

McDanoldsJanice\_19911121

RICHARD SHARPLESS: This is an interview with Janice McDanolds of 532 O W Road in Bangor, Pennsylvania. It is November 21, 1991, and we are in Mrs. McDanolds dining room. The first impertinent question, can I ask how old you are?

JANICE MCDANOLDS: I'm 54.

RS: You're 54. Okay. Same as me.

JM: Oh, okay.

RS: I was born in the same year. And you're a native of this area?

JM: Oh yes. I've been here all my life.

RS: All your life?

JM: Mm-hmm. I was born in East Bangor. And I moved to Pen Argyl when I was five. And I've lived here since 1969 in this -- right here.

RS: In this house?

JM: Mm-hmm. Yep.

RS: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So you've always lived -- you lived your whole life in this area?

JM: Yes. Yes. I did.

RS: What did your parents do?

JM: My father worked on the railroad. And then when that

closed down, [00:01:00] he worked for [redacted] here in Pen Argyl. I don't know what he did up there. I think it had to do with knitting. I think he did knitting. And my mother worked in a blouse mill also. She worked at [redacted] in Pen Argyl. That was a bathing suit factory. And then before that, she worked at -- in a blouse factory.

RS: Mm-hmm. So your --

JM: A machine operator.

RS: Your mother, at least, was involved in this --

JM: Yes. She was also.

RS: -- a long time.

JM: Yeah. This is the biggest industry around here for women in this area. There were a lot of blouse mills.

RS: Oh, there were at one time?

JM: Oh yeah. Yes. All over this area.

RS: Do you have any idea how many there might have been?

JM: I don't know. Maybe 30. About 30, I believe. Yeah. Basically.

RS: And you went to school here?

JM: Yes. [00:02:00] We both went to Pen Argyl.

RS: When did you start working?

JM: In 1954. I started nights after school. I think it was in -- yeah. 1954, 1953. That's how I learned, nights after school, on the sewing machine. And then during the summer,

I worked all summer. And that's how I got started there. There was nothing else really around here, I mean, for anybody to go into at that time, during nights after school like that. I don't think there was that many like fast food places or anything like that around at that time that you could get a job.

RS: Was that usual practice for a woman -- young woman -- to do this? To work after school like this and the summers?

JM: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Most of them did.

RS: You got your training then with sewing.

JM: Yes. Mm-hmm.

RS: So you've been working in [00:03:00] one way or another in the garment industry since that time?

JM: Yes I have. That's the only thing I've ever done.

RS: Okay. What exactly do you do?

JM: I'm a machine operator. Sewing machine operator.

RS: Sewing machine operator.

JM: Mm-hmm. I do different jobs. No one special job.

RS: Okay. And who are you working with today?

JM: [redacted] in Bangor. It's over in the viaduct. That's where he took the picture.

RS: And what do they sew? What kind of --

JM: They make skirts, slacks, shorts, tops, and they also are making a wet suit for -- I think it is the [redacted]

stores. We just took the [redacted] line on here recently. And it's been -- given us quite a bit of work. Before, it wasn't that steady. But since we've got this work, it's been really good. So how long [00:04:00] it's gonna last, I don't know.

RS: Mm-hmm. Is this a seasonal type of industry? Or is it more or less regular?

JM: Well, I think it's regular. It goes, you know, they have different styles for different seasons, but there is a slow spot, I think, before each season. I haven't had that much time off over here. But where I worked before, this lady was in her -- she was like 80 years old I guess. And she didn't have a whole lot of work. And therefore, a lot of the girls started leaving because they wanted steady work, and we were off more than we weren't, which that didn't bother me too much. I enjoyed the time off because I have things I can do here at home. But then I figured, "Hey, if I don't work more steady, when it comes time for my social security and that, I'm not gonna have that much in there." So I decided -- first I was gonna stay home [00:05:00] and help my husband out in the garage here. But then it came to the fact that the hospitalization was so expensive. So I decided I had better go back in the blouse mill. And if I was going to go back in, I wanted to go where I was going

to have more steady work.

RS: Okay. How many--

JM: That's where I ended up over at [redacted].

RS: Okay. How many shops have you worked in all together since 1953 or '54?

JM: Let's see. One, two, three, four.

RS: Four.

JM: Yeah. I was in -- the first one I was in I was there till '78.

RS: So that was quite a few years.

JM: Yeah. I had time off in between. I had my children. But that's where I was basically. And that's the longest place I've stayed. That closed. He closed that mill. Then I went to another mill, and I didn't -- I [00:06:00] stayed there about maybe a year and a half. And then I went to this last mill where I said this lady didn't have a whole lot of work. And I might have been working for her about ten years.

RS: Mm-hmm. So altogether you have --

JM: About 27 years. I just figured it up tonight.

RS: 27 years.

JM: Yeah.

RS: That's a long time.

JM: Yeah. It wasn't steady. But it was -- that's how long

I've been in the blouse industry.

RS: And essentially doing the same thing? Sewing?

JM: Mm-hmm. Yep. Sewing.

RS: Mm-hmm. Did you ever do anything else in the shop other than sewing?

JM: Mm-mmm. Nope. No floor work or nothing like that.

RS: Mm-hmm. And this is all piecework?

JM: Where we are now? Yeah. Before, I wasn't on piece work. It was all time work.

RS: Uh-huh. How do they make that distinction?

