Penn South Archive Project
Witness: Bertha Bendick
Interviewers: Trudy Rudnick, John Harris
Date: 8 June 2022

Trudy: OK, let's start with your name, the building that you live inand what year you moved in.

Bertha: Okay. Am I ready?

Trudy: Yes, sure.

Bertha: My name is Bertha Madeline Weiss Bendick.

[Trudy chuckles]

And I live in building nine, apartment 9B and I moved in to this development on September 1960– uh... '62. It was about in '62. Say 60 years. Yes.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Right.

Trudy: Yeah. Great.

Bertha: The very beginning.

Trudy: And how old were you when you moved in?

John: Trudy, I'm sorry to butt in but there's some music.

Bertha: 30.

Trudy: Oh.

Bertha: I was 30.

Trudy: OK, wait one second. We have to have her close the door. 'cause the music, we can hear.

John: Can you turn that music off that's coming from the back? And this I don't hear yet, but maybe keep the TV down.

Bertha: You have to do this with each person.

Trudy: If it's... it depends. All situations are different. So yeah, it helps because then you can think about it for a minute and... are we... should we start from the beginning again, or?

John: Oh no. We have all that. Then I paused it so we're good to go.

Trudy: OK, tell me when we're ready.

John: We are... rolling.

Trudy: OK, so how old were you when you moved in? How old were you when you moved in?

Bertha: Yeah. Oh, I was thirty.

Trudy: Oh, ok. OK. And... um... and where did you live before you moved to Penn South?

Bertha: I lived in Brooklyn.

Trudy: Where?

Bertha: Williamsburg?

Trudy: OK.

Bertha: Yeah, I... my father was a business, so I lived in every part of Brooklyn that there was.

Trudy: Oh, really?

Bertha: Yeah. Yeah. We used to have a deli. Jewish deli.

Trudy: Oh, really? Oh, wow.

Bertha: And let me tell you, they don't have the same corned beef with pastrami that my father had.

Trudy: I'm sure. I'm sure. And why did you move to Penn South?

Bertha: I moved to Penn South, uh... number one, I wanted to be in Manhattan.

Trudy: Mhm.

Bertha: I wanted uh... a nice apartment. And, and, I knew about Penn South from the very beginning and I knew all the features that were going to entail and so that made me want to move there.

Trudy: How did you know all that?

Bertha: I knew about... coincidentally, I worked for the labor union that put up money for Penn South.

Trudy: Which union was that?

Bertha: The International Ladies Garment Workers Union.

Trudy: OK, so tell me about that. How did you hear about it?

Bertha: I was... I was a substitute school teacher. I'd just started, my father became very ill. We had to give up the business. It was very important to have money come into the house. It was summer vacation. And that's when I saw an ad in the paper for... uh... help wanted. And I answered that even though I thought I was going back to school.

Trudy: Uh huh. How old were you when you started at the union? At the ILGWU? How old were you?

Bertha: How old was I?

Trudy: Yes.

Bertha: Let me see, I was 20.

Trudy: Oh, ok. OK. I graduated high school at 16 and college, 20. Yeah.

Trudy: OK, so what work did you do? What work did you do at the ILGWU?

Bertha: Well, originally, originally. Uh... I... uh... I don't want to tell you guys a story about how I was hired. You weren't... you didn't want that story. Did you?

Trudy: Just talk about... Just talk.

Bertha: Well, when I answered that ad in the paper, it was for typists.

Trudy: That's right. Yeah.

Bertha: I... I... I only had a short amount of typing that I took in the study period. Typing instead of, I had some study periods in school and I took a year of typing and stenography. And I answered this job as a typist.

Trudy: OK.

Bertha: It was the first time in the industry that they were going to give a vacation check to the worker it was trying to figure out how

to do this because there was a piecework industry. How do you give a vacation check?

Trudy: Uh huh.

Bertha: And so... they figured out that I was an operator and I work four months a year, so I was entitled to one third of a check. And somebody that worked three months of a year, had that that ratio and a half a year. Only a sample maker worked a full week and got a full check. So the idea of the typist was type... typing the amount that was due each worker.

Trudy: OK.

