

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in the Mill During World War II

Personal Experience

O.H. 1374

JOSEPHINE J. KEMPER

Interviewed

by

Joseph Lambert

on

October 11, 1990

Josephine Kemper

Josephine Kemper was born in 1925 in Youngstown, Ohio to Albert and Maria Smrek. Mrs. Kemper grew up in the city's Smokey Hollow section. She grew up in a large family under the shadows of the steel mills. Sweeping soot off the porch from the mills was a daily ritual. In 1937, she remembers her uncle taking her down to watch the events of the Little Steel Strike on Poland Avenue.

While in high school, she worked a short while at the Fifth Street Market in Struthers, Ohio. Later that same year, she found a job at McCrory's Department store in downtown Youngstown.

She married young at age 18 in August, 1943. One of the reasons she married so young was because her husband was being shipped off to the war. She followed her husband Jack to Army camp in Massachusetts and then spent time at a camp in Kentucky. When her husband went overseas, Mrs. Kemper went to work at Republic Steel where her aunt, who also worked there, helped her to get a job. At Republic, she worked at Stop 5, where she was a helper on a pipe machine. Among other tasks, she examined the threads on the pipe.

Mrs. Kemper was let go two weeks before her husband returned from the war to make room for returning servicemen. While her husband was away she managed to save enough money to make the down payment on the couple's first house.

Today, she enjoys spending time with her grandchildren and crafts. She was an officer of the St. Charles Altar and Rosary Society at St. Charles in Boardman in the 1950s. She and her husband are now parishioners of St. Nicholas in Struthers. She also enjoys writing poetry. Mrs. Kemper and her husband have seven children: Jacqueline, Paul, Mary Jo, Kevin, Patrice, Hope and Victoria. Her grandchildren especially give her much pleasure these days.

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Women in the Mills During World War II

INTERVIEWEE: JOSEPHINE J. KEMPER

INTERVIEWER: Joseph Lambert Jr.

SUBJECT: Women's experiences in the mill during World War II, Republic Steel, Smokey Hollow, Pearl Harbor, Downtown Youngstown, mill experiences

DATE: October 11, 1990

L: This an interview with Josephine Kemper for the Youngstown State University Oral History program on Women's Experiences in the Mills during World War II, by Joseph Lambert, on October 11, 1990 at 76 Helena Drive, Struthers, Ohio at 11:00 a.m.

Okay, Mrs. Kemper, can you tell me where and when you were born?

K: I was born on Quinn Street on the East Side of Youngstown at home. I was born April 15, 1925.

L: What do you remember growing up?

K: I don't remember anything about that neighborhood. The first neighborhood I remember. . . . I was raised in Smokey Hollow. The home where I was raised is now a parking lot for YSU. The MVR Club that's down there, that was the neighborhood bar. It was down around the corner.

My parents moved from Quinn St. to Dewey to Homewood on the South side to Webb St. in Smokey Hollow. I was three years old. My father owned his own neighborhood grocery on Dewey

and Homewood in the Slovak community of Lansingville. At the time we lived in the hollow, he was a butcher for various places. He worked at Oles's Market on the corner of Walnut and East Federal Street downtown.

We had a big house. There were four children in the family; three girls and a boy. We belonged to St. Cyril's and Methodius Church. Everyone in our neighborhood was from Europe. My parents were born in Czechoslovakia. They came over here separately. My mother was raised in Campbell and my father came over when he was older, a little older. Everyone on our street was from some other country. We had Italians next door to us. We had Greeks. There was every nationality. The parents all spoke their own tongue and the children spoke [English]. Smokey Hollow was a melting pot.

We used to walk to town to go to movies. Movies were 10 cents apiece. When we got to be teenagers, we would take the bus out to Idora Park for dancing and to the Elms Hall. The Elms Hall was a real popular dance spot. We would go out dancing on the weekends. In the neighborhood, there were boys and girls and we would go together on the bus.

L: What was downtown Youngstown like?

K: It was nice. It wasn't as fancy as it is now. East Federal Street had a lot of individual shops. When I was little . . . this went up into when I got older, and then things changed. I think it was after I was married [that] the first A&P came on Walnut Street. My father didn't like it because he said, "Those frozen meats, you don't know how long they're frozen. They're no good." My father was a butcher. We'd eat fresh meats.