JM: Well, we were supposed to be a time work shop [00:07:00] at [redacted]. She told me we were piece rate. I don't know how they make it. I guess they just figure that they decide they're going to pay the piece rate and that's it. I think the employer is the one who decides that. But if they're piece rate, then they have to be all piece rate. If they're time work, then they have to be all time work.

RS: The whole shop?

JM: Yeah.

RS: I see. You can't --

JM: And I think it's the employer that makes that decision.

RS: I see.

JM: Yeah.

RS: I see. According to what he thinks will be most

profitable?

JM: Probably. Yeah.

RS: Where do most of your products go? To New York?

JM: That I don't know. I would say -- I'm not positive of that though. I am not -- I don't know where they go, really. I haven't followed that up here. I don't know where they send them to. But I think that's where most of them were. In the other mills, they sent them to New York. I think so.

RS: Now what were the -- over this period of 27 years [00:08:00] you were working, what period of time would you say was the most prosperous? Not only just for the industry but also for you yourself.

JM: I think in the first mill that I was in. The wages weren't that great. You mean wage wise? Or you mean --

RS: Yeah. Steady work, wages?

JM: Well, where I am now, I would say the wages are the most and the steadiest. And the way -- the work is the steadiest at [redacted].

RS: Okay. Now a couple of these other mills you worked at closed. What was the reason they closed?

JM: Well, I think the first one I was in, [name redacted] -- I worked for him. He just retired. I guess he just had it with the blouse. And things were probably going downhill,

it was getting hard to get work, I think. And the same way with the other mill. This lady that I worked for.

[00:09:00] This was the problem. She couldn't get work because she didn't have that many girls. A lot of them had gone into other mills where they had more steady work. And with just the few that she had, they didn't want to stay there because they wanted more steady work.

RS: Right.

JM: But other than that, I think where I am now -- [redacted], I think, has been one of the oldest mills around. I believe it's been open the longest. And probably they will survive, more so than any of the other ones.

RS: Why do you say that?

JM: Well, they've been in it through the worst. When it was really slowing down. And they seem to be gathering more like this here new line that they took on. But the work has to be more perfect. They're more particular now than they ever were. And every little thing has [00:10:00] to be just right.

RS: Is that because of the competition or --

JM: I think. In order to get the work.

RS: In order to get the work.

JM: Mm-hmm.

RS: I see.



JM: Yeah. And --

RS: Does this have an effect on the women? In other words, the working conditions?

JM: Well, when we took on this new line, I think the girls were really, really wore out and tired, and they just didn't want that kind of pressure on them to be so perfect.

Because if you don't get the garment right from the cutting room perfect, you're not gonna make it perfect. And this is the problem. And they just -- they come around, and you had to measure everything. Everything had to come out just so. And it was just so much pressure on you. And I think they were glad when the biggest part of it -- the bulk of it -- was out. So --

RS: Would you say it's -- you talk about pressure. Would you say it's harder work now in the mills than it was [00:11:00] say 10 or 15, 20 years ago?

JM: I feel it is. I do. And I think most of the other girls -- because you hear a lot of them say that they just can't wait until they can retire. A lot of them.

RS: You didn't hear that that much before?

JM: No. Not really. I think they were glad for the money they were making and the -- I don't know. They just didn't seem to want to retire that soon. But now today, even our mechanic, he's counting the months. And he was my foreman

when I worked at my first mill. And he is now a mechanic over at the mill I'm at now. And he said that he just can't wait until he gets out of it. He's tired of that business. And even my foreman says the same thing.

RS: And that's -- you described the pressure.

JM: Yes. Yes. That's what it [00:12:00] -- the big thing is. I would say.

RS: Have any other working conditions changed that much?

JM: I don't think so. I can't see. I mean where I am now the machines -- they have a lot more machines. It's a bigger mill. And I think they're more -- they're more modern than the ones that I was working on before, which gives you more production. But basically, it's the same. Yes.

RS: How many women work in your mill, now?

JM: I don't know. About 100. More maybe. No. I'm not sure. I've never really took a count, but it's a big mill.

RS: That is a fairly large mill.

JM: Yeah. Mm-hmm. And then you have the cutting room upstairs.

RS: Right. Most of the cutters are men. [00:13:00] Is that right?

JM: Yeah.

RS: Is that still the case?

JM: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

RS: All the sewers are women, right?

JM: Yeah. Yeah. You don't find any men sewing. But my husband used to button sew and buttonhole.

RS: Was that a -- traditionally a man's job?

JM: No. Not necessarily. No. He just -- it's just something that he learned. Some men did it. In the first mill that I was in, there was a man that did button sewing there and button holing. And there was women too. But I think the men -- that's one of the jobs that they would do. The button sewing or buttonholing and also pressing --

RS: Right.

JM: -- is another thing.

RS: Pressing?

JM: Pressing. He used to press also.

RS: Who does the pressing now?

JM: They don't press. Well now, wait a minute. Do they press them? Yeah. They have to press 'em to a certain extent. I think it's the women that are doing it right now, but it's a different way. I never looked out in the back [00:14:00] of this mill. How they press it. But we're --

MARTIN DESHT: They don't press by hand anymore.

JM: Well, we're -- down at [redacted], they did. And there was a man, and there was a woman that pressed there. So it didn't matter. The women could do either. But you mostly

saw men. You don't see the men on the sewing machines.

Just to fix 'em. (laughs)

RS: Just to fix them. Maintenance people are men.

JM: Right. Right. Just to fix them.

