

**VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR / LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI**

**Avana Bakery, Freeman's Cigars, Elke's Biscuits – Cardiff**

**INTERVIEWEE: VSE021 Doreen Lawson**

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**INTERVIEWER: Catrin Edwards on behalf of Women's Archive of  
Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru**

*Tell me a little bit about your background. Where you were born, your father, your mother. Their occupations, your siblings, that kind of thing?*

Right, I was born in Ely, Cardiff. Didn't have time to go to the hospital, I was born on the mat, as I was told. Then I got two brothers and three sisters. My eldest sister is Joan, she just lost her husband, my brother is Colin, and he's lost his wife, which I showed you, then Moira my sister is not very well, she's still alive, then there's myself, and I've got a brother Wilfred, that lives in Bridgend. My mum worked in Shivers' Pickling Factory for quite a long time and also in Britain's Dairies on Sanatorium Road, and my brother worked there as well. Then my dad, I wasn't happy with my dad. My mum was great, she'd do anything for us, she was a worker, a grafter. She was brilliant, mum, and I wish I still had her now. My dad worked as a, he was a bricky. And he had to retire early because he had a breakdown. My mum carried on working, then they all got married in turn and it was my turn to get married, so they moved from Ty Park Road to Archer Crescents in Ely. So by then it was only myself and my brother left to live in there with my mum and dad. Then I wanted to get married and I wasn't allowed to get married until I was 21. So I got married at 21. But not long after I got married my father worked on the railway then, after, painting the bridges. And he had an accident in Cogan Bridge. Three men come down off the scaffolding, and my dad was the worst. So he had a lot of injuries, a lot. So he never worked after that, and he used to march up and down the rooms, in and out, in agony all the time. Then when I got married then, we just moved into our house, we bought a house after being married for nine months. My father had this accident, and my mother had to go into hospital because she had lumbago and sciatica after looking

after my dad, so they took her into the hospital. She was there a fortnight, and she signed herself out, worried about my dad. So I had to give up our house which we'd just bought, to live up there to look after them. But we had to work in the day. So we made sure they were okay, my sister lived on the other end of the road, took them their meals, and made sure their fire was still lit for them. My husband slept upstairs with my dad, I didn't know until the last minute, but he slept on the floor. He didn't want to hurt my dad, who turned over because he was in so much pain. But every day when I slept with my mum downstairs, 2 'o clock, it was like clockwork, she'd wake up screaming in pain. So we'd call the doctor out, he'd inject her and then it lasted a couple of hours and that went on for about three or four months. Gradually, she was getting better, he never did. And then we went back home, I carried on with my job then and so did my husband. He worked in Poparts (?) [04.20], the fruit place down the market. He used to go early in the morning, finish lunchtime. So from there then I went in, I worked in the Avana bakeries when I, before I got married.

*[04.40] Before we go there, can I just take you back and ask you a little bit about education, which schools you went to?*

I went to Windsor Clive School first, until I was eleven, then I went to Herbert Thompson School, failed the exam, so I stayed in Herbert Thompson. I had great fun in there, it was great, I had a lot of friends in there. And I do miss it, and I miss my friends as well. But I do see them occasionally. So then I left there when I was, so when I was 14 my mum got my friend and myself a job in Littlewood's, working Saturdays, in Cardiff. And I did the year there, finished school then at 15. I was called in office at Littlewood's, I thought "uh-oh, I'm out", but they wanted me to stay, but when I was working in the canteen, the kitchen and tables, they wanted me to work on the counters. They didn't give my friend the job, only me. so I worked on the counters then for about 2 years, enjoyed that because you were meeting different people all the time, and we had one time when Fess Parker came, Davy Crocker, the real one came to Littlewood's. But we wasn't allowed to say anything. I'd seen him, but it was up to the other people to spot him and have a prize off him, you know, and that was exciting when that happened. But then we saw, this old man used to come down on a Monday morning. With one arm, as we thought. But the other arm used to come out of his coat and take the biscuits and the sweets off the counters! We'd let him - they used to say, the bosses - "leave him. We know what's going on. Just leave him because he's down and out", you know. But that was that, I left there then.

*[06.44] Before then. before we go on, can I just ask you, were you sad to leave school, would you have liked to have stayed on?*

No, I wanted to leave. I wanted to go out and earn money.

*[06.58] Why was that?*

Well we didn't have a lot of money. My mum and dad didn't have a lot of money so I wanted to go out and pay my way to my mum. Yeah, I was happy when I got that job and it was great. I had loads of friends there in the Littlewood's, and then I left there then and I went to the Avana.

*[7.24] So how old were you when you got to the Avana Bakeries?*

I must have been about 18.

*And do you remember what year that was?*

Well I was born in 1940 so it would have been... '58. Yeah it would have been by then, '58. And I never looked back from there. I had great fun. I had great fun there. One day the (?) (08.00) to go

for our break and the boy, John Trudgeon, always got up there first. So I thought, “this day he’s not getting up there first”, so I tied his shoelaces to the table, and he didn’t know. And then the hooter went off I went and he was - “I can’t move!” and I said “no, I know”, I said, “I’m getting first this time!” So I got up there and got my cup of tea and my doughnut. He said “I couldn’t get a doughnut today!” I said “well that’s your fault”. And then we used to have a line – IO was on the marzipan counter at first - that’s where it was then. No, sorry it was on the Dundee Cakes putting the nuts on, when I first went.

*(8.48)Do you remember how you got the job?*

I went for an interview.

*Right, can you tell me something about that?*

Well when I went to the interview and um, oh gosh now. There was a nurse there as well, and, a few questions, you know. Where did you work before, of course I’d only had one job before. so straight away, as soon as they’d asked me all the questions, they said “right, the job is yours, start Monday”.

