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### Oral History Interview: Audra Mae Earls

Audra Mae Earls

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## **AUDRA EARLS**

**Ms. Earls, a former Owens Illinois Glass Plant worker, describes how she began her career at Owens at age 29. She describes the different colors of glass, how glass is inspected and selected. She briefly speaks about the Opal Mann lawsuit that changed women's rights in the 60s. She tells of the cafeteria that once operated in the plant, the local union, sporting activities for employees, different positions for men and women. She concludes by talking about strikes, OSHA, the Glass, Mold Makers and Pottery local, The Huntington Onizer, the Owens newspaper for employees and Audra State Park.**

# RELEASE FORM

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I, X *Andra Earls*, do hereby give to the Oral History of Appalachia Program of Marshall University the tape recordings and transcripts

of my interview(s) on *February 22, 1994*.

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<u><i>Lina Hates</i></u>	<u>X <i>Andra Earls</i></u>
(Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program)	(Donor)

X *Jan. 29, 2000*  
(Date)

**Interviewer:** Today is February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1994. I'm doing an interview with Audra Mae Earls, born November 12<sup>th</sup>, 1925. Her current address is 1033 West 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Huntington, West Virginia. And the place of the interview was in her living room. When did you first start working at Owens?

**Audra:** I was twenty-nine.

**Interviewer:** You were twenty-nine years old. What was your first job there?

**Audra:** Well, like, when you went to work there, the women did nothing but select the ware.

That was their only job. They couldn't go any higher at all. That was it. People before me, they stayed on that job til they retired.

**Interviewer:** So the women just, so the women was just like out in one job? And then like, how did [inaudible]

**Audra:** Well, what you did was you inspect the bottles as they go down the line, or if it was on a straight lahr, you picked them up and you looked at 'em and if you found a bad one, you'd throw 'em away and if not, you put them in the cartons. And then you also loaded the cartons on the pallets. You had different pallets, I mean, different patterns for every job. And sometimes you'd get [inaudible]

**Interviewer:** Were they like big? Really heavy to lift?

**Audra:** Well, forty-eight whiskey cartons. But of course, they kind of got a weight limit on that; the women didn't have to lift. But they went from little cartons to big cartons. It's just according to what the customer wanted.

**Interviewer:** So you, you like custom made the bottles? Like the customer could come in or. . . ?

**Audra:** Well, they would take orders from the customers. And they would have molds. You have to have molds to uh, be in the hot end. And the glass falls down in these

molds. And they come through a lahr that cools this glass down. And sometimes it's hot when they bring it out to you. But most of the time they're not too hot to handle. And uh, you pick out the defects. Sometimes you'll find maybe the finish'll be low. And they'll have. . .well, we called [inaudible] or a stone. And uh, they'll be different parts. Sometimes it'd be in the finish, sometimes in the body, sometimes in the bottle. And you'd have to inspect that whole bottle to find the defects.

**Interviewer:** Did you use like clear-colored glass or did you do different colors?

**Audra:** Oh, we had uh, we had clear and we had green when I first went to work there. And then later on with the Avon bottles we got uh, amber and a blue and another shade of green. But most of our bottles were clear, except wine bottles. They were a dark green.

**Interviewer:** Dark green. Uhm, did you enjoy your job? Did you like. . .

**Audra:** Well, when I first went to work there I enjoyed it, all but the midnight shift.

**Interviewer:** So you all had different shifts.

**Audra:** Yes, we worked five days of day shift, we'd be off one day and go out the next day three to eleven, work five days on three to eleven, off two and a half days, go out at eleven o'clock at night and work five days of eleven to seven. And then had two days off. And the midnight shift was rough. . . for me. Now some people liked it. My sister did. But I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep.

**Interviewer:** Because your system gets all turned around.

**Audra:** Yep.

**Interviewer:** But did you do the same job. . .

**Audra:** No, when you first went to work there, you just filled in. And after your seniority built up, you would have a [inaudible] lahr then. And you would work on that lahr every day until they had to shut down or something and then they could change the uh, where you worked. (Interviewer: Right) Otherwise you stayed there.

**Interviewer:** Could the women like build up seniority?

**Audra:** Well, you . . . that was the only thing we had when I went to work there, was seniority. But you couldn't bid like the men. Now they could have younger men come in. And uh, if they had an opening on a quality job, the women wasn't eligible. Although they'd been there more years. This young man could get that job. And uh, like I said, the women stayed there on the lahr. That was it. Now we did have a matron that cleaned the restrooms and the lounge. But otherwise-, and a nurse, but otherwise the women was right there in the selecting or over in corrugated where they made cartons. But there was no advancement. They were the lowest paid job in there. And uh, and of course, finally, I don't know how it come about. But I know one women, woman, who was active in the union, she sued the company [Opal Mann is the female that sued the company and won her case] And uh, for equal rights. And the government come in. And too, when we were laid off the seniority, the women. . .if they had like a lahr attendant or a quality job that a younger man had, they would keep him and the older women would get laid off. So that happened to me in my group. I had lost oh, about nine months seniority by being laid off. But when this equal rights come in, I got my seniority back. And uh, then we got to bid on jobs when there was an opening. But before this all come about, they would put a man on that job for one day

and give him his rating. While it would take a woman thirty days to get the rating. And the man would know no more a bad bottle from a good bottle.

