

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR / LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

Smith's Crisps - Abertawe/ Swansea

Interviewee: VSE075 Era Elizabeth Francis

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Interviewer: Catrin Edwards for Woman's Archive of Wales / ar
ran Archif Menywod Cymru

My name is Era Elizabeth Francis. My date of birth is 5th November 1933.

00.32

So tell me a little bit about your background. Where you were born, your mother and your father, what they did for a living if they worked, and if you had any brothers and sisters.

Well I was born in Pen – y- Bryn and we lived with my father's brother and he had poultry business and my mother learnt with him how to skin rabbits and so on. We were living in rooms there and then my father was working in the mills down Ty Canol, Fforest or wherever and we came to live in Morryston then, just before the war came, because there was a newsagent 2 doors away from where we were living in Midland Terrace, it's called Clydach Road now. I can still remember the signs they put up to say war declared, and we were actually standing on the wall on the newsagent's two doors away – I was five or six then. I lived there until I got married in 1956, I was 22 and a half, in the meantime was when I went to work in *Smiths* crisps round about 1953 something like that. That's when I went to work in *Smiths*.

02.28

Can I just ask you, before that where you went to school? Primary and secondary.

When I was living in Pen-y-Bryn I went first of all to a school up there, I don't remember much about that because I was only 4. Then I came to live in Morryston and I started going to Pentreporth girl's school, then I went to Neath Road girl's school – that's where I was educated such as I was. The education system was a lot different then to what it is now. I did try the eleven plus, but I didn't go into the scholarship class because my uncle was in the army and he said try the exam. I knew I wouldn't pass and I didn't! When I was 14, that year, they said if you were born before April you had to stay in school until you were 15. So I had an extra year, I didn't leave school until I was 15, you'd leave school at Christmas, at the end of the term. I went to work in the laundry, because that was what was there and I didn't have any special education. It was alright in school.

04.20

Would you have liked to stay on?

No, I was quite happy to go to work. My mother needed the help then, because my father wasn't in the best of health and he failed to get in the army because of his chest but he had to go away to work in Gloucester, so he was working away, he would come home sometimes at the weekend. Men were conscripted and they had to go into the army. That was that. When he came back he went to work on the railways, he didn't go back to the heavy works like the tin works and all that because that was very hard work and men only worked and women did not work. And yet when they had a chance of buying their house, everyone lived in rented accommodation, so my mother wanted money so they could pay for this house. Everybody hoped for the best they could do. You had to put down, they didn't want a mortgage at their age. It was only £100 to buy the house I think then. But of course that was when my husband and I were saving to buy a house. And my mother asked if we could lend them some money but we were trying to save for a deposit for a house of our own. But a friend of theirs lent them the £100, fair play, mother went to work so that she could pay that £100 back.

06.22

Where did your mother work then?

She went to work in the Duffryn works, and my youngest sister she worked there for a while – but I never worked in the works.

06.44

So what did they do in the Duffryn?

Well, it was tin works I think. It was hard work, I couldn't have worked there. I ran there with a message for somebody and I was knocking on the door. They would have had to drop a bomb, good job somebody happened to be passing, and I delivered this message and I was so frightened by all the furnaces and fires I didn't fancy working in anywhere like that.

07.24

So you were in the laundry for a couple of years were you?

Yes.

Tell me then about when you went to work in the factory?

As I said, my friend said that we would be earning a lot more than at the laundry where I was earning £2, and I think if you went to work at *Smiths* you were earning over £4 – you still had to pay for bus fare. But they had systems if you were on a certain rate you'd have a bit more money and you were rewarded. It was so different.

08.07

Tell me how old you were when you went to Smiths?

I must have been 18 or 19, a couple of months after my 18th birthday so I was old enough to earn the full rate if you did the set amount in an hour, they had this system. They were making the crisps upstairs – they called them the kitchens. I was working on the floor and in a different part of that floor was where the other girls would take the crisps all packed and go and put them in the tins that were sent out to the shops. You'd see the big vans reversing in.

Everything was going on on the ground floor – it was where you clocked in, it was whistles for this, whistles for tea breaks it was all so different.

09.34

Take me through you said you went to work there with your friend, did you work together?

Yes

Did you know anyone else who was working there?

Not when I started there

Do you remember if you had to have an interview

I don't think so, I don't remember having to have an interview

09.56

Did you have any training?

Not really. You just learnt on the job more or less.

So take me through a day – you said you had to catch a bus – at what time?

I was getting on the bus on the cross at 6.55 and we must have been starting about 7.30. You would clock in and then you would have to put on an overall and scarf on your head because of the food, you had to wash your hands and then you would go on this machine and they would tell you now – it was only *Smiths* crisps there.

10.49

So what exactly were you doing on the machine?

You'd be on different parts – there were 3 different parts where the crisps came down from the kitchen on big chutes - on conveyor belt down into these 3 other machines through a chute, you'd pick the bag up then you had another thing on the side with the salt in the little blue bags and then you put that down onto this other conveyer belt, there were about 6 tables of girls either side and they picked them up and had to guess the right weight, the supervisor would test so many bags. The other girls would pack these bags, put them on trays and put their numbers in. I think there were 18 on top and 18 on bottom so that would be 2 tins of crisps, they would take these tins out. After you'd done so many and reached your target you have a better rate of pay. You had to do so many a week so you made sure you were working hard to get your bonus.

You had to do hand packing as well. These crisps would be going into other big things, it was all done by hand I can remember all that. When you were on the machine there was the supervisor, there were 8 girls overall and the big boss. Each machine also had somebody in charge so you had to put your hand up and turn machine off if you needed to leave for any reason. Couldn't come and go as you liked it would be quite a palaver. This conveyor belt would be going all the time.

13.34

Were they quite strict with you then?

Oh yes. There were all sorts of rules and regulations, after just working in the laundry. Although there was lots of machinery there you were used to hearing all that. But once you'd put on the switch, crisps would be going down into the machine. There were big bins everywhere catching the crisps, aluminium troughs, each of you would have a chair and it all had to be done by hand. The crisps could be quite sharp so your hands would get really sore, but you weren't allowed bandages or plasters. That's when I discovered *Nu-skin*, it's something you could put on a sore or a cut it would heal and it was kept clean. It would seal it but it was half a crown which was a lot of money - otherwise you wouldn't get your bonus if your fingers were too sore so we used to use that *Nu-skin* and it was marvellous stuff.

15.32

So you were allowed to use Nu-skin?

Well nobody ever stopped us, I don't think you'd go around showing it. You were allowed to use that because your hands were sore, because even if you were on the machine bit – it was all a machine – you weren't handling the crisps. But if you were on hand packing your hands could get sore, so you always had a bottle of *Nu-skin* in case we were on hand packing and our fingers did get sore. Because at least then your fingers would be sealed, it was all quite ok but I remember when I went working at Woolies on the deli the same thing would apply there. You weren't allowed to put bandages or plasters, so I've been using *Nu-skin* for years. But now it's £4-odd, the last time I bought that bottle, the first time I bought it it was half a crown, so that tells you I was only earning £4 then!

16.45

Talking about the bus fare now, how much did you have to spend on bus fare a week?

I can't remember but I think it used to be about 12/- or 14/- a week. I know looking at the price of bus fares now, that's a thing. But you were working for a week's pay of £4 odd taking out 12/- for a start, it was a lot of money. Things were cheaper, you can't really compare to today's prices. But little things like that I can't remember what things were. That was one of the things. Every time I use the *Nu-skin* or see *Smith's* crisps I think, 'Oh I worked there' and I worked there for about 5 or 6 years.

17.51

So tell me what it was like, what you felt like the first day you walked in, what the factory was like. Because it must have been very different to the laundry.

Oh yes. I didn't think I'd stay there a week the first day I went there.

Why was that?

Well I could smell the oil and the crisps for a start and you know when you'd been in work, although you had an overall on and a thing on your head but if you went and stood in front of a fire or any heat, oh you could smell the crisps. I thought people will think that I was smelly, but that was if you were inside, should be walking along the road perhaps it wouldn't have been noticeable. But you know your mother and father, they all had coal fires so when I come in from work and if it had been raining and I stood in front of the fire, I could smell the *Smiths* crisps. I wasn't very keen on that, but in saying that you got used to it and everybody was in the same boat and that performance. The worst part I hated about it was getting on the buses, because there was all the other factories coming up as well, it was quite a walk up from *Smiths* crisps up to the Mile End Pubic house, uphill towards Swansea, these men that

were working upstairs and a lot of older women and they all had to wear clogs as the floor was so slippery with the oil, so it was safer for them to wear wooden clogs.

20.07

Did you ever go upstairs to have a look?

Oh yes – you'd have to go upstairs cos the canteen was upstairs, and sometimes you'd have to go upstairs on a message or something like that. But I didn't like going, I didn't like working upstairs.

20.21

Can you describe what it was like in the cooking bit for me?

Well obviously there was hot fat and all the potatoes. There was a few men working upstairs, not a lot of men, and they were all old. I think all the younger men were in the war, they were in the army wherever, but they would be putting the cold fresh potatoes into the fat and then they would go along, there was lots of conveyor belts, and one lot going here and one lot going there with lots of chutes coming down, everywhere there would be a possibility that the crisps would come down or over the top. They would have all these bins and they would all be galvanised, I don't suppose they were stainless steel, and be able to be kept clean. And somebody would be up these big wooden steps and there was one of those by each machine and I think there were 4 machines downstairs having crisps coming down from upstairs. It was quite a big place. It was a large area.

21.36

How many of you worked there do you think?

I couldn't tell, quite, I'm sure a few hundred from downstairs and upstairs.

Were you mainly women?

Oh yes. Not many men there at all.

Who used to cut the crisps then?

That was must have all been done by machinery upstairs, I never saw that bit. And then it would come along this conveyor belt, and as I said everyone on the machine, once you pulled that lever the crisps would start coming down through your machine, so you'd have to be there with the bags and the salt. And that's the way it was, you were doing it automatically, sometimes the conveyor would get stuck and then they, but you had bins underneath the chute on your machine and once that got filled to a certain amount you'd have to go and empty it, either into one of these tin galvanised bins or maybe into where the girls were hand packing. So that's what happened, for the hand packing. If one of the machines broke down or had to be repaired in anyway, you had to take all those machines apart and you had to clean them every night.

23.12

You had to clean your machines then?

Oh yes, you were responsible for it.

Were you always on the same machine?

No, there was 4 different machines, one time you'd be on one then you'd be hand packing for a while or you'd be at the other end. The girls that had been setting them down and putting them on these trays they would be next week on the next machine or something like that. There was a supervisor in charge to make sure if anyone wanted more salt or if they wanted more bags or whatever, and there was the salt room they used to call it.

Another thing I remember is, there was a young boy working there then and he was so small he couldn't reach the machines so he used to have to stand on one of these empty tins to be able to put the salt in the machines. And then he was called up to go to the army, so he was only 18 and he had to go to the army - and how he grew. When he came home on leave he came up to the factory cos he was so proud of himself in his khaki and how he had grown in that couple of months. He was in the army, he did his 3 years and I remember him coming back and he started courting one of the girls and I think eventually they married. All the girls used to make a big fuss of him cos they remembered him going to the army and he was so small he had to stand on these boxes.

And we used to have music, we'd have music over the loudspeaker.

25.15

Was it radio or records?

It was workers playtime I suppose or whatever it was - not BBC1 or BBC 2 and all that.

Did you used to sing with the records?

Yes - some. I always remember that was when one of the songs was nice. If you were hand packing you weren't far from the salt room and remember Grace Kelly and Bing Crosby singing *True Love* and *High Society*. So we used to like listening to that. I can remember that. I always was inclined to like a lot of serious music even then. I liked the pops, not that it was called pops then, but you had nice music, songs that you could sing the words to and understand - not this load of rubbish that they've got on now.

26.12

Did you used to do this work, the same thing, all day?

Oh yes. But you weren't always in on the same machine. But if you were in the kitchen, you were in the kitchen, you were upstairs. If you were in the tin department where they were packing, that's where you would be. But in the part that I was in on the machines you were always on one or other of these machines.

So you used to have a variety

Oh yes.

26.42

What was the work like? Did you find it boring or monotonous?

Monotonous yes - it was the same. I can still do that now, that was all you were doing all day. But you were doing it and I made some nice friends there. If you were sitting on the end of the machine you'd be more or less on your own because you were the first contact but then the other 2 girls would be facing, one was one side and one was the other. So you could sort of talk to each other through this thing. And if you had somebody nice there who'd been to the pictures the night before and seen a nice film they'd be telling you the story and you used

to have a few of the girls who were really comical and they were fun you know. So it was nice to be working with somebody like that.

27.32

Was it OK for you to talk?

Oh yes. They wouldn't be able to stop us - I suppose they would have if they could have, we used to think. When I was reading about unions and all that, no I don't think anyone would say anything about unions I don't think that was ever brought up.

You weren't members of a union?

I was never a member of a union, whether the others had unions after I left I don't know. But not while I was working there, I don't remember any unions.

28.10

What about the facilities, what were the facilities like in the factory?

You had nice toilets and plenty of places to wash hands obviously, as we were working with food, you were expected to keep yourself clean and tidy and make sure your hair was covered and all that. But it whistles and machines off and then whistles once the break was over. They had a nice canteen there.

Tell me about the canteen, did you use to eat there everyday?

Oh yes, you could take your own food if you wanted to. There was no where else to eat, you weren't allowed to leave the site. You just had an hour for dinner, you bought a ticket for 2/- or half crown and then if you wanted the dinner you would stand in that queue, then another queue for a cup of tea. So by the time you had done all that it was time for the whistle to go and you'd have to go downstairs then - the canteen was upstairs see.

Was 2 shillings reasonable for a dinner?

It was 2/- or half a crown; it wasn't a bad meal, you had a cup of tea and a cooked dinner.

Do you think it was subsidised, the canteen?

I can't remember - you had to pay for it. You paid for what you had, so if you wanted a cup of tea you just paid for that. I can remember standing in the queue. If somebody who was a friend would get your tea. You had to be hands washed and back on your machine by the time they switched it back on again. It was done by whistles and all that.

Was the food OK?

As far as I can remember. Nobody had posh meals then, you just had - the war was still - we still had rations. Once a month or maybe a week you were allowed to buy crisps a little bit cheaper, but you had to pay for that obviously.

31.07

Was that the only perk?

We would have them for tuppence a bag instead of tuppence ha'penny. It wasn't a big savings but that was allowed then, as long as you paid for them.

And did you ever eat crisps?!

Oh you could eat the crisps.

No, I meant did you ever eat them out of work, were you fed up with them or did you fancy crisps?

It was only them crisps you had then see, I didn't like the smell on my clothes but I ate them. I was glad to finish there, because that rush for the bus was hard going.

32.10

Did you have a break in the afternoon as well?

We may have had a quarter hour. I can't remember for sure, but I don't think we used to finish work until about 5 pm and then we had to take the machine all apart and wash it all, ready for the morning.

That was a very long day then.

It was, yes. But there we are, there was nothing else.

32.44

How many hours do you think you worked in a week?

