Oral History Interview: Opal Mann

Opal Mann
ORAL HISTORY
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DATE: July 1, 1994

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DATE: 7/1/94

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OWENS GLASS HISTORY PROJECT

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: OPAL MANN

CONDUCTED BY: JENNIFER STOCK

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JULY 1, 1994
Jennifer: My name is Jennifer Stock. I’m interviewing Opal Mann at her home on July 1, 1994. Could you uh, speak your full name for the record?

Opal: Opal uh, Paulie Mann. [laugh] I mean, uh, Paulie was my maiden name. Uh.

Jennifer: Uh, when were you born?

Opal: November the 3rd, 19 and 9.

Jennifer: And are, were you, are you a widow? Were you married, uh?

Opal: I’ve been married, I was married three times. [laugh] But my hus—, uh, all my husbands are dead now. [laugh] But I divorced two of them.

Jennifer: Huh. Do you have any children?

Opal: No.

Jennifer: Oh. What kind of education level did you achieve?

Opal: Uh, I uh, graduated from Huntington High, and uh, then I had quite a few of those uh, uh, labor extension uh, classes. Uh, some at Morgantown and some here in Huntington. Uh, at Marshall and, and at the labor council and uh, I had quite a few of those classes. Some of them I took over ti—, two or three times. (Did you?) Course, I really enjoyed them.

Jennifer: You really enjoyed them? And what kinds of classes were those? What were they...?

Opal: Well, they were uh, like uh, sociology, uh, uh, labor history, uh, uh, how to write uh, uh, newsletters, uh, uh, political science, uh, uh...Let’s see, Professor Stewart up that, was over at Marshall uh, was one of my teachers at one time. (Uhhuh.) And uh, they’s one over there now that uh, a David goes to, uh, shoot, I can’t think of his name right now. But anyway, uh, uh, I, I, I had classes over there at Marshall, you know. They was short, short courses. (Mmm—hmm.) You know. (Mmm—hmm.) And they were not credit...(Yeah.)...courses. They were...of course, they gave us certificates to make us feel good. (Yeah.) [laugh] But I did learn a lot. (Yeah, yeah.) Uh—uh. (It’s good to keep uh, going to classes, I think.) And uh, I really enjoyed every bit of it. (That’s wonderful.) [laugh]

Jennifer: Um, all right, when, when did begin at Owens, did you say?
Opal: Uh, February of 1931.

Jennifer: And you retired in...?

Opal: February of 1972. But I, I quit one time. I had a nervous breakdown. (Oh dear.) Uh, I guess that’s what happened to me. The doctor didn’t call it that, but uh, anyway, uh I got to a point that every time I walked in that place I, I’d break down and start crying. I had been through a lot of ups and downs in my life, you know. (Sure.) And it seemed like that uh, uh, it just, uh, hit me all at once, you know. I mean, and uh, so I was outta there about four years. I had, uh, I, I receive a pension for 36 years.

Jennifer: Did you see a medical doctor or a psychiatrist?

Opal: Huh?

Jennifer: Did you see a psychiatrist at the time?

Opal: No, I was...I went to doctor uh, shoot, uh, he...just regular doctors. Doctor Gang was one of them and I, I’ve been to several. (Hm.) The fact is I’ve had uh, I’ve had a lot of uh, uh, operations and so on, you know. I’ve had female trouble and I’ve had gallbladder trouble. I’ve had lung surgery. (Yeah.) [laugh] My stomach looks like a road map. (laugh)

Jennifer: Well, goodness, 85 years old. That’s uh, to be expected, I think. Um, did, do you have any other, did you have any other family working at Owens at any time?

Opal: Well, my brother was a brick layer, and uh, every once in a while, uh, he would uh, uh, work down there building furnaces, but uh, no, uh, no one regularly. I only had one brother. And uh, uh, he, he worked down there a few times, uh, building furnaces. But other than that...Oh yeah, one of my husband’s uh, I married a, a fellow that worked there on, on the machine line. And uh, he was one of them I divorced. (laugh)

IN BACKGROUND: BELLS CHIMING

Jennifer: Well, okay, um, got that outta the way. I usually start off by asking uh, what made you get a job at Owens in the first place? What sent you there?

Opal: Desperation. [laugh] Uh, it was during the worst part of the Depression. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, uh, my mother and my brother and I were...I was, I was working in a little uh, store uh, uh, opening up the store at six o’clock in the morning and work ‘til one. And uh, that, just before that, I had, uh, I’d work ‘til one o’clock of a day, and then at uh, uh, when the uh, around five o’clock in the evening, I’d go to the bowling alley and work down there ‘til closing time. (Wow.) And I got uh, uh, sick, and I couldn’t take,
you know, uh,... (those hours.)... those hours, and uh, I finally had
to quit the bowling alley, but I was still working in that little
store. (Uh-huh.) Uh, it was just a little uh, just a little store,
you know. (Grocery store or...?) Uh-huh. A little grocery store. I
had to open up every morning. Up here on 16th Street. I mean, Hal
Greer Boulevard. (Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, uh, then the, the owner,
he'd come in and uh,... (Oh, at one?)... at one, and, and uh, and I,
I'd be free the rest of the day. (Mmm-hmm.) But I was only making
six dollars a week. (Hmm.) A dollar a day. [laugh] (My goodness! Oh
God!) And uh, uh, my mother, uh, meanwhile, was working uh, at a
restaurant making 50 cents a day. And we got most of our meals out
there. (Uh-huh.) We were really hard up, but uh, we were always
able to pay our rent and, and utilities and... (Mmm-hmm.)... and uh,
things like that, but uh, and I was never hungry.

Jennifer: How much was rent then? I mean, how much, how much was
your rent back then? If you're making six dollars...?

Opal: About 25 dollars a month.

Jennifer: So how did you, how did you hear about Owens? I mean,
what, what...?

Opal: Well, uh, uh, uh, a lady that uh, I knew when I was growing
up, you know, uh, came by our house and uh, she had got a job at
Owens. And uh, Mom ask her if uh, she thought she could get me a
job down there and uh, which she talked to her boss and uh, he
agreed to give me a job. And uh, back then uh, they had a, a little
place that you went through, you know, a ______ house as we called
it. Uh, and uh, uh, when, the way they did their hiring at that
time, you'd go in there and stand around and if they needed anyone,
you'd come out and get you, you know. And uh,... (So just stand
around in front of the gates, is that what you said?) You know,
you'd, uh, just, just inside that, that ______ house. (Uh-huh. Uh-
huh.) And uh, so uh, he told, uh, they told me to uh, come down
there at 11 o'clock at uh, I mean, before the 11 o'clock shift that
night. (Uh-huh.) And uh, uh, Frank uh, oh shoot, I can't think of
his name right now to save my soul. (Mmm.) But anyway, uh, he was
the night superintendent. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, uh, Mr. Sizemore had
told him to, to uh, hire me and he did. (Mmm-hmm.) And I went to
work on night shift of all things. And it was just like a
nightmare. [laugh] (Was it really? Tell me about that? What did you
do that first shift?) It was horrible. [laugh] I'll never forget it
as long as I live. [laugh] (Oh goodness! Tell me about it.) Well,
uh, this uh, they put me on a, uh, a, do you know what a laher is?
(Yes. I've learned.) Well, they put me on a laher. They had two
girls back on the side at a laher that was uh, supposed to be
selecting the ware, you know, I mean, putting, getting the bad ones
out. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, sitting them back down. There was a little
bottle about yea-high, I mean, about an inch high. (Mmm-hmm.) And
a little square bottle and uh, it had a, uh, it was a deodorant
bottle. (Huh.) Uh, called Dew. (Dew.) And uh, uh, you had to uh,
put them in a carton, lay them in the carton and then you had to, to take a strip of paper and every two bottles or three, I can't remember now just how many it was,... (Yeah.)...but anyway, I know we called it interlace. (Interlace.) Uh, you had to interlace, and then lay a strip across and then uh, put another row. And they put uh, me and another woman they just had hired uh, working down at the end of that laher packing those things. (Uh-huh. Uh-huh.) And I'm telling you, we had those little Dew bottles piled up all over that place. (Laugh) And I never will forget where we were working was down a little bit lower than uh, the lahers were up high. (Uh-huh.) And, and uh, but uh, the laher I was working on was a little bit lower than the others. There was different kinds of machines back then. There was IS and uh, lynch machines. (Wha-, wha-...) Lynch. (L-I-N-C-H?) Uh-huh. (L-Y-N-C-H?) I think that's the way you spell it. I never did see it written down. (Yeah.) But uh, uh, lynch machines and uh, and then they uh, on, on the lower end of the plant, was um, Owens machines. (Oh. Those great big...) Uh-huh. Those great big machines. (Yeah.) But these uh, uh, these uh, were what they called ___ machines. (Uh-huh. These were the newest ones right, at that time?) Huh? (Were those the newest ones at that time or...?) I don't know whether they were or not. But anyway uh, uh, we had, that girl and I had those Dew bottles piled all over that place. (Laugh) And the boss came around and he was trying to show us how to do it, you know. And he looked, he made it look so easy. (Yeah.) I could have killed him. (Laugh) [Laugh] (Yeah, sure.) And there was a woman working on a laher up, up a little bit higher than I was and she was uh, looking down there and, and just died laughing at us, you know. (Laugh) [Laugh] (Yeah.) It was just like a nightmare. (Yeah.) And uh, another time, uh, right at, not long after that, uh, uh, I, they put me on a laher by myself. And uh, it was a bigger bottle and I can't remember what, what kind of a bottle it uh, jar it was. It was a jar. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, they told me to look for brown spots. They didn't give us any training, you know. (Yeah.) I mean, it, they put us on there and told us "Look for brown spots." And, and uh, uh, I was just looking and looking and looking, you know, and them things was piling up and this little man walked up and he had on a suit and tie oh, you know, was real business-looking. (Yeah.) And he said, uh, I was just standing there just crying. And he said, "Little girl, what's the matter?" [Laugh] (Laugh) And I said, "They told me to look for brown spots and I don't know what a brown spot is." (Laugh) [Laugh] (Oh dear.) And come to find out, it was the plant manager. [Laugh] (Oh my goodness! Oh, that's wonderful.) So from then on, he always stopped by and talked to me, you know. (Did he?) And uh, uh, short, not too long after that they started uh, uh, you know, having classes and training people to what, what the different defects were. (Sure.) But when I first went to work...[Laugh] (Look for the brown spots. Oh! Did you find any? Were you finding any?) No, I didn't even know what they were. They were kind of a, an oily-looking uh, spot that, uh, probably was oil... (Uh-huh.)...in the glass. (Yeah.) Uh, but uh, anyway, uh, I'll tell you, it was really, really rough uh, you know, getting started. (Yeah. What was
it like seeing that factory for the first time? Being inside that factory?) Well, I had been in that factory when it was Boldt Glass. (Oh, did...Uh-huh.) Uh, but uh, uh, uh, my mother, my moth-, my father, after he moved us to Huntington when I was four years old, he took off, and uh, and uh, that was the last we saw of him until...I didn’t uh, didn’t know much about my dad until after uh, I was grown. Uh, he was uh, uh, and uh, my mother had a sixth grade education. We had a rough way to go, I’ll tell you. (Hmm.) And uh, so anyhow, um, uh,...(So the plant itself didn’t scare you or intimidate you?) Huh? (So the plant itself didn’t intimidate you that much?) Well, uh, I, I had seen ______, uh, uh, her boyfriend took us through the plant,...(Uh-huh.)...and uh, we saw how they was working, but uh, uh, they had men on the, on the lahers then, you know. (Ah, yeah.) They was all men in that plant at that time. (Right. Sure.) That I first went through there. And uh, but then uh, by the time I went there, uh, you know, everything had chang-, uh, had changed, you know, they was all women on the lahers, and, and the men was uh, we had packed the bottles in cartons and then shoved them over a chute. (Mmm-hmm.) And then they was guys down on the uh, the lower level that uh, loaded them on trailers. (Right.) And uh, took them out to the warehouse. (Right.) And uh, so anyway, uh, uh, I, but, I, that work, to me, was just brain destroying. (Yeah. You know.) It was monotonous. (Yeah.) Uh, and uh, it was, it was uh,...

Jennifer: What, what did you think about, what did you, what, what did you think about when you were doing that? Standing on your feet, just, this monotonous work? What went on in your head? Do you remember or recall? [laugh] (laugh)

Opal: I don’t remember, but I know, I know that I hated every day I was in that plant. I really did.

Jennifer: Til the very end?

Opal: Yeah. (Really?) The happiest day of my life was the day I walked out of there. Uh, now, uh, you know, I mean, I, I, I had, I had days that uh, that uh, I enjoyed uh, I enjoyed the friendships I made there. (Yeah.) Uh, let’s put it that way. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, it was uh, it had its good points and it had its bad points. But it was uh, something that I, I didn’t enjoy at all. I mean, the work. (Mmm-hmm. Right.) Uh, part. I guess I’m kind of lazy. (laugh– Well, nothing wrong with that.) Uh, but uh, but uh, you know, after I retired, I, I sold real estate for a while. Now I enjoyed that. (Oh, I bet. Yeah. That’s nice.) I really did. I, I enjoyed every bit of it. (Talking to people and going to houses.) Uh–huh. Yeah. (I bet that would be nice.) Uh, and I worked in stores before I went to work at Owens, and I enjoyed that, you know, not, not a great deal, but I enjoyed it more than I...[laugh] (Yeah. So what kept you working? Was it the money? Was it uh, good money?) Necessity. [laugh] (laugh– Necessity. Oh dear.)
Jennifer: How long did it, how long were you there before you started making like friendships with people on the, in the selecting department? Do you remember?

Opal: Before I met ______? (Before you started making friendships with people?) Oh, I wasn’t there very long ‘cause uh, uh, you know, uh, uh, too long, not too long after I went to work, uh, they put me on a little bit higher paying job uh, and what my job was I would uh, uh, you know, after I learned uh, the job, you know. Uh, I had to uh, uh, look at the ____ bad ware that the girls would throw away. They put them in, they would put the bad ware in uh, crates. (Uh-huh.) And I would go around and look, look at the ware to make sure they wasn’t throwing away good ware. (Right.) And uh, write down what defects that they were finding. (Uh-huh.) And uh,... (A little more interesting.) Uh-huh. Yeah, it was, and uh, uh, it was, it paid a little bit more. (Is that what they call re-sort?) Uh, yeah. (Yeah?) No it wasn’t re-sort. It was, what did they call it? Well, I don’t remember what, what the title was, but anyway, I made about two or three cents more...[laugh]...on the hour. See, I, when I first went to work, I was making 25 cents an hour. (Uh-huh.) And uh, it paid a little bit more. (Yeah, it did.) Uh, and uh, uh, my boss told me, he said the reason that he uh, put me on that job, he said it wasn’t because I was uh, the fastest worker they had or anything. It was simply because I got along with people. (Oh I see.) And uh, uh, that made me feel kind of good. (Yeah. How long did it take, how, how long were you there before they shifted you to that...?) Well, maybe a year or two. (A year or two.) You know. But uh, you know, they had girls that had been there, I mean, women, that had been there longer than that. And, but they didn’t move up. But uh, of course, we didn’t have a union back then. (No.) And uh, so anyway, uh, uh, I got sick and had to have surgery and uh, well, we were having a rough time back then. Uh, and uh,...(Is this still before the war?) Oh yes, uh-huh. I, I, and I had to have uh, uh, surgery. That’s why I never had any children was uh, and uh, so uh, uh, then uh, before I got uh, through uh, my surgery, my mother got sick. (Mmm-hmm.) And she was in the hospital. I was in the hospital 18 days when I had surgery. [laugh] (Yeah.) Then my mother was in there uh, uh, 14 weeks one year. (Wow.) And uh, I was the only one working. (inaudible)

Jennifer: Did you have insurance then or was that like out-of-pocket you paid?

Opal: They had, they paid us six dollars a week insurance when we was off sick. (Uh-huh.) And uh, when I got sick, uh, uh, and they took me up to St. Mary’s, those sisters up there wanted to, wanted me to sign that six dollars a week over to them. And I told them, I said, "No." I said, "I won’t sign it over to you. If you don’t want to take care of me uh,..." (If you don’t believe me that I’m gonna pay you.)..."send me home." (Yeah.) I said, "Because..." I said, "My mother and brother has to eat while I’m sick." (Yeah. Yeah.) And uh, so... (Wow.) We paid off those hospital bills by
paying...[cough]...the hospital a dollar and the doctor a dollar and...[laugh] The sisters jumped on me one time 'cause I wasn't paying more, but it was 'cause I couldn't. (Yeah. Yeah.) Uh, and uh, so anyway um, uh, I told uh, the sister, I said, "I paid you and I pay the doctor the same." And uh, she said, "Well, you're supposed to pay us first." And I said, "He took care of me the same as you did." (Yep.) And uh, so anyway, sooner, uh, later on, my brother uh, was able to go to work up there and help. Uh, he was a brick layer. And he, he finally got some work up there to help work some of that doctor bill off uh, uh, for the hospital. But man, I tell you, I was up to my eyeballs. (Mmm. I bet. I bet.) I never will forget they was one of the bosses that I had that loved to talk dirty to me. (laugh) And I, I...(Oh dear.)...I, I had been used to that. (Mmm. You had or you hadn't?) Hadn't. (Hadh. Yeah, sure.) Uh, and uh, oh, it used to just embarrass me to death, and I, you know, I've thought about that woman, uh, that Hill woman, when she was talking about uh,... (Clarence Thomas?)...Clarence...(Mmm-hmm.)...Thomas. I thought...I remembered all that. And it, it, you know, it can't uh, it was awful. Uh, I had to stand there and take it because I was scared to death to sass him or anything. Afraid...(Right.)...Afraid I'd lose my job. And I was desperate, you know. We, we were, you know. (Sure. Sure.) Everybody was having a hard time back then, you know. (Yeah, sure. And a job at Owens was nothing to be uh...) Uh-huh. Yeah, it was, it paid better than, than most other places. And uh, so you just, you, you just stood there and took it. Whatever they dished out. [laugh] (Was he uh, like a little boss or a big boss or...?) Well, he was a, what they call a crew leader. (A crew leader.) Mmm-hmm. (How long did that go on?) Oh I don't, it didn't last too long, you know, but uh, it was just the embarrassment.

Jennifer: [inaudible]

Opal: I never will forget how embarrassed I would get, you know. (Yeah.) And uh, I had been married when I, uh, see, I got married when I was 17. And uh, uh, my husband and I separated in two years. [laugh] And uh,... (Oh goodness!)...so uh, uh, you'd think that it wouldn't embarrass so much but he would, you know, I remember one time when we were going on a trip with his sister and her husband. Uh,...(Your husband or...?)...My husband and, and, and his sister and her husband. (Uh-huh.) And Red was, he was saying so-, some kind of smutty little things, you know. And uh, my husband called him down for it because, you know, he, he, he knew how...(It bothered you.)...how embarrassed I, it, it made me, you know. And uh, of course, now, man, I, I cuss like a sailor. [laugh] (laugh) And you couldn't embarrass me with anything, I don't think. After all those years at, at...(Certainly. Certainly.) But uh, I never will forget how...(That's hard. That's hard.) Mmm-hmm. (That's real hard. I don't know.) But uh, uh,...

Jennifer: Did you see, I've heard that some women were hired down there because of their looks, because of uh, because men wanted
them, that they selected like prettier women to work.