**Interviewer:** So they were doing the same job as you all at the-, the men could walk in and. . . .

**Audra:** No, the men, when they came in they swept. Or they loaded some of the real heavy cartons. (Interviewer: Right) And they went from there to quality, and to crew leader. Well, the woman stayed right there.

**Interviewer:** Right there picking out the different. . .

**Audra:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Were any of your supervisors women?

**Audra:** No, no women bosses. It was no women in anything except [inaudible] Now we did have two cooks, I think there was two women. I know there was one woman.

**Interviewer:** So they fixed you a

**Audra:** Oh, we had a real nice cafeteria. And the food was great. And you could buy books—they called it a script—I imagine it's like the coal miners; I don't know. But you could pay cash for it, too. Well, you'd have to buy the book and then pay by the script or you could charge the script. But they did have good food.

**Interviewer:** Had really good food? You were talking about the union, what member, what union. . . ?

**Audra:** Well, we had, at that time, we had a woman union all by itself. And then there was the men, they had their union in the selecting department. And then they had a

union in the mold shop and a union in the hot end, all the men did. And they just fought one another for a long time. And I know that when equal rights come in, that the men would do some dirty tricks when the women started getting their jobs. Because they resented the women taking their jobs. (Interviewer: Right) But yet they didn't consider a woman had been there twenty years, was held back to the lowest paying job in the plant, while they came in, maybe been there two or three years, was making more money.

**Interviewer:** What ways could they like stop you from advancing? Could the men. . did they have control?

**Audra:** Well, the men, it was company, it wasn't men doing it. But after the equal rights came. . . . Now I know one woman at my midnight shift. They got up about it because she got a crew leaders job. And they got up on the roof and they throwed glue and water down on her, down in her face. And if the nurse hadn't have been there, she might have lost her eye. They'd just do tricks like that, you know. Because they resented the women. And one went out in batch and furnace and they walked her up, told her to get up on the roof, she went up on the roof—he didn't tell her to come down. So she sat up there. And he finally got worried about her and went up there and said, "What in the Hell you doing up here? Staying up here?" And she said, "Well, you didn't tell me to come down." But uh, it was a time over there for a while with the men and women. But it finally got better.

**Interviewer:** Right. But in your, in a women's union, were the, were the local leaders, were they women also in your. . .

**Audra:** There was women that worked right on with us.

**Interviewer:** How often did you all have like union meetings? Did you attend? (Audra: Once a month) And then like everyone attended those?

**Audra:** No, you didn't have to attend if you didn't want to.

**Interviewer:** But were you active in the union?

**Audra:** Well, I didn't participate. I went but. . .

**Interviewer:** Just went to most of them to see what's going on?

**Audra:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Uh . . .let me think. We were talking about the lunch and all that. Did like the management associate with the workers and all that?

**Audra:** Well, when I first went to work there, there was, most of them was home town men. And there was good relationship with the supervision and the bosses and all. But as time went by, they brought in people from different places, and they wasn't, you know, the relationship wasn't as good.

**Interviewer:** Right. Did you have like soc-, did you have any social activities or. . . ?

**Audra:** Oh, my Heavens, yes, we had oodles of that. [chuckling] (Interviewer: Okay) We had basketball, we had volleyball, we had bowling, we had horseshoes, uh, base-, did I say softball? Volleyball, baseball. . . horseshoes, bowling. . . that was about it I guess.

**Interviewer:** Which ones did you participate in?

**Audra:** I. . . I played one time in basketball. But I decided I was too old for that.

[chuckling] But I played volleyball. And I bowled. And I pitched horseshoes. And we

had good. . . you know, good companionship with each other. (Interviewer: Right) And then we had, each shift had their own club. And they would have activities once a month for the ones that wanted to belong to the club. Sometimes they'd have a covered dish dinner, sometimes they'd throw swimming parties, and sometimes they'd take one day trips, Cincinnati. And uh, we really had enjoyable times there. But the work was hard and we played hard. (Interviewer: Right) And then the company gave us a doe party, I think it was around Christmas.

**Interviewer:** What's a doe party?

**Audra:** Well, it's just all women. And now I said we had no women. We had one woman in the main office--Johnnie Aronson--and she done a lot for the women. If it wasn't for Johnnie. . .

**Interviewer:** Do you know how to spell her-, do you know what her name. . . ?

**Audra:** Her real name was Catherine Aronson. And she was, she was real big in the YWCA. [interruption to answer the phone] Where were we?

**Interviewer:** The woman's name was Catherine.

**Audra:** Catherine Aronson.

**Interviewer:** Do you know how to spell that?

**Audra:** No, A-r-o-n-s-o-n. Now she was a great worker in the YW.

**Interviewer:** And she was a member of the men's?

**Audra:** Yeah. She was over the women.

**Interviewer:** So there was one woman. That's pretty good.

**Audra:** But she was out in the main office. She wasn't out in the plant.

**Interviewer:** Right. Did the management like participate in the social activities? Like, like the softball, bowling? Did the management. . .? (Audra: It was all women) Right. So those were just women's activities? The men didn't. . .?

