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Phyllis Massino

Rosie the Riveter  
WWII American Home Front Oral History Project

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Interview conducted by  
Shanna Farrell  
in 2015

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Phyllis Massino at her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party on October 4, 2015



Phyllis and William Massino on their wedding day on April 21, 1948



Phyllis and William Massino at their daughter's wedding  
Joe Vetri photographer, 1989



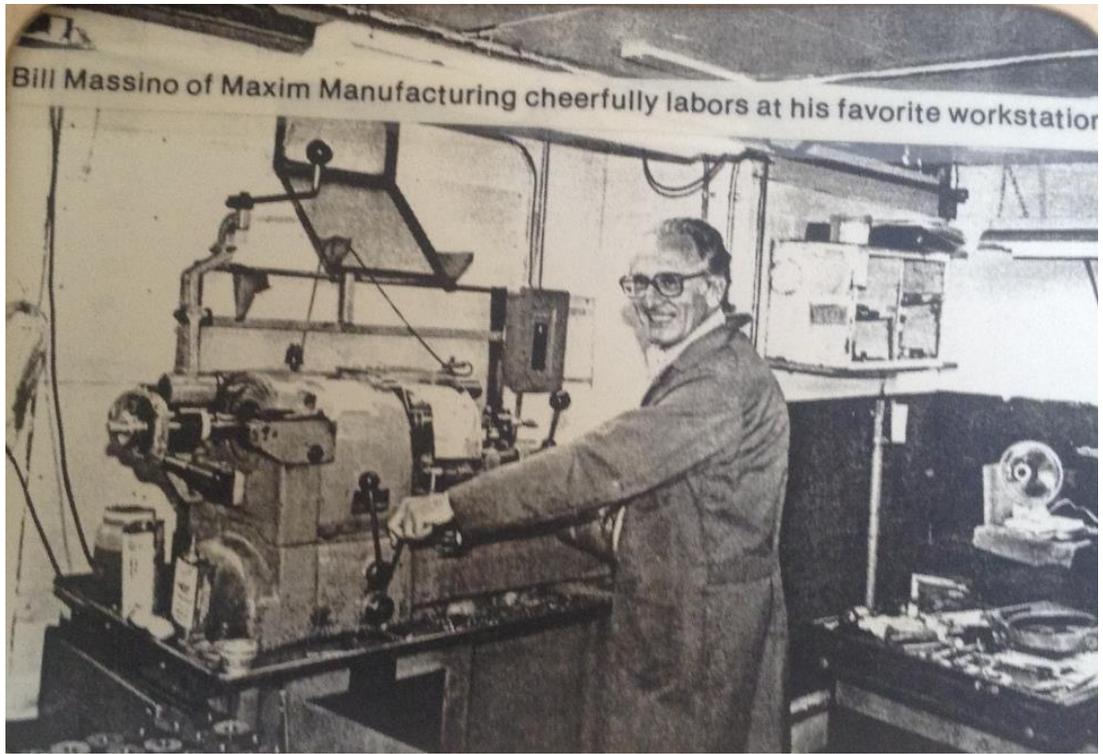
Phyllis on September 15, 2015 with her daughter, Maryanne Hickey  
Photograph by Maryanne Hickey



William Massino at age 25 in 1948



William Massino at work in a machine shop circa 1970



William Massino at his machine shop in his basement, Maxin Manufacturing, circa 1980



Phyllis and William Massino on a break at the defense plant circa 1945

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## Interview 1: September 20, 2015

01-00:00:00

Farrell: This is Shanna Farrell with Phyllis Massino on September 20, 2015 in Huntington, New York. We are doing an interview for the Rosie the Riveter project. Phyllis, can you start by telling me where and when you were born, and a little bit about your early life?

01-0:00:21

Massino: I was born October 4, 1925, which makes me ninety this year. I was born in The Bronx, New York.

01-0:00:36

Farrell: Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, what their names were?

01-0:00:41

Massino: Oh, sure. To Lena and Tom Cicarelli. They were young; my mother was about, I think she was just barely twenty when she had me, and my father was twenty-three. They were young. We lived in The Bronx almost all of my life till I was twelve years old. Then my father had a house built in Throgs Neck, and we went to live there. This was the country. There were five houses on the block. And we just loved it, because we had come from apartment houses, always lived on the fifth floor. My father said the air was cleaner there; it was also cheaper, so that's why we lived up there. I think my life really began probably in Throgs Neck.

I was twelve when we moved there. When I was thirteen, the boy around the corner came into my life, and he started coming to my house every day. I was thirteen and he was sixteen, and we became friends. My mother said, "You're too young to leave the house." Very strict Italian family. So my mother said, "He can come here every day, but you don't go anyplace." Okay, so that was part of the rules. And he did, and we had a very nice relationship.