*Do you remember your first day there?*

Yes.

*Can you describe that to me?*

When I arrived there, it was a Monday. And I thought, and there was another friend, Marion, started the same day as me. But we didn’t know this. We went in on the Monday, they gave us our overalls, our turbans, showed us how to put them on. And they brought us down onto the floor and... when I think about that job... they brought us down to the floor and we were putting the cakes onto the trollies, onto the racks, so that was great. But you had to be quick because you could miss them coming off of the conveyer belt. So I got on with that, so I was on that for a week then Saturday morning we went in, and they wanted us to do the Dundee cakes. Me and my friend. So we didn’t know this, we were there putting these nuts on now. 12 o clock come, 1 o clock and my husband, well my boyfriend then, was outside waiting for me. And it must have been about 4 o clock and the chargehand from upstairs, Josie Guy: “What are you doing here?” “Putting nuts on”. She said, “well you’re not supposed to be here now, you should have gone at 12 o clock”. I said, “well why didn’t somebody tell us?” I said, “we’ve only been here the week”. She said “stop what you’re doing, go and get your coat, clock out and go”.

*(10.44)Did you get paid for those?*

Yes, I made sure I clocked out. So I got paid for that. Then as the time was going by and I was getting more used to the job, and I was on a machine then. Putting the cakes on, to slice them. But you had to put a big roll of paper on, but it had to be straight, ‘cause there was a magic eye on the paper.

*And what’s a magic eye?*

It’s just a mark on the paper, which has got to correspond with the eye in the machine. And that pulls them right. If you haven’t got them right... waste of time. So I always used to do mine and my friend done another one. And, um, we did that.

*(11.28)Did you get trained at all?*

No. We were just put on a job and just got on with it.

*So you were straight in on the first day?*

Straight in on the job straight away. And did that, and I was put on the angel cake, on the end of the conveyer belt, and put them onto the rack. Of course they were coming down thick and fast weren't they, so some was on the floor, some was on the rack. So they were in stitches with me. I said, "stop the belt, stop everything", I said, "we'll have to sweep up first!" 'Doreen what you've done!' I said "They're on the floor!" right, ok. but I got used to it then, I could do it. But when you first go on there it's difficult I tell you. 'Cause there's no space in between them. They're coming down one behind each other. So anyway, I mastered that. So then they wanted me to go on the creamery, I thought "this is it now". So you put the cream on. So I thought, well I'd been watching the girl doing it so I'm going to do it how she done it and I was doing okay, because you've got to get it so it don't go over the edge of the thing. But of course you've got no space and you're like this all the time, and it's coming down the conveyor belt, you've got to be quick, so I mastered that. Then I had a go at doing the fruitcake, I was doing that. Then I would... when I think about it then, there was Josie, there was Len Jones and I've forgotten the other one, they were that charge hands downstairs. Well you're not supposed to wear rollers in your hair right, well on the Saturday I used to come in with rollers in my hair, a turban on, and Josie Guy, the one up in the office, used to come down - "Doreen! Get 'em off!" "Oh, I forgot", I said, "Okay", and I'd take about three out.

*(13.32) Why weren't you supposed to wear rollers?*

Because they could go in the cakes. You could lose one. So that was that. Then I'd come down, now I'd be late sometimes the bus would be late, so I'd creep downstairs now and then in the office right, they'd watch me go on my machine. And I'd put the Madeira cakes through. and I'd say "Come on Kate - here's some cake now I've one some cake for breakfast." Out comes the other two in the office - "Um? What time is this?"

"Ooh", I says, "it's about 8 o'clock, why?"

"You're supposed to be here half past seven."

"Oh," I said, "but the bus wasn't there for me."

"Right."

Hide the cake, hide the cake, hide the cake, hide the cake. So when they went upstairs then we all had a piece. I was, as I told you, the ringleader, but I'd been there for a year then.

*(14.25) Yes. So tell me, there's a few things I wanted to ask you now. You talked about the uniform, did they supply it?*

They supplied it, and they washed them. Then we'd come in the next day and you'd go in the office and see what size you are, you just take them off. The turbans you did yourself.

*Right. So you didn't, you weren't given a turban?*

We were given one, but we washed it ourselves.

*Oh, I see. And describe the uniform for me, colour and stuff.*

It was white. White, with the buttons down, and then you tied the belt round. Then the turban was white and you just tied it. All your hair had to be under. It'd look very pretty. And the shoes you wear, whatever shoes you want then, you know, it didn't bother. But no...

*Rings and things?*

No, no nail polish. No nail polish. So that was that.

*No nail polish, no rollers?*

No rollers, definitely no rollers, but I did do - because my hair, my friend used to do my hair then lunch time for me. So I'd get them in, the rollers, ready for her to do. But I was a devil. And this one day now Len Jones he said "right," he said, "you're not doing your job properly." Which I was, but he was messing about. He said, "you're going in the washroom!" Ah, ok. So I goes in the

washroom now, and in there there's all the foreign women working there, right? Well they haven't got a clue, not a lot of English anyway. So what it is, they're washing all the tins in these great big tubs. So they showed me what to do now. So I was leaving the clean ones in, and putting the dirty ones out. And they were, I could see the boss laughing like hell outside his window. So, and they were going "no no no no no no no no like this!" "Oh, yeah, ok" and I'd do it the other way. "Right, come on Doreen, out."

And that was my way of getting out. So I got back on my own job then.

*(16.44) So you said there were foreign workers, where did they come from, the women? Or were they women?*

Men and women.

