

Copy of TriscariAngela_20210407

BRIAN ALNUTT: So it's going. Okay. And then we can just talk.

So you're Angie Triscari and --

ANGELA TRISCARI: Yes.

BA: You came here in?

AT: I came to the United States in 1971.

BA: '71. And where were you born?

AT: I was born in Sicily.

BA: Sicily, I've been there.

AT: Yes.

BA: Beautiful place.

AT: It's beautiful. We're hoping that this COVID goes away and then we can travel again. But I was young. But I was married. I got married young and came here. My husband was here originally. And I came to the Bronx in New York City. So I was really young so we didn't want to have kids right away, even though my husband was older. But so I went to work. I lived near Fordham University and I walked maybe like three blocks. There were factories like every corner, left and right.

BA: Clothing factories?

AT: Yes. [00:01:00] And my first boss, he was also Sicilian but he had been born here. And it's funny, like even when he hired me because I was young and I didn't have experience in factory work, but my sister-in-law worked there, two of my sister-in-laws. So the one, she said to him look, his name was Pete Pirone. And actually he was an extra when they were making *The Godfather* movie. It was so funny. Yes, he will live every day because he was an extra. And you can see him at the funeral, that he's throwing in one of the carnations.

BA: Oh my gosh, he actually got to --

AT: Yes. So he didn't want to hire me. So my sister-in-law said, "Look, sit her next to me and she works under me and I will teach her like." So and in those days, it was -- we were making dresses. So and it was like a bundle and all the parts of the dress was [00:02:00] in the bundle. And you did everything from scratch. You did it all. So you didn't do much. If you did a bundle of five, six dresses in a day, you were good.

BA: So you're making the dress all yourself from scratch.

AT: Yes, making the cuffs and the collar and send them to the presser and then by the time they come back, you work on other parts. You do (inaudible), then you put it together.

BA: Interesting, so it's like all together.

AT: So I learned a lot, a lot about sewing doing that. So I work with my sister-in-law and she would give me easy stuff and harder stuff. And every week, like she would give me sometimes \$20, \$40. But those days, you know what the union rate was in those days? It was like \$4.15 an hour. The base union rate. But if you made piecework, you got whatever you made.

BA: Did you get a choice? To one or the other? [00:03:00]

AT: No, you don't have a choice. If you don't make, you get \$4.15. If you make more, if you make five, six, seven, eight, you get what you make.

BA: I see, okay. So if you don't make the rate, then you just get the \$4.15. I see.

AT: Yeah, that was like the union law like. And if you were really slow and bad, they would not keep you. They have you on trial and then let you go.-

BA: Okay. Now was that the ILGW?

AT: Yes.

BA: Ladies Garment Workers Union. Right.

AT: And that was funny. There was a fee that you had to pay to become a member of this ILGW. And the dues was like \$6 a month.

BA: Okay. I'm just in my head doing the calculation, that would probably be about --

AT: Now I think they're paying -- I'm not sure if they pay -- I think they pay like maybe \$15 a week? Because it's a lot. It's like \$50 or \$60. So they deduct it weekly by payroll, so it's not a lump sum.

BA: Did they seem to [00:04:00] help the workers at that factory? Were the union representatives helpful?

AT: The union was the way it is now. I mean, now it's not that strong anyway. But they're for themselves. I mean if you have any major issue, and of course you make a bad reputation for yourself with the company that you work for, if you're causing trouble, it's just another business, I think, the union. I mean they kind of -- when the contract is up, they negotiate the contract with the company. But the company always has their say, no matter what.

BA: Okay. So you felt the union wasn't very at that point strong?

AT: Even though it was really strong, had a lot of members at that time, but it was a business. Like the chairlady was getting paid, the union rep would come into the shop and just -- I don't feel like it's really, really helping you, [00:05:00] but you don't have a choice. If you are a union member, you have to be a member. You know, you have to pay the dues, they negotiate for you. But the company really pays you. Your holidays, your medical benefits, everything.

BA: Okay. Did the union get any extra holidays for you? Do you remember? Did they fight for more holidays?

AT: Sometimes they'll try to fight, but it's always like a compromise. You know, they start like this much, the union wants this and the company's willing to give you this and then they kind of each start to give in and they meet halfway.

BA: Okay. So how'd you move from the Bronx out to here? How did that happen?

AT: Well houses were like really expensive there.

BA: They still are.

AT: And now forget it. But we have friends that we used to come and visit here sometime, like just for a day. [And

mostly?] we used to come, you know the cheese place in Nazareth that they closed, Calandra's?