Bertha: As we were typing I thought to myself, I looked around and I saw people typing. I said, I never can keep up with these people. They were going at it. However, I was very good in math and arithmetic. And as I was typing, I raised my hand to the lady that was in charge. She wanted to know what was happening, and I said, I think this person is not getting enough… as much as they were entitled. And she said... and brought out the paper. She's "oh, you're correct! That's very good Bertha." And... and then as I typed, I said, I think this one is incorrect as well. And she said, "Oh." I got it to her. And this kept going on and on until she said, Bertha, we'll take you up. We want you to check this and find all the errors... over here. And I... I, then I had it made.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Because I didn't have to type. Now, that was my field.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah.

Bertha: So oh, incidentally, I also took a year of accounting, and in school too, I said that as well. And... and then I was told to bring this... into the... Secretary-Treasurer of the union. And I, —

Trudy: who was that? Who was that at that time?

Bertha: At that particular time, it was someone named Nathan... Nathanial Minkoff. M.I.N.K.O.F.F. He, at that time, was secretary treasurer, later on it was someone named Sam Bayer. Uh... I stayed there so long that people changed.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Yeah. And so I... then it was the end of that typing period. The job was complete and they got rid of... 75 people hired, they kept two. They asked me to stay and they asked another woman to stay

and they asked her if she'd be interested in working in their Bronx office. She was delighted. She lived in the Bronx. And he said "we would like you in Manhattan. "Another reason... I will tell you that later on. But... and then he asked me would I be willing to stay? And I thought, what have I got to lose by saying yes? If I don't want to stay, I'll say no later. And so he then offered me $27 a week. This goes way back.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: And, and if I was good, in three months he would give me $30. And so I hesitated and he said, You don't seem to be interested. I said, I am interested, but why don't you start me with $30. If I'm not good you let me go. And he liked that answer. So he put his hand out and, and then he asked me, do you have your working papers? 'Cause I looked young with short dresses and everything. And of course I told him I was 20 years old and... and so I was hired... I was hired and they stuck me in the accounting department because of the figures, I guess and I stayed there for a good while until one day they said, we're sending you down to another office temporarily. And I said, I don't want to go. And they said, well, we want you to go. We think you can handle this job. It's in the organization department.

Trudy: Uh huh.

Bertha: We're going to have a labor dispute. And we need somebody that is quick. And so I... I... I had to say yes. I went down there and they had a strike in the Italian industry at that time.

Trudy: That was in the 1950s, right? In the... in the 1950s? Around...

Bertha: The general strike you mean?

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Let's see, that was... 'cause we had a couple. that... that... that particular year, that particular was not a general one. It was just an organizational.

Trudy: OK

Bertha: The later one was... I'll have to think.

Trudy: That's OK. That's OK.

Bertha: I'll have to think. It was later.

Trudy: So then you worked in the organizing department for the rest of your time there?

Bertha: They never got me, never got me out of it. I ended up staying there. And later on I started... assigning people and I got more responsibility. Yeah, with the... and as I once wanted to tell you that the first manager that I had in the organization department was a Max Bluestein.

Trudy: Uh huh. Right.

Bertha: An old time anarchist.

Trudy: Yeah. Bluestein, right?

Bertha: Yeah. Yeah, an old time anarchist.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah. How was that working with —

Bertha: All these people, I learned later on lived in the colonies.

Trudy: Uh huh,

Bertha: Yeah.

Trudy: Did you like it? Did you like working with him?

Bertha: They were the builders of the union.

Trudy: Yes.

Bertha: They were the builders of the union.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Yeah.

Trudy: So how did you hear about Penn South? You said that you heard about Penn South for years before you moved here. How did you hear about it?

Bertha: At... about this job?

Trudy: No, hear about Penn South at the... at the union.

Bertha: Hear about Penn South?

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Uh... coincidentally one day with a... with a gentleman named Kurtzman. And... uh... Max Bluestein. And... uh... they were... I was taking dictation.

Trudy: OK.

Bertha: And they were talking about a new concept of a building that was going to go up around... around Pennsylvania Station. And they they were going to probably call it Penn South. And... and... and... I... that's how I actually found out about it, taking dictation. I didn't know that it would ever come to pass.

Trudy: Uh huh.

Bertha: And of course, later on, I knew all about it because they were talking about it in the office and... they were making phone calls about it and... Yeah, yeah. And... and as I mentioned today, later on, people that wanted to move into Penn South, you know, you gave... didn't you give a deposit there? What you put in down to hold your apartment.