*In the washroom?*

Yeah. Yeah there were like Pakistani ones, and Indians, and things like that you know. So they did employ that type of people, but that's where they were, down there. And then another time right, I'd go in the fruit room. So off I goes now, over to the fruit room now, and there's a glass window. A little glass window. Then there was Chinese in there. So, showed them what to do, and you've got, they're putting the fruit in the two hops, like, they come through and onto the conveyor belt. And then they go into a big tub at the back. Well you've got to take all the stalks off. Sometimes you'd get stalks that'd come through the machine. I'd leave the stalks on and take the currents out! And I thought, "this is great." "No no no!" ah, ok. Start it back up. Right, let a few go through, and I'd let the stalks go through, because they had to go through the barrel again haven't they? I was wicked.

*Was that just to get out of doing those job?*

No, just for a laugh. 'cause I knew they were watching me. So I'd come out of there then after about an hour, back onto my job, they said "you're a little so-and-so, aren't you?" I said, "why?" he said, "you knew what you were doing wrong!" I said "well don't put me in there then!" So I got on with my other job. Then on a Saturday then, on a Friday and a Saturday, we'd meet by the ovens. And as the cakes would come out the ovens, put them onto the belt. Uh no, somebody else was putting them onto the trays, we were just checking they were ok. We'd have a good sing-song. You'd be singing away, enjoying ourselves, you know it was actually great.

*(18.55) So do you remember, was the music, was it a radio or...*

Yeah, it was the radio.

*Do you remember what it was, what the programmes were?*

Oh gosh, it was all music programmes so I couldn't tell you really, what it was now.

*And do you remember what the, what the songs were?*

Well there was Lulu, there was The Beatles, no not The Beatles. There was Manfred Mann. Oh and I tell you, Frankie Vaughan, I used to love Frankie Vaughan. Lots of all the 50s it was.

*And did you know all the words?*

I knew all the words then. I could sing along brilliant, I can still - if a record comes on I can sing it word to word. But when I get it in my head I can't. When I hear it on the, what I got on here, I know word to word.

*So did the music play all day?*

Yeah, until we told them to turn it off. Then we'd say "right, we've had enough now, turn it off". But that was after a couple of hours. you know, we'd have our breaks, come down, and it'd still be on for us, you know.

*So tell me, the smell of the factory, could you describe that for me?*

It was, well it was very cakey obviously, you could smell them being cooked. Like you would at home. You could smell the cakes being cooked and it was absolutely lovely. You didn't have to come home and change your clothes. Because it wasn't on your clothes because you had the overalls. So you know, it was great, and your hair was covered, so you didn't have to wash your hair all the time.

*(20.41) So was the smell nice?*

Oh no, it was a lovely smell.

*Not too overpowering then?*

No, it just made you feel hungry really. I should know, I was cutting up the cakes.

*So tell me, you used to come to work then from Ely, and you said about the bus, were the buses, was it public transport or were they laid on by the company?*

Public. I used to get the bus every morning, and get off at the bus station and walk over the bridge, and under the bridge. And you'd do that seven o'clock in the morning. And sometimes that bridge was flooded, so you had to walk up and over the railway and down the other side and you had to be very quick. there'd be a couple of us, I wouldn't do it on my own, and we sued to do that.

*So you were supposed to be in work at half seven, so you clocked in did you?*

I used to clock in, so I'd lose the time obviously, because I was late. But sometimes I'd work a bit over, because you were allowed to. But then very often, they'd ask you to go in at six o'clock. And I used to be terrified, because around there was always a lot of rapes in that street, around that area. So I'd get off the bus now, and of course you'd have to go under that bridge. My eyes are everywhere. So I did that a few times, and I thought "no more, I'm not doing that again". It was okay if you lived near, but I was too far.

*Why were you asked to go in at six o'clock?*

They had so many orders, it was Marks & Spencer's we worked for, it was their cakes. And there's so many Marks & Spencer's as you know, so we had to cater for all of them. So we had a big order in and we had to get it out.

*(22.43) What were your usual hours?*

Half past seven to I think it was five o'clock.

*That's pretty long anyway.*

Oh, it was long hours. You did have a quarter of an hour for break, morning and afternoon, and an hour for lunch. And that was it.

*But there was a chance for overtime, was there?*

Always. There was always chance for overtime if you wanted it. Which I did because I was getting married, so it helped me.

*Did they pay more for overtime?*

Yeah, you used to get time and a half for the weekend, and ordinary for the week. So I'd do the weekend if I could. not a Sunday, Saturday. And Saturday was overtime, anytime. But we went in on Saturday on our first day not knowing we shouldn't have been there. Like fools.

*So what were the wages like then, tell me what your wages were when you went there.*

Goodness, now... I'd say about five pounds something. About seven pounds something if you did overtime.

*Was that good?*

It was good then, because you could do a lot with it. My mum used to have about £2 and I'd have the rest.

*That was a lot of money then?*

That was a lot of money. But I used to put it away see, because I was getting married as I said. Yeah I think about five pounds, seven pounds if you worked over sometimes, you know. Then when I got married it went up again see. Every year it sort of went up, inflation, you know. But yeah it was good.

*(24.36) Apart from putting it away, what else did you used to do with your money?*

I never used to drink, that was often my boyfriend. We'd go out, I tell you what, we used to go to the Pavlova dancing in Canton, or the Kennard's in Cathays. Or then I used to go roller-skating in Barry, or roller-skating in Cathays. Down there. And that was what we used to do. Or go down to the parks, go for walks, you know.

*So where was the Pavlova in Canton?*

Do you know Radiocraft, is it? Shop? Where Tesco's is, that where it used to be, up there. And you had to go upstairs to it. It was lovely. Boys one side, girls the others, and sarsaparilla and coke to drink, you know. It was lovely, I used to love that, jiving away.

*I was going to say, so it was rock and roll?*

Rock and roll, yeah.