BA: Yeah, yeah.

AT: We would come from the Bronx with two or three friends. They would come and buy cheese.

BA: Yeah, I've heard about that. Famous.

AT: Because those people were from my same hometown.

BA: Oh, and what town was that [00:06:00] in Sicily?

AT: It's San Fratello.

BA: San Fratello.

AT: It's near Messina.

BA: Okay, I've been past Messina. I went from Palermo to Taormina. But went past Messina. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And beautiful there, you know, just really nice.

AT: It's a very, very small town. So and then we decided to move here to Pennsylvania. And liked it?, houses were cheap. Our first house was \$11,000.

BA: What town was that in?

AT: It was in Easton. It was --

BA: Easton?

AT: -- a half double.

BA: Half, okay, yeah.

AT: But that was like a palace.

BA: Oh my gosh. And the prices are still good, you know, compared to New York, that's still true today, my gosh. Did you come and get to work right away when you came here or --

AT: Well to New York? You mean to United States?

BA: When you came to Easton.

AT: Oh to Easton. Well let me see. Now my son was little. He was one year old. And then it was in the summer and the winter came. [00:07:00] My husband started working with construction and in the winter they got laid off. So then I decided I'll go to work and he was staying home with our son. And so then I started working. Then when my husband went back to work, I got a babysitter that lived on the same street and I would pay her \$25 a week. That was like \$5 a day. But she was a friend and she had boys the same age.

BA: That's nice, it all works.

AT: And I would take the bus and then I was going to work downtown Easton.

BA: Okay, where'd you work there? What was the first place, do you remember?

AT: I worked at a dress shop. The name of the shop was called Betty Lee.

BA: Betty Lee. I think I've heard of that.

AT: And you know where that was? The building on Third Street before you go to up to College Hill, the gas station that used to be there on corner. The very first building next to it. [00:08:00] But now it's all changed. It's new and beautiful. But it was this dingy building. You walked in, was wooden floor, creak and dark, and you walked in and then there was this big room that was the factory.

BA: Okay. And did you just walk in there? How did you know there was work? Did someone just tell you there was --

AT: Well somebody told me that. (inaudible) friends that we met when we moved to Easton, they say, "Oh, if you want to come to work, you know, I'll tell them."

BA: Okay. So did you know some people working there? You knew people working at the Betty Lee, okay.

AT: Yes.

BA: That's good to know because people make jobs from friends sometimes.

AT: Yeah, the one was the bookkeeper and her sister was a sewer. And you know what, believe it or not I don't have

any family in this country at all. I have some cousins. But my husband's family was all in New York and in Easton all my friends that we have today after like 50 years almost, they're like family to me. [00:09:00] We met in factories. We sat next to each other, we were teaching each others and we would cook and share recipes and how you make this and how you make that. Of course I was young so I needed to learn everything.

BA: Yeah, that's such a friendly kind of feeling, you know?

AT: Yes. My best friend that I'm friends until today, you know, some are retired and some, you know, we met in the shop.

BA: How about that? Yeah, that's long connections.

AT: So then from there --

BA: Now who owned that place? Do you know who owned Betty Lee?

AT: It was two guys. Okay, the name Betty was the wife's daughter. No, the wife of one, his name was John Buffi and she still lives, but he's deceased. But Betty, and Lee was the daughter of the other, Betty Lee.

BA: Okay. That's where the name came from. Okay. Were most people working there mostly Italians [00:10:00] or other people there too, the workers?

AT: Mostly was Italian and even like born here. But a few, they were like American or whatever, other generations, And they were coming to work themselves, the two partners. They were cutters.

BA: Cutters, okay. So they were cutters right there.

AT: They would get probably contracts from New York or wherever and get the fabric and the pattern. They would cut it and then we would sew it.

BA: So there were you still -- they were dresses mostly, right?

AT: Yes, there we also made dresses. We'll make (inaudible) famous name dresses. Like Leslie Fay was one of the names that I remember. We made dresses for that company.

BA: Oh, I've heard that name now. My wife doesn't buy big fashion, you know, but I know that name, Leslie Fay.

AT: But years ago, that was like a good name. And then from there, of course you're always looking. Then I learned how to drive [00:11:00] a car and then I was able to drive. There was other factories around. So I heard that Pioneer in Stockertown, they were making blouses. And people working there, they were making a lot more money. So I remember I went to the office and told them I want a job. You didn't need no ID in those days. I mean just your

social security and your name and address and okay, when can you start? Tomorrow.