The only thing was, we knew that he had rheumatic fever, he had a hole in his heart, and he was supposed to die when he was eighteen. So being very romantic and believing that love conquers all at that age, we said, "Nah, that'll never happen. We'll make it not happen, of course." So when he was eighteen, he said, "Well, I think I have to get a job. I have to start working," because he was being homeschooled, but not by his parents. The board of education sent a teacher to his house, and that's how he got his education. He was a Boy Scout, made a lot of little things, and we did a lot of projects together. He was a sweet boy. Very respectful.

Then he went to work. When he went to work, he went to G & G Precision Company—remember that. He went there to work, but within a year he passed away, as the doctors knew he would. So I was sixteen, he was nineteen, when he passed away. Love does not conquer all. I was heartbroken!

By the time I was eighteen, I graduated school, and his friend came over and said to me, “How would you like to work where John worked? Now they’re taking in women for defense, and do you think you’d like to take his job? They’re doing that now.” So I said, “Sure, I’ll try.” I said, “But I’m making twelve dollars a week, don’t take me anyplace I’m not going to make more than twelve dollars a week.” So he said, “How about forty dollars a week?” That was the first time that they gave one dollar an hour to anybody, that’s when it started.

I went there, and I worked there for three years. In the three years, I met my husband, who was a foreman, he was the foreman of the girls. There were ten girls and about thirty men. I was nineteen years old, so I went out with two other young men, but after three months I said no, I don’t see anything worthwhile here. Then he was the third one I went out with, and he turned out to be the one. We got engaged I think a year later, we were married two years later. That’s about it as far as the life story goes.

01-0:06:23

Farrell:

Before we get to your work at G & G, I want to back up a little bit. So your parents had immigrated here from Italy.

01-0:06:32

Massino:

No. They were born here. My grandparents all came from Italy. But my parents were born here in the Belmont section of The Bronx. I was born on Washington Ave. My parents had a basement apartment in my aunt’s house. My grandmother lived with my aunt and uncle and cousin Mary. It was a two family house.

01-0:06:42

Farrell:

Okay, so your parents were born here. Were you living in—can you tell me a little bit about the neighborhood in The Bronx that you lived in? Was there a big Italian community?

01-0:06:51

Massino:

Yes. Very poor and very big community of Italian people, and there’s still—probably a lot of people might know Arthur Avenue, and that’s where I used to go shopping with my mother and my aunts and my grandmother, and of course that place is still there. Where I was born is not there, it burned to the ground at one time, so that’s over with. But it was a wonderful neighborhood.

We moved out of the basement when I was three years old. There, my aunt had a two-story house and it was only about a block away from where we lived, on the fifth floor. So we used to come down every day to be with Grandma and my aunt. We used to sit on the porch, you said hi to the people going by. We were a very friendly neighborhood with our neighbors. I went to public school around the corner. In school we had something I have never seen before in a school—a dentist’s office. On certain days my teacher would get a call on the intercom and told which child had to be sent down for dental

work. We had to have permission slips signed from parents as to if they wanted work done on their child. On my days, my mother would come and see what the dentist was doing. There was no charge at all. He was very good with children. I think he was probably the first dentist I ever went to.

My best friend was next door. My best friend's mother came in and witnessed and helped with my birth, which was at home. And then, when she was born, my mother helped and was there at her birth. We were friends all of our lives. She died about ten years ago. But friends all our lives. In fact, I have quite a few friends that I've been like friends for forty, fifty years, but now they're all about gone. It's lonely to be ninety, it is, because half the people—most of the people, three-quarters—are gone. I am also the last person in my family left. Now starts my children, but the older folks are all gone.

01-0:09:05

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about what your parents did as far as jobs?

01-0:09:11

Massino:

My father was a plasterer, which all the houses at one time were not made of this paper, cardboard, or anything, it was all plaster, as this house is, too. During the Depression, nobody was building houses, couldn't afford to. So he was gone—once he went to Florida to try to get work there, he heard that there's work there. He tried a lot of things. He even had a cab, a taxicab. They allow you to work in a taxicab a certain amount of time, but then you have to buy, what was it again, a label. Not a label. Medallion, right. You had to buy that, and that cost hundreds, so he didn't want to do that. Couldn't afford to.

So then heard of a job helping a man who had a publishing business, and he heard that he needed truck helpers, truck driver helper, and he went to do that, which he did for quite a while. In fact, he did it for so many years that finally, the man he helped offered the business to him, and he's such a great guy, this boss, that he let him pay him off as the money came to him, as he worked for the money. That's what he did—he bought the business.

And finally, he ended up having his own trucking business, and that was for a long time after. But that was the time that we finally, we were able to have our house built in Throgs Neck.

My mother was a stay-at-home mom. The last time she worked before she got married, she was a dress operator. They used to have dresses with beading on them, a lot of beading, and that was the flapper era. She used to go to a factory and put the beading on the dresses. Then once she had me, and then I had two brothers; one of them died very young and one of them I still have, he's eighty-two years old, and that was it, she really never worked in a factory or anyplace. Just took each of us.

