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ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA
 400 Hal Greer Boulevard
 Huntington, West Virginia 25755-2667
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ORAL HISTORY NUMBER: _____
 MORROW ACCESSION NUMBER: 00653

ORAL HISTORY

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DATE: 3/8/94

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Jackie Noble..... transcribed interview tape

Jennifer Smoot..... wrote Ms. Smith's oral history narrative

Stephanie Hudson.....wrote Ms. Smith's oral history narrative

History 250
April 11, 1994
Oral History Project

INTERVIEW OF LINDA SMITH

1737 Crestmont Drive

Born in Wayne County, West Virginia

✓

Jackie Noble

INTERVIEW OF LINDA SMITH

Q Linda, when did you first go to work at Owens?

A June of 1970.

Q And how old were you then?

A I was 21.

Q Can you describe for me your very first job there?

A I was a selector. I packed bottles off of an assembly line.

Q Did you enjoy that job?

A Yes, very much. It was something interesting that I had never done before or seen before and I was interested in how the bottles were made. And I liked my job very much.

Q Is there anything you didn't like about the job?

A Swing shift. Everyone there had to work swing shift which meant you were never on schedule. We worked weekends always. Holidays we seldom got off. That part I didn't like.

Q Okay. What exactly is swing shift? What do you mean by swing shift?

A You worked a different shift every week. You rotate day shift one week, midnight the following week, then 3:00 to 11:00 the week after that. And it just keeps rotating.

Q Were there other people doing the same job as you women?

A Yes. At that time there were all women that did what I did. The men had different jobs. But mainly what I did was all women up until 19- -- maybe 1980.

Q Okay. When you were doing the selecting, how many of your supervisors were women?

A None. We had no supervisors that were women.

Q None. How did you get along with your male supervisors?

A Very well. They treated us all very well, but they -- we knew who the boss was and who wasn't. We just did what we were told.

Q Did anyone in your community or family oppose to you, as a woman, working at Owens?

A No, not at all. It was one of the better places in Huntington to work for women because the pay was good, the benefits was excellent, and they were very good to the women because they all knew that we had families and children to consider and they all was very lenient where it came to the people with small children, such as myself.

When I first went to work there, when I had two small children, I went to work an hour later of the morning to get my kids off to school. So I only worked seven hours a day. So they was really good to us about things like that.

Q Were there any other members of your family employed at Owens?

A No.

Q No. Tell me what other jobs you had at Owens other than selecting?

A I've worked as a shipping and receiving clerk.

Q What exactly did you do as that?

A The things that were ordered that came into the plant -- materials, things we used on a daily basis, cleansers, tapes, things -- I unloaded it from a truck, checked it in, and put it up.

Then when it was needed I sent it out to different departments. I worked that job off and on for probably ten years.

I did labor jobs. I worked in what they called the mold shop, which is where they made the molds to make the bottles. And I was a sandblaster. When the molds would come up they were dirty. I would sandblast them off, clean them up, and send them to somebody to be repaired, then they would go back down on through the line.

I also held utility jobs. I was a quality inspector, which meant that when the bottles were packed on the line, I checked so many bottles per hour. And if there was anything wrong with the bottles, I held them up to be gone over again -- and reported was what we called it -- and then if there was nothing wrong with the bottles I shipped them out.

And I also held a job as a crew leader, which on what they call layers, that is where the bottles come out, too. I would check the bottles to make sure there was nothing wrong. If anything was wrong with the bottles, you would put them in a machine, the machine would throw them out. And you had three or four people working under you at the time and we just mainly got the bottles packed and down to the warehouse.

Q When you say you worked in the mold shop, was that -- were there any men that did that or was it mixed?

A I was the only one.

Q That sounds like something that the men do, not -- how did you get that job?

A It was a bid job. I took the job by seniority, which I

was tried -- they tried to persuade me not to take it. They said the job was too hard for a woman. It was too heavy. But after I tried the job for a while I found out that it was difficult at times, but yet it was easier than working the assembly line to me because I could work at my own pace. And if I would work an hour, then I maybe had a ten minute rest period in that time. Then I would go back to doing what I needed to be done.

Q Were any of the other jobs that you described men and women? Mostly women? Pretty mixed?

A At the beginning the other two jobs, the crew leader job and quality inspector job was mainly men, then after a few years women took over the job. So at the closing of the plant they were mainly women. They was very few men that did these jobs.

Q Okay. Do you feel that the women at Owens had the same opportunities as men?

A No, not at all. Most of the jobs were men-oriented. They were -- most of them were too hard for women, most of the jobs. Different jobs required high lift operators, tractor drivers. And the types of jobs they did were, you know, too difficult, I would feel, for a woman to do eight hours a day.

Q Physically too difficult?

A Physically too difficult.

Q Do you think the women had the same opportunity to advance as far as into management positions and into leadership positions as men? Did they sometimes overlook a qualified female and just take a man into the leadership role?

A I would say within the last ten years this didn't happen,

but before it did. In the last ten, maybe five years we had all different management. They came from different parts of the country.

In early years all the management were from local areas. So they were more men-oriented. They was more men bosses, but in later years the management changed completely. We ended up with people from California, Toledo, different places. And this brought a lot of women into Huntington area which then they wanted to train other women because they found out the women mostly got along better in the higher positions than the men did because they seemed to reason more with the employees than the men that was management. The men had sort of a different attitude toward the lower scale people, I guess I would call them, than the women did.

Q Oh, okay. That makes sense. Did you socialize with other people on your shifts after work hours? Did you have good friends that you established on your shift?

A Yes. When you work swing shift you have no other outside life, so to speak, because your days off other people was working. On weekends you worked while your family was home. So that's how you maintain your friendship was people you work with because you are with them eight hours a day and then they really became your family because they're the ones you were with all of the time.

Q Uh-huh.

A And not people, you know, that you didn't work with because they had other lives and you had a completely different life than anyone else.

Q Did that make it difficult sometimes if they wanted you

to change a shift? Sometimes you didn't want to leave behind your friends and things that you had made on a particular shift?

A That was very difficult. Most of the time they very seldom forced you into changing shifts. Sometimes they would ask you to change shifts or if different jobs came up for bidding you bid on another shift, you went. But the only time they forced you into changing shifts was right before a lay-off where they evened out the shifts is what they called it. And then they forced you into different shifts, but yeah, after you've been there for as long as I worked there you had friends on every shift.

Q Uh-huh.

A Not only on the one shift that you worked. You made friends -- mostly -- my closest friends probably didn't even work with me eight hours a day. They were probably on a completely different shift.

Q Okay. When you say that you bid on a job, what exactly does that mean and how do you go about bidding on a job?

A When an opening to a job comes up it is posted on a bulletin board, the type of job it is, the qualifications that you have to have, and the date that you have to bid on it. And then anybody that is qualified goes down and signs their name and what department they work in. So when the job is taken down, then the senior person that bid on that job, if they are qualified, gets the job. And then they go into training. It all amounts to who worked there the longest got the jobs. Regardless of -- maybe I was more qualified than you, but you worked there two days more than me, then you would get the job. Even though I had --

Q Better qualifications?

A -- qualifications and I would have been better suited for the job.

Q Did you participate in any of the company-sponsored social activities?

A Just about all of them because that is something I really enjoyed doing. The March of Dimes. The different -- visiting the nursing home, the Toys for Tots, the underprivileged children. I seemed to participate in most of them that I had time to do.

Q How often -- do you feel like Owens was -- really supported the community? Do you feel like they did enough by way of those types of activities for the community?

A I think Owens did probably more than any other large factory around here. They donated money to different causes. They would let their employees off work to participate in the meetings and in the different organizations. I think they went out of their way a lot to help the community.

Q Did the management and hourly workers socialize together even at these functions or outside of work-related activities?

A Yes, quite often. Most of the salary and hourly employees were friends. I mean, you know, there was no hostility or nothing toward anyone that I had ever seen down there.

Q Were you a member of a local union?

A Yes.

Q Can you tell me which one?

A The GBA. It was Glass Bottle Blowers Association.

Q Okay. How often did you go to a local union meeting?

A Very seldom. We had meetings once a month, but I was not a regular "goer" to the meetings.

Q Were there any women leaders in this union?

A No. No leaders. The secretary was a woman. I have never known -- we had never had a woman president, a woman vice-president, or a treasurer of our local union. We have only had a woman secretary.

Q Were there other unions at Owens Illinois?

A Yes. There were two other unions.

Q Did any of -- either of those have women leaders or women in any kind of leadership position or --

A The other two unions were there had no women members. They were all male.

Q Did you ever go on strike?

A No. The times that -- the plant I think went on strike twice in the 23 years I was there and I was laid off during both times. So I didn't have to participate in any of the strikes.

Q So did you ever walk picket lines or anything like that?

A No.

Q Were there people of different races or ethnic backgrounds working at Owens?

A Very few. We had mostly white. They was, I'd say maybe ten percent black. And other than that I don't know of any other nationality.

Q Any Asian --

A None that I can even remember.

Q Okay. Of the minorities, what kind of jobs did they

have, the same?

A The same. They was -- they had the same opportunities as everybody else did.

Q So it was broken more along gender lines. Even a female with a different ethnical background would have the same job as a white woman?

A Yes.

Q Basically the broken between the gender line is how you got assigned jobs?

A Yes.

Q Did you ever socialize or did these minorities participate in the social activities with Owens or did they -- did they ever feel excluded or did -- was everybody friends as far as --

A We were all friends. I don't think they were -- they participated the same as we did. I couldn't see no difference. We was all, you know, we were all the same. You know, I felt no different toward anyone and I couldn't say that anybody that I know of did. We were just all one group of people that worked together.

Q Were there any health or safety dangers on any of the jobs that you had?

A I'm sure that there were some, but they were well regulated. We had a safety committee and if I saw a danger or something I thought was a danger I just went to our safety director or someone on the committee and I informed them that I thought this was a safety hazard and it was taken care of immediately. That was one thing we never had to fight about, argue about. The company

was very strict about safety regulations there. Of course there was accidents and most of them probably was preventable which, you know, most accidents are, but I can't say the company neglected in any way that would cause anyone harm. If anything was a safety hazard it was taken care of immediately.

Q If there was an accident how did Owens help? In case of an accident, you know, what did you do in case of some type of accident?

A We had a full-time nurse. In the beginning they were there 24 hours a day. In later years when the work force was cut she was there eight hours a day. But the company trained numerous people, myself included, in first aid/CPR. They put us through a two or three day training in case something would come up that a person needed help before the paramedics could get there. The company really did not -- the only thing on accidents in the plant, they did not want you taking off work for accidents. They brought you in even though you wasn't able to work. They did bring you in. You punched a card, your time card, and you punched it out, but you did not have to perform any work if you was injured. But they still wanted you to make sure that you was on the job eight hours a day.

Q Did you get paid for those eight hours?

A Yes, you got paid.

Q That seems kind of -- is there anything that you felt that you had to protect yourself from? While working at Owens did you feel, although like not imminent danger but did you just feel like that you had to -- was there anything you felt like you had to

protect yourself from while you were there? Any kind of maybe possible contamination or anything that wasn't really spoken of, but that you maybe had a concern about?

A The only thing was asbestos. When the government started regulating asbestos. I knew that I had worked in asbestos for years. We knew it was there, but nobody knew what to do about it.

When they go in and remodel those old factories and things like that, the employees would do it in earlier years. But in later years when they did it they hired somebody. And when we noticed these people coming in with suits on and dust masks and things, you know, we wondered why we did it for years without any protection, but yet when they hired outside contractors they were protected. And when we questioned this, you know, we didn't get any answers for it. But the company did pay for our physicals and our x-rays to make sure nothing was wrong. And mine did turn up negative, which a lot of my fellow employees has turned up positive for asbestos in their lungs, quite a few as a matter of fact.

Q Did any of the unions help push any of that or was it totally -- the company volunteered to check everyone or was there any outside pressure from employees to say, you know, "Hey, this has happened and --

A I'm sure our union did this. They were the one that contacted the lawyers. The lawyers contacted us. So really the company really didn't have much to say about it. They really didn't have any, you know, recourse in, you know, of not doing it. So they just went along with it.

Q Overall, can you tell me what you liked most about

working at Owens?

A The people. The friends I made. The people I worked with. That is what I really miss now. When you work with someone that long and is that close, I mean I probably know more about them than their family does or they know more about me than my own sisters and brothers. I mean they know my kids, their ages, everything about them because that's what you talk about is your family, your outside life. So yeah, that's what I miss. I keep in contact with quite a few of them.

Q Can you describe for me what you liked least about working there?

A Not really. Like I said, about the only thing I really didn't like about it was the hours I had to work. But in the last two years I was there I worked straight day shift and I was off on Saturday and Sunday. So I liked my job. I had no complaints with my employment at all.

Q How do you feel about Owens in general, just about, you know, Owens as a company that you worked for?

A I think Owens is a good organization. It is a good company to work for. But in the later years, you know, Owens is probably the same as most factories. They are out to make money and the only thing they saw was numbers. They didn't see people out there doing jobs. They had a certain amount of people to do the job and yet on paper it says you work a certain job with two people, they work it with two even though it required four. And if the two people couldn't keep up with it, it was just our bad luck, you know. There was nothing we could do about it.

Q Okay. Just a second ago you said -- you were telling me how in the later years things started to change. Do you know approximately around what year or around what time you are talking about?

A Probably in the later part of the 80's. I saw a change in the management. Like I said, the local management was sort of weeded out and they brought in more sophisticated management, is that they called it. And I noticed the plant totally change at that time and, in my opinion, it wasn't for the better. We have always been a well-producing plant. We was always one of the top plants out of the 24. At that time there was probably a lot more than that, but I'm saying now. I think there was 24 plants left. And we was always at the top of the list. And then when I talk about the management come in, they reduced man power. They relied more on automatic equipment that didn't work. Things started to go down hill. And at that time we were blamed. When I say "we", the employees was blamed. Some of the management was blamed. But I can't see anybody was really at fault except automation.

In the later part of my employment there I was a carton maker. I made cartons that the other people put the bottles in. Instead of me making the cartons, I put the cartons into a machine and the machine opened them up and glued them and sent them down. Well, when they installed the new machines, a person was taken completely off that job. So the only thing I was qualified -- what I was supposed to do was load the machine and I was to go and do another job. Well, while I was doing that job the machine would break down. Well, while I was trying to fix the machine my other

job over there was running out. And then when I was trying to go back to do this job the machine would break down again. But in management's eyes this was my fault because I was doing a one person job, but which it would really take two people because the automatic machine never worked. And this went on for quite a few years until our quality went down. I mean when you have no cartons to put the bottles in the bottles have to go somewhere. So they end up on the floor. They end up on the floor anywhere you can put them. So when they are on the floor that means they're not looked at like they were supposed to be looked at. So they ended up in the cartons shipped to the customer and the quality went from good to very poor. And, of course, it was the employee's fault because they packed it. Yes, we packed it, but what was we to do when we were told to do it?

