

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

**London Pride Bridgend, Planet Gloves Llantrisant, Fiona Footwear Penybont /
Bridgend, Wella Pontyclun**

Interviewee: VSE018 Gwen Richardson
DOB: 7/2/1943
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Interviewer: Catrin Edwards on behalf of the Women's Archive
of Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru

0:00:00.0 could you tell me your name and date of birth

I'm Mrs Gwen Richardson, 71 this coming month 7/2/1943.

0:00:30.8 So tell me a little about your background and your parents what they did, where you were born, where you were brought up?

I was born in Llanharran. My dad was a miner my mother was a house wife. My dad died when I was 8 years old he had a mining accident but it was before the collieries were nationalised so my mother couldn't claim anything at all and he had a really bad accident and died within 2 years. From an early age things were really tough. It was my mother's second marriage she'd already lost her first husband from the mines because her first husband had died with a lung disease, which left her with a few children to bring up and she remarried to my dad who had an accident and she was left again with another 2 children to bring up. So her life was really tough.

0:01:45.4 So how many brothers and sisters did you have in all

We were 8 children I was the youngest of the 8. I was born in 1943 and my dad died in 1951

0:02:05.8 So tell me about you education where did you go to school and what was it like?

I went to Llanharran primary first and then onto the secondary school **in Dolau in Llanharran** and I left school 4 weeks after my 15 birthday to start work

0:02:27.2 Were you happy to leave school or would you have liked to stayed on?

At that time I simply wanted to earn money because of the poverty I had experienced through my childhood and I simply wanted to earn money to buy clothes and have things. I was quite happy to leave school and work and earn money. Later on I would regret that decision.

0:02:58.7 What did you do when you left School?

I went to work as a machinist. I went to train as a sewing machinist in a factory called London Pride. It was based in just outside Bridgend **in Bracla** - on the Bracla Estate.

0:03:19.3 Did you have to have interview or anything?

Yes I went along for an interview I think I did anyway. I must have had an interview. You went along and asked for a job and you went into a training school then to train as a machinist.

0:03:43.9 How long was the training for?

I think it was about 6 weeks where you only made collars and cuffs, that's all you did. You were taught how to use the machines and that is all they did was make the collars and cuffs for the blouses we were making so it was quite boring making those.

0:04:13.2 Was it good training?

Yes excellent

0:04:23.6 Describe to me the first day you went into the factory what was it like the noise, the smell

Very overwhelming, absolutely nerve racking you had to be in the factory by 7.30 to start work and you had to be sitting at your machine by 7.30 and I can remember it must have been the first week I kept looking at the clock and thinking that the day would never end. It seemed such a long day because we didn't finish work until 5 o'clock in the evening we had a 10 minute break in the morning half an hour for lunch, then a 10 minute break in the afternoon. But each time at break you only went when the bell rang and you had to be back on your machine by the time the finishing bell for the break to be over rang. If you wanted to go to the loo you had had to put you hand up. If there was someone else in the loo you had to wait for them to come back so you couldn't go to the loo the same time as anyone else off that line, you had to wait your turn.

0:05:43.3 So were they quite strict do you think?

Oh yes very no swearing you weren't allowed to swear. If anyone was caught swearing they were sent home

Forever?

No but they would be sent home it was very strict, prime and proper everyone wore overalls and everyone I'm not saying everyone, but the singing we would sing all day listen to the radio in the morning the radio would come on around 8 o'clock and at 9 o'clock it was a programme with all the local pop music and we would all sing along to that. Then the radio would go off at 11 and come back on at 1. At 1 it was called Workers Playtime and there would be a comedian or local artist... well quite famous artist not local at 1 o'clock... so everyone would enjoy that. It would go off again and I don't think it came back on in the afternoon... that was all we were allowed on the radio. The radio took off the monotony of the work you know.

0:07:11.7 So do you think it helped then?

Yes very much so

0:07:15.9 Were you allowed to talk when you were on the machines?

No you weren't allowed to talk or chat. That was taboo. I can remember one particular day I was standing by the side of a machine because the girl I was talking to was doing button holes she was button holing then she would hand the garment to me and i would mark for the buttons so we were chatting away and laughing although working at the same time I looked up and caught the eye of the manageress Mrs Taylor and she came to work every day in a navy blue suit with a white blouse every day in a taxi and her office had glass windows all the way around it so she could see every part of the factory floor from her office. Well I looked up like that and caught her eye and she came straight out of the office and straight over to me and said go back to your machine and stop laughing and giggling. I was shaking in my shoes.