But she had me go every summer to work. I went to an all-girls high school, Jane Adams High School, which was for all girls and it was all girls' services,

like a beautician—I took dressmaking. But it seemed like the only thing I was fit for was to go into these factories, which were sweatshops. At these places, the women were really, oh, they used to get hysterical if they didn't get the work. So I went in as a finisher, because I was new. I did that every summer. Not good enough as a dress operator yet.

Once a relative said, "Oh, come with me, it'll be a great job for you." She was making taffeta bedspreads. I was new to the machine. That taffeta kept slipping away, gave me a really hard time. The more I had jobs like that, the more I said, "I don't like this kind of work, you know?" I didn't want to do it.

But anyway, finally, at the defense plant, we were working on Navy orders. We were making metal bushings. We had to wear heavy gloves, and the coils that came off the bushings, you had to pull them with your hands. I had to learn how to read a micrometer. [Section added by narrator during editing process: It's a very precise instrument and it measures mostly metal that I know of. For fun we used to measure a lock of hair—it can do that too. The reason it took me about a month to get the hang of it was, yes you want the numbers on the dial, but if you squeeze it too tight it will be wrong, or too loose it would be wrong too. It's all in the feel of the way you control the shaft. Very important to hold it softly to get the right readings. Each bushing had to be measured to certain specifications. It became easier as I got used to it.] Then I had to measure them as they cooled off, make sure I got the right reading on them. It was hard work, didn't like it, happy to give it up. [Laughs]

01-0:14:30

Farrell:

Before you started working for G & G, was that when you were working on the taffeta quilts?

01-0:14:37

Massino:

Yes, before that. Oh, no, no, that was before. The job I had before I was working for G & G at twelve dollars a week was, I was working for Van Dutch Chocolate Company—Dessert Company. Van Dutch Dessert Company, and we used to make Jell-O and it was funny, in the winter we used to make the Jell-O in glasses and put it out the window sill. It was all business neighborhood. The soot was crazy, all over the place, but we put the glasses outside, because that's where it was cold. Within an hour, you had Jell-O all ready. And we only used tap water. It was fun.

That was the twelve-dollar-a-week job. I had my own machine, and I used to make the boxes with a little copper-colored clip came out of the machine to hold the boxes together, because all of these boxes were going to go overseas, and they were all desserts. But all the girls used to take little pieces of paper and put it in with the boxes, we put our names and addresses, you know? A couple of times the cooks wrote back to us.

Then another thing we did was, we belonged to the USO as well. We used to go dancing at different places and have hot chocolate and something, we'd sit down and talk with the boys. Maybe at least once a week we used to do that for quite a bit of the war.

01-0:16:45

Farrell:

So you were about, when the war started, you were about eighteen years old?

01-0:16:49

Massino:

Yeah, just graduated high school.

01-0:16:49

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about the start of the war, your memories. Did you know that it was coming?

01-0:16:58

Massino:

Well, the newspapers were frightening. That's all they wrote about, but they scared us the way they put it. It sounded like the enemy would be up the block soon.

01-0:17:00

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

01-0:17:01

Massino:

That was, the whole thing was those newspapers when they said that Japan was considering coming into the United States, I think we all got hysterical. We were scared stiff of the Japanese people. We didn't know too much about them anyway, but just the thought of them. And then we got—always the papers, had no TV at the time. TV didn't come till 1950; I had my first child then. It was just such a frightening time.

The rationing, well, you know, we managed somehow. I used to get bags, plastic bags of white stuff and you got a little yellow thing with it, a little package of yellow stuff, and then you had to mix that together, and that was your butter. It was horrible. I mean, people didn't go for much bread and butter in those days, believe me. Because it was a mess. But we did that.

01-0:18:24

Farrell:

Do you remember when you heard the news that the war had actually started, or that Pearl Harbor had been attacked?

01-0:18:31

Massino:

Oh, we were so scared. I don't remember too much about that because it was so far away. My Dad and I both worked at G&G for about six months. He worked there at night. At times we would work on the same machine. When we did that, he would make a little extra and put it aside and say to me, "Use this for tomorrow." That was nice. He didn't work there too long. I think for about six months he worked there, at night. And he tried to work in the day, too. It was hard. [Section added by narrator during editing process: My dad and I had a Victory Garden, mostly vegetables, but we threw in a few flowers

to make it pretty. My mom cooked up great dishes with the string beans, spinach, and tomatoes. She did not like weeding. I did some on Sunday and Dad did the rest. We were very proud of ourselves, Dad and I.]

01-0:19:34

Farrell:

Do you remember why he couldn't work during the day?

01-0:19:39

Massino:

When he couldn't?

01-0:19:42

Farrell:

You said that he wanted to work during the day. Do you know why he wasn't able to?

