

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in the Mills during World War II

Personal Experience

O. H. 1371

ELMA M. BEATTY

Interviewed

by

Joseph Lambert

on

October 5, 1990

Elma M. Beatty

Mrs. Elma M. Beatty was born on August 3, 1921 in Youngstown, Ohio. She was born to parents, Goldie Barret and R. Jones. She grew up in the shadows of the steel mills and learned the tragedies that the mills could produce at an early age. Her father was caught in an explosion at Republic Steel. Mrs. Beatty was sent to live with grandparents in Arizona for approximately three years. She returned to Youngstown where she was to spend her childhood.

She experienced life growing up during the Depression. She married her husband, G.W. Beatty, in 1939 and the couple moved in with her new sister-in-law due to the economic hardships of the Depression. Her husband was to participate in the WPA as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's recovery program.

Mrs. Beatty gave birth to her first two children, Gail and Lynn, in 1940 and 1941. In September of 1941, she got a job at the Ravenna Arsenal as an inspector. When the United States was forced into World War II, Mrs. Beatty sought employment a little closer to home at Republic Steel. Spurred by patriotism, she was hired on the spot at Republic. At the time, her husband was also employed at Republic Steel. Employed in the Electric Weld Department, she worked at mill numbers 1, 2 and 3. She mostly worked on the crusher and water tester. Both ends of a pipe were cut off and crushed and then tested to check how the weld held up. Water testing was flushing water through the pipe at high pressure to check for leaks. Eventually, she worked her way up to inspector. As the war was nearing an end, Mrs. Beatty looked forward to the day when she could return home and spend more time

with her two young children. In December of 1944, she left her job at Republic Steel as the war came to a close within the next six months.

In January of 1945, she gave birth to her infant child, David. By December, tragedy claimed the life of the five year old, Lynn. Being an energetic person, she became self-employed. From 1946 to 1951, she ran a gift shop at 446 Warner Street, close to South Side Hospital. From 1952 to 1966, Mrs. Beatty and a friend drove a truck full of fresh produce from Florida to sell wholesale at such places as the Pyatt Street Market in Youngstown. In January of 1967, she returned to the Ravenna Arsenal and worked in the quality Control Department until 1970.

Today, Mrs. Beatty attends church at Highway Tabernacle and is a member of the Rebecca Lodge. Her hobbies include lapidary and numismatics. She also enjoys traveling. She resides with her husband in Boardman, Ohio and enjoys spending time with her grandchildren.

--Joseph Lambert

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in the Mills during World War II

INTERVIEWEE: Elma M. Beatty
INTERVIEWER: Joseph Lambert
SUBJECT: Ravenna Arsenal, Depression, World War II,
Pearl Harbor, Republic Steel, Youngstown
DATE: October 5, 1990

LAMBERT: This is an interview with Mrs. Elma Beatty for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Women's Experiences in the Mills During World War II by Joseph Lambert at the Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor on October 5, 1990 at 9:05 a. m.

First of all, Mrs. Beatty, can you tell me when and where you were born?

BEATTY: [I was born] in Youngstown, Ohio in 1921.

L: What part of Youngstown was that?

B: It was over on Himrod. Well, that's about all I can say.

L: Can you tell me what it was like growing up at the time?

B: I had a very unusual bringing up. I lived with [my] grandparents till I was 9 years old, then lived in Arizona with an aunt for three years, then I come back here and I lived three years. So, my bringing up was a little different not having a mother and father. Then, I married early. To date, I'm married 51 years. I going on 52 years. I had four children, eight grand-

children and I have a great-grandchild.

L: Can you tell me what sort of things you did for fun as a child?

B: I've always been interested in coins. I'm still interested in coins today. In fact, I belong to all of our clubs around here. There's eight of them. I'm also into lapidary. I cut stones and I make jewelry. That's my hobby.

L: What do you remember as a child about the mills in Youngstown?