How did you feel?

Oh it was terrible and of course then the supervisor came up and she told me off because the supervisor also had a telling off from the manageress because I was laughing. But I was simply passing the time of day, I was still working, That's the kind of atmosphere it was you know... very strict.

0:08:52.8 Did you worry about losing your job?

Yes you did .

Did people lose their jobs from being disruptive?

Yes if you didn't do your work if you weren't pulling your weight then yes you would lose your job because you had to keep up on a production line so if you didn't keep up or were chatting and laughing not keeping up on the line, then you would lose your job. Because it was a production line. There was a belt running down the middle of the production line and the garments came down on the belt you took it off did your part put it back on the belt for the next person so it was a continuous line all the time. You had to keep up.

0:09:53.9 So you did these collars and cuffs for 6 weeks?

Yes

What did you do then?

I went onto the finishing line where the garments were actually finished. The garment went onto a production line to be made up, side seams all those to be put in but then it came to the finishing line because I was just starting out. You didn't go onto the actual production line until you'd been there quite some time and you were really proficient. On the finishing line it was much easier work you were on a machine sewing the buttons on, a machine doing the button holes, a machine doing the bottom hems - all that kind of thing. Then the whole garment would be examined and the ends all cut off, it would go on to be pressed and then a final examination on a model.

0:10:58.6 A live model?

No a mannequin model

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0:11:05.8 Do you know who you were making these garments for, what we're making and who were you making them for?

They were blouses made out of a print called Liberty Lawn and **Viella** and they were for.. well it was a very up market garment and they went to all the big stores in London because at that time they were costing something like £60, the blouse, which would be expensive now but at that time it was a fortune.

0:11:45.7 And how much were you earning?

When I started work I've asked my friend this and we think it was £1 /7/ 6, that's how much we started on. That would have been about... it would be over 40 hours a week. Out of that we had to buy bus fare, give my mum some and what was left was mine, which wasn't much.

0:12:25.2 They were long hours weren't they

Yes 7.30 till 5

How much of a lunch break?

Half an hour

Very long hours

It was very long hours

0:12:43.1 Did you wages up when you stopped being a trainee?

Slightly yes you did you had a small amount more and I think when you went onto the full production line you earned a little more as well.

0:13:05.8 Were you on piece work at all?

No it wasn't a piece work it was a flat wage

Were all on the same wage or were you aware of some people having more?

No everyone was on the same.

0:13:23.7 Did your wages go up every year then?

Not every year I can't remember it going up every year. The one incident I can remember because the company was owned by London Based and was a Jewish Company. It was the anniversary of the owner so they sent us around a box for us to put money in to buy and anniversary present for the owner and I can remember they bought silver candelabra for the owner of the company, from the £1/7 /6 I was earning.

0:14:24.1 When you went to work at London Pride did you know anybody working there, people from school other members of your family?

No it was my friend and I who started together we both went and we both started on the same day

A School friend?

Yes so I had company no I don't think I knew anyone else it was just we must have known they were taking on people and we both wanted to do sewing and we just all started work together

0:15:04.6 How many were there when you started?

I think there was about 4 lines of 50 people so that would have been 200 then there would have been the training school. I expect there were about 300 people working there.

0:15:20.5 And these people were mainly women?

Yes mainly women

Were there any men?

Only the mechanics who looked after the machinery and the people in the cutting room there were men working in the cutting room and in the dispatch area where the products went out of the factory.

0:15:45.2 Were they all men in the cutting room?

Mostly yes the odd girl in fact my friend did end up working in the cutting room because she never went onto the machines

0:16:01.5 So did your job remain the same while you were there

Yes

Did you find the work satisfying?

No far from it. It was so boring because you only did one part of it you didn't do a complete item it was so boring bored me to death.

0:16:32.9 What kept you going?

The money. The thought that at the end of the week we would get our wages.

What about the other women was there a good gang working there?

Very yes they were. The camaraderie was brilliant in those kind of places because you all went to the same dance halls on the weekend. We'd go to the Palais in Bridgend and met each other there, it was a lovely camaraderie.

0:17:06.2 Was there any social events arranged by the factory?

Not in that particular factory I don't remember going to any there

What about day trips and such?

No I can't remember every going on anything organised through the factory

0:17:29.4 What about your holidays, were you given paid holidays?

Yes we were given paid holidays. I think it was bank holiday's you had 1 day for bank holidays. Christmas we had 2 days

What about an annual summer holiday?

