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[caption: History is What we Have, The June L. Mazer Lesbian Archives Presents]

[caption: Rita Gonzales on her archives at the Mazer]

[shows photo]

Gonzales: I remember the day this was taken. In those days, we didn't have cameras. I mean if we had a camera it was even before they had the throwaway cameras, it was the ones where you had an actual camera.

And we just—we were on our lunch break by the golf course in Hollywood. It was me and two of my—two guys on my crew. And we just took a couple of pictures and this is actually the only real picture I have of me.

At the time, you don't think about it. It was just your day to day life, you're not thinking about something in history. It was just—it was a day, it was just our lunch hour.

[caption: On being a pioneer: "You just don't look down."]

I did not want to be a phone installer. I was not on the first wave of women. There was a wave of women that were not part of the phone company, they were actually going to a school—I believe at Fairfax High there was a training class for women who wanted to be a phone installer. And a lot of women did that. Because they were looking for another job and the phone company got gigged by the EEOC that they had to start hiring women.

And I saw them, I thought, "I'm a secretary—I wanna do that." So I studied my math, and I took the test and I passed! But my boss did not want to release me. He liked me as his secretary. And so I said, "Well, no. I want to do this job. It's a lot more money than what I'm making right now and I *really* hate being a secretary."

So I went to the EEOC and said that I wanted this job. They said they had to give me a job. But all the teletype jobs were taken already. And they said, "There's only one job left. If you want

that title, you have to be a phone installer.” And I thought—well, I had to save face! So I said, “Ok I’ll take that job.” And I’m thinking, “I don’t know what I’m gonna do.”

The next thing I know, I’m in a class learning and the first thing they say is, “You have to climb a telephone pole.” Well I looked at that and I thought, I’m terrified of heights. But you just don’t look down.

[caption: What was it like to be a woman in the industry?]

It was hard for women out there to accept that there was a woman coming to their place to fix something. That happened to me a couple of times. I’d knock on the door and they’d look at me and I’d say, “Well I’m your phone installer.” And they’d say, “Well you’re not a phone installer, you’re a woman.” I said, “Yes, I am a woman, but I am your phone installer. [laughs] I’m here to repair your phone.” “Well no, I want a man to repair the phone.” I said, “Okay, but it’s going to take a little longer, I’ll go call somebody.”

Now this is before cell phones. So what I used to do—you know you’d go to a payphone or you’d go to somebody’s house to clip in and you’d call up. I’d say, “They’re not letting me fix the phone, you need to send somebody else out.”

My union rep, who’s supposed to support me on everything, was so anti-women. That we went into this house—because we did houses too, a lot of houses were businesses too, so we would go into homes. And he’s just going on and on that this is horrible that women are doing this type of job. And the woman is agreeing with him, and it’s like, I’m thinking, “Well you’re my union rep, you’re supposed to be on my side!” But a lot of guys just couldn’t get behind us taking their jobs away, which we weren’t really taking their jobs away.

I also had to wear a wedding ring, too, on some of the places that I went to because some men thought it was exciting that a woman was fixing their phone or installing their phone. It was always a challenge and you just pretty much knew how to take care of yourself, you just learned, you just—your guard’s not down, but like I said it was a different world then. I’m not saying it was right, but this is what you put up with, because who do you tell?

[END OF VIDEO]