Q Was there anyone who served as a liaison? Was there anybody that you could voice your complaints to who then voiced your complaints to the management that the management respected or --

A We had a shift woman which was management, but they were directly over us, which -- if we had a complaint that's who we went to. We also, since we were union, we had shop stewards or grievance people, which I was a grievance person for a number of years. If you went to your shift woman and you couldn't get any results over these complaints that something was wrong, then you went to your shop steward. The shop steward in turn went to voice the complaint to the shift woman. And if this didn't work out they had morning meetings every single day, mostly after every shift.

That is when the problems were resolved in these meetings. And if we couldn't get anything corrected or to our satisfaction then we would go to management and say, "We would like a meeting. A certain amount of people wants a meeting with the company to voice our opinions to try to work out these difficulties." And we were always met. The meetings was always held. Whether we got what we wanted or not, we all came to a happy medium.

Q So who exactly was present in these meetings? Who was there?

A Our shift woman. Our boss directly over us. Our shop steward which was the union. We had like production supervisors which was the boss over the shift woman. And then it just kept going up the ladder to the, you know, our plant manager, which the plant manager never sat in on any of these meetings. Never.

Q Was he asked?

A Probably not. That wasn't his role, I assume. It went from our selecting supervisor maybe up to another step of production supervisor, but that was the highest it ever went. But anyone of a given person could go to any of these bosses, any of them, and say, "I've got a complaint." And they would listen. You know, you were supposed to go by channels. You know, you move up the ladder with your complaints, but if I had a complaint and I happened to see the production supervisor, you know, I'd say, you know, "I have a complaint. Do you have a moment that I could talk to you?" And they always did. Like I said, we were all friends, you know. All of them was easy to talk to. I had never found one that I couldn't sit down and talk to.

Q Were they readily available? Did they just walk around the plant or did they have offices that you had to go to?

A They all had offices and we were welcome at any given time. If someone was in there talking all you did was waited your turn. They never turned you down unless they was an emergency come up and then they'd always say, "I'll talk to you later. Get back with me another time." But they always walked around the plant. They were constantly out on the floor, overlooking things and a lot of times helping. You know, if there was a -- like i said, you know, there was always trouble in factories. There's always problems. Something's not going to work right. Something's going to jam up. And they were always there to help. You know, if there was help, any given boss was there to help, except for the, like I said, the plant manager very seldom was ever seen. He stayed in his office or wherever, you know.

Q When you say they were "out on the floor," what goes on? Everything goes on out on the floor? Is that just conveyor belts or what's on the floor?

A We had different levels at Owens. We're not on one floor. You have the offices were sort of -- they were upstairs. You'd come down and you had an open area which was the layers. The layers was where the bottles came from the hot end out onto the floor. Well, the -- after the bottles were packed they went even to a different level on down where -- that's where the men, most of these younger men worked. They were called layer attendants. They had very few layer attendants.

Q Do you have a reason maybe why there were no women?

A The work was harder. The cartons had to be handled a lot by hand. And they were stacked like eight cartons high which was probably ten foot. A woman -- I am 5'4". It would be hard for me to throw a 50 pound carton ten foot in the air to stack it. And they all had to be stacked a certain way. They all had to be tied. And it was just hard work for a woman. In the last two or three years they had automatic, you know, that would pack them automatically, but the work to me was just as hard as it was if they did it by hand. It was no job that I ever wanted. I never even tried because I just did not want it.

Q Back in the 80's when you said that they brought new management in, what did they do with the old management? Were they lowered? Did they stay the same and the other people just kind of blended? Were they fired? What did they do with the --

A No one I don't think was actually fired. They were forced into retirement. A lot of them were forced into retirement. Some of them was sort of demoted down a couple of jobs. Some of them were made jobs just so they could work out their employment, I mean, until their retirement. If they were like a year or two old enough to retire, they just sort of kept them there and created jobs for them, but nobody was actually ever fired.

Q Okay. Let's go back to when you were describing your different jobs when you said you worked in the mold?

A Mold shop.

Q In the mold shop. And it was mostly men that worked there with you. Did the men treat you differently as a female working?

A Yes. I'd say they treated me very differently, but in the good sense. They respected me very well. I took my breaks with them. I ate with them. They sort of pampered me because they wasn't used to having a woman up there. And some of them volunteered even to do my job for me which I declined, you know. That wasn't what I was up there for. I was up there to do my job. But I got along very well with all of them. None of them seemed to mind me being there.

At first it was a little uncomfortable because of language, I think, because they weren't used to having me there and they was always trying to watch what they would say. But working in a factory you don't watch what you say. Everybody says what they want to say. So after I explained that to them, then things sort of eased off and become a little more comfortable. But I enjoyed it very well. It was a small department. There was approximately 30-some men there, but they worked shift work, too. So since I worked straight evening shift there was only like three or four in the department while I was there. So things wasn't bad at all.

Q What made you leave that job?

A It was a temporary job. I only had it until someone else came back.

Q And the next job after the mold shop was?

A I went back into selecting for a while and then I bid on the utility job which was straight day shift. In order to work straight day shift you take a large cut in pay because you don't get your shift differential. So in order for me to work straight

day I probably took a \$200 a month cut in my salary.

Q What is a shift differential?

A When you work 3:00 to 11:00 you get so much more money on the hour which was I think maybe eight or nine cents. And then on midnight shift you got even that much more on the hour. And then on Sundays you got time and a half. So when you worked straight day shift Monday through Friday, you know, you lose this much money. But to me, you know, I'd rather work the day shift than the swing shift.

Q And what exactly did you do in the utility?

A Utility? I swept, mopped, cleaned, painted, anything that they wanted me to do. We had a list of things that we did every day from emptying garbage to cleaning the bathrooms. And so but then, of course, they added extra things if they wanted things done. There were three of us that did this job.

Q In the whole entire plant or just --

A No. In the selecting department.

Q In the selecting department.

A But when this job came up for bid for the straight day shift, they always had a utility, but it's been men mostly and they used two per shift. So we had four shifts in the plant, A, B, C, & D. That's what they were called. Well, they used two utility men per shift which was eight. Eight men. So when they combined it to day shift they added three women and did away with eight men's jobs. So we did the work that the eight men did with three women.

Q Did anyone question that or say, "Wait a minute. This is

the job that eight men were doing?"

A Yes, but that's all they did was question it.

Q You really didn't get any kind of response or explanation?

A No. No.

Q After you worked utility you went to quality control?

A No, my quality was before. The utility job was the next to the last job I held. The quality job was before. A lot of times when you work in a factory you really don't know what you want to do or what you would really like to do. So when the jobs come up for bid you sort of bid on them and get trained. To me the more I knew about the factory the better I would like it. So I always bid on jobs and I wanted the training whether I kept the job or not. You really didn't have to keep the job. If you decided within 60 days of the job that you didn't want it, you could go back to your previously held job.

Now, the quality inspector job I held for quite a while, but the crew leading job, all I wanted was the training. I wanted to know what was wrong with the bottles, why they were bad, and what could prevent them from being bad. So when I got my training on the crew leader job, I gave it up. I just didn't want it anymore, even though it was a dollar more on the hour. But the quality inspector job, what I had was a back-up job. That meant they have permanent quality inspectors and they have back-ups. That means if somebody is off or they needed an extra one I filled in. But I really -- I think of all my jobs that was probably the most interesting.

Q Were most of the permanent inspectors men?

A No, not when I had it. The majority of them was women at this time. This was the 90's, you know, before I had the job or '89. That's when most of the women took over the better jobs. But the reason for that was, by that time most of the people that were hired in at Owens, I can't say they were mostly women, but most men didn't keep the jobs. When I hired in they hired a lot of summer help, what they called them. So the men usually stayed and the men left for better job, at that time. Then by the time they started hiring a lot of men I had more seniority than these men and most of the women had more seniority because the women I hired in with, like I said, they stayed but the men didn't because they went on to better jobs. They didn't like swing shift or they just, you know, went other places. So the majority of the people in this department were women because the men went to different departments. When I first came there, there was no women allowed in the furnace department. There was never any women in the hot end. There was no women in machine repair. So the men bid on these jobs that women were not allowed to bid on.

Q Were women ever allowed in those places?

A A few on occasion, but they never stayed. I don't know why. I don't know if the jobs were too hard or the atmosphere was too much for them to take because when you go into some departments that are male dominant they want to leave it that way. But in my opinion the machine repair and the hot end was no place for any woman. In my opinion no woman could do the job that those men did without someone getting hurt.

Q Was it physically too hard?

A It was physically too hard and it's too hot. I mean the men worked in a thousand degree heat and they could only stay there a few seconds. Well, if a woman is up there working in mid air and it a thousand degrees, the men literally pick them up and take them out. And if he is left partnered with a woman, what if a woman can't get a 200 pound man out?

Q So it's a danger issue as well?

A Right. It's very dangerous. Very.

Q So how did you lose your job at Owens?

A The factory closed.

Q Do you know due to what?

A They said economic reasons. They said our plant was old, which it was. It took too much money to maintain it. Our area they said was a little out of the way of distilleries, which we were mainly liquor business. That's -- 99 percent of our bottles were liquor, liquor and beer. And they said the distilleries was a little bit too far away from our area to be shipped and it was more economical for them to keep another factory open than it was ours.

Q Do you feel that that's the truth?

A In a lot of ways it was true, but I think they had intentions of closing our factory when they sent the last group of management in.

Q In the 80's?

A No, in the 90's. The plant manager that we ended up with had shut down six other factories. Like I said before, we were

like number one or number two. When Denny Silvice, that's his name, when he came to Huntington, within six, seven, eight months, we went from number two I believe to like number 20, within just a few months. I really don't hold anything against him because I think it was a corporate decision, not an individual decision to shut the factory down.

Q You think he was sent there to do that?

A Yes. I believe he was sent here to shut the plant down, because our factory, what has kept Owens in Huntington for so long, we did jobs nobody else wanted. That meant we had a lot of mold changes. We did little jobs that maybe last a week where some of the newer factories would run a job for a year without changing, 365 days a year, seven days a week. Our factory never did that. So when our new plant manager came he said, "I do not want the little jobs. I want all big jobs." Well, we couldn't keep up. Our machines was too old. We could not run a continuous job and compete with the newer factories. So when he started turning down all the little jobs we completely lost out. And the jobs that we ran, Seagrams, Anheiser-Busch, those jobs, yes, we kept. We have run them until the last day of the factory operating. But we couldn't last on three or four machines on three or four companies. We needed a lot of little companies because before we ran Avon. We ran pharmaceuticals, you know. Anything that any company wanted us to run we ran it because they said we could make any bottle that anybody wanted. But in the last two or three years they didn't want to do that. They just wanted a continuous operation and we failed. We couldn't do that. We just did not have the equipment

to do it.

Q Did anybody like in the unions, did they know the reputation of this person? Did anybody see it coming like long before? Did anybody do anything to try to stop it?

A No. No one knew. No one had any idea. Yes, we heard. When he came we heard that he had been to other factories. But, you know, you may hear something and you may think something, but you really don't want to realize it. And we really didn't realize it until the morning they came in and said, "We're closing." I mean nobody, even though you can see it coming, you really don't want to believe it.

I can say I saw it coming. When he just kept shutting down machines and shipping them to other companies, you know it can't last. We were a company on 92 acres or whatever, but we operated on five acres. Okay? We had a building that was 80 percent empty that you still had to heat. You still had to furnish electricity for security reasons. You still had to furnish guards, you know, and it was just vacant. Our equipment was sitting there, obsolete equipment that nobody would ever use. So that, you know, that's what we were looking at in the last three years of operation.

Q Since you have lost your job, have you or will you receive a pension from the company?

A No. I received severance pay for my 23 years. When I am eligible for retirement, yes, I will get my retirement which won't be much.

Q Okay. You said you won't receive much retirement.

A No, because our retirement is based on the years of service. If I had got to work until I had been there 30 years I would have gotten my full retirement, but since the plant shut down and I only had 23 years, I'll only get a percentage, which mine I think will amount to maybe \$205 a month if I draw it at 55. If I wait to 65 then I can draw I believe it's \$465 a month on my retirement. So more or less I just froze my retirement as they say.

Q Do you still have any medical benefits from the company?

A Yes. They carried our benefits for six months, then after six months we can pick up what they call Cobra. Cobra is about the same thing I have now but I will have to pay for it, which will be very expensive. But they will only carry you for 18 months. The only problem with that is if you would have an illness or something serious, then at the end of 18 months they are going to drop you and then another company won't pick you up because you have like a continuous illness, say a heart attack or cancer, and then you won't be covered under nothing because Cobra is going to drop you at 18 months and another company, if you have cancer, is not going to pick you up because you have an illness.

So that is something that I am going to have to think about, maybe picking up a private company and not going along with the Cobra. At the end of my six months I'm considering just picking up a private company while I can.

Q Okay. Is there anything that you would like to add about Owens, anything about your experience that we may not have covered, any feelings that you have?

A Well, the only feelings that I really had is maybe, like I said, Owens is a very good place to work. They were very good to me the 23 years I was there. I never had any problems but I think most people that had worked there would agree nobody could really understand the loss of a plant like we've had. I mean the hurt. You have hurt. You have anger. I have hurt. I went through a real bad depression time. I'm sure a lot of other people did, too. It's knowing it's not ever going to be there again. It's just like a family member. You know, it's some place you go everyday. Some place you love to go everyday. Most of the people really enjoyed their jobs. And then for them to come in and say, "We are going to close down." I mean I was hurt. I was very hurt. I was angry. You know, I think they could have done something to maybe keep it open. I was angry with management, but in time all of that goes away. But I'm still hurt. You know, something was taken away from me. Some part of my life is gone. That part of my life is gone forever and I think I'm still hurt. I don't really think I'm bitter anymore. It's just something in my life that's gone.