RS: What would you say the average age of the worker is in your mill?

JM: Well, the average? I would say 40.

RS: 40. Hmm.

JM: Mm-hmm.

RS: And I am assuming then that most of these women have quite a bit of experience.

JM: Oh yes. Yeah. You don't find too many young people coming in the mills today.

RS: Why is that?

JM: There is no future in it. There is no advancement. You just sit there, and that's it. [00:15:00] You have no --

RS: No advancement in terms of money or --

JM: Well, you get raises, but as far as seniority or -- well, for instance, if somebody comes in and they -- I don't know how many have -- how much experience they have to have. Several months, I guess. I'm not sure of this with the union. But they're brought up to what you're getting as an hourly rate, wage, very shortly. So you're not gaining anything. In all the years I've been there -- in fact,

I'll tell you. When I worked at [redacted], this was one of the things that I quit for because I was getting like three cents less than what they brought the minimum wage up to. And that's what she gave me for a raise. [00:16:00] Three cents.

RS: Less than the minimum wage.

JM: Well, not the minimum. The minimum wage for a machine operator.

RS: For a machine operator.

JM: What I was supposed to be getting. I was getting three cents less than that when the raise came. The last raise came. And to bring me up to that, she gave me three cents. Not even a nickel. And I figured if I wasn't worth any more than that, then I was going to get out of it. I just felt, "Hey, I work hard. I put my day in. And I do the best I can, and I don't fool around. I give all I've got." And I just felt that, "Hey, she just doesn't appreciate me, so," --

RS: What was that hourly wage?

JM: I think I was getting four -- no, wait a minute. Four forty, \$4.42. Something like that. I'm not positive now.

RS: That was when?

JM: Or was it \$5.42?

RS: \$5.42.

JM: \$5.42. [00:17:00] That's what it was.

RS: What year was it?

JM: Nineteen eighty-nine, I think it was. Nineteen eighty-nine.

RS: Okay. Can I ask you what your hourly wage is now?

JM: Five sixty-five.

RS: Five sixty-five. Mm-hmm.

JM: And if you can make your piece rate -- and you can, sometimes you get jobs that you can make your rate, and then you get a percentage over that. But it isn't too often because there's girls that only do certain jobs. And then when they're on that same job all the time, they can pick up speed, and they can make that rate if it's a good rate. But when you're put from this job to this job to this job or wherever they need you -- and a lot of them are very tedious things. It doesn't go that easily. And you can't. You just can't make it. There's no way that you're going to do it.

RS: So you're sort of just stuck at that hourly rate?

JM: Right. Right. [00:18:00] And you get, like, in a three-year contract, they give you so much of a raise each year.

RS: Right.

JM: But for all the years that you're in, I don't think that

it's -- it's a very good wage.

RS: And this is the -- this is really one of the main reasons young people don't go into it.

JM: That's right. There's no future. You don't make any headway hardly.

RS: What kind of benefits do you get?

JM: Well, we get paid holidays. We get a personal day with that. We get a day -- our -- paid for our birthday. And we get a vacation check in the summer. Two weeks.

RS: Oh, you get two weeks' vacation?

JM: Mm-hmm. It's called health and welfare checks. And we get that the first two weeks in July. We always have that off. And then we have between Christmas and New Year's. And we get paid for that. And we have [00:19:00] our Blue Cross and Blue Shield is paid for us.

RS: Is there a pension?

JM: Yes. A little one.

RS: That goes into the union. Is that correct?

JM: Yeah. Mm-hmm. I think you have to be -- at 65, you get 100 and some dollars a month.

RS: 100 and some dollars a month. At 65. Doesn't matter how many years you put in?

JM: Well, it may, but it doesn't -- no. I don't think it does. I think that's the bottom --

MD: You have to have a certain amount of years to qualify.

JM: Yeah. You have to have 20 years in. And when we -- when I first started in the union, that wasn't going to take effect until you got to age 35. You had to be 35 then your 20 years started from there.

RS: So you had to go to 55.

JM: But now they've changed that. See? It starts from when you are taken in the union which was good. But some people lost out on that too.

RS: Right. Right.

JM: [00:20:00] Years ago.

RS: Have you always been a member of the union?

JM: Yes.

RS: And that is the International Ladies Garment Workers?

JM: Yes.

RS: Okay. What do you think of the union?

JM: Well, I think they're all right. I mean I have never had any problem. And as far as I've ever seen, they've taken care of problems that the girls had. I don't know how. I've never really had the experience of seeing any real big problem. And so I really can't say. I --

RS: Did you feel that it's been overall a positive --

JM: Yeah. I would say. They did what they could. That's all I -- I think was in their rights or whatever. I think they



backed the girls up.

RS: Are there any other -- are there any nonunion jobs in this area?

JM: Yes. There is [00:21:00] one that I know of. There may be more, but I do know that there is one up in West Bangor.

RS: How does the pay and benefits compare than a nonunion job? Do you know at all?

JM: Whatever they want to give you, I guess. I know a girl that started -- she was working over [redacted] getting what I'm getting. And she went to a nonunion job, and she's getting \$6 or \$6.10 an hour. But there is no -- she may be getting Blue Cross and Blue Shield. He said he may be able to give that to them. I don't know about the holidays. I don't know about that. Say if they want to give it, they can. If they don't --

RS: Yeah. Yeah. So the union actually probably keeps the wages up in the other -- in the other nonunion jobs too.

JM: Yeah. I guess. Yeah.

