

Beatrice G. Marshall

SR 9081, Oral History, by Madeline Moore & Christine Poole

Coll 883, Northwest Women's History Project records and interviews

1981 June 11



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MM: Madeline Moore

CP: Christine Poole

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Tape 1, Side 1

1981 June 11

CP: It's June 11, 1981. This is Madeline Moore. Christine Poole and I are going to interview Mrs. Marshall.

Before we actually get into the shipyard work, would you mind telling a little bit about your early childhood and your background?

MARSHALL: I was raised on a farm in Illinois. I went to school in southern Illinois. I finished high school the same year the war broke out in 1941. I went off to college at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois.

When the war broke out and everybody was leaving and taking up wartime jobs, my sister Ida and myself decided to do some work for the wartime effort. So we didn't have any training at that time because we were just out of high school. So they had an organization called the N.Y.A. [National Youth Administration], which was for the youth program during that time. So we signed up for that, with a government project. The government paid all of our expenses, including food, lodging and the whole works. They sent us to South Bend, Indiana for training.

We had a choice of what we wanted to do to prepare ourselves for wartime work. Some of those choices [were] airplane riveting, you know, working on airplanes, drill press, steel lay. It was mostly machine shop work. We were very interested in that, so we took up

several trades to make sure we could fit in to one. The requirement was about six to eight weeks training before we would even be able to go out on the job. We went to South Bend and we stayed at a camp that was specially prepared for youth at that time. We completed our eight week's training. At the government's expense, they sent us to the job. They paid our way and everything.

At the time we finished, we had planned to stay in and around about Illinois, Ohio, and like that, but they didn't have any employment at the airplane factory in Ohio. So we had a choice to come to Portland, Oregon or some place in California to work in the shipyard. So not knowing where either one of those places was on the map, we decided to come to Portland. They got us prepared and put us on the train. But before we left the camp, we had to pass the test in drill press, steel lay, and airplane riveting.

We had our address where we were going, but we wasn't on our own. It was a lady from the Y.W.C.A. [Young Women's Christian Association] that had charge of us when we get to our destination because we didn't know where we were going or what we was going to do. We were still just young people at that time.

When we got to Portland, they was supposed to have a place for us. They didn't. We stayed at the Y, I think it was that one night. Then we went to Eugene, Oregon at the University of Oregon.

CP: Excuse me a minute. This thing...

MARSHALL: We were there to complete the final stages of our training. I don't recall just how many weeks we were in Eugene before we came back to Portland to work in the shipyard. When we got to the shipyard, we had to apply to the work. They told us that they didn't have any openings as steel lays and drill press operators and that we would have to either accept as painter's helper or sweep. We didn't know what a painter's helper consists of, but we felt that a painter definitely would be a little more sophisticated than just sweeping. We chose that. To our surprise, it was something that we really wished a thousand times we hadn't taken it, because the job was in the bottom of the boat. I don't

mean the lower deck. I mean the hull that sit on the water. We had to go through holes – manholes – the round holes that were made, and we had to crawl on our hands and knees and carry a light and extension cord to see because it was pitch dark in there. Then we had a little tool, something like a spreader where you scraped the rust off of the bottom of the boat where they had to paint.

We had to wear masks because it was so much dust in there until you couldn't hardly breathe and you had to come up, you know. We complained because that wasn't what we was trained for. We asked for a job with what we was trained for, and they said there wasn't any available. So my sister Ida and Leona and Myrtle, they decided that they didn't want to work in the shipyards anymore. So my sister was the first one that left because we wasn't getting what we wanted. They said they didn't have it available. Leona, she lost a relative in Los Angeles, so she left and went to Los Angeles. Myrtle went with her. That left me in the shipyard by myself. I mean, with the group that I came in with.

So I was really depressed with the job that I was doing. I didn't want to continue with that because it was hard. It was really making me sick. So they finally gave me a job on top of the boat sweeping. Well, that was much better than in the bottom. I did that for several weeks. I finally found out that they had work as drill press operators and steel lays, but they weren't hiring Blacks.

At that time, if you would walk off of the job once you had a government job, you couldn't get one no other place unless you had a clearance from the personnel office. So I went to the personnel office and I asked for my clearance. He said, "Well, you can't have a clearance because we have work here for you to do." I had my papers. I still have that little cord that we graduated. It's something like a diploma, but it was in a card form. I still have it, but I haven't been able to find it. I showed them where I was really qualified and how many hours we had us in training for that.

He said, "Well, there just isn't any openings for you."

I said, "Yes, there are openings. They just won't let me have it." So he called the machine shop to see if there were openings. The man at the machine shop told him that there were openings, but they just wasn't hiring Blacks. So he had to give me my clearance.