Their choice was to go on to something better or maybe, you know, they just didn't want to work anymore. But when somebody comes up and says, you know, they take it away from them. It was not my choice. Maybe that's what I'm saying. That choice was not left up to me. It was put in somebody else's hands. If I was ten years older, I'm 45 now. If I had been 55 I would say, "Oh, great. I'm going to retire. I'm going to enjoy my life." I think I would have been one of the happiest people on this Earth to know that I could do that. But right now I'm thinking what am I going to do

next year when my unemployment runs out? I have no other skills. Do I go back to school? What do I go back to school for? I'm 45. If I go to school for two or three years, you know, who's going to hire me? I'm looking at this. And I'm still deciding what there is left to do. I mean the company is holding work shops and seminars, things to try to help us. They even have, you know, we could go to a psychiatrist. We could do whatever we want to do. The company is trying to help us to adjust, but what do we see out there? If I go to school, I'm going to go to school but you've got 500 or 1,000 kids, young people, coming out of college that's going to know twice as much as I know. So what do I have to look forward to? I'm not in real financial bad shape as some people is, but yet it's going to get worse and then what am I going to do? So I'm just sort of debating, deciding, trying to decide where I want to go now with my life at 45.

Q That also reminds me, in the media it has been said that there were a lot of people who were working at Owens-Illinois who were illiterate and I just want your opinion on that.

A That was a misconception. It didn't bother me because I think I understood what the governor was talking about. He didn't mean that we was illiterate, that we could not read and write. He meant that we were illiterate to the world, to the computers, to the modern science of things. I do not think he meant that we were -- most people took it as illiterate, that we could not read, write, or function. That is not what I took him to say. I have a high school education. I do have other educational, you know, I have had other classes, other jobs and things. So I'm not

illiterate, but as far as the work place is concerned I am because I have no skills that the world today is requiring. So that is what the illiteracy came from.

Q Not actually being able to read and write?

A Right. What most people took it as. They took it as an insult and to me it wasn't an insult exactly. It just meant I wasn't trained to do anything else. And I'm not. I'm not trained because factory work, you are trained to do different jobs, but there is nothing out there, no place I can get a job for what I am trained for.

Q Unless it will be another factory and it's virtually impossible to get one of those jobs.

A Right. Everyone has cut down they call it man hours. And every factory, not only Owens. We are talking about different factories here in Huntington. They all cut down on man hours. They want the people there to produce more than they did so they just cut down on man hours and make one person pick up on somebody else's load. All factories and Owens has done that. So I have no chance whatsoever of going to another factory because I am not skilled labor, what they consider skilled labor. Some skilled labor went to other factories, which was electricians, millwrights, gauge mechanics.

Q Are most of those positions held by men?

A All positions were held by men because at the time when those jobs came open we were not allowed. Women were not permitted to bid on them. So the men got the jobs which required four years of schooling and I think 2,000 hours of working in that position.

There was no women that were skilled labor in the Owens-Illinois factory. They were all men. And all the openings in the other factories were for skilled labor.

Q Not for any of the positions that women held.

A Right, because we were not considered skilled.

Q Well, is there anything else you would like to add?

A No. I can't think of anything.

Q Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

A REARVIEW GLANCE OF A MODERN DAY
ROSIE the RIVETER

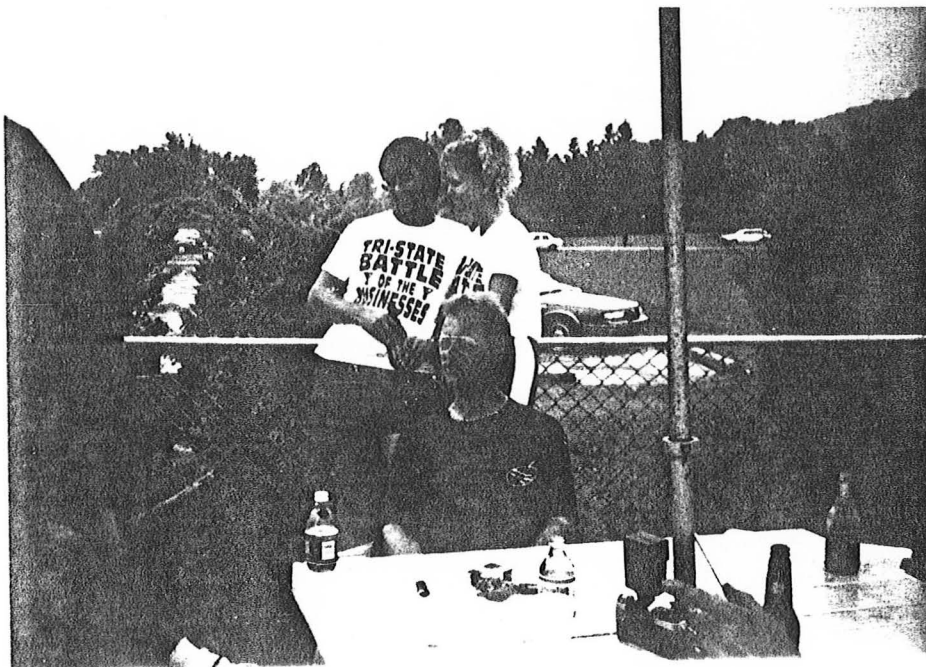
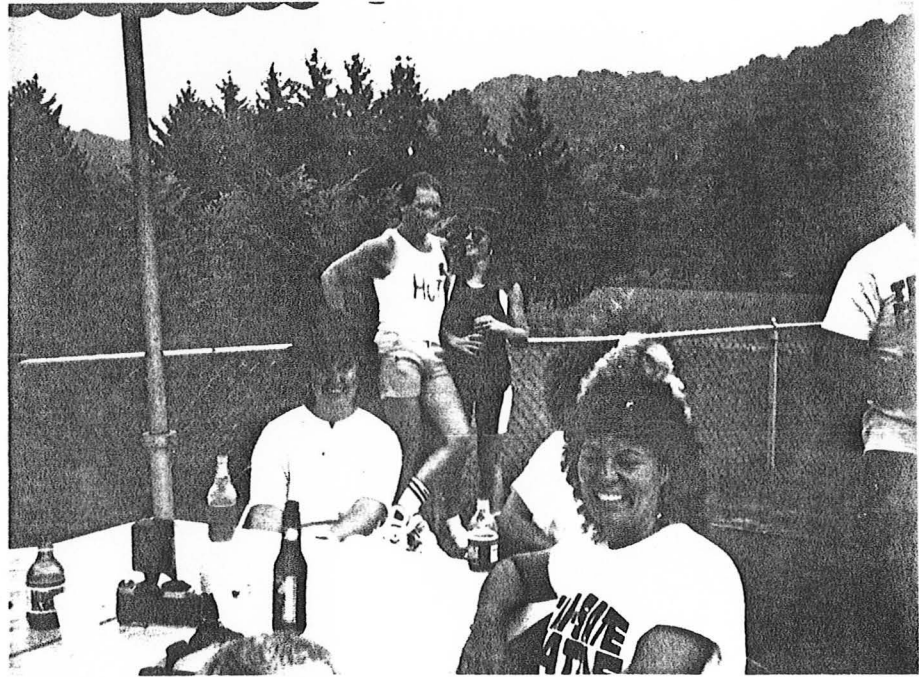
The story of Linda Smith

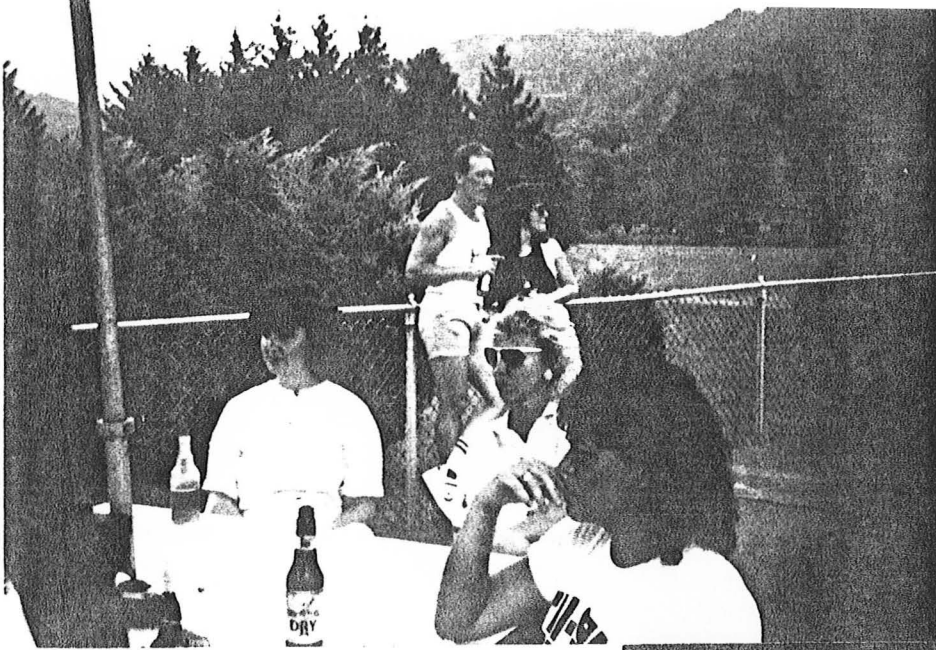
Jennifer Smoot
Stephanie Hudson
History 250
April 11, 1994



LINDA SMITH AT AGE 21

OWENS ILLINOIS
EMPLOYEES SOCIALIZING







ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA
 400 Hal Greer Boulevard
 Huntington, West Virginia 25755-2667
 304/696-6799

SUBJECT: _____

 ORAL HISTORY NUMBER: _____
 MORROW ACCESSION NUMBER: _____

ORAL HISTORY

GIFT AND RELEASE AGREEMENT

I, Linda Smith, the undersigned, of Cabell,
 County of Huntington, State of West Virginia, grant, convey,
 and transfer to the James E. Morrow Library Associates, a division of the Marshall
 University Foundation, INC., an educational and eleemosynary institution, all my right,
 title, interest, and literary property rights in and to my testimony recorded on
MARCH 8, 1994, to be used for scholarly purposes, including study
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- J.S. (initial) Open and usable immediately.
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- _____ (initial) Closed for a period of _____ years.
- _____ (initial) Closed for my lifetime.
- _____ (initial) Closed for my lifetime unless special permission is gained from me or my assigns.

DATE: 3/8/94

Linda Smith
 (Signature - Interviewee)
1737 Crestmont Dr.
 (Address)
Huntington, WV
522-3812
 (Phone)

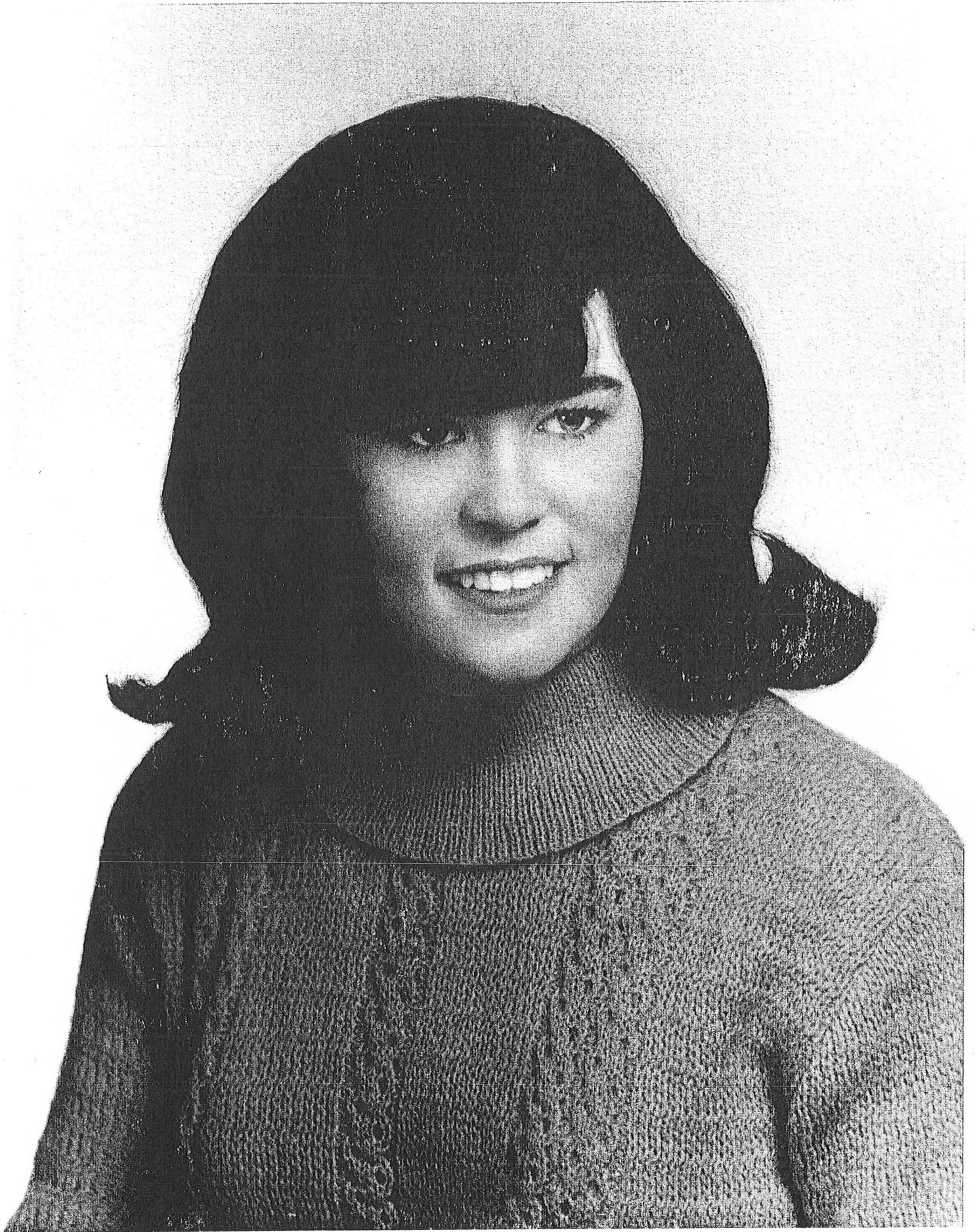
DATE: 3/8/94

Clayton A. Wooten
 (Signature - Interviewer)
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525-2441
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A REARVIEW GLANCE OF A MODERN DAY
ROSIE the RIVETER

The story of Linda Smith

Jennifer Smoot
Stephanie Hudson
History 250
April 11, 1994



LINDA SMITH AT AGE 21

OWENS ILLINOIS
EMPLOYEES SOCIALIZING





ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
MEMBERS

Claudia Wooten..... conducted the interview, gathered pictures

Jackie Noble..... transcribed interview tape

Jennifer Smoot..... wrote Ms. Smith's oral history narrative

Stephanie Hudson.....wrote Ms. Smith's oral history narrative

History 250
April 11, 1994
Oral History Project

INTERVIEW OF LINDA SMITH

1737 Crestmont Drive

Born in Wayne County, West Virginia

✓

Jackie Noble

INTERVIEW OF LINDA SMITH

Q Linda, when did you first go to work at Owens?