RS: Were you ever on strike?

JM: One time that I can remember. And that was so long ago. I think -- [00:22:00] when we worked at -- when I worked at my -- the first mill. I don't remember the year. But I do remember they paid. They paid you so much, but I don't remember how much that was either. That was quite a while

ago. Other than that, they threatened to strike different times but actually never went out. They always settled.

RS: Did you ever go to any of the ILGW's vacation spots in the Poconos and Harmony [Unity] House?

JM: Mm-mmm.

RS: No. You never went to those?

JM: No. I never went. I don't know of anybody that did. But there must be some people, but I --

RS: Well, they closed them down now.

JM: Yeah.

RS: They were started back in the thirties, forties.

JM: Unity? Was it Unity House? Yeah.

RS: Unity House. Unity House, right. Mm-hmm.

JM: No. I never was up there.

RS: Do you have any other -- do you have any kinds of relations with the union? Does the union do more for you than just simply represent you [00:23:00] at contract time or handle grievances? Things like this.

JM: Well, they have -- there's a lawyer a -- that you can get a hold of, I guess, if you have to. I have never had to use that either. I don't know offhand. I can't think. I have my book over there that tells you some of the stuff. But I really -- I've never had to use it. The hospitalization I used already. And they've -- they're really good with

that. For me, they were. Some people have some trouble. I never did. Just because I had them -- the numbers mixed up on -- well, both of our initial start with J. And they had his card as a dependent instead of mine, so we had to get that straightened out. But other than that, I've had no trouble with that.

RS: So overall then, your experience with the union has been pretty good.

JM: Yeah. I've had no problems.

RS: Do the other women feel that way about the union? More or less?

JM: I never [00:24:00] hear them complain.

RS: They don't complain?

JM: No. I never hear.

RS: Do you think conditions would be better or worse without the union?

JM: That depends on the employer. I --

RS: Okay. Let me ask that question. How do the employers feel -- how does the manager -- how does management feel about the union?

JM: Well, I -- the one that we have -- that I'm at now, I think they get along well with them because we had a meeting when it was time for this contract to come up. And he had the union man right there when he talked. What he had to say.

And I think that they have a pretty good relationship. I don't think there's a -- I've never heard any squabbling or anything between them. I know the first mill I worked in the -- he never liked to have the -- be around when the union man came in for the meetings. But I don't know that there was -- I don't think he really got along [00:25:00] too well with them. I think he resented them in a way. But no. Who I'm working for now, I've never seen that.

RS: Do you know -- some of the garment owners in the Lehigh Valley tried to get the union actually to obtain contracts for them for jobs.

JM: Mm-hmm.

RS: Does that happen at all with your mill? Do you know?

JM: I don't know about over there. And I don't know about [name redacted] either. But I remember if she got any nonunion work in, or was going to, or if any of the mill owners would get any nonunion work in, they had to get permission from the union first.

RS: I see.

JM: And I don't know if they had to pay a percentage to them for that. I don't know about that. I had heard that.

RS: Yeah. Usually, they have to pay 10, 15 percent.

JM: Yeah. I wasn't sure. But that's the only one though I ever knew of. [00:26:00] And I don't know if she went to

the union for that work or not. I don't know.

RS: When did the -- I asked you this a little bit from way earlier. But I want to ask you again. Do you think the years of top employment in this industry around here, was it in the '60s would you say? The '50s? The '60s? The '70s?

JM: I would say between the '50s and '60s.

RS: Okay. And then the industry started to decline probably in mid, late '60s. Is that right?

JM: When the imports started.

RS: When the imports started coming in?

JM: Right. That's where you saw it. And that's right when they should have stopped it. But they didn't see it, I guess, until it was really bad.

RS: How do you and your coworkers feel about this business of the free trade? Now you know -- I guess you've heard [00:27:00] they're -- the president wants a free trade pact with Mexico, which may kill off the rest of the garment industry.

JM: Oh my. Well, I don't have that many more years in it. But I do feel bad for the ones that are young. There are some young ones in our mill. They're not that young. But they have families to raise. Hey, I don't like to see it come. I think that they're destroying this country really.

Little by little. And if they don't take care of their own first, I don't know what it's going to come to.

RS: What do you think the government should do? Federal government?

JM: I have no idea. I don't --

RS: Restrict imports? Or actually --

JM: Well, I don't know how they have agreements to their trade and that. I don't know. But I think it should be that -- it should be restricted. That it doesn't take away [00:28:00] from our country. To the point where there's so many out of work, 'cause there's a lot of mouths to feed right here. And we do need the work. If they've got to be out of jobs in that and then somebody else sends work in here for whatever, it isn't fair. It isn't right.

RS: Twenty-five thousand garment workers' jobs have been lost in eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the last 15 years.

JM: I believe it.

RS: Twenty-five thousand.

JM: I've seen a lot of mills close. Not that I worked in but around here. I know it's going down. There's only a handful left anymore. Right in this area.

RS: Where do the women go or people go when their -- these mills shut down?

JM: Well, there are some of them that are retiring. In fact, there's probably quite a few that have been in long enough to retire. But the ones who aren't, they have gone in -- I know some of them have gone into different trades. There's some that have gone in to [00:29:00] nurse's aides. I've known of people that have gone to, like, the crayon place here in Easton -- some have gone to M&M in Hackettstown. They try and get in -- some try and get in the mill if they have no way of getting to these other places and they need something local. They try and get into another mill. And there's not that many left anymore. There isn't that much around here really to go into. Some have gone to these fast food places to work, but there isn't a whole lot around here other than the blouse mills.