Opal: Well, they might have, I don't know. But uh, uh, after, not too long after I went to work there, they did set up some rules, you know, to go by. You had to have uh, a high school education and I don't know why because that's stupid work. [laugh] (Yeah. You needn't know how to read to do that. Huh?) Uh, but anyway, uh, uh, uh, they uh, uh, they had, uh, rules, you know. (Mmm-hmm.) Of course, you know, uh, I think any place that uh, if you knew somebody that, a boss or something, why you might could get in. I don't know, I mean, I never was much aware of that. But some, uh, but uh, a lot of the women that, that uh, was pretty and all, they got the better jobs, you know. I mean, easier jobs. (Yeah, yeah.) Uh, and uh... (Easier on them as a whole too probably.) I never was the boss' favorite. [laugh] (laugh) (Well, uh, sounds like a pretty uh, uh, difficult situation to be in. I mean, you know, like you said. So...) But uh, I know, uh, Louie Pike was my boss for years and uh, Louie and I, we, we would go 'round and 'round every time you t-, turned around. (Oh really? I've heard a lot about Louie.) And I was, I was uh, uh, back-up grievance girl and uh, the grievance girl was off about half the time, and I, uh, I uh, uh, I never will forget, Louie called me in the office and he said, "Now Opal," he said, uh, uh, "You know, Ann and I, we get along fine." And I said, and he said, "And I hope you and I can get along." I said, "Louie," I said, "There's only uh, one thing about it." I said, "As long as you treat the girls right," I said, "I'll get along with you." (Yeah, right.) And uh, I never will forget the first time I tangled with him. [laugh] (laugh) Oh Lord. That was uh, I was uh, they used to put me on uh, uh, quality inspection. (Mmm-hmm.) Uh, and uh, then I'd work it for a while and uh, and then they'd take me off and put a man on that had been there about a year, you know. So uh, uh, I finally got the quality reading, you know, but they wouldn't allow me to bid on it. It was a higher paid job, you know. (Sure.) And uh, so uh, uh, I happened to be working on quality uh, and uh, uh, at that time and, and uh, they was uh, on A-1 laher, they was two girls working on there. (Mmm-hmm.) And their, their job was running real bad, and it was hard to handle, you know. I mean. (Lots of bad ware or...) Yeah, lots of bad ware. And it was the kind of defects that were hard to see. (Mmm.) And uh, they was two girls on the other laher next to them that their job was easy. (Mmm.) And uh, so uh, the boss on this job on, on the lahers, crew leader told them to uh, swing, you know, between the lahers, you know, to uh, for those girls to take off more ware on that other laher. (Right.) And let one of the girls go over and help them out occasionally. (Right.) And so, uh, the crew leader was, he couldn't talk plain. And uh, he uh, he uh, they was uh, one of those girls was standing there talking to her boyfriend all day long. I mean, off and on, you know. (inaudible) And they never, not one time, and I had to go back between those lahers uh, to cut the ware, you know. The-, they had uh, light spots in the sides of them. (Oh, right.) And I had to go back between the lahers to cut the ware to check and make sure they were all right. And uh,
I couldn’t work ______, I couldn’t help but to see what’s going on. And not only that, but the guy came down there and called my attention to it. (Really.) He says, "I told them to swing over there and they’re not doing it." [laugh] (Yeah.) And uh, so anyhow, the next day when I uh, went to work, uh, one of the women off of the A-1 uh, told me, said, "Look at that uh, bonus sheet." And I looked and they had charged up uh, uh, about two or three hours of the other laher’s time to, to A-1. (Uh-huh.) And uh, that wasn’t right because they were working on bonus, you know. (Uh-huh.) And uh, so I, I, I jumped on the crew leader and he said, "Look, ______ they made a 150 percent bonus the way it was." I said, "Well, they earned it." (Yeah.) I said, "They were the ones that earned it." Uh, I said, "You called my attention to, to the fact that those girls weren’t swinging over there." (Yeah.) And I said, "They, uh, the girls on A-1 earned that bonus if they made 200 percent." (Right. Right.) And uh, so uh, uh, I went and jumped on Louie. (Yeah.) And uh, Louie, he said, "How did you know they didn’t swing over there?" I said, "I couldn’t help but see it. It was right in front of my eyes." (Right.) He said, "If you’d been doing your job, you wouldn’t have seen it." And I said, I said, "Not only that but..." I can’t think of the guy’s name. As well as I know him, I can see him. (Yeah, yeah.) Anyway, I said, "He even called my attention to it." (Yeah.) And uh, so Louie uh, wasn’t satisfied. I went on back and I, I, I said, "Well, you’re gonna pay those girls." I said, "You’re gonna correct this." And he said, uh, he came down, he jumped on me, you know. And he, uh, uh, uh, again about it. If I had a been paying attention to my own job, I wouldn’t have seen it, you know. And uh, so I just finally, I, I, I, I just went to pieces. (Mmm.) And I, I had to go home. (Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.) And I walked up to him in the, in the factory...[laugh]...and one of the guys from machine line was standing there with him and uh, ______, and I walked up to Louie and shook my finger in his face and I said, "Louie," I said, "you’ve got me so upset that I’m gonna have to go home." (Yeah.) But I said, "I’m gonna tell you something. When I come back, I’m gonna have a grievance written up, and you’re gonna pay those girls." And...[laugh]...(inaudible)...when I came back the next day, those two girls there on that A-1 signed that grievance and uh, and when it came before the uh, supervisor, uh, uh, the supervisor looked at Louie and says, "What are you gonna do about this grievance, Louie?" He says, "Pay the girls." [laugh] (So he, he gave into you?) He just...(inaudible)...he was just trying to run a buff on me.

Jennifer: Yes, yes he was. So let me, let me, let me go through this to make sure I understand this. The two girls that were working the really difficult job were and then they were...(They were on A-1)...Right, and the other girls were being told to swing over there and help them, but they didn’t? (They didn’t, uh-huh.) They, but they were getting compensated as if they did? (Yeah, uh-huh.) And the two girls that worked hard weren’t getting enough for both of them. (Uh-huh. They wasn’t getting as much as they earned.)
Right. All right. Well, that's, yeah, that, so that, was that the only kind of procedure that you had, that kind of grievance procedure? Was that the only form of like uh, I mean, did that handle everything? Did all grievances go through this kind of procedure?

Opal: Yeah, you had to uh, file a grievance. You had to write it up, you know. And uh, uh, file it and uh, give to the boss and, and give it to the supervisor. And...

Jennifer: Could you have, could you have written a grievance, filed a grievance about you were talking earlier about the man that uh, kept talking to you and harassing you?

Opal: No, you see, back, back, when that, when that went on, we didn't have a union. (Uh-huh.) You see, uh, uh, the only union that was in that plant when I first went to work there was the uh, mold makers. (The mold makers.) Uh, and they were uh, uh, they were the only ones that was organized. Well, then later on, the machine mine, uh, which was, was skilled workers, you know, these were skilled workers,...(Right.)...uh, they organized...(Mmm-hmm.)...and uh, uh, the machine mine. And then uh, uh, they uh, uh, during the war, uh, the, they started organizing the uh, uh, the rest of the plant. (Mmm-hmm.) The uh, uh, maintenance uh, uh, selecting and maintenance. And uh, the rest of the plant uh, organized. The fact is I helped organize when, when they were organizing. Uh, the guy back on the machine line that was a friend of mine uh, ours, you know,...(Mmm-hmm.)...uh, came down and asked me if I would talk to the girls, you know, they was gonna have a union election. (Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, the uh, they had uh, uh, the mold makers was one international union. (Mmm-hmm.) And then when they organized the machine line, it was AFL-CIO. (Mmm. Mmm-hmm.) I mean, it was AFL. (AFL, right.) Uh-huh, but uh, uh, that was before the, the AFL-CI, and CIO or-, uh, merged. (Merged. Right.) And uh, so uh, uh, Homer came down talked to me, and uh, he was one of their union officials back on machine line. (Uh-huh.) And he asked me if I would talk to the girls and ask them to vote for the AFL instead of the CIO. (Hmm.) And he didn’t have to talk to me very much about it because, you know, I had been uh, uh, uh, noticing that the CIO uh, uh, was out on war strikes and everything than the AFL. (Uh-huh.) And of course, I was a little uh, timid about, about strikes and things like that. [laugh] (Yeah. Yeah.) Uh, but uh, I, I remember the first, first uh, uh, thing that ever happened about a union there. Uh, Owens started uh, clubs, you know, organizing clubs in the, in the plant...(Mmm-hmm.)...and they would uh, spend money, you know, they built that club room down there, and uh, uh, they would have parties uh, uh, you know, give the clubs a little bit of money along, you know. In other words, they was trying to keep the people happy...(Right.)...without a union. (Right. I see.) Uh, but uh, uh, and we enjoyed it. [laugh] (Yep. Yeah. You ran with it. You all had a lot stuff.) And uh, we had uh, some real _____,
nice activities and they had uh, ball teams uh, ball, ball players. They hired just to play ball. (Yeah. I heard that.) And uh, so uh, uh, that was all, uh, to try to keep the people satisfied to keep them out of the union probably i-, in my opinion. (Mmm-hmm.) Uh, and uh, uh, but anyway, I know I, I really, thoroughly enjoyed it because, you know, working the shift work we did, it was awfully hard to keep up with the friends that you had before you went to work there. (inaudible) Uh, ‘cause, you know, you’d work all kinds of crazy, I mean, three ’til eleven, seven to three,...(Rotating, just whatever week.) Uh-huh. (Yeah, sure.) And uh, so uh, uh, it uh, it made the people uh, uh, you’d form friendships in there that, that uh, lasted. (Keep you tied in. Right, right.) But uh, anyway uh, when uh, when they uh, I, I did everything I could to, to get the AFL, AFL uh, in there, and uh, I know the night that uh, that they had, after they had the election and the union had won, we uh, the, uh, international man from uh, our union and uh, several of us went over in _____ to a nightclub over there. He took us out, treated us. (Yeah. Sure, sure.) [laugh]

Jennifer: So you’re talking about, okay, you were organized by the international glass blowers union?

Opal: Glass uh, glass bottle blowers association. It was then. (Sorry. All right.) And uh,...(And there was still a debate as to whether you were going to go AFL or CIO at that point?) But, yeah, and uh, but uh, uh, the AFL won. (Mmm-hmm.) You know. (Mmm-hmm.) It was uh, see, uh, glass bottle blowers was associated with the, with the AFL. (Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.) And uh, the CIO was uh, uh, like the automobile workers...(Hmm. Heavy machinery, heavy industry. And the AFL was for _____ right? More traditional crafts, more traditional trades?) Well, they originally were, uh, mostly craft workers, but uh, uh, later on, they organized uh, you know, uh,...(Sure.)...unskilled workers, the same, you know. (Right, right.)Because I’d say that it uh, our jobs at Owens, that we had to work so many years there before we got, got a chance to bid on anything else...[laugh]...was unskilled workers. (Yeah. Sure, sure, sure. But you were getting paid, you know, money that, you know, getting paid good money.) Yeah.

Jennifer: So who, who led the, the people, who led the workers in the direction of having two different locals for the men and the women? What, do, do you recall how that decision got made to organize the women and the men separately?

Opal: No, I really don’t uh, know how, how it came to uh, to be that way. (Hmm. Mmm-hmm.) But really, it was better.

Jennifer: Yeah? You think so, and what’s, what’s your reason for that?

Opal: Well, uh, my reason for it is that when the men took over, I mean, when, when they merged the two locals uh, when they merged
the two locals uh, uh, the men and the women, they always had a
man, and the damned, stupid women would vote for them men. (Yeah.)
[laugh] (Yeah.) They'd have a man, uh, they was never another woman
uh, president of the union after, after they merged. Women are,
women are so stupid. (laugh) I swear they are. (Um...) And I’m a
woman, but I, I still say that.

Jennifer: So if a separate female union like...(Huh?)...the, the
separate female local provided like a space where women could like
get positions of leadership and such. But when it merged, they lost
those opportunities?

Opal: Well, uh, they, they had to depend on the men to uh, uh, you
know, to fight for them and uh, I don’t know how much the men
fought for them. But that, they, they didn’t merge until after I
left. (Mmm-hmm. Yeah.) So I don’t know how they fared, but uh, you
know, even after I sued the company, you know, and won the suit,
uh, they still kept trying to get by with uh, you know, stopping,
uh, keep, keeping women from different jobs, you know. (Yeah.) Uh,
but uh, uh, they was two or three women that uh, several women
that, that would back me, you know, or they would uh, fight on
their own, you know. They’d file charges too, you know, after I
did. (Mmm-hmm.) I mean, after I got...(Mmm-hmm. So you had some
help?)...Uh-huh. Later on, I did, but I also had...[laugh]...while
I was suing the company, uh, they was uh, two girls that I know of
was taking a petition to uh, for me to stop the suit. (A petition?)
A petition. Yeah. And I was working on the laher with those girls,
and they were treating me like, ooooh. (Ooh brother.) They were
giving me a rough time. (I bet.) Uh, and uh, so uh, I, I found out
about it, and uh, uh, and when I found out about it, I walked up to
them, and I said, "I hear you all are taking a petition for me to
stop that suit." I said, "If every damn woman in here signs that
uh, petition," I said, "I’m going through with it." I said, "You
can’t stop me." (Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.) And...(What’d they say to
that?)...Well, I never heard any more about the petition. [laugh]

Jennifer: So how did this process um, begin? When did you first
begin to think, when were you first, you know, kind of uh, uh,
understand what was going on in terms of uh, what you could do? In
terms of a lawsuit? (Well...) When did you first start to think
about it?

Opal: ...uh, I’ll tell you, my, my sister-in-law was president of
the union at the time. (Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, she’s the one that got
me uh, more or less involved in uh, a lot of the uh, union
activities. (What, what’s her name? What was her name?) Her name
was Louise Allman. (A-L-L-M-A-N?) Mmm-hmm. Uh, but uh, uh, she um,
uh, she had been away on a trip uh, you know, for the union. (Mmm–
hmm.) And when she came back, uh, uh, we were working real closely
together. That was, you know, when I was still back there, I was
back at grievance girl and...(Mmm-hmm.)...was real active in the
union at the time. And uh, I think, I don’t know whether I was
treasurer or something. [inaudible] I held some kind of an office besides being back-up grievance...(Uh-huh.)...on the shift, and uh, uh, uh, but anyway, uh, I think I was chairman of the business committee is what, what it was. (Mmm–hmm.) And uh, so anyway, uh, Louise came back from this trip, and that’s when that law had gone into effect, you know, that uh, this law against discrimination against uh, sex... (Uh-huh.)...uh, uh, national, uh, origins and I don’t know. (Mmm. Yes. And do you know what year that was?)

that law ______...(Yeah.)...but uh, you know what I’m trying to say. (Yeah.) It’s uh, that’s when that law went into effect, and we had, before that we had filed charges, I mean, filed grievances and filed grievances, and they’d gone to arbitration and the arbitrator would rule against us every time. (inaudible.) And uh, so Louise came and uh, we were sitting down there in uh, locker room and uh, she was telling us about that law and uh, uh, we said that, that we believed that uh, that that might be the way to go, you know. (Yeah, take advantage of that.) So I said, "Well," I said, "I’ve got the quality rating." I said, "I’d be ideal to do it." (And why is that? And why would that be? I don’t, I don’t understand that.) Well, it was a little bit higher paying job. (Oh, I see.) Mmm–hmm. Uh–huh. (All right.) And they had uh,...

END OF SIDE ONE

Jennifer: ...volunteered basically, for the...

Opal: Oh yeah. Uh, uh, and uh, see, uh, it hadn’t been very long before that that I had, they had put me on quality for uh, to, to train, help train some guy. (Yeah. To take over a position higher than yours eventually.) And it, and it hadn’t been very long before that til [inaudible] I had helped train that guy. And then they took me off and put him on. (Mmm–hmm.) And I know, uh, we got a space on the laher, and I was sweeping and one of them little smart, smart guys...[laugh]...uh, said to me, said, "Well, they finally found something that you could do." (Hmm.) He was a lah--, uh, laher tenant. (Mmm–hmm. Uh–huh.) Uh, and uh, God, it burned me up. (inaudible) Uh, and so, so anyway, uh, it wa--, wasn’t too long after that til that law went into effect and, and I was just all _____ for fighting it, you know. (Yeah. You had your own motives is what you’re saying?) Uh–huh. (You weren’t doing it for the union?) But you know, there was women there that had years more seniority than I did, you know, that uh, uh, that I, uh, you see, I, my, my seniority was broken, you know. (Uh–huh.) Because I quit that one time. And uh, they was [inaudible] some women there that had years on, ahead of me. (Yeah.) But uh, anyway, um, I filed a grievance and uh, and it uh, went the same way the others did, you know. They...(What...)...uh,...(What was the, the specific reasons
about?) Well, I filed a grievance. That was the first procedure I did when I started the suit. (Uh-huh.) When I started this. (Okay.) I filed the grievance. I went through the grievance procedure. (Uh-huh.) And uh, they ruled against me. So I, I called Ken Heckler uh, and uh, uh, and uh, ask him how to get in touch with the uh, equal opp-, opportunities commission in Washington. And uh, so uh, uh, Ken uh, put me in touch with them, and uh, they sent uh, uh, an investigator down. And it was a woman, bless her heart. (Bless her heart.) And uh, so meanwhile, uh, the uh, union had a, our union had an election and uh, my sister-in-law lost, lost the election. (Mmm.) Elected another woman. And uh, Jane McComas. (Jane McComas? All right.) And uh, so anyway uh, but I invited, we met down uh, I, I invited quite a few uh, women to meet with, with the uh, uh, investigator and uh, or what, I forget what they called her. Anyway, she was a lawyer. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, uh, all of us put our two cents worth in, you know. (Yeah, sure.) Uh, uh, our complaints, and uh, so uh, of course, the suit was, was my, my suit, you know, but I let everyone of them have a say, say in it, you know. (Sure, sure.) Uh, that was, uh, uh, they was Ann Fowler and, and uh, my sister-in-law and, and I, the new president of the union and uh, I think I was the vice president of the union at that time. (Wow.) And uh, uh, I forget, they was several others, but I, I forget uh, who all was there. But all of them ha-, uh, uh, you know, chimed in, you know. (Yeah.) And, and told her. (Sure.) Told her what was going on. (Sure. Contributed. Yes.) So anyway, uh,...

Jennifer: Now did the plant, did the management know you were going through all these channels? I mean, was there ever a point when they found out everything that was going on? Did you carry out any of this um, secretly, quietly or was this open?

Opal: No way, I, I wasn't, I wasn't uh, being quiet about it. (laugh) Uh, uh, anyway, uh, they had uh, they, they sent uh, I, I tried to call her. She was an investigator, but they sent conciliators in here, you know, to try to get the com-. They sent people in here from Toledo and everywhere, you know, to try to get the two unions to agree, you know. (Mmm-hmm.) Uh, I mean, uh, unions to agree and so on, and they couldn't get, get any agreement uh, with the company and the union, so uh, uh, finally they sent me a letter from uh, the office of e-, equal opportunity that um, uh, it seemed that we couldn't get, get a concilia-, you know, any concilia-,...(Conciliatory action, yeah.) And, and uh, so they said that uh, I would have to sue through the uh, federal court. And it would, at no charge to me, and uh, no cost. (At no charge to you?) Uh-huh. (They were gonna foot the bill?) No cost. (The EOE was gonna foot the bill?) Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh, no cost to me and uh, and that the company couldn't do anything to uh, uh, you know, with me. They couldn't fire me or anything for it. (Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm. You were protected.) Uh-huh. So you know, it scared me, you know. (Whew. Yeah.) Uh, to think about having to go to federal court. (Yeah.) And Judge Christie was the judge, you know, here in Huntington. He was the federal judge. (Oh.) And uh, I went down to
Judge Christie's office after I, I thought about it for several
days before I went, but I, I, I was determined, you know. (Yeah.
Yes. You were in it. —laugh.) So I went down, I went down, and you
know that son-of-a-gun, that's a polite name for him. (Yes.)
[laugh] (Yes. What did he say to you?) He said, "Young lady," he
says, he says uh, "You're not a, a young lady anymore." He said,
uh, "Aren't you afraid of losing your job?" A judge. It's a man's
world. (Oh, it sure is.) Uh... (It sure is.) And he was trying to
scare me. (Yes he was.) And I went to uh, I told him, I said,
"Well, judge," I said, "It's like this." I said, "I've had someone
to, I've had to take care of all my life up until now." (Yeah.) And
I said, "There's nobody gonna starve if I lose my job except me."
(Yeah.) And I said, "This is one thing I'm willing to starve for.
And uh, so he saw I was determined, and uh, he said, "Well, do you
know any lawyers?" And I, I said, "Well, I don't know." I said,
"Uh, I'll think about it." He said, "Well," he said, "uh, you pick
you out a lawyer and I'll appoint him." And uh, so I went over and
talked to Lafe _____ uh, he was, he had done some work for the
union. (Uh-huh. What was his first name?) Lafe ____. (Lafe?)
take, wouldn't touch it. (Huh.) And uh, so my brother, meanwhile,
had a drinking buddy, uh, that was a lawyer. Uh, and uh, Ken
Fisher, uh, and uh, Ken had been to my house and everything. And I,
when Lafe turned it down, I hated to ask uh, uh, uh, Ken. (Mmm-
mmm.) But I thought well, uh, he can uh, he can turn me down if he
wants to, you know. (Sure, yeah.) So I, I, I called him and I said,
"Ken," I said, "I've got a, a case against Owens–Illinois for
discrimination." And I said, "One lawyer's already turned me down."
I said, "I-, if you want to turn me down, now I'm not gonna be mad
at you." (laugh—Yeah.) And uh, he said, "I'd be delighted to take
it." (Cool.) So uh, Ken uh, was my lawyer, and bless his heart, uh,
he told me one time, he said, "Opal," he said, "you know, we do
do things in our life time that we are ashamed of, and we do things
that we are proud of." And he said, "The proudest thing I've ever
done was to take your ____ case." (That's great.) He said, uh,
that we would be in law books from now on. (Yeah.) We, I know that
we were the first suit that was ever filed in this area. I don't
know but what it was the first suit that was ever filed. (It was
certainly one of the very first, if not the very first.) Uh, I'll
tell, uh, uh, one of the men that came in from Washington, you
know, like I said, they just kept trying to get by with stuff, you
know. (Yeah.) Uh, and uh, uh, I know Marg-, uh, Margaret Daly and
uh, uh, two or three of them had uh, filed charg-, uh, grievances
and charges and things... (Mmm-hmm.)...til they uh, finally decided
that they wasn't gonna get by. And uh, so anyway they uh, uh, uh,
this man came in from Washington and they sent for me to come up in
the office. (Mmm-hmm.) And I thought what have I done now? (Oh
goodness. Yeah. It must have been a scary time working there then.)
And uh, here it was this guy from uh, o-, office of equal
opportunity. He said, uh, "I wanted to meet you." I, he said, "I,
I, I, I, I told them that I wanted to talk to you." He said, "You
know," he said, uh, "I, I am so proud to meet you." He said,
"Because we’ve settled cases all over this country..." (Yeah.) "...with the precedents set by your suit." (Yeah.) He said, uh, he said, "Your name was the first name that I heard when I went to work for the office of equal opportunity." (Wow. Wow. Wow. That must make you feel so good.) And uh, ... (That’s wonderful.) ... so uh, you know, I, I was happy, you know, that, that I made a difference. (Yeah, yeah.) Fact is, ... [laugh] ... I’ve got, I’ve got a whole lot of junk over there to prove it. [laugh] (Oh, you sure do, don’t you? Lots of ______.) [laugh] (laugh)

Jennifer: So um, so anyway, so I, I like the way you were telling me about it, uh, this narrative. So uh, Ken Fisher takes your case, agrees to be your lawyer, uh, and then what? So then you’re in court, right?