Yes I think it was a week 7 days

Did you have a choice when to take it or did the factory shut down?

The factory shut down completely, everyone had the same. Actually it might have been 2 weeks.

The same time as the miner's holidays?

Yes

0:18:21.3 Do you remember what you did, did you go anywhere?

Not in particular only perhaps on the train we'd go to Porthcawl or Cardiff. Used to get on the train at Llanharran and going to Cardiff and going to Roath park on the lake. We used to go to Barry Island perhaps a group of us would meet up and go.

So you used to go with friends from work?

Not particularly from work my one best friend we always went together but there might be a group of 10 -12 of us go all from the same social group.

How did you go, did you say?

On the train because the train actually stopped in Llanharran, so we'd go on the train.

All the way to Barry Island?

Yes and Porthcawl, it actually went into Porthcawl then. That's the only places I can remember going. My friend and I did go to Liverpool to visit my sister and we stayed with

her, I think a week, with my sister and her husband. We went up on the train on our own which was a huge adventure as we had to change in Crewe. How an earth we got to Liverpool I'll never know.

0:20:16.9 Tell me about Unions were there any unions in the factory?

Yes

Were you all members?

Yes

Can you remember any disputes?

Not in London Pride later on in the 1970's but not when I first started work

0:20:42.1 What were the conditions like in London Pride?

It was clean and it was clean work there was a canteen that you could go and eat and there was a clean atmosphere. You didn't come home filthy dirty. You could actually buy the material. My friend and I if they were selling the material we'd buy it and go home and make a new outfit to go out on Saturday, we loved it. We'd have a new outfit nearly every week, we both bought material quite reasonable, off cuts, and went home, sewed and had a new outfit to go out.

Was it good material?

Very yes

0:21:37.3 What about the actual garments were there ever any seconds you could buy?

Yes I think there was. You could buy the garments the seconds. But they were still too expensive for us to buy we couldn't afford to buy the seconds even.

No we'd buy the material and make it ourselves.

0:22:05.6 You said it was a clean factory but was it too hot or too cold any issues like that?

No in the summer we'd open all the windows. In the mornings it was really cold going to work because it was so early and when you went into the factory it was obviously cold but it never seemed to be overly cold or overly hot not that particular factory, the conditions were quite good.

0:22:48.6 What about the facilities?

Yes compared to what I experienced further on in my working life.

0:23:07.7 Was the work dangerous in any way?

No only in the way you watched your fingers caught in the needles and things like that. You could get your fingers caught in the needles because they were electrical operated machines, particularly the button hole machine, you made sure you kept your fingers away

So you don't remember any bad accidents?

No

0:23:34.6 Were you made aware of Health and Safety?

No that was unheard of in those days. We did have a rest room in London Pride. There was a rest room there for people who were really ill and they'd take you there. I can remember one particular day I must have had a migraine headache and I ended up I went to the toilet and I was so ill I must have started crying and they took me to the rest room and I stayed in the rest room for an hour. The conditions weren't horrendous or anything.

0:24:17.2 Did they pay for that hour?

Yes they did

0:24:23.3 Was there any other kind of sick pay?

No you didn't go to work you didn't have money

0:24:36.0 Were you mainly younger women in London Pride or were there older women and married women

It was quite a mixed age group there were older women there and I can particularly remember older single women. There were a number of older single women, not so much younger but older and single.

Did you all do the same kind of work?

Yes

Did they pick the supervisors out of the workforce or did they bring people in?

No they were picked out of the workforce

0:25:38.4 What about if you did have a family, were there child care facilities?

Unheard of. No one worked if they had children, there was no child care

Did anyone come back to work if they had children?

No

Was that something the management wouldn't have wanted?

They wouldn't have wanted or cared for because there would have been no facilities. You wouldn't be allowed to take time off if your children were ill or if there was something on in school. You wouldn't have been allowed to take time off. I never knew anyone working with children.

0:26:28.5 What if you had to take time off for personal reasons like a funeral was it allowed?

Yes you would have been allowed to take off for a funeral, I'm not too sure, but you wouldn't have been paid for it, you wouldn't be paid for anything except what you were working for. Anything else was deducted from your weekly wage.

0:27:00.4 You said a lot of the garments were sent to big London Stores were you aware of anywhere else they were sent, like local stores in Cardiff.

Yes the James Howell Store in Cardiff stocked them and I can remember seeing advertisements in magazines and things like that they would be advertised in these magazines in the expensive magazines, if you were in dentist surgery and looked through their magazines they would be in there. You were well aware of how much they cost, of the price of the garments.