But when I was small, we went downtown shopping. Oles's had bread and meats and there was a coffee store where you only bought coffee much like specialty stores now. There were chickens out on the street in chicken coups and my mother would pick out the chickens and bring them home. Everything was individualized shops where you bought different things. You could buy different cheeses from different countries. When my mother would go shopping, she would carry shopping bags. We would walk up Walnut Street hill and down and down the other Walnut Street hill to where we lived. Our street was the second street coming down Walnut Street hill. Webb Street. Then shopping changed. We had two neighborhood grocery stores, but mainly our mother would go downtown shopping for the groceries.

East Federal Street was full of stores. Kline's was a department store. It was locally owned. There was a store on the corner down there of Walnut and Federal. It was

called Central Store. It was a department store. The department stores all had bare floors. There were street cars. That's what we took to Idora Park; a street car.

I thought our town was nice. I don't like it today. It's not the way it was. The Palace Theater was beautiful. The Strand Theater was down around the public square in the center of Youngstown. There's a cigar store there now. They would give prizes on different nights of the week. [They'd give] dishes you could add to your set of dishes. They would give different prizes when you went to the show. My mother used to go in the evening.

When we were small, there was a diner on the corner of the Wick Avenue bridge. There was a confectionery store across the street where you bought old-fashioned hamburgers and fountain Cokes. Next door to the Palace Theater was a candy store. When I started dating my husband, we would go to the confectionery store and get a Sunday or get a Coke. He would walk me home and he would take a bus home to where he lived. I think they made big mistake when they took out the Palace Theater and put in a parking lot. It was beautiful. I'm glad they saved Powers Auditorium, because I think the Palace was even more beautiful. That was a mistake.

McKelvy's was a locally owned department store. It was on West Federal Street and in later years, they modernized and were really beautiful. Strouss's was a local store. Really, you could buy anything you wanted; jewelry, nice clothing, anything.

L: Was it always crowded downtown?

K: Yes, because that was the only place where people had to go shopping. There weren't too many people in our neighborhood that even owned cars. Everybody used public transportation and went downtown. You did your shopping. The delivered big things and you carried your other things home in shopping bags. Everybody did that. It was crowded, yes. Like the shopping malls. The populations increased, but I thought town was crowded. You'd get into a store and you couldn't get waited on right away.

The clerks were nice and the merchandise was nice. I did that even after we had children. We lived in Boardman and once a week I would walk to Market Street and get a bus downtown with my children when I just had two and three. I would hold them by the hand and we would get on the bus. Penney's was at the bus arcade and that's where I used to buy their clothing. We'd go down there and I'd meet my husband and maybe come home with him. That was the only way you could pay your gas, electric, and water bill was go

right to the building and pay it. You couldn't pay at the banks. You had to go downtown to pay those bills. You had no choice.

L: Do you remember what Youngstown College looked like then?

K: Yes. It was one building. It was on the corner. We lived on Webb Street behind the [St. John's Episcopal Church]. Youngstown College was just the one building where they have the offices with the big rock in the front, [Jones Hall]. That was all of it. I had a cousin who came in from Warren on a bus and he went there to Youngstown College and it was just the one building. It was quite busy up there. The Sadie Hawkins Day was kind of exciting. I used to go up there and see them some time. I always went to the Butler [Museum of American Art]. I used to go by myself. We used to walk behind the wall of the church. The Butler art gallery was one of my favorite places to go, especially in the summer. They had one room in the back where they had all [American] Indian pictures. They still have them. We were there last week. That's still one of my favorite places to go. We went to see some panoramic pictures of the steel mills. I would go to the Butler art gallery and look at the pictures there. Today, our youngest daughter is married to a boy who is half Navaho Indian. We have a grandchild who is a quarter Indian. I used to love these Indian exhibits.

L: What do you remember about the steel mills growing up?

K: My father didn't work in the steel mills, so I had no personal connection with them. But, I know that we got a lot of soot from the mills in our home. The soot would come in on the window sills and my mother would have to wash walls and curtains quite often.

