

Interviewer: What was your childhood like, growing up in Middlesex?

Resident: It was very nice, very simple. I was born in this house¹, that I live in. Right above, upstairs [over] there. It was nice.

This was sort of the center of Edison at one point. This is the part of Edison that built Edison. This is the Piscataway Town area; when Piscataway Township broke off in 1666, it took the name Piscataway, but added township to it.

This was where all the girl scouts were, all of the parades . . . stuff like that.

It was nice.

It was a nice neighborhood. Now it's gotten very big and overwhelming. Nobody knows anybody. The small town that it was, is gone.

But growing up here was nice. You had neighborhood schools, so you know all the kids there, and they lived around—not too far from you.

It was nice.

Interviewer: What do you feel society expected from you?

Resident: I guess, just to grow up and be a good person. To help others. I felt that as I grew up, you know being a girl scout leader myself (and boy scouts), was part of what I learned from when I was younger. People were always very helpful in this area, and even in Piscataway Township. I was nine when I moved.

I just grew up in Church and all, where people helped everybody. I wanted to be a missionary. My grades weren't good enough for the school that I wanted to go to, which was Northwestern.

So I gave that up, got married and had kids, and did my mission in smaller ways; with scouts, with church, with different groups around.

When my kids grew up, there was a group of us women that used to bump into each other through scouts and PTA² and all [that]. We formed a little group called the Hen Club—that's what the guys called use, 'cause they said that "They're sitting around cackling" . . . so a bunch of old hens.

¹ The interview took place at the Resident's home.

² Parent Teacher Association

We would find people that were needy or just around Thanksgiving/Christmas time, we would chip in and take care of a family or two. That's where I was.

Interviewer: What do you feel your parents expected from you?

Resident: *Laugh* Personally, I don't like to have to admit this, but I think it was to get married and have children and be a housewife. Okay?

That was—to be a good person, to be involved in the community, yes. But you know, to—I just figured you get married and you do your share and your husband does his share and you raise the kids.

Not how it turned out, but that's what it was, growing up that was what woman did.

Interviewer: What expectations of yourself did you hold? What dreams did you have?

Resident: Wanted to be a missionary. Wanted to go overseas and help. I didn't want to be a missionary that said “Jesus said I'm here” or “God said I'm here”.

I learned through growing up between scouts and church and the community to give and to be good. When I go over to help people, I don't want to preach to them. I want to say “This is how I live and this is how I'm helping you because of the way that I was raised, that way I lived and I want to help you, and you can get yourself together and you can go help more.”

That was my thing.

Interviewer: What did you do after high school?

Resident: I worked at Westing House, which is now Amazon on Route 27. I have a sneaking suspicion that since my brother was a junior engineer at the Westing House that that's why I was able to get in there.

I can remember one time on a Saturday afternoon, sitting on line, having my boss tap me on the shoulder and say that I have to go home because as a woman, I couldn't work at that kind of a job (that was dominated by men) for more than 54 or 56 hours.

So you know, women did have to get married, because they couldn't make the money that men could. Cause if they got a job that was in the women's field, it was

less money. The man that I married, Bill, he worked the same job as me, came after me (to Westing House) and made more money than me.

I resent myself for not tying myself to that work bench that day and saying, “No, I’m not going, I have a right to be here.”

But . . . I was kind of taught not to make too many waves.

Interviewer: How did you come to enter the warehouse supply chain business, a male dominated field? Because of your brother?

Resident: Because of my brother. My brother was a—he’s passed now— but my brother was extremely smart. When he was 12-years-old, he was going down to the Edison dumps, picking up radio parts that Westing House would dump, and build radios. He was offered a job at NASA, but declined it because he wanted to be more free to go further, than to sit in one spot. He worked for a couple of places after Westing House.

Westing House wanted him to stay when he was drafted, but he went to Vietnam, because he felt like it was his part [his duty]. So when he came back from Vietnam they gave him a broom.

So he left.

He went to another company, where he—he invented a windshear factor for airplanes and rocket ships and all that kind of stuff. His company kept the patent for it, but he was paid for it and he was the one who invented a lot of those things.