**Audra:** Yes, but the men also had their activities, their own.

**Interviewer:** But it was like segregated.

**Audra:** Oh, yeah.

**Interviewer:** The men had theirs and the women had theirs. And the men had stag parties when we had the doe parties. And we had the mother and daughter banquet at Mother's Day. And you couldn't bring little ones. You had to bring your mother, so people that was working in the plant had to bring their mother. You could not bring your children because she let 'em bring children once, and they disrupted it. And she always had a great program. She had singers and she had people doing other things. And children did disrupt. So she put a stop to that. They just had, you could bring your mother.

**Interviewer:** Well, that's really. . .well, what kind of. . .so you'd have singers and then like eat and. . . .

**Audra:** Oh, yes, we always had a big meal. They had good cooks over there.

**Interviewer:** Did you do like. . .did you have dances? Like dancing or. . .?

**Audra:** Yeah. Each. . now I know our shift, we generally sponsored a New Year's dance over there at the clubhouse. And then they would have other, other shifts would have different dances. (Interviewer: Right) And people, you know, people would come and bring their husbands and have parties.

**Interviewer:** Now what's the . . . the clubhouse, is that, it was like your-all's meeting place?

**Audra:** It's right over. . .well, it's where I credit union is now. It's right there on Eighth Avenue. It faces Eighth Avenue. Owens is here and our credit union is. . .there's a row of beer joints here, and then the credit union is the next building with the large parking lot. Now that's where our clubhouse used to be. And we still got the gym back there.

**Interviewer:** Right. So did all the different shifts use that clubhouse? (Audra: Oh, yes) And the men and women, everyone shared.

**Audra:** And every officer in the club went to meetings once a month, and you had to have your books up to date on your monies and what you spent and everything.

**Interviewer:** Did you have like a president, vice-president. . . ? (Audra: Yes) Secretary, treasurer?

**Audra:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Did you hold any offices?

**Audra:** Yeah, I was uh, treasurer, but that's as high as I wanted to go. I didn't ever want to be president. But I was mostly treasurer. And I was up until oh, see, I retired six years ago. . .and I guess maybe a couple of years before I retired. . . .

**Interviewer:** Right. Do you know. . . you started right in the beginning?

**Audra:** Well, I belonged to the club say right around thirty-some years. This is the first year I never joined. Of course, our shift is the only shift that has a club left. The rest of them has all. . .

**Interviewer:** Broken apart? (Audra: Yes) Right.

**Audra:** But we had some good times. But like I said, we worked hard, but we really had a good bunch of people to work with. And it was like family. Of course, there was so many families there. And that was family.

**Interviewer:** So like if you had like your mother or father working there, then it was really easy for you to get on? (Audra: Mmm-hmm) Did, did anyone in your family or community oppose you as a woman going to work at Owens?

**Audra:** Oppose it? (Interviewer: Yeah) Nope.

**Interviewer:** Because it was like a family-run. . . ?

**Audra:** Well, I didn't have many. . . I had a sister worked there and an uncle. But my immediate family, my mother and father never worked there.

**Interviewer:** Right. Now your husband was employed there?

**Audra:** My ex was.

**Interviewer:** Your ex-husband was employed? (Audra: Mmm-hmm) And how many years did he work there?

**Audra:** Well, I don't really . . . let me see. . . I would say maybe about ten, then he got fired. [laughing]

**Interviewer:** What job did he have?

**Audra:** He was uh, machine operator. He made the bottles in the hot end.

**Interviewer:** So they would pour the glass into the mold?

**Audra:** Well, he would, yeah, he, that was done automatic. He would watch the machine. And they'd have to dope 'em up. Which it's just like a swab they put in those molds, hot molds. They have to do that to keep the bottles going.

twenty-five, thirty.

**Interviewer:** Because of the machines taking over?

**Audra:** Yeah. But they was still making as about as much ware, but they were faster. And uh, of course, we didn't have the different amounts of ware, bottles making as when I went there. When I went there we had baby food, we had food jars, we had beer, we had wine, we had whiskeys and cleaning jars, handle lotion, finger nail polish, penicillin, medicine bottles, which we didn't have. When I left there all we had was wine and beer and uh, every now and then a medicine bottle, and that was about it. We were, the glass industry really went down.

**Interviewer:** Went down. That's. . .

**Audra:** Plastics.

**Interviewer:** Took over. And all these people lost their job.

**Audra:** Well, I guess that's the process. But I don't. . . don't like to buy my Coke in plastic. I think it loses its strength. Of course, I'm against glass, I mean, plastic.

**Interviewer:** Plastic. Glass woman! [laughing]

**Audra:** Well, if you'd stop and think, things will taste better in glass.

**Interviewer:** In glass. Yeah, the old Coke Cola bottles, it tastes so good. It does taste a lot different in glass.

**Audra:** Milk did.

**Interviewer:** I never had, I never got the chance. . .

**Audra:** You never got the chance to drink milk in a bottle, huh?

**Interviewer:** No, I know my parents did. They used to talk about the milk man coming

and he'd deliver milk. But that's another thing, glass. . . . So your last job you were a crew leader? Up until the time you retired.

