

Copy of FaraceRosalie_20210617

BRIAN ALNUTT: Okay, so I'm going to start. I'm Dr. Brian Alnutt, and I'm interviewing -- would you pronounce your name?

ROSALIE FARACE: Rosalie Farace.

BA: Rosalie Farace.

RF: Yes.

BA: And this is part of my oral history of the Lehigh Valley apparel workers, which I'm doing as part of the Lehigh Valley Engaged Humanities Consortium, which is an intercollegiate operation. So we're meeting, and we're actually here at Wind Park, very nice place to meet. And I'm just going to ask a few questions, you know? First of all, where were you born?

RF: Phillipsburg.

BA: Phillipsburg, you mentioned that before, but I have to ask. Phillipsburg, New Jersey.

RF: Yes.

BA: Okay, I'll put it closer. Phillipsburg, and did you grow up there? Or --

RF: Yes. Yes. I was there until I got married, so 1966.

BA: Sixty-six, okay. And where did you move [00:01:00] after that?

RF: Roseto, Pennsylvania.

BA: Roseto, Pennsylvania. Okay. What was your highest education level, did you --

RF: High school.

BA: Graduated high school? Okay. And then did you have any plans when you grew up, your career plans? Or what did you think you might do as you --

RF: Well, I did go to beauty school.

BA: Okay.

RF: I was a hairdresser for a while.

BA: Is that right?

RF: Yes.

BA: How did you like that?

RF: It was good.

BA: Couldn't do it to me.

RF: (laughs) No. You'd lose patience with you.

BA: Yeah. There's nothing to do. So when did you get involved in the apparel, in the clothing business?

RF: When I got married.

BA: When you got married?

RF: My husband's parents had a mill.

BA: Ah, okay.

RF: So I worked for them at the mill. Then [00:02:00] I had a baby, so I was home a lot. And in between work, then I had another baby.

BA: Okay. Do you recall the name of that mill they had?

RF: Yeah, it was Quality Garment.

BA: Quality Garment. Okay.

RF: Yes. There's pictures in here.

BA: Mm-hmm. Okay. In your -book-

RF: There's a bunch of pictures.

BA: Okay. What did they make? What was their specialty?

RF: Blouses.

BA: Blouses, okay.

RF: That was the big thing.

BA: Okay.

RF: And when I was young, my mother worked in Phillipsburg.

BA: Oh, okay.

RF: Blouses.

BA: Blouses also?

RF: I had all kinds of blouses.

BA: My goodness. Was there any particular brand the made there? Do you remember any famous --

RF: Oh geez, I don't remember.

BA: Okay, but blouses. What was your job on the line? What was your first job?

RF: Trimming. [00:03:00] Packing. I didn't sew in the beginning.

BA: Okay, trimming.

RF: Then I learned.

BA: Okay. How did they teach you? Was it -- who did the training, through --

RF: For sewing?

BA: Sewing, yeah.

RF: I was at another mill.

BA: Oh, okay.

RF: And the boss said to me, "Come and sit here at this machine." And I said, "I can't sew." She said, "Can you drive a car?" She said, "Do you know how to work the pedals?" So I learned a little bit at a time.

BA: Just like driving a car. Just like driving --

RF: Yeah, that foot, you keep it going. Yeah.

BA: Was that all paid on piecework? Was it paid by the piece, do you recall?

RF: Well, both.

BA: Both, okay.

RF: If you really were good and worked fast, you could make out well. But I never [00:04:00] did.

BA: Oh, okay. Did they have, like, a quota that they wanted you to make every hour or something? Was there a --

RF: They tried, but some just can't, you know. Either you have it or you don't. This was my in-laws'.

BA: Oh, Quality Garment. Oh my gosh! Okay. And your husband was right there.

RF: Yeah.

BA: Oh, my gosh.

RF: Didn't know him then.

BA: So you married into the company, okay.

RF: Yes.

BA: Nice. Nice.

RF: Yes, this was his parents'.

BA: Okay. Now how long did you stay at Quality Garment? How long were you there for, about? Do you remember?

RF: Two or three years. Then they sold the business.

BA: Oh, okay. And did you move on to another mill then?

RF: Yes. Yes. I (inaudible) a lot.

BA: A lot.