I had an uncle who worked in the steel mills and I can remember. . . . I don't know when this was. When I was quite young, there was a big strike and he took us in his car down on Poland Avenue and we watched the fighting in the gate. This strike was really a serious strike. The workers were out of work for a long time. That's when the unions really started to get power. But, it was a very serious strike.

I can remember at that time, too, how poor people were, because on riding down on Poland Avenue, there were a lot of people that lived in boxes that things would be delivered in. They were actually living in these. There were a lot of poor people at that time. I was born in 1925. I can remember seeing them live in little shacks. We had this big house. We weren't rich, but we did have a big house. We

also had a larger family. Houses were big then. Those houses down there were all big houses with big rooms.

I remember that strike. That's when everybody started to make more money and buy cars and things after that because of the union. I felt, as we got later in times almost when the mills went out, that the unions were too powerful. I felt that they were greedy and that's why they lost out. It wasn't so. I feel now that management was greedy, then I felt that the unions got too powerful.

But, I can remember that about the big strike down on Poland Avenue. Seeing them at the gate, the picketers. The fighting between the police and them.

L: Was that about 1937?

K: I don't remember the year at all. I know they were hurt and killed and it was bad. I had an uncle in Warren who worked in the steel mills in Warren. There were quite a bit in my family--not my father--but quite a bit of uncles that worked in the mills. Some were blood uncles and some were married into the family.

L: What was life like growing up during the Depression?

K: I didn't think it was so bad. But, then, we were middle class. We're still middle class today. We had a rug on our living room floor. We had linoleum on our dining room floor. My mother had a Maytag washing machine, a ringer washing machine. We had a garden. My mother canned. She sewed some of our clothes. We did not have a car, but we always had something new to wear for Easter. We got a birthday present. We didn't have bicycles. We couldn't afford them. My youngest brother was seven years after me. I was the third one and he was the fourth. He was seven years younger than me and he got a bike. We had jumping ropes and jacks and we used to play a lot of cards. We had playground, Harrison Field. They had swings. They had checkers down there. They had a big sand box. They had baseball games on Sunday. Then, as our kids got older, our kids got involved in baseball. There were Little League teams. It was almost the same thing like Harrison Field. I didn't think it was that bad.

There were some people in our neighborhood that were wealthier than others. Those had stained-glass doors on their house. There wasn't anybody really, really rich or anything. I didn't think it was so horrible. We did have enough to eat, but things weren't expensive either. My mother and dad were not materialistic. They didn't go for real expensive things. We had enough. I didn't think it

was so horrible.

L: How did you feel about President Roosevelt?

K: I loved him. I was married when he died. I can remember when Truman went in. Of course, being raised where we didn't have a car when we were little. I knew that as I got out into the world, I realized that we did not have what a lot of other people had. But, the majority of the people were in the same shoes that we were. I knew that those presidents did good for the United States because people were starting to buy more things. Then it got to be necessary to have a car. Today, you can't get along without one. Things changed and the people had more. I don't know what your party politics are, but I felt like the democrats did good with people.

L: Can you recall your emotions after Pearl Harbor?

K: I was out on date with Jack and the news came over the air that [the attack on] Pearl Harbor had happened. He said, "There I go," and I knew he was going to leave. I didn't have anyone in my family old enough to go. My brother went a little later. He went after [my husband] got home. He joined up. He joined the Air Force. There wasn't anyone personal to go except him. But he had two brothers, and I was acquainted with them. I knew that they were all going to go. Then, I had friends whose boyfriends. . . . The young couples started to get married before they went to the service. I had friends whose boyfriends and husbands were going. It was a very emotional time. We knew it was a serious war.

L: When did you get married?

K: August 4th, 1943. He came home on his first furlough.

L: What is your husband's name?

K: Jack Kemper.

L: Were you employed at this time?

K: I worked in high school at McCrory's Dime Store downtown in summer vacations. My father was a butcher and he worked at the 5th Street market in Struthers. We're new to Struthers. We just moved here 3 1/2 years ago. Down on 5th Street where that paper and paint store is where I worked. I can remember working there. I was, I think, a junior in high school. I remember staying out real late--Jack took me to his prom--then going to work the next morning. I can remember that. But I worked as a clerk in that grocery

store.