Opal: Yeah, uh, well, uh, uh, there wasn’t anything to it after it went to court. (Really?) Uh-huh. (It wasn’t in litigation hardly at all?) No. (It just...) It just uh, after it went, aft—, after it went to the judge. (And what ______?) Judge Christie. (And, and he...) Uh, they, uh, it was settled right, right now after the, after it got the judge uh, after the judge so they couldn’t talk me out of it. [laugh] (laugh— ______ way to get around it, huh?) [laugh] (Trying to strong arm you. That’s interesting. So it just went like that. It was a proving case, yeah.) Mmm-hmm. But we had, I don’t know how many meetings, you know, uh... (Hmm.) ... to try, with the, with the big, big shots from uh, Toledo and, and uh, and uh, the union, all the union officers and uh, people uh, you know, meeting. But they, they nev—, we never could get a settle peaceably so uh, uh, it had to go to court. But when it did get to court, why it was over in no time flat. I didn’t even have to testify. (Really?) Uh-huh.

Jennifer: Really? Um, okay, let me, let me back track a little bit. What was the original grievance that you, that, that you filed that led into... wa—, was it about the way you...

Opal: They wouldn’t give women the right to bid on higher paid jobs. (All right.) They just kep—, we, we couldn’t bid on anything uh, uh, the only job we could work on was uh, packing those bottles. [laugh]

Jennifer: [laugh] And how did they justify that? Did they, did they try to justify that? Did they try to give you reasons why?

Opal: No, I tell you uh, one of the times that we filed a grievance uh, uh, you know, about the uh, uh, bidding on higher paid jobs uh, uh, the uh, uh, selecting supervisor said, uh, "You women," he said, "we couldn’t, we couldn’t do without you." He said, uh, "But we’re not gonna give up our right to uh, uh, to s—, to work you where we want to." (Yeah.) I showed him. [laugh] (laugh)
Jennifer: You sure did, you sure did. [laugh] Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness. I’ve heard things about the, the management would say things like um, we need the women in the selecting department because of their dexterity and men don’t have the dexterity that women do for the selecting jobs. And that’s why men work over here and women work over there. I mean, uh, I’ve heard some interesting stories about that. It must have just really been hard to hear. [laugh] You know. Just total nonsense. Um, okay, and so what years was this? Wha--, wha--...

Opal: It was in the 60s, but I, I swear I’ve, I, I, I don’t think I even have my uh, uh, copy of the uh, ruling. (Mmm.) Because they have uh, several of the women have uh, used my case, you know, uh, to uh, settle with the, the company. And I, I, I don’t know whether the last one I let have a copy of my uh, uh, suit, whether she ever gave it back to me. (Huh.) But uh, you know, if anybody knew where to look in the law books...(Yeah.)...they could find uh,...(A copy of it.)...a copy of it. I, I don’t uh, I don’t have a copy of it I don’t think. (Um,...) And I can’t remember what year it was. But it was r--, they hadn’t e--, they didn’t even have an office completely set up when I filed charges.

Jennifer: Really? So that was real, real quick. Jumped on it. Well, that’s, that’s exactly what it was there for. Um, how were the changes implemented? How were the chan--, how did, how did they start making up for lost time? I mean, what did, what was it like afterwards?

Opal: Uh, I think they was one or two women got some back pay, but uh, I, I didn’t get anything out of it, you know. (Yeah.) I just uh, all I was fighting for was the right to, to bid on a job, you know. (Sure.) Uh, and uh, I remember one time, [laugh] uh, this friend of mine, Ruth, uh, uh, Ruth Black, she was a fighter too. And uh, uh, Ruth asked me if I would uh, set up a meeting with the plant manager. See, uh, Jane, uh, the president of our union that beat my sister-in-law,...(Mmm-hmm.)...she was company, uh, and fact is I’ve got a tape over there where one of the women went to arbitration with her, and she was telling all about going out uh, about uh, Jane going out with the, with the, the uh, plant managers [inaudible]. (laugh) [laugh] And all this stuff, you know. (Uh-huh. Uh-huh.) And she, she taped this all. She’s dead now, but uh, I’ve got that tape over there. Uh, and uh, uh, she uh, uh, but uh, uh, Jane would agree with the company ev--, every time, you know. But I was the vice president of the union. (Mmm-hmm.) And I sat, had to sit in, I sat in on all the meetings. (Mmm-hmm.) So uh, I, I remember this one time, uh, uh, Ruth uh, asked me to set up a meeting with uh, the plant manager because uh, one, the, the uh, selecting uh, supervisors had uh, said that he wasn’t gonna post uh, one of the jobs uh, that uh, I forget what they called that job now. But it was a job that, keeping track of the amount of ware that was uh, uh, produced and so on. (Inventory.) And uh, uh, he wasn’t gonna post that job anymore and uh, so uh, sh--, she uh,
asked me to set up a meeting with the plant manager. So I did. (Yeah.) Uh, pla-, that plant manager happened to like me. (Oh, huh.) You know, I mean, I wasn’t dating him or anything like that. (No, no.) It wasn’t anything like that. But, but he seemed like he, he, he...(You could get along with him.)...he was, he was a nice guy. (Mmm–hmm.) And uh, so I called him and uh, I made an appointment and Ruth and I went in. And so boy, the minute we hit the door, she started laying it out to him. [laugh] (Oh really?) And uh, I didn’t have to say a word. [laugh] (laugh) And he said, "Now quiet down." He said, "I, I’m gonna get these guys in here." (Yeah.) He got Sandy and uh, and uh, a other guy that was concerned. I, I can’t remember what his name was, but I, I can see him, you know. (Yeah, sure.) Uh, but anyway, he got them both in there and uh, that was uh, bosses. And uh, she lit in on them. (Hmm.) And so one, this one that was over, over the shipping and the selecting both, you know, he jumps up and he says, "I don’t have to sit here and listen to this stuff." And uh, the plant manager pointed his finger at him and he says, "You sit down there." He said, he said, uh, "You will listen to it or you’ll go out the door." He said, "Ten years ago, we wouldn’t have dreamed that we would have women back on the machine line sweeping." (Yeah.) "Or uh, working on, in any of these jobs that they’re working on now." But he says, "It’s the law and you’re going to abide by the law or you’re gonna leave here." (Wonderful.)

IN BACKGROUND: BELLS CHIMING

Jennifer: Good to hear probably.

Opal: And uh,...(Yeah.)...so I had a lot of admiration for him. (Yeah that was a good plant manager. laugh) [laugh] Yeah. And uh, so uh, uh, when we left that day, left his office, uh, uh, that guy walked down to the plant with me, he says, "Well, from here on out," he says, "I’m gonna know I’m in the right before I make a move...(Yeah.)...because you’re gonna keep on 'til you get me fired." [laugh] (laugh—Oh goodness.) [cough]

Jennifer: So wha-, what do you think, I mean, there were so many women that uh, uh, di-, m-, I mean, didn’t help, and like you said, petitions and voting for men continuously. What, what, what do you think made you different? Why do you think you were different from those women?

Opal: Well, I, I suppose, uh, I’ll tell you why I believe. You know, uh, I think that down deep, my resentment of my father walking off and leaving us...(Mmm–hmm.)...and my mother with a sixth grade education trying to raise us uh, and we, you know, I, I, I think that uh, that that probably had a lot to do with my uh, uh, feeling about men, you know. (inaudible) Uh, I remember one of the guys uh, uh, that was president of the union uh, at the time of the men's union. Uh, when we were having those uh, uh, conciliators in. (Mmm–hmm.) He said, uh, "I've got a family to keep." (Mmm.) I
said, excuse my language, but I said, "Who in the hell do you think keeps these uh, children where these men walk off and leave their wives to take care of them by theirself?" (Yeah.) I said, "Who takes care of them?" (Yeah.) I said, "These women need their jobs the same as you do." (Certainly. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. That’s true. Absolutely true.) And you know, he lost his ____ before it was over with. [laugh] (Laugh) I mean, not, not anyway, he went on up into management, you know. (Oh.) He got, he got to be a big shot down there. (Yeah.) And then he got in trouble, and uh, I heard some of those women talking about uh, how sorry they was for uh, John Perry. And I thought, sorry for John Perry, I not, I wasn’t a darned bit sorry for him. (Laugh) I wasn’t sorry for any of those men down there because boy, the w--, I’ll tell you, they really tried to give me a rough time.

Jennifer: Yeah. So tell me about that. What kind of uh, what kind of harassment did you get because of your actions?

Opal: One time there um, there was a job they called chief quality inspector. Uh, and it was uh, you know, quality inspector. It was uh, uh, a higher paid job. And then chief quality inspector was a higher paid job yet. And uh, so I never did see those chief quality inspectors a doing any work that I didn’t think a woman could do. (Right.) Uh, now I, I, I believe this, I believe that uh, you oughta be able to do every phase of a job that you are bidding on before you bid on it. (Yeah, sure.) Uh, I don’t feel like that a woman should uh, if a job’s heavy and she has to lift something too heavy, uh, she shouldn’t uh, bid on that job. (Right, if she can’t do it.) Uh, and uh, so anyway, uh, but this chief quality inspector job came up and uh, and uh, they was arguing about it in uh, uh, in uh, with management. Uh, and uh, management was saying that it wasn’t a job for a woman. (Mmm. Mmm-hmm.) And so Ann Fowler and I, we, we were both on the uh, committee, business committee, and uh, uh, we were arguing that it was. And our president was agreeing with the company. (Your president, your plant manager? Your...) The president of our union. (Oh! Oh, I see.) She was agreeing with the company. (And this is Jane McComas?) Uh-huh. Jane McComas. And uh, so uh, finally they said, "Well," they said, "I’ll tell you what, we’ll let you and Ann uh, work with uh, uh,..." Can’t, I can’t remember names as you well see. (inaudible) "Uh, this uh, chief quality inspector...(Uh-huh.)...uh, all day one day and see if you still think it’s a, a job for a woman." (Yeah.) So we said okay. (Okay—laugh) So we go in the next day and we get with him and uh, he takes out immediately out to the warehouse. And he made us climb, thes--, they stack that, those cartons clear to the ceiling in that warehouse. (Right.) I don’t know whether you’ve ever seen what the inside looked like. (Pictures—laugh.) Uh, well, it’s, they’ve...it’s, they’re stacked higher than this room uh, uh, an duh, he made us climb up on the cartons. One carton after another to the top of that stack of ware. (Mmm-hmm...) Uh, and uh, we was sitting out, and I was sitting up on top there, and he was over there, you know, pretending to be gauging the ware, you know. (Huh.
Right.) And he said, "Can you feel these stacks shaking?" I said, "I sure can." I said, "It wouldn't take much of that to put me to sleep." I said, "I didn't get much sleep last night." And uh, so uh, Ann was, she wasn't as tall as I was. And [laugh] she was having a worse time climbing those stacks than I was. But uh,...(Yeah...)...but she climbed them. (Yeah?) We both did. (Yeah.) And uh, so uh, uh, when we came down off of there, they was abou-, uh, two or three guys standing over there that worked out in the shipping, and they was just dying laughing. And uh, uh, they called us over there and they said, "Stay right in there with him." He said, he s-, he hasn't worked this hard in all the years he's been on that job. (laugh) Said, "He'll have to take two weeks off to rest up." (laugh) [cough] So...[cough]...(You all right?)

PAUSE

Opal: And they'd ride with him and uh, uh, we went around on another stack and, and uh, they was uh, one of these uh, fork lifts. (Yeah.) Uh, trucks there. And uh, he made us ride those forks and uh, the guy that was operating the, the fork lift, he s-, he uh, uh, he uh, wanted to put a palate...you know what a palate is? (Mmm-hmm.) It's a... (Yeah.)...a...(Bunch of boxes.)...He wanted to put a palate on it. (Mmm-hmm.) And he, uh, he wouldn't let him. He wouldn't let him put a palate on it. They was one laying right there. (Uh-huh.) He wouldn't let him put it on there. He said, "There might not be one." So he made us ride those forks up the top of that stack. (You were sitting on this tow motor being lifted up?) Yeah, being lifted up to the top of the... (Oh my goodness!)...yeah, one of us on each one of the swings. [laugh] (laugh) (What a sight.) (laugh) And so uh, we stayed u-, right with him, you know. So when the shift was over that day, uh, uh, Louie came up to me and he said, "Opal," he said, "you surely don't think that's a job for a woman." I said, "Louie, they not a damned thing about that job that a woman can't do." I said, I said, "We did it." I said, "It sure is a good job for a woman." (Yeah.) [laugh] (laugh) (All right. What did he say to that?) Uh, he, he, he couldn't say anything. (Uh-huh.) And so anyway, uh, old Tom _____, uh, uh,...(What's that last name?) Moning. (M-O-N-I-N-G or...?) M-O-N-I-N-G, I believe it is. Uh, uh, anyway, he was uh, he was chief quality inspector, and he hollered at me to come over there and uh, this was at the end of the shift. (Mmm-hmm.) And he looked at me and he s-, he was a _____ somebody, you know. And uh, I always have thought he was a queer. (Yeah.) Anyway, Tom said, "You surely don't think that you are qualified for a quality inspector?" I said, uh, I said, "Well, the only trouble with you, Tom, is that you are just scared to death a woman's gonna get a, a, some kind of a break." I said,...(Yeah.)..."You darned men," I said, "You just think that you own the world." (Yeah, yeah.) And they pretty well do. (inaudible—Well, yeah, yeah.) But uh, anyway uh, we just, we had to just keep fighting them and fighting and fighting, and we was still fighting them when I left. (Yeah, so you just went through this all...inaudible.) Shortly before I left, uh,
uh, I was uh, working on, as back up quality inspector, uh, 'cause like I told you, they was a lot of those women had more seniority than I had because my was broken. (Right, right.) And uh, so uh, uh, I, I didn't even get a, a steady job out of it, you know. [laugh] I got _______ nothing only, but satisfaction, you know. (Yeah, yeah.) And so uh, uh, I uh, I uh, was uh, working down there in the hole and uh, uh, Ruth told me, said that there was a little old laher attendant that was trying to make her put a, put a trailer when she pulled one out, you know. (Uh-huh.) If uh, you know, if we, we inspected so many bottles off of each trailer. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, then uh, if we had to hold it up, we had to pull that trailer out ourself. (Yeah.) And uh, so they, they uh, those men would help each other pull those trailers out. (Yeah.) But the-, but we had to pull them out by ourself, you know. (Yeah, yeah.) Uh, they, they, nobody offered to help us. And uh, uh, I know they was one guy that, that uh, you know, acted like he wanted to help me but uh, you know, they, they, you know, stayed on his back...(Yeah.)... 'til he wouldn't, he wouldn't help, you know. (Pressed him.) Uh-huh. And uh, so anyway, uh, uh, this one uh, guy, he, he was trying to make her put her trailer back in. And I said, "Don't you do it Ruth." (Mmm.) I said, "I've read the job description." (Yeah.) I says, "All it says is to pull the trailer out." Uh, and I said, "It doesn't say to put, put a trailer back in." (laugh) Because if we'd a had to put the trailer back in, we'd a had to put uh, hunted up palates to put on them and, and...(Yeah.)...all that, you know. Been a whole lot more work for us. (Yeah.) And uh, so anyway, I t--, I dared her to, to, to,... (Leave it out.)...uh, to, to put her trailer back in. So it wasn't long after that 'til they put that little old guy down there on my laher. So I held him a load of ware up, you know, and I pulled it out and...(Yeah.)...and uh, uh, went on about my business and uh, so uh, I happened to look over there and the, the chute was piling up, you know. I mean, he wasn't, hadn't put a trailer back in. (Mmm--hmm.) And directly here came the, uh, I don't know what it was, I, Louie was off or something. (Mmm--hmm.) Anyway, uh, we had another uh, shift foreman, uh, that day. And uh, oh, it was Emmitt. Emmitt Osborne. And uh, Emmitt came down there and he said, uh, "Opal," said, "put that trailer back in there." I said, "I'm not gonna do it." [laugh] That was the wrong thing to say, but uh, uh,... (Hm.)...uh, I, he, he said, "Why?" I said, "You go upstairs and look at my job description." I said, "Now if you can show me where I, where I'm supposed to put that trailer back in there, I'll do it." (Mmm--hmm. Yeah.) That was the last I saw of Emmitt. And, and directly, that boy, but I picked up my pocketbook and went on to eat. (Mmm--hmm.) And uh, that boy, when I came back, he was loading [inaudible]. (Yeah, yeah.) But you know, they just, they would do everything they could to make it hard on you. (Yeah, yeah. And there weren't, and there were some then that wanted to help you, but they were pressured not to?) Mmm-hmm. (Yeah, that's a shame. That must have been really difficult.) One guy...[laugh]...one of the, one guy, when, when I filed that suit, you know, I told you, all those women met over there. (Yeah.) Well,
somebody told that, told there was one in from Washington that uh, that this guy got this woman pregnant and they was uh, trying to, they la-, fired her before uh, having an illegitimate pregnancy. (Oh. Yeah.) Uh, and he's still working. (Yeah.) You know, I mean, they was...(Oh God, that makes me mad!)...that, that was in my suit, you know. (That was in your suit?) Yeah. Mmm-hmm. (Stuff like that?) Yeah, yeah. Uh, that was uh, some of them uh, in uh, so anyway uh, that guy got, he's the one that I trained. That, that g-, that p-, that, that, that took the job and p-, and they put me back on the laher, you know. (Uh-huh.) That time, and uh, so uh, while I was training, you know, we got along great, you know. [laugh] (Yeah, sure.) But, but uh, after that why, uh, he uh, every time uh, he was, he got active in the union and uh, uh, we'd be up in Charleston to uh, state meetings, you know. And...(Mmm-hmm.)...and uh, if he'd seen me uh, uh, if he could get close to me if we's at the, in the uh, hospitality room or somewhere and he'd see me, he'd he'd saddle up to me and he'd say, "I hate you, you old bitch you." (laugh) He said, "I'll be glad when you're dead." (Oh my goodness.) And he told me one time, he said, "If I ever catch you up at our galley, I'll kill you." [laugh] (Good Lord!) (laugh—Good night! Did you get a lot of that or was that...?) No, he was the only one that was ever that...(That)...that bad. (Yeah, yeah.) [laugh] (Were you ever scared?) No, I wasn't scared of him.

Jennifer: What about the other women? How did they treat you?

Opal: Well, some of them uh, treated me pretty bad, but uh, uh, others, you know, uh,...(Were real grateful.)...but uh,...(...think.) Uh, they was very few of them had guts enough to stand up to for theirslelf though. (Yeah.) I, I swear, I don't know how many times I've had women come up to me and they'd tell me, oh, they'd complain about, about the working conditions or something. (Uh-huh.) And they'd say, "Now don't say I said anything, you know." (Yeah, yeah.) You can't do that. (Yeah.) You know. (No, no.) You gotta either uh,...(______ up behind what you say if you're gonna say it.) Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And so it just uh, uh, I don't know, it just uh, crazy world.

Jennifer: Yeah, it is. It is. I don't understand that. I don't understand why all the women weren't behind you. I guess pressure from their husbands or from men at work or status quo or you know. (Mmm-hmm.) That must have been difficult.

Opal: Uh, they made all kinds of ware down there. (Mmm-hmm.) Uh, uh, I imagine that uh, some of them's told you about all the Avon bottles and...(Liquor and...).liquor and beer...(baby food jars)...rolling pins. [laugh]

Jennifer: Penicillin. Yeah. ________. Yeah, um, Clara Effingham showed me her, her glass rolling pin. She said she wouldn't be able to bake anything without it. [laugh]
Opal: I’ve got one.

Jennifer: Do you? They must be wonderful. Did you bring home a lot of stuff?

Opal: I brought home stuff and I gave it all to my cousin. (Did you?) She, she was a collector, you know. (Yeah, yeah.) I brought home a lot of Avon bottles and I, I remember I brought home a little bear one time, you know, of some, I don’t know what went in that bear. I forget, you know. But uh, (It had what?) Bear. A little...[laugh]...little jar...(Oh bear!) A jar about so high was a bear. (Yeah.) And uh, they had all kinds of...