BA: That fast.

AT: Yeah. And I worked there. And I'll tell you, I was making more money there than I made the last few years before I retired. That was like maybe early '80, '80 until '89.

BA: Up in Stockertown, okay. So that whole decade, almost 10 years up there. Okay.

AT: Yeah. And I worked there and then they went out of business. That's when things started to -- then in '89, then I went to work. [00:12:00] Actually in between, I was laid off so I enjoyed. I was making more on unemployment than I did working. So then the unemployment sent me to looking for jobs. Actually, they sent me to A&H.

BA: A&H, okay. And remind me where that is, what town that is, A&H.

AT: It was in Easton. But I was picky. I wanted to stay home. It was summer, I was getting good money. So and I told them I didn't know how to sew and I want only to do the Merrow machines. So they didn't hire me. That was good, one week. Next week, I go downtown again to unemployment and then she sends me to Valerie Fashion in Wind Gap.

BA: Okay, all right. Way up there.

AT: I played the same game, I told them I didn't know, I didn't have a lot of experience, I don't know how to sew. So they hired me. I go into work and this woman that was the forelady, she brings a bunch of scraps, rags. She says here, [00:13:00] practice on the machine, you know. And then she disappeared, you know. So then I got up, I went to her. I said, look, when I was married, I know how to sew, just you can tell me what you want me to do, you know? I couldn't get away, yes. So I worked there like about three months and then a friend of mine, all my friends worked at A&H. In those days, A&H was nice to work with because they worked with you. All the women that had children, they would be let off during the summer. And there were ones that wanted to work. But now they cannot do that anymore. If there's work, everything's got to be legal, you know. So I went to work then a friend of mine, she said, "Why don't you come at A&H? It's so close. It's in Easton." So I said well, I'll think about it. So one day my husband calls me at work at Valerie Fashion. We were not allowed to get phone calls so I got a message. [00:14:00] They say, well on your break time, call your

house. You know, it was not emergency. So I called my husband and he said -- he was working the middle shift.

BA: Okay. And he was doing construction still, right?

AT: No, then he went to work at Victaulic.

BA: Oh, Victaulic. I know about Victaulic.

AT: That's where he worked.

BA: Okay, big company.

AT: Well and it worked out good because the kids were growing up. He would be home to send them off to school and then I come home about 2:30, 3:00 and they'd be coming home from school. So that was another sacrifice, to work that.

Then, when the kids grew up and he wanted a day shift, they took a long time to get a day shift job.

BA: At Victaulic? Yeah, those are hard to do.

AT: So and then I went in, I called him and he says to me, "Elizabeth called. She wants you to call her. Go to A&H after work." So I get off from there, I went straight downtown [00:15:00] and I remember like the Bastinelli, they were a lot involved with A&H. They were not the owners, but they were really close friends with the owner. And I said who I was and he said, "Here, what can you do? You want to try this?" He made me try the Merrow machine.

"Come in tomorrow." I said oh my god, I said it was Thursday. I said, "Can I finish the week where I am and tell them that I'm not going back?" He said, "No, no, no. Don't worry about it. I'm good friends with Joe (inaudible)." But I did call Valerie and tell them that I wasn't going back there.

BA: That's so fast, that is so quick. Like rapid, you know. Wow, wow. Now Sherry told me that if she left one place, she could get hired at the next place right away.

AT: And there were places like -- there was like a this [Delu?] outlet, they were making lingerie stuff in Easton. There was Strongware Pants. There used to be like Easton Dress, I've heard. There were places in Southside Easton, [00:16:00] in Northampton like you said, Bath, Bethlehem, Wind Gap.

BA: Northampton, I think it was called Cross Country Clothes. It was a big thing [is what it was called?], big place.

AT: Well, I know place in Bath. What was it called? They were Italian, the Fantozzi owned those places.

BA: Interesting, interesting. Now was it always mostly -- like up in Wind Gap, was that mostly women? Were there men there working? Any men you saw?

AT: There were men also working.

BA: And what were they doing? The same job?

AT: They would be cutter or presser. They were like harder jobs, different jobs. Yes.

BA: Yeah, so it's separate. Women, Mero machine or single --

AT: Yes. Not necessarily sewing, yes. Trim, inspecting, bagging..

BA: Okay. But the men are doing pressing work?

AT: Yeah, pressing work and cutting, spreading the rolls of fabric. And yes.

BA: Were you mostly on like more dayshift there? Did they run all around the clock? Did they have nightshifts at those?