RF: And they kept closing, [00:05:00] and the same thing. He'd go somewhere else, and they'd close.

BA: Huh! Was it because --

RF: The business was going out.

BA: So -- okay, you began to see that.

RF: Because of the imports.

BA: I heard all about that, and it just began --

RF: That killed it.

BA: Yeah. Yeah. Did you move on to other companies in Roseto?
Was it mostly in Roseto where you were?

RF: Most of them, yes. Then there was one in Bangor.

BA: Oh, okay.

RF: Then when I retired from A & H, that closed in Nazareth.

BA: Right, yeah.

RF: And our group is called "displaced workers," all us girls
got thrown out the door, and there was nowhere to go.

BA: My goodness. That's the story of it, you know. It's sad,
but that's the true story all over the Lehigh Valley.

RF: Yes. Yes.

BA: I saw [00:06:00] that happening in the '80s and '90s, yeah.

RF: They're all gone.

BA: All gone.

RF: Because of imports to Mexico, here, there.

BA: I'm just going to have a couple of questions. Did you have
friends in the mill? Were you able to have friends that
come in to work with you? Or just made friends with --

RF: I made friends.

BA: Made friends in there. Okay.

RF: Yeah. All these girls from that group, I didn't know any
of them. We made friends.

BA: You made friends there.

RF: Yes.

BA: And everyone --

RF: And everywhere I went, you met somebody else.

BA: That is so nice.

RF: Yeah.

BA: So it was a pretty friendly atmosphere in most of the mills?

RF: Most of them.

BA: Most of them?

RF: Yes.

BA: Mostly ladies? Were there any men working on the --

RF: A few. Not such a lot.

BA: And were they doing the same jobs women were doing?

RF: Some, yeah.

BA: Same thing.

RF: But the money from it, the money was not good.

BA: Oh, okay, compared to what else a male could do.

RF: Right. Yeah.

BA: I see. So [00:07:00] men tended to move in other businesses?

RF: Right. Right.

BA: I see.

RF: Because my husband, when he retired, he was working, there was a place in Bangor called Bear Automotive.

BA: Yeah, I've heard about that. Mm-hmm. Yeah?

RF: Well, guess what? It closed, and he lost his job. I think that's when he retired.

BA: Well, I'm sorry to hear about that. It's a lot of closings, a story of a lot of closings. I think there's one, isn't there one big company still around here? Majestic, or something? They make athletic --

RF: Yeah, they moved. Where are they? (inaudible)?

F2: (inaudible), I think.

BA: (inaudible).

RF: (inaudible), yeah. You could see it coming up 33, in there somewhere.

BA: Okay, yeah, I think I did. And they're still making the uniforms.

RF: Yes. They make all the baseball -- yeah. But it's not [00:08:00] Majestic anymore.

F2: They're Fanatics, I think.

BA: Fanatics.

F2: Fanatics.

BA: They changed the name.

F2: Yeah.

RF: In fact, what, a couple of years ago, the governor went there. They were going to take it away.

BA: Oh!

RF: The new company. But he talked them into staying.

BA: I see. That was good. Were most of the businesses you worked unionized? Was the union most of them?

RF: Yes.

BA: Okay. And did they get along pretty -- were their relations good with the management? Or was it --

RF: I think so. Yeah.

BA: If there were any issues, did the union help the ladies resolve them?

RF: I guess on occasion. But that's when you would get a raise.

BA: Union?

RF: Through the union.

BA: Okay.

RF: A perc-- every year, and percentage.

BA: An increase, yeah, like, percentage. And a new contract, of course, would be coming up.

RF: Yes. And then they'd always say, [00:09:00] "We're on strike." I think I would (inaudible), if we had a strike maybe three, four days.

BA: Okay. Was that the only strike you ever --

RF: That I participated in.

BA: Okay. What was that like? Did you actually have to picket outside the mill? With signs?

RF: Yes. We'd sit and they'd say, "No, you've got to keep walking."

BA: But only three days, it was over. Did you get what you wanted? Did the union get that they wanted? Do you remember?

RF: I don't remember. That was a good 50 or more years.

BA: Okay.

RF: I'm out of work six years, in fact, around now.

BA: Is that right? Okay. Well, you continued on quite late in working life.

RF: I quit at 72.

BA: Retired at 72? Oh my gosh!

RF: Yeah.

BA: I might do that.

RF: Maybe I would have kept going a few more years --

BA: How about that?

RF: -- if it wouldn't [00:10:00] have closed.

BA: I'll tell you a little story, it's not in this interview. But I read a story in the *Morning Call* paper, about 10 years ago. A lady up in Scranton was working in a clothing mill, she was 100 years old.

F2: Wow!

BA: Full time. She was there at 6:00 a.m. She said, "I just don't want to retire." She was 100 years old.

RF: That's a bit much. First you've got to make it to --

BA: That's right. Gee whiz. Now did the mills have -- did the mills have different feels to them? Did one mill have a friendlier feel to it than the others?

RF: Yes. Some bosses were terrible.

BA: Oh, is that right?

RF: I worked -- it was called Merry Maid in Bangor.

BA: Merry Maid?

RF: It was okay when I was there, but I heard stories about the manager before that said he was [00:11:00] horrible. He'd swear at the girls, he'd make them cry. So I saw this man one time. He was happy, he loved when he made somebody cry.

BA: My gosh! My gosh. And he stayed on doing that? Oh my gosh, that doesn't seem the way to build --

RF: And he wasn't the owner. He was just --

BA: The manager.

RF: Yeah.

BA: And the union wasn't able to stop him from doing it, I guess.

RF: I guess not.

BA: Did the companies have, like, nice benefits for you? Like nice time off, or, you know --?

RF: Well, you got two weeks in the summer vacation, Christmas we got a week, and some holidays.

RF: Mm-hmm, so regular benefits, yeah.

RF: Yeah.

BA: Now tell me something else, because you mentioned something before I began recording about taking summers off and then the high school. How did that work? [00:12:00] The ladies got to take summers off to child care?

RF: Yeah. And high school kids would look for jobs, so they'd go to the mills.

BA: So they would work in the summer.

RF: Yeah. You did one summer.

F2: I know.

RF: She had enough!

BA: Now and they would go back to school, I guess, then.

RF: Right. They'd go back --

BA: Then the regular work would come back.

RF: Then we'd come back.

BA: Okay. Were you mostly on day shift? Or did the place work all --

RF: Day shift. Day.

BA: Did they work 24 hours, any of the mills?

RF: No.

BA: No, all day shift.

RF: No, all days. Because these people had to be home for their children and their husband to cook.

BA: All right, mm-hmm. So the companies respected that.

RF: Yes.

BA: The schedule was set, you could get home and be with your family. Okay. What about injuries? I was going to ask just various questions, did people feel safe on the job? Because I've heard [00:13:00] many people getting their fingers sewed, and things like that. Did that happen some?

RF: But not too much.

BA: Not too bad.

RF: Yeah. You had to watch.

BA: Right.

RF: And they did put a safety thing by the needle.

BA: Okay.

RF: If you got your finger caught, it was your fault.

BA: Oh. (laughs) Be careful.

RF: Yes. Yes.

BA: I would just have my fingers all pricked up. I know I would have my fingers all punctured.

RF: No, there's a guard, a needle guard, so you shouldn't do it.

BA: Now did they -- did the ladies, because there was mostly ladies working there, did the company allow flexibility if

a child was sick, or something? If you had to do something special at home? Was there a chance to get --

RF: Well, they had to because there were so many mills.

BA: Right

RF: They couldn't get help then.

BA: Oh, okay. Okay.

RF: Of course, many times I'd get phone calls. [redacted by interviewee]

RF: Had to leave. What are you going to do?

BA: Yeah, yeah. That's true, yeah.

RF: That's it. Or they got sick, you had to go pick them up.

BA: Yeah. And the company was -- companies were pretty good about that?

RF: Yes. They had to be.

BA: Had to, because there were choices for ladies, because --

RF: Yes, because if they said to you, "Well, then you don't have a job," there was nobody to replace you.

BA: Ah, okay.

RF: Of course there were so many mills.

BA: Imagine that! Imagine that. So you could pick and choose where you wanted to go.

RF: There were people [00:15:00] getting out of here quick, go next door.

BA: That's nice. That's a good situation to have for a working person.

RF: For a worker, yes. Yeah.

BA: It is. It is. But then you said you started to see places closing up.

RF: Yes.

BA: Any idea when that was? Do you remember about which --

RF: I would say in the '90s.

BA: Nineties is when it began.

RF: Yeah.

BA: Imports, mostly?

RF: Yep.

BA: Because I've seen --

RF: I forget which president at the time.

BA: It would have been Bill Clinton probably. Probably Bill Clinton, yeah, I'm thinking, yeah.

RF: Yeah.

BA: And then the imports, and one after another --

RF: Yes. Yeah.

BA: -- they start closing down.

RF: Yeah. I worked at this place near (inaudible) in Bangor. They opened a mill in Mexico.

BA: I have to grab that. I'll be right back. So they opened a mill in Mexico? [00:16:00]

RF: Yes.

BA: And then they moved down there?

RF: And A & H, where we all came from, they moved. I forget where they went.

BA: Mm-hmm? And it was shrinking up. I was going to ask, were most of the ladies there -- Roseto, of course, is mostly an Italian town, almost. Were there mostly Italian workers there?

RF: It was then.

BA: Then?

RF: It has changed.

BA: Okay, now.

RF: As people die, they sell the homes, different people, nationalities, move in.

BA: Oh, I see. Okay.

RF: Other people, you don't know.

BA: A lot of change over in the town, yeah, I see.

RF: Yeah. Yeah.

BA: But I know Roseto was actually famous for being one of the most Italian towns in Pennsylvania for a long time.

RF: Yes. Now at our church, one priest is from India, [00:17:00] one's from Fiji, and the other one, Africa.

BA: How about that? How about that?

F2: Very nice.

BA: Things are changing, then. It's interesting.

RF: Even we had two priests there for years. They were brothers.

BA: How about that?

RF: They both died within the last year, too.

BA: That's something.

RF: They were up there, in their nineties. Yeah. So they said we're going to keep the churches still open.

BA: That's good to hear. I was going to ask, were there any people -- let's see. I know the population, nationality, I think in Bangor there were a lot of Welsh people, believe it or not.

RF: Yes.

BA: Were any of them working in the mills with you?

RF: Oh, yes.

BA: Okay, quite a few still? Okay.

RF: In fact, my in-laws' mill, they had a little bus type van. And my husband [00:18:00] had to go pick up about 10 women every morning. He'd start up there, go to (inaudible) --

BA: How about that?

RF: -- and pick up some of these women. But they spoiled it. They took them home for lunch, they'd pick them up again. And they'd take them home at night. And I thought, why can't they eat lunch there? He's come home lunchtime, eat

a sandwich, have to run out the door to go pick up the women.

BA: (laughs) I have never heard of anything like that. That's quite a service they were doing.

RF: They did that, though. I don't say the lunch bit, but the women didn't drive in those days.

BA: Didn't drive? Okay.

RF: Mother never drove.

BA: Yeah, my grandmother didn't drive, either. That's a much older time period, but she never did. I think a lot of women back then really didn't, you know?

RF: And they only had one car.

BA: That's the other thing. That's the other thing.

[00:19:00] Yeah, because it was not the 1950s that most families got the two cars, a lot of people just had one, if they had any. I live in a place called New Tripoli, which is way out there. And I was told that our farm families, some of them just had horse and buggy until 1950 or so, seriously.

RF: Yeah. Well, this is a story that I heard when I was little, and my parents didn't have a car. So my mother had a bachelor brother, and of course you would go out 10:00, 11:00 at night to clubs, or whatever. So he'd let them

have the car on a Saturday night, and we'd go out and give him the car. We shared it with him.

BA: That's nice, yeah. Yeah.

RF: Because we couldn't afford a car.

BA: No. We forget about that, you know? Cars were expensive and they were a luxury. A lot of families did not have them. [00:20:00] Over in Bethlehem, many of the steel workers didn't have cars. They walked down the hill to work, and then they'd walk back up to their homes, yeah. It's sort of a luxury. Yeah. Oh, did the company have special -- any of the mills have special picnics for you, or things, because some of the ladies told me about outings they would do.

RF: Maybe a Christmas party.

BA: Christmas party.

RF: Any of the ones I worked at, no picnics.

BA: No picnics, just --

RF: And Christmas parties, they ended up at -- you worked until, say, 1:00, you were done. And we had a luncheon. That was it.