Jennifer: Did you do mostly white and green glass or did you do any other colors of glass?

Opal: Amber once, they uh, had a, I think they had amber there for a short time, but they wasn’t too much green glass. Uh, they didn’t make too much green glass. Uh, it was mostly whiskey bottles uh, there towards the last. (Yeah.) But uh, that’s the reason I guess I registered Democrat, and I guess ____ been Democrat for the rest of my life. [laugh] Uh, when I first went to work there, you know, uh, uh, they had, it was prohibition. (Right.) Uh, and uh,...(Yeah.)...so uh, not long after I went to work there, uh, Roosevelt ran for president, and uh, they ask us down there at the uh, the plant to vote for Roosevelt so that we could start making whiskey bottles. (Start making whiskey bottles again. Yeah.) Mmm-hmm. (I bet.) So my mother was a strong Republican. (Uh-huh, uh-oh.) And uh, so uh, would you like to have a glass of lemonade? (Um, sure. Sure, why don’t I stop this?)

Jennifer: What about D-Day? Okay. (Huh?) I was just explaining on the tape. We’re talking about D-Day. Go on.

Opal: Um, I, I wrote uh, uh, about what they did down at Owens, you know. They posted a, uh, the addresses of all the guys that was in service. (Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.) Uh, and asked us to send Christmas cards to the ones we knew. (Mmm-hmm.) And I sent Christmas cards uh, to a whole bunch of them. And I got letters back begging me to write to them. And all during the war...(Yeah.)...I went around with [laugh] pencil and paper all, I mean, with pen and paper, all the time. (Writing letters.) And my mail box would be stuffed. (Stuffed.) Uh and I got sent letters that I have uh, had stuck in my memory, you know. (Yeah.) Uh, all those years and uh, things that they said, you know. Like one, one of my best friends uh, her, she got me to write to her brother. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, I wrote to him, and he was, uh, in service when war started, and he went in from uh, Italy on up through, all the way through until just before uh, the war was over. (Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, so I was writing to him and uh, you know, most of his letters were very calm, you know. (Mmm-hmm.) And, and all. (Mmm. –inaudible–) And all of a sudden I got one from him and he said, but I didn’t hear from him for
several days, you know. I mean, for a while. (Uh-huh.) And uh, then when I did get a letter, he said, "How much longer do they think that I can stand to go on seeing my buddies uh, die beside of me." (My goodness.) And uh, uh, so he did, he cracked up, you know. (Yeah, yeah.) Battle fatigue. (Yeah.) And uh, then I got a letter from uh, one of the fellas that [laugh] uh, he was a laher tenant. (Uh-huh.) And uh, one day there, uh, I uh, uh, was having uh, the cartons was kinda tight that I was packing, and, and I was pushing and shoving on it, and, and uh, Red was just a real, he was a young, real young fella, you know. (Mmm. Mmm-hmm.) And uh, he said, uh, "You look like you’re having trouble." I said, "Yeah." I said, "I need a carton stretcher." And uh, he said, uh, "Well, when I get time, I’ll go hunt you one." And [laugh] sure enough, little fella, he [laugh](Did he go find you one?)...hunting for his carton stretcher ________. [laugh] (laugh) (I was taken in too. I was like a carton stretcher?) [laugh] (Oh, well, I guess she needed a carton stretcher.) And so, so anyway, he got real peeved at me, you know. [laugh] (Yes. Yes. He tried to help you and all.) So, so, so when uh, when he, when I wrote to him, uh, I said, "Red, you been looking uh, hunting long enough for that carton stretcher. It’s about time you come home." And I started getting letters from him. (Yeah.) And I, I got some of the most witty ones from him. (Yeah.) He was telling me about uh, being out uh, taking a bath i--, in his helmet, uh, out in the field. (Uh-huh. laugh) And uh, uh, a truckload of women went by...[laugh] (laugh— Oh dear!) You had women workers that was going somewhere, and he said here I stood with my bare face hanging out. [laugh] (With a helmet on.) No with, he, he was, he was taking his bath in the helmet, you know. (Oh I see, I see.) Had...[inaudible]. (Oh goodness.) And, and uh, uh, uh, oh I don’t know. I, I got some ...... that I remember uh, one of the guys that uh, worked at the plant that was, was in the Navy, and I ha--, had known him since I was about 16 years old. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, but I got a letter from him, and he was, he was on a ship that landed the Marines at Iwo Jima. (Oh wow.) And he was uh, he was telling me how sad it was to see those guys uh, landing there, you know, and being shot down, you know. (Yeah.) He said they was going off of the uh, those landing boats like uh, kids going out to recess at, at school. And uh, being shot down. And uh,...(inaudible) Uh, I wish I’d a kept all those letters, but uh...(Oh yeah.)...you know. (Yeah.) You can only keep so much junk in your lifetime. (Yes. That’s true.) And, but anyhow, my husband was in uh, 101st Paratroopers uh, I mean, the one that ended up being married to when he died. [laugh] (laugh—That you stuck with.) Much, I, I was stuck with him. I couldn’t divorce him. I tried to divorce him, but, [laugh] but, uh, darned, he wouldn’t let me divorce him. But uh, (Yeah.) uh, yeah, it was a long story about that, but anyhow, uh, anyhow, he was in that 101st invasion, you know, uh, in, Normandy. (Oh yeah.) And uh, and uh, he went in, they went in ahead of the uh, others, you know. Uh, they, they flew in before the rest of them did. (Mmm--hm. Mmm--hm.) And uh, uh, when he uh, jumped out of the plane, he was hit in back of the head with shrapnel. And he laid on a field over there for 13 hours before
they got to him. (Wow.) And it fractured his back uh, and uh, of course, that was the end of his uh,...(Career.)...uh,... (Military.)...I wasn’t married to him at that time, but uh, I, I mar-, we got married after he came, after the war was over. (Mmm–hmm.) But anyway, uh, I thought about him, D-Day, you know, him laying there on that field for 13 hours with a broken...(inaudible)...fractured back. (Wow.) And he was telling me that uh, he told me that uh, uh, when they finally did take him out to the, the, the beach,...(Mmm–hmm.)...uh, the medics was working on him and uh, things flew over and started ______ the beach and uh, these medics, they, they run and hid under the table so ...anything they could get under, you know. [laugh] (Yeah, yeah.) And uh, when they came back, he said, said, they apologized to him for leaving him. And [laugh] he said, "Well," he said, "don’t, don’t worry about it." He said, "If I could have run, I’d a been with you." [laugh]

Jennifer: laugh—Absolutely. Crazy stuff. Crazy. Goodness gracious. Hmm. Were there more women working at the plant during the world, during World War II?

Opal: Yeah, we–, uh, we worked on the jobs that the men did then. (Did you really? Yeah.) I, I forget what they called that job that I worked on during this, the war. But it was a little higher paid job. (Uh–huh.) And uh, I had to uh, count the ware that uh, was packed and take it back and mark up a board back on the machine line. (Hmm.) And pull the trailers out and put the trailers back in for the girls to, to load. (Mmm–hmm. Mmm–hmm.) And uh, uh, it was a, a, a little higher paid job, but I tell you, they put me on these higher paid jobs when,...(Yeah.)...when they wanted me to, you know, to use me, but, but then I never had any rights on it. (Yeah.) Of course, I didn’t, I, I didn’t expect to keep that job because when the guys came back, that was their job, you know. (Right.) They had gone...(Yes.)...to fight the uh, war, and it would have been right for them to have kept it. Uh, that, that I didn’t resent. (No, sure, sure.) Uh, but I resented the fact that, that women never got a chance to bid on jobs like that. (And ones they were needed, and ones they were required.) Mmm–hmm. (And then they could do the job just fine.) Mmm–hmm. Yeah, they...(Yeah, they could do the job just fine during the war.) You w–, women, we can’t do without you. [laugh] But we’re not gonna give you any right. (Yep. laugh That’s it...)

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Jennifer: ...closing of the plant. Why do you feel like uh,...

Opal: ...build that plant overseas. [laugh]

Jennifer: Yeah, you think _____ capital flight? Is that, is that
your... (Yeah.) Hmm. A lot of people have told me that. (Mmm-hmm.)

**Opal:** Yeah, they’re gonna build a plant overseas. [laugh]

**Jennifer:** Someone told me that they had heard they had opened up a plant in Poland the day that the Owens plant closed. (Where?) Poland.

**Opal:** I wouldn’t doubt it. Well, uh, okay, my theory... (Okay, [inaudible]) I’ll tell what I thinks gonna happen sooner or later. [laugh] (All right.) But of course, it’s not gonna be, be enough to help us. (Yeah.) Uh, but when they, they keep on uh, putting people outta work in this country and sending them to countries that uh, that they can get cheap labor. Who in the hell’s gonna buy that stuff? (Yeah. Yeah, exactly.) They gonna do way with people’s purchasing power and... (Yes.)...and uh,... (Then they’re gonna lose their productive power.)...uh-huh. But meanwhile,... (Meanwhile...)...these guys’ll get rich... (Yeah.)...uh, and uh, uh, and uh, what do they care. They don’t care anything about this country.

**Jennifer:** I know. Or the workers. Yeah, it’s a, it’s a sorry situation. What do you see happening in Huntington? (Huh?) What do you see happening in Huntington? What do you see this town doing?

**Opal:** Oh, it breaks my heart. (Yeah.) I’ll tell you, you know, see, uh, when I was uh, growing up, uh, we lived down there on 7th Avenue and 14th Street. And we lived uh, right next door to the editor of The Herald-Dispatch. (Mmm-hmm.) They uh, and uh, I, I washed dishes for Ms. Gerald uh, of an evening. Uh, and uh, uh, she paid me a quarter a week. [laugh] And then when I got so that I, I was old enough to do a little bit of dusting and things like that, uh, she paid me, uh, she uh, raised my wages and let me help her on Saturday, you know. (Yeah.) Uh, and uh, but when I went to high school, I was 14 years old when I went to high school. (Mmm-hmm.) Uh, uh, I went over in town one day and uh, went to the dime store. And one of my friends had got a job in there. And uh, she was... (Your age.)...uh, my age and uh, uh, and I said, "Edith, how’d you get this job?" And she said, "I lied about my age." (Yep.) [laugh] And uh, so I just promptly walked myself in the office and I lied about my age and I went to work at the dime store working on Saturdays and during Christmas holidays. And uh, but you know, when I earned that quarter a week, and when I earned that uh, two dollars a day that I made at the dime store,... (Yeah.)...I, I took that home and gave it to my mother, you know. I, I never, I never had any money to manage myself until after my mother died. (Yeah, yeah.) Uh, and uh, so uh, uh, I worked uh, at Grant’s that next summer uh, all summer in the store downtown. (Is that a department stor–, was that a department store?) Uh, it was a, uh, it was, it wasn’t a dime store, but it was a, a, a, I believe about like, like they say the dollar store is now. (Hmm. Like a...) Some,
a store similar to that or a... (Okay...) ...I don't think I've ever been in a dollar store. But anyway, it was, uh, it was similar to a dime store. But uh... (Kind a more expensive...) ...a little uh, they had a little more stuff, you know. But anyway, I worked there that summer, that first summer I was in high school. Then I worked at uh, Woolworth's uh, dime store the next winter, and uh, see, I worked at McCrory's first and uh, uh, Grant's and then Woolworth's. Then the next summer uh, I worked at the Blue Jay overall factory. Uh, and all the money I earned I gave it to mom, you know, because, uh, uh, she bought my clothes, and she managed the money. And so anyway, uh, I was kinda trained to. [laugh] (Yeah.) And even after I got married, you know, uh, uh, now I didn't work the first time I was married. But the second time I was married, I worked all the time. And I took my paycheck home and gave it to my mother because she was uh, sick. Uh, she, after she got that time, and she was 49 years old, she was never well again enough to ho-, hold a job. So uh, until my mother died, I never cashed a paycheck from Owens. (Wow. That's interesting.) And uh,... (Yeah...) ...uh, so I never, I, I, I've had a hard time learning to manage money. [laugh] (laugh) But uh, I, I think I've done pretty good. (Yeah.) Uh, between my brother and I, we-, I've, I've got this house and it's paid for and I've got uh, enough income to live on and I, I, I and I thank God that I'm able to live by myself and uh, take care of myself. (Certainly.) 'Cause I had a stroke here a while back, you know. (Oh, you did really?) Oh yeah. And uh,... (You seem to have recovered perfectly.) Well, uh, I, 'm just a little bit unsteady on my feet, you know. (Mmm-hmm.) But uh,... (Balance _____.)...yeah. (Deal with that.) But uh, anyway, I, I really am thankful that, that uh, I'm thankful for the years I did work at Owens. Now believe me, uh, I mean, I hated every day of it, but I still uh, feel like I'm glad I did it. (Yeah, sure.) And uh, (Sure.) So uh, and I've had some awful good friends over the years that uh, uh, has come to my rescue when I really needed it. (Sure, sure.) So.

Jennifer: Yeah, it was a remarkable place to work, you know. It had such a community aspect to it that you just don't get anywhere else today.

Opal: Yeah, they just, just seemed like family to you. (Yeah, I bet.) And uh, uh, you know, uh, when my friends, uh, uh, used to have a grocery store down on the corner across the street from Owens,... (Mmm-hmm...) ...and uh, I'll tell you, when I came back to Huntington, I went up to uh, uh, Oak Hill, West Virginia and lived up there for a short time. (Mmm-hmm.) And my husband was an alcoholic and he just drank like a fish. (Mmm.) And uh, we were havin'-, uh, it was, we had gone through a long mine strike and he was drinking awful bad. (Was he a miner?) Yeah, he was a miner, but, but he was a, uh he, he ended up uh, with 22 years in service. (UH, military service or...) Uh-huh, military. (Huh. 'Cause he did the national guard and all that?) And uh, but uh, he, he came out, outta service, uh, uh, in '45, you know. (Right.) Uh, but uh, uh, after uh, and we got married after that. And then uh, uh, that's,
that's when I really cracked up, you know. (Yeah.) Uh, after I
married him. (Yeah.) See, my mother died in '44. (Uh-huh.) And uh,
uh, I had gone through a divorce just a while before that. (Uh-
huh.) And uh, I had been having a real rough time, you know. (Yeah.
Yeah. Sure.) And uh, so I got, kinda cracked up after I married
Frank. [laugh] (Yeah.) And uh, so uh, I quit. (Yeah.) And uh, uh,
that...[inaudible]. (laugh—Yeah.) But uh, anyway, uh, we uh, uh,
ended up at Oak Hill uh, for a while, uh, and uh, he just kept
drinking so bad and carrying on so bad that I finally uh, uh, wrote
back down to the plant and uh, wrote to Casey Straw and I said,
"Casey," I said, "I'm p-, I'm over age." I was past 40, you know.
(Yeah.) And uh, I said, "I'm over age," but I said, "I sure would
like to come back to work if I could." (Yeah.) And he, uh, wrote
back and said they'd be glad to have me back. (That's wonderful.)
And uh, so uh, I uh, uh, it wasn't just a day or two after that
they sent for me to come back. (Mmm-hmm.) And when I came to
Huntington, I had two dollars and a half. And uh... (My goodness.
And this was what year? This was like 19-?) 1950. Uh, uh, and uh,
so uh, my friends uh, ______ that had the grocery store down
there. (Mmm—hmm.) They had uh, they had a little house down there
on 8th Avenue and they had, in the upstairs was a little kitchen,
a little apartment, you know. (Yeah.) It had uh, and...(inaudible)...and they took me in and, and uh, uh, let me
stay there 'til I got back to work and got on my feet. (Yeah.) And
uh, they fed me and took care of me and... (Wonderful.) And so here
uh, uh, but they had lived with me before my, uh, after my mother
died for a while. And their son was born while they lived with me.
And uh... (Special...) I, he was, he was my pet, that's, that's him
and his boys over there. (Oh. In the green? Oh no. The older one in
the back? Oh I see.) The one in the back is uh, the father and uh,
and uh, I don't know that, David, uh, David _____, uh, goes to
Marshall. (Hmm.) Uh, he's uh, he's uh, interning down at the
newspaper this summer. (Oh is he really? He looks familiar.) Uh,
and uh, then those two little ones he's got, and uh, but anyway,
uh, Paul, the father, came over and knocked on my door one day
there, you know. And we always have uh, kept in touch, you know.
(Yeah. Sure.) And uh, he knocked on my door and he said,
"_______." He always called me ________. He said, "______,
Debbie run me off." I said, "Well, come on in, Paul." [laugh] I
said you gotta bedroom upstairs. (Yeah, sure.) And uh, so he stayed
here with me for about four or fi-, 'bout f-, four or five years or...
(Really?) And uh, uh, and then of course, she'd bring the
little boys over and I've got, the-, they're just like, like my own
children. (Certainly.) And I just... (That's lovely.) And uh, David,
he's a, he just won a scholarship and he's won Pell Grant.
(Mmm.) And he served four years in service t-, to get to go to
Marshall. (Did he?) He's really an extremely fine young man. (Well,
that sounds like it.) And uh, he's getting married in August.
(That's nice. That's nice. Yeah, success stories. [inaudible]) Hmm?
(Success stories.) Well, I, I'll tell you, I'm proud o-, o-, of
David. Uh, because he's really, he's really worked hard to try to
get an education. You know, when you see someone trying to get an
education...(inaudible) You...listen, I, I'd just do anything I could to help. (Sure, sure.) And uh, I know I’ve loaned him money before now to buy books, you know, and uh, uh, when he would be having a hard time getting it. (Yeah.) And uh, so I, you know, uh, but he’s always been, always paid me back. (Sure, sure, sure.) And uh, but he’s uh, but he’s, he’s not a bit lazy. He, he cuts grass for people or does any...(Yeah.) He worked with his dad. His dad’s a, a mechanic. (Uh-huh.) And uh, so they uh...(Wow. Sounds like a beautiful bunch of men there.) They are. They’re a handsome bunch of men. (Yeah, yeah. Hmm.) But uh, anyway, I, they’re just like family to me. (Yeah, yeah. And you wouldn’t have known them without Owens?) Huh? (You wouldn’t have met the, the, the, the, his parents without...?) Probably. Uh, ‘cause, one, I don’t, I don’t know uh, uh, I met his si–, mother, Paul’s mother uh, was living next door to me. And uh, uh, with uh, uh, her uh, uh, friend, and she married uh, Paul’s uncle. (Hmm.) I mean, married Paul’s father. [laugh] (laugh) Uh,...(Oh really?) He was uh, he was uh, it was his sister uh, his aunt that uh, that Ann was living with and uh, and uh, Ann uh, uh, tried to get a job at Owens, but uh, she couldn’t pass her physical. And uh, so uh, uh, she uh, uh, she would help me do housework. You know, for a while there. (Yeah.) And then that’s how we get acquainted. And uh, and then uh, we got to be close friends and uh, I’ll tell you. If I had a sister, it wouldn’t be dearer to me. (Yeah. Sure.) And she, her mind’s gone now and she’s uh, in awful shape. I, I’m,...(That’s a shame.) They’re expecting her not to live too much longer. (Yeah.) And uh, I hate it so bad. (Yeah. It’s hard to see. That’s hard to go through. It must be one of the worst parts of uh, growing old.) Yes. To see your friends dying all around you. Yeah. Yeah, I looked in the paper every morning to see if I’m in there.

Jennifer: [laugh] You seem to be doing just fine. Um, is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you’d like to address? Any other story? What have I not talked about?

Opal: I don’t know. Uh, I’ve come way off of the subject of Owens. [laugh] (laugh) (It happens. It happens. That’s fine. That’s fine.) Well, anyway uh, I guess you know that they put me in the labor Hall of Fame. [laugh] (Oh did they?) Yeah. (Yeah, yeah. Where is that?) Well, it’s uh, uh, I don’t know, some of the professors up at uh, West Virginia University and uh, aw shoot, uh, one over there at Marshall. I forget what his name is. Edwards. (Edwards. Hmm.) Uh, uh, I think they all got together, you know, and started this uh, labor Hall of Fame. (Mmm-hmm.) And I’m in the labor Hall of Fame with uh, with uh, uh, Mother Joe and . (Yes.) Uh, people and uh, (Sure, sure.) And uh,...(That’s wonderful.) I got the, uh, I guess, the uh, first uh, Susan B. Anthony Award that was awarded down here in this area. (Oh really? You were the first?) Uh-huh. And I got a, uh, uh, Award rom uh, West Virginia’s Teachers’ Association. (What was that name?) Corma Mallory. (Colonel or...?) Corma. (Corma.) Corma. (C-O-R-M-A?) Uh-huh, I think it is. Corma. Uh, and uh, I’ve got several
citations from, I mean, uh, awards from uh, labor. (Well, you’re famous.) Oh yeah. I, fact is, I got distinguished uh, citizen from uh, Governor...[laugh]...Caperton. [laugh] (Did you ever see that judge again, that Judge Christie?) No. [laugh] (laugh) Didn’t want to either. (No.)