And because he was so smart, my father was a radio ham operator and you know, I just figured; my father took care of things and while my mother stayed home, my mother did all the scouts and all that kind of stuff, she didn’t even drive.

I didn’t even want my license ‘cause I was in a car accident. But then one of the kids in high school, one of the boys, said “No, you’ve got to get your license,” and he helped me get my license.

Thank God, because I love my car, I love to drive.

Interviewer: What was the atmosphere at work like?

Resident: At Westing House, I was on a line and it was very pleasant. Mostly all women.

When I worked in all the warehouses, like I worked—my last warehouse was Granger—I liked it. I liked it because—any job I went to, like Mattel, which is standard plastics—all these jobs, I started off at the bottom and within a month or two I was at the top, where I could go without an education (you know [not] a college education, a supervisor type), but I was always a lead person or something.

I had a knack for being able to organize a lot of the procedures and stuff. You know I worked for HP Fuller, an adhesive company, I worked for Emerson Quire.

A lot of these companies moved out, and I didn't move with them—I went to a different company. But I was able to organize their job qualifications and stuff. I always got high ratings.

I just liked it. It came natural to me, to be able to put away a product and find out that the product that somebody else put in there is the wrong product. I could straighten it out. Put it where it belonged. I just had that sense of responsibility.

Interviewer: Did you get along well with your co-workers?

Resident: Yes. I still see them and [?]

Interviewer: What about the male ones?

Resident: Yep.

Interviewer: That's wonderful. Did you join the union or other organizations at work?

Resident: There was a union at Mattel, other than that, there weren't unions. The last two places that I worked [at], which were HP Fuller and Granger, they treated you well. There was no need for a union.

We did, on one job at Granger, a group of us said, "Hey, listen. If I'm doing all this work for this [amount of] money and this person isn't doing anything like we are doing; they are not being responsible, they shouldn't get the same pay. They (Granger) [then] did pay increases according to your workload. That's fair."

Interviewer: At your other jobs did you wish there was a union?

Resident: No.

Interviewer: Why not?

Resident: Because they didn't always benefit you. Somebody else got benefitted

Like (not at my place, my late husband's place) people got protected when they didn't do their jobs, by the union. Which didn't help the other people who were in the union. They protected people who didn't follow the rules and regulations. So you got people getting; "late to work", "taking off too much time", "not doing their job", getting paid the same as you are. And when the company wants to fire them, the union saves them. So how is that fair?

Interviewer: The feminist movement was coming to the forefront when you entered the workforce. Did you or do you identify as a feminist?

Resident: Well, I believe right is right, and if that makes me a feminist, then yeah I guess I am. But I'm not going to push myself into every aspect of man's life either.

When it comes to being qualified for a job, [the] person should be qualified whether they are male or female. I shouldn't just go in there and say, "Well, I'm female, you have to give me a job because there's men there," no. I believe that people should be paid according to their qualifications. They should all be given chances, they shouldn't be . . . you know . . .

Stevie Wonder once said that being blind was an asset because he didn't see anything bad. . . and I think, that's how I feel.

Interviewer: It sounds like you didn't relate to the feminist message too much.

Resident: I did, but when women were being . . . pushy to private men's clubs and stuff . . . I think that's wrong. That's a private club. If it's a public club we belong there just as well. And if the men wanted be like, over here . . .

[For instance] at the Peanut Bar, [that] was known to be a man's bar and when women were served, when I was kid, they were served at the window. They could be served but they couldn't go inside. Well, the men used to spit on the floor, they used to cuss and stuff. So when the feminist going in there, and they (the bar) had to let them in, they (the feminist) were complaining about the men. Well, if you don't like it don't go in.

But you should be allowed to go in. Whether you wanna stay it's up to you.

My grandmother was a suffragette, back in the early 1900's.

Interviewer: Do you want to expand on that a bit?

Resident: I don't know that much about it, I just know that she was.

She just felt that women—and she wasn't like a violent person that would've . . .
She just believed that women should vote.