RS: Do you think this has -- this kind of decline has affected people's attitudes toward work or toward the companies in your experience?

JM: Well, I don't -- well, I guess they just feel there's no future anymore [00:30:00] in it for one thing. And I don't know.

RS: Well, let me ask the question this way. There's been a lot of complaints [phone ringing] about the productivity of the American worker. American workers aren't as good as foreign workers. What do you think about that? Do you

think that's true?

JM: You mean what they put out?

RS: Yeah.

JM: Well, I don't know how it is in other places, but I do know in a blouse mill you work. You don't fool around. You have to produce. And I have always put -- and most of the girls. I will speak for most of them. They put in a good day's work.

RS: So they really work hard.

JM: Oh yeah.

RS: Steady.

JM: Steady is the word. Yes. There is no fooling around. In fact, they don't even want you to talk. And sometimes they even time you when you go to the ladies' room. Not in this mill. I've never had that. But I've known [00:31:00] of people that have told me that. And it's just -- in fact when I had -- in our church, in our youth group, they wanted different people to give something on their vocations for the youth. And when I went up to talk to them and tell 'em -- this is some of the things I said. And it was all negative. And I couldn't tell them anything good, that I could encourage them to go into a blouse mill with. I just felt that there was no future there for them. You have to work hard. There's no fooling around. You're



not supposed to talk. You only have a limited time to go to the bath-- ladies' room or whatever. And you can't take time off. You can if you have to. I mean, if it's necessary. But you've got to work. And the wages are not that high there. And there isn't a great increase in it. So the benefits were there. There's [00:32:00] benefits there, but as far as bettering yourself, you're not going to do it there. There's not that big a field to expand in. And I felt bad that -- I just felt bad that I couldn't encourage them. But I told the truth. So --

RS: You worked what? Seven, eight hours a day?

JM: Seven.

RS: Seven hours a day. You get a lunch hour, a half hour?

JM: A half hour lunch. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

RS: So six and a half hours you're pretty much working steadily.

JM: Oh, we work seven hours.

RS: Seven hours.

JM: Yeah.

RS: They don't count the lunch hour.

JM: No. Mm-mmm. That's extra.

RS: What time do you go in in the morning?

JM: Seven thirty.

RS: Seven thirty.

JM: Mm-hmm. I work till 3:00.

RS: Until 3:00.

JM: Mm-hmm. They were talking about -- when this contract come up, they were talking about going back to eight hours. But that never came about.

RS: How did everybody feel about that?

JM: Mm-mmm. They didn't want to do it. (laughs) [00:33:00]  
The majority of girls you heard, they didn't want to go back to eight hours again. No.

RS: Even for the extra money?

JM: No. See? You'd of have to work eight hours before you got any time and a half, any overtime.

RS: Well, that's true. Do you get much time and a half?  
Overtime?

JM: No. Not a lot. I could have had more, but I didn't go in on Saturday. I just -- There's some girls that get quite a bit of it. But I didn't go in. I could have had some, not an abundance of it, but I could have had some. But I figure five days is enough. If I was younger, maybe then I would put the time in. Or if I was by myself, I would probably want to work more. But I think in my 35 hours a week, I figure is enough for me in the blouse mill.

RS: Especially after 27 years.

JM: Yeah. Right. (laughs)

RS: What's the [00:34:00] -- you said your feelings were pretty negative because there doesn't seem to be much of a future. Do the other women feel this way?

JM: Oh yeah.

RS: They do.

JM: They don't enjoy being there. It's not a job that you -- if you can make the money, that's all they're there for. Someone who is on piece rate. They try. They try their best to make as much as they can, if they know they're going to make it. But it isn't that they're going in there and going to enjoy it. What they're doing.

RS: Was it always this way? Did you feel -- or did they feel -- differently years ago?

JM: I don't think so. I don't think so. It's the same thing. And it's constant. I mean, you don't get a break. You just -- well, you can. What I mean is it's just all the time. You're moving, and you're producing all the time. And it's constant. And you're tired. When you get my age, [00:35:00] I'm tired when I come home from there.

RS: Right. There's no (inaudible).

JM: No. There isn't. That's why I say my five days a week is plenty for me. I don't know how anybody else feels. But I think the majority of them do, even the -- my sister, Teri. I think she would say the same thing. That she'll be glad

when she can retire from the blouse mill.

RS: How do you feel about management? Do you think they could make your working life easier there?

JM: No. No. I think they've done what they can. But you just have to -- they have to have the production in order to get the work out. If not with the production, they also want the perfection.

RS: Right.

JM: And it doesn't always work that way. Either you do the job right or (laughs) you do it fast. You can't do both.

RS: Right. Mm-hmm.

JM: Nobody can, that I know of, that they're gonna do a really good job [00:36:00] and do it fast.

RS: Do you think this is related to the competition?

JM: Mm-hmm.

RS: That this is forcing everybody to --

JM: Produce.

RS: -- produce like this.