B: Everybody, either their husbands or fathers. . . . Everybody worked in the mill, just like my husband. He worked in Republic Steel. He was a brakeman. They used to do their own switching in the mill. Outside lines would bring cars in and then, the crews would take it from there and then get hot steel. It was quite interesting. The children, when they was coming up, they used to go down around Federal Street where they used to call Elephant Bridge and you'd see the Bigelow. The Bigelow had a lot of sparks and fireworks all of the time. It was interesting.

L: What about pollution?

B: Everybody had graphite. Every morning you could sweep your porch off. But I'll tell you one thing. . . . You could put your clothes out and they would blow, and you never got it on them. But, outside of maybe an odor. . . . There would be an odor coming up from the mill, but everybody seemed to be happy. Everybody worked. Generations worked in that mill.

L: Did any of your relatives work there? Your father or your grandfather, perhaps?

B: My father worked at Truscon. [He] was an electrician there, they tell me, until they had an explosion. He was in the explosion. All in all, I don't think they had that many explosions and death traps. That's what you would call the mines, but these steel mills. . . . It was a real going place.

We didn't have the crime rate. Everybody was busy. Everybody knew their children was going to be here. That's one you can't say today. There's no jobs to be had.

L: The graphite, did it get into the house at all?

B: Oh, yes. You'd open the door and it would blow in. It was shiny. That's one way . . . you always knew you

had to sweep the dust. You just took that for granted, because at least everybody was working.

L: What was your father's name?

B: I really don't know. On my birth certificate, it has R. Jones. Like I said, that happened right after I was born, then my grandparents kept me.

L: Did he get hurt during this explosion?

B: Yes. He was in that explosion. That's odd to think that I come along and. . . . But, everybody went into the mills. When they declared war on December 7, everybody was rushing out. The guys had to go. There was no people. Grandmas, grandpas, everybody worked. The only ones home was . . . like that song, "They're either too young or too old or 4-F'ers." That's what they called fellows that didn't qualify for service. That's what we had.

L: They called them "4-F'ers?"

B: Yes. "4-F'ers," because they were. . . . Well, I shouldn't say rejects, [but] they were. They didn't come up. Maybe they was crippled or their eyesight was bad or something, so they couldn't go. So, they came into all the works, which otherwise, probably wouldn't have taken them. Then fellows that was on jobs had to keep them, they wouldn't take them to service. They could stay home.

The people was working. . . . My husband would work like 16 hours a day. They would ask who would volunteer to work another 8 hours, and that's how people was going: around the clock.

L: What [is] your husband's name?

B: Wayne. It's odd too, because everybody would watch the newspaper, listen to the radio to find out how we were doing. We also had aluminum piles. Anybody who had pans brought them down and put them into this aluminum scrap. We were hard hit.

L: Speaking of [being] hard hit, what was it like growing up during the Depression?

B: Terrible. When the banks closed, my family eventually got 25 cents on the dollar. A lot of banks didn't get anything back. So, then everybody more or less pitched in and lived with one another or families to see where they could go to branch out.

L: What were the mills like during the Depression?B:

Would you believe they worked for 40 cents an hour? But, then when you stop and think about it, eggs was 15 cents a dozen, so everything was low because nobody had anything. When you went to school, in schools, they read the Bible. We had prayer and [we] even prayed for [the] economy. I'm talking about public schools. Today, they don't even allow a prayer in school, let alone the Bible, but the kids grew up with all this.

L: So, you didn't know any different?

B: No. They accepted the fact that if you just had spaghetti on the table, or if you just had rice. . . . Everybody accepted it.

L: Are those two things that you ate a lot?

B: Yes, basically that and potatoes. A lot of the churches gave things out. I remember there was a Greek church on Woodland Avenue which is still there, I think. Once a week they used to give celery and potatoes and the kids used to go down there for hand-outs. Other churches gave milk and things like that and you went for that.

It seems odd. I haven't thought about all that in years. Children, young people, they accepted it. Things were just sort of pulling out when the war hit. That was a big change when the war came along.

L: How did you feel about President Roosevelt?