0:27:47.2 Do you remember the first time when you realised how much they were?

No because I always knew they were expensive.

0:28:03.3 How did you get to work?

On the bus

And how much of a trip was it?

It took approximately half an hour to get to work because the bus left Llanharran at 6.30 you had to get to the bus stop before because London Pride was outside Bridgend, so it wasn't on the normal bus route if you missed the bus that was going that way you had to go into Bridgend then out of Bridgend to Coity which took perhaps another half an hour you were always aware that you had to catch the 6.30 bus.

That was Public Transport?

Yes Rhondda Bus and Western Welsh

0:29:05.0 Did people come from far and wide to London Pride?

More or Less within 20 mile radius people from right up in Nantymoel, the Ogmore Valley as far down as Bryn Cethin Pencoed Llanharran, No further than Llanharran, so less than a 20 mile radius.

So no one from Pontypridd, Rhondda?

No

0:29:43.4 So fairly local?

Yes

0:29:53.8 So when did you decide to leave

I think I left after 2 years so I would have been coming up to 17 and I wanted to earn more money and my other friend was working in a factory on piece work and she earned more. She

told me that there were jobs going and I applied. I went to work at a Glove Factory in Llantrisant, which was piece work. You only earned what you worked. You had a peace rate for the job so if you worked hard you earned more

0:30:45.7 Did you have a basic wage?

It wasn't called a basic wage there was a basic limit but if you didn't earn that basic limit then you were in big trouble you had to earn the basic limit and anything else on top was the bonus rate.

0:31:13.1 So what was the glove factory called?

It was planet gloves and it was based in Llantrisant in the Model House. I worked on the top floor. That was I think 7.30 start again and I travelled by the local bus service that went up into Llantrisant so we'd start work at 7.30 but the manageress didn't come until 8 o'clock. So from 7.30 to 8 it was riots it was such good fun laughing and joking but someone would always be on watch to see the manageress car coming up the street cause you could see it from the windows. They would say Mrs Coach is on her way, heads down and from the moment she entered you could hear a pin drop you'd only hear the hum of the machines going we were like children

0:32:28.1 So how many were in Planet Glove?

I think about 150 people to 200.

Still a lot of people then?

Oh yes on the different levels right the way through. They cut the gloves at the bottom and then they went up to another level. There were offices on one level. Then there were different styles of gloves, ladies and men on different levels in different rooms.

0:33:13.9 Did you have training to go there or did you use the training you had had already?

The training I'd had already opened the door for me to go to another place where they used sewing machine because once you had been trained on one sewing machine you could to adapt to different kinds of machines. A glove making machine is a specialised sewing machine in the fact that it had a stem on it so you sewed on the top of the stem to be able to get the angle of the gloves to be able to get the fingers and thumbs in.

0:34:03.8 Did you have to go for an interview or just applied?

I think I applied and just started.

What about references?

No.

Just left on one and started another.

Yes

Did you have to give much notice?

A week you had to give a weeks' notice.

0:34:26.5 It was quite a mobile workforce then?

Yes

Can you describe your first day at Planet Gloves what was that like, how did it compare?

It was much more... the work was much harder it was sort of, your hands became stained with the leather. The conditions in the factory although they weren't really dirty they weren't as clean as London Pride. The work wasn't as nice ... London Pride you were making nice things, feminine things. In the glove factory it wasn't so feminine.

Leather is dirty isn't it?

Yes and the you still had a code of practise, you weren't allowed to swear in fact the girl on the picture that I showed we were talking about this last week, she swore and the manageress heard and sent her home.

0:35:52.4 How long was she at home for?

The day, she sent her home that day and she came back the next day that was because she was swearing. There were 2 ladies toilets if you wanted to go you had to go, put your hand up and go and get a key to open the toilet. Everyone smoked weren't supposed to smoke in the ladies toilet. So we'd open the window and hang out so we could smoke, in the toilet was the machine to dispose of the sanitary towels. The smoke coming off there and smell was horrendous. So you would be trying to hang out of the window smoking. Do you know I can still smell that smell now, it was horrendous?

0:36:53.7 So the facilities there weren't as good?

No

What about a canteen?

The canteen was on the ground floor, you worked on the top floor, you had 10 minutes to come down 3 flights of stairs and it's funny but if I am faced with a long flight of stairs even now I'll still do it, hold onto the sides and slide down the stairs and that's how we came down as it was the fastest way so that you'd get in the queue for your tea and toast or whatever you had ordered because you had to be back on your machine by the time the buzzer went for the end of break.