When I married [Jack], I went to Army camp with him. I got a job at camp and it was classified as a civil service job. It was in the camp laundry. There were a bunch of women. This was the first time that I ever went away from home. There were like ten women from all over the United States. One of them was younger than me. I was eighteen when I married him. There was one a year younger. She was from West Virginia and she had a little baby. Her mother took care of the baby and she came down to spend the last few months with her husband before he shipped overseas. I worked with these women. We had like a combination bedroom-sitting room. A lot of young couples started out that way in those days. We shared . . . kitchen privileges is what it was called in Falmouth, Massachusetts. He was in Camp Edwards. Most nights he would come in, like he was coming from a job. If he didn't, I had these women. It was a very small town--Falmouth, Massachusetts.

He's retired now. He told me he's taking me up there on a trip. I've always wanted to go to Ellis Island, because that's where my father always talked about--coming in on Ellis Island and having his first banana. So, we were going to go there, but now, the Statue of Liberty is shut down.

L: What happened next after camp?

K: We were there and I remember coming home for Christmas until after the first of the year. Then he got shipped to Camp Campbell, Kentucky. I went down to Camp Campbell to visit him and then he went into New York City, I think, in April or something. It was in the springtime or sometime he shipped overseas. This was 1944. He was actually overseas a little over a year--14 months or so. When he shipped overseas, he went to New York and he made a phone call the night before he shipped out. Then next, I got a letter, V-mail. What they did was they wrote a letter and photographed it to save space on the planes coming over. Your letter was maybe six inches long and the envelope was very small. They photographed the letter. Everything was classified and if they wrote something they shouldn't, it was crossed out so that they wouldn't give out any information. He wrote me a V-mail letter. He was in England.

He went in on the second day of D-Day. I do remember that. When D-Day happened, his mother was really devastated. She had a boy in the Philippines. She had a boy in the Navy in the Pacific. And he went in to France into Germany. His mother said she raised three canon fodder. They all got back without being hurt.

He wrote and he sent some pictures as he went into France and into Germany. He sent scarves from Belgium and he brought back different souvenirs. He went into Hitler's castle when he was there. He was discharged December 23rd, 1945.

He wrote and asked me in the Fall of 1944 if I would come overseas. He could volunteer for the Army occupation. If I could come over, he was going to stay. That way, the soldiers got privileges, free everything. We could travel around and see Europe together. My parents were from Europe and I was interested in Europe. But he asked them over there and they said, "No. You can't bring her." So, he got discharged in December and in January, they started taking wives. At that time, we didn't have any children and I would have gone. I would have gone without any hesitation.

L: When did you start working in the mill?

K: He got shipped out in 1944, so I came home from Camp Campbell, Kentucky. They needed women in the mills. So, I thought, "Well, that was the patriotic thing." I had an aunt that was working there and I thought that would be nice because I didn't drive or have a car or anything. We still didn't have a car. My father didn't have a car. I didn't know how to drive. I had to ride the bus and go downtown on Federal Street and get a bus on Poland Avenue and get off at Stop Five. I worked there a lot in the night shift and then would come home in the morning and then sleep. It was mostly night shift. I didn't have any trouble getting the job. I got a job very easily.

I was young. I wasn't even 21, yet, when he got home, so I was very young. They took the young women. They needed anybody. I went in. You had to have a physical. [You had to have] your eyes examined and everything like that. I wore glasses in high school for reading. That's all I need them for now, but I wear them because I don't want to take them on and off all the time. You had to wear safety goggles and safety shoes. That was my first experience, actually, with slacks. That's when the women started to wear slacks. I used to have a pair of jodhpurs because I used to horseback riding at Mill Creek Park when I was young once in a while on a date. But I didn't have slacks until then. That's when women started to wear slacks and men's type of shirts and things like that. You had to wear it to work and we had to have our hair covered to keep it from getting caught in the machinery. If you see any movies of the 40s, the women have bandannas on. That's what we used to wear our hair up in, a bandanna, to go to work. There were women welders and they would wear the hood and everything. I wasn't in that, but you had to have your hair

covered, slacks, safety shoes, all of that. I don't remember what the wages were, but they were better than if you were to work in a different job.