B: I thought he was a wonderful man. For all he done, I don't think there has been--in my estimation--another president like him. He was for the people and the things that he did for the human beings. . . . We had WPA. My husband was on WPA. That's when they was putting trees out there around Meander dam and they put it out at all these various spots to give the guys something to do. Instead of relief, they went out and worked in the countryside and lakes. People worked for what they had.

L: Can you recall your emotions after [the bombing of] Pearl Harbor?

B: Yes. I was sick at heart. I hate to say it even today, but my feelings toward the Japanese has not been the best, and yet I associate with them. But, knowing how many people was killed in that thing and how sneaky the whole thing was. . . . It was really a scramble around here, the whole country. It just took a shock like that to make the people all come together, and they did. Like I said, [we] went into war plants, because we was caught--like they used to say--with

[our] pants down in this case, because we didn't have the airplanes, battleships. . . . We didn't have anything.

L: Were you employed at this time?

B: No. I went right out. That was in 1941. Then, they started calling and I went right out to the Ravenna Arsenal. I [was] hired out there. Being my age. . . . You realize I was just coming on to 21 and I get a job as being what they called a floorwoman. We were making the fuse of the shell for a 105 millimeter. I worked in the fuse department which is the top of the shell. Being a floorwoman, I had over 300 women that was under me. We had various machines. Here again, everybody rushed out to do their part. We had young and old. The women had to wear caps to keep their hair back from the machinery, which in a few cases they didn't do. When you're drilling down into something, you can't have hair hanging down. We did have a few accidents that way. We worked with various types of gun powder and what they called detonators. Your skin would turn yellow, because you was working with gun powder. Finally, I got powder poisoning there where both eyes, instead of the tears being on the inside, the tears would run down on my face. So, knowing I was allergic to this gun powder, I had to give up.

When I gave up, I came back down to Youngstown and I put my application in and I was hired the very day I put it in for Republic Steel. Now, here I am at the Republic Steel inspection [department] and my husband's in transportation which he was throughout the entire Republic Steel. When I hired out, I soon found out that there's no heat in those mills. You would wear long johns and overalls and jackets just like the men. You couldn't tell the difference. The only heat you ever had was from a cokejack (drum). When you stand by a cokejack (drum), you get one side warm and the other's freezing. Oh, [it was] dirty and heavy work.

I worked in the first, second, and third mills which is a pipe [mill]. When the pipe comes out of a mill, it come along and it comes onto a table. Then, they fall into a pocket and there's a man on both ends and he picks this up. The crane picks it up and puts it up onto a table and [it] goes into their machine on both ends. They cut a piece of it off to see if the weld that the mill put on there was going to hold up, because a lot of this pipe was going out for defense. It was going out for water lines. It was going out for various things all over the country. If there was something bad in the weld, there's where the inspection came in. You immediately told them and they would have to shut down that mill, which is [a loss of]

production and money. Then, they would have to change over to see what was wrong and fix it up. So, it's a case where inspection goes hand in hand with production.

L: What would a bad weld look like? How could you detect them?

B: Well, the first thing they would do was put water in it. High pressure was put into a pipe on both ends. If there was a leak, naturally, it would spring right up there. Then, the inspector would go over there with chalk and mark it off. They would cut this pipe down. Of course, there's a lot of loss to it. Then the next thing would be, if it passed that, it would come down and they would cut both ends off. Then you would put it in what you call a "crusher." You'd pick it up with a pair of tongs. It would probably be about a foot long, this piece of pipe, and you would put it into a machine and pull the handle down on it and it would crush that piece. Now, you would look to see if the weld held up, or what was wrong with the pipe or the steel itself. If you found something wrong, then you'd give them a high sign because nobody could talk. It is so noisy. This is why so many people have hearing problems, because pipes hitting the pocket . . . all that noise. Just like they talk about the percussion type of music that they're having today. These young people have a lot to learn because it will affect your hearing. So, everything was done by high sign. [You signaled] "cut it" or various signs with your hands. Then if you found something wrong, you cut another piece off to make sure what you found is truly all the way in the pipe and if it was, that was scrap. If it was good, then it was put in a pocket and a crane would take it away. Then from there, of course, it would either be beveled on the end or it was sent to be threaded where they would put couplings on it.