Jennifer: Well, I sure enjoyed talking to you today. (Yeah.) Draw this to a close.

END OF INTERVIEW
ORAL HISTORY

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DATE: July 1, 1994

Opal Mann
(Signature - Interviewee)

925 Charles Court
Huntington, WV 529-7251

DATE: 7/1/94

Jennifer R. Smith
(Signature - Interviewer)

412 10th St. #1/Hunt, WV 25701
(304) 520-0143

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DATE: July 1, 1994

Opal Mann
(Signature - Interviewee)

925 Charles Court
Huntington, WV
529-7151

DATE: 7/1/1994

Jennifer Barker
(Signature - Interviewer)

412 10th St. #1/Hunt. WV 25701
(304) 522-0143

(Address)
(Phone)
Jennifer: My name is Jennifer Stock. I'm interviewing Opal Mann at her home on July 1, 1994. Could you uh, speak your full name for the record?

Opal: Opal uh, Paulie Mann. [laugh] I mean, uh, Paulie was my maiden name. Uh.

Jennifer: Uh, when were you born?

Opal: November the 3rd, 19 and 9.

Jennifer: And are, were you, are you a widow? Were you married, uh?

Opal: I've been marri-, I was married three times. [laugh] But my hus-, uh, all my husbands are dead now. [laugh] But I divorced two of them.

Jennifer: Huh. Do you have any children?

Opal: No.

Jennifer: Oh. What kind of education level did you achieve?

Opal: Uh, I uh, graduated from Huntington High, and uh, then I had quite a few of those uh, uh, labor extension uh, classes. Uh, some at Morgantown and some here in Huntington. Uh, at Marshall and, and at the labor council and uh, I had quite a few of those classes. Some of them I took over ti-, two or three times. (Did you?) Course, I really enjoyed them.

Jennifer: You really enjoyed them? And what kinds of classes were those? What were they...?

Opal: Well, they were uh, like uh, sociology, uh, uh, labor history, uh, uh, how to write uh, uh, newsletters, uh, uh, political science, uh, uh...Let's see, Professor Stewart up that, was over at Marshall uh, was one of my teachers at one time. (Uh-huh.) And uh, they's one over there now that uh, a David goes to, uh, shoot, I can't think of his name right now. But anyway, uh, uh, I, I, I had classes over there at Marshall, you know. They was short, short courses. (Mmm-hmm.) You know. (Mmm-hmm.) And they were not credit... (Yeah.)... courses. They were... of course, they gave us certificates to make us feel good. (Yeah.) [laugh] But I did learn a lot. (Yeah, yeah.) Uh-huh. (It's good to keep uh, going to classes, I think.) And uh, I really enjoyed every bit of it. (That's wonderful.) [laugh]

Jennifer: Um, all right, when, when did begin at Owens, did you say?
Opal: Uh, February of 1931.

Jennifer: And you retired in...?

Opal: February of 1972. But I, I quit one time. I had a nervous breakdown. (Oh dear.) Uh, I guess that's what happened to me. The doctor didn’t call it that, but uh, anyway, uh I got to a point that every time I walked in that place, I'd break down and start crying. I had been through a lot of ups and downs in my life, you know. (Sure.) And it seemed like that uh, uh, it just, uh, hit me all at once, you know. I mean, and uh, so I was outta there about four years. I had, uh, I, I receive a pension for 36 years.

Jennifer: Did you see a medical doctor or a psychiatrist?

Opal: Huh?

Jennifer: Did you see a psychiatrist at the time?

Opal: No, I was...I went to doctor uh, shoot, uh, he...just regular doctors. Doctor Gang was one of them and I, I've been to several. (Hmm.) The fact is I've had uh, I've had a lot of uh, uh, operations and so on, you know. I've had female trouble and I've had gallbladder trouble. I've had lung surgery. (Yeah.) [laugh] My stomach looks like a road map. (laugh)

Jennifer: Well, goodness, 85 years old. That’s uh, to be expected, I think. Um, did, do you have any other, did you have any other family working at Owens at any time?

Opal: Well, my brother was a brick layer, and uh, every once in a while, uh, he would uh, uh, work down there building furnaces, but uh, no, uh, no one regularly. I only had one brother. And uh, uh, uh, he, he worked down there a few times, uh, building furnaces. But other than that...Oh yeah, one of my husband's uh, I married a, a, a fellow that worked there on, on the machine line. And uh, he was one of them I divorced. (laugh)

IN BACKGROUND: BELLS CHIMING

Jennifer: Well, okay, um, got that outta the way. I usually start off by asking uh, what made you get a job at Owens in the first place? What sent you there?

Opal: Desperation. [laugh] Uh, it was during the worst part of the Depression. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, uh, my mother and my brother and I were...I was, I was working in a little uh, store uh, uh, opening up the store at six o'clock in the morning and work 'til one. And uh, that, just before that, I had, uh, I'd work 'til one o'clock of a day, and then at uh, uh, when the uh, around five o'clock in the evening, I'd go to the bowling alley and work down there 'til closing time. (Wow.) And I got uh, uh, sick, and I couldn't take,
you know, uh, (those hours)...(those hours, and uh, I finally had to quit the bowling alley, but I was still working in that little store. (Uh-huh.) Uh, it was just a little uh, just a little store, you know. (Grocery store or...?) Uh-huh. A little grocery store. I had to open up every morning. Up here on 16th Street. I mean, Hal Greer Boulevard. (Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, uh, then the, the owner, he'd come in and uh,...(Oh, at one?)...at one, and, and uh, and I, I'd be free the rest of the day. (Mmm-hmm.) But I was only making six dollars a week. (Hmm.) A dollar a day. [laugh] (My goodness! Oh God!) And uh, uh, my mother, uh, meanwhile, was working uh, at a restaurant making 50 cents a day. And we got most of our meals out there. (Uh-huh.) We were really hard up, but uh, we were always able to pay our rent and, and utilities and... (Mmm-hmm.)...and uh, things like that, but uh, and I was never hungry.

Jennifer: How much was rent then? I mean, how much, how much was your rent back then? If you're making six dollars...?

Opal: About 25 dollars a month.

Jennifer: So how did you, how did you hear about Owens? I mean, what, what...?

Opal: Well, uh, uh, uh, a lady that uh, I knew when I was growing up, you know, uh, came by our house and uh, she had got a job at Owens. And uh, Mom ask her if uh, she thought she could get me a job down there and uh, which she talked to her boss and uh, he agreed to give me a job. And uh, back then uh, they had a, a little place that you went through, you know, a _____ house as we called it. Uh, and uh, uh, when, the way they did their hiring at that time, you'd go in there and stand around and if they needed anyone, they'd come out and get you, you know. And uh,...(So just stand around in front of the gates, is that what you said?) You know, you'd, uh, just, just inside that, that _____ house. (Uh-huh. Uh-huh.) And uh, so uh, he told, uh, they told me to uh, come down there at 11 o'clock at uh, I mean, before the 11 o'clock shift that night. (Uh-huh.) And uh, uh, Frank uh, oh shoot, I can't think of his name right now to save my soul. (Mmm.) But anyway, uh, he was the night superintendent. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, uh, Mr. Sizemore had told him to, to uh, hire me and he did. (Mmm-hmm.) And I went to work on night shift of all things. And it was just like a nightmare. [laugh] (Was it really? Tell me about that? What did you do that first shift?) It was horrible. [laugh] I'll never forget it as long as I live. [laugh] (Oh goodness! Tell me about it.) Well, uh, this uh, they put me on a, uh, a, do you know what a laher is? (Yes. I've learned.) Well, they put me on a laher. They had two girls back on the side at a laher that was uh, supposed to be selecting the ware, you know, I mean, putting, getting the bad ones out. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, sitting them back down. There was a little bottle about yea-high, I mean, about an inch high. (Mmm-hmm.) And a little square bottle and uh, it had a, uh, it was a deodorant bottle. (Huh.) Uh, called Dew. (Dew.) And uh, uh, you had to uh,
put them in a carton, lay them in the carton and then you had to, to take a strip of paper and every two bottles or three, I can't remember now just how many it was,...(Yeah.)...but anyway, I know we called it interlace. (Interlace.) Uh, you had to interlace, and then lay a strip across and then uh, put another row. And they put uh, me and another woman they just had hired uh, working down at the end of that laher packing those things. (Uh-huh. Uh-huh.) And I'm telling you, we had those little Dew bottles piled up all over that place. (laugh) And I never will forget where we were working was down a little bit lower than uh, the lahers were up high. (Uh-huh.) And, and uh, but uh, the laher I was working on was a little bit lower than the others. There was different kinds of machines back then. There was IS and uh, lynch machines. (Wha-, wha-....) Lynch. (L-I-N-C-H?) Uh-huh. (L-Y-N-C-H?) I think that's the way you spell it. I never did see it written down. (Yeah.) But uh, uh, lynch machines and uh, and then they uh, on, on the lower end of the plant, was um, Owens machines. (Oh. Those great big...) Uh-huh. Those great big machines. (Yeah.) But these uh, uh, these uh, were what they called ___ machines. (Uh-huh. These were the newest ones right, at that time?) Huh? (Were those the newest ones at that time or...?) I don't know whether they were or not. But anyway uh, uh, we had, that girl and I had those Dew bottles piled all over that place. (laugh) And the boss came around and he was trying to show us how to do it, you know. And he looked, he made it look so easy. (Yeah.) I could have killed him. (laugh) [laugh] (Yeah, sure.) And there was a woman working on a laher up, up a little bit higher than I was and she was uh, looking down there and, and just died laughing at us, you know. (laugh) [laugh] (Yeah.) It was just like a nightmare. (Yeah.) And uh, another time, uh, right at, not long after that, uh, uh, I, they put me on a laher by myself. And uh, it was a bigger bottle and I can't remember what, what kind of a bottle it uh, jar it was. It was a jar. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, they told me to look for brown spots. They didn't give us any training, you know. (Yeah.) I mean, it, they put us on there and told us "Look for brown spots." And, and uh, uh, I was just looking and looking and looking, you know, and them things was piling up and this little man walked up and he had on a suit and tie and, you know, was real business-looking. (Yeah.) And he said, uh, I was just standing there just crying. And he said, "Little girl, what's the matter?" [laugh] (Laugh) And I said, "They told me to look for brown spots and I don't know what a brown spot is." (laugh) [laugh] (Oh dear.) And come to find out, it was the plant manager. [laugh] (Oh my goodness! Oh, that's wonderful.) So from then on, he always stopped by and talked to me, you know. (Did he?) And uh, uh, short, not too long after that they started uh, uh, you know, having classes and training people to what, what the different defects were. (Sure.) But when I first went to work...[laugh] (Look for the brown spots. Oh! Did you find any? Were you finding any?) No, I didn't even know what they were. They were kind of a, an oily-looking uh, spot that, uh, probably was oil...(Uh-huh.)...in the glass. (Yeah.) Uh, but uh, anyway, uh, I'll tell you, it was really, really rough uh, you know, getting started. (Yeah. What was
it like seeing that factory for the first time? Being inside that factory? Well, I had been in that factory when it was Boldt Glass. (Oh, did... Uh-huh.) Uh, but uh, uh, uh, my mother, my moth-, my father, after he moved us to Huntington when I was four years old, he took off, and uh, and uh, that was the last we saw of him until...I didn’t uh, didn’t know much about my dad until after uh, I was grown. Uh, he was uh, uh, and uh, my mother had a sixth grade education. We had a rough way to go, I’ll tell you. (Hm.) And uh, so anyhow, um, uh,... (So the plant itself didn’t scare you or intimidate you?) Huh? (So the plant itself didn’t intimidate you that much?) Well, uh, I, I had seen ______, uh, uh, her boyfriend took us through the plant,... (Uh-huh.)... and uh, we saw how they was working, but uh, uh, they had men on the, on the lahers then, you know. (Ah, yeah.) They was all men in that plant at that time. (Right. Sure.) That I first went through there. And uh, but then uh, by the time I went there, uh, you know, everything had chang-, uh, had changed, you know, they was all women on the lahers, and, and the men was uh, we had packed the bottles in cartons and then shoved them over a chute. (Mm.) And then they was guys down on the uh, the lower level that uh, loaded them on trailers. (Right.) And uh, took them out to the warehouse. (Right.) And uh, so anyway, uh, uh, I, but, I, that work, to me, was just brain destroying. (Yeah. You know.) It was monotonous. (Yeah.) Uh, and uh, it was, it was uh,...

Jennifer: What, what did you think about, what did you, what, what did you think about when you were doing that? Standing on your feet, just, this monotonous work? What went on in your head? Do you remember or recall? [laugh] (laughs)  

Opal: I don’t remember, but I know, I know that I hated every day I was in that plant. I really did.

Jennifer: Til the very end?  

Opal: Yeah. (Really?) The happiest day of my life was the day I walked out of there. Uh, now, uh, you know, I mean, I, I, I had, I had days that uh, that uh, I enjoyed uh, I enjoyed the friendships I made there. (Yeah.) Uh, let’s put it that way. (Mm.) And uh, it was uh, it had its good points and it had its bad points. But it was uh, something that I, I didn’t enjoy at all. I mean, the work. (Mm.) Right.) Uh, part. I guess I’m kind of lazy. (laughs—Well, nothing wrong with that.) Uh, but uh, but uh, you know, after I retired, I, I sold real estate for a while. Now I enjoyed that. (Oh, I bet. Yeah. That’s nice.) I really did. I, I enjoyed every bit of it. (Talking to people and going to houses.) Uh-huh. Yeah. (I bet that would be nice.) Uh, and I worked in stores before I went to work at Owens, and I enjoyed that, you know, not, not a great deal, but I enjoyed it more than I...[laugh] (Yeah. So what kept you working? Was it the money? Was it uh, good money?) Necessity. [laugh] (laughs— Necessity. Oh dear.)
Jennifer: How long did it, how long were you there before you started making like friendships with people on the, in the selecting department? Do you remember?

Opal: Before I met _____? (Before you started making friendships with people?) Oh, I wasn't there very long 'cause uh, uh, you know, uh, uh, too long, not too long after I went to work, uh, they put me on a little bit higher paying job uh, and what my job was I would uh, uh, you know, after I learned uh, the job, you know. Uh, I had to uh, uh, look at the _____ bad ware that the girls would throw away. They put them in, they would put the bad ware in uh, crates. (Uh-huh.) And I would go around and look, look at the ware to make sure they wasn't throwing away good ware. (Right.) And uh, write down what defects that they were finding. (Uh-huh.) And uh,... (A little more interesting.) Uh-huh. Yeah, it was, and uh, uh, it was, it paid a little bit more. (Is that what they call re-sort?) Uh, yeah. (Yeah?) No it wasn't re-sort. It was, what did they call it? Well, I don't remember what, what the title was, but anyway, I made about two or three cents more...[laugh]...on the hour. See, I, when I first went to work, I was making 25 cents an hour. (Uh-huh.) And uh, it paid a little bit more. (Yeah, it did.) Uh, and uh, uh, my boss told me, he said the reason that he uh, put me on that job, he said it wasn't because I was uh, the fastest worker they had or anything. It was simply because I got along with people. (Oh I see.) And uh, uh, that made me feel kind of good. (Yeah. How long did it take, how, how long were you there before they shifted you to that...?) Well, maybe a year or two. (A year or two.) You know. But uh, you know, they had girls that had been there, I mean, women, that had been there longer than that. And, but they didn't move up. But uh, of course, we didn't have a union back then. (No.) And uh, so anyway, uh, uh, I got sick and had to have surgery and uh, well, we were having a rough time back then. Uh, and uh,... (Is this still before the war?) Oh yes, uh-huh. I, I, and I had to have uh, uh, surgery. That's why I never had any children was uh, and uh, so uh, uh, then uh, before I got uh, through uh, my surgery, my mother got sick. (Mmm-hmm.) And she was in the hospital. I was in the hospital 18 days when I had surgery. [laugh] (Yeah.) Then my mother was in there uh, uh, 14 weeks one year. (Wow.) And uh, I was the only one working. (inaudible)

Jennifer: Did you have insurance then or was that like out-of-pocket you paid?

Opal: They had, they paid us six dollars a week insurance when we was off sick. (Uh-huh.) And uh, when I got sick, uh, uh, and they took me up to St. Mary's, those sisters up there wanted to, wanted me to sign that six dollars a week over to them. And I told them, I said, "No." I said, "I won't sign it over to you. If you don't want to take care of me uh,..." (If you don't believe me that I'm gonna pay you)..."send me home." (Yeah.) I said, "Because..." I said, "My mother and brother has to eat while I'm sick." (Yeah. Yeah.) And uh, so... (Wow.) We paid off those hospital bills by
paying...[cough]...the hospital a dollar and the doctor a dollar and...[laugh] The sisters jumped on me one time 'cause I wasn't paying more, but it was 'cause I couldn't. (Yeah. Yeah.) Uh, and uh, so anyway um, uh, I told uh, the sister, I said, "I paid you and I pay the doctor the same." And uh, she said, "Well, you're supposed to pay us first." And I said, "He took care of me the same as you did." (Yep.) And uh, so anyway, sooner, uh, later on, my brother uh, was able to go to work up there and help. Uh, he was a brick layer. And he, he finally got some work up there to help work some of that doctor bill off uh, uh, for the hospital. But man, I tell you, I was up to my eyeballs. (Mmm. I bet. I bet.) I never will forget they was one of the bosses that I had that loved to talk dirty to me. (laugh) And I, I... (Oh dear.)... I, I had been used to that. (Mmm. You had or you hadn't?) Hadn't. (Hadan't. Yeah. Sure.) Uh, and uh, oh, it used to just embarrass me to death, and I, you know, I've thought about that woman, uh, that Hill woman, when she was talking about uh, ... (Clarence Thomas?)... Clarence... (Mmm-hmm.)... Thomas. I thought... I remembered all that. And it, it, you know, it can't uh, it was awful. Uh, I had to stand there and take it because I was scared to death to sass him or anything. Afraid... (Right.)... Afraid I'd lose my job. And I was desperate, you know. We, we were, you know. (Sure. Sure. - inaudible) Everybody was having a hard time back then, you know. (Yeah, sure. And a job at Owens was nothing to be uh...) Uh-huh. Yeah, it was, it paid better than, than most other places. And uh, so you just, you, just stood there and took it. Whatever they dished out. [laugh] (Was he uh, like a little boss or a big boss or...?) Well, he was a, what they call a crew leader. (A crew leader.) Mmm-hmm. (How long did that go on?) Oh I don't, it didn't last too long, you know, but uh, it was just the embarrassment.

Jennifer: [inaudible]

Opal: I never will forget how embarrassed I would get, you know. (Yeah.) And uh, I had been married when I, uh, see, I got married when I was 17. And uh, uh, my husband and I separated in two years. [laugh] And uh, ... (Oh goodness!)... so uh, uh, you'd think that it wouldn't embarrass so much but he would, you know, I remember one time when we were going on a trip with his sister and her husband. Uh, ... (Your husband or...?)... My husband and, and, and his sister and her husband. (Uh-huh.) And Red was, he was saying so-, some kind of smutty little things, you know. And uh, my husband called him down for it because, you know, he, he, he knew how... (It bothered you.) ... how embarrassed I, it, it made me, you know. And uh, of course, now, man, I, I cuss like a sailor. [laugh] (laugh) And you couldn't embarrass me with anything, I don't think. After all those years at, at... (Certainly. Certainly.) But uh, I never will forget how... (That's hard. That's hard.) Mmm-hmm. (That's real hard. I don't know.) But uh, uh, ...
them, that they selected like prettier women to work.