0:37:42.5 How many flights up were you?

Another 3 flights because its 3 levels in Model House, the stairs were so narrow. When I went there recently because it's a craft shop now those narrow stairs are still there I was really tempted to slide down them.

0:38:11.3 How much time did you have for lunch?

Half an hour

Afternoon break?

I don't think we had one; I think it was only a morning break and a lunch break. If we had an afternoon break we used to sit at our machines we didn't go down to the canteen.

Too far?

No it wasn't open. Only open for morning and lunch breaks

0:39:04.5 How many hours did you work at Planet Gloves?

Well that have been the same 7.30 start till 5 in the evening.

Long Hours?

Yes very long hours

0:39:19.5 Was it unionised?

No union there

So what happened if there was a dispute?

I can't ever remember there being a dispute. You if you didn't like something or thought something wasn't right you just went to the manageress and explained the situation to her or tried to. It was very strict in the fact that if you didn't like what you had then tough luck take it or leave it.

They weren't very sympathetic?

No

0:40:07.4 Would you say they were good employers on the whole?

No I wouldn't say they were good employers. The welfare of the people was of no consequence. Having said that I can't say they were really good Iris Williams the singer worked there. Iris when we started singing we always used to sing but Iris always wanted to sing something Operatic and of cause we wanted to sing the pop songs. So if Iris started to sing a easter hymn or something like that we would drown her out with a pop song. I did get to hear that the manageress encouraged Iris to go to the Royal College of Music.

0:41:04.2 Had they backed her financially?

Yes I think so

What - the firm?

Yes. No I think it was her personally doing it
So she was quite nice - Mr and Mrs Courtey they were husband and wife. I think she would have been alright but if course someone else owned the actually factory she was just the manageress. She may have had shares in the company I don't know.

0:41:40.2 What about compared to London Pride, were London Pride good employers?

For the time I suppose they were, that time in history.

Good but strict?

Yes there was a standard there if you worked there it wasn't.... you knew you had to behave in a certain way.

0:42:16.7 Tell me about Iris Williams where did she come from?

She came from Tonyrefail I think so was adopted or fostered in Tonyrefail

and she was there for.. how long?

2 to 3 years

Then she went to college?

I think she did. When I left, I was there about 2 years and then it closed 2 years after that and Iris went from there and she started her singing career as that was her ambition. There was no doubt about it that Iris was going to sing.

0:43:07.8 Were there more girls from Pontypridd way, Rhondda way.

The Rhondda mostly. Tonyrefail, Llantrisant, Beddau... yes that area

0:43:24.1 And how did they get there

All public transport. No one had a car then.

It was all paid out of your own wages?

Yes

0:43:39.0 Do you remember what your wages were there as you were on piece work?

I think I went there and I was on. I can remember taking home £3 to £4 because I worked on piece work and I was quite a fast worker and I always only took 15 minutes for my lunch and then I'd go back and sit at my machine and do all the cutting and things. I'd do the sewing and then leave those for my break to do the cutting part, so that would make it faster for me, I earned more than. I was quite a fast worker and I think that I was one of the top earners.

0:44:34.1 It suited you in a way then the piece work?

Yes it did because I wanted to earn more money.

0:44:47.2 What about holidays, can you remember what the holidays were there in Planet Gloves?

It was the same as the miner's holidays but only the bank holidays, you'd only have the bank holidays, perhaps the 2 days.

0:45:05.8 Did you do the same kind of things

Yes we never went away on holiday

0:45:16.2 You said you knew a friend when you went too Planet Gloves - did you know anyone else?

Yes there were quite a few local people to that I knew them personally but I sort of acquainted with them.

0:45:31.1 What was the camaraderie like?

Brilliant they were a funny crowd. Such good laughs, like I relayed the incident where you went to the toilet. Because you were sitting on hard seats you would have a cushion on the seat and there was one particular girl, who if you went to the loo she'd put a needle in the cushion and you'd come back go to sit on the cushion and you'd shoot off that cushion a bit sharp. You just laughed about it, although thinking about it now, they were quite sharp needles, but they would do things like that, silly things, and pranks.

0:46:21.5 So were you very close to your co-workers?

Yes I think we were

0:46:27.9 What kind of things did you do, did you go out together?

Yes to the local dance hall

The same dance halls as you went to before?

No that was near Bridgend. I had changed my area now we were more towards Llanharry now. Sometimes one particular person would organise a bus and we would go to The Gardens in Cardiff or the Pageant Rooms in Penarth. A specially organised coach and we'd got to dance halls like that. I can remember going to those.