AT: Well when I went to Pioneer, they had a second shift.

BA: Okay. [00:17:00] Did you have to work that shift?

AT: No, no, no, that was voluntary. People that they had children, they would come into work at 3:00, 3:00 until 9:00 or 10:00, whatever they could do.

BA: Oh, okay. So it's voluntary, okay. I see. What about overtime? Would you get called in for a lot of overtime with (inaudible)?

AT: Yes, you would ask if you wanted to stay for overtime.

BA: I'm trying to think, the managers mostly pretty nice for the workers there?

AT: Like I have to say maybe I'm simple, honest, I don't know. I have no problem with no one. I'm nice and I would say you get treated the way that you treat people.

BA: True enough, yeah. Yeah.

AT: If you're polite and respectful, you are treated that way. If you are disrespectful, everybody talks to you and use you know, kind of bad words and screaming and yelling, you know. Like I worked for A&H alone for 31 years.

BA: Thirty-one years. [00:18:00] Well that's a long, long record.

AT: Yeah, I started as a sewer. But I had a lot of experience. I knew how to sew, to do like fine work. So then I was promoted to a supervisor, like a forelady to teach others. I didn't do that for very long. One day in the hallway, one of the owners, he called me into his office. He says, "I have an idea. I want you to do something." They had started this sewing factory in Nazareth, A&H also. And he says, "And I want you to go up there. I want you to run it, to be in charge." Because they had started with another girl that was a forelady down there also. But she

didn't know how to sew. And the girls were having such a hard time. So I went up there and everybody was so happy, excited because I have experience in all the different jobs. [00:19:00] How to do it easy. So and then at that time then, I became company, came out of the union.

BA: Okay. Now you're plant manager? Or shop manager?

AT: Shop manager.

BA: Shop manager, how about that?

AT: The sewing department. Because there was other departments in the same building.

BA: So you're managing the sewing department.

AT: It was the shipping and receiving building, actually. But we had like a quarter of the building with sewing machines and we had a -- they installed all tracks for the electrical so nobody would trip over the wires. They made it really nice.

BA: Wow, that's nice. So you got promoted to management then.

AT: Yes.

BA: Oh, how about that?

AT: So then when they started closing, downsizing, I still stayed company and then we went to Forks. That's where the only facility is now. And we have -- they had a small

sewing section. But as people retired, it shrunk. I think there's like five or six girls in sewing. [00:20:00]

BA: Still there today?

AT: Well, they basically only do repairs or changing the label, adding a label, you know.

BA: They can fix these pants of mine. I wore them out.

AT: Because we just make samples like. They would send me all the different samples that we -- and we do them there.

BA: Wow. Now how was the change from being in union to being a manager? Was that a hard change for you? A big change?

AT: Not really. Because I was still the same person. And I was nice with all the girls and we were like a family.

BA: That's what I've heard. I've heard a lot of this family thing. Did they have flexibility for the hours? Like if a mother had child trouble at home, she could go home for a while?

AT: Sure, yes. And it's not like a job, like I don't know how. Even the store, they can cover up for that. But like at a hospital, places like that, you know.

BA: Or steel company, no one could do that. They would have to stay. Yeah. "You're not going anywhere." [00:21:00]

AT: And if you didn't feel good the next day or if your kid was home sick, you could stay home and you would be excused, you know.

BA: Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah. Now when you were management, did you have to talk to the labor -- the union people? They had to talk to you then about the factory or no?

AT: Well not really me. There was like the higher manager, like my boss was one of the engineers. Like everybody has a shop assigned, day boss. Yes. I would pass issues on to my manager.

BA: Okay, so they would talk to him about like maybe higher, different conditions or someone has a grievance, right grievance, someone has a grievance.

AT: Yeah, if there was like a grievance or anything I just sent it to the upper one.

BA: Did you think the union was different here in Pennsylvania? Because you said the New York, it didn't seem very helpful. Were they more helpful in the Pennsylvania shops?

AT: I think it was the same. And I remember the one year they went on strike.

BA: Okay, I was going to ask about that. [00:22:00]

AT: They haven't gone on strike many times, I don't think so.
But the one year, that probably was maybe around between
2000 and 2005. Maybe something like that.

BA: It was a strike.

AT: Yeah.

BA: How long was it?

AT: They went on strike, maybe a week or two. And all the
company people even from other building, they were coming
here to help because this was a shipping and receiving
building. So they were folding it, packaging and shipping
suits that we made at the time. Now they still make them
but they buy them already made for Land's End. We used to
actually sew them.