*Do you remember any of the songs you used to dance to?*

Oh gosh yeah... Freddie And The Dreamers... actually I'm trying to think of the boy that used to come there. Oh goodness. Sheridan. He's still going now actually. Oh God. Billy Sheridan? Or something like that, I know something Sheridan his name was and he used to be the little band in there that was, you know, in the pub, we used to dance to. There wasn't records, it was live.

*Live band. Tommy Sheridan?*

It could have been. I know it's Sheridan, but I can't think of his first name.

*What about Kennard's, where was that?*

That was in Cathays.

*Where was that in Cathays?*

I'm trying to think now, because we used to wait under the bridge, and get the bus to take you to the Kennard's. Now I'm trying to think here exactly that was. Oh goodness. It was on a corner, it was. It was only about three or four stops away from there, and we'd all go there. There'd be a lot of us.

*(27.16) And then you said you went roller-skating in Barry, do you remember where that was?*

Yeah. do you know where the sea front is? You've got the shops, you've got your grass, the road and the shops there. On the end, up the stairs we used to go. Lovely. And the other one was in Cathays then, and that was down, that was only a few stops away, God, I could find it now! We used to have some fun.

*Plenty to do then.*

Oh yeah, I was never still, I was always on the go. When I think about it now, (?) (27. 54) time to do it. But you know, it was great. I enjoyed my youth thoroughly.

*Where you unionised in Avana Bakeries?*

No.

*Nobody a member of the union. Do you remember any disputes there at all?*

No, not while I was there, no. No.

*(28.18) Was it a kind of - were they good employers then?*

They were brilliant, they were absolutely brilliant. They looked after their staff, like I said every year they'd have a dinner and dance.

*Where was the dinner and dance?*

That was in the Angel Hotel. In the Angel Hotel every year, and it was beautiful. A meal put on for us, dance after, we'd be there 'till about twelve o'clock. A coach would take us home. So it was all set up, we'd do it every year, everybody - your hair done, new dress, let's go.

*(29.00) What about other social occasions, did - tell me about how many women and how many men worked in the Avana?*

More women than men. More women than men, but there was a lot of men as well because of the ovens. Because women didn't work on the ovens. And upstairs then they used to do the, what was upstairs... the separate cakes. Like we did the slab cakes, they did the little cakes upstairs. They did the packing of them. Used to come down from somewhere and they packed them. And they dared me one day, to go down the slope. There was a slope, they had to send the stuff straight down, and it used to go down on the conveyer belt, to the rollers, to the drivers. and they'd put them in the van. So there was this thing that it had to go through, and if there was anything in it, it would ring. So then they dared me to go down there, and into the loading bay. Don't dare Doreen! So I did, I laid down on this thing. I went down there, I'd forgotten about the rollers. So I went across the rollers, bump bump bump bump bump bump, now. And who should be there, it was Marks and Spencer's. There was two there, two little men it were, I'll always remember that. And they looked at me, and I looked at them, and thought "that's it, I've got the sack". They was in stitches. They said "how did you come down there?" I said, "it's easy, I just laid back and just came down". And they said "well don't do it again", and I said "no, I won't do it again", and I didn't. I used to really enjoy it. Had some good friends there. And it was great. So then I left to get married.

*(30.56) I was just going to ask you, before you go onto that, what about the camaraderie, you said you had good friends there, did you used to go out with the girls as well?*

Oh yes, yeah, I'd go out with them. And then my other friend used to do my hair. Her and her boyfriend and mine, like a little foursome, used to go out, you know. And it was great.

*So there was a good feeling?*

Oh yeah. you didn't mind getting up in the morning and going to work. 'Cause you knew it was going to be fun. Your friends were there and whatever. It was never a dull day, I don't think so, because I used to make it a good day.

*So the work was quite separate was it, between the men's work and the women's work was it?*

No, 'cause we had some men working with us. Like I said I was on the marzipan thing at one time, and John Trudgeon was there and he was our side, and I was his side. So I tied his laces up, so's he couldn't get up there first. There was quite a few around, um packing and the machines, you know, as well as myself. But there was more women than the men.

*(32.02) What was the relationship between the men and the women?*

We all got on great. We all got on great. We used to go off for dates, a load of us, meet up in Barry. Meet up in other places, you know, Porthcawl, you'd be there at a certain time and there'd be about twelve of us.

*Did you go for trips from the factory kind of thing?*

No. No, no, no. Never had any like that.

*What about, why do you think the men were the bakers, or why did the men do the ovens?*

I think it was a man's job then. It was more of a man's job than a woman's job. Because the stuff that would come onto there was very very hot, if you worked by them, like I said we did when it was coming out, and it was very very hot. When you worked there in the summer, you know. But they did that, the women never did that part.

*Did they used to bake at a different time to you as well?*

No. They'd bake in there all day.

*They'd bake in there all day? They didn't bake in the middle of the night?*

No, no. No I don't think so no, it was in the day. 'Cause it was always baking when we were there and, you know. But like I said the men was great, we used to get on with them, thought they were fun. Everything was clean fun. Those days. You could have a bit of fun with them, and it was great. Nice going there, working there.

*What about holidays and things? Did you have paid holidays?*

Yes, we had a fortnight off, and I kept mine for when I got married.

*So you could choose when?*

Oh yeah you'd choose when you want it. And yeah that's right we used to choose our own holidays, after April obviously. go and tell them when you wanted and they'd book it in and say "yeah, that's okay", then go off and come back two weeks later. So it was great, no problem.

*What about bank holidays?*

We used to, I think we used to have the Monday off....No I don't think we did. I don't think it was around then, you know we had the bank holidays but we, gosh you've got me now haven't you? I don't know, I should imagine we did, I can't think now whether we did or we didn't. I'd say we must have had them off because they were good to work for, so I should imagine we did. I mean Christmas we didn't work obviously. 'Cause it wasn't open.