0:47:08.3 Can you remember what year it was when you went to work in Planet Gloves?

It would have been.... I would have been 17-18 so... my maths is very good now, it would have been about... and if I left 1953 it would have been about 1959-1960. The start of the Beatle era.

0:47:47.5 Do you remember what the music was like in Sophia Gardens and the Pagent Rooms.

In those places it was all big bands

So it was quite glamorous?

Yes

0:48:01.8 How did you go did you hire a bus?

Yes one particular person would hire the bus and we'd all pay our fares and it would be there waiting for us to come home. Which was sometimes quite late and my mother didn't like it. She'd be quite annoyed.

0:48:26.2 What did you do about clothing. Did you still make them?

Yes always made my own clothes, I occasionally I would buy clothes if I had enough money but no I mostly made my own clothes.

0:48:42.9 What kind of stuff did you wear to go to these dinner dances?

If you were going to one of those big band dances you'd have something special. You would buy something then.

0:48:59.5 Were these arranged by the factory or by one of the workers?

Ordinary individuals. But we did used to have A Christmas Dinner Dance that the factory organised.

Where was that put on?

In the Glove Factory it was Bindles in Barry and the bus would be put on and you would go and buy a special dress then a big event you'd sit and have a meal and then there would be a big band after to dance to. So that was a very special event.

and that was every Christmas?

Yes every Christmas.

0:49:42.1 So how long did you stay at the Glove Factory?

About 2 years and then I went from there then because at the time then we were saving to get married and I wanted to earn more money and things were going down in the glove trade then things were getting sort of not as easy to earn money. So I went from there back to Bridgend Estate to a place there were making shoes for Marks and Spencer's and it was really good money there. I worked until I got married. I earned quite a lot of money there. I remember quite a good wage, because I was able to save to get married.

0:50:40.0 What was that called?

That was called Fiona Footwear and they made all the shoes and slippers for Marks and Spencer's

0:50:48.3 What did you do was that still sewing?

Yes still sewing the shoes or slippers but they had about at any one me 3 factories on the Bridgend estate and they all made for Marks and Spencer's they only made shoes for Marks and Spencer's. They would hold a sale at the end of season they would sell the end of season shoes and you could buy the shoes or slippers quite cheaply. But they only worked for Marks and Spencer's. At the time most the factories on the Bridgend estate only manufactured for Marks and Spencer's. There was a factory there making clothes for them and like I said shoes and slippers, the gloves for them. Marks and Spencer's had a lot to answer to when they took their manufacturing out of this country.

0:51:59.2 So Planet Gloves made gloves for Marks and Spencers?

Yes they did

0:52:04.6 You went to Fiona Footwear and you said the wages were good was that piece work again?

Yes it was a basic wage but anything you earned over that was added to so you the harder you worked the more you could earn.

0:52:23.4 Do you remember how much you earned there?

No I can't remember but I know it was a lot more than what I earned in the glove factory. They were one of the top paying companies on the estate.

0:52:45.0 What year did you go there?

I must have been early 20s then. I was there until I got married and I got married when i was 22-23.

0:53:16.1 Was that unionised?

Yes that was a union there.

Do you remember what Union?

No I think it was something like how Makers Union. There was a Union.

0:53:30.3 What were the conditions in the factory like?

They were quite good. There was a canteen and you could eat in pleasant surroundings. But strict again with time keeping. You only got paid when you were in work. You had to be on time - you couldn't walk into the factory 10 minute late. You had to be there on time and on time in the morning.

0:54:02.1 Was that clocking in and out?

Yes if you didn't clock in on time they deducted.. like if you were one minute late you would lose half an hour pay. So you made sure you clocked in within a certain time. I think they allowed you 3 minutes but after 3 minutes you lost half an hour.

0:54:29.8 What time did you start there?

Half past 7 again.

Same hours of work?

Yes I think we finished at 4.30. I think they had knocked off half an hour off the working week.

Was that something that happened because of legislation?

Yes the working week was reduced

That's sounds a bit better

Yes

0:55:01.8 What about the breaks were they the same?

The breaks were the same only half an hour for lunch and a 10 minute break in the morning. No afternoon break. Because if I remember rightly when they reduced the working week they took off the afternoon break because you were supposed to work so many hours before you had a break. Because we were working less hours they took off the afternoon break.

You can't win can you?

No

0:55:41.9 Same holidays?