Trudy: Oh, you mean... I think $100. You mean the application. Just the application?

Bertha: Application.

Trudy: Yeah. I think I put down $100 when I moved in. Something like that.

Bertha: Yeah.No, but I mean to say is in the beginning, the... uh... we people that moved in, we gave money that was towards the building of the building. That was all the money that went into building the building here.

Trudy: Uh huh.

Bertha: So what am I, $500 is remembered

[Both chuckle]

Trudy: But like in general, did the officer... did the... the union communicate with staff about the ability to move into Penn South? Like, did they talk about it?

Bertha: No. Not really. No, no. No. The ILG... uh... people... I shouldn't say no. People, yes. The ILG at the... let the workers in the industry know about this building that was going to get built because it would be that purpose. For the worker. for the worker

to... and you know the money was put up by ILG and the school teachers retirement fund.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: But and... and then of course the banks.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: And the banks. Uh, but yes, as people would come in, as workers would come in, they let them know that they knew that building, that they're gonna start, they gonna anticipate building something that... that the dressmaker could go into.

Trudy: OK, and did they... they made lists for people to sign up? Or how... do you know how that process worked?

Bertha: Well people would come into the office for a job or for any reason, for a complaint and this is how we found out.

Trudy: And.

Bertha: And then, of course, they... they had those newsletters that they distributed also.

Trudy: Uh huh. And how about the staff? Was the staff encouraged to move like you and other people who worked at the ILGWU? Were they encouraged to move here?

Bertha: And the people who worked with me, No. I was not encouraged to move into it. That's something I discussed with my husband and I thought... and then I also... my father passed away and I wanted my mother to move with me she said, I don't go to live with any married people. I won't do it. But my father passed away. And I decided thatif I took a big enough apartment, that I would say, uh, Mom, there's a room. There is enough room. And so on. That's how I took the extra,extra bedroom. That's why I took a two bedroom apartment.

Trudy: OK,

Bertha: Yeah. And... um... she still wouldn't move in. And um... still wouldn't move in. And then I... I got her to spend a couple of weekends come and spend a weekend and then I said, stay an extra day. The funny thing is you're always a child to your mother. My mother moved in... I mean my mother spent a weekend here and I went to work the next day, she said, be careful how you cross the street.

[Both chuckle]

Like a mama how you get a child ready, yeah. And then I had her spend more days and more days. And then she said, why should I keep paying rent at my apartment? And I got encouraged that I moved in, yeah.

Trudy: Oh, that's good. That's nice. So how long... how long did it take when you first heard about Penn South to move in... till when you could finally move in? Did you have to wait a long time?

Bertha: Well. I moved in right in the beginning, and it took... it took about five years.

Trudy: OK

Bertha: It took about five years, yeah.

Trudy: So who else from the ILGWU that you knew moved in here?

Bertha: Oh, I knew a lot of workers from the ILG that were active some workers from the industry that were active.'Cause when we had some picketing going on, they would volunteer.I picketed. I picketed too, And then later on, I made all of the signs up.

Trudy: Oh really.

Bertha: Had a good hand writing and I wrote all the picket signs up. I picketed many times. Yeah.

Trudy: Oh, do you have one... Do you have any particular time that you really remember?

Bertha: I did it. I did for um...for um... Tried to organize different firms for –

Trudy: Uh-huh

Bertha: Yeah.

Trudy: Yeah. Wow. That's great.

Bertha: Yeah. Walked around with a picket sign.

Trudy: That's great. Do you remember any one particular picket line that you were excited about? You know, any one particular strike or picket line that was... meant a lot to you? Or...

Bertha: You know,some of these firms are out of business now.

Trudy: Yeah,

Bertha: yeah, yeah. I'm thinking of it because I have so many dresses that were...

Trudy: That's OK.I mean...

Bertha: For the moment, I can't.

Trudy: That's OK. Did you... did you go to the dedication of Penn South where, you know, JFK was there and other prominent people?

Bertha: Yes. I was there with the president of the United States.

Trudy: Yeah.

Trudy: How was that?

Bertha: Eleanor Roosevelt.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: I was here that day.

Trudy: Yeah. How was that? Was that exciting?

Bertha: When I see the picture in our office over here. I said I was in that crowd. Yeah. Yeah.