**Audra:** Until I retired.

**Interviewer:** And you retired in . . .

**Audra:** Well, let me see. Let me count up. Six years ago.

**Interviewer:** '88, right around 1988?

**Audra:** Yeah, I would imagine. Let me see, I can tell you right to the day. Let me figure. I'm not good in my head.

**Interviewer:** Oh, you were the other night. You were doing a good job. [laughing]

**Audra:** Well, that's not gonna work out. I was sixty-two when I retired. I'm sixty-eight

**Interviewer:** So that's six years, six years ago.

**Audra:** This is '94. I don't know. I can't figure that out.

**Interviewer:** It was right around '89. You haven't been retired very long. Let's see here. The women leaders that were like in the union, how was their leadership accepted by the other women and by the men? Like did the woman in management, did she cause any, any problems? Or were they able to accept that okay?

**Audra:** No, our woman that was head, out in the personnel department, she fought for it. I mean, she was, she was for women, period.

**Interviewer:** Right. So she tried to get you all. . .

**Audra:** It wasn't-, she tried to get everything. I mean, she really got things for the women. She got their lounge; she always got good furniture in there, and it cleaned

and everything. She fought for the women.

**Interviewer:** Right. Did the men have a problem with her or did they, I mean, did they...?

**Audra:** Yes, they had some good names for her.

**Interviewer:** They called her different names?

**Audra:** But uh, now, my father-in-law, he was the boss in the hot end. And he said that the women was the only one that worked. That the men did not work in there.

**Interviewer:** Mmm-hmm.

**Audra:** And that's, I mean, that's his opinion. But you wouldn't get many men to agree with him. He said that before I went to work over there.

**Interviewer:** Sounds like it was true—the women were hard workers. [chuckling]

**Audra:** Well, we did, we worked hard. But we partied hard, too.

**Interviewer:** That's the way to live it. [laughing]

**Audra:** We had good times. But there at the end it got to be a drudge.

**Interviewer:** Did you all ever go on strike? Did you ever. . . (Audra: Yes) you went on strike?

**Audra:** We had one big strike. And then we had one, we've had two good strikes.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember like how many years you had worked there before the first strike?

**Audra:** No, I'd been there quite a while when we had our first strike.

**Interviewer:** And how long was, how long did that last?

**Interviewer:** It was hot. What's like that dope 'em up? That's, they put something in that?

**Audra:** Yeah, it's like I don't know, oil and grease or something; I don't know what. But they put it on a swab and put it in the molds. They have to do it fast because them molds just open and shut. Just like that. [snapping her finger]

**Interviewer:** Did you have any other jobs at Owens? Just like you started . . .

**Audra:** Yeah, after we got to the place and my seniority took me up, I held the quality inspector.

**Interviewer:** What did you do as quality. . . ?

**Audra:** Well, after the bottles was put in the cartons, I would go to a pallet and take out a carton and inspect the bottles on it. And on each pallet you took a certain amount of bottles to inspect. And if you didn't find any bad ones, then it went on. But if you found bad ones, it was held up and had to be sent to reporter to be reporter. (Interviewer: Right) And then after quality I went to crew leader. And I was crew leader til I retired.

**Interviewer:** And what was the crew leader? What did they do?

**Audra:** Well, she has, well, at the time I had two lahrs. No, I had one. First I had two, then they cut it down to one. Because they kept putting machines out. When I went to work there they had I think about thirty-two machines. And when I retired they had six.

**Interviewer:** So that cut down on emp (Audra: Oh, yeah) like how many employees started like were there when you started?

**Audra:** Well, when I first went to work I would imagine in the selecting department there was close to nine hundred people. And then uh, when I retired they was lucky to have

**Audra:** Well, it was about two weeks, I imagine.

**Interviewer:** Two weeks on strike.

**Audra:** It was cold. And it was fun.

**Interviewer:** Was it in the middle of winter?

**Audra:** Oh, my Heavens, yes. It was cold. And the men would bring their campers and they'd have these big barrels and built fires. We had. . . And then one woman, she laid on the railroad track, silly thing.

**Interviewer:** What for?

**Audra:** She was gonna stop a train from going in.

**Interviewer:** Ohhh, okay.

**Audra:** We had another one that was gonna stop the mail from going in. Course, we had to get her out of there. Because you couldn't stop that mail. But that was their first strike, I guess, that they just didn't know what, what they was doing.

**Interviewer:** Right. What were, uhm, were they like negotiating pay or benefits or. . .?

(Audra: Pay and benefits) Both of those? (Audra: Yeah) Uh, how was, was the pay for the men a lot different than the women?

**Audra:** Yeah. The men had, like I said, they had higher paying rates than the women. And uh, women were the low man on the totem pole. Even the man that'd come in and sweep floors. He would make more money. (Interviewer: Than the women?) Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Did you all get like raises? Did you get. . .

**Audra:** Yeah, we got raises. And uh, then when the women got to be where they could bid on the jobs and take 'em away from the men, well, then they started getting good

pay. Of course, they paid good. But when I went to work there, they wasn't paying I don't think but about sixty-some dollars, sixty-some cents an hour. I know I found an old check the other day, I think I made a hundred seventy-some dollars for two weeks.