So, every step of the way in the mill, there was inspectors to check every step of it. I don't know. I was never on the final end of it to find out how many pipes was rejected, but basically, the minute something was wrong, the mills did listen and they would close down and fix it.

L: Were there a lot of women working in the mill?

B: Yes. I think one of the hardest jobs. . . . Picking up this pipe was heavy. When you'd crush it, you'd have to take your tongs and throw it into a bin that they would pick up and scrap and remelt it all down. But, that was heavy, very heavy. Then there was another job when they put threads on pipe that you would have to take couplings and screw a coupling on the end

of this pipe. If it didn't go, there was something wrong with the threads. Here again, this was a case where they would have to cut it off and rethread it. But, putting those couplings on, going fast . . . that's a hard job.

We had small pipe. We had three inch. We had spaghetti pipe, then we had the big 20 inch. I worked up on inspection where you put a light in this big 20 inch pipe. It was so heavy, there was two people up there. One person couldn't roll a pipe. You couldn't do it. You would have to have somebody else up there with you. Usually, they would send a man over on that particular job on the 20 inch. It's a big pipe. It's heavy.

L: Were you exhausted at the end of the work day?

B: Yes, and I had two children at home. Two babies. I worked all three turns. My husband worked only one, because they, on the railroad, bid on a job. And he worked all three to eleven. So, every three weeks, we'd come on the same turn. But, we rode buses, and got off at Poland Avenue at Stop Five. Everybody was coming and going and waving. It was comical. One woman said, "That's the only time I get to see my husband--when he gets off of the bus."

That's the way everybody lived. But, they were busy. They were anxious. It's amazing how fast we had to learn. All the older ones that was there that couldn't go to service, they were so helpful in explaining the business--the job we was on. The women only stayed there during the war. Now, when the fellows started coming back. . . . As they would come back to their jobs and everything, then women was more or less eliminated.

L: Did you have to go through some type of formal training to learn your job?

B: No, you learned it right on the job. If they put you on a job where. . . . Like I said, when you first started out, all you were looking for would be, maybe leaks or something in pipes. But, as you would go along on various jobs, you could learn to use micrometers to know the depth of the threads. All those kind of things came along as you went up the ladder. When you become a final inspector, that is when your pipe is getting ready to be shipped out onto the shipping floor. You would have a number and you would stamp it on this pipe and it went out onto the shipping floor. They would put it in rail cars, and they would ship it to their destination.

- L: As a final inspector, did you have your own specific number?
- B: Yes, you would have [a number] at the very end of everything. Yes, I did. When I started out, I was making 65 cents an hour and when I ended up, I was making 95 [cents an hour] and I was making more than my husband on the railroad.
- L: Did you work a lot of midnight shifts?
- B: Yes, every three weeks. We had a restaurant, a canteen, down there at Stop Five. Whoever was able to go, you'd give them a list of what you wanted up at the canteen, otherwise you carried your own thermos and you carried your lunch right down on the job where you're at. You see, when the women went in at Stop Five on Poland Avenue in dress clothes, we would have to go to a change house. There we would change over completely into heavy shoes and heavy gloves, and then we'd walk all the way down to the electric weld and we'd wait on our foreman, which was Al Conti. He would tell us what mills was running and he would appoint us to whatever jobs he wanted us to be on. So, therefore, you just carried your lunch with you.
- L: Were you intimidated when you first got your job at Republic Steel?
- B: No. Everybody was. . . . They were glad that somebody was coming in, because there were so many of the boys that had to immediately go. No, we didn't hear anything like that.
- L: What other positions did women have in the mill? What other jobs did they do?
- B: Well, there was a job I considered quite tough for the women. They followed the crane. They were called "hookers." They would have to put a big, heavy cable down underneath all this pipe that's in a pocket, and then signal the crane. The crane would lower, and then they would signal until they put the cable on there. Then the crane would lift up this pocket of pipe and carry it to whatever table it had to go to or the shipping floor. This person . . . these girls had to climb on top of all those pipes. In between each row of pipe, there would be a four by four. They would have to skim this cable underneath. It was very dangerous. We had one girl that was crushed down there. She wasn't on my turn. Apparently, the crane operator didn't see the signal and moved the pipe. Here, this girl was still putting in the cable. There wasn't really that many accidents in the mill.