Trudy: That must have been exciting for you.

Bertha: Very exciting. Very exciting.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Bertha: And it was so exciting moving in even more than yourself, because... Because you were the... you were... Nobody ever lived there before.

Trudy: Yeah,

Bertha: When I moved in, it was brand new.

Trudy: Yeah. Yeah, I... Well, I do want to talk about that with you. How it was at the beginning. If you want, you can give me the cards back. these are... these are... this is like a picture of one of the cards. Just... they asked me to do that so that people know what we're doing.

Bertha: Yeah. They had some of the offices moved in.

Trudy: Oh. Like who... do you?

Bertha: – and some of them moved in. And I told you, the vice president of the union never moved in.

Trudy: Who was that?

Bertha: His name was Charles Zimmerman.

Trudy: And how come he didn't move in?

Bertha: They used to... everybody was... knew each other from way back. They called him Sasha, Sasha Zimmerman. And... um, and he made them reserve that apartment and never moved in because he was a very friendly, open minded person. And we used to be able to go into his office, open that door. And he figured that would happen over here. So he just never moved in. Yeah.

Trudy: How – But who else moved in that you knew? Like you knew other people? Like you said that...

Bertha: I know the um... somebody at... The union was made up of the two groups. It was started by two groups, the Italians and the Jews. Each one... each one didn't understand each other's language.

Trudy: OK.

Bertha: So they had a Jewish local and an Italian local later on... later on, the Jewish local took on everybody, all nationalities, all colors. The Italian local only always stayed Italian. Nobody ever, ever, ever was part of that except an Italian.

Trudy: Wow. Wow.

Bertha: They even... we even had um... our own... the union had its own resort unity house up in Pennsylvania, in the Poconos.

Trudy: Really?

Bertha: Gorgeous gorgeous.

Trudy: You went there? You...

Bertha: Oh yeah.

Trudy: So what was that like?

Bertha: Actually, that also was put up for the workers to be able to have an inexpensive vacation. And it was only open from Pay– from

Easter time until the Jewish holidays,and then... it never made a profit because it was closed the rest of the year.

Trudy: Uh huh.

Bertha: Only opened for the vacation months.

Trudy: Wow. Wow.

Bertha: Yeah. And I used to go there. I was invited on weekends and so on. And don't forget... the Italians had an Italian kitchen. That's how strictly Italian they stayed.

Trudy: Wow. So both the... the Jewish people and the Italians went to the resort?

Bertha: Yeah, they're the ones that started the union.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah.

Bertha: The labor movement.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then... and did you... did any of your coworkers move to Penn South, any of the people you worked within the office?

Bertha: In the office? Well... uh... this Max Bluestein, that was my manager in the organization department. Later, his son, Abe Bluestein, was... was in the co-op here.

Trudy: OK

Bertha: He became the manager of the co-op.

Trudy: Oh, OK.

Bertha: I guess that this was until they started having elections. This is a... he was placed there at that time.

Trudy: OK,

Bertha: Yeah.

Trudy: And did you —

Bertha: Later, later on, they had, you know, where we voted like we do now, but that particular time he was there.

Trudy: OK, was he good? Did you like him?

Bertha: Yeah. Until they started having elections, yeah.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah, So... um... living here, who... who lived with you in your apartment here? I know you said your mother did, but your husband like who did you live with when you moved in here?

Bertha: In my apartment here was my... my husband. And then after a while, when we convinced my mother to move in, she lived here with me. And it was always my husband and my mother.

Trudy: OK.

Bertha: When my husband passed away, I was lucky to have my mother with me.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah,

Bertha: Yeah, yeah.

Trudy: What was your... here. Um... what was your apartment and the building like when you moved in? Like what... Were you the only building? Were there other buildings here? Or was it just your building?

Bertha: When we first moved in here?

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Oh, we had a lot of... a lot of things that had to be taken care of. First of all, we had mice! They dug... They were digging down below, you know?

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: So we had mice here... and it was funny with the mice. You try to catch mice and... disgusting, but one mouse always got away. Always got away. And after a while I was on his side. I hated to see him caught. Yeah.

Trudy: You give him a picket sign?