JM: Yeah. Whether you are making piece rate or whether you are not, you still have to produce. Like I say, there -- I don't think there's a girl in there -- or she wouldn't be in there very long -- that doesn't produce, because you just have to put out as much as you can on the jobs that you have. They expect that of you. They have a deadline

to meet too. And if they don't meet it, I don't know what happens, if they're stuck with the garments or what. So they have to get it out. And sometimes they -- they have quite a bit of work over there where I am. And sometimes it's rough. If the girls aren't in all, of them, and the ones that they need, some of them are out sick or taking personal days or whatever. And it throws them off. It isn't always easy for them either [00:37:00] because it still has to go out at a certain time. And they've got to get all the operations done somehow.

RS: And it's always been this way.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. They always have that deadline to meet. They have to have the garment done at a certain time. And wherever it's supposed to be at.

RS: When the industry began to decline, what -- did you think about this at all?

JM: Yeah. I was wondering what I was going to do if -- and especially when the first mill that I worked in closed down. I didn't know where I was gonna -- I just hated to start at another mill, 'cause I was so used to working there all those years. And it was just the idea of going to work for somebody else and not knowing what you were going to be doing. And basically, it's the same operations. But you just don't know what that employer is

gonna be like. But I really never had no problem with any of them as far as that goes. [00:38:00] Just the fact that you're going into a new environment and the -- that -- and then you didn't know when there was so many of them closing up around here. You just didn't know who all was going to be able to go to these mills and have a job for everyone.

RS: Right.

JM: And I just take it day by day. I figure, "Hey, if I've got a job, I've got one." I can feel that way because I have my husband, and he's working. But if I was the only one working, I would really be worried. And there are some people that are working in the mill that are self-supporting. And they have families. They have young ones. And that would be scary for me. Yeah. That would be scary.

RS: They are worried, then?

JM: Oh yeah. I'm sure. About the security of their jobs. And the work. That they have enough of it.

RS: Do you think anything could be done about this [00:39:00] industry? We talked about restricting imports. Is there anything management you think could do to improve the industry, to make it more competitive?

JM: I don't think so. I don't think there is. You would probably have to talk to (inaudible).

[INTERRUPTION]

RS: You do use modern machinery.

JM: Oh yeah.

RS: You get modern, updated machinery.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

RS: Where do most of your machines come from? Are they American machines or foreign machines?

JM: I don't think they are. I think they're made -- I'm not positive of it. Like they had Juki, and I think that's made in Japan. Yeah.

RS: Japan. Right.

JM: And Singer. We have a lot of Singers in there now. I don't know if they're made in Japan or not anymore.

RS: [If they're made here, I don't know where they are?]  
(overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

JM: I was gonna say, I think most of them probably are made in Japan. Yeah. Yeah.

RS: [00:40:00] Which is different, I guess, from when you started.

JM: Yeah. I would say so. I think most of this -- we had mostly Singers and Union Specials. And I think most of them were made right here at that time. I would think so anyway. But today most of the things are made in other countries.

RS: Other countries. Mm-hmm. Do you think your lifestyle, the way of you live, is better now than it was say 15, 20 years ago? Material conditions?

JM: I think so. Yeah. I think so.

RS: So you don't feel that your standard of living or anything has declined?

JM: No. I don't feel that way.

RS: I didn't ask you earlier, how many children do you have?

JM: Two.

RS: Two.

JM: There's one of them. (laughs)

RS: There's one of them. Hi.

JM: Yeah. That's her.

RS: What ages are they?

JM: Well, my oldest is 28, and Doug is 24.

RS: [00:41:00] So they're adults.

JM: Right. It was a little rough when they were -- when we were raising them. It was rough. It was building a home or buying a home and then putting them through school and that. But now it's -- I would say, it isn't hard. It isn't rough for us now.

RS: Right.

JM: But it is for young people starting out on those families.

RS: Do you think the young people starting out now, the younger



women for example, in your mill, have it tougher than you had it back in the '50s and early '60s?

JM: In what way do you mean?

RS: Well harder to make a living, to make ends meet?

JM: Oh yeah. Because of the economy. How everything is so high and expensive. And everything has gone up. And the wages have gone up but not that much. They haven't gone up as much as the economy.

RS: Prices.

JM: Yeah. Prices. Yeah. It just [00:42:00] hasn't been keeping up with that. Not in the blouse mills anyway.

RS: Do you have any idea how the percentage of wages have increased over say 20 years? Do you have a ballpark figure on it?

JM: I know when I first started in the blouse mills I think I was getting like \$0.65 an hour.

RS: \$0.65.

JM: Mm-hmm. And that was, like I say, back in 1953 or '54. So it's come up.

RS: But not as much as the prices (laughs) have gone up.

JM: Well, this is it.

RS: Would you do it over again?

JM: Well, hey, if I had nowhere else to go, I would. Yes. There isn't that -- like I said, there isn't that much

around here. And if it's a job and you need the income, yeah. I'll go in there. [00:43:00] Because I can say that because I have the experience. But I think I would try it. Yes. If I was starting out. But there's so much other opportunity out there today as far -- with your schooling and that. Back when I was school there wasn't that much there. I don't know. I would go in there because I know what it is and I -- that's all I know. I can say that now.

RS: You've seen a lot of changes in Bangor, I'm sure, and in this area.

JM: Oh yeah. Yeah.

RS: What impact do you think the decline of the garments industry in this area has had on this community? You mentioned the church, for example. You're active in the church. What sort of impact has it had? What effect has it had? I know a lot of -- you said -- mentioned a lot of women workers went to other places. But what about the communities at home, do you think it's had an impact on the [00:44:00] community?

JM: Well, I can't really see it. I don't know what way -- what you're looking for. Maybe I don't understand what you're looking -- what you're trying to tell or asking me for.