L: Do you remember this girl's name?

B: No, not her last name. I remember it was Sophie or something like that. As a matter of fact, I'm going to try to find out who it was. It happened in the number two mill where she was working. But, there again, they worked on different floors. They worked for the mill.

We had old women that were cutting pipe, cutting scrap with torches. They worked in the labor department. They would push wheel barrows and pick up big piles of these ends that they had to use. They worked hard. Mighty hard.

L: Were you ever concerned for your safety?

B: Well, yes. When you were walking through the mill, you had to watch everything. Now, this crane, and loads, and pipes falling in the pockets and things like that. . . . You knew not to be in those areas. [You knew to] stay on the walkway, which everybody did. I don't know. Nobody really thought of those kinds of things. Trains was coming in. Cars was coming through and they were backing them into the mill to load them. You had all those things going on. Nobody thought of those things.

L: You were too busy.

B: That's right. [You were] thinking about your job.

L: What were the men like over all in the mill? How did they treat you?

B: [We were] a welcome sight. Most of them were foreign men. They treated most of the women just like they were their daughters. [They thought] they're going to educate us and explain everything which made them look macho. They knew all about everything and here we come in knowing nothing about anything. Some of the older guys--I will say this about them--they were having a field day, because here's these pretty, young ladies coming into the mill and these old guys had no competition. [laughter] I don't mean that nasty or anything like that. In a way it was about the only bright spots that anybody had.

Then a few times, they did have parties afterwards. There was a store, a beer garden, right at Stop Five. [It was] right across from where you drive in at Stop Five. When they was getting ready to have . . . like a party on the weekend, a crew or something like that, they would supply the hot dogs and everything. They would go up to Pine Lake or something like that.

L: Do you remember the name of that beer garden?

B: No. They tore this store down, but you could buy gloves and everything you needed over there. Guys would buy cigarettes and [chewing tobacco] and they just had everything pertaining to the guys going into the mill. You had to stand out there waiting for your bus. All the way around, you could buy pop or whatever. Things have changed down there.

L: How about your work clothes? Can you describe those?

B: Yes. They were definitely men's clothes. [They were] overalls, overall jacket. Your shirts and things like that. . . . You had to have a heavy sweater on. Then your work shoes were steel-toed shoes and if you worked where you had couplings, like I was telling you about putting on pipes, then you had to wear metal toe guards on the top of these shoes to keep them from breaking your toes. But, you had to wear those because of safety. You had to have goggles.

Then I worked on what they called the "upsetter," which I brought you some pictures of. Out there, they would take the end of the pipe. They had a furnace. Here's this pipe again, but they would put the end of it in and make it hot and expand it. So, they could turn around and put threads on the outside of this or on the inside so pipe could fit into it. Here, you had to have gloves with gauntlets to it. So, there would be no shavings or any pieces of steel hit you, because you could realize what could happen when it hit you. You would get some burns on your face or it would hit you on the neck or something like that. It would bring you to attention in a big hurry. You had body covering on just about everything. Now, there was no girls at the blast furnaces. [There were] none down there. They were in areas that could be worked at.

L: Was the blast furnace too physically demanding?

B: Oh, yes. They wore heavy wool clothes covering and shielded in front. Those men really worked for their money. The heat was tremendous. You have no idea what that can be like.

L: Did you have to wear hard hats at all?