But before I got my clearance to go, my sister Ida and the other three girls and myself, we tried through the Urban League to get the job that we was qualified for. It wasn't too much they could do. It came out in the *Observer* at that time as to our plight trying to get the work that we were qualified for and couldn't get it. But at that time, there just wasn't anything they could do about it.

So eventually, when they gave me my clearance, I left Portland and went to Los Angeles to get the work there. That was in the latter part of – around the first of 1944. It was 1943 when we came out here. In early 1944 is when I went to Los Angeles. They didn't have anything available there, but I did get a little better job in Los Angeles than I did in Portland. So I decided to go back to Illinois and finish another year of college. I had just about completed one, and I finished my two years of college. That was the end of my shipyard experience.

CP: Which shipyard was this?

MARSHALL: I worked at Oregon Shipyard.

CP: When you were going through the training in Indiana, was there any indication that, because you were Black, you wouldn't be getting a job when you came out to Oregon?

MARSHALL: None whatsoever because there were Black and white working together in the training camp, you know what I'm saying? I mean we worked together. There was no indication whatsoever and I was really surprised that we wasn't able to get it. Especially when we were sent out here at the government expense.

CP: Did you feel like you could get in touch with any government agency, the people who had paid for your training or anything?

MARSHALL: We tried with – I can't recall now who was in charge of us when we first got here. They tried and everybody that we was involved with tried, but we ourselves didn't know what channels to go through except the Urban League to try to get what we was trained for.

CP: There was no one at the shipyard who was supportive of...

MARSHALL: No one, no. In fact, they was denying that there [were] openings for us. But eventually they did admit that there was openings but they wouldn't give it to us because we were Negroes.

CP: Did you feel like there was anybody, legally, that you could go to? Any law authority?

MARSHALL: No, I didn't. Being at the age I was, I just really didn't know that there [were] channels that I could go through, you know.

CP: There may not have been so many, either, in the 1940s.

MARSHALL: There probably weren't. I didn't know what to do. The only thing we knew to do was to go to somebody that we felt knew more about it than we did. That was Urban League.

CP: Do you remember what specifically their response was?

MARSHALL: I can't recall just exactly what response they had because it's been so long ago, but I do know they tried their, you know, whatever channel it was they had to go through to do it.

CP: Oh sure. Was this the first time something like this had been done to you so openly?

MARSHALL: It was. It was the first time that I ever experienced discrimination. When I was in school in Illinois, I went to an all-Black school, except college. I went to S.I.U. in Carbondale, Illinois. But I never experienced any discrimination that I noticed, you understand what I'm saying? None whatsoever.

CP: How did you feel?

MARSHALL: I really felt hurt and I felt that we were sort of mistreated because after taking the training and being prepared to do the job, we should have been able to do it. That was really my first experience with discrimination and it really did do something to me. But I lived through it.

CP: Did it affect the rest of your life? What did you take from that?

MARSHALL: It did affect my life quite a bit because at that time I was young and it was really the first job that I ever had tried to get. Really the first job. Except, you know, I worked on the farm with my family picking beans and strawberries and stuff like that. Like most kids did. But that was really the first job on my own that I had ever tried to get. The way we was trained for the job with kids that were white and Black all together, and there was no problem there, I just couldn't understand it when we got to Portland and couldn't get the job.

CP: Were they giving the jobs in Los Angeles? If you were trained in Illinois and you had gone to Los Angeles, do you think you would have gotten a job that you'd trained for?

MARSHALL: No, I don't think I would have. I don't know.

CP: There was less discrimination [Inaudible].

MARSHALL: Yes, now, there were better jobs in L.A., in the shipyard there. Like my own [sister] that left, Leona, she got a job as an airplane riveter. You know what I mean. If that same job had been available in Portland, I don't know if she'd have been able to get it or not. I really don't. One of the girls that left, she went to Seattle. I guess that was [an] aircraft place up there that she worked. What she specialized in was just aircraft riveting. But we had several, you know, specialties. We could do that or drill press. I felt that I was really a champion in the drill press. I really did like it and we had real high [grids?].

Coming to Oregon, when we left South Bend that evening and they put us on the train in Chicago, we didn't have any seats on the train. I was thinking maybe a little farther down the line we will get a seat because of myself and sister Ida and Leona and Myrtle, we was in the Ladies Lounge to start, waiting for somebody to get off a little further down the line. We had to ride the Ladies Lounge all the way to Portland.

CP: Was it because of discrimination?

MARSHALL: No, that wasn't because of discrimination. That was because there wasn't any seats on the train. Everybody was coming to the West Coast. That train was full. It took us three days and three nights to get to Portland. The lounge that we were in, it had nice seats in it, you know what I mean. It was quite comfortable. We didn't have to stand up all the way. No, that was not discrimination. It just happened that the train was crowded. When we got to Portland, that's when the trouble started.