There were older men. The men that were able were in the service. Men that had some kind of a physical disability or a married man with children worked in the mills. But even men with one or two children, they were drafting them. So, a man with a bigger family or a little older wasn't going.

The man that I worked with was about 50 years old. I'm just guessing. He was Hungarian. He was great. He was really a super guy. He had a wife who was a fantastic cook, because he brought fantastic lunches. In last night's paper, there's a seven-layer sponge cake with chocolate filling advertised that you could buy. This man would bring this seven-layer cake in his lunch. He would bring the most fantastic lunches.

There were two of us that worked with him. This was called the continuous tube mill. So I was told, the pipes that were manufactured were sent overseas to France to run pipelines for the fuel for the men who were on tanks and half-tracks. He was on a half-track. They shot enemy planes down. There were five of them on one half-track. The pipes were put in the ground for fuel for this government machinery. That's what we were told we were doing this for. There was nothing secret about it.

When the pipes came out of the furnaces, they would be cut to pieces. We weren't in that part. I just remember being on this big machine. We would walk up the steps and it was at least as wide as this room, about 11' by 16'. The pipes would come rolling on it. What would put the pipes on and off was an overhead crane. We would examine the ends of it to see if all the threads were there. They had to connect these to other pipes. That's what we did. Then, he would wrap it up and the crane would come and pick it up and take it away.

That's what I did for 8 hours out of the time. You had a break every so often to go to the restroom. Sometimes, we would take turns going to the coffee shop. We would have to go out and walk between the mills and go down to the coffee shop. I worked mostly the night turn, which I liked because in the daytime, I would sleep and get up and do housework or go shopping or whatever I needed. It was really better for me, because I was used to having Jack come home at night. This is what I was put on and I didn't object to it.

L: Where did you live at this time? Did you live with your family?

K: I lived at my mother's home when I worked in the steel mill.

L: Did you normally work eight hours per day?

K: Oh, yeah. You worked your shift, 11 p.m. to 7 a.m.

L: Did you get many days off?

K: You worked five days a week. There were a lot of women. I put a down payment on our first home in the months before he got home. He wanted to live around his family. The neighborhood was called Scienceville. I stayed with his family while we got the house ready for him to come home. I stayed in the house. I bought only a few furnishings and we bought everything else when he came home. I bought a living room suite and a bedroom suite and a stove.

L: Why did you choose to work at Republic [Steel]?

K: Because an aunt worked there who was older than me. I was young. I got put on night turn and that way, I had somebody to go back and forth with because it was dark out at night when you went. Some mornings at 7 o'clock when you got out of the mill, it was still dark out. I had a partner. She came to work in the steel mill. Why did I choose Republic? Because they needed workers. I really don't know how I got there. She was there and I went down and signed up and they took me. They took me and gave me a physical and they hired on the spot. They needed anybody. I was able-bodied at that time. Really, it was close to my home to get on the bus there. Poland Avenue wasn't that far. That's where I was needed.

I knew people who went out to Ravenna and got jobs welding and that, but you had to get in a carpool. That was like, complicated because then you maybe got a car and took turns driving. This was a way that I could do it.

L: How did your family react to you working in a steel mill?

K: Nothing. It was just a job. It was during the war and nobody ever said anything. Actually, I wasn't the only one. . . . I had a sister who was a welder in Ravenna, and nobody said anything even to her. Those were the jobs where women were needed and they took them and that was it. It was just accepted as a way of living. Like today, women are going out and getting men's jobs. It's just accepted as a fact of the times.

L: What was your official title?

K: I was a helper, that's all that it was called.

L: Were you intimidated at all when you first started working there?

K: No. The women were needed. I said the guy that I worked with was super. And the other women, I had no problem with the women, either. They were all there. They either had brothers in the service or husbands in the service or sweethearts in the service and they all wanted the war to end and the men to come home. Nobody intimidated anybody. There was no problem. I don't have a doubt in my mind at all.