A June of 1970.

Q And how old were you then?

A I was 21.

Q Can you describe for me your very first job there?

A I was a selector. I packed bottles off of an assembly line.

Q Did you enjoy that job?

A Yes, very much. It was something interesting that I had never done before or seen before and I was interested in how the bottles were made. And I liked my job very much.

Q Is there anything you didn't like about the job?

A Swing shift. Everyone there had to work swing shift which meant you were never on schedule. We worked weekends always. Holidays we seldom got off. That part I didn't like.

Q Okay. What exactly is swing shift? What do you mean by swing shift?

A You worked a different shift every week. You rotate day shift one week, midnight the following week, then 3:00 to 11:00 the week after that. And it just keeps rotating.

Q Were there other people doing the same job as you women?

A Yes. At that time there were all women that did what I did. The men had different jobs. But mainly what I did was all women up until 19-- -- maybe 1980.

Q Okay. When you were doing the selecting, how many of your supervisors were women?

A None. We had no supervisors that were women.

Q None. How did you get along with your male supervisors?

A Very well. They treated us all very well, but they -- we knew who the boss was and who wasn't. We just did what we were told.

Q Did anyone in your community or family oppose to you, as a woman, working at Owens?

A No, not at all. It was one of the better places in Huntington to work for women because the pay was good, the benefits was excellent, and they were very good to the women because they all knew that we had families and children to consider and they all was very lenient where it came to the people with small children, such as myself.

When I first went to work there, when I had two small children, I went to work an hour later of the morning to get my kids off to school. So I only worked seven hours a day. So they was really good to us about things like that.

Q Were there any other members of your family employed at Owens?

A No.

Q No. Tell me what other jobs you had at Owens other than selecting?

A I've worked as a shipping and receiving clerk.

Q What exactly did you do as that?

A The things that were ordered that came into the plant -- materials, things we used on a daily basis, cleansers, tapes, things -- I unloaded it from a truck, checked it in, and put it up.

Then when it was needed I sent it out to different departments. I worked that job off and on for probably ten years.

I did labor jobs. I worked in what they called the mold shop, which is where they made the molds to make the bottles. And I was a sandblaster. When the molds would come up they were dirty. I would sandblast them off, clean them up, and send them to somebody to be repaired, then they would go back down on through the line.

I also held utility jobs. I was a quality inspector, which meant that when the bottles were packed on the line, I checked so many bottles per hour. And if there was anything wrong with the bottles, I held them up to be gone over again -- and re|sorted was what we called it -- and then if there was nothing wrong with the bottles I shipped them out.

And I also held a job as a crew leader, which on what they call layers, that is where the bottles come out, too. I would check the bottles to make sure there was nothing wrong. If anything was wrong with the bottles, you would put them in a machine, the machine would throw them out. And you had three or four people working under you at the time and we just mainly got the bottles packed and down to the warehouse.

Q When you say you worked in the mold shop, was that -- were there any men that did that or was it mixed?

A I was the only one.

Q That sounds like something that the men do, not -- how did you get that job?

A It was a bid job. I took the job by seniority, which I

was tried -- they tried to persuade me not to take it. They said the job was too hard for a woman. It was too heavy. But after I tried the job for a while I found out that it was difficult at times, but yet it was easier than working the assembly line to me because I could work at my own pace. And if I would work an hour, then I maybe had a ten minute rest period in that time. Then I would go back to doing what I needed to be done.

Q Were any of the other jobs that you described men and women? Mostly women? Pretty mixed?

A At the beginning the other two jobs, the crew leader job and quality inspector job was mainly men, then after a few years women took over the job. So at the closing of the plant they were mainly women. They was very few men that did these jobs.

Q Okay. Do you feel that the women at Owens had the same opportunities as men?

A No, not at all. Most of the jobs were men-oriented. They were -- most of them were too hard for women, most of the jobs. Different jobs required high lift operators, tractor drivers. And the types of jobs they did were, you know, too difficult, I would feel, for a woman to do eight hours a day.

Q Physically too difficult?

A Physically too difficult.

Q Do you think the women had the same opportunity to advance as far as into management positions and into leadership positions as men? Did they sometimes overlook a qualified female and just take a man into the leadership role?

A I would say within the last ten years this didn't happen,

but before it did. In the last ten, maybe five years we had all different management. They came from different parts of the country.

In early years all the management were from local areas. So they were more men-oriented. They was more men bosses, but in later years the management changed completely. We ended up with people from California, Toledo, different places. And this brought a lot of women into Huntington area which then they wanted to train other women because they found out the women mostly got along better in the higher positions than the men did because they seemed to reason more with the employees than the men that was management. The men had sort of a different attitude toward the lower scale people, I guess I would call them, than the women did.

Q Oh, okay. That makes sense. Did you socialize with other people on your shifts after work hours? Did you have good friends that you established on your shift?

A Yes. When you work swing shift you have no other outside life, so to speak, because your days off other people was working. On weekends you worked while your family was home. So that's how you maintain your friendship was people you work with because you are with them eight hours a day and then they really became your family because they're the ones you were with all of the time.

Q Uh-huh.

A And not people, you know, that you didn't work with because they had other lives and you had a completely different life than anyone else.

Q Did that make it difficult sometimes if they wanted you

Q Better qualifications?

A -- qualifications and I would have been better suited for the job.

Q Did you participate in any of the company-sponsored social activities?

A Just about all of them because that is something I really enjoyed doing. The March of Dimes. The different -- visiting the nursing home, the Toys for Tots, the underprivileged children. I seemed to participate in most of them that I had time to do.

Q How often -- do you feel like Owens was -- really supported the community? Do you feel like they did enough by way of those types of activities for the community?

A I think Owens did probably more than any other large factory around here. They donated money to different causes. They would let their employees off work to participate in the meetings and in the different organizations. I think they went out of their way a lot to help the community.

Q Did the management and hourly workers socialize together even at these functions or outside of work-related activities?

A Yes, quite often. Most of the salary and hourly employees were friends. I mean, you know, there was no hostility or nothing toward anyone that I had ever seen down there.

Q Were you a member of a local union?

A Yes.

Q Can you tell me which one?

A The GBA. It was Glass Bottle Blowers Association.

Q Okay. How often did you go to a local union meeting?

have, the same?

A The same. They was -- they had the same opportunities as everybody else did.

Q So it was broken more along gender lines. Even a female with a different ethnical background would have the same job as a white woman?

A Yes.

Q Basically the broken between the gender line is how you got assigned jobs?

A Yes.

Q Did you ever socialize or did these minorities participate in the social activities with Owens or did they -- did they ever feel excluded or did -- was everybody friends as far as --

A We were all friends. I don't think they were -- they participated the same as we did. I couldn't see no difference. We was all, you know, we were all the same. You know, I felt no different toward anyone and I couldn't say that anybody that I know of did. We were just all one group of people that worked together.

Q Were there any health or safety dangers on any of the jobs that you had?

A I'm sure that there were some, but they were well regulated. We had a safety committee and if I saw a danger or something I thought was a danger I just went to our safety director or someone on the committee and I informed them that I thought this was a safety hazard and it was taken care of immediately. That was one thing we never had to fight about, argue about. The company

was very strict about safety regulations there. Of course there was accidents and most of them probably was preventable which, you know, most accidents are, but I can't say the company neglected in any way that would cause anyone harm. If anything was a safety hazard it was taken care of immediately.

Q If there was an accident how did Owens help? In case of an accident, you know, what did you do in case of some type of accident?

A We had a full-time nurse. In the beginning they were there 24 hours a day. In later years when the work force was cut she was there eight hours a day. But the company trained numerous people, myself included, in first aid/CPR. They put us through a two or three day training in case something would come up that a person needed help before the paramedics could get there. The company really did not -- the only thing on accidents in the plant, they did not want you taking off work for accidents. They brought you in even though you wasn't able to work. They did bring you in. You punched a card, your time card, and you punched it out, but you did not have to perform any work if you was injured. But they still wanted you to make sure that you was on the job eight hours a day.

Q Did you get paid for those eight hours?

A Yes, you got paid.

Q That seems kind of -- is there anything that you felt that you had to protect yourself from? While working at Owens did you feel, although like not imminent danger but did you just feel like that you had to -- was there anything you felt like you had to

A Very seldom. We had meetings once a month, but I was not a regular "goer" to the meetings.

Q Were there any women leaders in this union?

A No. No leaders. The secretary was a woman. I have never known -- we had never had a woman president, a woman vice-president, or a treasurer of our local union. We have only had a woman secretary.

Q Were there other unions at Owens Illinois?

A Yes. There were two other unions.

Q Did any of -- either of those have women leaders or women in any kind of leadership position or --

A The other two unions were there had no women members. They were all male.

Q Did you ever go on strike?

A No. The times that -- the plant I think went on strike twice in the 23 years I was there and I was laid off during both times. So I didn't have to participate in any of the strikes.

Q So did you ever walk picket lines or anything like that?

A No.

Q Were there people of different races or ethnic backgrounds working at Owens?

A Very few. We had mostly white. They was, I'd say maybe ten percent black. And other than that I don't know of any other nationality.

Q Any Asian --

A None that I can even remember.

Q Okay. Of the minorities, what kind of jobs did they

working at Owens?

A The people. The friends I made. The people I worked with. That is what I really miss now. When you work with someone that long and is that close, I mean I probably know more about them than their family does or they know more about me than my own sisters and brothers. I mean they know my kids, their ages, everything about them because that's what you talk about is your family, your outside life. So yeah, that's what I miss. I keep in contact with quite a few of them.

Q Can you describe for me what you liked least about working there?

A Not really. Like I said, about the only thing I really didn't like about it was the hours I had to work. But in the last two years I was there I worked straight day shift and I was off on Saturday and Sunday. So I liked my job. I had no complaints with my employment at all.

Q How do you feel about Owens in general, just about, you know, Owens as a company that you worked for?

A I think Owens is a good organization. It is a good company to work for. But in the later years, you know, Owens is probably the same as most factories. They are out to make money and the only thing they saw was numbers. They didn't see people out there doing jobs. They had a certain amount of people to do the job and yet on paper it says you work a certain job with two people, they work it with two even though it required four. And if the two people couldn't keep up with it, it was just our bad luck, you know. There was nothing we could do about it.

Q Okay. Just a second ago you said -- you were telling me how in the later years things started to change. Do you know approximately around what year or around what time you are talking about?

A Probably in the later part of the 80's. I saw a change in the management. Like I said, the local management was sort of weeded out and they brought in more sophisticated management, is that they called it. And I noticed the plant totally change at that time and, in my opinion, it wasn't for the better. We have always been a well-producing plant. We was always one of the top plants out of the 24. At that time there was probably a lot more than that, but I'm saying now. I think there was 24 plants left. And we was always at the top of the list. And then when I talk about the management come in, they reduced man power. They relied more on automatic equipment that didn't work. Things started to go down hill. And at that time we were blamed. When I say "we", the employees was blamed. Some of the management was blamed. But I can't see anybody was really at fault except automation.

In the later part of my employment there I was a carton maker. I made cartons that the other people put the bottles in. Instead of me making the cartons, I put the cartons into a machine and the machine opened them up and glued them and sent them down. Well, when they installed the new machines, a person was taken completely off that job. So the only thing I was qualified -- what I was supposed to do was load the machine and I was to go and do another job. Well, while I was doing that job the machine would break down. Well, while I was trying to fix the machine my other

That is when the problems were resolved in these meetings. And if we couldn't get anything corrected or to our satisfaction then we would go to management and say, "We would like a meeting. A certain amount of people wants a meeting with the company to voice our opinions to try to work out these difficulties." And we were always met. The meetings was always held. Whether we got what we wanted or not, we all came to a happy medium.

Q So who exactly was present in these meetings? Who was there?

A Our shift woman. Our boss directly over us. Our shop steward which was the union. We had like production supervisors which was the boss over the shift woman. And then it just kept going up the ladder to the, you know, our plant manager, which the plant manager never sat in on any of these meetings. Never.

Q Was he asked?

A Probably not. That wasn't his role, I assume. It went from our selecting supervisor maybe up to another step of production supervisor, but that was the highest it ever went. But anyone of a given person could go to any of these bosses, any of them, and say, "I've got a complaint." And they would listen. You know, you were supposed to go by channels. You know, you move up the ladder with your complaints, but if I had a complaint and I happened to see the production supervisor, you know, I'd say, you know, "I have a complaint. Do you have a moment that I could talk to you?" And they always did. Like I said, we were all friends, you know. All of them was easy to talk to. I had never found one that I couldn't sit down and talk to.

job over there was running out. And then when I was trying to go back to do this job the machine would break down again. But in management's eyes this was my fault because I was doing a one person job, but which it would really take two people because the automatic machine never worked. And this went on for quite a few years until our quality went down. I mean when you have no cartons to put the bottles in the bottles have to go somewhere. So they end up on the floor. They end up on the floor anywhere you can put them. So when they are on the floor that means they're not looked at like they were supposed to be looked at. So they ended up in the cartons shipped to the customer and the quality went from good to very poor. And, of course, it was the employee's fault because they packed it. Yes, we packed it, but what was we to do when we were told to do it?

Q Was there anyone who served as a liaison? Was there anybody that you could voice your complaints to who then voiced your complaints to the management that the management respected or --

A We had a shift woman which was management, but they were directly over us, which -- if we had a complaint that's who we went to. We also, since we were union, we had shop stewards or grievance people, which I was a grievance person for a number of years. If you went to your shift woman and you couldn't get any results over these complaints that something was wrong, then you went to your shop steward. The shop steward in turn went to voice the complaint to the shift woman. And if this didn't work out they had morning meetings every single day, mostly after every shift.

protect yourself from while you were there? Any kind of maybe possible contamination or anything that wasn't really spoken of, but that you maybe had a concern about?

A The only thing was asbestos. When the government started regulating asbestos. I knew that I had worked in asbestos for years. We knew it was there, but nobody knew what to do about it.

When they go in and remodel those old factories and things like that, the employees would do it in earlier years. But in later years when they did it they hired somebody. And when we noticed these people coming in with suits on and dust masks and things, you know, we wondered why we did it for years without any protection, but yet when they hired outside contractors they were protected. And when we questioned this, you know, we didn't get any answers for it. But the company did pay for our physicals and our x-rays to make sure nothing was wrong. And mine did turn up negative, which a lot of my fellow employees has turned up positive for asbestos in their lungs, quite a few as a matter of fact.