Yes there was no increase in the holidays not that I can remember.

0:55:55.3 Did your wages stay the same all the time you were there?

No they didn't sometimes it depended on I can remember them increasing the price because you had a price for whatever you did for instance if you made slippers you would have so much per dozen and they would increase the price per dozen. I can't remember it happening many times. But I did get increases when I was there.

0:56:39.9 Were you quite happy with the wages there?

We were never happy we always wanted more money. You'd apply for it and if it was refused you'd just accept it.

0:57:00.8 Were the conditions there quite good?

Yes

Facilities.. heat cold that type of thing?

Yes not bad

0:57:11.3 Any disputes then?

No I can't remember any disputes there. The only dispute I can remember was later on towards the 70's when I worked part time after i was married.

Where did you work then?

Well once I was married and had my first child he was around 2 and we'd already our own house which was unusual at that time. It was an old house and it needed an awful lot doing to it. SO I applied for an evening job in the local Wella factory making hair cosmetics. You worked from I think it was 5 till 10. So my husband would come home from work I would have all the tea ready and he would look after my son and put him, to bed and everything while i went to work. So I worked from 5 till 10 and that was 5 evenings a week in the hair cosmetics, which I enjoyed. I think there were about 50 of us working on the production line.

0:58:44.6 What did you enjoy about that?

Well I quite enjoyed it, because you were going out in the evening and they were all in the same position, young married women with children there was very few without children. Because we couldn't work in the day because there was no childcare facilities. There were no nurseries nothing your child didn't go to school until they were 4, so the only way you could work was unsociable hours.

There was many of the manufacturers used to do the evening shifts - unsociable hours. Wella's was the nearest one but there was also A B Electronics where they used to weld circuit boards and things like that - they always did evening shifts

0:59:49.2 Do you think they did those shifts to suit people like you?

Yes very much so

They were aware ...

They did it because they needed the extra production and they knew you could double up on production by using it right from the day shift in the day right through till 10m in the evening.

1:00:10.8 They knew there was a whole workforce out there of women?

Yes there was never any problem to recruit for the evenings.

1:00:19.7 Do you think you liked going there for a bit of adult conversation?

I did very much so . I mean money was the first priority but yes the adult conversation and... because we were all we had a lot in common and then we had a wonderful social life because we all organised things like day trips to Tenby and we'd all go on the coach with the children... and I've got photos of us all sitting on the beach in a circle with the children. We'd go out to dinner dances it was really a good social life

1:01:04.5 On those trips was it mainly women and children or did your husband's go?

Only in the day if we were going to the sea side no but if we were going to the dinner dances our husbands would come to.

I mean the day trips.

It was mostly women and children.

1:01:23.2 Did you make new friends in Wella?

Yes I did

Were there people there you knew?

There were one or two I did know from around the locality. But I got to know a lot of different people while I was there. They were excellent employers.

Better than the rag trade?

Yes much better

1:01:51.4 Why do you think that was?

They were much more interested in the welfare of the workers. It was a German company actually. We always had a Christmas present. I can think of different social events that were organised through the company... no they were excellent employers.

1:02:17.9 What kind of social events?

There was always Christmas parties and I can remember one particular time a formula one racing car. it must have been a promotion for the company and they bought the formula one car in the company grounds and we all met the driver and we all got to sit in the car. I assume it was an advertising car for the company.

Was it someone famous?

Yes I think it was I can't remember as I wasn't too interested at the time in racing cars. They were an excellent company.

1:03:06.0 What about the work itself was it dangerous working with chemicals?

Yes it could have been

Were aware of anyone with health issues?

Not at the time only since because now I can remember the vats of hair products coming out of the lab and going onto the production line. When you started the shift because I was a supervisor or line leader you would check the product, you would lift the lid on the vat and you'd smell and look at it. Thinking of that now I'm thinking of all those chemicals I've inhaled. One particular line was glass bottles going through the line to be filled on a turntable and capped and labelled. If the machine wasn't set up properly or there was something wrong with the machine then the glass bottles would break, it could have quite dangerous, the machines were quite dangerous but in all fairness the company were aware of Health and Safety at that time, it wasn't called Health and Safety but they were aware of the safety of the workers. Like if you were filling anything.

So there was protection?

Yes they would make sure that you wore goggles if you were filling something that wasn't. Yes they were. I think that was companies becoming more aware of the safety of the workers in manufacturing.

1:05:14.6 Were you aware of anyone with health issues from there afterwards; you said you thought of yourself?

No I don't think so.