CP: What about housing?

MARSHALL: We stayed at the Y until they found us a place in Vancouver. We didn't like Vanport because it was a little different than what we had been used to. They would not give all four of us an apartment together. We wanted to save money and all four of us have an apartment together. My sister and myself could have an apartment together because

we were related, but the other two could not stay with us. We had to rent two apartments. We didn't like that. We wanted to come into Portland. We wanted to rent a room and not an apartment because you know how Vanport was, it was just a housing project. It really did seem kind of rough to me and I really, coming from a farm, I didn't appreciate that.

The lady that was in charge for a little while, she found us a room. A nice room that we wanted over on Southeast Tibbets with Mrs. McCleary. It was in a private home. This house had a large room upstairs with two double beds in it. It was just what we wanted. So we lived over on the Southeast side.

Our first day at the shipyard, after we came out of the holes from the work, I really was embarrassed to get on the bus to go back home because of the condition of our clothes. When we were training in South Bend, we wore blue jeans and light blue blouses. We kept them neat and ironed like that. So that's what we wore to work because we had a couple of changes of those. That's what we wore to work, and I wish we could have seen us. When we came out of that hole, we was nothing but rust. Dirt in our hair, just all over. Because when you just down in a hole where you just can't hardly move and scraping and the rust and the dust from that is coming up in your face, and you just can't hardly make it. When we got home and took a bath, it was just nothing but rust in the tub. We just couldn't take it. But we had to keep that job until we got a payday or until we got on our feet because we only had about, I think it was \$36 apiece that we were required to have to come to Portland. That was the only thing that the government didn't furnish for us was \$36. They furnished everything else. They even paid us, gave us a little money each month plus our board and our room.

CP: Did those folks who were paying you ever know that you didn't get the job that you were trained for because you were Black?

MARSHALL: You mean, back in South Bend?

CP: Yes.

MARSHALL: Not that I know of. I don't think they do unless they knew the rules and the regulations. I don't think they knew because I don't think they would have sent us out here. They might would have, you know.

CP: Were the trainers Black and were the trainers mixed, or were they all one race?

MARSHALL: It was one or two Black in the personnel department in South Bend. The trainers that worked in the machine shop, they were all white.

CP: Were they all men?

MARSHALL: The teachers. Yes, they were all men.

CP: I was wondering whether, after you got out here and didn't get the job, whether they ever learned later that all their training was for naught?

MARSHALL: I don't know, because I was really so disgusted with the whole situation in the personnel out here until I didn't have enough confidence to try to find out if there was anything that they could do.

CP: The personnel here in Portland was white, then.

MARSHALL: Yes.

CP: How did the white women get trained when they were here?

MARSHALL: You mean in...

CP: That had the jobs that they wouldn't give you.

MARSHALL: I don't know. I don't know if it was because...

CP: Whether they trained or not, or they just had on-the-job.

MARSHALL: That's right, they probably had on-the-job training because there was a lot of people came to Portland didn't have any training at all and they were trained on the job. That's why I couldn't understand why we had the training and they wouldn't give it to us. We were the only ones from South Bend in that group that came to Portland at that time.

CP: How long was your initial employment with the Portland situation?

MARSHALL: It was about – we came to Portland in, I think it was April, in the spring. It was March or April of 1943, and my employment with the shipyard was until January of 1944.

CP: So you were in Oregon nine months. You were a painter's helper for how long?

MARSHALL: I was a painter's helper maybe about two or three months.

CP: Then you were a sweeper for the rest of the time?

MARSHALL: I was a sweeper for the rest of the time.

CP: So you could have come out from any place with no experience and gotten the jobs you got.

MARSHALL: Oh, yes.

CP: There was no experience in painting necessary?

MARSHALL: Oh no. There was no training necessary for what we was doing. I could have just picked up and left Illinois and come out here. No, there was no training required for the sweeping and scrapping.

CP: So mostly the trained Blacks would just get disgusted like you, then, in that sense. The ones who remained would be the ones untrained or had no aspiration of going further than they could.

MARSHALL: That's right.

CP: Did you see any Black women in the skilled jobs?

MARSHALL: No. None whatsoever. The only Black women working that I saw was either sweeping or doing what I was doing – scraping.

CP: Were all the painter's helpers Black, or were they mixed?

MARSHALL: I don't know. No, they weren't all Black, I don't think. I don't remember seeing any white ladies in our group, you understand what I'm saying? I didn't remember seeing any. In our group it was just us.

CP: You were the only painter's helpers?

MARSHALL: In our group, you see, we had a lead man.

CP: The lead man was Black?

MARSHALL: No, the lead man was white.

CP: White male?

MARSHALL: [Yes]. White male.

CP: And then you and your sister and Leona and Myrtle all worked together for a while as painter's helpers, correct?

MARSHALL: Yes. Yes. We worked together. The painter's helper crew.

CP: Well, I've got some other questions for you. I'd like to hear you describe your training a little bit if that would be okay.

MARSHALL: Okay, the training with the drill press, we were making tools. We would make bolts, screws, nuts, and things like that. With the drill press, this was the steel lathe. With the drill press, we were drilling parts. Just for an instance, if something needs a hole in it, we would be drilling the hole. We were making parts for the boat or the airplane or whatever it was we was working for. It was really skilled work. It was something that we enjoyed.

CP: How long was the training?

MARSHALL: The training was eight weeks.

CP: How did you find out about it, being in southern Illinois and having to go to Indiana?

MARSHALL: We found out about it through the school. We were on the campus at Southern Illinois University at that time. They were people leaving all around, going to

different parts of the United States, working for the government. We thought it would be a little patriotic to get into the act. We first thought of the [Inaudible], it was several things we thought of. I wanted to work. I had not planned to come to this coast. We just wanted to work in an airplane factory or the shipyard or whatever, so we got prepared for both of them. When we completed our training, our counselor checked where we wanted to go. There wasn't any opening there at that time, and she told us. Now I'm beginning to wonder if it was some kind of conspiracy where they knew. There were openings all over all the time.

CP: There should have been openings where you wanted in the first place, even in Illinois.

MARSHALL: In Ohio, yes. It should have been opening there, but they told us it wasn't. They needed help desperately here in Portland and I think it was Richland, California, was where...

CP: Richmond?

MARSHALL: Richmond, [yes], was where the choices was that we had to go.

CP: So they would train you, but then they would not give you a job?

MARSHALL: That's right. They trained us and paid our way to Portland and would not give us the job when we got here. We had to take some type of job, because...

CP: You had no money.

MARSHALL: I had no money. \$36 was all we had.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

Tape 1, Side 2

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CP: What was your parents' reaction?

MARSHALL: My parents didn't want us to leave home in the first place. When we explained to them about the situation, they wanted us to come back and finish school. We promised them that we would. I wanted to finish school, but it was a lot of things – I wanted to be a nurse, is one thing I wanted to be. I wanted to be a secretary, I wanted to do clerical work. I found out that I couldn't get a job anyplace with that. So actually, my spirit was let down.

CP: It broke your spirit.

MARSHALL: It really did. It really did. After I left the shipyard and went back in Illinois – I had left the shipyard in California and went back to Illinois. I finished the second year. At that time, with two years of training, you could get a two-year certificate and you could teach. But we could only teach other Black students. I felt like I was qualified to do that, but I didn't want to teach. My sister Ida, she stayed out here in Portland. She had a job with the library downtown.

CP: Is Ida McClendon your sister?

MARSHALL: Her name is Ida Green at that time.

CP: Was that your sister?

MARSHALL: Ida Mae Green?

CP: Oh, no. Because it's Ida McClendon down at the library now. That's not her?

MARSHALL: No. She was Ida Green, and then she married Lenworth Miner. But she worked at the library for a good little while and then she left there and she was an elevator operator for [Inaudible], one of those department stores downtown. She never did leave Portland and she got married. I went back. I said I would never set foot in Portland again, but after she stayed out here and then I finished my second year of college, she asked me if I would come and stay with her. She said, "I promise you, I'll get you a job and you won't have to work in the shipyard." So I came back out and I did get a job as a power machine operator in a bag factory. That was for Amos and Harry's. But Amos and Harry's paid – now this was discrimination, too – Amos and Harry paid two bag factories – one for Black and one for white.

CP: You were paid less than what they paid whites?

MARSHALL: That's right. [Laughs] That's right. I felt better about the power machine operator than I did the shipyard job. So that's where I worked until the war was over after I come back to Portland at the bag factory.

CP: But they didn't pay as well as the shipyard?

MARSHALL: Oh, no. they didn't pay nothing compared to what the shipyard... Neither did the library where Ida was working, nor any of the other jobs – elevator operators or whatever.

CP: Did the maintenance work and the painter's helper pay less than a machinist would have paid?

MARSHALL: Oh yes! Very much less. That was just chicken feed compared to the others.

CP: When you began to do this training as a machinist and you thought you were going to be a machinist, you've mentioned how much you liked it. Was it a different kind of work that you thought you'd be doing? When you were a young girl, did you think...?

MARSHALL: Yes, it was different. I never thought I would be doing machine shop work like that. Working with a machine, making tools with my hands, and just using that machine and to do it myself. I got to the place where I could handle more than one machine at a time. There was a young man there who could do two machines, I mean two lathes at one time.

CP: Why was he in there and not at the war, this man?

MARSHALL: He wasn't old enough. See, they would take them from 16 to 21.

CP: Oh, I see. He wasn't 21.

MARSHALL: No, he wasn't 21. I think he was around 16. Most of them there were 16 and 17 and 18. Kids that didn't want to go to school or wasn't going to school and wanted to get away from home.

CP: It sounds like what they're doing now with federal job training...

MARSHALL: That's right.

CP: Drop them off. Private industry was supposed to pick them up and then educate them. Private industry was really tied to class. [Inaudible] false leads all along.

MARSHALL: It was. It was called the N.Y.A., which was the National Youth Association. They didn't discriminate as far as the training was concerned, so I couldn't understand why they discriminated with the job.

CP: The shipyard wasn't a government shipyard.

MARSHALL: It was Kaiser Shipyard.

CP: But Kaiser was a private industry then.

MARSHALL: I suppose it was. It was government run, wasn't that?

CP: It was subsidized by the government, but it was privately owned. They got contracts from the government, but they were privately owned. Kaiser was an individual who started the shipyards and made a lot of money off of them. Whereas the government would have, you know, I'm sure it was against some regulations for the government to blatantly discriminate that way, but Kaiser could get away with it.

What did your parents think about your training to be a machinist? I know they didn't want you to go so far away, but what kind of expectations did they have of you as a young girl?

MARSHALL: They expected me to finish college. They were old-fashioned and they believed that if you got at least two years of college training you could teach or whatever. That's what was open to Blacks during that time, was teaching. As long as we was prepared for something. When we decided to go off and work for the government with the war, they knew it was making more money and we was satisfied with that. They were supportive, but they didn't know about the discrimination until we got out to Portland.

CP: The fact that you were girl learning to be a machinist didn't bother them too much?

MARSHALL: No, no it didn't. It didn't bother them. I really don't think they knew the details of what we was doing in our training. We [were] just drill press operator, lathe, in the machine shop. Me being a farm girl working on the farm, I was around machines all the time. You know, with my father that didn't bother him too much. The only thing that bothered them was coming so far away from home and hadn't never experienced being really away from home.

CP: Would you mind describing some of the other jobs that you've had since then? You went down to California. You got a job doing what down there?

MARSHALL: I got a job working in the shipyard. It was practically the same. It wasn't sweeping. It was just, it was maintenance work, but I didn't get the machine [job] that I had [wanted].

CP: They never let you do that.

MARSHALL: No.

CP: I want to ask you about the kinds of management trying to help Blacks in reference to getting jobs that they had been trained from the government. What I understand is Kaiser took the government trained employees, but the management itself did not try to help them get the jobs they were trained for.

MARSHALL: I'm sure when we went to the Urban League – we might have gone to the NAACP, too, I don't know – I'm sure they went farther than just the Kaiser shipyard for their findings. I'm sure they went as far as they could go. What channel they went through I don't know. They just weren't able to work through and get the jobs for us.

CP: Do you know how many people do you think came and complained to the Urban League, or did you have any idea that you weren't the only ones doing this?

MARSHALL: I don't know. I know at the time we were complaining, we were the only one that was sent by the government and was trained and didn't get the job. There might have been some that came on their own. I mean, that came and couldn't get the training job for it. They might have applied for it, you know, for the training.

CP: So it sounds as though the government training thing was sort of a scam just to pay you, get your hopes up, and then the training people did not do anything helping you get the job. Even the people in Eugene that you went down and got the special training from, they didn't try to help you get jobs?

MARSHALL: It wasn't anything anybody could do.

CP: Or would do.

MARSHALL: Would do. This was their story. There's nothing I can do.

CP: The personnel on down.

MARSHALL: This is personnel on down. "There's nothing I can do. I'm just doing my job. This is the rule and I have to go by the rule."

CP: They said it's a rule?

MARSHALL: Yes, that they would not hire Black – "Negro" was the word they were using then – in the machine shop. There was just certain jobs Negroes were not allowed to hold, and the machine shop was one of them.

CP: Was this a union shop or something, or what?

MARSHALL: I think it was.

CP: So it was the Machinist's Union, too. It was their policy.

MARSHALL: That's right.

CP: In fact, that could have been the major source of the problem.

MARSHALL: Could have been.

CP: Were there Black men in those kinds of jobs, as far as you know?

MARSHALL: As far as I know, no. As far as I know in the training, where we was training in South Bend, it was more White than it was Black kids there. I think it was about half a dozen...

CP: Now the white kids that you came out with, they got the job that you...

MARSHALL: We didn't come out with any white kids.

CP: They were probably sent to Ohio.

MARSHALL: They were probably sent to Ohio or someplace else. It was just me and my sister Ida, Leona...

CP: So the whole [Inaudible] was a scam then!

MARSHALL: It probably was. Christine, she went on to Seattle. We all came to Portland...

CP: She didn't get a job, either, because of that.

MARSHALL: No. No, she didn't. I really don't know what happened to her, because she was by herself. She was in Seattle by herself and we didn't hear any more from her. I don't know what happened to her.

CP: You haven't heard from her since.

MARSHALL: No. We wasn't able to get out under no circumstance.

CP: So the whole government program might have just been a big scam to get you out of college!

MARSHALL: That's right. One reason I believe it was some sort of government and not just only Kaiser was because to quit a job where plenty of jobs were available, you had to have a clearance. They gave me a clearance to get another job before they would give me the job.

CP: They chose to do that rather than...

MARSHALL: They chose to do that. To give me the clearance.

CP: Yet they were still advertising every day for machine people.

MARSHALL: That's right. That's right. They needed machinists in the machine shops.

CP: They needed white machinists.

MARSHALL: That's what it was. They needed white. But they would not hire us.

CP: So after being in California for a while and [you] went back to school, then you came back out to Portland and lived with your sister.

MARSHALL: That's right.

CP: And worked at the bag factory.

MARSHALL: That's right.

CP: How long did you work there?

MARSHALL: I worked at the bag factory – I started at the bag factory in the summer of 1945. I worked until the bag factory closed, which was about 1946. It didn't seem like it was long. It had to be, because when did the war end? The war was over in 1945, wasn't it?

CP: Yes.

MARSHALL: I think it was 1945, and the bag factory closed in 1946. I got married in 1947. So the bag factory was...

CP: Did you work outside of the home after you were married?

MARSHALL: After I was married, I worked at the library downtown as a page girl until I got pregnant. My husband was running on the road at that time. I had some time on my hands, so I...

CP: He was a porter?

MARSHALL: He was a Pullman porter, [yes]. And you're talking about discrimination, they had it there, too. Real bad.

CP: That's why he was a porter.

MARSHALL: Yes. That's why he was a porter. So I worked at the library and I also worked at one other job making – after I quit there. I quit there because one time I decided to take a day off when my husband was in town. When I went back to work, I was explaining why I took the day off because he'd been out a long time and you know, I needed to take the day off. They told me I shouldn't have told them why I took the day off.

CP: You should have lied.

MARSHALL: I should have lied and it wouldn't have been any problem. After that I had problems. They was complaining about this, so I finally just quit the job. I couldn't have worked long because I was pregnant, you understand what I'm staying, but I quit before I wanted to because of that type of pressure. After that pregnancy ended, which ended in a miscarriage, I worked a few months making clotheslines. You know, these metal clotheslines that open up like an umbrella? I worked at a factory [Laughs] making those. I worked at that until I got pregnant with Joyce. That's it. I worked a little as a census taker in 1970, taking census. I worked in 1978 as a teacher's aide for about two or three months. A lady took sick and had a heart attack, so I worked about three months as a teacher's aide. That's been about the extent of my work since I left the shipyard. I worked all told maybe about twelve months.

CP: Do you feel that if you had gotten a job as what you were trained for that it would have given you more successful orientation?

MARSHALL: I know it would have.

CP: That your work experience would have been longer?

MARSHALL: That's right.

CP: Better paying.

MARSHALL: Yes.

CP: And led to something.

MARSHALL: That's right. Who knows what it would have led to? We were so interested and enthusiastic about the job. There was just too much of a let-down to pick up. I started a night course while I was working at the bag factory. I was taking clerical work, you know, typing, [Inaudible], stuff like that. After finding out what type of jobs I could get.

CP: Didn't [work hard?] [Inaudible]

MARSHALL: No, they weren't. So I just didn't finish that. I didn't complete it because I was trying to get some work where I could get some training on the job. There it wasn't possible. I saw where I was and wasn't going to be able to have a job, even if I had completed it.

CP: How did you feel in reference to what the P.R. that was going on during the war with saying help your country – particularly for the women – join industry and help out? When

you were in training and you had seen all this propaganda – hearing it on the radio and seeing it on posters – how did that make you feel?

MARSHALL: Well, that was what I couldn't understand. They were doing all of this advertisement and wanting it to do this. Here I am, spending time and getting trained and qualified for the job, and couldn't get it. I just felt that it was a lot of – I just didn't know what it was. I just couldn't figure it out.

CP: Would you have felt better if they had said, "No, you're a Negro, you cannot get this job." I mean, in reference to life in the South where they were honest about saying you're not going to get this job and you don't need to aspire to it. Rather than in your position where you get armed to the teeth with, you know, and then you're denied for various reasons, but the reason being the same as it was in the South. How did that strike you?

MARSHALL: It did strike me, it really did. It was a hard blow. Had they told me in the beginning that I wouldn't be able to get a job as a Negro, I doubt if I'd have taken the training. I probably would have...

CP: Not wasted your time.

MARSHALL: That's right. Gone into something that I was sure of. That's why I stopped the clerical work, was because it wasn't any use. Why take it if you can't get a job for it? As far as teaching is concerned, the jobs were scarce for teachers because that's what all Blacks, that's mostly what they could do. They could teach at Black schools...

CP: Even teaching jobs weren't plentiful.

MARSHALL: That's right. They weren't plentiful. They weren't plentiful.

CP: And the pay, I'm sure...

MARSHALL: The pay was very poor.

CP: Would you say that Portland had given you the most discrimination as far as the different places you've lived?

MARSHALL: Portland has given me the only discrimination of places where I lived. In Illinois, I'm not saying it wasn't any discrimination in Illinois, but I didn't encounter any. None whatsoever. Not even at school. Now, as I say, I went to an all-Black grade school and all-Black high school. In Carbondale it was mixed, and it was mostly white. But there was no discrimination to my knowledge.

CP: Expect when you got out of the training and they didn't keep you in Illinois.

MARSHALL: The training that I had to come out here was not in South Bend, Indiana.

CP: They didn't give you any jobs in Indiana, either.

MARSHALL: No.

CP: There probably were jobs there.

MARSHALL: It wasn't any defense jobs there. There were jobs there but no airplane factories or shipyards. No. We had to go out of state for...

CP: So the West Coast was the ship building area.

MARSHALL: The West Coast was the shipbuilding...

CP: That's what you were trained to do. It could have been in Detroit. They were making ships up there, I think.

MARSHALL: Oh, is that right?

CP: Yes. What was the work in Ohio that you were wanting?

MARSHALL: The work was at an airplane factory.

CP: And they didn't send you there because they already had employees there.

MARSHALL: They didn't need any help there. They were completely full. Because we were thinking of riveting.

CP: Did they know when you were coming to Oregon that you were Black?

MARSHALL: Yes, they knew we were Black because all of the teachers and counselors were white.

CP: The people from the personnel in Portland, Oregon, said they wanted your training. But they sent you out specifically because of what you were trained to do.

MARSHALL: That's right, because of what were trained to do because...

CP: They sent you for more training in Eugene.

MARSHALL: That's right.

CP: Do you think they were stalling that [Inaudible], or do you think it was really sincere?

MARSHALL: I really don't know. I can't recall – I think we were in Eugene two or three weeks, maybe a month, I don't know. I don't know if that was a stalling, but I didn't know at the time we left for...

CP: Illinois.

MARSHALL: Illinois, Indiana, that it would be more training in...

CP: They didn't tell you that?

MARSHALL: No. I knew we would have to go to a place, but our training was complete because we had our certificates...

CP: You thought you were ready to move into a job.

MARSHALL: We were supposed to...

CP: Then you had to – here in Portland, they sent you away to Eugene for two weeks. Then you came back and were offered pretty rotten jobs.

MARSHALL: That's right. We were offered the job. When we left South Bend, we were supposed to have had our jobs waiting for us.

CP: They were waiting, but not for you.

MARSHALL: That's right. We couldn't leave the camp without employment.

CP: Good jobs were promised, but you had to...

MARSHALL: Our jobs were promised.

CP: What happened?

MARSHALL: The jobs that was promised to us? They were openings and we just didn't get them because we were Black.

CP: Then they knew you were Black coming out here for the job.

MARSHALL: They should have known, because they saw us. They should have known. It was just the four of us – me, Ida, Leona, and Myrtle. It was just the four of us in that room, going to Portland and this one Black girl, Christine, going to Seattle.

CP: And you don't know if she got her job in Seattle?

MARSHALL: No, I don't. No, I don't.

CP: What was your supervisor – how did he treat you? The one on the paint crew or the sweeping crew, too?

MARSHALL: He wanted us to – it was so much they had to get done and it was no let-up. We was just...

CP: Worked like slaves.

MARSHALL: Worked like slaves all day long. We'd come out of the hole for a break and then was it and right back in the hole. I mean, at the bottom of the boat. Down in little holes-

you probably don't know what I'm talking about. It was a hole where you just barely could squeeze through it. We had to carry extension cords with a light on the end of it so we could see, it was so dark down there.

CP: Clearly unskilled.

MARSHALL: Clearly unskilled and unwanted work. We didn't have to have any skills whatsoever.

CP: Did he seem racist to you, as an individual?

MARSHALL: Not that I noticed. I didn't notice that he was racist.

CP: Did you have any harassment against you, either because you were Black or because you were a woman during the months that you worked in the shipyards?

MARSHALL: The only harassment that I can remember was when it was time for the whistle to blow, when it's time to get off. We would quit a few seconds before time to sort of put things away. You know what I mean, brooms or whatever, during this time. This was up on the deck. When we was down in the hole, we quit to come out when the lead men said come out. It was no break down there. We just come out then. Up on top of this deck when I was sweeping and time for the whistle to blow, we couldn't hardly wait for that time. One time we was standing there and it was time for the whistle to blow. Because it was a few seconds before, the lead man came and saw us standing there. He called everyone into his office and was going to give them some type of – I don't know what he called it at that time, but it was some type of a punishment for quitting before. Now, it was just a few seconds and we had put our brooms away. We was allowed a few minutes to put their work away.

He said, "Everybody come in." There was nothing but Black in that group.

CP: All the sweepers were Black?

MARSHALL: In the group I was in. At that time, the whistle was going to blow any second. I did not come in the office. I got mixed in the thousands of people that was going out the gate. The rest of my group went on into the office. So he didn't know where I was at that time. He didn't know whether I quit – it wasn't early because it was just a few seconds, but they didn't want you to have a second of breather or whatever you want to call it. So they was docked – I don't know what all happened to them. They had several things done to them just in the few seconds...

CP: Did anything happen to you because you didn't show?

MARSHALL: No. No. Didn't anything happen to me because I didn't go into the office.

CP: And he didn't miss you?

MARSHALL: He didn't miss me.

CP: Did the other White workers, did they...

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

Tape 2, Side 1

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MARSHALL: We packed a lunch and we didn't eat in the cafeteria at the shipyard.

CP: Do you have any idea whether the cafeteria was integrated or not?

MARSHALL: No, I don't. But I do know that the movies and the cafeteria downtown and the ones close to the railroad station, all of those were segregated. Everything was segregated. Everything in Portland.

CP: Was that the way it was in Illinois and Indiana?

MARSHALL: No. In fact, in Illinois, as far as the theatre was concerned, I don't remember any segregation, but I didn't go to the shows then much. I don't know why, but I just didn't notice it in Illinois like I did out here. I'm not saying it was there, but I didn't notice any. It might have been because certain things are Black and certain things are White. I know it was that way in Illinois as far as the school was concerned. Riding the bus, I would catch the bus from Polaska to Carbondale before my folks moved to Carbondale, and there was no discrimination on the bus. I could sit anyplace I wanted to.

CP: What about in Portland?

MARSHALL: Yes, I could sit anyplace on the bus because we rode the city bus and the shipyard bus to work. No, I don't remember any discrimination on the bus.

CP: Would you describe your day – what time, for example, you had to get up in the morning?

MARSHALL: Oh, we had to get up early. I know it was dark when we got up. I can't remember now. I think our shift was from eight until 4:30. Something like that. We had to get up in the neighborhood of 5:30 or six, because we lived over on the Southeast side. We had to catch the bus to downtown, and then we would have to catch a shipyard bus going to the shipyard. That would take, you know, quite some time. So it was a long day.

CP: Did you and your roommates take turns cooking for each other? How did your domestic chores work out?

MARSHALL: Our domestic chores worked out fine. We got along real good, just like family. We would take turns in cooking. Whoever would cook that day would choose the menu they want to cook. That's what we cooked. There was one girl that was Catholic in the bunch – that was Leona. We would go along with not eating meat on Friday. It was no problem among us. We were just like sisters, all of us.

CP: Do any of them live in the Portland area now?

MARSHALL: No, my sister Ida is married to a man, a professor that teaches Catholic college. He's president, I believe it is, of the Catholic college back in eastern Michigan. Leona is still in L.A. and Myrtle is still in L.A., and I'm still in Portland. We plan on having a reunion one day.

CP: That would be wonderful. Did you make any new friends working on the shipyards?

MARSHALL: Yes, I did. I made quite a few new friends working in the shipyards.

CP: The women that were working in the shipyards, the Black women that came, did most of them stay or did they go back home once their jobs ended?

MARSHALL: There's a few I know stayed and a few went back.

CP: What kinds of things would you and your sister and friends do on your day off?

MARSHALL: On our day off we would mostly rest and houseclean and get things ready to go to work the next day. Another thing that sort of amazed me was working on Sunday. I wasn't used to working on Sunday, you understand what I'm saying.

CP: How many days – was it six days a week? How many days did you work a week?

MARSHALL: We worked a 40 hour week, but it was, you know, we had certain off days. In the supermarkets and stores, everything opened every day, all day. I wasn't used to that back home in Illinois. I don't know if the shipyard was open Sunday or not.

CP: I believe it was.

MARSHALL: It was. I don't remember it. All I know is we had off days.

CP: Is there anything else you can think of that you want to say, Mrs. Marshall? Anything that we haven't asked that you want to be sure to have us know about?

MARSHALL: No, I think we pretty well covered everything from the time I left there – left Indiana and came to Portland and didn't get the job I was trained for. [All laugh] I was real mad.

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

[End of Interview]