Opal: Well, they might have, I don’t know. But uh, uh, after, not too long after I went to work there, they did set up some rules, you know, to go by. You had to have uh, a high school education and I don’t know why because that’s stupid work. [laugh] (Yeah. You needn’t know how to read to do that. Huh?) Uh, but anyway, uh, uh, uh, they uh, uh, they had, uh, rules, you know. (Mmm–hmm.) Of course, you know, uh, I think any place that uh, if you knew somebody that, a boss or something, why you might could get in. I don’t know, I mean, I never was much aware of that. But some, uh, but uh, a lot of the women that, that uh, was pretty and all, they got the better jobs, you know. I mean, easier jobs. (Yeah, yeah.) Uh, and uh...(Easier on them as a whole too probably.) I never was the boss’ favorite. [laugh] (Yeah, uh, sounds like a pretty uh, uh, difficult situation to be in. I mean, you know, like you said. So...) But uh, I know, uh, Louie Pike was my boss for years and uh, Louie and I, we, we would go ‘round and ‘round every time you t–, turned around. (Oh really? I’ve heard a lot about Louie.) And I was, I was uh, uh, back-up grievance girl and uh, the grievance girl was off about half the time, and I, uh, I uh, I never will forget, Louie called me in the office and he said, "Now Opal," he said, uh, uh, "You know, Ann and I, we get along fine." And I said, and he said, "And I hope you and I can get along." I said, "Louie," I said, "There’s only uh, one thing about it." I said, "As long as you treat the girls right," I said, "I’ll get along with you." (Yeah, right.) And uh, I never will forget the first time I tangled with him. [laugh] (laugh) Oh Lord. That was uh, I was uh, they used to put me on uh, uh, quality inspection. (Mmm–hmm.) Uh, and uh, then I’d work it for a while and uh, and then they’d take me off and put a man on that had been there about a year, you know. So uh, uh, I finally got the quality reading, you know, but they wouldn’t allow me to bid on it. It was a higher paid job, you know. (Sure.) And uh, so uh, uh, I happened to be working on quality uh, and uh, uh, at that time and, and uh, they was uh, on A-1 laher, they was two girls working on there. (Mmm–hmm.) And their, their job was running real bad, and it was hard to handle, you know. I mean. (Lots of bad ware or...?) Yeah, lots of bad ware. And it was the kind of defects that were hard to see. (Mmm.) And uh, they was two girls on the other laher next to them that their job was easy. (Mmm.) And uh, so uh, the boss on this job ______ on, on the lahers, crew leader told them to uh, swing, you know, between the lahers, you know, to uh, for those girls to take off more ware on that other laher. (Right.) And let one of the girls go over and help them out occasionally. (Right.) And so, uh, the crew leader was, he couldn’t talk plain. And uh, he uh, he uh, they was uh, one of those girls was standing there talking to her boyfriend all day long. I mean, off and on, you know. (inaudible) And they never, not one time, and I had to go back between those lahers uh, to cut the ware, you know. The–, they had uh, light spots in the sides of them. (Oh, right.) And I had to go back between the lahers to cut the ware to check and make sure they were all right. And uh,
I couldn’t work ______, I couldn’t help but to see what’s going on. And not only that, but the guy came down there and called my attention to it. (Really.) He says, "I told them to swing over there and they’re not doing it." [laugh] (Yeah.) And uh, so anyhow, the next day when I uh, went to work, uh, one of the women off of the A-1 uh, told me, said, "Look at that uh, bonus sheet." And I looked and they had charged up uh, uh, about two or three hours of the other laher’s time to, to A-1. (Uh-huh.) And uh, that wasn’t right because they were working on bonus, you know. (Uh-huh.) And uh, so I, I, I jumped on the crew leader and he said, "Look, they made a 150 percent bonus the way it was." I said, "Well, they earned it." (Yeah.) I said, "They were the ones that earned it." Uh, I said, "You called my attention to, to the fact that those girls weren’t swinging over there." (Yeah.) And I said, "They, uh, the girls on A-1 earned that bonus if they made 200 percent." (Right. Right.) And uh, so uh, uh, I went and jumped on Louie. (Yeah.) And uh, Louie, he said, "How did you know they didn’t swing over there?" I said, "I couldn’t help but see it. It was right in front of my eyes." (Right.) He said, "If you’d been doing your job, you wouldn’t have seen it." And I said, I said, "Not only that but..." I can’t think of the guy’s name. As well as I know him, I can see him. (Yeah, yeah.) Anyway, I said, "He even called my attention to it." (Yeah.) And uh, so Louie uh, wasn’t satisfied. I went on back and I, I, I said, "Well, you’re gonna pay those girls." I said, "You’re gonna correct this." And he said, uh, he came down, he jumped on me, you know. And he, uh, uh, uh, again about it. If I had a been paying attention to my own job, I wouldn’t have seen it, you know. And uh, so I just finally, I, I, I just went to pieces. (Mmm.) And I, I had to go home. (Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.) And I walked up to him in the, in the factory...[laugh]...and one of the guys from machine line was standing there with him and uh, ______, and I walked up to Louie and shook my finger in his face and I said, "Louie," I said, "you’ve got me so upset that I’m gonna have to go home." (Yeah.) But I said, "I’m gonna tell you something. When I come back, I’m gonna have a grievance written up, and you’re gonna pay those girls." And...[laugh]...(inaudible)...when I came back the next day, those two girls there on that A-1 signed that grievance and uh, and when it came before the uh, supervisor, uh, uh, the supervisor looked at Louie and says, "What are you gonna do about this grievance, Louie?" He says, "Pay the girls." [laugh] (So he, he gave into you?) He just...(inaudible)...he was just trying to run a buff on me.

Jennifer: Yes, yes he was. So let me, let me, let me go through this to make sure I understand this. The two girls that were working the really difficult job were and then they were...(They were on A-1)...Right, and the other girls were being told to swing over there and help them, but they didn’t? (They didn’t, uh-huh.) They, but they were getting compensated as if they did? (Yeah, uh-huh.) And the two girls that worked hard weren’t getting enough for both of them. (Uh-huh. They wasn’t getting as much as they earned.)
Right. All right. Well, that's, yeah, that, so that, was that the only kind of procedure that you had, that kind of grievance procedure? Was that the only form of like uh, I mean, did that handle everything? Did all grievances go through this kind of procedure?

Opal: Yeah, you had to uh, file a grievance. You had to write it up, you know. And uh, uh, file it and uh, give to the boss and, and give it to the supervisor. And...

Jennifer: Could you have, could you have written a grievance, filed a grievance about you were talking earlier about the man that uh, kept talking to you and harassing you?

Opal: No, you see, back, back, when that, when that went on, we didn't have a union. (Uh-huh.) You see, uh, uh, the only union that was in that plant when I first went to work there was the uh, mold makers. (The mold makers.) Uh, and they were uh, uh, they were the only ones that was organized. Well, then later on, the machine mine, uh, which was, was skilled workers, you know, these were skilled workers,... (Right.)... uh, they organized... (Mmm-hmm.)... and uh, uh, the machine mine. And then uh, uh, you, uh, during the war, uh, the, they started organizing the uh, the rest of the plant. (Mmm-hmm.) The uh, maintenance uh, uh, selecting and maintenance. And uh, the rest of the plant uh, organized. The fact is I helped organize when, when they were organizing. Uh, the guy back on the machine line that was a friend of mine uh, ours, you know,... (Mmm-hmm.)... uh, came down and asked me if I would talk to the girls, you know, they was gonna have a union election. (Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, the uh, they had uh, uh, the mold makers was one international union. (Mmm-hmm.) And then when they organized the machine line, it was AFL-CIO. (Mmm. Mmm-hmm.) I mean, it was AFL. (AFL, right.) Uh-huh, but uh, that was before the, the AFL-CI, and CIO or-, uh, merged. (Merged. Right.) And uh, so uh, uh, Homer came down talked to me, and uh, he was one of their union officials back on machine line. (Uh-huh.) And he asked me if I would talk to the girls and ask them to vote for the AFL instead of the CIO. (Hmm.) And he didn't have to talk to me very much about it because, you know, I had been uh, uh, noticing that the CIO uh, uh, was out on war strikes and everything than the AFL. (Uh-huh.) And of course, I was a little uh, timid about, about strikes and things like that. [laugh] (Yeah. Yeah.) Uh, but uh, I, I remember the first, first uh, uh, thing that ever happened about a union there. Uh, Owens started uh, clubs, you know, organizing clubs in the, in the plant... (Mmm-hmm.)... and they would uh, spend money, you know, they built that club room down there, and uh, uh, they would have parties uh, uh, you know, give the clubs a little bit of money along, you know. In other words, they was trying to keep the people happy... (Right.)... without a union. (Right. I see.) Uh, but uh, uh, and we enjoyed it. [laugh] (Yep. Yeah. You ran with it. You all had a lot stuff.) And uh, we had uh, some real _____,
nice activities and they had uh, ball teams uh, ball, ball players. They hired just to play ball. (Yeah. I heard that.) And uh, so uh, uh, that was all, uh, to try to keep the people satisfied to keep them out of the union probably i-, in my opinion. (Mmm-hmm.) Uh, and uh, uh, but anyway, I know I, I really, thoroughly enjoyed it because, you know, working the shift work we did, it was awfully hard to keep up with the friends that you had before you went to work there. (inaudible) Uh, 'cause, you know, you’d work all kinds of crazy, I mean, three ‘til eleven, seven to three,...(Rotating, just whatever week.) Uh-huh. (Yeah, sure.) And uh, so uh, uh, it uh, it made the people uh, uh, you’d form friendships in there that, that uh, lasted. (Keep you tied in. Right, right.) But uh, anyway uh, when uh, when they uh, I, I did everything I could to, to get the AFL, AFL uh, in there, and uh, I know the night that uh, that they had, after they had the election and the union had won, we uh, the, uh, international man from uh, our union and uh, several of us went over in _____ to a nightclub over there. He took us out, treated us. (Yeah. Sure, sure.) [laugh]

Jennifer: So you’re talking about, okay, you were organized by the international glass blowers union?

Opal: Glass uh, glass bottle blowers association. It was then. (Sorry. All right.) And uh,...(And there was still a debate as to whether you were going to go AFL or CIO at that point?) But, yeah, and uh, but uh, uh, the AFL won. (Mmm-hmm.) You know. (Mmm-hmm.) It was uh, see, uh, glass bottle blowers was associated with the, with the AFL. (Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.) And uh, the CIO was uh, uh, like the automobile workers...(Hmm. Heavy machinery, heavy industry. And the AFL was for _____ right? More traditional crafts, more traditional trades?) Well, they originally were, uh, mostly craft workers, but uh, uh, later on, they organized uh, you know, uh,...(Sure.)...unskilled workers, the same, you know. (Right, right.)Because I’d say that it uh, our jobs at Owens, that we had to work so many years there before we got, got a chance to bid on anything else...[laugh]...was unskilled workers. (Yeah. Sure, sure, sure. But you were getting paid, you know, money that, you know, getting paid good money.) Yeah.

Jennifer: So who, who led the, the people, who led the workers in the direction of having two different locals for the men and the women? What, do, do you recall how that decision got made to organize the women and the men separately?

Opal: No, I really don’t uh, know how, how it came to uh, to be that way. (Hmm. Mmm-hmm.) But really, it was better.

Jennifer: Yeah? You think so, and what’s, what’s your reason for that?

Opal: Well, uh, my reason for it is that when the men took over, I mean, when, when they merged the two locals uh, when they merged
the two locals uh, uh, the men and the women, they always had a man, and the damned, stupid women would vote for them men. (Yeah.) [laugh] (Yeah.) They’d have a man, uh, they was never another woman uh, president of the union after, after they merged. Women are, women are so stupid. (laugh) I swear they are. (Um...) And I’m a woman, but I, I still say that.

Jennifer: So if a separate female union like...(Huh?)...the, the separate female local provided like a space where women could like get positions of leadership and such. But when it merged, they lost those opportunities?

Opal: Well, uh, they, they had to depend on the men to uh, uh, you know, to fight for them and uh, I don’t know how much the men fought for them. But that, they, they didn’t merge until after I left. (Mmm-hmm. Yeah.) So I don’t know how they fared, but uh, you know, even after I sued the company, you know, and won the suit, uh, they still kept trying to get by with uh, you know, stopping, uh, keep, keeping women from different jobs, you know. (Yeah.) Uh, but uh, uh, they was two or three women that uh, several women that, that would back me, you know, or they would uh, fight on their own, you know. They’d file charges too, you know, after I did. (Mmm-hmm.) I mean, after I got...(Mmm-hmm. So you had some help?)...Uh-huh. Later on, I did, but I also had...[laugh]...while I was suing the company, uh, they was uh, two girls that I know of was taking a petition to uh, for me to stop the suit. (A petition?) A petition. Yeah. And I was working on the laher with those girls, and they were treating me like, oooh. (Ooh brother.) They were giving me a rough time. (I bet.) Uh, and uh, so uh, I, I found out about it, and uh, uh, and when I found out about it, I walked up to them, and I said, "I hear you all are taking a petition for me to stop that suit." I said, "If every damn woman in here signs that uh, petition," I said, "I’m going through with it." I said, "You can’t stop me." (Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.) And...(What’d they say to that?)...Well, I never heard any more about the petition. [laugh]

Jennifer: So how did this process um, begin? When did you first begin to think, when were you first, you know, kind of uh, uh, understand what was going on in terms of uh, what you could do? In terms of a lawsuit? (Well...) When did you first start to think about it?

Opal: ...uh, I’ll tell you, my, my sister-in-law was president of the union at the time. (Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, she’s the one that got me uh, more or less involved in uh, a lot of the uh, union activities. (What, what’s her name? What was her name?) Her name was Louise Allman. (A-L-L-M-A-N?) Mmm-hmm. Uh, but uh, uh, she um, uh, she had been away on a trip uh, you know, for the union. (Mmm-hmm.) And when she came back, uh, uh, we were working real closely together. That was, you know, when I was still back there, I was back at grievance girl and...(Mmm-hmm.)...was real active in the union at the time. And uh, I think, I don’t know whether I was
treasurer or something. [inaudible] I held some kind of an office besides being back-up grievance... (Uh-huh.) ...on the shift, and uh, uh, uh, but anyway, uh, I think I was chairman of the business committee is what, what it was. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, so anyway, uh, Louise came back from this trip, and that's when that law had gone into effect, you know, that uh, this law against discrimination against uh, sex... (Uh-huh.) ... uh, uh, national, uh, origins and I don't know. (Mmm. Yes. And do you know what year that was?) That law... (Yeah.) ... but uh, you know what I'm trying to say. (Yeah.) It's uh, that's when that law went into effect, and we had, before that we had filed charges, I mean, filed grievances and filed grievances, and they'd gone to arbitration and the arbitrator would rule against us every time. (Inaudible.) And uh, so Louise came and uh, we were sitting down there in uh, locker room and uh, she was telling us about that law and uh, uh, we said that, that we believed that uh, that that might be the way to go, you know. (Yeah, take advantage of that.) So I said, "Well," I said, "I've got the quality rating." I said, "I'd be ideal to do it." (And why is that? And why would that be? I don't, I don't understand that.) Well, it was a little bit higher paying job. (Oh, I see.) Mmm-hmm. Uh-huh. (All right.) And they had uh,...

END OF SIDE ONE

Jennifer: ... volunteered basically, for the...

Opal: Oh yeah. Uh, uh, and uh, see, uh, it hadn't been very long before that that I had, they had put me on quality for uh, to, to train, help train some guy. (Yeah. To take over a position higher than yours eventually.) And it, and it hadn't been very long before that til [inaudible] I had helped train that guy. And then they took me off and put him on. (Mmm-hmm.) And I know, uh, we got a space on the laher, and I was sweeping and one of them little smart, smart guys... [laugh]... uh, said to me, said, "Well, they finally found something that you could do." (Hmm.) He was a laher tenant. (Mmm-hmm. Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, God, it burned me up. (Inaudible) Uh, and so, so anyway, uh, it wa-, wasn't too long after that 'til that law went into effect and, and I was just all for fighting it, you know. (Yeah. You had your own motives is what you're saying?) Uh-huh. (You weren't doing it for the union?) But you know, there was women there that had years more seniority than I did, you know, that uh, uh, that I, uh, you see, I, my, my seniority was broken, you know. (Uh-huh.) Because I quit that one time. And uh, they was [inaudible] some women there that had years on, ahead of me. (Yeah.) But uh, anyway, um, I filed a grievance and uh, and it uh, went the same way the others did, you know. They... (What...) ... uh, ... (What was the, the specific reasons
about?) Well, I filed a grievance. That was the first procedure I did when I started the suit. (Uh-huh.) When I started this. (Okay.) I filed the grievance. I went through the grievance procedure. (Uh-huh.) And uh, they ruled against me. So I, I called Ken Heckler uh, and uh, uh, and uh, ask him how to get in touch with the uh, equal opp-, opportunities commission in Washington. And uh, so uh, uh, Ken uh, put me in touch with them, and uh, they sent uh, uh, an investigator down. And it was a woman, bless her heart. (Bless her heart.) And uh, so meanwhile, uh, the uh, union had a, our union had an election and uh, my sister-in-law lost, lost the election. (Mmm.) Elected another woman. And uh, Jane McComas. (Jane McComas? All right.) And uh, so anyway uh, but I invited, we met down uh, I, I invited quite a few uh, women to meet with, with the uh, uh, investigator and uh, ______ or what, I forget what they called her. Anyway, she was a lawyer. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, uh, all of us put our two cents worth in, you know. (Yeah, sure.) Uh, uh, our complaints, and uh, so uh, of course, the suit was, was my, my suit, you know, but I let everyone of them have a say, say in it, you know. (Sure, sure.) Uh, that was, uh, uh, they was Ann Fowler and, and uh, my sister-in-law and, and I, the new president of the union and uh, I think I was the vice president of the union at that time. (Wow.) And uh, uh, I forget, they was several others, but I, I forget uh, who all was there. But all of them ha-, uh, uh, you know, chimed in, you know. (Yeah.) And, and told her. (Sure.) Told her what was going on. (Sure. Contributed. Yes.) So anyway, uh,...

Jennifer: Now did the plant, did the, did the management know you were going through all these channels? I mean, was there ever a point when they found out everything that was going on? Did you carry out any of this um, secretly, quietly or was this open?

Opal: No way, I, I wasn’t, I wasn’t uh, being quiet about it. (laugh) Uh, uh, anyway, uh, they had uh, they, they sent uh, I, I tried to call her. She was an investigator, but they sent conciliators in here, you know, to try to get the com-. They sent people in here from Toledo and everywhere, you know, to try to get the two unions to agree, you know. (Mmm-hmm.) Uh, I mean, uh, unions to agree and so on, and they couldn’t get, get any agreement uh, with the company and the union, so uh, uh, finally they sent me a letter from uh, the office of e-, equal opportunity that um, uh, it seemed that we couldn’t get, get a concilia-, you know, any concilia-,...(Conciliatory action, yeah.) And, and uh, so they said that uh, I would have to sue through the uh, federal court. And it would, at no charge to me, and uh, no cost. (At no charge to you?) Uh-huh. (They were gonna foot the bill?) No cost. (The EOE was gonna foot the bill?) Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh, no cost to me and uh, and that the company couldn’t do anything to uh, uh, you know, with me. They couldn’t fire me or anything for it. (Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm. You were protected.) Uh-huh. So you know, it scared me, you know. (Whew. Yeah.) Uh, to think about having to go to federal court. (Yeah.) And Judge Christie was the judge, you know, here in Huntington. He was the federal judge. (Oh.) And uh, I went down to
Judge Christie’s office after I, I thought about it for several days before I went, but I, I, I was determined, you know. (Yeah. Yes. You were in it. —laugh.) So I went down, I went down, and you know that son-of-a-gun, that’s a polite name for him. (Yes.) [laugh] (Yes. What did he say to you?) He said, "Young lady," he says, he says uh, "You’re not a, a young lady anymore." He said, uh, "Aren’t you afraid of losing your job?" A judge. It’s a man’s world. (Oh, it sure is.) Uh... (It sure is.) And he was trying to scare me. (Yes he was.) And I went to uh, I told him, I said, "Well, judge," I said, "It’s like this." I said, "I’ve had someone to, I’ve had to take care of all my life up until now." (Yeah.) And I said, "There’s nobody gonna starve if I lose my job except me." (Yeah.) And I said, "This is one thing I’m willing to starve for." And uh, so he saw I was determined, and uh, he said, "Well, do you know any lawyers?" And I, I said, "Well, I don’t know." I said, "Uh, I’ll think about it." He said, "Well," he said, "uh, you pick out a lawyer and I’ll appoint him." And uh, so I went over and talked to Lafe _______ uh, he was, he had done some work for the union. (Uh-huh. What was his first name?) Lafe _______. (Lafe?) Lafe. (Lafe.) L-A, L-A-F-E. (L-A-F-E.) Uh, and uh, Lafe wouldn’t take, wouldn’t touch it. (Huh.) And uh, so my brother, meanwhile, had a drinking buddy, uh, that was a lawyer. Uh, and uh, Ken Fisher, uh, and uh, Ken had been to my house and everything. And I, when Lafe turned it down, I hated to ask uh, uh, uh, Ken. (Mmm-hmm.) But I thought well, uh, he can uh, he can turn me down if he wants to, you know. (Sure, yeah.) So I, I, I called him and I said, "Ken," I said, "I’ve got a, a case against Owens-Illinois for discrimination." And I said, "One lawyer’s already turned me down." I said, "I-, if you want to turn me down, now I’m not gonna be mad at you." (laugh—Yeah.) And uh, he said, "I’d be delighted to take it." (Cool.) So uh, Ken uh, was my lawyer, and bless his heart, uh, he told me one time, he said, "Opal," he said, "you know, we do things in our life time that we are ashamed of, and we do things that we are proud of." And he said, "The proudest thing I’ve ever done was to take your _____, case." (That’s great.) He said, uh, that we would be in law books from now on. (Yeah.) We, I know that we were the first suit that was ever filed in this area. I don’t know but what it was the first suit that was ever filed. (It was certainly one of the very first, if not the very first.) Uh, I’ll tell, uh, uh, one of the men that came in from Washington, you know, like I said, they just kept trying to get by with stuff, you know. (Yeah.) Uh, and uh, uh, I know Marg-, uh, Margaret Daly and uh, uh, two or three of them had uh, filed charg-, uh, grievances and charges and things... (Mmm-hmm.) ...til they uh, finally decided that they wasn’t gonna get by. And uh, so anyway they uh, uh, uh, this man came in from Washington and they sent for me to come up in the office. (Mmm-hmm.) And I thought what have I done now? (Oh goodness. Yeah. It must have been a scary time working there then.) And uh, here it was this guy from uh, o-, office of equal opportunity. He said, uh, "I wanted to meet you." I, he said, "I, I, I, I told them that I wanted to talk to you." He said, "You know," he said, uh, "I, I am so proud to meet you." He said,
"Because we've settled cases all over this country..." (Yeah.) "...with the precedents set by your suit." (Yeah.) He said, uh, he said, "Your name was the first name that I heard when I went to work for the office of equal opportunity." (Wow. Wow. Wow. That must make you feel so good.) And uh,...(That's wonderful.)...so uh, you know, I, I was happy, you know, that, that I made a difference. (Yeah, yeah.) Fact is,...[laugh]...I've got, I've got a whole lot of junk over there to prove it. [laugh] (Oh, you sure do, don't you? Lots of ______.) [laugh] (laugh)

Jennifer: So um, so anyway, so I, I like the way you were telling me about it, uh, this narrative. So uh, Ken Fisher takes your case, agrees to be your lawyer, uh, and then what? So then you're in court, right?