Q Did any of the unions help push any of that or was it totally -- the company volunteered to check everyone or was there any outside pressure from employees to say, you know, "Hey, this has happened and --

A I'm sure our union did this. They were the one that contacted the lawyers. The lawyers contacted us. So really the company really didn't have much to say about it. They really didn't have any, you know, recourse in, you know, of not doing it. So they just went along with it.

Q Overall, can you tell me what you liked most about

Q Were they readily available? Did they just walk around the plant or did they have offices that you had to go to?

A They all had offices and we were welcome at any given time. If someone was in there talking all you did was waited your turn. They never turned you down unless they was an emergency come up and then they'd always say, "I'll talk to you later. Get back with me another time." But they always walked around the plant. They were constantly out on the floor, overlooking things and a lot of times helping. You know, if there was a -- like i said, you know, there was always trouble in factories. There's always problems. Something's not going to work right. Something's going to jam up. And they were always there to help. You know, if there was help, any given boss was there to help, except for the, like I said, the plant manager very seldom was ever seen. He stayed in his office or wherever, you know.

Q When you say they were "out on the floor," what goes on? Everything goes on out on the floor? Is that just conveyor belts or what's on the floor?

A We had different levels at Owens. We're not on one floor. You have the offices were sort of -- they were upstairs. You'd come down and you had an open area which was the layers. The layers was where the bottles came from the hot end out onto the floor. Well, the -- after the bottles were packed they went even to a different level on down where -- that's where the men, most of these younger men worked. They were called layer attendants. They had very few layer attendants.

Q Do you have a reason maybe why there were no women?

A The work was harder. The cartons had to be handled a lot by hand. And they were stacked like eight cartons high which was probably ten foot. A woman -- I am 5'4". It would be hard for me to throw a 50 pound carton ten foot in the air to stack it. And they all had to be stacked a certain way. They all had to be tied. And it was just hard work for a woman. In the last two or three years they had automatic, you know, that would pack them automatically, but the work to me was just as hard as it was if they did it by hand. It was no job that I ever wanted. I never even tried because I just did not want it.

Q Back in the 80's when you said that they brought new management in, what did they do with the old management? Were they lowered? Did they stay the same and the other people just kind of blended? Were they fired? What did they do with the --

A No one I don't think was actually fired. They were forced into retirement. A lot of them were forced into retirement. Some of them was sort of demoted down a couple of jobs. Some of them were made jobs just so they could work out their employment, I mean, until their retirement. If they were like a year or two old enough to retire, they just sort of kept them there and created jobs for them, but nobody was actually ever fired.

Q Okay. Let's go back to when you were describing your different jobs when you said you worked in the mold?

A Mold shop.

Q In the mold shop. And it was mostly men that worked there with you. Did the men treat you differently as a female working?

day I probably took a \$200 a month cut in my salary.

Q What is a shift differential?

A When you work 3:00 to 11:00 you get so much more money on the hour which was I think maybe eight or nine cents. And then on midnight shift you got even that much more on the hour. And then on Sundays you got time and a half. So when you worked straight day shift Monday through Friday, you know, you lose this much money. But to me, you know, I'd rather work the day shift than the swing shift.

Q And what exactly did you do in the utility?

A Utility? I swept, mopped, cleaned, painted, anything that they wanted me to do. We had a list of things that we did every day from emptying garbage to cleaning the bathrooms. And so but then, of course, they added extra things if they wanted things done. There were three of us that did this job.

Q In the whole entire plant or just --

A No. In the selecting department.

Q In the selecting department.

A But when this job came up for bid for the straight day shift, they always had a utility, but it's been men mostly and they used two per shift. So we had four shifts in the plant, A, B, C, & D. That's what they were called. Well, they used two utility men per shift which was eight. Eight men. So when they combined it to day shift they added three women and did away with eight men's jobs. So we did the work that the eight men did with three women.

Q Did anyone question that or say, "Wait a minute. This is

to change a shift? Sometimes you didn't want to leave behind your friends and things that you had made on a particular shift?

A That was very difficult. Most of the time they very seldom forced you into changing shifts. Sometimes they would ask you to change shifts or if different jobs came up for bidding you bid on another shift, you went. But the only time they forced you into changing shifts was right before a lay-off where they evened out the shifts is what they called it. And then they forced you into different shifts, but yeah, after you've been there for as long as I worked there you had friends on every shift.

Q Uh-huh.

A Not only on the one shift that you worked. You made friends -- mostly -- my closest friends probably didn't even work with me eight hours a day. They were probably on a completely different shift.

Q Okay. When you say that you bid on a job, what exactly does that mean and how do you go about bidding on a job?

A When an opening to a job comes up it is posted on a bulletin board, the type of job it is, the qualifications that you have to have, and the date that you have to bid on it. And then anybody that is qualified goes down and signs their name and what department they work in. So when the job is taken down, then the senior person that bid on that job, if they are qualified, gets the job. And then they go into training. It all amounts to who worked there the longest got the jobs. Regardless of -- maybe I was more qualified than you, but you worked there two days more than me, then you would get the job. Even though I had --

A Yes. I'd say they treated me very differently, but in the good sense. They respected me very well. I took my breaks with them. I ate with them. They sort of pampered me because they wasn't used to having a woman up there. And some of them volunteered even to do my job for me which I declined, you know. That wasn't what I was up there for. I was up there to do my job. But I got along very well with all of them. None of them seemed to mind me being there.

At first it was a little uncomfortable because of language, I think, because they weren't used to having me there and they was always trying to watch what they would say. But working in a factory you don't watch what you say. Everybody says what they want to say. So after I explained that to them, then things sort of eased off and become a little more comfortable. But I enjoyed it very well. It was a small department. There was approximately 30-some men there, but they worked shift work, too. So since I worked straight evening shift there was only like three or four in the department while I was there. So things wasn't bad at all.

Q What made you leave that job?

A It was a temporary job. I only had it until someone else came back.

Q And the next job after the mold shop was?

A I went back into selecting for a while and then I bid on the utility job which was straight day shift. In order to work straight day shift you take a large cut in pay because you don't get your shift differential. So in order for me to work straight

Q Was it physically too hard?

A It was physically too hard and it's too hot. I mean the men worked in a thousand degree heat and they could only stay there a few seconds. Well, if a woman is up there working in mid air and it a thousand degrees, the men literally pick them up and take them out. And if he is left partnered with a woman, what if a woman can't get a 200 pound man out?

Q So it's a danger issue as well?

A Right. It's very dangerous. Very.

Q So how did you lose your job at Owens?

A The factory closed.

Q Do you know due to what?

A They said economic reasons. They said our plant was old, which it was. It took too much money to maintain it. Our area they said was a little out of the way of distilleries, which we were mainly liquor business. That's -- 99 percent of our bottles were liquor, liquor and beer. And they said the distilleries was a little bit too far away from our area to be shipped and it was more economical for them to keep another factory open than it was ours.

Q Do you feel that that's the truth?

A In a lot of ways it was true, but I think they had intentions of closing our factory when they sent the last group of management in.

Q In the 80's?

A No, in the 90's. The plant manager that we ended up with had shut down six other factories. Like I said before, we were

like number one or number two. When Denny Silvice, that's his name, when he came to Huntington, within six, seven, eight months, we went from number two I believe to like number 20, within just a few months. I really don't hold anything against him because I think it was a corporate decision, not an individual decision to shut the factory down.

Q You think he was sent there to do that?

A Yes. I believe he was sent here to shut the plant down, because our factory, what has kept Owens in Huntington for so long, we did jobs nobody else wanted. That meant we had a lot of mold changes. We did little jobs that maybe last a week where some of the newer factories would run a job for a year without changing, 365 days a year, seven days a week. Our factory never did that. So when our new plant manager came he said, "I do not want the little jobs. I want all big jobs." Well, we couldn't keep up. Our machines was too old. We could not run a continuous job and compete with the newer factories. So when he started turning down all the little jobs we completely lost out. And the jobs that we ran, Seagrams, Anheiser-Busch, those jobs, yes, we kept. We have run them until the last day of the factory operating. But we couldn't last on three or four machines on three or four companies. We needed a lot of little companies because before we ran Avon. We ran pharmaceuticals, you know. Anything that any company wanted us to run we ran it because they said we could make any bottle that anybody wanted. But in the last two or three years they didn't want to do that. They just wanted a continuous operation and we failed. We couldn't do that. We just did not have the equipment

A Well, the only feelings that I really had is maybe, like I said, Owens is a very good place to work. They were very good to me the 23 years I was there. I never had any problems but I think most people that had worked there would agree nobody could really understand the loss of a plant like we've had. I mean the hurt. You have hurt. You have anger. I have hurt. I went through a real bad depression time. I'm sure a lot of other people did, too. It's knowing it's not ever going to be there again. It's just like a family member. You know, it's some place you go everyday. Some place you love to go everyday. Most of the people really enjoyed their jobs. And then for them to come in and say, "We are going to close down." I mean I was hurt. I was very hurt. I was angry. You know, I think they could have done something to maybe keep it open. I was angry with management, but in time all of that goes away. But I'm still hurt. You know, something was taken away from me. Some part of my life is gone. That part of my life is gone forever and I think I'm still hurt. I don't really think I'm bitter anymore. It's just something in my life that's gone.

Their choice was to go on to something better or maybe, you know, they just didn't want to work anymore. But when somebody comes up and says, you know, they take it away from them. It was not my choice. Maybe that's what I'm saying. That choice was not left up to me. It was put in somebody else's hands. If I was ten years older, I'm 45 now. If I had been 55 I would say, "Oh, great. I'm going to retire. I'm going to enjoy my life." I think I would have been one of the happiest people on this Earth to know that I could do that. But right now I'm thinking what am I going to do

A No, because our retirement is based on the years of service. If I had got to work until I had been there 30 years I would have gotten my full retirement, but since the plant shut down and I only had 23 years, I'll only get a percentage, which mine I think will amount to maybe \$205 a month if I draw it at 55. If I wait to 65 then I can draw I believe it's \$465 a month on my retirement. So more or less I just froze my retirement as they say.

Q Do you still have any medical benefits from the company?

A Yes. They carried our benefits for six months, then after six months we can pick up what they call Cobra. Cobra is about the same thing I have now but I will have to pay for it, which will be very expensive. But they will only carry you for 18 months. The only problem with that is if you would have an illness or something serious, then at the end of 18 months they are going to drop you and then another company won't pick you up because you have like a continuous illness, say a heart attack or cancer, and then you won't be covered under nothing because Cobra is going to drop you at 18 months and another company, if you have cancer, is not going to pick you up because you have an illness.

So that is something that I am going to have to think about, maybe picking up a private company and not going along with the Cobra. At the end of my six months I'm considering just picking up a private company while I can.

Q Okay. Is there anything that you would like to add about Owens, anything about your experience that we may not have covered, any feelings that you have?

the job that eight men were doing?"

A Yes, but that's all they did was question it.

Q You really didn't get any kind of response or explanation?

A No. No.

Q After you worked utility you went to quality control?

A No, my quality was before. The utility job was the next to the last job I held. The quality job was before. A lot of times when you work in a factory you really don't know what you want to do or what you would really like to do. So when the jobs come up for bid you sort of bid on them and get trained. To me the more I knew about the factory the better I would like it. So I always bid on jobs and I wanted the training whether I kept the job or not. You really didn't have to keep the job. If you decided within 60 days of the job that you didn't want it, you could go back to your previously held job.

Now, the quality inspector job I held for quite a while, but the crew leading job, all I wanted was the training. I wanted to know what was wrong with the bottles, why they were bad, and what could prevent them from being bad. So when I got my training on the crew leader job, I gave it up. I just didn't want it anymore, even though it was a dollar more on the hour. But the quality inspector job, what I had was a back-up job. That meant they have permanent quality inspectors and they have back-ups. That means if somebody is off or they needed an extra one I filled in. But I really -- I think of all my jobs that was probably the most interesting.

There was no women that were skilled labor in the Owens-Illinois factory. They were all men. And all the openings in the other factories were for skilled labor.

Q Not for any of the positions that women held.

A Right, because we were not considered skilled.

Q Well, is there anything else you would like to add?

A No. I can't think of anything.

Q Okay. Thank you very much for your time.

illiterate, but as far as the work place is concerned I am because I have no skills that the world today is requiring. So that is what the illiteracy came from.

Q Not actually being able to read and write?

A Right. What most people took it as. They took it as an insult and to me it wasn't an insult exactly. It just meant I wasn't trained to do anything else. And I'm not. I'm not trained because factory work, you are trained to do different jobs, but there is nothing out there, no place I can get a job for what I am trained for.

Q Unless it will be another factory and it's virtually impossible to get one of those jobs.

A Right. Everyone has cut down they call it man hours. And every factory, not only Owens. We are talking about different factories here in Huntington. They all cut down on man hours. They want the people there to produce more than they did so they just cut down on man hours and make one person pick up on somebody else's load. All factories and Owens has done that. So I have no chance whatsoever of going to another factory because I am not skilled labor, what they consider skilled labor. Some skilled labor went to other factories, which was electricians, millwrights, gauge mechanics.

Q Are most of those positions held by men?

A All positions were held by men because at the time when those jobs came open we were not allowed. Women were not permitted to bid on them. So the men got the jobs which required four years of schooling and I think 2,000 hours of working in that position.

next year when my unemployment runs out? I have no other skills. Do I go back to school? What do I go back to school for? I'm 45. If I go to school for two or three years, you know, who's going to hire me? I'm looking at this. And I'm still deciding what there is left to do. I mean the company is holding work shops and seminars, things to try to help us. They even have, you know, we could go to a psychiatrist. We could do whatever we want to do. The company is trying to help us to adjust, but what do we see out there? If I go to school, I'm going to go to school but you've got 500 or 1,000 kids, young people, coming out of college that's going to know twice as much as I know. So what do I have to look forward to? I'm not in real financial bad shape as some people is, but yet it's going to get worse and then what am I going to do? So I'm just sort of debating, deciding, trying to decide where I want to go now with my life at 45.

Q That also reminds me, in the media it has been said that there were a lot of people who were working at Owens-Illinois who were illiterate and I just want your opinion on that.

A That was a misconception. It didn't bother me because I think I understood what the governor was talking about. He didn't mean that we was illiterate, that we could not read and write. He meant that we were illiterate to the world, to the computers, to the modern science of things. I do not think he meant that we were -- most people took it as illiterate, that we could not read, write, or function. That is not what I took him to say. I have a high school education. I do have other educational, you know, I have had other classes, other jobs and things. So I'm not

to do it.

Q Did anybody like in the unions, did they know the reputation of this person? Did anybody see it coming like long before? Did anybody do anything to try to stop it?