B: No, at that time, we didn't have hard hats. That came in after from the time of the women. All we had was just. . . . They did tell everybody, "Keep your hair covered." Of course, some girls had to be very pretty and they'd leave a little bit out front, but they were told [to be] safety wise. Like I said, you dressed like a man and you always looked like a man. But, I

will say that the treatment for the women there was unbelievable. We got good treatment, because they knew it had to be done.

L: So, they accepted that you. . . .

B: Absolutely.

L: Did you ever work any overtime?

B: Yes, sir. When I'd work overtime, they would send me out to the electric well in another part of the mill. They had what you would call a spaghetti pipe which is about a one inch pipe. We would go there for our extra time. But, yes, if somebody didn't show up and they have a lot of mills running and they needed inspectors, you were asked if you would work another eight [hours].

L: Did that happen a lot then?

B: Yes, it did.

L: On the average, did you work there a straight eight hour day?

B: On the average, yes, but every week we had overtime of some kind, because they had to get an order out. Maybe somebody didn't show up, and this is why you'd be stuck.

L: Did you have the weekends off?

B: No. Maybe you had Monday or Tuesday off or something like that. No, they worked around the clock.

L: [What's] the most amount of days that you worked straight? Do you remember?

B: Yes. I even had it down on the calendar. I worked for 21 straight days. My husband . . . we were just talking about it. In those 21 [days], for 10 of them, [my husband] worked 16 hours a day. You wonder . . . it wasn't that we were making a lot of money. It wasn't the case of that, but when they finally declared war, we were behind the eight ball in this country. Let me tell you, everybody scrambled to do what they could.

L: Were you concerned. . . . Did you follow the progress of the war?

B: Yes. Definitely. Every time you got the paper. . . . We had two newspapers, The Vindicator and The Telegram.

We had the two here. [The papers] and radio. . . .

We'd listen right along [to] what was happening. That's what made people work that much harder, because they either had sons, grandsons, or somebody in the service. [They were] writing letters. [When] someone was captured, everybody would feel bad for them because. . . . This one woman's son had been captured. The worry that went along with everything. . . .

- L: Did you have any personal friends or relatives in the service?
- B: No. I was very fortunate.
- L: Did you feel that your efforts were contributing to bring the war to a close?
- B: Yes. Maybe we were programmed. I don't know, but everybody felt. . . . A lot of people couldn't even talk English that worked in the mills and so on. They would tell you how they'd feel everyday. [They'd say], "We got to do it. We got to do it." [That was the] attitude. Everybody was hit.
- L: They're very patriotic, then.
- B: That's right. Like I said, nobody could realize what our diamond was like where our buses come down. People had to transfer. Sheet & Tube or wherever they were going. . . . The hustle, the bustle. . . . And having no problems like we have today. You didn't have the fear of going to town. And another thing. . . . We didn't have the gasoline. If you wanted two tires, you had to. . . . It was rationed and so was our food and everything. We had food stamps that we had to get things with. To get tires, you had to get this slip and almost promise your life. Therefore, people. . . . Now, like when I was at the arsenal, they would have as high as seven or eight people in the car trying to get to work. It was sort of comical. I rode with one old guy and we would have a flat tire going and coming all of the time. He would sit out on the bank while the women changed his tire. I'm just saying how some men took advantage of the situation.
- L: You were talking about rationing. How did that affect life at home?
- B: It's hard. I had two children, two babies. Even in meat, you're only allowed so much. Food stamps, people was even trying to exchange. They didn't need this or they'd give it to that one and they needed more. . . . Like I said, everybody was in the same boat, but then there were those who tried to sell them, too, in a black market thing. Basically, everybody had to have stamps for everything.

L: Who watched the children while [you were working]?

B: My sister-in-law. At that time, I only had an apartment at my sister-in-law's. She was an elderly woman, and she would take care of the kids. You have to come home. You have to do your washing. You have to cook. I'd get my husbands' things ready because he was on a different turn. Like I said, we didn't have cars, so we had to travel by the bus all of the time. That's hard.

L: Things were very chaotic then.