Opal: Yeah, uh, well, uh, uh, there wasn't anything to it after it went to court. (Really?) Uh-huh. (It wasn't in litigation hardly at all?) No. (It just...?) It just uh, after it went, aft-, after it went to the judge. (And what ______?) Judge Christie. (And, and he...) Uh, they, uh, it was settled right, right now after the, after it got the judge uh, after the judge so they couldn't talk me out of it. [laugh] (laugh---____ way to get around it, huh?) [laugh] (Trying to strong arm you. That's interesting. So it just went like that. It was a proving case, yeah.) Mmm-hmm. But we had, I don't know how many meetings, you know, uh...(Hmm.)...to try, with the, with the big, big shots from uh, Toledo and, and uh, and uh, the union, all the union officers and uh, people uh, you know, meeting. But they, they nev-, we never could get a settle peaceably so uh, uh, it had to go to court. But when it did get to court, why it was over in no time flat. I didn't even have to testify. (Really?) Uh-huh.

Jennifer: Really? Um, okay, let me, let me back track a little bit. What was the original grievance that you, that, that you filed that led into...wa--, was it about the way you...

Opal: They wouldn't give women the right to bid on higher paid jobs. (All right.) They just kep-, we, we couldn't bid on anything uh, uh, the only job we could work on was uh, packing those bottles. [laugh]

Jennifer: [laugh] And how did they justify that? Did they, did they try to justify that? Did they try to give you reasons why?

Opal: No, I tell you uh, one of the times that we filed a grievance uh, uh, you know, about the uh, uh, bidding on higher paid jobs uh, uh, the uh, uh, selecting supervisor said, uh, "You women," he said, "we couldn't, we couldn't do without you." He said, uh, "But we're not gonna give up our right to uh, uh, to s--, to work you where we want to." (Yeah.) I showed him. [laugh] (laugh)
Jennifer: You sure did, you sure did. [laugh] Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness. I've heard things about the, the management would say things like um, we need the women in the selecting department because of their dexterity and men don't have the dexterity that women do for the selecting jobs. And that's why men work over here and women work over there. I mean, uh, I've heard some interesting stories about that. It must have just really been hard to hear. [laugh] You know. Just total nonsense. Um, okay, and so what years was this? Wha-, wha--.

Opal: It was in the 60s, but I, I swear I've, I, I, I don't think I even have my uh, uh, copy of the uh, ruling. (Mmm.) Because they have uh, several of the women have uh, used my case, you know, uh, to uh, settle with the, the company. And I, I, I, I don't know whether the last one I let have a copy of my uh, uh, suit, whether she ever gave it back to me. (Huh.) But uh, you know, if anybody knew where to look in the law books... (Yeah...) they could find uh, ... (A copy of it)... a copy of it. I, I don't uh, I don't have a copy of it I don't think. (Um,...) And I can't remember what year it was. But it was r-, they hadn't e-, they didn't even have an office completely set up when I filed charges.

Jennifer: Really? So that was real, real quick. Jumped on it. Well, that's, that's exactly what it was there for. Um, how were the changes implemented? How did, how did they start making up for lost time? I mean, what did, what was it like afterwards?

Opal: Uh, I think they were one or two women got some back pay, but uh, I, I didn't get anything out of it, you know. (Yeah.) I just uh, all I was fighting for was the right to, to bid on a job, you know. (Sure.) Uh, and uh, I remember one time, [laugh] uh, this friend of mine, Ruth, uh, uh, Ruth Black, she was a fighter too. And uh, uh, Ruth asked me if I would uh, set up a meeting with the plant manager. See, uh, Jane, uh, the president of our union that beat my sister-in-law,... (Mmm-hmm.)... she was company, uh, and fact is I've got a tape over there where one of the women went to arbitration with her, and she was telling all about going out uh, about uh, Jane going out with the, with the, the uh, plant managers [inaudible]. (laugh) [laugh] And all this stuff, you know. (Uh-huh. Uh-huh.) And she, she taped this all. She's dead now, but uh, I've got that tape over there. Uh, and uh, uh, she uh, uh, but uh, uh, Jane would agree with the company ev-, every time, you know. But I was the vice president of the union. (Mmm-hmm.) And I sat, had to sit in, I sat in on all the meetings. (Mmm-hmm.) So uh, I, I remember this one time, uh, uh, Ruth uh, asked me to set up a meeting with uh, the plant manager because uh, one, the, the uh, selecting uh, supervisors had uh, said that he wasn't gonna post uh, one of the jobs uh, that uh, I forget what they called that job now. But it was a job that, keeping track of the amount of ware that was uh, uh, produced and so on. (Inventory.) And uh, uh, he wasn't gonna post that job anymore and uh, so uh, sh-, she uh,
asked me to set up a meeting with the plant manager. So I did. (Yeah.) Uh, pla-, that plant manager happened to like me. (Oh, huh.) You know, I mean, I wasn’t dating him or anything like that. (No, no.) It wasn’t anything like that. But, but he seemed like he, he, he... (You could get along with him)...he was, he was a nice guy. (Mmm--hm.) And uh, so I called him and uh, I made an appointment and Ruth and I went in. And so boy, the minute we hit the door, she started laying it out to him. [laugh] (Oh really?) And uh, I didn’t have to say a word. [laugh] (laugh) And he said, "Now quiet down." He said, "I, I’m gonna get these guys in here." (Yeah.) He got Sandy and uh, and uh, a other guy that was concerned. I, I can’t remember what his name was, but I, I can see him, you know. (Yeah, sure.) Uh, but anyway, he got them both in there and uh, that was uh, bosses. And uh, she lit in on them. (Hm.) And so one, this one that was over, over the shipping and the selecting both, you know, he jumps up and he says, "I don’t have to sit here and listen to this stuff." And uh, the plant manager pointed his finger at him and he says, "You sit down there." He said, he said, uh, "You will listen to it or you’ll go out the door." He said, "Ten years ago, we wouldn’t have dreamed that we would have women back on the machine line sweeping." (Yeah.) "Or uh, working on, in any of these jobs that they’re working on now." But he says, "It’s the law and you’re going to abide by the law or you’re gonna leave here." (Wonderful.)

IN BACKGROUND: BELLS CHIMING

Jennifer: Good to hear probably.

Opal: And uh,...(Yeah.)...so I had a lot of admiration for him. (Yeah that was a good plant manager. laugh) [laugh] Yeah. And uh, so uh, uh, when we left that day, left his office, uh, uh, that guy walked down to the plant with me, he says, "Well, from here on out," he says, "I’m gonna know I’m in the right before I make a move..." (Yeah.)...because you’re gonna keep on ‘til you get me fired." [laugh] (laugh—Oh goodness.) [cough]

Jennifer: So wha--, what do you think, I mean, there were so many women that uh, uh, di-, m-, I mean, didn’t help, and like you said, petitions and voting for men continuously. What, what, what do you think made you different? Why do you think you were different from those women?

Opal: Well, I, I suppose, uh, I’ll tell you why I believe. You know, uh, I think that down deep, my resentment of my father walking off and leaving us... (Mmm--hm.)...and my mother with a sixth grade education trying to raise us uh, and we, you know, I, I, I think that uh, that that probably had a lot to do with my uh, uh, feeling about men, you know. (inaudible) Uh, I remember one of the guys uh, uh, that was president of the union uh, at the time of the men’s union. Uh, when we were having those uh, uh, conciliators in. (Mmm--hm.) He said, uh, "I’ve got a family to keep." (Mmm.)
said, excuse my language, but I said, "Who in the hell do you think keeps these uh, children where these men walk off and leave their wives to take care of them by theirself?" (Yeah.) I said, "Who takes care of them?" (Yeah.) I said, "These women need their jobs the same as you do." (Certainly. Absolutely. Yeah. Yeah. That's true. Absolutely true.) And you know, he lost his _____ before it was over with. [laugh] (laugh) I mean, not, not anyway, he went on up into management, you know. (Oh.) He got, he got to be a big shot down there. (Yeah.) And then he got in trouble, and uh, I heard some of those women talking about uh, how sorry they was for uh, John Perry. And I thought, sorry for John Perry, I not, I wasn't a darned bit sorry for him. (laugh) I wasn't sorry for any of those men down there because boy, the w--, I'll tell you, they really tried to give me a rough time.

Jennifer: Yeah. So tell me about that. What kind of uh, what kind of harassment did you get because of your actions?

Opal: One time there um, there was a job they called chief quality inspector. Uh, and it was uh, you know, quality inspector. It was uh, uh, a higher paid job. And then chief quality inspector was a higher paid job yet. And uh, so I never did see those chief quality inspectors a doing any work that I didn't think a woman could do. (Right.) Uh, now I, I, I believe this, I believe that uh, you oughta be able to do every phase of a job that you are bidding on before you bid on it. (Yeah, sure.) Uh, I don't feel like that a woman should uh, if a job's heavy and she has to lift something too heavy, uh, she shouldn't uh, bid on that job. (Right, if she can't do it.) Uh, and uh, so anyway, uh, but this chief quality inspector job came up and uh, and uh, they was arguing about it in uh, uh, in uh, with management. Uh, and uh, management was saying that it wasn't a job for a woman. (Mmm. Mmm-hmm.) And so Ann Fowler and I, we, we were both on the uh, committee, business committee, and uh, uh, we were arguing that it was. And our president was agreeing with the company. (Your president, your plant manager? Your ...) The president of our union. (Oh! Oh, I see.) She was agreeing with the company. (And this is Jane McComas?) Uh-huh. Jane McComas. And uh, so uh, finally they said, "Well," they said, "I'll tell you what, we'll let you and Ann uh, work with uh, uh,..." Can't, I can't remember names as you well see. (inaudible) "Uh, this uh, chief quality inspector... (Uh-huh.)...uh, all day one day and see if you still think it's a, a job for a woman." (Yeah.) So we said okay. (Okay—laugh) So we go in the next day and we get with him and uh, he takes out immediately out to the warehouse. And he made us climb, thes--, they stack that, those cartons clear to the ceiling in that warehouse. (Right.) I don't know whether you've ever seen what the inside looked like. (Pictures—laugh.) Uh, well, it's, they've...it's, they're stacked higher than this room uh, uh, an duh, he made us climb up on the cartons. One carton after another to the top of that stack of ware. (Mmm—hmm.) Uh, and uh, we was sitting out, and I was sitting up on top there, and he was over there, you know, pretending to be gauging the ware, you know. (Huh.
Right.) And he said, "Can you feel these stacks shaking?" I says, "I sure can." I said, "It wouldn't take much of that to put me to sleep." I said, "I didn't get much sleep last night." And uh, so uh, Ann was, she wasn't as tall as I was. And [laugh] she was having a worse time climbing those stacks than I was. But uh,...(Yeah...)...but she climbed them. (Yeah?) We both did. (Yeah.) And uh, so uh, uh, when we came down off of there, they was abou-, uh, two or three guys standing over there that worked out in the shipping, and they was just dying laughing. And uh, uh, they called us over there and they said, "Stay right in there with him." He said, he s-, he hasn't worked this hard in all the years he's been on that job. (laugh) Said, "He'll have to take two weeks off to rest up." (laugh) [cough] So...[cough]...(You all right?)

**PAUSE**

Opal: And they'd ride with him and uh, uh, we went around on another stack and, and uh, they was uh, one of these uh, fork lifts. (Yeah.) Uh, trucks there. And uh, he made us ride those forks and uh, the guy that was operating the, the fork lift, he s-, he uh, uh, he uh, wanted to put a palate...you know what a palate is? (Mmm-hmm.) It's a... (Yeah.)...a... (Bunch of boxes.)...He wanted to put a palate on it. (Mmm-hmm.) And he, uh, he wouldn't let him. He wouldn't let him put a palate on it. They was one laying right there. (Uh-huh.) He wouldn't let him put it on there. He said, "There might not be one." So he made us ride those forks up the top of that stack. (You were sitting on this tow motor being lifted up?) Yeah, being lifted up to the top of the... (Oh my goodness!)...yeah, one of us on each one of the swings. [laugh] (laugh) (What a sight.) [laugh] (laugh) And so uh, we stayed u-, right with him, you know. So when the shift was over that day, uh, uh, Louie came up to me and he said, "Opal," he said, "you surely don't think that's a job for a woman." I said, "Louie, they not a damned thing about that job that a woman can't do." (Yeah.) [laugh] (laugh) (All right. What did he say to that?) Uh, he, he, he couldn't say anything. (Uh-huh.) And so anyway, uh, old Tom ________ (What's that last name?) Moning. (M-O-N-I-N-G or...?) M-O-N-I-N-G, I believe it is. Uh, uh, anyway, he was uh, he was chief quality inspector, and he hollered at me to come over there and uh, this was at the end of the shift. (Mmm-hmm.) And he looked at me and he s-, he was a ________ somebody, you know. And uh, I always have thought he was a queer. (Yeah.) Anyway, Tom said, "You surely don't think that you are qualified for a quality inspector?" I said, uh, I said, "Well, the only trouble with you, Tom, is that you are just scared to death a woman's gonna get a, a, some kind of a break." I said,...(Yeah.)..."You darned men," I said, "You just think that you own the world." (Yeah, yeah.) And they pretty well do. (inaudible—Well, yeah, yeah.) But uh, anyway uh, we just, we had to just keep fighting them and fighting and fighting, and we was still fighting them when I left. (Yeah, so you just went through this all...inaudible.) Shortly before I left, uh,
uh, I was uh, working on, as back up quality inspector, uh, 'cause like I told you, they was a lot of those women had more seniority than I had because my was broken. (Right, right.) And uh, so uh, uh, I, I didn't even get a, a steady job out of it, you know. [laugh] I got _______ nothing only, but satisfaction, you know. (Yeah, yeah.) And so uh, uh, I uh, uh, I uh, was uh, working down there in the hole and uh, uh, Ruth told me, said that there was a little old laher attendant that was trying to make her put a, put a trailer when she pulled one out, you know. (Uh-huh.) If uh, you know, if we, we inspected so many bottles off of each trailer. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, then uh, if we had to hold it up, we had to pull that trailer out ourself. (Yeah.) And uh, so they, they uh, those men would help each other pull those trailers out. (Yeah.) But the—, but we had to pull them out by ourself, you know. (Yeah, yeah.) Uh, they, they, nobody offered to help us. And uh, uh, I know they was one guy that, that uh, you know, acted like he wanted to help me but uh, you know, they, they, you know, stayed on his back... (Yeah.) 'til he wouldn't, he wouldn't help, you know. (Pressured him.) Uh-huh. And uh, so anyway, uh, uh, this one uh, guy, he, he was trying to make her put her trailer back in. And I said, "Don't you do it Ruth." (Mmm.) I said, "I've read the job description." (Yeah.) I says, "All it says is to pull the trailer out." Uh, and I said, "It doesn't say to put, put a trailer back in." (laugh) Because if we'd a had to put the trailer back in, we'd a had to put uh, hunted up palates to put on them and, and... (Yeah...) all that, you know. Been a whole lot more work for us. (Yeah.) And uh, so anyway, I t--, I dared her to, to, to... (Leave it out.)...uh, to, to put her trailer back in. So it wasn't long after that 'til they put that little old guy down there on my laher. So I held him a load of ware up, you know, and I pulled it out and... (Yeah...)...and uh, uh, went on about my business and uh, so uh, I happened to look over there and the, the chute was piling up, you know. I mean, he wasn't, hadn't put a trailer back in. (Mmm-hmm.) And directly here came the, uh, I don't know what it was, I, Louie was off or something. (Mmm-hmm.) Anyway, uh, we had another uh, shift foreman, uh, that day. And uh, oh, it was Emmitt. Emmitt Osborne. And uh, Emmitt came down there and he said, uh, "Opal," said, "put that trailer back in there." I said, "I'm not gonna do it." [laugh] That was the wrong thing to say, but uh, uh... (Hmmm...)...uh, I, he, he said, "Why?" I said, "You go upstairs and look at my job description." I said, "Now if you can show me where I, where I'm supposed to put that trailer back in there, I'll do it." (Mmm-hmm. Yeah.) That was the last I saw of Emmitt. And, and directly, that boy, but I picked up my pocketbook and went on to eat. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, that boy, when I came back, he was loading [inaudible]. (Yeah, yeah.) But you know, they just, they would do everything they could to make it hard on you. (Yeah. Yeah, yeah. And there weren't, and there were some then that wanted to help you, but they were pressured not to?) Mmm-hmm. (Yeah, that's a shame. That must have been really difficult.) One guy...[laugh]...one of the, one guy, when, when I filed that suit, you know, I told you, all those women met over there. (Yeah.) Well,
somebody told that, told there was one in from Washington that uh, that this guy got this woman pregnant and they was uh, trying to, they la-, fired her before uh, having an illegitimate pregnancy. (Oh. Yeah.) Uh, and he’s still working. (Yeah.) You know, I mean, they was...(Oh God, that makes me mad!)...that, that was in my suit, you know. (That was in your suit?) Yeah. Mmm–hmm. (Stuff like that?) Yeah, yeah. Uh, that was uh, some of them uh, in uh, so anyway uh, that guy got, he’s the one that I trained. That, that g–, that p–, that, that, that took the job and p–, and they put me back on the laher, you know. (Uh–huh.) That time, and uh, so uh, while I was training, you know, we got along great, you know. [laugh] (Yeah, sure.) But, but uh, after that why, uh, he uh, every time uh, he was, he got active in the union and uh, uh, we’d be up in Charleston to uh, state meetings, you know. And...(Mmm–hmm.)...and uh, if he’d seen me uh, uh, if he could get close to me if we’s at the, in the uh, hospitality room or somewhere and he’d see me, he’d he’d saddle up to me and he’d say, "I hate you, you old bitch you." (laugh) He said, "I’ll be glad when you’re dead." (Oh my goodness.) And he told me one time, he said, "If I ever catch you up at our galley, I’ll kill you." [laugh] (Good Lord!) (laugh—Good night! Did you get a lot of that or was that...?) No, he was the only one that was ever that...(That...)...that bad. (Yeah, yeah.) [laugh] (Were you ever scared?) No, I wasn’t scared of him.

Jennifer: What about the other women? How did they treat you?

Opal: Well, some of them uh, treated me pretty bad, but uh, uh, others, you know, uh,...(Were real grateful.)...but uh,... (...think.) Uh, they was very few of them had guts enough to stand up to for theirself though. (Yeah.) I, I swear, I don’t know how many times I’ve had women come up to me and they’d tell me, oh, they’d complain about, about the working conditions or something. (Uh–huh.) And they’d say, "Now don’t say I said anything, you know." (Yeah, yeah.) You can’t do that. (Yeah.) You know. (No, no.) You gotta either uh,...(...up behind what you say if you’re gonna say it.) Uh–huh. Uh–huh. And so it just uh, uh, I don’t know, it just uh, crazy world.

Jennifer: Yeah, it is. It is. I don’t understand that. I don’t understand why all the women weren’t behind you. I guess pressure from their husbands or from men at work or status quo or you know. (Mmm–hmm.) That must have been difficult.

Opal: Uh, they made all kinds of ware down there. (Mmm–hmm.) Uh, uh, I imagine that uh, some of them’s told you about all the Avon bottles and...(Liquor and...)...liquor and beer...(baby food jars)...rolling pins. [laugh]

Jennifer: Penicillin. Yeah. _________. Yeah, um, Clara Effingham showed me her, her glass rolling pin. She said she wouldn’t be able to bake anything without it. [laugh]
Opal: I've got one.

Jennifer: Do you? They must be wonderful. Did you bring home a lot of stuff?

Opal: I brought home stuff and I gave it all to my cousin. (Did you?) She, she was a collector, you know. (Yeah, yeah.) I brought home a lot of Avon bottles and I, I remember I brought home a little bear one time, you know, of some, I don't know what went in that bear. I forget, you know. But uh. (It had what?) Bear. A little...[laugh]...little jar...(Oh bear!) A jar about so high was a bear. (Yeah.) And uh, they had all kinds of...