L: What were your impressions? Did anything stick out at that time when you first went in?

K: When the first went in, the mill was different than I thought it would be. I was big and the ceilings were high and it was dirty. I thought, that's a heck of a way to earn a living. It isn't an easy job. It was dirty work. You got your clothes dirty. The men got dirty. When I passed the furnaces and the fire was on and everything, that was hard work. That was my impression. I never realized how hard those men worked. They earned what the union gave them. They really did. I felt that the unions got powerful in their latest years but those men earned it. I thought, these men have to love their families a lot to do this kind of work to earn a living. That's how I felt.

L: How did you feel when you saw the open hearths on the furnaces?

K: Awed. That's what I said, to think that the men would stand there and work on them. When I'd go to the coffee shop, we'd pass through different mills and different yards. You got a glimpse of them. I stayed away from the furnaces. To me, they were dangerous. You could really get burnt.

L: Was your job dangerous?

K: I suppose anything is dangerous. You could walk down the street and turn your ankle and break your ankle. But, no, not really. You could get hurt if you didn't handle the pipes well. You could fall down the steps going up to the table where the machine . . . where the pipes were coming down and break your leg as far as that goes, but no. It was a job but it wasn't what the soldiers were doing. We were all there just waiting for someone to come home, or several to come home. We felt that we were doing something important, because what we were doing was going to the soldiers.

L: If that was the case, did you try to work every day that you could? Did you miss any days?

K: Very few. Very few.

L: Can you recall any accidents at all?

K: No.

L: Did you follow the progress of the war pretty closely?

K: Oh, yes. I got letters from my husband as he went in. I knew what was happening over there. We all knew that it was just a matter of time till the boys got home and that we were going to win. We just had that feeling. I didn't have that feeling during Vietnam and I felt very, very frustrated about the United States being over in Saudi Arabia. I just don't like it. I have a grandson who is leaving on the 20th. He's 21 years old and he's in the reserves. I feel like [President] Bush has made a big mistake, but I didn't feel that way in World War II. It was necessary. There were human rights, like when Hitler went into the different countries and took over the different countries. Those were human rights. This is all over oil and to me it's just ludicrous. I don't like it. That's how I feel. I just feel it's ludicrous. It's material. It's not human rights.

L: Did you have any type of formal training to learn your duties?

K: No, I was taught right on the machine.

L: Was it hard?

K: No. As you got it, it became easier. The boss was nice. As I said, they all knew there was a war going on. Those men that were running those machines had no choice. You could have never done it. But they had no choice. They had to take what they got because that's who came in there. They would have never hired someone my age when you look back at it now, if they didn't need me. Today, there's lawsuits over everything.

L: So, there was no harassment by the men?

K: No. Did any of the women say there was?

L: Not really, other than a little flirting, but that's about it.

K: Oh. Well, this man . . . they way his wife cooked, he didn't flirt with anybody. He was very satisfied with what

he had. There were a lot of women. There were some women that dated the men in the mill. There was a little hanky panky, but I wasn't interested in that. I just went to work and that was it.

L: What were winters like working in the mill?

K: It was cold in the steel mill. We wore long underwear. Heavy socks. Of course, we had heavy shoes, you know. Then, you had your head tied up and you could wear a sweater under your shirt. It was cold.

L: Were the summers extremely hot?

K: No, not at night. If it was, I really don't remember. I don't know, I just went to work and felt I was doing my job. It was night turn and I was tired when I got out. It really wasn't one of the things that I focused on, the weather. I do remember that I got laid off just several weeks before Jack got home. It worked out perfect because I was getting the house ready. I was in my own home at that time. I was getting the house ready for him because I knew he was coming home. It worked out perfect because I had a few months to get reacquainted with him and then I went out and got another job. I really didn't pay too much attention to the weather. It was like you lived day by day waiting for your loved ones to come back.

L: How were you able to buy your own home at this time?