BA: I think I got this -- I think if I open this, I think the
back would say Land's End.

AT: Land's End, J.Crew. Oh my gosh. I can't think. My mind
went blank.

BA: Big names though.

AT: Eddie Bauer. And they had a children's line also, like you
know.

BA: Wow, that's big names.

AT: So when they were on strike, [00:23:00] they brought office people from other buildings there to help fold and help pack and ship orders. You know.

BA: Okay, yeah. Would they put a picket line around the building? Picket, strike line?

AT: Yes, they were outside the building, the girls, the ladies there. They were taking turns like a shift. Who would come in what day.

BA: Okay, but you were at that point management, right? So you weren't on strike.

AT: Yes, no.

BA: Just waved to them, hi.

AT: Yeah, just waved to them. They were still my friends.

BA: Yeah, okay. I was going to ask that. Yeah, so still friends.

AT: All my sewers, they were my friends. And I mean it wasn't their fault and it wasn't my fault, you know. I mean the majority voted to go on strike I guess.

BA: Well, that's true. This is such a great thing because it just -- it's such a different business. Sewing and clothing is so flexible, it seems like. Everyone knows everybody else.

AT: It is. But unfortunately, we don't have no more factories.

BA: I know, it's [all closing?].

AT: I mean there's not. Not in swimsuits or dresses [00:24:00]
or shirts.

BA: I know. It's all gone. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AT: In Allentown, there was so many factories. A lot of
non-union shops. Years and years ago when I was laid off,
I would go get work from some of those non-union shops and
do it at home.

BA: Okay, interesting. Take home work.

AT: I have a sewing machine. But they were paying like so
little. And at night after dinner, would just go
downstairs and sew for two, three hours because I promised
this is going to be done by Friday, you have to get it
there.

BA: Ah, okay. Take home work from there. Okay. I was going
to say when new people came in, the new girls, did you have
to train them? Because by the time you got experience, did
you have to train?

AT: Well usually everybody had experience. Even maybe in
different garments. And yeah, I trained them for whatever
we were doing, you know.

BA: Did you have kids coming out of high school, like the high school kids?

AT: Not too many young kids. No, it was always like [00:25:00] mothers, like people like in the -- at least like mid-30s to 40s and up.

BA: Okay, so not so many of the high school kids.

AT: No.

BA: No, at that point. That's something that changed, you know. Interesting. I was going to ask about like coming, we call it poaching people. Like somebody would come from one factory and say, "Hey, do you want to come work for me?" Or call you at night and say, "You want to come work here?"

AT: No.

BA: Trying to pick up people from other --

AT: No, I didn't have any of that.

BA: Not too much of that, okay.

AT: Just like I said, friends work at a different shop, they're making better money. Then you know, they would say, "Why don't you come over here? Put your name or give my name as a reference, you know."

BA: Okay, yeah. I was going to ask about -- I know that somewhere up in Roseto, a lot of Italian workers and such. Did you have people of other groups and other backgrounds working in the factories, you know? Who, Welsh, or Irish or whatever? Girls or -- [00:26:00]

AT: Oh yeah. There were different people from like many different --

BA: Pennsylvania Dutch, maybe?

AT: -- nationality.

BA: All together?

AT: Especially when I worked in Nazareth. I was Italian and the building manager was Italian still. He is still alive but he no longer works. Dominic Biando, that's his name, yeah. But no, all the girls, they were like Irish and Polish and Pennsylvania Dutch, and so then we shared and learned different recipes. Different cultures.

BA: Everybody all working together though, sharing different recipes and --

AT: But it seems like everyone always seems to love Italian food.

BA: Well, I certainly do. I certainly do. I went to Sicily -- this is not part of the interview, but I had those little fried rice balls.

AT: The rice balls.

BA: Yeah, little -- oh, they're tasty.

AT: I make them sometimes.

BA: Oh, they're good. Oh, peas inside. Oh, they're good.

AT: Yes, and ground beef. And we used to buy -- when we would order lunch there in Nazareth, [00:27:00] the pizza place. And we would order their rice balls --

BA: You knew how to make them? Okay.

AT: Yes.

BA: Because when I go to pizza places, I don't usually see them on the menu here. Usually it's just pizza.

AT: No, but you know what, where did I see them? I saw them at Wegman's.

BA: Wegman's.

AT: Somebody -- yes.

BA: Wegman's. Okay.