01-0:19:48

Massino:

He wanted to do his trucking business. There's something about that. And we were in a flood when we moved to that house, the flood of '38, and the water was seven feet into our basement. But we didn't have a downstairs basement, it was a walk-in basement. Seven feet of water. A little dog jumped up the steps. We were taking care of my cousin's—my mother's cousin's little dog. She was going to Europe, so she left her dog with us. So this little dog used to stay downstairs, because my mother didn't like animals. So I hear him barking, which he didn't do. We had all gone to bed, really. I said, "Whitey, what's the matter?" When I went to say that, I saw the water right up behind him. Oh my god. I started screaming for my parents.

Well, the firemen came and they took us out in the boats. Terrible night! While we were in the boats, we could see rats running across the top of the water. That was the worst part, just seeing that. But that was when we first moved in to that house. I think we were into that house maybe not even a month. It was some welcome, I tell you. It was a nightmare.

01-0:21:33

Farrell:

What was the recovery like for that? What did you have to do to recover from that?

01-0:21:39

Massino:

Believe it or not, the next day we went back and it was dry. What had happened was, we had a wall that was built up around Throgs Neck, the wall had broken because the storm was so fierce and it had broken down that wall. We lived actually about two blocks from the water, but it came in all that way.

When we were in the boat with the firemen, I hear my uncle calling—we're on the boat, and he's calling our names, "Where are you?" Because we were in like a depression of the lay of the land, and my uncle was on the highest part, and all he did was yell, Uncle John kept calling us and calling us, and finally I said, "That sounds like Uncle John." Finally, when they took us up on dry land, it was him we went home with. He was there with his car. Our cars,

everything was covered with water. It was really something. We didn't know how we would get out of there.

The next day, as the tide went back, it was dry. But you know what it was? All that mud, horrible, smelly mud that whatever was in it, covered with it, you had to throw out, you just couldn't clean it, you couldn't wash it enough. It was really a lot of experiences, I'll tell you.

01-0:23:30

Farrell:

You were also eighteen when you started working at G & G? You told me a little bit about how you had gotten the job. Can you tell me about what the training was like, or maybe even the interview process when you applied for the job?

01-0:23:48

Massino:

Actually, no training. On the job, it really was. But they were very careful with us, especially the ladies, make sure you got this and that, your gloves. Especially the gloves, because we were always working with hot steel.

One day the owner of the business, he was a doctor of metals? Metallurgics or something like that. So he came around, and I was kind of a glamour girl, and he came around, he said to me, "Why did you come here to work?" I was taken back, you know? I said to him, "Aren't we all working here for our country?" I was shocked. And he says, "You gave the right answer." Testing me.

But most of us were young. I would say at least half of us were eighteen to twenty to start. The others, well, they came from all around. They came from—one came from—there's that Polish town, oh, I forget what you call it. It must have been over by Brooklyn.

[Section added by narrator during editing process: The girl from Greenpoint and I became friends. Her name was Sarah but they called her Sacha and that's what she wanted us to call her. She was polite and she invited me to her sister's wedding. It was interesting and of course her family had a young man they wanted me to meet. That didn't work out at all. He was so shy, he hardly talked. We always laughed about that and referred to him as "Silent Sam."

Another lady, Mary, was from Manhattan and she liked that I always wore earrings to match every outfit or top that you could see under the jumper top. So one day she asked how many earrings I had and I told her about one hundred and she asked if I had a lot of good ones. I told her no, mine were all about fifty cents to one dollar. She decided she wanted to get me a good pair. She took me to dinner one night at Schraffts and then she took me to "Repacqe." It was an upscale jewelry store. The interior was all leopard skin and lights. She wanted to get me a fifty dollar pair but I refused it. I did not want the responsibility of expensive earrings. So she got me a ten dollar pair because I would not let her spend more.

Word got out in the shop that she took me to dinner and gave me earrings. I told them we were only friends and she wasn't special to me. But one of the young men asked if I really did have one hundred earrings. I say yes and that I would bring them in sometime. Well one day he asked me when I was going to bring them in and I said next week, which I did and counted them in front of everyone. He said, "If you do all of this just to confirm my curiosity, I will bring you in a pair next week to add to the collection." He did. He made his sister buy them and they were so awful. I only work them for work. He was one of the boys who were drafted and he never came back.]

01-0:25:30

Farrell: Greenpoint?

01-0:25:31

Massino: Yes, she came from there, and some came from New Jersey. I don't know how they got the jobs, but I know how I got it.

01-0:25:46

Farrell: What was it like to learn on the job?

01-0:25:50

Massino: It was hard, very hard. Because I had to know how to read the micrometer, and that wasn't too easy, because you had to handle this hot metal, which we used to try to wait. They'd say to us, Wait till it cools off and then take it, then do it. We wore jumpsuits, that's what they wanted us to wear, to be covered, jumpsuits. Had the hair back, because when you were looking over to measure the metal, they didn't want your hair falling in or anything, so we had to keep it back.