[Both chuckle]

Trudy: But what was the... was—

Bertha: And then things had to be done. They had to come back in uh... Minor things. Minor things. Fixing a wall, painting something that wasn't completely done, and my sink. My sink. The rim was a

piece missing. I lost... I used to lose knives and forks down there in... in... in... this. In fact, I never got it back. They're probably down there.But I had... my late brother-in-law was a plumber and he got me a sink with a big lip on it. And that covered... that covered... I still have that sink. Yeah.

Trudy: How were the... were there a lot of buildings up when you moved here? Were... was it all done when you moved here?

Bertha: The neighborhood?

Trudy: No, in you're... Penn South. Were there are a lot of buildings? Were a lot of the buildings up or were you one of the first buildings?

Bertha: No. Just Penn South. Everything was destroyed. I had... a lot of it was slum. And then there were... I understand there were a couple of new buildings because one of the ladies that lived upstairs, on a floor where I had a friend of mine, said that she got the apartment because her building was destroyed and she said it was much nicer. And she bragged she had a much nicer building than we have here. She said it was a beautiful building.

Trudy: Yeah,

Bertha: But they... but they needed the area.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: So they knocked it down.

Trudy: Did you—

Bertha: And across the street, were belly dancing places. This was a Greek area. And there... all these stores.In fact, I should have taken it out to show you I have pictures with the names of the belly days. Ali Baba was one and then... another... there were a couple of them... and um... and it was... people used to pull up at night in their cars to watch the belly dancing and so on.

Trudy: There... right here, like across the street on 8th Ave. you mean?

Bertha: Right across the street.

Trudy: Yeah. Yeah.

Bertha: And I told you this story that... that... that we had very... no lighting here at all. It was dark. It was... we... we put up the

houses and nobody thought about the lighting and you could hardly see how to get into the building. And so I wrote a letter. I... I was on one of the first Building and Grounds Committee that nobody knows about here. They don't know that I was on... I volunteered and I was on it for three years. And... in fact, I stayed on it, was a bad time my husband had a stroke at that time and I still was part of the Building and... And not only that, but whenever there was... the Red Cross or any kind of donations... At that time they didn't give you an envelope to put something in. You had to knock on every door and ask for a contribution.

Trudy: Uh huh.

Bertha: And then with my sick husband,I knocked on doors, I was on the Building and Grounds Committee.

Trudy: Wow. What... tell me more about the Buildings and Grounds Committee? What did you do on that committee? What did that committee do?

Bertha: What we did was... because the neighborhood was... I... I was instrumental in getting of a lamppost put in. A light. I mentioned to you that I got in touch with the building department and I took care of lighting, and I said, that we have no lighting. We can't see how to get into our... our building. And then I said that if it weren't for the belly dancers, that had little flashlights in their bellybuttons, I said that... lighted a little bit at night... said, we'd never see our way. So a week later, we got a lamppost put there with the flash— It's still there... and then... with a letter. I should have gotten the letter for you. I don't know where I put it.- said, Lady, you have some imagination.

Trudy: That's great. I love that story. So what else did the Building and Grounds Committee do? Just monitor what was happening?

Bertha: Oh, yeah. Well, we. We... we... we talked about planting talk about planting. They used to put tulips here one time For the spring came around the gardener would put up tulips. We had a wonderful gardener. He did that on his own. He put up tulips. We had in this building here and... it was it was a very joyous building. Everybody sort of was friends with each other.

Trudy: Uh huh. That's nice.

Bertha: For a good long time.

Trudy: Yeah, that's great. It's this building, this apartment, right?

Bertha: Yes.

Trudy: So you made a lot... so what kinds of things did you do with people then? You said it was like... you felt like it was a community or, the building.

Bertha: Yes, it was just very, very friendly. Yeah

Trudy: Yeah, yeah. I... I... Are there places... I want to go back to the community part of Penn South 'cause I think it's very important to people. So did you have events here that people would go to together? Like things that people would do together at Penn South?

Bertha: But they would work together

Trudy: Here. Like what did people do together?

Bertha: Oh, I was very active and then I just... dropped out. Yeah.

Trudy: Yeah, that's OK. That's OK.

Bertha: Uh, different events. Yeah. Well, I'm trying to think if they're important

Trudy: That's OK.

Bertha: I think... I think anything that happened Oh, while we were a group here, and... uh... we used to celebrate holidays. We, at the very, very beginning, we used to celebrate birthdays.