*(35.11) What about the facilities in the factories, were they okay? Were the conditions...*

Yes, they had a sick room, they had a lovely canteen, you'd buy food there if you wanted to, or bring your own, it was up to you. And you'd go up there every Friday to collect your wages, a couple would go at a time. And yeah it was lovely you know. Yeah it was huge, absolutely huge. And I had my 21st birthday there, and my birthday was in the April and I was getting married in the October, so my mum couldn't afford to do two parties, so I said "well I'll get married then instead". So, unknowing to me, I went in on my birthday, and I was called up to the staff room. I thought "uh-oh, what's happening?". And when I got up there, there was a great big two tier cake two brothers had made for me, 'cause they knew I wasn't having anything, and a lot of presents up there for me. And I thought, I had to get a taxi home that day, and balloons. So, you know that was a really surprise - that's how good they were. And when I left I had a lot of stuff off them when I left. So it was really good.

*Apart from that, what were the perks of working there? Could you buy cheap cakes?*

Yeah. Downstairs, you can buy them down there. And half price probably, half the price maybe less again. Yeah, plenty there, they used to bring the stuff down from Risca, there was one in Risca, so you could buy smaller cakes as well, you know. And puddings and stuff. So you could do that. We had the perks that way, so that was good. 'Cause I probably ate in between!

*So how long were you there altogether?*

18-19-20, that was three years. Then I left and I got married. I think I didn't go back straight there, where did I go? Oh goodness.

*So you left to get married did you?*

Yeah, in '61. Yes, October '61.

*So why did you leave when you got married then? Is that what people did? What I mean was, you could have worked?*

Oh I could have carried on?

*Yeah.*

Yeah, I could have carried on. But he didn't want me to work then after we were married.

*(38.16)Right, I see.*

So I thought "well hang on, that's right, you want me to work after we're married". He said, he was going to go fourteen pound a week then, and then we had our own house and all. So that was in Llanrumney, it was a lovely house there.

*Were you sorry to leave them?*

I was. But then I can't think what I did... Oh I know what I'd done. My sister said, "come and work with me in Lionites on Sanatorium Road down Canton", that's where they make music boxes. Oh God, I went down there, oh what a place! It was horrible. And all you could smell was the glue. And I was there for about two months, if that, maybe a little bit more. I thought, "I can't stand this". So I went out and went down to the Avana and asked there, they said "yes, come back", and I had my job back And I stayed there then 'till, about another two years, maybe.

*So what did you say to your husband then? You said, I mean I'm just asking 'cause you left 'cause he wanted you to leave, but you went back to work, so...*

He didn't mind then. And he realised what he said was wrong. 'Cause I was home on my own, didn't have any children then. And I went back to the Avana then for about a year, year and a half, something like that. I left there, then I went to -

*Did you leave then because you were expecting?*

No, that was the cigar factory.

*Can I just ask you, before we leave the Avana altogether, what was the age of the women working there, I mean were there, were they all young, all ages?*

All ages.

*Were they married, did they have children?*

Yeah, yeah they were married with children, some were young like myself, a lot of us, we all used to sit together. Yeah there was a lot, all of them. We got on with the married women, the married

men, the single men, we all sort of clicked together. It was really, it was like a family, you know, when I think back on it. We hit it off, there was never any animosity there.

*So why did you leave for the second time then?*

I'm trying to think why I left there. Gosh, I've got to throttle the brain now haven't I.

*(41.04) Well I'm going to stop now, and - So why did you leave the Avana?*

Because my sister said she could get a job for me in the Gorman (?) Cinema, with more money. Because I was married. And okay, so I thought, she's got the job for me, I packed in my job, and I went down there and they said "no there's no jobs here, we haven't got any jobs. And we can't have two sisters working together".

*Why was that? Sounds like a bit of an excuse, that.*

It was. There was jobs there but they wouldn't give it, they said because they don't allow two sisters working together, so I thought oh right, so I'm out of a job. Sorry and all that. Then I got a job in Bourne's Laundry. I was in there for a couple of months. From there to another laundry around the corner, that I can't remember the name of it. I wasn't there long. I left there, then I was in the cigar factory.

*So can you tell me, did you have to have an interview?*

I had to have an interview to get into the cigar factory. And I think I worked there about a year, year and a half, then I became pregnant.

*So shall we go back to when you first went there?*

Yeah, when I first went there, I got the job straight away, start on the Monday. That must have been '65, about '66 I would say. And I turned up to work on the Monday, had to go into a training room. what they called it, train you what to do. On the machines. I was on the end part of the machine, that actually made the cigar. There was a girl on one end, she used to put the, doesn't matter if there's a hole in the leaf. But there wasn't to be any holes on my side. So we were doing that. So I wasn't in there long, I came out of there

*Sorry, can I ask you about that? Why was it important there wasn't a hole in the leaf?*

Because they were selling it, if there was a hole in it, it's no good. What happened, if there was a hole, a girl used to come round when we used to put our hopper up, she'd come round and take them and check them, and bring them back if they had holes in them. And then we'd re-do them. and then start from scratch again.

*So were they the leaves that wrapped the cigar, rather than...*

Yes, we had a machine, and we used to stretch it on the machine, there was air coming up the machine. Stretch it on the machine, and it'd come and cut it. Then it would slide on and wrap it. Then it would go into the hopper. Then it'd fill up then, and you'd swap your machine then, the girl come and take them away, put another hopper there, start again.

*(44.15) What's a hopper?*

Like when the - you come to the end of your wrapping the cigars it goes into what they call a hopper. And it fills it up. Starts from the bottom and it fills up. There'd be a couple of hundred in there. And then they'd take that away then and sort some out, put in another one and start again.

*So is this what you did from day one?*

From day one, yeah.

*But they trained you for that?*

They trained me for then, and they took me out of training and they put me on a machine, I had a machine. and the more you do the more money you got. It was like policed work, but it wasn't. So if you can fill as many of them as you can, you'd get more money But courser a lot of them had been there a lot longer than me so they were earning a lot more than me. But I was working my way up to it.

*Do you remember what your wages were. Like your basic wage and stuff like that when you went there?*

I think about twenty thirty odd pounds something like that, I'm trying to think , let me think now. Hang on, that was in '66. Wages wasn't big then. 'Cause we had our house, and he was earning about fifteen to seventeen. I'd say about twelve pound, twelve to fifteen pound. That's without overtime, but I didn't work any overtime there.

*(46.00)That was, was that good money?*

Well it was good money then because it went a long way. Then. But now you couldn't do it obviously. But I went out of training, I got on my own machine. Doing fine, I learnt to do it fast, and the other girl on the other side had to go fast, and I had to keep up with her. She'd put the leaf on the other side, if it had a hole in it, but not a big hole. Only had to be a little hole. Then it'd come over to me and I would put - it would come over to me and my leaf didn't have to have a hold. Mine was the top leaf. And as I say it went into the hopper, and it got filled in at once. And you can fill about ten of them a day if you're quick. I think I used to get about nine.

*So do you remember how much you were paid per hopper?*

No, it didn't work like that. It's if you, like the other girls were more faster than me 'case they'd been there years, I wasn't, I was just come out of training, so I was building myself up. Of course I became pregnant then. So after about a year I was there then, you're only allowed to work six and a half months, you couldn't work any longer than that. Any job. Any job.

*Once you knew you were pregnant, yeah?*

Yeah, six and a half months after that then you had to leave. Any job you were in.

*So what did that take you up to?*

That took me up to about '68. '67. Because I had her in '68.

*And were, I mean, you told me about when you found you were pregnant you had to go up to the -  
To get my last wages?*

Yes.

Upstairs.

Yes.

And wait outside the window thing, then tell them you're there and they gave you your wages. But then I was surprised when I went up there how many people were pregnant. All six and a half months, the same as myself. And I seen one of them in the hospital when I went in for mine, she was having hers. I don't know where the others had theirs to, wether they were later or earlier they had theirs, I don't know.

*So how many of you worked in the cigar factory?*

Oh gosh I wouldn't - there was quite a lot. 'Cause when I think I used to finish there's be coaches outside, buses sorry, outside to take them to different parts of Cardiff. Some used to go out to Penarth, some Barry, some Cardiff.

*And they were paid, were they paid by the company, the buses?*

Yeah. Oh, I don't know, I never managed to get on one. I didn't manage to get on one! I was always late getting out see, they wouldn't have been here, they knew how to do it. Off the machine and out. Well I'd be off the machine, and get my coat on, and take my stuff off and get my coat on, bus is gone. So I'd wait for the normal bus to come up then.

*(49.21) So people used to come, women used to come from all around?*

Yeah.

*Up the valleys?*

Yeah, in the valleys, yeah yeah. Yeah they'd come from there. There was quite a lot, couple of hundred people working there, downstairs and upstairs. Quite a few.

*And were they mainly women?*

A lot of women but there was a lot of men, maintenance for the machines.

*But it was women on...*

It was on the machines, it was all women.

*So it was mainly women in the factory?*

It was more women than men. There was a lot more women than men. A lot more. But I enjoyed it there, it was great, but I enjoyed the Avana better.

*Did you?*

Yeah. I had more friends down there, probably because I was down there longer than I was in the cigar factory, and in the cigar factory you didn't have time to mess around. It was a serious job. Which, fair enough, that's great. It was a really serious job, so you went there, did your job, and that was it. Clock off and home.

*When did you start work there, you know, what time in the morning?*

Half past seven. Yeah about five o'clock again. And then...

*What about breaks?*

We had a break in the morning, quarter of an hour, the same, and the afternoon. And I think we had three quarters of an hour for lunch then in that one. It wasn't long. But some people never used to go for their break, they'd have it downstairs when the supervisor wasn't looking and keep working, get more money. And I thought, "well I'm not doing that".

*What about a uniform, did they have a uniform there, or overalls or something?*

Yeah, what was that like? I think it was maroon. No hat. Just overall over your clothes. Yeah, it was a maroon colour with a belt.

*And that was given to you by the factory?*

Yeah.

*Did they used to wash them again?*

Yes. Yes they used to wash them. And like I say this fella worked there and he lived down the road from us, well across to the other side of the road, and he said "well look I'll give you and, can't think of her name now, a lift in every morning". We'd pay him some petrol money. "Yeah, that's fine". And you can guarantee, the time come he wouldn't be down the shops waiting for us, we'd go and knock him up. "Oh I'll be there now", we'd be late! But if you're late, it was very regimental, if you were late you were called, and you were in the middle of the floor with him in charge, the man, I've forgotten what he's called now, he was very strict. "Why are you late?" well I couldn't put the blame on that fellow all the time. Oh, I said "the bus was late". "Oh, right, same excuse, okay. Right, you've lost your machine, so you can go over by there and give them the leaves when they need them, or go there and pack up that lot". You know, you were shoved anywhere. For the day. And I used to hate that, 'cause I used to love to be on my machine.

*(53.02) Yes, and you lost your piece work, did you?*

Yeah. For the day. you wouldn't get that then. I used to go mad over that. I mean, it was alright for him, he wasn't on that type of work, so we was just the maintenance, so if he was late it didn't matter. But with us we lost our machines, so it did to us, so we lost out on a lot, because he was late a lot. So in the end I said "right, we're going on the bus". Well of course I got pregnant then, and he said "no, I'll bring you and take you back" he said.