I didn't like that work, it was terrible. And smoke, smoke all the time. Plus you had to put some kind of liquid on it, so that it cuts better. You had to learn how to sharpen those bits that go on—that do the cutting. That was hard. It was on a wheel, you had to do that. That wasn't easy to do, really, especially I always had long nails, you know? So I said I gotta do it with my gloves on. That's where my husband came in. [Laughs] I used to say to him, "Please, could you do this for me?" And he'd go, "Sure, no problem."

Then started to go out with him, and he was the sweetest guy. [To daughter, who is in room:] Show the picture of Dad. You don't have any pictures of him, I thought you might want some.

01-0:27:59

Farrell: Sure, yeah.

01-0:28:00

Massino: This is him, in the middle.

01-0:28:05

Farrell: How long was he a foreman at the factory before you were there?

01-0:28:09

Massino:

Oh, quite a while. Maybe a year. He wore thick glasses, that's why he was not in the service. Well, he was there as long as the girls were there. I think that's when he started to be a foreman. He was in charge of the girls. And this—this was our first date here. Right from the factory we went out.

01-0:28:45

Farrell:

Just zooming in on that a little bit.

01-0:28:51

Massino:

Oh yeah, I used to give him my lunches, yeah. Because he liked the homemade food, and my mother always gave me omelets and—and I gave it to him.

01-0:29:11

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit more about your—so you had to wear gloves, and you had to wear jumpsuits. And you said there was a lot of smoke. Did you have to wear masks at all?

01-0:29:24

Massino:

Sometimes when the smoke got too much, we had to wear the masks, yeah.

01-0:29:30

Farrell:

Do you remember any accidents or any workplace safety issues that came up that you had to have addressed? Or that he would've had to deal with as the foreman?

01-0:29:46

Massino:

Oh, I know one, yes. Well, he was out with a virus or something for a couple of days, so another fellow took over. He sent me to work on a drill press. I was, at the time, about 120 pounds, so went on this drill press, and as I pulled down the handle, it lifted me right up. I was just too light for it, you know? I'm yelling, "What happened? What happened?" And they all come running and they help me down. They said, What are you doing on this machine? I said, So-and-so sent me. He told me to do this. So then they had to talk to him and say, The girls do not do this machine, they're too light for it. That's about the only thing I remember.

Mostly it was very safe, and they were always checking for different things, make sure the machines were timed right. It didn't seem hazardous at the time, except for what you breathed in, it was awful. In three years I don't think it did any harm, [Section added by narrator during editing process: but I'm sure it affected my husband to breath in all that smoke. He was also a smoker of one pack a day. When he was in his sixties he had emphysema and I'm sure that smoke from the work did not help him with the cigarettes as well. He died at seventy-one.]

01-0:31:28

Farrell:

Do you remember some of the other jobs that people were working on in the same factory, or was everybody working on the bushings?

01-0:31:36

Massino:

Yes, we were all working on all different sized bushings. These were for the Navy ships. I once worked on one that was an inch, just an inch long, but all I had to do on that was to de-burr it. But on a wheel, one of those wheels that was for—how do you call them? They were sandpaper wheels? And I was just de-burring them. But mostly we had nice-sized bushings, I would say about two to seven inches. I think seven was about the longest.[ Section added by narrator during editing process: I don't know if anyone knows what deburring is, but sometimes after the autside is done, it might come out with a small overhang. On the big ones we'd use a planer and took it off quickly by hand. On the small ones it always had burrs on them. So they had another step to them and you did them all on the sand paper wheel stones.

[Section deleted by narrator during editing process.]

01-0:33:58

Farrell:

Once you pulled the metal off, what would happen to it?

01-0:34:01

Massino:

Well, then it was a new measurement. Then we had to measure it. We had to wait till it cooled off, and then measure it. And if it wasn't the right measurement, either you cut more or—[Laughs] or then it was no good. Then you got into trouble. Too many of those they didn't like. Believe me, we were very careful.

01-0:34:30

Farrell:

So some of it got used, and some of it didn't.

01-0:34:31

Massino:

Mostly all got used. Because then the men knew how to fix it up, that's what they'd do. But with us ladies, we really didn't know what we were doing, we just did what we were told. We just didn't have the feeling for it like the men did. And you know what? When the men were in the service—they used to tell us, let's say, Oh, we can't wait to get back, I want to get back to my farm, I want to get back to this, back to that. So when us girls were together, we'd say, "I want to go and be a salesgirl someplace, be dressed up, look nice." So those were our dreams.

I had my dream, though. I went to work for Bloomingdale's, and I loved it. It's funny, how everybody's got their own dream of what they want to do. That's how we looked at it. I was just a salesgirl and hat model in the millinery department. Just loved it.

01-0:35:51

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit more about some of the women that you worked with and maybe some friendships that you formed while you worked there?