**Interviewer:** Goodness.

**Audra:** And the pay, of course, prices wasn't high. But it was still rough to make a living, you know.

**Interviewer:** Right. The economy started boosting up.

**Audra:** Of course, every time you'd get a raise, everything else would raise, your insurance would raise. We had good insurance. And it kept improving. But when you retired you didn't have nothing. We have an insurance, but it's with the local. But it don't pay much. You have to be. . .catastrophic sickness to get anything.

**Interviewer:** Right. So you can like draw social security? Can you get like social security?

**Audra:** And you get a pension. You get, let me see, they've got two raises on their pensions since I retired. For every year of service they pay you I think it's about maybe eleven or twelve dollars for every year of service.

**Interviewer:** And so do you get like a monthly check for that?

**Audra:** Yeah, you get a monthly pension check and a monthly social security.

**Interviewer:** And then like with your medical benefits, do you have. . .do you have any benefits? Or. . .

**Audra:** Not with the company we don't have any retirement sick benefits. But we do have, well, it's with the union, but like I said, it don't pay nothing. Now, when I retired, I

wasn't eligible for medicare. So I took out a supplement, I mean, another policy. And then of course, when I reached sixty-five, my policy turned into a supplement, and then I went on medicare.

**Interviewer:** Well, that's good you were able to get that, even though they don't help you out with that.

**Audra:** But uh, and then you have the death benefit with the company when you retire. And uh, you have death benefit with the union. And I guess that's about it.

**Interviewer:** So is that like with the, if you have like a family, a husband and wife working and the husband would die, the wife would receive benefits for him? Do you?

**Audra:** She would receive his pension, unless he . . . set it aside. Where he would take less of his pension to be set aside for his wife if he passed away.

**Interviewer:** And that was a big if. Right.

**Audra:** And of course, [inaudible] whichever.

**Interviewer:** We were talking about the strikes a little bit ago. Was there any like trouble? You mentioned about the railroad and about the post office.

**Audra:** Well, not really. There wasn't any fights or no well, now, I'll take that back. There wasn't any fights, but one of the union members, he got up on the roof, [inaudible] inside and when he got down he fell. I think it was his leg he broke. And uh, that was about the only incident I know of. Except one of the men hugged-, one of the men on inside the plant hugged one of the women and broke her rib. [laughing] But he just, you know, that wasn't intentionally.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Audra:** There was no hard feelings really. Well, I'll take. . . some of the union officials may have had some hard feelings. But the majority of the members didn't. They. . . they were more like partiers.

**Interviewer:** Like partiers. And Owens was a party plant.

**Audra:** They walked that picket line. But uh, like I said, we had a time.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Were there any people of different races working at Owens? It was all white?

**Audra:** It was all white. Until you know, segregation.

**Interviewer:** Until like in the 60's? (Audra: I would imagine) And then you start-, was there-, did like a majority start coming, or like how. . . how many?

**Audra:** Well, they first brought in, they were hand-picked. And I don't know where they had four, maybe I don't know. We had two on our shift, I know. And uh, at first. And the other shifts probably had one or two on each shift. I don't really know in the beginning how many was hired.

**Interviewer:** And what jobs were they hired for?

**Audra:** They were hired in as selectors.

**Interviewer:** In as selectors?

**Audra:** There was no, they didn't bring nobody in except selecting. Even men. After equal rights and everything come out, the men went on the lahrs, too.

**Interviewer:** Started down where the women were? (Audra: Yeah) And then had to work their way up, too.

**Audra:** Through seniority.

**Interviewer:** It's a good system.

**Audra:** But it took 'em a while to get that done. And you know. . .

**Interviewer:** Right, and you worked there for years and years (Audra: Thirty-three years and nine months). Total? (Audra: Total) Thirty-three years, nine months, goodness. Did other people, did they like socialize with the black people? Like on lunch breaks, did you all socialize at lunch breaks or were they. . . ?

**Audra:** Some did. And some didn't. I mean . . . .

**Interviewer:** They were sort of put in a position when all that was going on. Do you think that the people of different races had the same opportunities as everyone else when they came to the plant?

**Audra:** Well, like I said, the opportunity came by seniority, except when a boss was appointed. Now, they did make, we had one black guy a boss. Which Bill was good. He had one of the best memories of anyone I ever saw. He gave out checks for awhile. And once he gave you a check, and you went the next time, he had your check waiting on you. He knew. Of course, he died. And then we had, later they made a girl, well, that was right before, wasn't too long before I retired. They made a girl a boss in the selecting department.

**Interviewer:** So like towards the end of your retirement they started getting like upper positions. . . .?

**Audra:** Well, I'll tell you. . . .not too many blacks stayed. They didn't like the work and they didn't like the heat. That was the hardest place in the summer that you ever saw. And in winter time it was the coldest. They couldn't, couldn't keep it warm. You go

back in the hot end and I'm telling you it was hot in there. There would be ice frozen on the walls back there. Now that don't seem possible, but it's true.

**Interviewer:** You mean five or six inches thick? (Audra: Yeah) Ice frozen? Were they like cement like for a block wall?