*Did he mend his ways, time-wise?*

A little bit. A little bit, not a lot. I said I can't rush around now, I'm taking my time to be early, be up by the shops. Once or twice he was.

*Were people unionised in Avana?*

I'm sure they were - uh not in the Avana.

*Sorry. Freemans.*

I'm sure they were in Freemans, I'm sure it was. There was no dispute when I was there.

*Were you a member of the union?*

No.

*You could?*

You could if you wanted to, yes.

*Yes, I see. Do you think they were good employers in Freemans?*

Oh yeah. I mean it was a good job, don't get me wrong. That's the type of job I would have liked if I was younger, you know, starting off. I'd have gone into it and I could work my way up.

*If you'd stayed there could you have become a supervisor?*

Probably. But I did int he dry-cleaners, when I was at the dry-cleaners I became a supervisor there. But it's awful hard to work with your friends and all of a sudden you become a supervisor. You've got to tell them what to do. Well I had a good talk to them, I said "if I tell you - do it". And it was okay, they were good. But with the cigar factory I should imagine you had to be there quite a few years before you had a - went up. But then they had the cameras in, this one day. And they asked me to go into the... the changing room... what do you call it? Where you learn.

*The training room?*

The training room. If I'd go in there and work on the machines, one of them, well there was a few of them. I said yeah, there was about four of us in there I think. And we were working, they're asking us questions you know. And the supervisor - "Go slower. You're supposed to be training".

Course, you'd get carried away, you'd start going like this all the time. You're supposed to go like that! And I couldn't - I did do it, but in between. The cameras was everywhere, about an hour or so, maybe more than that.

*(56.06) Were they?*

But I don't know where it went.

*So do you know what they were filming, were they filming a training video, or...?*

I should imagine a documentary, on the training in the cigar factory. But the cameras was rolling all the time.

*And do you remember what year that was?*

It's either '61 or '60. 1960 or '61. Ah! No no no no no I had the baby then. I was just getting married then, hang on, I had a baby in, it could have been '97 or '96. Uh...

*'67 or '66?*

You've got it. Don't know where I am!

*So do you know whether it was a BBC film?*

I don't know, because I was so busy doing it that I didn't have time to ask anybody. And when you did they said they don't know themselves. But they must know. Where it went I really don't know.

*Be lovely to find that.*

I'd love to find it, I really really would love to find it. I don't know how I'd get around that now. How I'd find it. Whether it's still going. If you find it let me know!

*I will. So you - can I just ask you before you went off pregnant, what were the conditions like in the factory?*

They were good, they were good. you know, there was no bother there.

*Did you have a canteen and things?*

Yeah, lovely canteen, we had that. And plenty of food. It was nice It was lovely.

*And did I ask you this, you think they were good employers?*

They were. Yeah.

*And would you say it was a happy workforce?*

Oh yeah, yeah it was. Because I would have liked to have been there a bit longer, to get to know them all.

*(58.37) Could you speak when you were on a machine?*

Oh yes, yeah we were talking. And you could talk to the next one as well, but as long as you make sure you're not putting any holes in the stuff you know. And you'd get so many out of a leaf. Sometimes you'd get six, sometimes you'd get seven, sometimes you'd get five. Depending on the leaf, you could put the leaf all shapes and get the - what you can out of it.

*What about music then, did you used to...?*

No.

*No music?*

I don't think so. Can't remember music.

*What about the smell of the factory? Did it smell of tobacco?*

It did because when I came home I changed my clothes. And I'd have a shower or a bath or whatever it was then. And then when I was pregnant I couldn't stand the smell of it then. It was making me feel nausea a lot. So I managed to stay there for the six and a half months, and I was glad to go then for that reason. But other than that it was very - and it was clean. It was a clean place. Very clean.

*What about the perks of working there?*

Never smoked, never bothered. I've been lucky with my husband, he never smoked. I never smoked, my children don't smoke. And I definitely wouldn't bring any cigarettes, buy them for anybody. They want to kill themselves, they can do it themselves. Even when I go to Spain, I won't bring any back. A lot of people ask me to bring them back, tobacco or cigarettes for them, I say nope. Anything else but that.

*Was that it then when you left and had a baby, you didn't go back to the cigar factory?*

No, the only time I went back to work was when I had the three children, moved into a bungalow from the house in Llanrumney, we bought a bungalow on Newport Road, and we wasn't there long, and my husband worked in an overworks then. they went on strike. And they were on strike for quite a couple of months. So I thought, well I can't have this. So I got a job in the nursing home, which was a couple of doors up from where I lived. So I worked there. But in the meantime I phoned the restaurant which was down the road, if there was any jobs and there wasn't. They said "Give me your phone number and if something comes up we'll phone you". But I was in the nursing home for about six months, phone goes, there's a job for me. So I thought oh, right, okay. So what I don't was I had the two jobs, so I was going up there at quarter to nine instead of nine o'clock, to the nursing home, finishing at quarter to twelve, running down the road to start at twelve o'clock another job, finish there about half past three, four o'clock, come back home, do a meal. And go back about six o'clock then 'till about two o'clock in the morning. I'd be doing that for a couple of years. And he got his job back then, so I gave up the one job and I stayed in the restaurant. For twenty one year's then.

*(1.01.58) What about Elke's Biscuits, you told me...?*

Well I was in there, I wasn't in there for long, I would say about eight months.

*And when did you work there?*

That was before I got married.

*Oh it was before you got married.*

No, no, wait a minute now. Yeah I'm sure it was. 'Cause I was getting - I was married. I was married. Because I'm thinking of the bus now, I was getting a bus to go to Llanrumney, yeah, I was married. So it must have been when I'd finished at the Avana then.

*Between the Avana and the cigar factory?*

Yeah.