01-0:35:59

Massino:

[Section added by narrator during editing process: On Saturdays we worked half days. All of us girls would go into New York City which was only a train ride away. We'd have lunch and sometimes go to a play. We loved to go to McGinni's and have clams and clam chowder on to Morning to You, who had ham and eggs all day and served it in a small frying pan. We kind of became a small family, but not overly so.] One girl was heavy, and we became friends. She and I used to go to the gym. We went to a gym that was outdoors. First time I had ever seen an outdoor gym. Up on a rooftop, yeah, on the West Side. She lived not too far from there. But I still had to go, oh, to The Bronx, you know? That was all right. I was becoming a veteran traveler of trains.

One girl used to get letters from her husband in the service. One time, when we walked into the break room, she was sitting there crying because he had been injured. A lot of unhappiness around at that time.

Once when I came home and my mother said she hadn't heard from an aunt of mine—not a real aunt. In the Italian people, when you have good friends, you call them aunt, you know, and she was called my aunt. But it was her nephew, and he was killed in battle. So there was a lot of heartaches around at the time, really. We just couldn't wait for it to be over.

But I'll tell you, what happened when it was over? We were all in the—all working, and somebody, one of the higher-ups in the office, came on and said, "Well, girls, the war is over, so you don't have to come in Monday."

01-0:37:52

Farrell:

That's how you found out the war was over?

01-0:37:55

Massino:

That's how we found out.

01-0:37:56

Farrell:

What was the reaction in the factory after that?

01-0:37:58

Massino:

We were mad. What a way to tell us, as far as that goes. But we were happy the war was over. But they said—I guess they were happy to get rid of us, that's how we felt about it.

01-0:38:12

Farrell:

Did you know that that was coming?

01-0:38:14

Massino:

No. Couldn't imagine how it was going to be. But they didn't, like, say, "Okay, in a week, in a day." No, that's how they said it.

01-0:38:27

Farrell:

Did they lay off everybody at that time, women and men?

01-0:38:31

Massino:

No, not the men. Only the girls. They didn't need us anymore. But I don't know why, because they had—they still had our places empty. It isn't that those people were coming back. And a couple, at least three that I know right away didn't come back. But that's how they did it.

01-0:39:08

Farrell:

And when you were working there, can you tell me a little bit about the commute that you had to make to get there?

01-0:39:14

Massino:

I had to take a bus to the train, and then I had to take two trains to reach Long Island City. Then I'd get off at Long Island City, I think it was Jackson Place. I worried so much about the war and how things were going. I had two cousins in it. One was in Iraq at the time, they called it Persia, and my other cousin was in Italy. We worried about them, and I used to stop in at the church and just go in and light a candle every so often for them. Then I'd go to work.

Altogether different feeling in those days, as there was later on, once it was all over. I mean, such nice boys, all of them. Young boys worked there, but they were all going to be drafted.

01-0:40:33

Farrell:

Did most people that you encountered or that you knew feel a sense of patriotism and like you were helping the war effort? Sort of the climate, the tone of the time.

01-0:40:51

Massino:

More or less, I would say, but never talking about it, really. Just you knew. There were signs all over about slip of the lip—we didn't talk about what we did or who we were working for, because we weren't supposed to let anybody know that we were working on Navy—had a Navy contract. So there were signs all over, Don't say anything. And we didn't. I mean, I'll talk about it now, but in those days you didn't, you just didn't.

01-0:41:43

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit more about—was there a union at all?

01-0:41:49

Massino:

Yeah.

01-0:41:50

Farrell:

There was a union there. My husband belonged to it for years. It was the machinists and long shoremens' union.

01-0:41:51

Massino:

There was a union.

01-0:41:52

Farrell:

Were you a member of the union?

01-0:41:54

Massino:

Yes, and in fact I was—at one point I was the secretary and I took notes for them. Let me think. What was the name of the union? It's funny, I belonged to a union but I don't think it had to do with this one, where they were the confectioner—oh, that was the dessert company. Confectionary Workers and Pickle Workers Union, together. [Laughs] No, that wasn't for this one, though. This one was just a regular—I can't remember. I don't think it was funny, so I don't remember it as well.

01-0:42:57

Farrell:

How did you get involved as the secretary?

01-0:42:59

Massino:

They needed one. We all went to the meetings, paid our dues, and they said, We need a secretary. Okay. That was it.

01-0:43:11

Farrell:

What kind of things would you talk about at the union meetings?

01-0:43:16

Massino:

About what's going on in the shop, how the bosses treated you, whether you needed anything. I think that's about it.

01-0:43:32

Farrell:

You leisure time, you had mentioned that you were involved with the USO. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

01-0:43:43

Massino:

We used to go, mostly at night, and they used to have the meetings at different places. Apartment houses had basements, and they used to sometimes have the meetings there. Then there was one in New York that we used to go to, but not so much—it was too far away. If we had to go there, we wouldn't go. It was just too far. Because I had friends who lived in Long Island City, and they wanted to go from there, so I was kind of the outsider who lived in the boondocks, you know?