**Audra:** Cinder blocks, uh-huh. And then where we worked out in the front, they had heaters, but they couldn't keep 'em heated, they'd have a time up here on the runway. They had to keep the runway open so they could run the tractor trailers down that way. And they had these flap things that they could go through. And the wind just come blowing up. We wore long underwear under our clothes. And I have, when I first went to work there, we would put a carton and step in that carton and go back and get hot bottles and put down there to keep our feet warm. (Interviewer: My goodness) And that's the coldest place in the winter, and the hottest place in the summer.

**Interviewer:** So even your department like in the summer was really hot to work, too?

**Audra:** Uh-huh. Of course, as time went on, course you couldn't air condition it. But they did have a lot of fans. As they got, they started bringing in more fans and everything. And in winter time they'd go and rent those big old blowers. And they tried. but it was just impossible with some of these cold days we had, you know.

**Interviewer:** Did they, did you all have like uniforms? Or did you just wear normal. . . ?

**Audra:** Just normal clothes. Now before I went to work there the lady that lived there, used to live next door, they wore uniforms. They wore blue uniforms. But by the time I got there, they were wearing their own clothes.

**Interviewer:** So by the time you started when you were around 26 they had, they didn't

have those?

**Audra:** I don't know when they done. . . . But she, well, now, Minnie still wore some of hers at work when I went there but you didn't have to. But they was still good and she just went ahead and wore 'em. So they couldn't have been done away with too soon, too quick before I went to work.

**Interviewer:** Right. Did the guys like, did they have to wear any protective stuff? Did they wear gloves or . . .? (Audra: Uh-huh) They didn't have to, even though it was real hot?

**Audra:** Now the hot end wore gloves. But now if our ware was hot, and we got to the point we would wear gloves. The little thin gloves to keep the dope off of your hands, because it would just eat your hands up. And we would wear little thin gloves. They would generally give us a pair that was supposed to last us a week. But they'd get so dirty they couldn't last a week. And they got so they just gave 'em to us every day.

**Interviewer:** So the guys would shoot the dope into the bottles and you all put. . . .

**Audra:** [inaudible] molds and then they would get on the bottles.

**Interviewer:** Right. So did you all have to clean 'em off anyway? (Audra: No, no) They just stayed like that?

**Audra:** If they were too dirty, we threw 'em away. And sometimes if it was just a little bit, we'd wipe it off.

**Interviewer:** Right. So that was the help the bottle, to help prevent it from cracking?

**Audra:** No. Well, that was for the hot end. (Interviewer: For the hot end?) Uh-huh, for the hot, to make the bottles.

**Interviewer:** Right. That's neat.

**Audra:** You'd have enjoyed it if you ever went there. Anybody that ever went through it. . . . I know at times we'd have open house, and we'd take people through, different ones of us. And a lot of people was really amazed. But it was interesting.

**Interviewer:** Right. So you all gave people tours sometimes?

**Audra:** Yeah, every so often. I don't know, I don't know whether it was on their anniversaries or what. We had open house. (Interviewer: Tours) And uh. . .

**Interviewer:** Too bad I didn't come down here sooner. [laughing] That would have, that would have been really interesting. Let me see, I was asking you about the protective stuff. So you all wore gloves. Were there any other health or safety dangers?

**Audra:** Well, in the later years, when OSHA I guess it was, we had to have safety glasses. But otherwise, we never had to, until OSHA came in.

**Interviewer:** Right. And that was like the, they set the standards, OSHA did?

**Audra:** And of course, they made us have hearing tests. Because it was noisy. When you get thousands and thousands of bottles going down the line a clicking together, it was noisy. (Interviewer: Right) And then we had to take hearing tests every so often.

**Interviewer:** Did some people lose, start losing their hearing?

**Audra:** Yeah, some of 'em would have to go to a doctor (Interviewer: And get hearing aids) But uh, I didn't have any problems. Only one time. She told me to listen. I told her, I said, "I can't listen." I said, "I get in this little old room by myself and all that, I get, my mind gets to wondering, I forget to push that button."

**Interviewer:** Right. Did they give you ear plugs or anything?

**Audra:** Yeah, we had ear plugs, uh-huh, after OSHA came in. [tape fades in and out]. . .trips. I stayed with her one time and she snored all night. [laughter] (Interviewer: So you needed your little ear plugs) So I started. . . .

**Interviewer:** [inaudible] little, about two inches long. . . .

**Audra:** No, that's two there.

**Interviewer:** Oh, there's two, ah, there they are.

**Audra:** And what you do, you mash 'em and you put that in your ear and then they expand.

**Interviewer:** And it'll expand.

**Audra:** Uh-huh. And then there was another kind that was hard rubber that they gave us.

**Interviewer:** Was that, how often did they give these to you?

**Audra:** Any time you want. They had 'em out on the line.

**Interviewer:** That's good. I guess the safety with-, my dad works the railroad and they brought, started doing ear plugs from the train whistles and everything. He's lost a lot of his hearing from all that.

**Audra:** Well, I think I've lost some of mine. But I still hear pretty good. Of course, I can hear what I want to hear. [laughing]

**Interviewer:** Selective hearing. That's right. Whenever we were talking about the unions, what, do you, was there like different names for the unions? Like the theme, do they have names?