*How did that compare to the Avana?*

Nothing. The Avana was the best.

*You didn't like Elke's did you?*

No. No I didn't like it at all.

*Was it mainly women working there again?*

There was a lot of women and a lot of men, but one of the men was very very bitchy. Not to me, but to a lot of the girls. But if he started on me I would have, you know... but other than that I didn't like it.

*What was it? Was it the employers or was it the conditions?*

What happened, I fainted. we had to work upstairs, at the, it wasn't upstairs, but there was steps to get up around the top thing. And it was very very hot, it was a hot summer. And I fainted up there. What I did was decided to go on strike, because of the heat up there. they shouldn't have put us up there. And I said, "give us something to drink or something". Well, if they did the boss come down and "get back on your jobs!" and "don't you strike! You're not going on strike get back up there!" And they turned away and got back on their jobs. So nothing was done. I think that's why I left.

*So it was really bad conditions there?*

That was bad. That was bad, I did not like that at all. So I'd never go back there. the only places I'd go back really is - well not now, but that time - was the Avana or the Alpha dry-cleaners. 'Cause that's where I had a lot of friends and I messed around a lot in my jobs. It was great, it was great, we all... one knit family. It was lovely, in the both of them. And I still see friends now from both of them.

*Do you?*

Yeah.

*(1.04.48) Do you see them quite regularly, do you go out with them?*

No, no, not so much now, I had my seventieth birthday last year - no, not last year, two years ago now. And my daughters dug up some of my friends, and I didn't know. I thought I was going to my other friends from my other job. Thirty five, no forty five years and one of us was doing a surprise party, so I managed to get a card with '45' on on this day now. so I knew it was my birthday then, that weekend, and I thought "well, they were taking me out on the Saturday" so they said "no don't worry we'll take you out on the Sunday". So I bought two dresses. One to go to my friend's and one to go out with my family for my birthday. Well I put the one that I wasn't fussed on for the Saturday, gets down there now, it was in the British Legion in Rumney. And I thought "It's my friend from church. What's she doing here?" and I looked again and I thought, "hang on, that's my friend from around the corner, what's she doing here? She don't know the girl from the Home Stores." And I looked again, and my granddaughter came towards me, and I said "what are you doing here Rebecca?" and I looked up and I could see my brothers, and I thought oh God I know what's happened. They'd done a surprise party and they were all there, they all come 'round from the back, surprise, surprise! I thought, "oh sugar". That was a shock not a surprise! So she'd dug all of my friends up and they were there as well, so that was great.

*From the Avana bakery?*

From the Avana and the Alpha. And I can't even find those photos.

*Do you think any of the work you did in manufacturing, was any of it dangerous?*

Well the Avana could have been. Because you're putting your hand in the machine. And if that went off, your hand was gone. Right? So you had to be very careful.

*Were you made aware of health and safety?*

I was. Oh yes, yeah. You're shown how to put them on. And what to look for and whatever, so that was okay.

*(1.07.16) Were you aware of anybody who had accidents while you were working?*

Yeah. I don't know whether it was a girl or a boy now. Had a finger cut off. In one of the machines. And that's the only one I know, I didn't, I don't know if it was a girl or a boy because it wasn't where I was. It was a different department, so. Only a youngster it was.

*What happened then, do you know?*

Well they had to come back and find the other part of the finger. They found that and I think they put it back on. But I'm glad she wasn't by me. 'Cause they'd have had to take the two of us to the hospital. Other than that, nothing. Nothing really bad.

*Was she given any compensation, that kind of thing?*

I don't know, that I wouldn't have a clue about. I should imagine she did, I mean losing a finger or part of a finger. I suppose they did compensation those days.

*Okay, I'm just going to ask you then, did you enjoy working in the factories you worked in?*

I loved them all. Bar the Elke's Biscuits, that's the only one I didn't like. I liked it all, the laundries. But it's not the type of job I wanted to stay in. 'Cause I was getting electric shocks off the machines all the time. So that wasn't for me. But I liked the Alpha, the dry cleaners. And Avana. And I worked in Littlewoods.

*And Freemans?*

Freemans, they were my (?) (1.09.15)

*Why do you think that was, was it job satisfaction, or was it you know the social interaction?*

It was the social, very friendly people working there. The bosses were great. And when I worked in the Alpha dry cleaners, we had to go upstairs, and I was working as what the call a spotter. And as the clothes come up from being washed, there'd be marks on them. So I'd have the machine to get the spots, there was about five of these machines. Then they'd put music on for us every day downstairs. "Now what do you want today?" "Frankie Vaughan!" "You can't have him, you had him yesterday". I said "well I want him again today", "okay, this is for Doreen", right. Then this is for so-and-so, this is for so-and-so and they were great, they were great to work for, really great. We used to have, well I used to have some fun down there. I put a Scotch skirt on there, it came up as a little kilt. I was on the barrels dancing with the skirt on, and the boss was watching me. But, didn't take any notice, that was okay. That's Doreen that is! I used to, in whatever job I was in.

*So looking back now from many years later, how do you feel about the time you spent working in factories?*

I feel, I'd like my time over again to do it again. I would really love to do it all over again. Not the ones now, I don't like the jobs I've had now, I liked them. But it's not as nice as I had years ago. I loved them. I loved every minute of them. It was lovely to wake up in the morning and think "ah I've got work today". The weekends I'd go "oh what am I going to do on the weekend?" so we used to go off somewhere you know. Other than that it was absolutely smashing. Absolutely. And as I said if I could turn the clock back I'd turn it back to when I left school. And start all over again. But some of the jobs I wouldn't go to, stay longer in the others. Yeah, that's what I would do. It was absolutely brilliant.

*Thank you very much.*

71:29

END OF INTERVIEW / DIWEDD CYFWELIAD