RS: Well, was Bangor or Pen Argyl a more pleasant place to live in, to be in?

JM: Not really. No. I don't think so. I think they've sort of adjusted, finding other places of employment. I don't know. I don't think there is that many people -- I don't know of that many out of work, but I have seen a lot over in the unemployment lines when we were down from the blouse mills. But I don't think there's that many over there now in our local unemployment office. So I think they've probably gotten [00:45:00] jobs other places.

RS: Or moved.

JM: Or moved. Yes.

RS: Do you know of any families who worked -- who did move out of the area?

JM: Mm-mmm. No.

RS: So most of them--

JM: They, more or less, found jobs right around here.

RS: In other words, they're a pretty stable community -- people. Generally kind of stay here.

JM: Yes.

RS: Who, like yourself, don't necessarily move away. Do you think that the -- has the -- has the companies done anything for the community in the years that you've worked there? Sponsored teams? Do they have community picnics?

JM: Mm-mmm.

RS: Do they donate to things? They haven't done any, as far as

you know.

JM: Not that I know. I've never heard of it anyway. I don't know if [redacted] might have done something. [name redacted]. He might have. But I can't -- maybe my husband would know something. But all the other companies, I don't know of anything. [00:46:00] Any sponsoring of any teams or anything. Maybe a bowling team or something. I don't know. But I never -- I don't know that I've ever heard of a blouse mill sponsoring one. (laughs)

RS: In other words, they use the labor. Period.

JM: Right.

RS: That's it.

JM: That's what I would say.

RS: Are most -- yes. Go on.

JM: I was just gonna say that one thing that they do over at [redacted] -- they, like, have a Christmas party for you. And some of the mills do. But they usually put on a nice meal. He has a catering service also. And then we bring the desserts like -- and also they have a Halloween party for the girls. And they let them dress up and come in the mill like that if they want to. You don't have to. You can if you want to. And then they have a little get together party for that too. That's something that they didn't do at the other mills where I was.

RS: Are most of the owners local people too?

JM: Mm-hmm. Yes.

RS: [00:47:00] They're not -- it's not money from New York.

JM: No. Mm-mmm. They're right around here.

RS: Is that unusual? Or is that the way it's always been?

JM: That's the way it's always been. The mills I've worked in they're just -- they live right here. Mm-hmm.

RS: So they're also part of the community.

JM: Mm-hmm. Right.

RS: Because there's a -- a lot of people have the idea that these -- a lot of these operators are --

JM: From New York?

RS: -- from New York. It was true to some extent in Wilkes-Barre.

JM: Oh yeah?

RS: Yeah.

JM: No. The ones around here live right here in this area. I don't know of any that's come from New York. I know some that --

[INTERRUPTION]

RS: Right. But that's okay. You're aware, of course, that Bethlehem Steel has suffered tremendous losses, unemployment, and other metal industries have in Easton, Bethlehem, Allentown, this whole area. What do you think

about that? How do you feel about that? Do you feel the government should be doing something to protect the American --

JM: [00:48:00] Absolutely.

RS: -- industry?

JM: Absolutely. That's imports too again. I mean you see it everywhere. Everywhere you go. In shoes and clothing and radios and TVs. And you don't see too much that's made in USA anymore.

RS: Right. Mm-hmm.

JM: And that is very scary. And definitely there should be -- there should have been something done long ago. Because it's gone so far that I don't know if they're ever going to recover it. I really don't.

RS: Would you support the government programs that would try to bring back these industries?

JM: Oh yeah. Absolutely. Anything is worth a try, if they could do something to reverse it. I would like to see that happen.

RS: Do other people you work with feel that way?

JM: I'm sure. I'm sure they do 'cause they also have husbands and family that have lost [00:49:00] jobs. And there isn't that much industry right around here. Bethlehem Steel is big. And Mack Truck was another one.

RS: Right. They're gone.

JM: Yeah.

RS: They're gone.

JM: Yeah. And Collins & Aikman up here in Pen Argyl. They were big -- had a lot of workers there. I guess over at Blue Ridge over in Bangor. That was another pretty good size company. They're gone.

MD: I took pictures over there.

JM: Did you?

MD: That's what brought me to this area, to Bethlehem.

JM: Is it? Yeah. There's hardly anything left around here. And the blouse mills, there's only a handful of them left. And the railroad is gone.

RS: The railroad is gone.

JM: That was another thing. The knitting mills that were around here, they're gone. There was a big suit factory over in Bangor that employed a lot of people over there. And that's gone.

RS: When did that [00:50:00] disappear?

JM: Well, that was probably back in 1960s, I think that was.

RS: Nineteen sixties.

JM: Yeah. Because there was some of the girls -- that was the Amalgamated Union, and some of the girls came from there over to the one mill that I was working in. They lost

their union benefits there. But then they were able to pick up in the ILG.

RS: Of course the slate industry is gone.

JM: Yeah. That's another one. That was a -- yeah. A big industry around here. There's just hardly anything left. But the people are surviving. I mean I don't say they're making great wages, but they're surviving.

RS: How are they managing to do that?

JM: I don't know. I think around our age group we've come from the era where you struggled [00:51:00] in your family when you were raised. And it was hard. And you're used to doing without a lot of things. I mean --

RS: Our generation especially.

JM: Right. I mean you don't want for everything. You know there's things that you need, and some things that you'd like to have. And you can get them. But for everything, you don't want. And you have been taught that from little on up.

