, you might as well let him go, because you'll have to send the provosts looking for him afterwards, and it's going to cost more money to send and get him." 'Cause he wanted the shine, see, so he said, "Let him go, and he'll come back on his own, won't you?" "Yes," Roy said, "Yes." So before he left the captain came over and put money in Roy's hand, "Bring back a quart." (laughs) After that he was home every damn weekend.

E: That must have been nice for you, though, and the children?

R: Well, I didn't have any children. [Oh, you didn't have any children then?] No. -- He was character, he was. And -- and drink it. Cause nobody else's stomach could handle it. (laughs)

E: Did the women who worked in the plant ever have a reunion or anything?

R: No, not really, 'cause we were so scattered, you know. And I met some nice girls now ... The Sadie MacDonald, she married to... Madore. Now, what was his name... [from Hankard Street?] He was from there, but they built a house up right... the street that the Ashby liquor store is, that... Richmond Street. The second last house, -- I'm trying to think of his name. He often used to

come down and ride with me on my crane. He only had a little crane, was right cute. It was like a miniature compared to mine, you know. And he used to come down and sit with me, and... that was before him and Sadie got married. Sadie was on the levers. But I must tell you a story about her and I.

E: What do you mean she was on the levers?

R. She was on levers that moved the rails on the cooling bed. You know when the rails are finished, they [-- like that?] Yeah. And they had to be pushed over and kept in line, you know. And one block was stamped one number and one block was stamped another, um... And you couldn't mix the numbers cause sometimes they were different sizes. You know, they were 100 lb rails, or 120 lbs, or 80 lbs, or whatever, you know. But anyhow, she had... she worked in a booth by herself, and she was further up in the mill than me. This was a winter, oh cold, cold winter day, oh my God, was it ever cold! When we'd walk into that mill, before it starts to operate... You couldn't believe how cold, cold steel. There's nothing worse than it. I went up in the crane, couldn't get a gig out of the crane. Nothing. Everything was frozen solid. So I thought to myself, might as well keep warm in the shack. So the shack had electric heat... heaters everywhere. So I went down anyhow with the electrician for the rail mill, Connie MacDonald, he was there, and everybody was trying to get into the shacks so they'd keep warm. But anyhow, it caught. They started rolling. And a call came for the crane. I said, "Oh my God, I wonder if my crane will work." So I ran up anyhow and never questioned, just ran up. -- Started the... the... crane and the crane had defrosted. Down I come. Here, who was in trouble but Sadie. She had moved... it's hard to--... The way the rails were, there was like... now what would you call them... like half moons. And they were on wires. And it was those things that moved the thing over like that. All right, she had moved one or the other, and the other didn't work. And anyhow she was sideways on the bed. And I had to go up to help her. Well, I was thinking the crane was still frozen, didn't plug it in time, and I went over the edge. Here, only the two of us in the mill. Two women and we had it tied up for about two hours because they had to put me back on the whatdya call 'em, before I could even move that... it was stone cold, of course. By the time... it was scrapped. The two of us. (laughs) All I could think of was, "Oh my God, wait till Mr. Moffat hears about this." And, of course, he sent for me. He said, "Rose, what happened... in the heck happened?" And I said to him, "I came in, I said, the crane was frozen solid," I said, "Couldn't get a gig out of it." And I said, "When the call came it was moving, but I never realized it defrosted that fast. And when I plugged her," I said, "to slow down," I said, "it just kept going. The wheel went right off the tracks." (laughs) So he said, "Well, well, that's your first," he said, "Let's hope it's going to be your last." "Well," I said, "I've learned something from that one." And he, oh he was a massive man. Oh, he was six foot four, great big broad shoulders. Out back his head and he roared. Never said... I was so scared that he was going to... (laughs) -- Every time I see Sadie I remind her of it. She worked at Crowell's for years. [Is that right?] Uh umm.

E: Is she still around?

R: Oh yes. [Was she from the Pier?] No, she was from Ottawa Brook. [Ottawa Brook?] Oh, she was a mild, easy going girl. She married this other operator, the fellow that used to come down and sit with me. Madore, yeah. Freddy, Freddy was his name. I'm getting awful on names, but Freddy Madore.

END OF TAPE