Jennifer: Did you do mostly white and green glass or did you do any other colors of glass?

Opal: Amber once, they uh, had a, I think they had amber there for a short time, but they wasn't too much green glass. Uh, they didn't make too much green glass. Uh, it was mostly whiskey bottles uh, there towards the last. (Yeah.) But uh, that's the reason I guess I registered Democrat, and I guess ____ been Democrat for the rest of my life. [laugh] Uh, when I first went to work there, you know, uh, uh, they had, it was prohibition. (Right.) Uh, and uh,...(Yeah.)...so uh, not long after I went to work there, uh, Roosevelt ran for president, and uh, they ask us down there at the uh, the plant to vote for Roosevelt so that we could start making whiskey bottles. (Start making whiskey bottles again. Yeah.) Mmm-hmm. (I bet.) So my mother was a strong Republican. (Uh-huh, uh-oh.) And uh, so uh, would you like to have a glass of lemonade? (Um, sure. Sure, why don't I stop this?)

Jennifer: What about D-Day? Okay. (Huh?) I was just explaining on the tape. We're talking about D-Day. Go on.

Opal: Um, I, I wrote uh, uh, about what they did down at Owens, you know. They posted a, uh, the addresses of all the guys that was in service. (Mmm-hmm. Mmm-hmm.) Uh, and asked us to send Christmas cards to the ones we knew. (Mmm-hmm.) And I sent Christmas cards uh, to a whole bunch of them. And I got letters back begging me to write to them. And all during the war...(Yeah.)...I went around with [laugh] pencil and paper all, I mean, with pen and paper, all the time. (Writing letters.) And my mail box would be stuffed. (Stuffed.) Uh and I got sent letters that I have uh, had stuck in my memory, you know. (Yeah.) Uh, all those years and uh, things that they said, you know. Like one, one of my best friends uh, her, she got me to write to her brother. (Mmm-hmm.) And uh, I wrote to him, and he was, uh, in service when war started, and he went in from uh, Italy on up through, all the way through until just before uh, the war was over. (Uh-huh.) Uh, and uh, so I was writing to him and uh, you know, most of his letters were very calm, you know. (Mmm-hmm.) And, and all. (Mmm, -inaudible-) And all of a sudden I got one from him and he said, but I didn't hear from him for
several days, you know. I mean, for a while. (Uh-huh.) And uh, then when I did get a letter, he said, "How much longer do they think that I can stand to go on seeing my buddies uh, die beside of me." (My goodness.) And uh, uh, so he did, he cracked up, you know. (Yeah, yeah.) Battle fatigue. (Yeah.) And uh, then I got a letter from uh, one of the fellas that [laugh] uh, he was a laher tenant. (Uh-huh.) And uh, one day there, uh, I uh, uh, was having uh, the cartons was kinda tight that I was packing, and, and I was pushing and shoved on it, and, and uh, Red was just a real, he was a young, real young fella, you know. (Mmm. Mmm-hmm.) And uh, he said, uh, "You look like you're having trouble." I said, "Yeah." I said, "I need a carton stretcher." And uh, he said, uh, "Well, when I get time, I'll go hunt you one." And [laugh] sure enough, little fella, he [laugh]... (Did he go find you one?)... hunting for his carton stretcher __________. [laugh] (Laugh) (I was taken in too. I was like a carton stretcher?) [laugh] (Oh, well, I guess she needed a carton stretcher.) And so, so anyway, he got real peevd at me, you know. [laugh] (Yes. Yes. He tried to help you and all.) So, so, so when uh, when he, when I wrote to him, uh, I said, "Red, you been looking uh, hunting long enough for that carton stretcher. It's about time you come home." And I started getting letters from him. (Yeah.) And I, I got some of the most witty ones from him. (Yeah.) He was telling me about uh, being out uh, taking a bath in his helmet, uh, out in the field. (Uh-huh. laugh) And uh, uh, a truckload of women went by...[laugh] (Laugh-- Oh dear!) You had women workers that was going somewhere, and he said here I stood with my bare face hanging out. [laugh] (With a helmet on.) No with, he, he was, he was taking his bath in the helmet, you know. (Oh I see, I see.) Had...[inaudible]. (Oh goodness.) And, and uh, uh, uh, oh I don't know. I, I got some ..... that I remember uh, one of the guys that uh, worked at the plant that was, was in the Navy, and I ha-, had known him since I was about 16 years old. (Mmm--hmm.) And uh, but I got a letter from him, and he was, he was on a ship that landed the Marines at Iwo Jima. (Oh wow.) And he was uh, he was telling me how sad it was to see those guys uh, landing there, you know, and being shot down, you know. (Yeah.) He said they was going off of the uh, those landing boats like uh, kids going out to recess at, at school. And uh, being shot down. And uh,... (inaudible) Uh, I wish I'd a kept all those letters, but uh... (Oh yeah...)... you know. (Yeah.) You can only keep so much junk in your lifetime. (Yes. That's true.) And, but anyhow, my husband was in uh, 101st Paratroopers uh, I mean, the one that ended up being married to when he died. [laugh] (Laugh----That you stuck with.) Much, I, I was stuck with him. I couldn't divorce him. I tried to divorce him, but, [laugh] but, uh, darned, he wouldn't let me divorce him. But uh, (Yeah.) uh, yeah, it was a long story about that, but anyhow, uh, anyhow, he was in that 101st invasion, you know, uh, in Normanby. (Oh yeah.) And uh, and uh, he went in, they went in ahead of the uh, others, you know. Uh, they, they flew in before the rest of them did. (Mmm--hmm. Mmm--hmm.) And uh, uh, when he uh, jumped out of the plane, he was hit in back of the head with shrapnel. And he laid on a field over there for 13 hours before
they got to him. (Wow.) And it fractured his back uh, and uh, of course, that was the end of his uh...(Career.)...uh,... (Military.)...I wasn’t married to him at that time, but uh, I, I mar-—, we got married after he came, after the war was over. (Mmm–hmm.) But anyway, uh, I thought about him, D-Day, you know, him laying there on that field for 13 hours with a broken...(inaudible)...fractured back. (Wow.) And he was telling me that uh, he told me that uh, uh, when they finally did take him out to the, the, the beach,...(Mmm–hmm.)...uh, the medics was working on him and uh, things flew over and started _____ the beach and uh, these medics, they, they run and hid under the table so ....anything they could get under, you know. [laugh] (Yeah, yeah.) And uh, when they came back, he said, said, they apologized to him for leaving him. And [laugh] he said, "Well," he said, "don’t, don’t worry about it." He said, "If I could have run, I’d a been with you." [laugh]

Jennifer: laugh—-Absolutely. Crazy stuff. Crazy. Goodness gracious. Hmm. Were there more women working at the plant during the world, during World War II?

Opal: Yeah, we–, uh, we worked on the jobs that the men did then. (Did you really? Yeah.) I, I forget what they called that job that I worked on during this, the war. But it was a little higher paid job. (Uh–huh.) And uh, I had to uh, count the ware that uh, was packed and take it back and mark up a board back on the machine line. (Hmm.) And pull the trailers out and put the trailers back in for the girls to, to load. (Mmm–hmm. Mmm–hmm.) And uh, uh, it was a, a, a little higher paid job, but I tell you, they put me on these higher paid jobs when,...(Yeah.)...when they wanted me to, you know, to use me, but, but then I never had any rights on it. (Yeah.) Of course, I didn’t, I, I didn’t expect to keep that job because when the guys came back, that was their job, you know. (Right.) They had gone...(Yes.)...to fight the uh, war, and it would have been right for them to have kept it. Uh, that, that I didn’t resent. (No, sure, sure.) Uh, but I resented the fact that, that women never got a chance to bid on jobs like that. (And ones they were needed, and ones they were required.) Mmm–hmm. (And then they could do the job just fine.) Mmm–hmm. Yeah, they...(Yeah, they could do the job just fine during the war.) You w–, women, we can’t do without you. [laugh] But we’re not gonna give you any right. (Yep. laugh That’s it...)

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Jennifer: ...closing of the plant. Why do you feel like uh,...

Opal: ...build that plant overseas. [laugh]

Jennifer: Yeah, you think ______ capital flight? Is that, is that
your...(Yeah.) Hmm. A lot of people have told me that. (Mmm–hmm.)

Opal: Yeah, they’re gonna build a plant overseas. [laugh]

Jennifer: Someone told me that they had heard they had opened up a plant in Poland the day that the Owens plant closed. (Where?) Poland.

Opal: I wouldn’t doubt it. Well, uh, okay, my theory...(Okay, [inaudible]) I’ll tell what I thinks gonna happen sooner or later. [laugh] (All right.) But of course, it’s not gonna be, be enough to help us. (Yeah.) Uh, but when they, they keep on uh, putting people outta work in this country and sending them to countries that uh, that they can get cheap labor. Who in the hell’s gonna buy that stuff? (Yeah. Yeah, exactly.) They gonna do away with people’s purchasing power and...(Yes.)...and uh,...(Then they’re gonna lose their productive power.)...uh–huh. But meanwhile,... (Meanwhile...)...these guys’ll get rich...(Yeah.)...uh, and uh, uh, and uh, what do they care. They don’t care anything about this country.

Jennifer: I know. Or the workers. Yeah, it’s a, it’s a sorry situation. What do you see happening in Huntington? (Huh?) What do you see happening in Huntington? What do you see this town doing?

Opal: Oh, it breaks my heart. (Yeah.) I’ll tell you, you know, see, uh, when I was uh, growing up, uh, we lived down there on 7th Avenue and 14th Street. And we lived uh, right next door to the editor of The Herald-Dispatch. (Mmm–hmm.) They uh, and uh, I, I washed dishes for Ms. Gerald uh, of an evening. Uh, and uh, uh, she paid me a quarter a week. [laugh] And then when I got so that I, I was old enough to do a little bit of dusting and things like that, uh, she paid me, uh, she uh, raised my wages and let me help her on Saturday, you know. (Yeah.) Uh, and uh, but when I went to high school, I was 14 years old when I went to high school. (Mmm–hmm.) Uh, uh, I went over in town one day and uh, went to the dime store. And one of my friends had got a job in there. And uh, she was...(Your age.)...uh, my age and uh, uh, and I said, "Edith, how’d you get this job?" And she said, "I lied about my age." (Yep.) [laugh] And uh, so I just promptly walked myself in the office and I lied about my age and I went to work at the dime store working on Saturdays and during Christmas holidays. And uh, but you know, when I earned that quarter a week, and when I earned that uh, two dollars a day that I made at the dime store,...(Yeah.)...I, I took that home and gave it to my mother, you know. I, I never, I never had any money to manage myself until after my mother died. (Yeah, yeah.) Uh, and uh, so uh, uh, I worked uh, at Grant’s that next summer uh, all summer in the store downtown. (Is that a department stor–, was that a department store?) Uh, it was a, uh, it was, it wasn’t a dime store, but it was a, a, a, I believe about like, like they say the dollar store is now. (Hmm. Like a...) Some,
a store similar to that or a... (Okay.) ...I don’t think I’ve ever been in a dollar store. But anyway, it was, uh, it was similar to a dime store. But uh,... (Kind a more expensive.) ...a little uh, they had a little more stuff, you know. But anyway, I worked there that summer, that first summer I was in high school. Then I worked at uh, Woolworth’s uh, dime store the next winter, and uh, see, I worked at McCrory’s first and uh, uh, Grant’s and then Woolworth’s. Then the next summer uh, I worked at the Blue Jay overall factory. Uh, and all the money I earned I gave it to mom, you know, because, uh, uh, she bought my clothes, and she managed the money. And so anyway, uh, I was kinda trained to. [laugh] (Yeah.) And even after I got married, you know, uh, uh, now I didn’t work the first time I was married. But the second time I was married, I worked all the time. And I took my paycheck home and gave it to my mother because she was uh, sick. Uh, she, after she got that time, and she was 49 years old, she was never well again enough to ho–, hold a job. So uh, until my mother died, I never cashed a paycheck from Owens. (Wow. That’s interesting.) And uh,... (Yeah.) ...uh, so I never, I, I, I’ve had a hard time learning to manage money. [laugh] (laugh) But uh, I, I think I’ve done pretty good. (Yeah.) Uh, between my brother and I, we–, I’ve, I’ve got this house and it’s paid for and I’ve got uh, enough income to live on and I, I, I and I thank God that I’m able to live by myself and uh, take care of myself. (Certainly.) ‘Cause I had a stroke here a while back, you know. (Oh, you did really?) Oh yeah. And uh,... (You seem to have recovered perfectly.) Well, uh, I, ’m just a little bit unsteady on my feet, you know. (Mmm-hmm.) But uh,... (Balance ______.)...yeah. (Deal with that.) But uh, anyway, I, I really am thankful that, that uh, I’m thankful for the years I did work at Owens. Now believe me, uh, I mean, I hated every day of it, but I still uh, feel like I’m glad I did it. (Yeah, sure.) And uh, (Sure.) So uh, and I’ve had some awful good friends over the years that uh, uh, has come to my rescue when I really needed it. (Sure, sure.) So.

Jennifer: Yeah, it was a remarkable place to work, you know. It had such a community aspect to it that you just don’t get anywhere else today.

Opal: Yeah, they just, just seemed like family to you. (Yeah, I bet.) And uh, uh, you know, uh, when my friends, uh, uh, used to have a grocery store down on the corner across the street from Owens,... (Mmm–hmm.) ...and uh, I’ll tell you, when I came back to Huntington, I went up to uh, uh, Oak Hill, West Virginia and lived up there for a short time. (Mmm–hmm.) And my husband was an alcoholic and he just drank like a fish. (Mmm.) And uh, we were havin’–, uh, it was, we had gone through a long mine strike and he was drinking awful bad. (Was he a miner?) Yeah, he was a miner, but, but he was a, uh he, he ended up uh, with 22 years in service. (Uh, military service or...?) Uh–huh, military. (Huh. ‘Cause he did the national guard and all that?) And uh, but uh, he, he came out, outta service, uh, uh, in ’45, you know. (Right.) Uh, but uh, uh, after uh, and we got married after that. And then uh, uh, that’s,
that’s when I really cracked up, you know. (Yeah.) Uh, after I married him. (Yeah.) See, my mother died in ’44. (Uh-huh.) And uh, uh, I had gone through a divorce just a while before that. (Uh-huh.) And uh, I had been having a real rough time, you know. (Yeah. Yeah. Sure.) And uh, so I got, kinda cracked up after I married Frank. [Laugh] (Yeah.) And uh, so uh, I quit. (Yeah.) And uh, uh, that...[inaudible]. (Laugh—Yeah.) But uh, anyway, uh, we uh, uh, ended up at Oak Hill uh, for a while, uh, and uh, he just kept drinking so bad and carrying on so bad that I finally uh, uh, wrote back down to the plant and uh, wrote to Casey Straw and I said, "Casey," I said, "I’m p–, I’m over age." I was past 40, you know. (Yeah.) And uh, I said, "I’m over age," but I said, "I sure would like to come back to work if I could." (Yeah.) And he, uh, wrote back and said they’d be glad to have me back. (That’s wonderful.) And uh, so uh, I uh, uh, it wasn’t just a day or two after that they sent for me to come back. (Mmm—hmm.) And when I came to Huntington, I had two dollars and a half. And uh...(My goodness. And this was what year? This was like 19–?) 1950. Uh, uh, and uh, so uh, my friends uh, ______ that had the grocery store down there. (Mmm—hmm.) They had uh, they had a little house down there on 8th Avenue and they had, in the upstairs was a little kitchen, a little apartment, you know. (Yeah.) It had uh, and...(inaudible)...and they took me in and, and uh, uh, let me stay there ‘til I got back to work and got on my feet. (Yeah.) And uh, they fed me and took care of me and...(Wonderful.) And so here uh, uh, but they had lived with me before my, uh, after my mother died for a while. And their son was born while they lived with me. And uh...(Special.)...I, he was, he was my pet, that’s, that’s him and his boys over there. (Oh. In the green? Oh no. The older one in the back? Oh I see.) The one in the back is uh, the father and uh, and uh, I don’t know that, David, uh, David _____, uh, goes to Marshall. (Hmm.) Uh, he’s uh, he’s uh, interning down at the newspaper this summer. (Oh is he really? He looks familiar.) Uh, and uh, then those two little ones he’s got, and uh, but anyway, uh, Paul, the father, came over and knocked on my door one day there, you know. And we always have uh, kept in touch, you know. (Yeah. Sure.) And uh, he knocked on my door and he said, "______." He always called me ______. He said, "______, Debbie run me off." I said, "Well, come on in, Paul." [Laugh] I said you gotta bedroom upstairs. (Yeah, sure.) And uh, so he stayed here with me for about four or fi–, ’bout f–, four or five years or...(Really?) And uh, uh, and then of course, she’d bring the little boys over and I’ve got, the–, they’re just like, like my own children. (Certainly.) And I just...(That’s lovely.) And uh, David, _____, he’s a, he just won a scholarship and he’s won Pell Grant. (Mmm.) And he served four years in service t–, to get to go to Marshall. (Did he?) He’s really an extremely fine young man. (Well, that sounds like it.) And uh, he’s getting married in August. (That’s nice. That’s nice. Yeah, success stories. [inaudible]) Hmm? (Success stories.) Well, I, I’ll tell you, I’m proud o–, o–, of David. Uh, because he’s really, he’s really worked hard to try to get an education. You know, when you see someone trying to get an
education...(inaudible) You...listen, I, I'd just do anything I could to help. (Sure, sure.) And uh, I know I've loaned him money before now to buy books, you know, and uh, uh, when he would be having a hard time getting it. (Yeah.) And uh, so I, you know, uh, but he's always been, always paid me back. (Sure, sure, sure.) And uh, but he's uh, but he's, he's not a bit lazy. He, he cuts grass for people or does any...(Yeah.) He worked with his dad. His dad's a, a mechanic. (Uh-huh.) And uh, so they uh...(Wow. Sounds like a beautiful bunch of men there.) They are. They're a handsome bunch of men. (Yeah, yeah. Hmm.) But uh, anyway, I, they're just like family to me. (Yeah, yeah. And you wouldn't have known them without Owens?) Huh? (You wouldn't have met the, the, the, his parents without...?) Probably. Uh, 'cause, one, I don't, I don't know uh, uh, I met his si-, mother, Paul's mother uh, was living next door to me. And uh, uh, with uh, uh, her uh, uh, friend, and she married uh, Paul's uncle. (Hmm.) I mean, married Paul's father. [laugh] (laugh) Uh,...(Oh really?) He was uh, he was uh, it was his sister uh, his aunt that uh, that Ann was living with and uh, and uh, Ann uh, uh, tried to get a job at Owens, but uh, she couldn't pass her physical. And uh, so uh, uh, she uh, uh, she would help me do housework. You know, for a while there. (Yeah.) And then that's how we get acquainted. And uh, and then uh, we got to be close friends and uh, I'll tell you. If I had a sister, it wouldn't be dearer to me. (Yeah. Sure.) And she, her mind's gone now and she's uh, in awful shape. I, I'm,...(That's a shame.) They're expecting her not to live too much longer. (Yeah.) And uh, I hate it so bad. (Yeah. It's hard to see. That's hard to go through. It must be one of the worst parts of uh, growing old.) Yes. To see your friends dying all around you. Yeah. Yeah, I looked in the paper every morning to see if I'm in there.

Jennifer: [laugh] You seem to be doing just fine. Um, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you'd like to address? Any other story? What have I not talked about?

Opal: I don't know. Uh, I've come way off of the subject of Owens. [laugh] (laugh) (It happens. It happens. That's fine. That's fine.) Well, anyway uh, I guess you know that they put me in the labor Hall of Fame. [laugh] (Oh did they?) Yeah. (Yeah, yeah. Where is that?) Well, it's uh, uh, I don't know, some of the professors up at uh, West Virginia University and uh, aw shoot, uh, one over there at Marshall. I forget what his name is. Edwards. (Edwards. Hmm.) Uh, uh, I think they all got together, you know, and started this uh, labor Hall of Fame. (Mmm-hmm.) And I'm in the labor Hall of Fame with uh, with uh, uh, Mother Joe and Corma Mallory. (Yes.) Uh, people and uh, (Sure, sure.) And uh,...(That's wonderful.) I got the, uh, I guess, the uh, first uh, Susan B. Anthony Award that was awarded down here in this area. (Oh really? You were the first?) Uh-huh. And I got a, uh, uh, Award rom uh, West Virginia's Teachers' Association. (What was that name?) Corma Mallory. (Colonel or...?) Corma. (Corma.) Corma. (C-O-R-M-A?) Uh-huh, I think it is. Corma. Uh, and uh, I've got several
citations from, I mean, uh, awards from uh, labor. (Well, you’re famous.) Oh yeah. I, fact is, I got distinguished uh, citizen from uh, Governor...[laugh]...Caperton. [laugh] (Did you ever see that judge again, that Judge Christie?) No. [laugh] (laugh) Didn’t want to either. (No.)

Jennifer: Well, I sure enjoyed talking to you today. (Yeah.) Draw this to a close.

END OF INTERVIEW