B: Yes, especially when you could only buy so much. Today, when you go to the [grocery] store and buy everything, you have it stockpiled. You have freezers. But, there wasn't that much meat and things around. With your stamps, of course, you was only allotted so much.

L: How old were you children at this time?

B: In 1941, July, my second child was born. So, he [was] just a baby.

L: Which child was that?

B: My first child, she was born in May of 1940. July of 1941, my son was born and I went to work in September.

L: What were their names?

B: Gail was my first and Lynn was my second. In 1945, I come to a halt with my work in the mill, it was because I had another boy in 1945, David. Lynn was burned to death in December of 1945. So, that was the end of my working like that.

L: Did your children. . . . I know they missed you while you were working so much. Did that have any affect on them?

B: No, I don't think so, because being in the same house. . . . If I had to take them away everyday or something. . . . But, being that they were right there, they accepted the fact. They're babies. They don't understand.

L: So, your sister-in-law lived in the same house with you?

B: We lived in her place. We only had an apartment, because we didn't have the money. We were a young cou-

ple. We were married in 1939. We had no money. I told you, he worked on WPA. In 1940 was when he went to work for Republic Steel. He worked there until 1975 when he retired.

L: That's a long time.

B: Yes.

L: What sort of things did you do for recreation when you had the opportunity?

B: During the war years, believe it or not, we didn't do anything, because we were too busy. We just didn't have time to go anywhere.

L: You didn't go to Idora Park or. . . ?

B: No. We didn't have time for nothing, because like I said, he worked one turn. I worked on another turn, and the kids. . . . No, we just had no time for nothing.

L: Were you able to save money during this time?

B: Well, they were taking money for bonds. They'd ask everybody, so what savings we had, actually was taken out for a savings bond.

L: Every bank was doing that?

B: Yes, because that was one of the ways that we had to fight the war; taking these bonds out. Everybody did.

L: Did you join the union?

B: We didn't have any union. Now, the labor department might have, but in the inspection department, no we didn't have it.

L: As the war was drawing to a close, did you fear the loss of your job?

B: No. I was getting anxious and happy to get out. It's dirty. It was a dirty thing. I think just about every job in a steel mill is dirty. If you can come to a place where you can get out of that, I think just about everybody wants to. That's why so many people, the older ones, like to see their young people get an education so they won't have to do those kind of jobs. Those were dirty jobs. [They were] hard. So, the young people today, they have a chance for an education to better themselves and that's what everybody wanted.

L: So, if the mills were open today, would you want to see

your children or your grandchildren in the mill or would you rather see them pursue an education?

B: I would rather they go for a better education, because do you realize that these mills. . . ? I told you about some being foreigners. Most of them came to this country. [They] was brought over here. They worked in coal mines. But the steel mills, now they used these guys. They couldn't even talk English, like I said. They were put on dirty filthy jobs and it was hard work and low paying. That day is gone now, but that's what we were faced with. Then, when the women went in, here we are females with. . . .

L: So, you had no desire to continue working at Republic?

B: No.

L: Did you want to work anywhere else after the war or did you want to return to home life?

B: I found that, financially, I would have to go to work again, so I went into private business. I worked for a few years like that. I've always worked. If I told you that I drove a truck and produce afterwards. . . .

There was a Jewish man and myself. We went into business together. We'd bring things up from Plant City, Florida. In the wintertime, we would go to the cold storages in Tonawanda, New York and up in that area. We'd go up to Toledo and all over bringing produce in.

At that time, we had the Pyatt Street Market. We had wholesalers there. That's what we did. We brought [produce] in to wholesalers. We had Chevlen's, Goldbergs, Kaleels, all of them were there. We'd bring it into them. Then the people in the market, they would come over and buy wholesale and then retail it over in the market.

L: What time period are we talking here?

B: Now, we're talking almost 1952. That's what I did.

L: How long did you continue to do that?