Interviewer: Did you feel supported by society, being a working mom at that time?

Resident: My family, my neighbors, people I worked with, my ex-husband—no. He just felt . . . barefoot and pregnant, that was his motto. That's where women belong, barefoot and pregnant . . . and in the kitchen.

That's why he's no longer my husband, alright!

I woke up and smelt the coffee.

Interviewer: What does the barefoot part mean?

Resident: You're home. You don't go out.

Interviewer: When did you become a mother?

Resident: 1969. Jodie made me a mom. I was 21 . . . no, 22. I had just turned 22.

Interviewer: Was she planned? Were you happy that you had her at that point in life?

Resident: Yeah. Jodie was named after me.

'Cause my ex-husband, when he was introduced to me, the girl he wanted to date had a cold and she introduced him to me and she said "Bill, this is Jodie. Instead of Joanie," so he thought my name was Jodie.

So I named her Jodie Marie, after Joan Marie. That was it.

Let me just put a note on there, about women's . . .

I guess I am a feminist, when it comes to the fact that every time I have any kind of legal paper like my passport, I have to put down all my last names that I ever was. Men don't ever have to do that, because they never change their name. But women do.

And that sucks.

Interviewer: Do you feel that society has similar expectations of your daughter(s) as it did with you?

Resident: Only when it comes to being a good person. I guess that's what everybody wants everybody to be, but with this political garbage going on. It's okay to have different opinions. I just don't think somebody should tell another person [that] they're wrong.

It's hard to say. I think as she was growing up there wasn't a lot of . . .

There was always "be who you wanna be", "do what you wanna do", "you have rights".

Right now, it's a little too much arguments around the world, not just states.

I don't think society makes anymore of a demand on a woman, more than they would on a man. I think it's pretty much even.

That would probably come more from the family not from outside the family.

Interviewer: Do you think, like you said; that familial expectation that you would get married have kids . . . was that similar for Jodie?

Resident: Oh, no. No. No. I believe my children . . .

Even when it came down to sex, my husband and I didn't before we got married. I mean, that was just the way it was. I don't feel that way, everybody's personal . . .

I think that people need to make decisions on their own and not be talked into something. So I taught my kids to be strong in what they believed in.

It was up to them.

Interviewer: No objection from their father?

Resident: Nothing

Interviewer: Nothing?

Resident: Nothing.

Interviewer: When/why did you decide to switch to a profession in special needs?

Resident: Well, I don't know . . . I guess, even when I worked in the warehouses, we [the Hen Club] always did things outside the company, 'cause I still have my girlfriends, to always help people.

So, when I had knee surgery and had trouble getting back to that job. . . which I believe [what] they call a hatchet person, to cut down on people, they tried to get

rid of me and use my knee [as an excuse] for that. I think it was because of my age. I won that lawsuit case. I didn't go back because, she [the hatchet person] was still there. She would just find another way to get rid of the older people.

She left there after a while. She had been to a lot of different Granger places and the next one was like Minnesota or Michigan or something like that that she wanted to go to New Jersey.

But by that time I had gotten to helping a friend with his business for a little bit. And then my step-daughter said, "Hey, why don't you come work with Allies. They're looking for a vo-tech person to teach restaurant."

So I said, "I'm a cook," and I went through all the books and learned all about restaurants, and all the big ovens, and all different kinds of rules that the state had and I taught that until COVID hit.

Interviewer: And after COVID?

Resident: One of the mother's whose son couldn't go to class anymore . . . because they didn't have it. And he wasn't one that was from residential . . . you know, one of the houses that Allies had; asked me if I would come and tutor him and I said "Okay," and that's how I got involved.

Interviewer: Do you have a message to young girls finishing high school?

Resident: Yeah, finish high school. Learn. Read.

Interviewer: Do you feel that college is necessary?

Resident: No. I think further education [is necessary], it doesn't have to be college. Some people can go to a secretarial school and go learn how to woodshop.

Further your education.

Interviewer: That's good. Thank you.

Resident: You're welcome.