Trudy: Uh huh.

Bertha: Yeah. We did that, you know.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah.

Bertha: Yeah. People don't do that anymore. I mean, if we knew somebody had a birthday on the sixth floor, everybody would get together and sort of welcome the person on the sixth floor. Was very heimish like, you know?

Trudy: Yeah, yeah. Nice.

Bertha: That was very nice.

Trudy: You were saying that you would go door to door to collect money for Red Cross or something. Did that... did you coordinate that? Who? You said you would go door to door with people to you would go door to door to collect money for Red Cross.

Bertha: That I... I'm sorry.

Trudy: That's OK. That's OK. That's OK.

Bertha: I know, I know. um... If my family's saying, Bertie, I told you they call me Bertie.

Trudy: Uh-huh.

Bertha: Bertie, please get a hearing aid!

[Both laugh]

I... uh... have um... I thought I mentioned that I had hearing aid.

Trudy: Yeah,

Bertha: I paid $5,000 and... then... what I had was supposedly the best they had to offer.

Trudy: yeah.

Bertha: It was not the best for me. So now my nephew, who also wants to buy one, doesn't need one as bad as I do, but he wants to buy one. And he said it was advertised on TV, that now they have hearing aids where you do... do not need to have a doctor or anything. The same components and the same everything. He said, wait another month or so, they should be coming out. So obviously this is June. So he said July, there are supposed to be hearing aids coming out. And meanwhile, I got a couple of clippings from the paper and I said, Harvey, I'm gonna send away for something because they say you get your money back if it's no good 'cause I want to get something. It's annoying.

Trudy: Have you ever... have you done any... gotten any help from P.S.S.S. over time?

Trudy: because...

Bertha: I never did. I am funny and you see what happened. I got my own lady over here.

Trudy: Yeah. Yeah.

Bertha: I don't think anybody even knows that I have a problem.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah. Plus they may know.—

Bertha: What I did, though, I have... I think $35 was a membership or something. Yeah, I belong to it.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bertha: I should get in touch with them for different things I guess.

Trudy: Yeah. Because they have something with... for hearing aids.

Bertha: As long as I can hold out and otherwise.

Trudy: I think the mic fell off.

John: Only the top part? OK.I'm gonna push pause.

Trudy: Yeah.

Trudy: Ok. So I wanted to ask you what... what would you want new people to know about Penn South or the history of Penn South that they may not know?

Bertha: About the history of it?

Trudy: Or living here? Anything that you... because –

Bertha: I mean... I mean. Everybody knows that this is an ideal location and that... and that it's run beautifully.

Trudy: Uh huh.

Bertha: Uh the place is kept up beautifully and it's just... people are clamoring to get in here. And I don't think that it'll ever change. I don't think it'll ever change because it gets better and better. It gets better and better. And there's more activities now. It became intergenerational now. It's for all groups of people.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Children enjoy it as much as adults and as seniors.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: And luckily I came in as a young person and remained here as a senior. One of the senior people.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Yeah, and... it was one of the best things I ever did in my life. And I think people generally will feel that way about living in this development.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah,

Bertha: Yes. I remember... I remember the first group of people, not the first group, but but new people came in. Not the original people but newer people and they came in and they wanted to privatize it.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: And... and they... they wanted a door man which a lot of people agreed to. They wouldn't mind paying extra money. They said for security purposes, but but as far as, you know, other... other things, I mean, it just was ideal. And, and we couldn't say enough good things about this place. You couldn't say... when they wanted to privatize it, I'll never forget. One worker stood up and said: We... we... we are lucky enough to have this. We want the next generation to have it and the one after that and so on. And... and... and... and why can't people, middle-income people have an affordable, wonderful place to live? Why do you have to be a rich person to be able to enjoy all this? And of course, they... they were outnumbered. They were outnumbered. But I'm still sure that many people today would love to see it happen.

Trudy: Yeah,

Bertha: They'd love to see it happen. I, in fact, don't know where she is now, but I remember this one woman. This is... listen to this, both of you. She wanted to get in here and she got on a waiting list. And I forget how long they... she had a long wait. She moved into the one on the Lower East Side. She lived there. It went private. She sold it. And they called her over here. Just about the timing there. She sold that place and moved into this one.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: So she... she really... she really benefited, you know. Yeah.