B: We worked for about 14 years, this man and I. I had my own truck and the kids were still. . . . They were going to school. When we would come in with watermelons and we couldn't unload our load, we would have to huckster. [We would] go out on the street and this friend, this man, he had a knack for it. He would say, "Watermelons. . . ," and we'd sell them that way. Then, I'd take my children. My oldest girl then was already going to high school. I had the kids help me.

I would pull along side the road and sell watermelons.

But, this way, they graduated and we had our own home. We had a couple of homes and we bettered ourselves up the ladder so they could graduate in style. It took working together. But, there was no kind of money like there is today.

L: Getting back to the end of the war. . . . When you started at Republic steel, did you have to sign some sort of agreement stating that when the war ended, you would give up your job?

B: No. [There was] nothing like that. The employment office, it used to be down under Market Street bridge. That big building that you see [by the] Market Street bridge, there was the employment office down there. You were handed an application, and you filled it out. . . . I guess they felt, "Well, you're old enough. Go to work." You didn't question it. That's how desperate they were for people.

I don't know of anybody that sat home and did nothing unless they were taking care of children or was physically not able to do anything.

L: So, things really slowed down then after the war?

B: Well, yes, as far as the mills were concerned. Now, I had a brother-in-law that was a foreman at the spike factory. They made spikes at Market Street. Where I told you the big building was, there were small mills along the [Mahoning] River. They made these spikes that they used for ties for railroads. That was a big job because they were shipped all over the world. Like I said, my brother-in-law was the foreman there for over twenty years.

L: What do you remember about the Mahoning River when the mills were in production?

B: [It was] dirty. There's an odor to it, because after all, a lot of that coming out of mill went into that river. We worked along it. Pollution. There was no such a thing as going fishing or anything like that in there. No way. As a matter of fact, some of the foreign fellows was telling me that they made gardens down there along the river.

L: How do you feel today when you look around and all these mills are at a standstill?

B: Sad. Sad to think that our economy. . . . When you realize that all this European steel is coming into this country when we have the steel mills here. . . .

I think this country sold out. That's my honest opinion. They sold out to the foreign people, because they can get it cheaper. They could have worked out some kind of deal with our steel mills. Here's all of our people that are unemployed. Pittsburgh and all over. . . . Now, I understand that those places that went into high tech, they're changing and everything, but here we sit, our mills gone. You look down [there] and it's so sad. Everybody uses steel.

L: Do you have fond memories working at Republic Steel?

B: Absolutely. The friendships, the people I met. . . . There was a woman [who] had a nursery on South Avenue just before you come to Indianola. They used to call this poor woman Dumb Dora. She owned this big nursery, yet she used to cut pipes. She worked in the labor department. You would see her pushing a wheel barrow and loading and. . . . Your heart goes out to people. They had a business and everything else, yet she came down to the mill. When you say, "labor department," you're talking about doing the dirtiest, filthiest jobs. That's when your heart goes out to people.

I think most people have a heart and they realize how hard you're working and everything. At least it was that way. . . . [They'd] give you a ride and help you. [They'd say], "I'll share my sandwiches with you," and things like that. [They'd say], "My wife made this soup." That used to be the thing. There was this one man, and he'd come. . . . Oh, his wife made the best soup. When he'd bring his thermos, everybody had their cup ready. You know, personal things like this.

You'd work hard, you ached all over, and you'd think--especially a woman. . . . A woman likes to have fingernails. Forget the fingernails. Forget everything. Your hair was a mess. Your hands [were] banged up. [You had] callouses. Those were the years. Now, when you talked to these people that worked there, and the kind of memories like this that they have. . . . They feel that this government sold us out, really, by not having those steel mills. Because, we could be making pipe. There's no reason why we couldn't compete in the world market.

L: Do you have anything else you'd like to say?

B: No, other than I think my heart's sad to see this town, our town, look like it does now. We had so much going for it and so many people came here. Now, they have. . . . Seeing our young people having to go away to find jobs. . . . There was a lack of foresight. Where were these people? Why didn't they help us? High tech? Anyway, that's my whole experience of the

Republic Steel.

L: Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW