

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

**Slimma-Dewhirst, Cardigan**

**(Started work around 1967, had a career break when she had a child. Finally finished work with the closure of the factory in 2002)**

**Interviewee: VSW013 (NB: WISHES TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS)**

**Date: 5.12.13**

**Interviewer: Susan Roberts on behalf of Women's Archive Wales**

**00.00.20: First of all, thank you for agreeing to speak to me. We're going to talk a bit about your background now if you don't mind. Can you tell me where you were born?**  
I was born in Cardigan.

**And what about your parents then? Was your father working?**

My father was working in the Labour Exchange and my mother never worked.

**And what about siblings? Did you have brothers or sisters?**

Yes, I've got four live brothers, and one dead. And a sister.

**And where did you fit in? Were you the baby of the family, or the eldest?**

No, I'm in the middle but I was the first girl.

**And can you tell me a bit about your education. Where did you go to school?**

Cardigan. Well, Morgan School it was. My first, the infants (school), then we went to Morgan School, which is where the health centre is now. Then I went to Secondary Modern, then up to the County.

**And how did you feel about school, did you like school?**

No, because I had a terrible job with my spelling, and I was never really given a chance. My brothers were given, you know, a lot of chances. They had the uniform and things to go to school when they, but I didn't. So the kids used to laugh at me.

**Kids can be cruel can't they. Why do you your brothers had the opportunity when you didn't then?**

My younger brother didn't. I think in my family it was who shouted the loudest, got things whereas me and my brother, we were. Because we're very short as well, and I think my other

brothers were big and what you call. They seemed to get everything whereas we didn't get anything.

**00.02.35: And they were boys as well, was that part of it as well?**

I think so, as well yes.

**So how old were you when you left school?**

Fifteen. The day I was fifteen.

**And how did you feel about leaving school?**

I was quite glad because I had problems with spelling I, I found I just didn't have any interest. I used to, what you call, mitch, I'd go pick potatoes. And I used to go plant cauliflowers, so I used to go to work and of course, I used to work in the chip shop and everything.

**00.03.20: So you were working in the chip shop while you were in school?**

Yeah, when I was eleven I got a job there.

**You're not afraid of hard work then, obviously.**

No.

**So how often would you work in the chip shop?**

Every night and Saturday, all day Saturday.

**00.03.36: Didn't you get tired?**

Oh yes, I used to be absolutely shattered but just had to do it.

**So that was your first job, as it were, in the chip shop.**

Yes.

**And when you were thinking about leaving school then, when you were fifteen, what did you expect you'd be doing? Did you have any plans when you left?**

No, I knew I was going to go to the factory.

**But how did that come about?**

Well, everyone did really. If you weren't very bright coming out of school, you went down to the factory.

**00.04.20: But did they give you any advice in school about what you could do or were you just left to it.**

We were more or less left to it.

**So how would you go about getting a job in the factory then? Would you put your name down?**

I just went down, and I was lucky, I got a job there straight.

**Did they interview you or did they ask you something?**

Yeah, they interviewed you, but it was a small, it was a small factory then, so people used to go there when they left school and then, but try for jobs in shops and things like that.

**00.04.58: What was the factory called then?**

When I went there, it had just become Slimma. It was Calders, because they used to make dressing gowns for Brentford Nylons. You know, the quilted dressing gowns. No, you wouldn't remember them.

**Oh, yes I do.**

And anyway, Slimma took it over and they started making what was a two way stretch. What we'd call ski pants now, with the stirrups underneath, whereas they were just called two way stretch, you know, old ladies trousers, bingo trousers and things like that.

**00.05.38: So you went there straight when you were fifteen, straight from school. Did you have a break at all, or was it straight in?**

No, I went a day after my fifteenth birthday.

**So how did you feel about that then?**

I was nervous and what you call, but I think when you're fifteen, you think you're big and what you call. And I went there and I used to, first job was packing, packing the trousers, folding them, putting them into bags, sealing them. Next then I went on to putting the labels on, just onto a bit of machining here and there.

**Did your work become more skilled then the more, the longer you stayed, would you say?**

Yes, but then it was, it was very, you didn't have to do it at a big speed, so you did. But when I went back then, after I left I went back like after about eight, nine years, and I found it had changed so much. You know you had to be sewing non-stop for all day.

**Was that when it was Dewhirst or was it still Slimma?**

There was so many things it was. It was Courts Vyella. Or there was about three different take overs. And then it became Dewhirst.

**00.07.17: To take you back now to when you first started, when you were fifteen, you went there on your first day. Were there other girls there you knew starting as well?**

No, one started about two or three weeks after, that had been in school with me.

**00.07.35: Were there people there already that you knew then?**

No, not really, because they were older. They were like eighteen, nineteen.

**And what did your mother say then, what did your family think that you'd got a job?**

Didn't say nothing. You now, we weren't a close family. We weren't a close family.

**And what were your impressions of the factory on that first day? You know, fifteen is very young to start work isn't it?**

I can remember walking in and thinking how easy it was going to be. But, when you start a job you're clumsy with it, do you know what I mean. They said, right, you'll pack here with this other woman, and I remember then, trying to get the jeans that they fitted in perfect in the

polythene bag, and things. But after a while it became second what do you call, and then thinking how glamorous the other girls looked, you know because they'd had their hair long, and different colours, and they had lovely clothes and everything. And I had horrible like skirt, which I thought was the bees knees, but it wasn't. It was really old fashioned and everything. And they had big platform shoes and things, and I was so old fashioned.

**00.09.08: So in a way it opened up your world did it?**

Well, it, there was one girl there and she was very glamorous. You know, she had the long blonde hair and she was very, very beautiful. You know, she could have been a model because I can still remember how pretty she looked and I think everyone looked up to her, like she was, and she had a little, little mini skirt up to here and things. And there was a hierarchy of the ones there then, the next ones, and of course, when you come in then, just come in, you're like the lowest of them. And my first wage was three pound and seventeen shillings.

**Gosh, did that feel like a lot to you then?**

Oh, it was. It was a fortune.

**Can you remember which year that was?**

Well, I'm 61 next now, so it would have been when I was fifteen in January, so nearly 46 years, 46 years January. And I remember that because it was a lot of money. But I worked, you know, you did work hard. You went in at quarter to eight and you finished then it was half past five.

**Do you remember receiving that first pay packet then?**

Yes.

**And how did you feel?**

No, because I had done a very, very silly thing. It was my first time at work, and there a canteen there and you were allowed to put it down. But I didn't realise I had to work a week in hand. So I couldn't pay the first week, so I had to explain to the man that was doing the canteen, sorry I haven't got any money to pay you. And he said, right, I know you've had to work a week in hand. I will let you pay, so I had two weeks lots of dinners, because I like my food.

**You've got to eat if you're working hard.**

And he sold sweets and things, so I owed him, I think it was not far off two pounds.

**So there wasn't much left.**

There wasn't much left, no.

**But what would you normally have done with the pay packet? A fifteen year old girl now, taking over three pounds home, earning three pound whatever.**

I did used to make sure my sister had something nice and things like that. Mind you, I did a very, very silly thing. Because I wanted to be like everyone else in the factory, I started smoking. I got to say that.

**When you were fifteen?**

Yeah. Just because they used to all go outside for a fag and I wanted to go out with them, and I couldn't inhale and I used to be (PUFFES) like that. I can always remember that.

**And do you still smoke now?**

Yeah. Yes.

**So the other girls influenced you quite a bit then?**

Yeah, because I wanted to be like them. And I wanted them to like me, do you know what I mean. It's a two way what do you call.

**00.12.48: How many were working there then?**

There was only thirty altogether. And there was a couple of cutters, a couple of pressers, and there was a conveyor belt across the middle. And, one girl would be sewing and then it would be put back on and then you'd grab that bundle off, sew it and put it back onto the conveyor belt.

**Were they mainly girls then?**

There was two boys pressing, and it was boys cutting. Yeah, no boys were on machines. Not like when I left, when I went back and everything, boys were as much on the machines as girls.

**00.13.47: But you said when you started there you were packing, who would actually show you what to do then?**

The woman that was doing the job, I was like helping her. So then when I went on to sewing, they called it sewing over-riders on it, it was sewing a big label on. Like the girl who normally does that, she showed me how to do it. They were nice, I've got to say, they were nice.

**But you said there was a sort of hierarchy.**

Only because you wanted to be like them, and you know, if they were all like in a gang talking and they were talking about being out the night before or something you knew you couldn't go in and just join in. You waited for them to speak to you and things, do you know what I mean.

**00.14.55: So when you first started then you were happy, and you had a chance to do different things then.**

Yes, you know, as you what you call. But then if someone was off you'd go back and you'd do the job perhaps you'd learnt a week or two before and then everything. You know, it was starting off because they hadn't been making trousers there before they were, you know, making the Brentford Nylon dressing gowns, the quilted ones, and aprons and things like that. So then they were starting making the Slimma ski pants.

**Where were the other girls from then? Were they from the town?**

There was quite a few from Fishguard, and there were some from Newport.

**From Newport, Pembs?**

Yea.

**Gosh, how far away is that then? Was that quite a while for them to travel?**

Well, Fishguard was eighteen miles, and Newport was ten miles.

**So, how did they get to work then?**

Well, they used to be, they used to come by car. Like one would come one day, you know the two from Fishguard and then the two. But as I'd been there a few years, more were coming from Fishguard and what you you call, so they were getting a little bus, and things.

**00.16.29: The work was putting a bus on then is it?**

Yes. That was later on a bit, but when I left there was must have been ten buses picking them up, at the very end, they were coming from all over New Quay, they were coming as far as New Quay, Drefach Felindre. So after you know, after I'd been there perhaps a year or two that's when the Fishguard bus started. It only started with the Fishguard bus and they'd pick them up in Fishguard, Dinas, Newport and things.

**00.17.25: Did the buses start because the factory had expanded then?**

Yes, because they had, they did start having quite big orders from Marks and Spencers and they used to have catalogues and, you know, they were, I suppose, they would be old fashioned, the clothes they were making. But that's what people wanted and then they would be making a different type of trousers, you know, with a draw string, comfy waist and things, well they would fly out. And when you go on to a different style, say you are making these ski pants with the stirrup on the bottom, they'll be quite easy but then you've got different. You've got the drawstrings. You know, you get a lot slower until you pick up speed, and you learn the job. I think there was a lot of that. But it did take off.

**Did you have targets then? Did you work to targets?**

Not then. But when, at the, when it was Dewhirst it was very hard targets.

**They were a different company weren't they?**

Oh yeah. Well, they were big then. I mean there was no minimum wage or anything then. You had your three pound, seventeen and six, you know, and ..

**Were they looking for qualifications at all for people starting there/**

No, no.

**00.19.04: And did everybody start at the same level, do you know what I mean? You had a chance and you worked your way up, didn't you, to do different things.**

No, it would depend. Perhaps if they needed trimmer, so you would come in then. That would actually be your job, a trimmer. And you know, they used to have casuals as well, so say they had quite a big order and then all of a sudden someone went sick so they would bring in a couple of casuals, just to trim and things like that. Because there's a lot of jobs, you know, but a lot of it as well was families. Like you know, say one girl was there, and her sister was leaving school. She'd get her a job there. There was quite a bit of that there as well.

**00.20.06: If Slimma hadn't existed then, what do you think you would have done?**

**Because Cardigan's quite a rural area really, do you think you would have hung around or do you think you would have gone away?**

I think I would have stayed because I was looking after my little sister as well, do you know what I mean. I had parents but ...

**How old was your little sister then?**

Well, she's ten years younger than me.

**She was only about five then, when you started.**

Yeah.

**So she's the one, you know, when you were talking about your pay packet and you'd make sure your sister would have something nice.**

So that she had something nice to wear to school you know. So I always bought her nice clothes.

**00.21.04: You were working for this factory now, and turning out clothes of a good standard really, you know M & S is highly thought of, how did you feel to be part of that?**

I don't think I appreciated how nice it was to work there, if, because you know, but then it was so different.

**So different to what?**

To how the factory became.

**I see, right.**

You didn't have it easy there, don't get me wrong. We worked very hard. But you had more of a, you did have a laugh and things, mind that was after a couple of years you noticed it. But when I was fifteen I didn't notice it. I was wanted to be part of them, but I was too young, and too small. You know they wouldn't like, when they'd get their pay on a Friday afternoon of course, and then they'd go to the pub. But I wasn't allowed to go. You know, and I always felt, not left out, but they were talking like, who's getting the first one in and all that, and on a Friday morning they'd always be talking about what they were going to do on the weekends, and everything. But you know, because our lives were so different as well, so. I think if you look at something like Upstairs, Downstairs the people downstairs want to be upstairs don't they, so it's exactly the same there. I wanted to be up with the big girls.

**But who were the people Upstairs then?**

Not Upstairs, no.

**But who was at the top then? The girls who could spend all their money on their clothes and stuff?**

And you know, no one was nasty to anyone. There was one fight there. They used to quarrel but only one fighting like on the floor I ever seen but that was quite a few years later. And that was two sisters who were fighting, so ..

**Could you tell me more about that?**

Oh no, it was nasty.

**Was it?**

They were dragging each other across the floor, and one of them hit, you know, on a machine and...

**What had caused the argument, do you know?**

A boy.

**A boy who worked there?**

No. A boy they both fancied.

**But they were sisters?**

Yeah.

**Had they get on previously?**

Well, I think they had. I'd never known of them quarrelling, but all of a sudden this boy, who everyone fancied I think, so.

**00.24.12: So how did the supervisors re-act to something like that?**

Well, they just, they just dragged them apart, and they took one outside and what you call. There was no discipline, there wasn't warnings and there wasn't things like that then, no. If you did something wrong, you were out. There was no Union of course, nothing then, no.

**Was there a Union later on?**

Yeah, yes. GMB it was later on.

**And were you a member later on?**

Yes, for twenty years I was a member.

**So you had to pay for that then?**

Yeah, one sixty a week.

**Did everybody have to be a member of the Union then?**

No, it was up to us totally, but when I went back, well it's thirty years. Well, it's been shut over ten years now see. Yeah, I was there over twenty years the second time. It was..

**Can you remember when you went back the second time?**

Yeah.

**Which year would that be?**

I'm not quite certain. I think my son was fourteen, but I'm not quite certain to tell you the truth.

**Don't worry.**

He was younger than that, but it was totally different. There was loads of machines there. But you didn't have your, you know, like I had my three pound seventeen and six. I'll always remember that. When I had my first wage there then, because there was no minimum wage, you just had what you earned.

**But did you feel that was fair at the time? Did you feel that the money you got in the beginning was fair for what you were doing?**

The three pound? Yeah. Because you could buy a lot. You wouldn't think of spending more than a pound on a dress or something then.

**And did you enjoy the work?**

Yes, I did enjoy it. You know, glad when it was Friday. Always glad when it was Friday, especially, I'll never forget, this is a funny story. Boots came out then, and they were like over the knee, and I'd been to a jumble sale and I'd got myself a little mini skirt. And my friend had these boots, which just came over the, plastic boots, just came over. But they were two sizes too big and I wore them to work. You know I was still fifteen, feeling so big wearing these boots. I was like the other girls then. But, oh my feet. I was crippled because they were so big and when I was doing the pedal on the machine, it was slipping. Oh, I nearly caught my fingers I don't know how many times.

**They were killers were they?**

Yes, oh they were terrible.

**It sounds as if there was a bit of a fashion parade there.**

Oh, yes, there was. There was a fashion parade, and I still think there was two girls there and they had long, long hair, and when they were going out, because there was like an ironing board but with a big steam iron on it. And they used to put their hair there, and put brown paper. They used to press their hair to have it straight. They really invented straighteners. Do you know I was thinking that, because they did. I never had long, long hair. And they used to put it and it used to look really lovely, total, total straight. But they really invented straighteners.

**00.28.11: Did they play music or something while you worked?**

Yes, there was always music, quite loud and one or two of the girls, there was two, I think they were from Newport, but they liked heavy metal. And when they came up they would be (HEADBANGING) sumping their guitars standing by their machines, and their heads going and everything. And we'd say, you know, "oh, here they go now again".

**So what would they play, the radio is it?**

Yeah.

**Can you remember which channel it was?**

No. I don't want to make it up, because if I remember it I'll say it.

**Don't worry, that's fine. Because there were lots of girls working there what would normally happen if some girls got married and had children. Would they leave then or what would happen?**

They normally left, they always did a collection for them. You know, perhaps there wasn't much put in but they do a collection.

**So would they leave after getting married, or would they leave after getting pregnant?**

They'd work up until they were about eight and they'd come back as quick as they could as well.

**They would come back would they?**

Oh yes, because I think you were only allowed so many weeks before, and so many weeks after. They had to keep your job open, but I don't know if they got paid at all for it. But I know, what it, was it so many weeks before because you were given a date then, by the doctor. And I think you were allowed four weeks before, and four weeks after, something like that.

**It's not much is it?**

It wasn't then, no. But then people's mothers used to watch them. Or if their sister had children they'd watch them.

**00.30.11: So how long did you work there the first time you were there?**

Not that long, I think it was four years, the first time I was there.

**So why did you leave?**

I got pregnant.

**So then you left then for a while?**

Yeah.

**And when did you go back then? How much of a gap was there?**

I think it was about eight or nine years.

**It was quite a while then really?**

It had totally, totally changed.

**00.30.38: Had you worked somewhere else in that gap?**

No, I was watching my father. He had stomach cancer, and looking after my son.

**00.30.54: For the women working there, say there were working mothers working there, how were they treated by the other staff? Was everybody the same, do you know what I mean?**

There wasn't a lot of working mothers there, when I was there first, mainly girls from out of school and the ones that were eighteen, nineteen. There wasn't many there, but then they started having children. So, no I think if anyone had any children, this sounds, perhaps you don't understand, there no one brought, you didn't bring your problems to work. No one really wanted to your problems, do you know what I mean. I think, because ..

**But managing with a child is very difficult isn't it, especially in those days, there were no creches.**

But I know the ones that did have children, like their mothers watched them mainly and things like that. Or if they had got married, because now you don't get married much to have children, quite a few stopped working then, because their husbands, the wives worked in Slimma and the husbands worked in REE Aberporth. That's how it worked years ago, and things like that.

**00.32.37: What was that place?**

A government thing, but they don't take so much on there now. But that's what it used to be.

**So the Slimma work was the second wage.**

With quite a few of them, except you know like the single girls and thing but they all lived at home. When I think about it, you know the ones that I wanted to be like and things, but they just lived at home and they didn't give their parents anything. So they could buy the clothes and things.

**00.33.17: Did they encourage you to acquire new skills then? You did it, didn't you, you went from one thing to the other as you went older.**

I think everybody had to do that, you know, you couldn't stick on one job. You know, you'd have to go where they told you because there was no training school or nothing there then. When I went back then, they had a little training school so everyone went in there, and was trained a bit.

**So who would do the training? Who was in charge of the training?**

In the first or the second?

**In the second.**

They had like a training instructor, someone that had learnt quite a few jobs, so say, say one girl could do zips she'd learn another job, and then another job, so then she'd become a training instructor. Because really, when I went there first there wasn't the, there was never zips put in trousers. It was a mock, you know an elastic, an elasticated waist. So when I went back the second time, and of course it was jeans and things were being made.

**Zips are tricky aren't they? (Not for you perhaps.)**

They used to be split down into three. You'd have Zip 1, Zip 2, Zip 3. So the first one, you'd have the two different garments and then you'd just sew a zip in, and then another one would come and do that. And another one would you know come and do that. It was three different little jobs then.

**00.35.04: So what was your job title then for the most of the time that you were there? Machinist?**

Yes.

**Do you remember them giving you a pay rise at all, either during the first phase or the second phase?**

No. Oh, yes I did. I did have a pay rise. I think it was, I don't know if it was after a year or what was it? I'm not quite certain. I know it went up to just over four pound.

**So how many days a week were you working?**

Monday to Friday, but you finished on a Friday at quarter to one.

**And what time were you starting did you say?**

Quarter to eight.

**How did you get to work then?**

I just walked.

**So how long would that take you?**

Ten minutes.

**Not too bad then? You could run couldn't you? So when you went back the second time you said that things had changed considerably then, it was busier, but there were targets then?**

Because the minimum wage wasn't in, and if you reached your 100% you'd get, say it was thirty pound a day, you know, but if you didn't reach it, it would go down. If you had 90% it would be perhaps twenty eight pound a day. So you always made sure you did over.

**00.36.34: But were there people there who couldn't reach their targets?**

Yes, there was quite a few even then.

**What happened to them?**

Well, they just took less money home. But then, minimum wage, when did that come in? I've never known that in Dewhirst. I never knew, but I've got to say I was quite, not what you call, I knew first aiders got seven pound a week extra, so I went training then. They sent me and paid for me to go training. You had to go five days. I had to go to Aberystwyth for five days, so I had an extra seven pound a week for that.

**That's good isn't it?**

Yes, you know, there was what you call, and Health and Safety, you had extra money for that.

**00.37.28: So did Health and Safety exist the first time you were there?**

No, no at all.

**But by the time you back there ...**

Well, once the Union was there, when I was there the first time, if you sewed your finger, and the needle went through it, they'd call you clumsy. 'Oh, you clumsy cow,' or something like that. But if, the second time when I went back there, it was £200 for doing that.

**What, compensation?**

Yeah. Automatic. Because their guards weren't right, whereas the first time half the time you didn't have guards on the machine.

**It's bound to happen though isn't it.**

Yes.

**Do you remember that happening to anybody, a needle in the ..**

Oh God, terrible things happened.

**Like what?**

One girl, she was sewing. What was she, sewing hems and she was. Right, when you do a hem, I'll just show you, otherwise you won't understand. When you've got, you've just got the blanks, so what you do is, you do that with your hand, and then you do that, and you put your fingers in there, and then you take it round like that. But she didn't take her hand round, so she sewed all her fingers. And the point is, when I was trained, you'd never take anything

out. So I'd get the mechanics to dismantle all the hem machine and take her to the hospital, like that. Well, you had to.

**Did she gets compensation for that then?**

(Yes)

**How much did she get for that?**

I'm not certain.

**Nobody wants that to happen do they?**

But there was a lot of, towards, perhaps about two years people were starting claiming for stupid things, and there was a lot of that going on then. Like, they brought in an Eaton system. That's what really closed Dewhirst. It was overhead. The garments used to come down like this, you used to sew it, press the button and they would go into the next what you call.

**What was that called, an 'Eaton system'?**

Eaton system. It was from abroad. It was terrible. You know, you could see your performance up there, so if you stopped and spoke for a minute it would go down. Because say you had twenty seconds to sew the garment and then press it on, if you didn't do that, when you went for tea break your performance was going down, and down and down. You clocked out at dinner time, and you know, there was a lot of cheating going on. People were pulling garments off and just banging them through. Well, that would give you a reading of perhaps a hundred and fifty performance because you hadn't actually sewn anything. So..

**But couldn't the supervisors watch against that then?**

Well, they were under so much pressure.

**What, the supervisors?**

They were.

**Did you feel that you were under pressure as well?**

I used to do, I used to get, up to the year it closed, I used to get such good money but then I used to work every night until ten.

**You used to work extra?**

Yeah. Changing labels, doing hems, what you call, and then I'd go up to Pontarddulais on a Saturday and Sunday.

**What was in Pontarddulais?**

It was where the warehouse was. They were always wanting things to be checked and everything. So when you left on a Saturday, the minute you left the factory on the bus, because they always laid buses on, you used to get paid and it used to be double time. But what was good, because your average used to be, my average used to be so high, and that's what your holidays were paid on. So I used to have nearly a hundred pound a day in holidays, when my holidays. But I used to work very hard. I used to work every night till ten o'clock.

**But why did you feel you had to do that?**

I dunno, I dunno. I honestly don't know but I think it's because I've always done it. And I never ever thought it would shut. So my son, you know he used to say to me, 'can you lend me two hundred pound', and I'd think nothing of it, you know, and take him shopping, and buy loads, you know. And I never thought it would end. If I'd known I would have saved, you know, but that's it, I never thought Dewhirst would leave Cardigan.

**00.43.00: It was a blow to the area wasn't it? What were other people's attitudes towards you working in the factory then? You know you were girls there, on good money. Did you ever get comments off other people from the town or whatever about the work that you were doing?**

Dewhirst had a terrible reputation. I'll tell you, I don't swear. I used to when I was younger. But I went out one night and I was in the Angel, what you call, and there was two girls that was paralytic drunk waiting for, to go to the toilet. And the language that they were using 'bs', 'cs', everything.

**These were Dewhirst girls?**

No. And two girls talking behind, and one of them goes, 'They must be Slimma girls'. It was never called Dewhirst it was still always called Slimma, right till the end. And I turned round and I said, 'no, they don't work in Dewhirst'. I said Dewhirst, because it was Dewhirst. But if anything was, it was always Slimma girls did it.

**How did that come about then? Do you think there was a bit of jealousy?**

No, because till they started putting our money in the bank, when we used to have our pay packets, we used to go to the pubs. Mind you the pubs loved seeing Friday because they always, the shops loved it because we had money. And of course, I just think, of course there was one or two that were fighting.

**Fighting when they were out in the pub?**

Yeah. But it was always over boys. And then when there was a lot of boys working there, they would fight, because they had enough money to drink and they couldn't take their drink, so they would start fights. But it was always Dewhirst girls, Dewhirst, Slimma girls they were always called. Not many people ever called it Dewhirst. If you ever asked anyone where Dewhirst factory was they would never know, but you ask them where Slimma was.

**00.45.25: When boys started working there, they were young boys were they, from school and stuff?**

Sometimes not, sometimes, like they'd lost their job somewhere, and they would.

**How were they treated by the women then? Did they have their legs pulled?**

A lot of them were actually better machinists than some of the women, but they were not given tricky jobs. They used to do like leg seams. (COUGHS) Because they could fly down them with an overlocker and things, and they used to, but they were never above cheating. They wanted their money and they'd get it, no matter what.

**00.46.23: Did they cheat more than the women, do you think?**

One, or two, yes. One or two. But like some of them had families. They couldn't afford not to. But the one thing that used to spoil it as well, because then you could have child, working

child credits. You couldn't have anything else. But you had to have six pay packets. Now the boys, that were the only bread winner, for six weeks they'd go on virtually stop, and take home perhaps fifteen pound a week, so they could send these six pay packets. And that used to spoil it you know, for the whole line then. Because it used to be a line, you'd start off here, you'd have back seams till practically the end then. And when you come a full circle you've got the hems. Now you've got this boy who's only wanting to earn fifteen pound a week, so he can get high child tax credits. So things like that did spoil it.

**00.47.29: How do you feel you were treated as workers, you know by the bosses and by the supervisors? Do you think you were treated fairly, because you've seen two different periods haven't you?**

Yes, I think, when I went there first, we didn't really have, right, it isn't going to be like said anywhere?

**Well, I'm recording it, would you like me to pause?**

No, you know, but it won't come back, that Jane said this.

**No, don't worry about that. It's going into the archive it is. But I will be typing it up mind.**

What I found the first time I was there, the woman that was a supervisor there, could, knew everything. You asked her what you call. The second time, I was there, this sounds terrible, but a lot of girls slept their way up. They slept with the, because there were so many bosses, and things there, half of them didn't deserve to be supervisors. You know, they didn't know more than anybody, but you had then, floats that could do every single job in the factory. But they'd get passed up, and you'd know if there was a supervisor's job coming up, you'd know who'd get it. You know the old hands, like, they were quite a few of us, we'd say like so and so will have it, and we were always right. But then I had a boy supervisor, and he was marvellous, he'd worked himself up, and I did have his picture but I can't think what I've done with it. But he was good and he was fair. And I think that the only thing is to be treated fair, and you're quite happy.

**00.49.52: When you went back the second time and the Union was there do you think it was useful having the Union was there, because you needed it?**

Yes, I think the, because we had some supervisors that shouldn't have been and they would try to push what you call, because I had to bring the Union in with one, because she swore at me, for no reason. You know, she went, 'get on with your effing work,' and I was you know. But that's how they were talking to a lot of them.

**That's how the supervisors were talking to the workers?**

To the young ones and things. But of course, I stopped then, and I went to my Union rep, and you know, I had an apology and everything, and.

**So what did the Union rep do, go to the bosses, or go to her directly?**

I'm not quite certain exactly what happened because I know I did have an apology and you know, it wasn't called for because you know, if I hadn't been working, but then I wouldn't have stood for that myself.

**Were you allowed to talk while you worked or wasn't it possible, because you know, machine work is quite noisy as well isn't it?**

We were allowed to as long as it but I couldn't go off my machine to, say you were on a machine two doors, I couldn't go and talk to you, unless I was waiting work or my machine was broken down, or something like that.

**Did you have a uniform in work or did you wear anything in particular?**

No. Some people used to wear a tabard but never was a uniform.

**They didn't supply anything?**

No, you had to ...

**So, the work was dangerous in a way, if you weren't careful?**

Oh yes. There was always accidents happening every day virtually. But when I went there when I was fifteen, because I caught my nail, finger quite a few times, and they'd just tell you, 'be careful next time' but you know you wouldn't think anything of it, so you would be more careful next time. You know, if like, you fell over, you slipped on a polythene bag that would have been dropped, you wouldn't think of suing the person that had dropped it, and you just got up and ..

**Got on with it?**

Hoped everyone wasn't laughing at you. But then, when I was back there the second time, if you know, the bit of polythene on the floor, and they tripped on it, they'd sue.

**00.52.52: What it a fun place to work then?**

I made some good friends there, the second time more than the first time because I was too young to, you know, the girls were too old and I was too young I think, you know. Like seventeen year old don't want to hang around with fifteen year olds. And I was small as well.

**00.52.25: Are you still in contact with some of the people you worked with?**

In Dewhirst, yes. Liz, quite a few, but I see quite a few of them in town and everything.

**00.53.38: So what are they doing now?**

Well, every one's doing a bit of different. Where I'm working in Hiut Denim three, four of them there was in Dewhirst.

**Can you remember any rules or regulations they had? You were saying the first time you went there, there weren't many rules and regulations, but by the second time things had changed a bit.**

You did have you know like, to me the second time when I went there, it was all this, you did have all this, it was stupid like Say they thought I wasn't pulling my weight they'd give me a warning, and then a final warning but it wasn't for anything in particular.

**00.54.45: Why would they do that then?**

You know, like, because they didn't want people that was slow there and everything.

**So what happened if somebody was slow, would they get rid of them?**

They used to try, or they'd put them on like trimming or something like that, but you know you couldn't afford to be slow there, you had to be fast otherwise you didn't make your money.

**Do you remember anyone having the sack there ever?**

Quite a few was sacked.

**What for?**

Swearing at management.

**But why wouldn't they swear?**

Thieving.

**Right.**

That's why they had to get a security guard there.

**So taking the finished garments, or taking bits of ones.**

No, finished garments.

**Was there a lot of that?**

I think there was more than they thought. I think there was more than they thought.

**It's difficult to watch against that because, you know, there are so many garments around there, isn't there really, but I suppose, did they get a security person in then?**

Yes. They had a hut at the bottom, but people used to roll them up and put them in their sandwich boxes and things, but they didn't know that.

**00.56.12: What type of things would they take then?**

Trousers.

**Because trousers are quite big.**

No, not if you roll them up and put elastic bands round them.

**Oh, I see.**

Not that I did that.

**No, I don't believe that for a minute.**

But they used to make me laugh. They used, see them gathering up elastic bands and I thought they're going to roll their trousers up. But you can see, you can squash them and put elastic bands.

**It depends what the material is.**

Yes.

**Was the factory warm, or was it cold?**

It was too hot in the summer. In the winter, it depends if you sat near a door. But in the summer it was very, very hot. There were the pressers, there were a lot of pressers and everything.

**00.56.57: What were the facilities like there, were there toilets, changing room?**

There was toilets there. We had a very, very nice canteen upstairs. It was nice and we had subsidised food.

**Was there a canteen there when you first started?**

Yes, but it was only small. It was just, but at the end you could have anything because I've been vegetarian over forty years.

**Have you?**

Yeah, and they always had something, even going back twenty year, twenty five years ago. They'd always have something for me.

**Well that's quite forward thinking isn't it?**

Yes, you know, Eddie and his son, they used to say it's so and so today, and they always had something, and because, I had two sheepdogs then, they'd keep me the scraps as well.

**Fair play.**

For the sheep dogs.

**00.57.55: When we were talking earlier you said they'd tend to play music, did people tend to sing along or was it too noisy?**

With the first time, because I think, because you didn't have music and things on the telly, like you have now, so I mean, I never really listened to a wireless until I went there. And then I'd here the songs and then you'd soon what you call, and then sometimes I'd hear a song I liked, and then you could go and buy like the music of it so I could learn the words, so I could sing along with it on Monday.

**Where would you buy that then?**

In Smiths.

**And with the noise of the machines, did you have anything to protect your ears ever?**

No. A lot of the girls, the second time they did.

**Did they?**

Yes, they did. The only thing I got out of there was carpal tunnel syndrome in both hands. I've had them done now.

**My husband's got that.**

But it was because I was doing hems the last year I was there.

**00.59.07: We were talking earlier about you staring smoking, so how would you manage to have a fag then? Would you go, were there breaks in the morning and in the afternoon?**

What the girls used to do see, they used to sneak out. Yeah, there was morning break, dinner and afternoon. But they would sneak out so I think that's why I started smoking so I could sneak out so I could stand with them and listen to them talk. It sounds silly now.

**Was that outside?**

Yeah. Just outside the door, but there was a smoke room in there. But you wouldn't go in there then because the supervisor would see you or someone, but if you just one out the door quick, and shut the door behind you, no one seen you.

**00.59.49: So what would the girls talk about?**

They used to talk about clothes, what they got, and what groups they were going to see and, it was just, they never talked about anything, never political, nothing like that. They always talked about themselves. You know, but that was the ones I wanted to join in with.

**01.00.18: Did you feel as if you were learning things from them, because you were very young starting?**

No, because I knew I could never dress like, you know because I could never have bought clothes like that.

**But their attitudes and stuff?**

Yeah, I just wanted to be round them, do you know what I mean. I always hoped it would rub off on me but now, when I think back how stupid it sounds.

**But you were young. We're all like that aren't we?**

It was because I'd never had anything nice, do you know what I mean? That sounds a bit silly but I'd never had anything nice and I just wanted them to like me. But they put up with me. I think that's the best way I can say it.

**01.01.12: You mentioned now about your hands, about long term affects of sewing, so you think you know with your hands, what did you say it was, carpal tunnel?**

Yeah.

**In both is it?**

Both.

**So do you think that was because of the hem sewing?**

Well that's what the man who did them reckoned it was. I'd left them go quite a long while and they were going when I was in Dewhurst because I came off machines and went on auditing. But my hands were sore, but I didn't like auditing much, so I did go back to hems.

**But did you tell them in work, look.**

No, because I didn't realise what it was. I just thought I was having pins and needles all the time.

**So you couldn't get any compensation for it?**

I wouldn't have for that because I'd left it myself, I'd left it too long. You know, if I'd stayed off and stayed on you know, auditing the jeans, that's just checking that they're fit for purpose, I think it would have been so different, but then I got fed up of that because that wasn't me. I wanted to be in with the girls although I was late forties.

**Was that monotonous then, the auditing, or was it boring?**

There was just, you'd find so many things wrong with them and then you'd got to take them back to the people who'd done them. I felt a bit guilty with that, I've got to say.

**It's awkward isn't it?**

Yeah. But it didn't. You didn't know what was going on around the machine floor.

**You were out of it I suppose?**

Yeah. And you had like the finishing section, where you audit and things, then you've got the machine floor, then you had the cutting room. Everything is totally different, whereas I've always been like on the machine floor.

**01.03.13: Did people tend to socialise within the job that they did, do you know what I mean, because there were different section. If you were a machinist in a particular area, did you tend to socialise more with the people there?**

Yes. You never seen the cutting room people because they were in a different section. You'd speak with the people down the finishing section that was getting everything out ready for the shops and things. You always spoke to them. I got one friend, Jo, that I made down there, and I'd never met her until I met her down there. And I see her quite often. Liz then, my other friend I made down there, she happened to be sitting next to me one day and she was very, very shy and I thought she was a bit stuck up, she was and I started speaking to her, because I like speaking and within an hour we were best of friends, although there's ten years age gap with us. But you know, we meet up and we go out, but she live about fifteen miles away. They used to have a bus coming from there, from Plwmp. But that's quite nice, because when I can I go up and like spend a night with her and we go out to her local and then chat, and chat away.

**01.05.02: So when you had breaks, in work, what did you do then?**

What the second time?

**Both really.**

The second one, you'd have a break for ten minutes and you'd go up the canteen. They'd have toast, you could have cooked breakfast, you could have anything. Well, we used to always have it there, because you were allowed to smoke there. It wasn't like now, so we'd go up there and we'd go to the smokers' section, and we'd have tea and toast and a fag and go back down. But in the second time I was there.

**What type of food did they do there? Did they do a cooked dinner there?**

They did all sorts. Chips, there were always chips, there was always potatoes, always something vegetarian,

**You didn't bring your own then did you?**

No because it was subsidised as well by Dewhirst so I mean you could have a proper roast dinner for a pound.

**Sorry, I interrupted you, you were going to say the second time round...**

But the second time round, late on my second time there it was brought in by the Union, you know, like sitting down, after an hour you were allowed five minutes, so everyone used to run

for a fag. You were allowed a relaxation break it was called, but we always called it a fag break. A quarter to nine everyone would have their relaxation break.

**01.06.50: How many days holiday a year did you have then?**

Twenty eight days.

**That's not bad then is it? And you were paid for those?**

When I first started there, the second time, you had to work a full year before you had any.

**01.07.07: Before you had any holiday?**

Before you had any pay for them. They'd give you the holidays, two weeks in the summer with no pay.

**That's not the same is it?**

No, but that changed then. Of course, they didn't have to give you holidays, and what happened then, the Union brought it in, that they had to pay people. It wasn't fair sending someone two weeks, because they used to take someone on two weeks before the holidays, and then you'd have two weeks without any pay, Christmas you wouldn't have any pay, what they had to do was (PHONE RINGS.)

**01.07.55: What did you do when you had holidays then? Did you go away or did you stay at home?**

I used to have my grandchildren down. They used to come down. We used to have the week in May. We used to have two weeks then, one in July, a week in August, next to each other. And potato week. So I always had my grandchildren down for those times.

**01.08.26: Did other girls used to go away on holiday together?**

Oh yes, they used to go abroad. There was always ones going abroad and everything. (PHONE RINGS.)

**01.08.42: Were any social activities organized by the workers there?**

Yeah. Well, they had a social club there towards the end, and everything. They used to organise quite a bit. There was trips over to Ireland, because you used to just go Fishguard to Ireland. They did organise to go to Eurodisney when the company first opened and the bus company went bust so, they did used to organise. There did used to be quite a few things organised.

**It was the workers themselves rather than the company?**

It was the workers that did that.

**Who were the bosses then, where were they from? Were they quite, were they there quite a lot or not?**

There was different bosses. You had all the supervisors, and then you had like the factory managers. So, they changed very quick. They did change very quick.

**01.09.40: What was it like there at Christmas times?**

It used to be the most loveliest place to work but the last few years, no. They just – pressure. Like before we used to go in (MICROPHONE POP). Like the Friday before or whatever day

we broke up we never used to do work or anything, and they used to bring booze out, and we used to be on the machine floor. We were having a dance and then we used to go up down and everything. Then it started, you had to work until ten, then it went you had to work until eleven, and in the end it went you had to work just until a quarter to one, and that was it.

**01.10.25: Was that because of Health and Safety or because they wanted to get the most out.**

It was to get the most out. Because they had to get two thousand like, off each line, and it was just, I don't know. Dewhirst just wanted to make the money.

**01.10.47: Did they give you any perks at all ever? I mean, you worked in a clothing factory.**

You could buy them quite a bit cheaper.

**Were they seconds then?**

Yeah, mainly. Staff purchases.

**So who ran the social club then?**

All different girls. You'd put your name down, and what you call. Always the Union rep. We had a good union rep there, Brigitte. She'd, you know, what you call. You had to have someone, because you paid in twenty five pence a week, or something like that, you had to have someone that you could trust with the money. And we had a union rep that you could trust with the money. That sounds a bit what you call.

**No, I know. You've got to be careful of that, whatever money's collected.**

You know, we did have an incident there, but this is quite a few years ago. One girl, collecting money for hampers, you know hampers, vouchers, high street, and she'd spent it.

**Oh dear.**

But because she lived locally, and she was there, she did pay the girls back.

**That must have been embarrassing for her because the thing is, she'd have to admit it wouldn't she?**

Well the, cause she'd started paying and she'd given everyone's names, in August the company wrote to all this people saying they hadn't received any payment. She wasn't going to say anything but like, fair play, the company did.

**So the first time you decided to leave, because you were pregnant, and the second time then ..**

Made redundant. It'd have still been there.

**How did you feel then, because it was quite a shock was it?**

It was a shock but because we heard of all the other ones closing, and closing, and we were always told, no, Cardigan's making good money. And we were, because we were told every week how much profit we'd made. You know, it was like forty two thousand and everything. But whereas we were making what they were called were five pocket Westerns, you know, what you call, and that's what we were good at. The next minute they were

shipped off to Morocco to be made, and we were made to do hard ones. We couldn't get the targets done, and things like that. It's like they ..

**Sabotaged you.**

Yes. And Fishguard, they never thought they would close. But they were making money up to the day they shut.

**01.13.53: How much notice did you get?**

90 days.

**Gosh, it's not much is it?**

90 days we had.

**01.14.07: If you could tell me what you're doing now?**

Well because, at the moment I have got four jobs. Well, no, because I want to get, because I was on Jobseekers and I used all my savings, just to survive really. So I work in Hiuts Denim. I'm a presser there, twenty four hours. I work in a shop on a Saturday, 'Penblwydd Hapus', all cards and everything. And I do a little bit of cleaning for two little old ladies.

**So you're still keeping busy then?**

Yes.

**01.14.49: So looking back at your time in Dewhirst, the first and the second time, how would you sum it up?**

I think, I'll never know what I'd have done if I hadn't gone to the factory but I don't regret it because the factory did give me quite a good life, but if I'd realised it was going to come to an end, so abrupt, I would have saved a lot more. But I mean it did make me grow up as well.

**Was there anything you didn't enjoy about working there?**

I've got to admit, I didn't like the pressure they put me under. They always wanted more, do you know what I mean. Whatever you did was never quite enough for them. They knew exactly how to push, and push, and push you. But then, they could be so kind as well, do you know what I mean. If you were really in trouble, they would help you.

**01.16.00: And what did you enjoy about working there then?**

The people, I've got to admit. I've met some amazing people, you know, over the years in the factory. Well, really up until I was forty eight, that's the only work I'd ever done. You know, I'd picked potatoes and things like that.

**01.16.25: Is there any one event that sticks out in your mind when you think back over the years?**

There's a horrible event that sticks out, and this is when I was young, but it's nothing to do with the factory. When it started getting a bit bigger, when it came to a quarter to five everyone would rush but most people would be walking, and one boy came out and he knocked one of the ladies down and he killed her. But it was because everybody was rushing to get out. And I think that stuck in my mind still to this day. And I do see him still, and I think, oh, he must always live with it. You know, it wasn't his fault or anything though.

**01.17.36: Just one last question, it's something that I remember you said talking about people getting sacked for swearing at supervisors. Was there much arguing or answering back, do you know what I mean because there were all these targets and you were being told to do this things. Were there many people, did people respect the authority or did they bite back sometimes?**

Mostly they did fight back because a lot of them didn't, you know. I was doing a certain job, and you had to overlock the fly part, and it was you know, the way to do it. And this girl, she'd just come out of college and everything, and she was doing time and motion and she was telling me, 'oh you must do it this way'. And it was, the way she was telling me to do it was impossible to do so I said, 'do you mind sitting on the machine and showing me'. Well, she couldn't, so I didn't think someone like that had the right to tell me what to do, do you know what I mean. So she reported me for being cheeky to her. But I wasn't being cheeky, and when I explained to my supervisor what I'd actually asked her just to show how the handling she wants me to change it to. You can't do a job for a year and a half and then someone says, 'oh I want you to handle it this way', when there was no difference. And a lot of that was people, especially when they had been to college and things, they used to come there, and they used to be like time and motion people and things like that. They used to think they were a bit above the machinists until they tried machining and then they realised, 'no we're not'. But you had to look after yourself or you would have been just walked on. But I always think, lose your temper and lose the argument, so I never raised my voice.

**But the first time you were there, if somebody told you, a fifteen year old girl.**  
I used to run and do it, no question.

**Thank you very much, you've been fantastic.**