**Audra:** Well, let me see. Ours is GMP, Glass, Mold Makers and Pottery, I believe is

ours now. It used to just be, heavenly day, I can't remember anything. I don't know what they was. I have no, I can't even remember. I know we had the mold makers.

(Interviewer: And that was for the women?) No, that was for the men. We only this one for the women. And uh, I know it's GMP now, but I don't remember what it was before.

I was never very active with the union. (Interviewer: Right) They had their own little clicks and I wasn't one of those that's. . . . Well, I was a little bit quiet, backward, in those times.

**Interviewer:** You quiet? Nooo. [laughing]

**Audra:** Used to be.

**Interviewer:** That had to stop, didn't it? We'll we're getting near the end. We're doing really good. Overall, what did you like most of all about working at Owens?

What did you. . .was there specific things? Like did you like the clubs or all the. . . ?

**Audra:** Well, I liked the uh, friendships. And. . . I didn't mind the work when I first went there. But later on it got, I guess the older you get, and I think I was burn out when I left. I couldn't wait to get out. (Interviewer: Right) But we had good times and we made some good friends. And uh, it was, to sum it all, I enjoyed it. (Interviewer: You enjoyed it?) Yeah.

**Interviewer:** Except like towards the end, the work?

**Audra:** Yeah, it got to the point where I just. . .well, they, they didn't, they didn't have enough help, and you just couldn't do the job right. And it just got to be a chore instead of (Interviewer: Fun) yeah. But we really used to have some good times.

**Interviewer:** That's good. Let me see. You said you retired six years ago, right?

(Interviewer: Yes) And what made you decide to retire six years ago?

**Audra:** I was getting old enough.

**Interviewer:** You were getting old-, let's see, did you take an early retirement?

**Audra:** I took an early retirement, 62.

**Interviewer:** That's good. And then you started receiving your bene-, pension benefits?

**Audra:** Oh, yeah. Before I, I retired. I got months, see, I retired the last of December and, and the last of December I got my pension check and my social security check.

**Interviewer:** That's good. Are you enjoying your retirement?

**Audra:** Oh, my heaven's yes. I'm on the road as much as I can go, any place the bus, tour bus, can go, I'm going.

**Interviewer:** Mmm-hmm. Is there like people from Owens that you still socialize with?

**Audra:** Oh, yeah. Now, we have a union retirees meeting once a month. And we cook; there's four or five us that cook. And we sell to outsiders and the people that come to the meetings. We raise money and we take bus trips every year. Just the Illinois people. (Interviewer: Right) And then the Owens women, now that is for men and women. Any retirees and their husbands or wives are eligible. And then we have a women's group of retirees that go out once a month and eat at different restaurants. And we still socialize. We're still good friends, a lot of us, and everything.

**Interviewer:** And do you like, any of your friends that work there, do they take, you all take bus trips together, right, (Audra: yeah) to all different places?

**Audra:** Yeah. I've got one friend that her and I, whenever we get a chance we're gone

on a bus.

**Interviewer:** Lasting friendships are forever. Well, I think this about concludes our interview. And I thank you very much.

**Audra:** Well, I'm glad, I hope you can use it.

**Interviewer:** We're back.

**Audra:** We had a plant paper that was put out about every month. And it had articles on every shift about what was going on. And maybe if somebody went on a trip to see their family or something, it was wrote up in the paper, and they had pictures. And I know I've got, got one paper. And it had a picture of my son when he was, I think, was about six years old, or maybe a little younger, at his birthday party. And I did keep that paper. That's the only paper I have. And uh, then each, each shift had a reporter. And she would write things, different things that went on, on the shifts.

**Interviewer:** And then it would be all put, everything put together.

**Audra:** Everything put in the paper.

**Interviewer:** What was the name of it? Do you remember?

**Audra:** Huntington Onizer.

**Interviewer:** Huntington Owenizer. How is that last name spelled? O-w -e-n. . . .

**Audra:** O-n-i-z-e-r, O-n-i-z-e-r.

**Interviewer:** O-n-i-z-e-r.

**Audra:** Onizer, Huntington Onizer. And it was interesting. We all would pick 'em up at the clock house every time they would come out and we'd all read 'em.

**Interviewer:** O-w-e-n-i-z-e-r?

**Audra:** O-w-e-n-i-z-e-r,

**Interviewer:** Owenizer, right?

**Audra:** Uh-huh, Huntington Owenizer.

**Interviewer:** That's neat. And so, right up until the plant closed, did they still. . .

**Audra:** No, they discontinued that several years ago. Like I said, when the hometown people left the plant and new people was brought in, and of course, money was a big option, wasn't as plentiful for their to sponsor everything. And a lot of things were cut out after, you know, times got rough. We really had good times.

**Interviewer:** Yes, that's very interesting. We don't have any place in our-, not that I'm aware of, in our hometown, anything like, I mean, that I've even heard of, like the community, like Owens was one big family in the community.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, at one time we uh, I mean, when they first started, Jerry Lewis, I think the Huntington Owens was one of the first ones to volunteer for the Jerry Lewis Telethon. And we were also one of the first ones that give out refreshments at the rest stops on holidays. And Owens did a lot of work. (Interviewer: For the community) For the community, yeah. And anybody that, you know, needed help or anything, they could contact . . . . .