A No. No one knew. No one had any idea. Yes, we heard. When he came we heard that he had been to other factories. But, you know, you may hear something and you may think something, but you really don't want to realize it. And we really didn't realize it until the morning they came in and said, "We're closing." I mean nobody, even though you can see it coming, you really don't want to believe it.

I can say I saw it coming. When he just kept shutting down machines and shipping them to other companies, you know it can't last. We were a company on 92 acres or whatever, but we operated on five acres. Okay? We had a building that was 80 percent empty that you still had to heat. You still had to furnish electricity for security reasons. You still had to furnish guards, you know, and it was just vacant. Our equipment was sitting there, obsolete equipment that nobody would ever use. So that, you know, that's what we were looking at in the last three years of operation.

Q Since you have lost your job, have you or will you receive a pension from the company?

A No. I received severance pay for my 23 years. When I am eligible for retirement, yes, I will get my retirement which won't be much.

Q Okay. You said you won't receive much retirement.

Q Were most of the permanent inspectors men?

A No, not when I had it. The majority of them was women at this time. This was the 90's, you know, before I had the job or '89. That's when most of the women took over the better jobs. But the reason for that was, by that time most of the people that were hired in at Owens, I can't say they were mostly women, but most men didn't keep the jobs. When I hired in they hired a lot of summer help, what they called them. So the men usually stayed and the men left for better job, at that time. Then by the time they started hiring a lot of men I had more seniority than these men and most of the women had more seniority because the women I hired in with, like I said, they stayed but the men didn't because they went on to better jobs. They didn't like swing shift or they just, you know, went other places. So the majority of the people in this department were women because the men went to different departments. When I first came there, there was no women allowed in the furnace department. There was never any women in the hot end. There was no women in machine repair. So the men bid on these jobs that women were not allowed to bid on.

Q Were women ever allowed in those places?

A A few on occasion, but they never stayed. I don't know why. I don't know if the jobs were too hard or the atmosphere was too much for them to take because when you go into some departments that are male dominant they want to leave it that way. But in my opinion the machine repair and the hot end was no place for any woman. In my opinion no woman could do the job that those men did without someone getting hurt.

"Most of the people really enjoyed their jobs. And then for them to come in and say, "We are going to close down." I mean I was hurt. I was very hurt. I was angry with management, but in time all that goes away. But I'm still hurt. You know, something was taken away from me. Some part of my life is gone. I don't really think I'm bitter anymore. It's just something in my life that's gone."

Linda Smith 1994

Linda Smith's "something" was her job at Owens Illinois which she held for 23 years. In the fall of 1993, Smith along with hundreds of other co-workers lost their jobs when this bottle-producing factory closed its doors. Owens Illinois had been employing Tri-State residents for decades. Linda Smith, Wayne County native, was employed at Owens for over two decades herself. During this time her employment at Owens became a large portion of her life, as did the community that encompassed this factory.

For eight hours a day, 40 hours a week, Linda stood beside clanky, heavy machinery and watched colorful bottles go by. Her duty, titled Selector, was to select and pack bottles that Anheiser-Busch and Seagrams would fill with their frothy substance. She also held various jobs during her employment at Owens. Other than a selector, Linda was a shipping and receiving clerk. This job entailed unloading the supplies that were used on a daily basis. She then distributed the materials to the different departments. Linda was also a quality inspector. In this job she checked the bottles for impurities and flaws before they were packed. One particularly unique job that Linda held was in the mold shop where molds were made for the bottles. This job was not only interesting in content, but also in the fact that it crossed the gender lines of Owens. Linda sandblasted molds to clean them, which was defined as "heavy work" and therefore men's. Like most other plants, specific gender rules were followed. At Owens in particular most of the jobs were male-oriented, "physically to difficult" for females. In the early years of Linda's career at Owens, men held most management positions. Women were secluded to the lower paying jobs and were classified as unskilled. However, in the years following management changed with the influx of women from California, Toledo, and other places. These women were specially

trained for managerial positions, because upper management, through various studies, had learned that women were more productive in higher management positions than men. Women had the ability to reason more easily with their employees.

Fact or conjecture?

Concerning gender roles on a smaller scale, Linda found working with the all male staff in the mold shop a surprise. She was not only tolerated, but respected by her male counterparts. When asked how she liked working with the men she replied, "At first it was a little uncomfortable because of their language. But working in a factory you don't watch what you say. Everybody says what they want too. So after I explained that to them, then things sort of eased off and became a little more comfortable for everybody." It should be noted however that Linda was an exception in her position as "sandblaster". Owens strictly prohibited women from working in the furnace department or machine repair.

Sand pt.

While Linda Smith worked and raised her two small children, the country around her was ablaze with feminist activity, the dwindling Vietnam conflict and the new age of civil rights. In Linda's own world, as a woman and mother she met few obstacles in her path as a working woman at Owens.

→ She, along with the other women of her generation were able to break away from the constraints of the true womanhood ideal that plagued the women from the generation before. Owens was considered a finer place for women to work ~~at~~ as the wages and benefits were excellent. In Linda's case the management of Owens were particularly accomadating as they let Linda come to work an hour late every day so she could see her children off to school. This give and take relationship between employer and employees was just one example of the social, human interaction at Owens. The company's far reaching efforts to improve the community often involved the employees themselves. Linda participated in almost all of the company-sponsored social activities, especially the charitable community events such as: the March of Dimes, visiting nursing homes, Toys for Tots, and assisting underprivileged children. "I think Owens did probably more than any other factory around here," Linda commented. "I think they went out of their way to help the community," she later added. The management and hourly workers often

socialized at these events, and were good friends. Race was not an issue at Owens. It was
? virtually extinct, and workers were friends with whom they chose. This friendship was a major
benefit of working at Owens. Rising with the sun, Linda daily joined her co-workers for eight
hours of tiring physical labor. Because of the swing shift that Linda worked, she even spent
weekends in the factory. This chaotic work schedule left Linda little time for anything except for
childrearing and the dishes. Since most other Owens employees shared her type of schedule the
long hours they spent together bound them into a tightly knit family. When asked what she
missed most about her job Linda replied, "the people. The friends I made. The people I worked
with. They know my kids, their ages, everything about them, because that's what you talk about
is your family... your outside life. I keep in contact with quite a few of them."

Sand

orig.

The close friendships that were created made the working conditions at Owens easier
for women. There were definite safety hazards, but they were well regulated. There was a
safety committee whose sole purpose was to prevent accidents, before they occurred. Also,
Owens had a full-time registered nurse, and the company trained employees in First Aid and
CPR. If a worker was injured at Owens, company policy dictated that they must report to work.
However, they were not required to perform any duties, and they were paid for these shifts
anyway. These shifts consisted of eight hour days, evenings, and midnights. The swing shift as
it was called alternated workers between all three shifts on a weekly basis. Linda commented
that she preferred to work the day shift, even though the evenings and midnight shift paid more
money. If an Owens worker had a complaint they addressed the shop stewart who in turn served
as a liaison to upper management. One reoccurring complaint of the workers was the fear of
asbestos. The local union dealt with the asbestos issue. They contacted the lawyers, and
followed through with the paperwork, so Owens was free to run as it had before. The Glass
Bottle Blowers Association was responsible for protecting its female members' rights. This was
the only female union at Owens- the other two were male, and excluded women workers. The
unions played an important role during the company's later years. They were essential to the
factory's closing, because they provided moral and legal support for the workers.

only later

To confirm the fear of the workers, in the fall of 1993 Owens Illinois closed for economic reasons. "They said are plant was old," Linda explained. "They said the distilleries was a too far away from our area to be shipped and it was more economical for them to keep another factory open than ours."

The closing of Owens Illinois may have been the perfect answer to a company under financial duress, but to the hundreds of workers left unemployed, they felt betrayed, bereft, and mostly confused. If Linda had worked at the plant for 30 years (she was lacking seven) she would have gotten her full retirement, but now she will only receive a percentage. A nominal amount that she will be unable to touch until her 65th birthday. With no skills that she can use in today's world, and 20 years until retirement Linda is left with few options. "So, I'm just sorta debating and deciding," she told the interviewer, "trying to decide where I want to go with my life at 45. What should I do?"

SIBLINGS

3. Father's Occupation(s)

WV Steel

Where? Huntington, WV

How long? 30 years

4. Mother's Occupation(s)

NONE

Where? _____

How long _____

5. Highest level of education

Father Elementary

Mother Elementary

6. Are your parents living?

Yes Father

No mother

1. Number of brothers and sisters:

Brothers 4 Sisters 1

2. Highest level of education:

Brothers: High School (all)

3. Brothers' Occupation: Various construction

4. Highest level of education:

Sisters: High School

5. Sisters' Occupation: Domestic Worker

6. If not currently employed, did your sister(s) / brother(s) work outside the home previously?

Yes _____ No _____

Done by Claudia Wooten

ORAL HISTORY LOG

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Linda Smith

MSON#: _____

NOTES: RE: Owens Glass

RELEASE FORM STATUS:

DATE OF INITIAL RELEASE FORM: _____

RELEASE FORM STATUS: OPEN OPEN AFTER REVIEW
 CLOSED UNTIL _____
 OTHER: _____

DATE LETTER WAS SENT REGARDING REVIEW/RELEASE: _____

WITH TRANSCRIPT

WITHOUT TRANSCRIPT

NOTES ON FOLLOWUP (NOTE DATE & SPECIFY ACTIVITY):

10/26/99 - sent ltr to ms. Smith c/ release form.

3/2/01 - found orig. trans & release form in box delivered from storage. Copied and sent copy of pictures & orig. tran. to Cora Zell in Special Collections, along c/ release form. gkk
(3/7/01)

AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH: LINDA SMITH

SUBJECT: Owens Illinois Class Company

... and I'm interviewing Linda Smith at 1737 Crestmont Drive. Linda was born in Wayne County, West Virginia. Okay, Linda, when did you first go to work at Owens?

Linda: June of 1970.

Interviewer: And how old were you then?

Linda: I was 21.

Interviewer: Can you describe for me your very first job there?

Linda: I was a selector. I packed bottles off an assembly line.

Interviewer: Did you enjoy that job?

Linda: Yes, very much. It was something interesting that I had never done before or seen before, and I was interested in how the bottles were made and I liked my job very much.

Interviewer: Is there anything you didn't like about your job?

Linda: Swing shift. Everyone there had to work swing shift. Which meant, you were never on schedule. We worked weekends always. Holidays, we seldom got off—that part I didn't like.

Interviewer: Okay, what exactly is swing shift? How do you mean by swing shift?

Linda: You worked a different shift every week. You rotate day shift one week, midnights the following week, then three to eleven the week after that. And it just keeps rotating.

Interviewer: Okay. Were there other people doing the same job as you all women?

Linda: Yes. At that time, they were all women that did what I did. The men had different jobs. But mainly what I did was all women up until maybe 1980.

Interviewer: Okay. How ma-, when you were doing the selecting, how many of your supervisors were women?

Linda: None. We had not supervisors that were women.

Interviewer: None. How did you get along with your male supervisors?

Linda: Very well. They treated us all very well. But they, we knew who the boss was and who wasn't. We just did what we were told.

Interviewer: Did anyone in your community or family oppose to you as a woman, working at Owens?

Linda: No, not at all. It was one of the better places in Huntington to work for women. Because the pay was good, the benefits was excellent, and they were very good to the women, because they all knew that we had families and children to consider. And they all was very lenient when it came to the people with small children. Which is myself. When I first went to work there, when I had two small children, I went to work an hour later of the morning to get my kids off to school. So I only worked seven hours a day. So they was really good to us about things like that.

Interviewer: Were there any other members of your family employed at Owens?

(Linda: no) No. Tell me what other jobs you had at Owens, other than selecting.

Linda: I've worked as shipping and receiving clerk. . .

Interviewer: What exactly did you do with that?

Linda: The things that were ordered that came into the plant, materials, uh, things we

used on a daily basis, cleansers, tapes, things—I unloaded it from the truck, checked it in, and put it up. Then when it was needed, I'd send it out to different departments. I worked that job off and on for probably ten years. I did labor jobs, I worked in what they called the mold shop, which is where they made the molds to make the bottles. And I was a sandblaster. When the molds would come up, they were dirty. I would sandblast them all, clean 'em up and send them to somebody to be repaired. Then they'd go back down on through the line. I've also held utilities jobs, uh, I was a quality inspector. Which meant that when the bottles were packed off the line, I checked so many bottles per hour. And if there was anything wrong with the bottles, I held them up to be gone over again, resorted, what we called it. Then if there was nothing wrong with the bottles, I shipped them out. And I also held a job as a crew leader. Which on what they called lairs, that is where the bottles come up to, I would check the bottles to make sure there was nothing running. If anything was wrong with the bottles, you'd put it in. . .the numbers in a machine, the machine would throw 'em out. And you had three or four people working under you at the time. And we just mainly got the bottles packed and down to the warehouse.

Interviewer: When you say you worked in the mold shop, was that, was there any men that did that? Or was it mixed?

Linda: I was the only woman.

Interviewer: It sounds like something the men do, not. . . how did you get that job?

Linda: It was a bid job. I took the job out of seniority, which I was tried-, the tried to persuade me not to take it. They said the job was too hard for a woman, it was too

heavy. But after I tried the job for awhile, I found out that it was difficult at times, but yet, it was easier than working the assembly line to me. Because I could work at my own pace. And if I would work an hour, then maybe I had a ten minute rest period in that time. Then I would go back doing what I needed to be done.

Interviewer: Were any of the other jobs that you described men and women? Mostly women? Pretty mixed?

Linda: At the beginning, the other two jobs, the crew leader job and the quality inspector job was mainly men. Then after a few years, women took over the jobs. So at the closing of the plant, there were mainly women. There were very few men.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you feel that the women at Owens had the same opportunities as men?

Linda: No, not at all. Most of the jobs were men-oriented. They were, most of them were too hard for women. Most of the jobs. Different jobs required high lift operators, tractor drives. And the types of jobs they did were, you know, too difficult for a woman to do eight hours a day.

Interviewer: Physically difficult?

Linda: Physically.

Interviewer: Too difficult. Do you think women had the same opportunity to advance, as far as into management positions and leadership positions, as the men? Did they sometimes overlook a qualified female, to take a man into the leadership role?

Linda: I would say within the last ten years this didn't happen. But before it did. In the last ten, maybe five years, we had all different management that came from different

parts of the country. In early years, all the management were from local areas. So they were more men-oriented. There were more men bosses. But in later years, the management changed completely. We ended up with people from California, Toledo, different places. And it brought a lot of women into the Huntington area, which then they wanted to train other women, because they found out the women mostly got along better in the higher positions than the men did. Because they seemed to reason more with the employees than the men that was management. The men had sort of a different attitude toward the lower skilled people, I guess I would call them, than the women did.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. That makes sense. Did you socialize with other people on your shifts after work hours? Did you make-, have good friends that you established on your shift?