Say that we started at 7.30 and perhaps we finished. We had a quarter of an hour break in the morning and then I think it was an hour for dinner, because if you had to queue you needed that hour and then we would finish - the machines were switched off at 5pm. Then it would take you all that time to clean the machine and if you were working on the other part, where you were sticking the packets down, you still had your table that you had to scrub. You were using glue then, you have this messy thing and a sponge to stick the bags. Obviously it couldn't be too messy but it had to be stuck down.

So you actually stuck the packets together?

Well you used to have this thing with glue on the top and when you picked up the bag from the conveyor belt, you made sure it was the right weight and there was salt in it and then you just stick the packet. There was 3 rows of 6 on the top and 3 rows of 6 on the bottom, you'd put of these discs in and a bit of paper with your number on, you had to write all the numbers down so they could check how many packets you had done in a day. If you didn't reach your target you'd lose your bonus, nobody wanted to lose their bonus. Some of the girls, if they were very quick, they could be earning maybe £5 for the week - if you were that quick.

34.59

Did you have time and motion people there?

They used to try and think that you could do things better if you were doing it their way. It all depended who you were working with. As I said it was alright. There was some nice girls there and there were some awful awful people. I'd never heard swearing till I went there, I nearly fell off my chair in the canteen and these were old, to me, ladies. They were from Greenhill and from Townhill and everywhere, they didn't come from Morrision they didn't talk like that there! I was so scared of them I would have let them walk over me rather than argue with them! I remember my friend, Hazel, was ill one day so she was didn't come into work. These old dears, as I thought they were, asked me to sit with them because I was on my own. And then they said this word - I thought you don't say that word - but they weren't taking offence. I could hear this going on and I was afraid to go and sit somewhere else in

case they grabbed me. I couldn't wait for my friend to come back and I stayed away from them in the bus queue because I didn't want anyone to think I was using language like that! I couldn't get over it, I'd never heard a woman swearing properly.

After a while I made lots of other friends, some lovely friends there. Two of the women that were in charge of this machine were Pentecostals and they were really good living people, and they could hear these other women! But I think we kept to our own lot in the canteen and we used to stick with your own group of workers.

38.11

This 'rougher' element, did they do a certain type of job?

Most of them were upstairs in the kitchens, so they were the rough and ready ones. I never worked there, I couldn't have worked there - I was a lot quieter than I am now.

38.33

Were you all paid about the same wage do you think, or were people who worked with the fat paid more?

I'm not sure about that, I know that us working on that machine, whether you were working on the conveyor belt part or on the actual, we were all being paid the same rate per hour. Of course if you were able to pack more than others you would have a little bit more on the bonus scheme.

Like piece work, was it?

Well, kind of I suppose. The same when you were hand packing you went at your own speed; if you were really good you could earn a lot more.

But if you were cooking, for instance, you couldn't make your money up like that?

To be honest I don't know what those ladies upstairs were being paid whether they were getting paid a higher rate because it must have been a more dangerous job, they were working with hot fat.

39.56

Do you think the work was dangerous in some ways?

Well, some of it could be I suppose, but as long as you used your head. You could slip on that greasy floor but we never wore clogs downstairs, we just wore our own shoes, the overalls and hat.

Was the overall given to you by the company?

Yes, but you had to take them home and wash them.

You didn't have to buy them yourselves?

Oh no. That was part of your job.

Do remember what they were like? What colour they were?

They were green and green hats. I don't think they had pockets. Some girls were smoking, they weren't supposed to be so they used to sneak off for a smoke, but I never smoked in my life. I used to get a bit annoyed if I knew somebody only wanted to go upstairs to meet a

friend off the other machine to have a smoke. And I'd be dying to go to the toilet and I couldn't switch my machine off, so had to wait till someone could relieve me!

So where did people smoke?

I think they used to smoke in the toilets myself, they couldn't be found out as they could have been sacked I'd say. Because it was food after all.

Could they smoke in the canteen?

I think they could in the canteen, as it was your break. I don't remember that, because I didn't smoke or any of my friends so I never really took notice.

What was the overall made out of?