AT: So they have rice balls. I think they're a little bit smaller, but --

BA: I'm just going to ask, oh, did you socialize outside of work? Like when the weekends came? You said the workers were friends altogether.

AT: Well like me, in my case that we had no family, those were my family. My friends, then we started -- for any excuse, we started visiting each other and the husbands became friends or some of the husbands worked together already in constructions. And we had children the same age. And we would go to picnics like in the summer. We would go to Beltzville or we'd go --

BA: Altogether, like --

AT: Yeah, with our friends. And in the winter, [00:28:00] we visit each others at home. I say, "Why don't you come over Saturday night?" Just have some coffee and cookies or have some sausage and some wine.

BA: Now some ladies from other shops too, other companies altogether like maybe all from the same place? Or mostly from all different companies?

AT: No, just the ones from the same place, like you became really close to.

BA: With them, okay. So not people from A&H or from all together, and just from A&H or whatever. Yeah.

AT: Now we are trying to -- with a lot of people retiring, you know, before the pandemic, we were trying to see each other. Like we would go to lunch like once a month, whoever was available. No reservation, nothing. Every Wednesday of the month, you know, we go. Different places. The pizza place, the Longhorn, you know.

BA: So altogether.

AT: Just to stay in touch. Now we haven't in this past year.

BA: Well, with COVID. You know, the whole COVID situation.

[00:29:00] Did the companies ever have a company picnic where they would take you out somewhere to an outing or something?

AT: A&H, they would have like a Christmas party. But then in the summer, then they started this as a thank you to the workers. In the summers sometimes, one day they would have like the ice cream truck. Or they would do a picnic like they would grill hamburgers and hot dogs. The owner, the bosses. All of them, they would grill up front and you would go and get in line and there are drinks and you know, sides.

BA: Right there at the place?

AT: Yeah, but they started doing this in the last maybe five, six years. Years and years ago, the girls had to put words in their mouth. "Can we have a picnic? Can we do this? Can we do that?" You know, and then they started doing it themselves.

BA: Okay. But it was suggestions from the ladies there?

AT: Probably, yes.

BA: So a nice input conversation. [00:30:00] Did the company seem like it would respond if a lady or worker had a -- sorry. [phone rings]

AT: I'm just going to answer. I'm sorry.

BA: Yeah.

[personal phone call 00:30:14-00:30:43]

BA: I've been to Italy, so I recognize some of that? I've been three times.

AT: That's okay. Was nothing --

BA: Anyway, I was going to ask -- oh, I had a real big question I was going to ask. Did you feel like they would push you to make a certain amount of dresses or whatever? Was there pressure to [00:31:00] produce? You know, hurry up, hurry up?

AT: Well sometimes, there was. But we were on piecework also. But if they had a deadline that needed to meet, it kind of worked both ways.

BA: Okay. And then they would say hurry up?

AT: Yeah, this needs to ship there on Friday. So by the time it gets done, everybody work overtime or whatever.

BA: But only certain times. Not all the time.

AT: Yes, yes. Whenever was needed. And even now, I hear that some of the girls, like that they still work at A&H, but they're working a lot of overtime.

BA: Okay, well that's interesting. Okay.

AT: But they've changed to cater to the people, to be nice to people a little bit more. Now they're giving incentive. Because nobody wants to work overtime most of the time, you know? Coming 3:00, everybody's out the door. And it's not mandatory so -- and they will hire temps.

BA: Okay, I was going to ask about that. Temps. [00:32:00]

AT: And temps, they don't have a lot of experience. By the time they learn the job and then if some are really, really good and come to work every day, they hire them. But the majority, they use them for when they need it and then that's it. So now they're giving incentive to the employee

to work overtime. For every hour of overtime they work, you get a half hour of accumulated time paid.

BA: Okay. Nice, okay.

AT: So I have a friend, she's working. An hour every morning she goes early. She says, you know, get a half an hour then I can take a day off or --

BA: Yeah, that's a nice deal. And they're doing that today?

AT: They're doing that today. And that has nothing to do with the union. That's the company.

BA: The company just offering that to get them to come in. Interesting.

AT: But almost like the last few years, everyone that retired was not replaced. They're giving more and more responsibility [00:33:00] to the ones that -- yeah.

BA: Who stayed. I was going to ask when did the ladies start to realize that things were going downhill? Where they start to say oh boy, like there's the industry's in some trouble here. Do you start to see that at some point?