BA: Okay. Just right at the mill. Well, it's a party.

RF: Yes. Yes.

BA: It's not at a special banquet hall or anything, but it's a party, I suppose.

RF: Yeah.

BA: I was going to ask something else. Did the lad-- because most of the ladies had husbands who worked, obviously, I think.

RF: Yeah.

BA: Did the husbands -- because they're both working, you know. [00:21:00] Did the husbands fill in housework at home? Did they do their portion of the housework?

RF: Not much. They did the outside, the grass and snow.

BA: Right, things like that.

RF: Your dad never cooked.

F2: No.

BA: That's ladies' work, okay, so it's double. I've heard that from some other people, too, full time work and then home, housework, too.

RF: The only thing, when he retired, he did help me some. But he didn't cook.

BA: Okay. Well, maybe you were good at it. I'll trust that.

RF: Sure. I'd come home from work and cook.

BA: Yeah. You didn't bring me anything. (laughs) In any case, anything else you remember about those days? Any particular moment that stands out as an interesting moment, or --?

RF: Not that I can think of.

BA: Not too much? [00:22:00] Going to say, did you ever look beyond this area for work in a mill? Like, look down toward Easton, or out to Nazareth or anything?

RF: Because of my kids, I had to be close.

BA: Right. Close by, okay. That was a good -- that's a --

RF: But then as they got older, then I worked in Easton a while.

BA: Okay.

RF: For A & H.

BA: A & H, right.

RF: Then we moved to Nazareth to the -- I was out up here. But everybody stayed close because of the children.

BA: Okay. Well, that's nice. Did the ladies get together outside of work? Did you have friends that would just, you know, have get-togethers outside?

RF: Yeah, sometimes. Yeah. Yeah, we would.

BA: Would they tell you -- like, was there people would share information about other mills, like, oh, they're hiring over here, and it's good? Or they're hiring at this mill, and it's good? Would they talk about the other mills?

[00:23:00] No?

RF: You hated to change, unless you had to.

BA: Okay. So you'd stay there, consistency.

RF: In between all this, I worked at a daycare. I don't know a year [or so?], but then that's when my husband lost his job, so no health benefits out of daycare.

BA: Right.

RF: So I had to get out, get benefits.

BA: Right, right, who offered the -- yes. This is true today, too. Very much so.

RF: Yes.

BA: I forgot to ask, I'm almost finished with my thoughts here, but did you find the work was physically over the day hard to do? Like it became, over a work day, tiring?

RF: Sometime. Yeah. You'd get tired just sitting. She said, "I don't know how you did it," but you did [00:24:00] what you had to do.

BA: Well, yeah.

RF: It was tough, yeah.

BA: Mm-hmm. What was the hardest job in the mill? Of all the ladies you knew, what was the most difficult one? Was it -- I've heard men talk about the pressing work, you know. Some of the -- wasn't that mostly men who ran the -- I've heard, I had a guy I know that said --

RF: Oh, the big --

BA: -- the pressing, yeah.

RF: I never worked where they did that.

BA: Oh.

RF: There were jobs that were hard, and some of the ladies at the group, they did good work. I didn't do intricate things.

BA: Okay, just the sewing, but not the intricate --

RF: I sewed but not maybe putting a lot [of inks on?] stuff. But some of those jobs were hard.

BA: Mm-hmm. I was going to see if there was anything else I wanted to ask you, because you've been very thorough. This is really, really complete. [00:25:00] Oh wait, you mentioned what your husband did already, that's true. Do you think, like, women workers have improved their status over time in this area? You know, I mean more women working in the work force, it's more popular now, or something, do you think?

RF: Yeah. There's not too many woman home.

BA: That's true.

RF: Everybody works. You need to work.

BA: Yeah. That's pretty much it. I feel I covered most of the questions I was going to ask, you know? I think that's very thorough. Everyone has been so informative, you know? Good memories people have, you know? Yeah.

RF: Some days I'd go down in my basement, what did I come down
Well, I do that, too. I've been doing that for years.

[00:26:00] It's nothing new with me.

RF: A lot of things you forget, but I still keep going.

BA: Okay. I'm going to turn this off real quick. Hang on one
second. I'm going to push that off.

END OF AUDIO FILE