Like cotton, it was nothing glamorous but at least you covered your own clothes. And you had to wear this thing on your head. It was like sort of a hat, to cover all your head.

I made some nice friends there.

42.26

Do you remember any accidents when you were there? Did anybody have any nasty accidents?

I never witnessed anything. If anything happened upstairs I don't know about that. Not in the part where I was working. Somebody could fall or something like that, but nothing major.

43.21

What were the conditions like in the factory, like heating and lighting?

It was strip lighting everywhere.

So the lighting was good then?

Yes, I suppose it was. It was glass all round. It was a lovely light building and they could always open the doors if it was really warm. It must have been warm upstairs in the kitchen mind.

You weren't too hot down on the floor?

I can't remember being too hot or too cold, I think it was quite a modern building and obviously built for making crisps, cos *Smiths* crisps was always known. I wasn't old enough to know what was there before.

Was it a clean factory would you say?

Oh well it had to be clean, everything was cleaned every night.

But apart from the smell of the oil machines, was it a clean environment?

Yes, it was really. I was just in the part where the food was being processed. Things did used to go wrong because it wasn't automated. We all had a box on the table to put the wrong stuff in and they would be taken away.

46.48

What about your holidays then? Did you have paid holidays every year?

Oh you had to work a year and then you'd get the full year's holiday and pay. If I remember rightly now, our working week used to be Wednesday and the first working day of the week was Thursday. Cos I remember when I got married I had to finish on the Wednesday although I wasn't getting married until the Saturday, because that was the working week. I had a fortnight off then, a paid fortnight.

Did the factory shut down or could you choose your holidays?

I don't think the factory used to shut down, so obviously Christmas day and those sort of days. You could have your holidays when you wanted as long as too many didn't want to go at the same time.

Did you go away on holiday?

Couldn't afford to go on holidays, never went away on holidays then.

Did you go for day trips?

Oh yes. To see my auntie in Ebbw Vale - a lovely place for a holiday! She was my favourite auntie so I didn't mind staying there, but not for too long! It is not a very nice place Ebbw Vale, but my mother thought it was safer for me up there than down here, because they weren't getting bombed like us, when I was young.

Did you go with your friends on day trips, that kind of thing when you were on holiday?

Not often, no. Everybody was more or less in the same position. I was trying to save to get married.

49.10

When did you meet your husband?

I actually met him a week before my 16th birthday queueing for *The Empire*. My friend was interested in one of the other boys, so I sort of went along. I can even remember (indistinct) he married Churchill's daughter and used to play the violin. He was on the stage in *The Empire*. My mother loved *The Empire*, she wasn't one for the pictures. We used to go up to the gods, it was only 9d to go up in the gods.

What was The Empire?

The Empire was a theatre, like a music hall. There were good acts there and my mother used to love it. It was quite jolly. The tightrope walkers would be coming up over the audience to the gods, as one of the acts years ago. They used to go all around.

50.50

Did Smiths use to arrange any social events for you?

No not really. The photo I showed you, where we've all got hats on, must have been Christmas or something. I remember Churchill retiring or something to do with him, and they asked for a contribution. My father was horrified, we were all Labour, he wasn't going to give anything to Churchill who was rich! That's the way you were brought up, there was no money to fritter away.

Tell me what did you do for Christmas? Did you have a party in the factory - what happened Christmas time?

I don't remember any parties there, whether we just had a special meal but we would have had to pay for it. I don't remember them paying for anything like that. We didn't go out to a restaurant or dinner dance or anything like that. It was so different when you went to work in other places then, but there in (indistinct) it was all just factories.

Was there any kind of social life there?

No.

Did you use to go out with your friends from work?

Yes but only to the sixpenny hop, or we'd go into Mumbles by train and town to a dance. I think I had 5/- pocket money, so it was all gone on the train, you didn't have money to have a cup of coffee, a drink or anything like that.

53.21

So what did you do with your money? Did you give it to your mother?

I had to until I was 21, yes. They were the rules.

So you gave all your wages to her and she gave you pocket money?

5 shillings pocket money.

And when you were 21 what happened?

I'd met Neil in the meantime and he was in the army from when he was 21, so we knew we had to wait for another 2 years before we would be able to think of getting married. My birthday was on 5th November, Neil's was on the 6th and Dave's birthday was on the 8th and when Anne came along many years later she was born on the 9th, so all of us were Scorpios, all stubborn people. We didn't think we were not so well off, we thought we were alright. We weren't rich but if you wanted something you had to work for it and save for it.

What did you do when you were 21, about your money?

Well I said to my mother, 'We are saving to get married so I think it's about time I started saving, I'll give you so much'. But when it came to it I was paying for my wedding, my sister got married 3 months before me, so my mother didn't have much left for mine. We more or less paid for mine so it was a good job I had started to save.

So did you go on board and lodging?

We didn't used to call it that, but I gave my mother money. We had to strike a bargain. We didn't have plastic then, so I saved for anything I wanted or go without.

55.37

How long did you work in the factory?

I was still working in *Smiths* when I got married in 1959.

Did you keep on working there for a while?

Well we got married in 1956 not 59, I went back to the laundry after and worked there until I was 6 months pregnant. I left *Smiths* just after I got married because it was hard going getting the bus into town, it creased me. I had to go into Swansea to get something for his

sandwiches the next day so I found it easier to give up *Smiths* and go back to the laundry. We were married 3 and a half years before we had Peter.

Did you ever go back and work in any factories?

No. I worked in the laundry and then the children; I was busy going back and for to school and they came home for dinner. Up and down these hills kept me fit!

57.21

Did you enjoy working in Smiths?

Well, I met some nice friends there. I got used to it, I didn't like the rushing for the bus it was hard going.

Did the bus take you all the way from Morriston?

Smiths was on the opposite side of the road to the bus stop. You walked so far and then ran the rest of the way because you had to clock in. We didn't have to change buses, but you had to hope that there wouldn't be too many people on the bus for them to pick you up. So we used to run up to the next bus stop.

And were these public service buses?

Yes, they weren't work buses. We didn't have a works bus, I think some of the factories may have had them. Because *Smiths* was up the way you had quite a walk or a run up. It was all that arguing and shoving and pushing. If you missed that bus you would have a heck of a long wait for another one.

You enjoyed the company there?

Oh yes, most of them were fine. I didn't like the crowd upstairs, but the girls that I was working with I made some really nice friends there.

Did you keep in touch with them after you left?

Yes, with one or two of them. The majority, after you'd left awhile got married and then having family you lost touch. But sometimes I would bump into one or two of them in Swansea or somewhere. A friend of mine that we hadn't met up for well over 30 years but we knew each other straight away, we hadn't altered much she was still a nice person, I still get Christmas cards off her.

Is this the woman you went there with?

No, not Hazel - she was a widow for quite a few years, but she did marry again but I knew her nieces because they were flower girls and I was bridesmaid in her wedding. I saw them at Country and Western and would ask after Hazel. She was a couple of years older than me and I'm 81 so she must be 84 or 85, but I think she's still going strong.

So who was the other friend you were talking about, and do you still see her?

Audrey - well I haven't seen her for a while now, we must every now and again, we arrange it. She was married, I became a widow and I've made other groups of friends - line dancing and another I go down the Grove with - I'm very busy.

Looking back, how do you feel about the years you spent working in Smith's?

It was a different experience and way of life. I would have preferred to have worked in a shop, but they didn't want me to start until after Christmas, I couldn't wait so I took the first job I could get after leaving school. I could have done better than the laundry. I worked in Woolies for over 20 years and I've been retired from there for over 20 years, but we still meet every Wednesday morning so I got much closer friendship with all of these than my other friends. They went to live in other places - it was out of my league then. I'm still a Morristonian!

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