So this was where we mostly had the meetings, in the different apartment houses that had community rooms or big basements. And there was always somebody there who came with the doughnuts and with the official labels on themselves. Yeah, we did that all the time.

Then we used to write to them, to the soldiers. And officials used to say to us, If you know who you're taking home, you can take them home, but know what you're doing. They used to give us a lot of talks about that before, because they didn't want just anybody coming home. So my mother always used to welcome them with open arms, and she said, "We're going to put the sign here, USO," she said. She'd always say, "I got leftover macaroni, who wants it?" And we'd always find somebody to have it. There were some good times, too. It seems so long ago, like a dream.

01-0:46:12

Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about what happened when the war ended, where you ended up? So they told you at work that the war had ended and then you weren't supposed to come back. What did you do from there?

01-0:46:30

Massino:

I went to Bloomingdale's.

01-0:46:31

Farrell:

So you went right from there to Bloomingdale's, okay.

01-0:46:34

Massino:

Yeah, because that was our dream, a couple of us went there.

01-0:46:38

Farrell:

Was it hard to find a job there then?

01-0:46:39

Massino:

No, because they more or less took us with open arms, because of where we had worked, you know. No, maybe it was the right time, I don't know. Probably the right time, the right place. We were about, I think we were three that stuck together, and all about the same age, so I think they were happy to get us.

01-0:47:13

Farrell:

How did you see things change in New York after the war ended?

01-0:47:22

Massino:

In New York. Well, you didn't see all those soldiers and sailors around like most of the time there were. That's it. I used to go—we girls used to go from Long Island City, we used to go into New York to see a play at least once a month, play and dinner out. Well, after that, we weren't going there anymore, because we had different jobs, and by then I was about to get married. I got married from Bloomingdale's, I was working there.

The girls there were so cute. They took me to Central Park for my shower. They gave me little kitchen things, you know? The food was pies. [Laughs] Never forget that. We had a lot of fun, though. And Bloomingdale's, we had a lot of fun. It wasn't as easy to have fun in the defense plant. But I gotta say, the men were very courteous, very nice to us all the time, very helpful—oh, except for one thing I forgot to tell you.

One day they sent me to, what did they call it now, they called the tool crib, for a left-handed micrometer. They looked at me, really? No such thing. They were teasing me. [Laughs] That was it as far as fun went.

Once we got back in a normal routine, then things got a lot better. Once the boys started coming home, oh, thank god. It was something. Then I got married.

Oh, so while I was in Bloomingdale's, the buyer said to me, "You know, you're really an up person. I'd like you for my assistant." I said, "Really?" And she said, "Yeah." Because I worked there about two years. So I said, "Oh, that's great. I'd love to be your assistant." Doesn't happen that way, you know, but I believed her. Whether she knew that it wouldn't happen, I don't know. But all I know is that one day this young woman comes in, and they said, "Oh, she's from Canada, but she's going to be your new buyer." I couldn't work there anymore. Could not work there anymore.

So my girlfriend called me and she said, "You know, they need an assistant manager in a hosiery shop. Will you try it?" And it was on Wall Street. Oh, more of a ride down, you know? But that's okay. So I said yeah, I can't work with her anymore, because I feel she didn't tell me the right thing.

01-0:51:33

Farrell:

How long were you at Bloomingdale's for, total?

01-0:51:36

Massino:

About two years.

01-0:51:40

Farrell:

And at that time you had started seeing people come home from the war. How did you see the workforce change? Were there less women working then, and were the men getting their old jobs back? Or there wasn't very much of a difference that you experienced?

01-0:51:56

Massino:

Well, in Bloomingdale's, the men didn't have too many jobs. It was mostly the women. So actually I didn't see that.

01-0:52:09

Farrell:

And did your husband stay on as the foreman after the war was over? Did he stay with G & G?

01-0:52:16

Massino:

Yeah, he stayed with them, I think, another year or so. But then we got married, and he said, "You know, this is the only work I've ever known. I'd like to see if I can do anything else." He had visions of being a salesperson too, but he was not that type. He was good with people, but he was not aggressive, you know, like when you had to make a sale, he didn't have what it took, really, to do that.

So I said to him, "Look, we're getting married, okay. So for a couple of years I'll keep working." I have a good job as an assistant manager in a hosiery shop. You ever hear of Albert's Hosiery? One of their shops.

For three years he tried different things. He tried being a salesman of jewelry, of car parts, of manufacturing screws and things like that. It didn't work out. So he says, "Well, I tried. I'm ready to go back to my work." And he did. So

he went back, and we had our first child. We were living in my parents' house, we had an apartment in their house. You know how life is? It ended up that my parents' last home was in my house, my basement. We made an apartment for them. Would you believe that? Isn't it funny how life works out? [Section added by narrator during editing process: My parents lived in my finished basement, Dad for five years and then passed on, and Mom for fifteen years. They lived in half of our basement. We made three rooms for them.]