Linda: Yes. When you worked swing shift, you had no other outside life, so to speak. Because your days off, other people was working. On weekends you worked, while your family was home. So that's how you maintained your friendship was people you worked with. Because you're with them eight hours a day, and then they really became your family. Because they're the ones you were with all the time. And not people that, you know, you didn't work with. Because they had other lives and you had a completely different life than anyone else.

Interviewer: Did that make it difficult sometimes if they wanted you to change a shift? Sometimes you didn't want to leave behind your, your friends and things you made on a particular shift?

Linda: That was, that was very difficult. Most of the time they very seldom forced you into changing shifts. Sometimes they would ask you to change shifts, or if different jobs came up for bid and you bid on another shift, you went. But the only time they forced you into changing shifts was right before a lay-off. That's how they evened out the shifts, what they called it. And then they force you to different shifts. But yeah, that. . . . But after you had been there for as long as I worked there, you had friends on every shift. If not only on the one shift that you work, you made friends. Mostly my closest friends probably didn't even work with me eight hours a day. They were probably on a completely different shift.

Interviewer: Okay. When you say that you bid on a job, what exactly does that mean, and how do you go about bidding on a job?

Linda: When an opening to a job comes up, it is posted on a bulletin board. The type of job it is, the qualifications that you have to have, and the date that you have to bid on it. And then anybody that's qualified, goes down and signs their name and what department they work in. So when a job is taken down, then the senior person that bid on that job, if they are qualified, gets the job. And then they go into training. It all amounts to who worked there the longest, got the jobs. Regardless of maybe I was more qualified than you, which you worked there two days more than me, then you would get the job, even though I had better qualifications and I would have been better suited for the job.

Interviewer: Mmmh. Did you participate in any of the company-sponsored social activities?

Linda: Just about all of 'em. Because that is something I really enjoyed doing. The March of Dimes, the different. . . visiting the different nursing homes, uh, the Toys For Tots, the underprivileged children. I seem to participate in most of them that I had time to do.

Interviewer: How often. . . did you feel like Owens was really supported the community? Did you feel like they did enough, by way of those types of activities for the community?

Linda: I think Owens did probably more than any other large factory around here. They donated money to different causes, they would let their employees off work to participate in the meetings and in the different organizations. I think they went out of their way a lot to help the community.

Interviewer: Mmm-hmm. Did the management and hourly workers socialize together, even at these functions or outside of work related activities?

Linda: Yes, quite often. Most, most of the salary and the hourly employees were friends. I mean, you know, there was no hostility or nothing toward anyone that I had ever seen down there.

Interviewer: Mmmh. Were you a member of a local union? (Linda: Yes) Which, can you tell me which one?

Linda: The GBA, it was a Glass, Bottled Blowers Association.

Interviewer: Okay. How often did you go to local union meetings?

Linda: Very seldom. We had meetings once a month, but I was not a regular goer to the meetings.

Interviewer: Were there any women leaders in this union?

Linda: Uh, no, no leaders. The secretary was a woman. I had never known, we had never had a woman president, a woman vice-president, or a treasurer of our local union. We've only had a woman secretary.

Interviewer: Were there other unions at Owens Illinois?

Linda: Yes. They were two other unions.

Interviewer: Did any of-, either of those have women leaders or women in any kind of leadership position or. . . . ?

Linda: The other two unions that were there had no women members. They were all male.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you ever go on strike?

Linda: No. Uh, the times that the plant, I think, went on strike twice in the twenty-three years I was there. And I was laid off during both times. So I didn't have to participate in any of the strikes.

Interviewer: So did you ever walk picket lines or anything like that? (Linda: No) Were there people of different races or ethnic backgrounds working at Owens?

Linda: Very few. We had mostly white. They was, I'd say, maybe ten percent black. And other than that, I don't know of any other nationality.

Interviewer: Any Asian?

Linda: None that I. . . none that I can even remember.

Interviewer: Okay. Of these other minorities, what kind of jobs did they have? The same?

You know, what did you do in case of some type of accident?

Linda: We had a full-time nurse. At the beginning, they were there twenty-four hours a day. In later years, when the work force was cut, she was there eight hours a day. But the company trained numerous people, myself included, in first aid CPR. They put us through a two or three-day training in case something would come up that a person needed help before the paramedics could get there. The company really did not, the only thing on accidents in the plant, they did not want you taken off work for accidents. They brought you in, although you wasn't able to work, they did bring you in, you punched a card, your time card, and you punched you out, but you did not have to perform any work if you was injured. But they still wanted to make sure that you was on the job eight hours a day.

Interviewer: Did you get paid for those hours?

Linda: Yes, you got paid.

Interviewer: That seems kind of. . . . Is there anything that you felt that you had to protect yourself from, while working at Owens? Did you feel although not imminent danger, but did you just feel like you. . . is there anything that you felt you had to protect yourself from over there? Any kind of maybe possible contamination or anything that really wasn't spoken of but that you maybe had a concern about?

Linda: The only thing, when asbestos, when the government started regulating asbestos, I knew that I had worked in asbestos, for years. We knew it was there, but nobody knew what to do about it. When they go in and remodel those old factories and things like that, the employees would do it, in earlier years. But in later years, when

they did it, they hired somebody. And when we noticed these people coming in with suits on and dust masks and things, you know, we wondered why we did it for years, without any protection. But yet when they hired outside contractors, they were protected. And when we questioned this, you know, we really didn't get any answers for it. But the company did pay for our physicals and our x-rays to make sure nothing was wrong. And mine did turn up negative, which a lot of my fellow employees has turned up positive for asbestos in their lungs. Quite a few of them, as a matter of fact.

Interviewer: Did uh, did any of the unions help push in any of that, or was it totally the company volunteered to check everyone, or was there any outside pressure from employees to say, "Hey, this has happened, and. . . ."

Linda: I'm sure our union did this. They were the ones that contacted the lawyers, the lawyers contacted us. So really the company really didn't have much to say about it. They really didn't have any, you know, recourse, you know, of not doing it. So they just went along with it.

Interviewer: Overall, can you tell me what you liked most about working at Owens?

Linda: The people. The friends I made, the people I worked with. That is what I really miss now. When you work with someone that long and is that close, I mean, I probably know more about them than my-, than their family does. Or they know more about me than my own sisters and brothers. I mean, they know my kids, their ages, everything about the, because that's what you talk about, is your family, your outside life. So, yeah, that's what I miss. And I keep in contact of quite a few of them.

Interviewer: Can you describe for me what you liked least about working there?

Linda: Uh. . . not really. Like I said, the only thing I really didn't like about it was the hours I had to work. But in the last two years I was there, I worked straight day shift and I was off on Saturday and Sunday, so I liked my job. I had no complaints with my employment at all.

Interviewer: How do you feel about Owens in general? Just about, you know, Owens as the company, that you worked for?

Linda: Uh, I think Owens is a good organization. It is a good company to work for. But in the later years, you know, Owens is probably the same as most factories, they're out to making money. And the only thing they saw was numbers. They didn't see people out there doing jobs. They had a certain amount of people to do the job, and yet, on paper, it says you work a certain job with two people, they worked it with two, even though it required four. And yet, the two people couldn't keep up with it, it was, it was, you know, just bad luck. You know, there was nothing we could do about it.

Interviewer: Okay, just a second ago you said, you were telling me how in the later years things started to change. Do you know approximately what year or around what time, what time you're talking about?

Linda: Probably in the later part of the 80's. I saw a change in the management. Like I said, the local management was sort of weeded out and they brought in more sophisticated management, what they called it. And I noticed the plant totally change at that time. And in my opinion, it wasn't for the better. We've always been a well-producing plant. We was always one of the top plants out of the twenty-four, at that time there was probably more than that, but I'm saying now, I think there was twenty-

four plants left. And we was always at the top of the list. And then when I'm talking about the new management coming in, they reduced man power, they relied more on automatic equipment that didn't work. Things started to go down hill. And at that time, we were blamed, what I say we, the employees was blamed, some of the management was blamed. But I can't see anybody was really at fault, except automation. Which I, in the later part of my employment there, I was a carton maker. I made cartons that the other people put the bottles in. Instead of me making the cartons, I put the cartons into a machine and the machine opened them up and glued them and sent them down. Well, when they installed the new machines, a person was taken completely off that job. So the only thing I was-, what I was suppose to do, was load the machine. And I was to go and do another job. Well, while I was doing that job, the machine would break down. Well, while I was trying to fix the machine, my other job over there was running out, and then while I was trying to go back to do this job, the machine would break down again. But in management's eyes, this was my fault, because I was doing a one person job but which it really was taking two people because the automatic machine never worked. And this, this went on for quite a few years, til all quality went down. I mean, when you have no cartons to put the bottles in, they's some-, the bottles have to go somewhere. So they end up on the floor! They end up on the floor anywhere you can put 'em. So when they're on the floor, that means they're not looked at like they've supposed to be looked at. So they ended up in the cartons, shipped to the customer, and the quality went from good to very poor. And of course, it was the employee's fault because they packed it. Yes, we packed it, but what else was we to

do when we were told to do it?

Interviewer: Was there anyone who, who served as a liaison? Was there anybody that you could voice your complaints to, who in turn then voiced their complaints to the management, that the management respected or. . . ?

Linda: We had a shift foreman, which was management. They were directly over us. Which, if we had complaints, that's who we went to. We also, since we were union, we had shop stewards or grievance people, which I was a grievance person for a number of years. If you went to your shift foreman and you couldn't get any results over these complaints, that something was wrong, then you went to your shift-, I mean, you went to your shop steward. The shop steward, in turn, went to voice the complaint to the shift foreman. And if this didn't work out, they had morning meetings every single day.

Mostly after every shift. That's when the problems were resolved in these meetings. And if we couldn't get anything corrected, or to our satisfaction, then we would go to management and say, "We would like a meeting. A certain amount of people wants a meeting with the company to voice our opinions, to try to work out these difficulties." And we were always met. The meetings were always held. Whether we got what we wanted or not, we all came to a happy medium.

Interviewer: So who, who exactly was present in these meetings? Who

Linda: Our shift foreman, our boss directly over us, our shop steward, which was the union, we had like production supervisors, which was the boss over the shift foreman, and then it just kept going up the ladder to the, you know, plant manager, which the plant manager never sat in on any of these meetings. Never.

Interviewer: Was he asked?

Linda: Probably not. It, that wasn't his role, I assumed. It went from our selecting supervisor maybe up to another, maybe up another step of production supervisor. But that was the highest it ever went. But anyone of a given person could go to any of these bosses. Any of them. And say, "I've got a complaint," and they would listen. You know, you were supposed to go by channels. You know, you move up the ladder with your complaints. But if I had a complaint and I happen to see the production supervisor, you know, I'd say, you know, "I have a complaint. Do you have a moment that I could talk to you?" And they always did. I mean, like I said, we were all friends. You know. All of them was easy to talk to. I had never, I have never found one that I couldn't sit down and talk to.

Interviewer: Were they readily available? Did they just walk about the plant? Or did you have, did they have offices that you had to go to? Or . . . ?

Linda: They . . . they all had offices. And we were welcome at any given time. If someone was in there talking, all you had to do is waited your turn. They never turned you down, unless they was, an emergency came up and then they'd always say, "I'll talk to you later, get back with me another time." They always walked around the plant. They were constantly out on the floor, overlooking things, and a lot of times, helping, if they was a, like I said. . . . There's always trouble in factories, they're always problems. Something's not gonna work right, something's gonna jam up, and they were always there to help, you know, if there was help, any given boss was there to help. Except for like the, like I said, the plant manager very seldom was ever seen.

Linda: The same. They was, they had the same opportunities that everybody else did.

Interviewer: So it was broken more along tender lines, even a female with a different ethnical background, would have the same job as a white woman? That basically it was broken between gender lines how you got assigned jobs?

Linda: Yes.

Interviewer: Did you ever socialize, or did these minorities participate in the social activities with Owens? Or did they ever feel excluded or was everybody friends, as far as. . .

Linda: We were all friends. I don't think they were. . . they participated the same as we did. I couldn't see no difference. You know, we were all the same. I felt no different toward anyone and I can't see, say that anybody that I know of did. We were just all one group of people that worked together.

Interviewer: Were there any health or safety dangers on any of the jobs that you had?

Linda: Oh, I'm sure they were some. But they were well regulated. We had a safety committee. And if I saw a danger or something I thought was a danger, I just went to our safety director or someone on the committee. And I [inaudible]. . . and it was taken care of immediately. That is one thing we never had to fight about, argue about. The company was very strict about safety regulations there. Of course, there was accidents. And most of 'em probably was preventable, which most accidents are. But I can't say that the company neglected in any way, that would cause anyone harm. If anything was a safety hazard, it was taken care of immediately.

Interviewer: If there was an accident, how did Owens help, in case of an accident?

He stayed in his office or wherever, you know.

Interviewer: When you said they were out on the floor, what goes on, everything goes on out on the floor. Is that just conveyor belts? I mean, what's on the floor?

Linda: Uh, we had different levels at Owens. We're not on one floor. You had-, the offices were sort of, they were upstairs. You'd come down and you had an open area which were the lairs—the lairs were where the bottles came from the hot end out on to that floor. Well, the, after the bottles were packed, they went even to a different level on down. Where, that's where the men, most of the younger men, worked. They were called lair attendants. They had very few women lair attendants.

Interviewer: Is there, I mean, can you, is there a reason maybe why there were no women?

Linda: Uh. . . the work was harder. The cartons had to be handled a lot by hand. And they were stacked, like eight cartons high, which were probably ten foot, you know. A woman, I am five foot four, it would be hard for me to throw a fifty pound carton ten foot in the air to stack it. And they all had to be stacked a certain way, they all had to be tied. And it was just hard work for a woman. In the last two or three years they had automatic to, you know, that would pack 'em automatically. But the work to me was just as hard as they did it by hand. It was no job that I ever wanted. I never even tried because I just did not want it.

Interviewer: Back in the 80's when you said that they, they brought new management in, what did they do with the old management? Were they lowered? Did they stay the same and the other people just kind of blended? Were they fired? What did they do

with the . . . ?

Linda: No one, I don't think, was actually fired. But they were forced into retirement. A lot of them were forced into retirement. Some of them was sort of demoted down a couple of jobs. Some of them were made jobs just so they could work out their employment, I mean, to their retirement. If they were like a year or two old enough to retire, they just sort of kept them there and created jobs for them. But nobody was actually ever fired.