AT: Well, when shops begin starting to close. Well, especially when generations -- like the parents that owned the shop and then the kids, they don't want to do that. They went to college, they want to do something else. So then they

were forced to close the shops. But it was like a lot of sacrifices and a lot of headaches. And they had to -- I remember like my boss from the Bronx, he would go downtown in Manhattan and talk to I don't know, salespeople there to get jobs, to get contracts.

BA: Right, yeah. To get a deal. Yeah, so it's a lot of work to hustle up the business.

AT: It's a lot of work to negotiate. Yes.

BA: And I heard that --

AT: There's a lot, a lot involved. [00:34:00]

BA: And the companies that buy, you know, they put pressure on to keep the price low.

AT: Yeah, but now with -- I remember when I worked in downtown at A&H the first few years, when they were getting the Land's End contract, that was such a big deal. And also I remembered one time the union came in that they were starting to send work out of the country. "But don't you worry about it, there's going to be plenty of work for you here in USA. Don't worry about it, you know. You're going to have a lot." But look what happens.

BA: Okay. So they told you it was going to be fine and then it just --

AT: But over like 30 years, things --

BA: Slowly went down.

AT: Went down. But even now like they get mostly it's made in China, Indonesia, Japan.

BA: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I see the labels, yeah.

AT: The label. And the pattern, the fabric, it's made [00:35:00] -- everything is made there. Here, we have designers here. They had tons of designers. Well last year, they kind of retired maybe about like 50 or 60 people. I was one of them. But I was semi-retired anyway. I was only working part-time because my position was no longer needed. So they put that into another person that's already there. So she's managing --

BA: So just (inaudible) more, more, more, more.

AT: Yeah. But even like the designer. The fabric gets made in China, they choose the pattern. They draw it, they pick the colors, they get swatches.

BA: All overseas now.

AT: And then they make the samples and then the samples come in. We used to inspect them, make sure everything was to measurements and everything. And then they were given. But they didn't wait to give them the okay to proceed with

the thousands of garments. By the time we got the suits here, they would get FedExed overnight [00:36:00] from China really. They inspect the first garment and then they need an answer right away what's wrong. And give them instructions on what to do.

BA: Wow, things have sure changed, yeah.

AT: Well, I know that because I was also then -- since the sewing went down, I was supervisor of quality. They gave me that responsibility also.

BA: Okay, I was going to ask about that.

AT: So I was managing like six girls.

BA: Inspectors, is that right?

AT: Yeah, inspectors. And we would inspect everything. If there was a problem with the lot that came in, you know, we had to deal with it right away. But we inspect the percentage and if it was a major problem, we had to get -- request the whole lot --

BA: To be inspected.

AT: Was hundreds or thousands, inspected or repair.

BA: Wow. Well that's a lot of work.

AT: And some things was really silly. The customer would not know that. Let's say if it needed like a [00:37:00] red

button and instead they put a blue button, for example.

But that's prospect. Those were the instructions. That's what we paid for. That's how we want it.

BA: So exact. Okay.

AT: So then we do it corrected. And charge them back more than probably all the suits are worth. Paying people to work on repairing and charge back the company that made them because didn't follow the instructions.

BA: High quality. Did you feel quality was high all the way through, that the companies really believed --

AT: It used to be high. But now, if there's a problem, okay, they're shipping at the same time they're inspecting it. The truck is out there waiting.

BA: So the problem doesn't get fixed.

AT: No.

BA: It just goes on --

AT: Quality, I think, has gone down a lot, a lot.

BA: Gone downhill. Did you ever work on some really -- you mentioned Land's End. Did anyone do very fancy dresses here, the highest level. Did any company have the contracts for like [00:38:00] Fifth Avenue?

AT: I don't know of dresses, but from what I heard, Easton Dress, probably they're making those fancy dresses.

BA: Yeah. I recall the old Hesses Store in Allentown.

AT: I remember that store.

BA: Used to have this room called the French Room. And they had all the elaborate -- very expensive dresses.

AT: High expensive.

BA: Now I don't know if they were made here or if they were just imported from France. But they were expensive.

AT: I have no idea. But even remember like Siegels, down Easton, that expensive bridal dresses especially and mother of the bride and prom dresses and all that. All those beads and all the, you know.

BA: Fine work, very --

AT: Yes.

BA: Very careful work. I forgot to ask, was there a chances for most of the ladies to have a promotion if they were good? Were there chances they could grow or get promoted?

AT: Not for everyone. No, because then if you were good at sewing, they need you for that. [00:39:00]

BA: Okay, so you're not just going to --

AT: Very rarely. Once in a while they'd pick one person and put you like as a supervisor or --

BA: But mostly just stayed doing that.