**END OF SIDE 1**

**Interviewer:** . . . See, you were just a good little talker.

**Audra:** Wait a minute and I'll bring that paper. (Interviewer: okay) I'll show you. . . .

When you was there ten years, you had a banquet and they gave you a pin and a set of glasses. And generally the first ones was held over at the club house, and then it

got too big. Then we went up to uh, Pea Ridge up there, country club. And every, they held them every year for people that started at ten years, then fifteen and twenty, and twenty-five, twenty-five you got to pick out a gift. And I picked a clock. And it's broke now. I have to send it to the company to get it fixed. And uh, then at thirty I got a piece of luggage. (Interviewer: Ohhh) And then at twenty-five and thirty on up you got a prize. I mean, a gift. And down below you generally just got glasses. You got glasses every time, with the year and things.

**Interviewer:** So they just give you like a set of glasses?

**Audra:** Uh-huh, with a pin for the ten, fifteen and twenty. And then for twenty-five you got the gift. One year I got a bracelet. See, I don't remember what year that was. I never did wear it. [laughing]

**Interviewer:** You never did wear it! A little bracelet, didn't wear it though. This is a really neat. . . . I guess this is what she wanted. . . I don't want to take this to copy it, though, then if something happens to it. . . . But that, that's very interesting.

**Audra:** Oh, that's a council meeting. That's what we had every month, a council meeting of all the officers. And uh, that was a president's there.

**Interviewer:** [inaudible] softball.

**Audra:** Yes, the men had softball. And the women really had a good softball team. [inaudible] [laughter] But the men, they all had their reporters and they . . . .

**Interviewer:** Did you have any friends working, right, whenever the plant, like when the plant still closed down? (Audra: Yeah) You did?

**Audra:** Mmm-hmm. Some of them went ahead and took an early retirement. And uh,

then I talked to one last night at the auxiliary meeting. She's got her a job out in Columbus at the television tube, where they're making television tubes. And then some of them's going back to school.

**Interviewer:** Whenever you retired, did you know that the plant was. . . .

**Audra:** Well, it had been rumored. But nothing official. It wasn't official until ninety days til it shut down. They have to give you ninety days notice. But it had been rumored for a long time. When this last plant manager come in, well, the plant manager before him. You could, you could tell the difference in the plant. I mean, things just wasn't, it seemed like to me it kept going down. And of course, I heard one time that they had twenty-, twenty-some people out on complaints. And I said then, I said that company can't, can't put up, can't stand that. When you've got twenty-five people on the road with complaints, that. . . . Of course, there was a dispute. I mean, between company and employees over there at the end. They just wouldn't cooperate with each other. I don't know what the problem was. I wasn't there. But I do know they built this pavilion over here across the street after I retired. And they would give them picnics and things over there. Well, they, the last one they had, there was five people from the plant came to the picnic. The rest of them was all us retirees. And so they gave one more. And it was the same thing. The people in the plant was protesting. I don't know what...well, they said the company was being dirty. Now I don't, like I said, I wasn't there to know both sides. But there was friction. And then the next thing you know it was shut down. But I think that this new, the last president that was sent in here, manager, was sent in here to shut it down. Now I could be wrong. But that's

what his name is. They send him where they want to shut 'em down.

**Interviewer:** Right. And who was the last? Do you know who the last president was?

**Audra:** Don't ask me what his name is. Not president, he's plant manager.

**Interviewer:** Plant manager.

**Audra:** I want to say Desavis. But I'm not sure that's the one. [NOTE: Last plant manager was Dennis Silvis] See, they're all after I left. And too, when they bought, when Owens went with Brockway, when they combined, that's when things started, that's when they started bringing Brockway people in to our plant and sending our people out.

**Interviewer:** Right.

**Audra:** I think that's when our problems started going downhill.

**Interviewer:** Do you know how to spell Brockway?

**Audra:** B-r-o-c-k-w-a-y.

**Interviewer:** A lot of these I haven't heard. A lot of people from Huntington, their names are really different and all that.

**Audra:** So is mine, except mine is similar. Like my first name. A lot of people get my first name . . .

**Interviewer:** Right. A-u-d-r-i, right?

**Audra:** -r-a.

**Interviewer:** -r. . . A-u-d-r-a. See, even I got it. . . .

**Audra:** Audra.

**Interviewer:** Audra, you say Audra. We have an Audra State Park. (Audra: You do?)  
Up near Elkins, Audra State Park. See, I thought it was Audri, I was giving the name  
Audri Earls.

**Audra:** Well, that's probably what I put down there. I have more problems with that.  
And it used to irritate me. But . . . . hardly anybody heard of A-u-d-r-a 'til the Big Valley  
[a 70's t.v. show] Linda Evans' name was Audra. But nobody, I've only had two people  
to ever pronounce my name right. They'll say Audri; of course, I answer. But it's  
Audra.

**Interviewer:** Audra. I've heard of Audra, because of Audra State Park. That's very  
pretty. Well, I'll go ahead and turn this off since we're finished.

**END OF INTERVIEW**