Trudy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's so true. It's part of why we're doing the archive is to interview people like you who have been here from the beginning and know how important it is.

Bertha: This is, of course, people think... I mean... it's these apartments they get my apartment. Well, my nephew, Harvey, was in a loft and... his wife passed away, and the owner of the building, Oh, it's... Oh, the store, Century 21, you've heard of Century 21?

Trudy: Yeah, yeah.

Bertha: He owned that building. And he wanted people out. He said, wanted them out. They let him harass people, they moved. One lady held out and my nephew, Harvey, held out. His wife had passed away and he held out and he said: No. I'm not... I'm not leaving. So they paid him. They paid him, to get out. I don't know how much he gave him, but it could have been a substantial amount.

Trudy: Sure.

Bertha: Because the other lady got $300,000... he gave her to get out. So Harvey stayed out a little longer, probably got a little more But why I'm telling you this, then he needed an apartment and he… there was none to be gotten. He wanted Manhattan and so he got a sublet. He got a sublet and he stayed there. And then the sublet was over the guy didn't really know it. So by that time,the landlord wanted... one bedroom... $3500 a month.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: He said how? I can't pay that money.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: They looked and looked. And he went... He wanted to get into a co-op around Columbia University, and they asked him how much he made a week and he said, I have my own... my own business. I can show you what I made for the year. No, they said, we want to know what your weekly rate is. Or your monthly they wouldn't... he said, I could pay cash for it. They would not gave it to him.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: You've got people sick here. They don't have money to pay the rent, you know?

Trudy: Yeah. Yeah. So and in terms of the union helping to build Penn South

Bertha: Of course people want to get in here.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: They can't... It costs a fortune outside.

Trudy: Yeah. Yeah. Is there anything that I didn't... that you didn't talk about that you want people to know about you and Penn South and the union? Because we're going to wrap up soon because this has been

a great interview, but did I leave anything out? Did I not ask you anything? John, do you think do you have anything?

John: I pushed pause for a second. one, because we were getting a little extra on that fire hydrant.

Bertha: I was putting all my tax papers away and I dropped everything on the floor and I piled... Put everything up on the table before you guys came in. I had everything all over the floor. A million papers.

Trudy: So.

John: We're rolling.

Trudy: OK.OK. Do you have any parting words that you want to say about Penn South or unions or some wisdom?

Bertha: Well, first of all, I met a nice person like you. And this gentleman, and it's just... it's just... you can't say enough about... about Penn South. You can't say anything bad. They used to call it the ILGWU houses.

Trudy: Yeah,

Bertha: They used to call it that at first.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: Yeah... and I'm so lucky that I happened to be around when this happened and... and to have spent all these years and enjoyed it all these years. Lucky, lucky me.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: And I've had a couple of friends that moved in. They're not around anymore, but they... they waited... waited. One girl said,how long would I have to wait? I said, maybe 15 years. She said, oh my God! So I said, you had... where were you going? You going someplace else? You don't like your apartment.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: And you can't afford anything else.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: And she... she was in heaven when she moved in here.

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: She said, Oh, I'm so lucky.

Trudy: Yeah,

Bertha: Bertie, thank you for... for... getting after me. You know?

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: I said, what do you need, your $25?

[Both chuckle]

Bertha: Yeah.

Trudy: Well, I'm... I'm lucky to meet you. I really. It's been an honor to get to know you. Really.

Bertha: Yeah.

Trudy: Thank you so much. You're a lovely, lovely, lovely person. Yeah.

Trudy: Thank you so much.

Bertha: And you know what? I feel bad, I... I should get more involved again but I had this accident.

Trudy: Yeah

Bertha: and I just... I just... not involved in anything anymore,and I should get active again.

Trudy: Yeah. They have a lot of programs over at the Senior Center.

Bertha: People don't even know that I was part of this or that I was on the committee and... and the first one and so on, you know?

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: I know the history of the place, and so on. They... they don't even know this, you know?

Trudy: Yeah.

Bertha: And... outside of yourself, I just, I... I... I like the campus and get around and stuff like that, but I never was a braggart or anything like that.

Trudy: Yeah. Yeah. Well it was great meeting you and doing this interview. Thank you so much.

Bertha: You're so welcome. Yes. It's my pleasure.