RS: Yeah. I have a great deal of difficulty in pressing this on my own children.

JM: Yeah.

RS: (laughs) My 19-year-old son thinks that -- I called him the "entitled generation." They're entitled to everything.  
(laughter)



JM: Well, they want everything right away. Yeah.

RS: Right away.

JM: Right away. And it doesn't work that way. I mean then they get themselves so bogged down that the -- they can't get out under.

RS: Right.

JM: They want everything that mom and dad had. It took us all these years to get. But they want it now.

RS: They want it now.

JM: Right. Yeah. They can't wait. They have [00:52:00] -- they're an instant generation. (laughs)

RS: Right. Well that's -- I see it in my students too.

JM: Oh yeah.

RS: Oh yeah.

JM: I can imagine. Yeah.

RS: Yeah. Uh-huh.

JM: But if they came up the hard way, why, they would realize the value of things. And I have -- our boys are -- they're pretty much that way. Well I don't say that they don't want for things. But they can wait because they've had to wait. We've never given them that much. We've made them always work for what they had. Not that hard. But they had to know that they had to earn it.

RS: Earn it. Right.

JM: Right. It wasn't gonna be just handed to them. And they've come to know the value of things a little bit better. Neither one of them went to college. Our oldest boy went to diesel school, which was only several months. But they're earning it. They have a trade. And they're earning a living through that. And they're doing all right [00:53:00] for themselves. So they didn't really want to go to school. So we never pushed it.

RS: They're both working regularly?

JM: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah.

RS: When did your husband start his business?

JM: Twenty-five years ago.

RS: Twenty-five years.

JM: Yeah. And that was part time. He was working at [redacted] as a parts man at that time. And I think it was in 1969 when he went into it full time here, when we moved up here.

RS: Between that and your work, you managed it.

JM: Right.

RS: You managed to make it.

JM: Mm-hmm.

RS: Is there any other thing you think the government could do to help people today? Any other kinds of programs? Employment programs? Healthcare? Things like this? We're

hearing a lot of talk about healthcare (laughs) especially lately with the recent election.

JM: [00:54:00] Well, I'll tell you. If it wouldn't be for my hospitalization, I don't think I would be in the blouse mill yet. And that's what I meant when I said that I'm working basically for the benefits.

RS: For the benefits.

JM: Yeah.

RS: For that medical.

JM: Yeah. Yes. In fact, that's why I went back in again. I was going to stay home when I came out of [redacted] that time. Well, it would have cost us, at that time, like \$900 every three months. And right now, it's probably about \$1,000 or more. So I figured I might as well go back in because I'm covered fully myself with the union. And my husband is a dependent. And his is only like close to \$300 every three months. And that's cheap. But if they would do something with the health care, the government -- I don't -- I've heard different ones say that if they have this [00:55:00] -- what is it? That the government -- they were looking for them. I'm trying to think of the word. The health care program.

MD: National --

JM: Huh?

MD: National healthcare?

JM: Well, whatever it is that they said that there's only certain doctors you're going to be able to pick out to go to.

RS: Right.

JM: And then you're going to have to wait so long that if you have an emergency or whatever, you're going to have to go to another doctor anyway and pay the price. Whether it will bring the cost down or not that way, I don't know. I would have to really see both sides of it before I would ever make that decision because if it would come to that, I don't know if it would benefit the people. But it's -- there should be really a ceiling, I think, put on these prices that people can charge for things especially something as important as health care. 'Cause there's people, I know of a party -- she's passed away now.

[00:56:00] But she was telling me that it was a difference of either eating or buying her medicine. And that should never be. And she had cancer. And something as important as that, they shouldn't have to make a decision. I think that should be available to them. That they don't have to worry about that. That's one thing that they should look into. The price of medicine and what the doctors charge and the hospitals. I mean there's too much waste, I think,

to begin with. I've known -- my mother-in-law was in the hospital recently. And every time they cut a bandage off or something off they throw the scissors away.

RS: Right.

JM: They throw them away. I couldn't believe that. I just couldn't believe that. And I don't know why they do it. But it's -- this is why [00:57:00] there has to be something done with the waste that people are doing. I don't know if there's a reason behind it or what. But I just think there has to be some kind of ceiling put on the prices. If they can do that, I don't know. I have no idea. But everything is just getting so out of hand, price-wise, even the rent. Everything. It's so hard for the young people to get a start and just to pay their rent alone. My son that was here, he's living with his in-laws. They had moved in with them. The in-laws had moved in with them just was going to be for a short time, but it's been three years now that they've lived together.

RS: Well, this is happening more and more.

JM: It's going to be more and more too I'm thinking. Yeah. You find it. Well, we know several people that their children have moved back home with them. Families. 'Cause they couldn't make it.

RS: [00:58:00] Yeah. Children's families?

JM: Yeah. Yeah. It's just their work -- they're laid off of work, or their work is slow. Hey, they got to eat. They got to live. And what you get for unemployment doesn't cover it all.

RS: Right.

JM: Mm-mmm.

RS: Have you ever collected unemployment? I mean, I guess you have.

JM: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Not a whole lot. Well, at [redacted], I believe I collected more there than I did anywhere else I worked, 'cause I worked pretty steady those places. But there, I did, because I was laid off quite a bit.

RS: Martin, do you have any questions?

MD: No.

RS: Okay.

MD: (inaudible).

RS: Yeah.

END OF AUDIO FILE