01-0:54:18  
Farrell:

It is, yeah.

01-0:54:23  
Massino:

Then he started working in, what was it, Reeves Instrument, and it was over in Long Island, but over here. So he says, "I can't take that commute. We're going to have to do something." So I said, "Okay, what do you want to do?" He says, "My brother and my cousin and me want to build a house. That's what I want to do." [Section added by narrator during editing process: In 1955 I was expecting my third child and we knew we were ready for our own home. My husband is a precision machinist. He brother is a draftsman and he helped build the first MRI machine. His cousin was in heating and refrigeration at Montefiore Hospital in The Bronx. This was the work backgrounds of the three men who built my house in one and a half years. My third child has his first birthday here and I have lived here for sixty years. We had two more children after we moved here.] This is the house. I lived in it for sixty years, never fell apart. Got a basement downstairs, made an apartment for my parents. Now my grandson and his wife live there. We raised five children in this house. What else can I tell you?

01-0:55:29  
Farrell:

Can you tell me a little bit about some of the biggest lessons or some of the biggest things that you took with you from your time working at G & G or working during World War II?

01-0:55:43  
Massino:

[Section added by narrator during editing process: The experiences I had at G7G never left me and came in handy when I needed them. In 1975 Bill felt he didn't want to work for anyone else. He wanted his own shop. He decided he would try to set up a shop in half of our basement and see if he could do it. Turns out it worked out well. He worked from blueprints and he did first samples for big companies on Long Island. They had all been in the war effort and were now turning to peace time work. Bill made the samples and designing the work effort and he did very well for fifteen years. Because I knew the work and he did have a small lathe like I used to work on, I was able to help him with different things. Also I helped him when he had a deadline to meet and took care of inspection and again my handy micrometer came in. Sometimes I delivered worked for him too if it wasn't too far. I didn't like to go to areas I didn't know. After fifteen years his lungs began to give out. I'm

sure the solvent he used for cutting the metal did not help. Again my experience during the war came in handy. In his last year as he felt life slipping from him, I worked right next to him and he's talk me through some jobs so we could finished them and meet his deadlines. We worked together right to his end.]

01-0:55:44

Farrell:

What you learned about yourself?

01-0:55:49

Massino:

Well, I learned that I could do things if I have to, that's for sure. Because the whole three years, I mean, I hate to say it, but did not like it. It was not a woman's job, really. But the money was there, the patriotism was there, we felt good about working there. So any time we'd say, "Ugh, I hate that job," but it's for a good cause, that's what you've got to think of. We used to comfort each other. Because I was not the only one. Almost all of us didn't like the work. I think maybe two girls really liked the work and wanted to stick with it. Go ahead.

But you can do a lot when you have to. And weren't these poor fellows going out to a war, did they want to? They didn't want to. So that's what we always—we told each other that. It's for them that we're doing it, and we just gotta do it. And we did. So really, you learned a lot of stick-to-it-iveness, really.

01-0:57:20

Farrell:

And what are some of the things that you'd like future generations to know about your experiences or World War II in general?

01-0:57:28

Massino:

Well, I think I've just about said it, that if there's a job to be done, you have to do it. But you have to also look at yourself and say, Can I do this for the reason that I'm supposed to? We just did it, you know? As I keep saying, most of us did not like the work, it was not nice work, it's not what a woman would want to do. But we did it when we had to. And that's what young people have to realize, that there are some times you do things in life that you don't want to do, but you do it for a reason, you do it because it has to be done, and that's all there is to it.

And then, you know, my husband, have to admire that these three men made this house, a year and a half of weekends. As the money came in, we gave it out, but this was our dream house. This is what we wanted, and we were always happy here. They used to come to my house in The Bronx, my parents' house, every Friday night and look at a book, how to build a house. Would you believe anybody would do it? But they did it. And then his cousin built the house next door, but that is a house that's on a mountain kind of thing, it goes down—the back is all open, so they couldn't do it, there's too much to it, and they were not experienced enough. But they were willing to try.

So I used to babysit—they lived here for quite a while, they had two children. Me, with my—I always had a baby, it seemed, I babysat their children in with my children whenever they needed it, and that's how I paid them back a little bit.

01-1:00:19

Farrell:

Is there anything else that you want to add?

01-1:00:22

Massino:

No, just that I'm proud of what we did. I think we accomplished all the things that mattered to us in this life. Now I'm always sad, because every time I turn around, another friend dies. But that's life, I guess. So I've been living in this house sixty years. Wonderful years, raised five wonderful people and would not change a thing.

01-1:01:00

Farrell:

Well, thank you so much.

01-1:01:00

Massino:

Oh, my pleasure.

[End of Interview]