Interviewer: Okay. When you, let's go back to when you were describing your different jobs, when you said you worked in the mold, what . . . ? (Linda: In the mold shop) The mold shop. And you said it was mostly men that worked there with you. How . . . did the men treat you differently as a female working . . . ?

Linda: Yes, I'd say they treated me very differently, but in the good sense. They respected me very well. I took my breaks with them, I ate with them. Uh. . . they sort of pampered me because they wasn't used to having a woman up there. And uh, some of them volunteered even to do my job for me, which I declined. You know, that wasn't what I was up there for. I was up there to do my job. But I got along very well with all of them. None of them seemed to mind me being there. At first, it was a little uncomfortable because of the language, I think, because they weren't used to having me there and they was always trying to watch what they would say. But working in a factory, you don't watch what you say. Everybody says whatever they want to say. So after I explained that to 'em, then things sort of eased off and became a little more comfortable. But I enjoyed it very well. You know, there was, it was a small

department. There was approximately thirty some men there, but they worked shift work, too. So since I worked straight evening shift, they was only like three or four in the department while I was there. So things wasn't bad at all.

Interviewer: What made you leave that job?

Linda: Uh, it was a temporary job. I only had it until someone else came back.

Interviewer: Okay. And the next job after the mold shop was. . . ?

Linda: I went back into the selecting for awhile. And then I bid on the utility job, which was straight day shift. In order to work straight day shift, you take a large cut in pay, because you don't get your shift differential. So in order for me to work straight day, I probably took a \$200 a month cut in my salary.

Interviewer: What is a shift differential?

Linda: When you work three to eleven, you get so much more money on the hour, which was I think maybe eight or nine cents. And then on midnight shift, you got even that much more on the hour and then on Sunday's, you got time and a half. So when you work straight days Monday through Friday, you lose this much money. But to me, you know, I'd rather work the day shift than the swing shift.

Interviewer: And what exactly did you do in the utility?

Linda: Utilities? I swept, mopped, cleaned, painted, anything that they wanted me to do. We had a list of things that we did every day, from emptying garbage to cleaning bathrooms. And so, but then, of course, they added extra things if they wanted things done, that's what. . . . There were three of us that did this job.

Interviewer: In the whole entire plant or just. . . ?

Linda: No, in the selecting department.

Interviewer: In the selecting department.

Linda: So this job came up for bid for the straight day shift. They always had a utility-, but it's been men mostly. But they used two per shift. So we had four shifts in the plant. A, B, C, and D, that's what they were called. Well, they used two utility men per shift, which was eight. Eight men. So when they combined it to day shift, they added three women and did away with eight men's jobs. So we did the work that the eight men did, with three women.

Interviewer: Did anyone question that or say, "What a minute, this is the job that eight men were doing,"

Linda: Yes. But that's all they did was question it.

Interviewer: They really didn't get any kind of response or explanation?

Linda: No.

Interviewer: After you worked utility, you went to quality control?

Linda: No, my quality was before. The utility job was the next to last job I held. The quality job was before. A lot of times you really, if you work in a factory, you really don't know what you want to do or what you would really like to. So when the jobs come up for bid, you sort of bid on them and get trained. To me, the more I knew about the factory, the better I would like it. So I always bid on jobs, and I wanted the training whether I kept the job or not. You really didn't have to keep the job. If you decided within sixty days of the job, that you didn't want it, you go back to your previously held job. So when it came, now, the quality inspector job I held for quite a while, but the

crew leading job, all I wanted was the training. I wanted to know what was wrong with the bottles, why they were bad, and what could prevent them from being bad. So when I got my training on the crew leader job, I gave it up. I just didn't want it any more. Even though it was a dollar more on the hour. But the quality inspector job, what I had was a backup job. That meant they have permanent quality inspectors and they have backup. That means if somebody's off or they needed an extra one, I filled in. But I really, I think of all my jobs, that was probably the most interesting.

Interviewer: Were most of the permanent inspectors all men?

Linda: No, not when I had it. They were, they were, the majority of them was women, at this time. This was in the maybe nineties, before I had the job, or maybe '89. That's when most of the women took over the better jobs. But the reason for that was, by that time, most of the people that were hired in at Owens, I can't say they were mostly women, but most men didn't keep the jobs. When I hired in, they hired a lot of summer help, what they called them. So the women usually stayed and the men left for better jobs, at that time. Then by the time they start hiring a lot of men, I had more seniority than these men. And most of the women had more seniority because the women I hired in, like I said, they stayed, but the men didn't because they went on to better jobs. They didn't like swing shift or they just, you know, went other places. So the majority of the people, the employees in the selecting department were women, because the men went to different departments. When I first came there, there was no women allowed in the batching furnace department, there was never any women in the hot end, there was no women in machine repair. So the men bid on these jobs that women were not

allowed to bid on.

Interviewer: Were women ever allowed in those places?

Linda: A few, on occasion, but they never stayed. I don't know why. I don't know if their jobs were too hard, or the atmosphere was too much for them to take. Because when you go in to some departments that are male dominant, they want to leave it that way. But in my opinion, the machine repair and the hot end was no place for any woman. See, in my opinion, no woman could do the job that those men did without someone getting hurt.

Interviewer: Was it physically too hard or. . . ?

Linda: It was physically too hard. And it's too hot. I mean, the men worked in a thousand degree heat. And they can only stay there for a few seconds. Well, if a man is up there working in mid air and hit a thousand degrees and he's got to come out of there, the men literally pick 'em up and take 'em out. And if that, if he is left partnered with a woman, what if a woman can't get a 200 pound man out? Then. . .

Interviewer: It was a danger as well.

Linda: Well, it's very dangerous. . . very.

Interviewer: So uh, how did you lose your job at Owens?

Linda: The factory closed.

Interviewer: Do you know due to what?

Linda: They said economic reasons. They said our plant was old, which it was. It took too much money to maintain it. Our area, they said, was a little out of the way of distilleries. Which we were mainly liquor business. That's 99% of our bottles were

liquor, liquor and beer. And they said distilleries was a little bit too far away from our area to the shift, and it was more economical for them to keep another factory open than it was ours.

Interviewer: Do you feel that that's the truth?

Linda: Uh. . .in a lot of ways it was true. But I think, I think they had intentions of closing our factory when they sent the last group of management in.

Interviewer: In the '80s?

Linda: No, in the nineties. The plant manager that we ended up with had shut down six other factories. Like I said before, we were like number one or two. When Denny Silvis, that's his name [plant manager], when he came to Huntington, within six, seven, eight months, we went from number two, I believe, to like number twenty. Within just a few months. I really don't hold anything against him, because I think it was a corporate decision. Not an individual decision to shut the factory down.

Interviewer: You think he was sent there to do that?

Linda: Yes, I believe he was sent there to shut the plant down. Because our factory, what has kept Owens in Huntington open for so long, we did jobs nobody else wanted. That meant we had a lot of mold changes. We did little jobs that maybe'd last a week, where some of the newer factories would run a job for a year without changing. Three hundred sixty-five days a year, seven days a week. Our factory never did that. So when our new plant manager came, he said, "I do not want the little jobs. I want all big jobs." Well, we, we couldn't keep up. Our machines was too old. We could not run a continuous job and compete with the newer factories. So when he started turning down

all the little jobs, we completely lost out. And the jobs that we ran, Seagrams, Anheiser Busch, those jobs, yes, we kept. We ran them until the last day of the factory operating. But we couldn't last on three or four machines, on three or four companies. We needed a lot of little companies. Because before we ran Avon, we ran pharmaceuticals, you know, we did, we run anything that any company wanted us to run, we ran it. Because they said we could make any bottle that anybody wanted. But in the last two or three years, they didn't want to do that. They just wanted a continuous operation and we failed. We couldn't. . . we couldn't do that. We did not have the equipment to do it.

Interviewer: Did anybody, like in the unions, did they know the reputation of this. . .did anybody see it coming? Like long before? Did anybody do anything to try to stop it? Or. . . ?

Linda: No, no one knew it. No one had any idea. Yes, we heard. When he came, we heard that he had been to other factories. But you know, you may hear something and you may think something, but you really don't want to realize it. And you really, we really didn't realize it until the morning they came in and said "we're closing". I mean, nobody, even though you can see it coming, you really don't want to believe it. And I can say I saw it coming when you start shutting down machines and shipping them to other companies, you know, you know. . . you know it can't last. We were a company on ninety-two acres of whatever, but we operated on five acres. Okay, we had a building that was 80% empty, but you had to heat, you still had to furnish electricity for security reasons, you still had to furnish guards, you know. And it was just vacant. Our

equipment was sitting there, obsolete equipment that nobody would ever use. So that's, you know, what we were looking at in the last three years of operation.

Interviewer: Since you've lost your job, uh, have you or will you receive a pension from the company?

Linda: No, I received severance pay for my twenty-three years, but I won't receive, when I am eligible for retirement, yes, I will get my retirement, which won't be much.

Interviewer: Okay, you said that you didn't, or you won't receive much retirement.

Linda: No, because our retirement is based on the years of service. If I had got to work until I had been there thirty years, I would have got my full retirement. But since the plant shut down and I only had twenty-three years, I'll only get a percentage, which mine I think will amount of maybe \$205 a month, if I draw it at fifty-five. If I wait til sixty-five, I can draw I believe it's \$455 a month on my retirement. So just more or less I just froze my retirement, as they say.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you still have any medical benefits from the company?

Linda: Uh, yes, they carried our benefits for six months. Then after six months we can pick up what they call COBRA. COBRA is about the same thing I have now, but I will have to pay for it, which will be very expensive. But they will only carry you for eighteen months. The only problem with that is, if you would have an illness or something serious, then at the end of eighteen months they're gonna drop you. And then another company won't pick you up because you have like a continuing illness, say a heart attack or cancer, and then you won't be covered under nothing. Because COBRA is gonna drop you at eighteen months and another company, if you have

cancer, is not gonna pick you up because you have an illness. So that is a, that's something that, you know, I'm going to have to think about, maybe picking up a private company and not going along with the COBRA. Being my six month, I'm just considering just picking up a private company while I can.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything that you'd like to add about Owens, anything about your experience that we may not have covered? Any feelings that you have?

Linda: Well, the only feelings that I really had is maybe like I said, Owens is a very good place to work, they were very good to me, at the twenty-three years I was there. I've never had any problems. But I think, you know, most people that had worked there would agree, you know. Nobody could really understand the loss of a plant like we've had. I mean, the hurt, you have anger. I have hurt. I went through a real bad depressing time. I'm sure a lot of other people did, too. It's that, is knowing that it's never gonna be there again. It's just like a family member. You know. Some place you go every day . Some place you love to go every day. I mean, most of the people really enjoy their jobs. And then for them to come in and say we're gonna close down, I mean, I was hurt. I was very hurt. I was angry, you know. I think they could have done something to maybe to keep it open, I was angry with management. But in time, you know, all that in time goes away. But I'm still hurt. You know, something was taken away from me, you know, some part of my life is gone. That part of my life is gone forever. And I think I'm still hurt. I don't really think I'm bitter any more. It's just something in my life is gone. And if you never experience something like that. . . .

END OF TAPE 1 - SIDE 1

BEGIN TAPE 1 - SIDE 2

Linda: . . . quicker jobs but that is their choice. Their choice was to go on to something better or maybe, or maybe, you know, they just didn't want to work any more. But when somebody comes up and says, you know, they paid their way. . . . It was not their choice, maybe that's what I'm saying. That choice was not left up to me. It was put in somebody else's hands. If I was ten years older—I'm 45 years old now—if I'd been 55, I'd say, "Oh, great, I'm going to retire, I'm going to enjoy my life," I think I would have been one of the happiest people on this earth to know that I could do that. But right now, I'm thinking, "What am I gonna next year when my unemployment runs out? I have no other skills. Do I go back to school? What do I go back to school for? I'm 45. If I go to school for two or three years, you know, who's gonna hire me? You know, I'm looking at this. And I'm still deciding what there is left to do. I mean, the company is holding workshops, seminars, and things, to try to help us. They even have, we can go to a psychiatrist, we could do whatever we wanted to do. The company is trying to help us to adjust. But what do we see out there? If I go to school, I'm going to go to school, but yet, you've got five hundred or a thousand kids, young people coming out of college that's gonna know twice as much as I know. So what do I have to look forward to? I'm not in real financial bad shape as some people is. But yet, it's going to get worse. And then what am I going to do? So I'm just sort of debating, deciding, trying to decide where I want to go now with my life at 45.

Interviewer: That also reminds me, in the media there was a, it has been said that pe-, there were a lot of people working at Owens Illinois who were illiterate. And I just want

your opinion on that.

Linda: That was a misconception. It didn't bother me, because I think I understood what the governor was talking about. He didn't mean that we was illiterate, that we could not read or write. He meant that we were illiterate to the world, through the computers, to the modern science of things. I do not think he meant that we were, most people took it as we were illiterate, that we could not read, write or function. That is not what I took him to say. Which I am. You know, I had a high school education, I do have other educational, you know, I have had other classes, other jobs and things. So I'm not illiterate. But as far as the work place is concerned, I am. Because I have no skills that the world today is requiring. So that is what the illiteracy came from.

Interviewer: Not actually being able to read and write, which. . . ?

Linda: Right, what most people took it as. (Interviewer: Right) They took it as an insult. And to me it wasn't an insult, exactly. It just meant I wasn't trained to do anything else. And I'm not, I'm not trained. Because factory work, you were trained to do different jobs. But there is nothing out there, no place that I can get a job for what I am trained for.

Interviewer: Unless it would be another factory and that's virtually impossible to get, to get one on those jobs.

Linda: Right. Because everyone has cut down, they call it man hours, in every factory. And not only Owens. We're talking about different factories here in Huntington. They all cut back on man hours. They want the people there to produce more than they did, so they just cut down man hours and make one person pick up somebody else's load.

And all factories at Owens has done that, so I had no chance whatsoever of going to another factory. Because I am not skilled labor, what they consider skilled labor.

Some skilled labor went to other factories. Which was electricians, mill wrights, gauge mechanics. . . .

Interviewer: Are most of those positions held by men?

Linda: All positions were held by men. Because at the time, when those jobs came open, we were not allowed, women were not permitted to be [inaudible] So men got the jobs, which required four years of schooling, and I think 2,000 hours of working in that position to become a journeyman. There is no women that is skilled labor in the Owens Illinois factory; they're all men. All the other openings in the factory were for skilled labor.

Interviewer: Not for of the positions that women held?

Linda: Right. Because we were not considered skilled.

Interviewer: Well, is there anything else you'd like to add?

Linda: No, I can't think of anything.

Interviewer: Okay, thank you very much for your time.

END OF INTERVIEW