AT: Mostly stayed, yes.

BA: Yeah. Did most ladies there work like a long time? Like you know, just many years or sometimes in for a year and out? Was it turnover? A lot of turnover?

AT: It was both. People that I know that they worked 30 years, 40 years, 50 years, depending when they started there. They worked until retirement.

BA: Okay, straight through.

AT: But some younger generations, they try six months or whatever and then find something else to do.

BA: So just come in, try it and go (inaudible).

AT: Yes.

BA: So it's interesting how different people respond, you know, differently to [inaudible].

AT: I think -- well maybe I don't know. I'll think of just of me and like my friends. Because we didn't have like an education here. We didn't feel like we could get different jobs, like office jobs. But I tell you working in the

factory was fun. [00:40:00] I think office job would've been bored. Right?

BA: Other people have told me that too, that it was friendly or fun or whatever.

AT: Because like my kids, like they're happy with their job. My daughter works for City Hall in Allentown. And with the pandemic, she's been staying home a lot with the kids. She goes to work when the kids go to school. And they're really, really nice with her and she gets everything done. But she says, "Mom, I don't know. What would I do, five days a week, eight hours a day in the office? Now I get it done at home and then I have time to do the work at home and mind the kids and --" you know.

BA: Yeah, yeah. Offices can be pretty dry.

AT: Yeah, pretty boring too like.

BA: It can be. I forgot to ask, safety, getting hurt. The ladies - Was the machinery safe there or was there injuries?

AT: Yes, there were safety guides. But sometimes if you push your fingers too hard or whatever, [00:41:00] the needle would break into your nails. And every sewer would have that. That's when you are experienced. And then we have

to call mechanic, he comes with the plier and he pulls it out. But that happened to me. But now it's, you know, you have to have a tetanus shot and you know. Yes.

BA: I'm trying to think, is there anything else you wanted to mention that we didn't talk about? We've covered so many different things. This is pretty fascinating.

AT: I'm not sure.

BA: Let me see if there's anything else I was going to ask because -- oh, what about like lunch? Did people bring their own lunches in typically?

AT: Yes, you would pack your lunch or if you were near like in Nazareth, was all downtown. It was near places that would deliver lunch.

BA: Oh, okay. So they'd bring it in.

AT: Because lunchtime was only a half an hour, so to walk to a place and come back, you don't have enough time.

BA: You don't have time, so you bring it in.

AT: You bring your lunch and also like you share lunch. You do friends. [00:42:00] If you made like, make the rice balls, I bring those for lunch. I bring two or three extra, give them to my friends.

BA: Okay. Well that's neat. Yeah.

AT: Or in break time also, that's when you kind of socialize.

BA: Okay, how long were the breaks?

AT: Break, 15 minutes.

BA: Fifteen minute break. Morning and afternoon?

AT: Morning and afternoon. If you worked overtime. If you worked until five.

BA: Okay, then it was two breaks. Otherwise just the one. Was it hot there? Did they have for the summertime, the heat, was there fans or air conditioning.

AT: When I worked in my first factory in downtown, the dress factory, that was hot. The building was old. They had those huge fans in the windows that you felt like an airplane was ready to land, the noise that they were making.

BA: I've seen them going and going. And that's the only thing they had to keep -- it was still hot, still hot.

AT: Yeah, and then some people would have their own personal fan plugged in at their machine. But now, now they have air conditioning (inaudible).

BA: Air conditioning. And it was also -- in the winter time, warm enough, not [00:43:00] freezing?

AT: Yeah. Yeah, no, it was warm enough.

BA: So comfortable enough.

AT: Yes.

BA: Okay, so they kept everyone comfortable at least.

AT: Yes.

BA: Well that's nice to know. Not every place does that, you know. Some --

AT: No, but my experience, I think every place that I've worked, they were accommodating and making sure that you were comfortable.

BA: That's good. That's interesting. Well that's really good. I think I might have asked all my questions, you know? And this is going to be part of a bigger picture of hopefully many ladies and some men. I know a man who is a -- he just told me he was a presser up in Roseto. And I'm going to talk to him.

AT: I don't know anybody from Roseto.

BA: Yeah, but he said he was a presser in the -- up there. Just for --

AT: They probably were making like men's suits or jackets or suits and -- they had those big presser machines and --

BA: Wow. Well that's neat. I'm going to shut off my little machine here now. Hang on a second.

END OF AUDIO FILE