1:05:26.0 Were there any union disputes when you were there?

Yes there was a strong union there so the union would put forward for a pay rise and that would go through. If they didn't agree to the pay rise then they would walk out and go on strike. I can remember them picketing on the outside of the factory because we were evening workers we were on the fringe of the work force.

Were you members of the union?

Oh yes you had to be a member of the union because there was great competition between the days and evening workers. Because apparently because we only worked 5 till 10 the productivity from that small evening shift was much better than a day worker produced, as you were only working a few short hours. There was great competition between the day and the evening workers. They didn't particularly like the evening workers.

1:06:39.6 Were you aware of time and motion people?

Yes

In all the factories you worked at?

Yes that was how you... the price for your item would be by timing you particularly in the footwear trade. If a new style of shoe came out it would be a time in motion person who would stand by the side of you while you did your part of the job and they would time you. The time you took to do that piece of work would give you the price for that job.

1:07:26.1 So would that be the retail price?

No the price I would be paid for doing my part on the shoe, particularly in the shoe trade. There was always time in motion. For every new style of shoe would be timed.

1:07:49.2 You were talking about the Christmas parties - were these for you and the kids?

Yes there was a Christmas party for the kids and also a Christmas party for the workers.

So one in the day and one in the night sort of thing?

Yes

1:08:05.0 So was that one of the best places you worked?

Yes one of the best companies in manufacturing definitely.

Although it was hard in way because you worked at night?

Yes but they were an excellent company to work for.

1:08:21.5 Was that because they were German do you think?

I don't know, perhaps it was because times had moved on. However from there I had the best job of all because after my children started to grow up I went back to evening classes and I did an English O Level and then I saw a job advertised in the University of Glamorgan but it was through my sewing experience that I got the job first. It was a seamstress in the Halls of Residents. I thought to myself I think I'll try for that. I'd been out of work for around 2 years... no I hadn't... The evening work was drying up and I didn't want to do evenings because my children were getting older. So I saw this job advertised and I thought I'd Apply. I went for an interview and got the job. I started doing the laundry for the halls of residents at that time there was maids working in the halls of residents who cleaned the rooms made the beds changed the beds everything like that. I was in charge of all the laundry and different things like that. From there I had a manageress was a young person who really encouraged me she said why don't you go to college and do a City and Guilds because they were building new halls of residents. I said yes I went Newport College and did a City and Guilds because I was already doing an O Level. From there I never looked back. I started out as a seamstress and then she promoted me and I had a manager's job in the halls of resident. I worked there until I retired and I absolutely loved it.

1:10:44.8 How long was that for?

I worked there for around 15 years. Best job I ever had I loved it... working with the students. Looking after the main cleaning side of it and maintenance side of it. Of course they build new Halls of Residents on the campus so it became a huge.... about 1200 rooms there then. That was my whole career.

1:11:18.1 I was going to ask actually when you were at Wella did you miss doing the skilled work that you'd been doing, like sewing?

No I didn't.

Was it because you had done so much of it?

Probably yes. No I didn't miss it all because when I worked at Wella's, because I was the line leader I was more or less organised all the line and organised the work load.

It was a different skill?

Yes.

It was more of a managerial skill.

1:12:01.6 Are you in contact with any of your former work mates.

Yes I still keep in touch.

From all of the places?

Yes because this one here (she points to a photograph) I am still friends with as we have been friends since we started school together. Her name is Joan and Joan and I started school at 5 and we still meet up on a Saturday once a month and have lunch. We've been friends now for 70 years. That one is not alive anymore. These I keep in touch with because I'm in the University of the 3rd Age and I was a founder member in Tonyrefail and the craft class we go to now I meet the person here.

The one with the needles?

Yes

And what's her name?

Mair her name is - so I'm in touch with her. The Wella evening shift I'm in touch with the person, she goes to the craft class and we meet up occasionally we go to Leekes and have a coffee. I'm in touch with all of them and the University I'm still in touch with them.

1:13:51.5 Looking back how do you feel about the time you spent working in factories?

To be honest when I look back on my working life, I wished I had an education. When I worked at the University I used to envy those students. Not because it was it was a university but of all the knowledge they had and they had so many opportunities. I used to think what I would have given to have gone to university it would have been wonderful. That's why I made sure my own 2 children went to University. I always used to say you must have an education because your world is your oyster if you have an education you can do whatever you want in this world. I always say that to my children, it was my biggest regret that I didn't have an education.

74:53 END OF INTERVIEW/DIWEDD Y CYFWELIAD