K: I saved his allotments. I worked at camp. Some women just went down and stayed there, but really there was nothing to do. I got an allotment from him and then, I saved part of what I earned. I never was, like, a big spendthrift. I had a down payment. I bought a little three-room house. Klempay movers moved it. It was on the back of the lot and it had no cellar. His uncles were in construction and they dug a cellar. I bought cement blocks and everything. I gave them money and we built a cellar under the house and moved the house up over the cellar. Then after he got home, we added another room to it and we lived there till we had two children and we bought a home in Boardman.

L: During the war, did you do a lot of things for recreation?

K: I went to movies. When I was with Jack, we used to go to USO dances. He wasn't away that long overseas. We were married in 1943 and I started working in the mills in 1944 and he was home in 1945. So, it wasn't that long of a time. When we were first married, we lived outside of Camp Edwards. He was stationed in Camp Edwards. They had the latest movies and they were very cheap. Sometimes I went to the mess hall and ate or we went to the camp that had little

restaurants for the boys. The meals were very reasonable.

The first Thanksgiving we were away from home, we went to the USO in Falmouth and they had turkey and everything for the boys and their wives or girlfriends or families came to visit. They would have a group like the Andrew Sisters and all the band records and you would dance. They had different games like checkers and things like that. We went there because it was reasonable.

Once in a while, we went to a nice restaurant in town. They had the New Yorker. Where we were is where the Kennedy's have their compound. One weekend, we went to Boston on the train. We were on the end of the cape. When he wasn't home at camp at night, I had some friends that I hung around with. Falmouth was a very small town. We would go to a little bit bigger city, maybe, on a bus. We would do a little bit of shopping and there was a big department store in Boston called Filene's of Boston and they had very nice quality things. We would go to one of the Filene's in a little town nearby and maybe I would get a new dress or a pair of loafers or something.

We lived a block from the ocean. You could go for a walk down to the beach. The ocean was right there. In town, in the summer it was full of tourists because people come up to Cape Cod and spend their vacation. So, it was real bustling in the summertime. I wasn't there that long. I got there, like, in August after we were married. The town was bustling. It had movie theater.

When I went to see him down at Camp Campbell in Kentucky, it was the same thing. They had all kinds of entertainment. In town, they had USOs. I do remember one thing about Camp Campbell. That was the first time that I ever encountered the distinction between blacks and whites. Here up north, the blacks were everywhere. There weren't that many of them, but where ever you were, they were there. But down there, on the bus they would have blacks to the back, like if I was to take a bus out to camp. That's the first time I ever encountered segregation. The restaurants were the same thing. They would have a sign outside that said, "segregated."

It wasn't there that long till he shipped overseas. When I got home, again, I worked. I always liked the big bands. When the big bands would come to the Palace Theater, I would go to see the big bands. I had an autograph book with all their autographs and I threw it away when I was married like ten years. I should have kept it because the big bands have all come back into view because of television. I had Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey, Gene Krupa, Vaughn Monroe, all of

them. I had all of their autographs in this book. I used to go to see the big bands and to movies.

He wasn't gone that long and I worked and then I got the home and was buying furniture and picking out stuff, so I was busy.

I had a couple of his younger cousins that I would take swimming. We would walk down from where we lived to Lincoln Park and go swimming. He had a nephew and I used to take him.

There was a little Coke and hamburger shop down at Stop 19 and I would go down there. Being in neighborhood and dating him, I knew him and I would take my little nephew down there. There was a jukebox in there.

L: As the war was drawing to an end, did you fear that you were going to lose your job?

K: No. I was anxiously waiting to lose it, because then I knew the war was over. It was horrible. Today, you'll see one here and there, but then, everybody had somebody gone. My family, my brother was younger, but they had him gone. Everybody had somebody gone. Everybody was working for the war to be over. That was the most united war you could ever have, because everybody was just waiting for it to be over. They all knew that they were going to win, but we were waiting for it. No, I didn't worry about losing my job.

L: How did you feel about the men returning to their jobs after the war?

K: I thought that was great. I took a lesser job. My husband thinks that's what ruined the country to begin with, because the women got good jobs then and they went back out to work. If the women would have stayed at home, we'd have a good economy. (laughter)

L: How did you feel about the union at that time?

K: I thought the union was okay at that time. I thought they got too powerful ten years after that.

L: Did you have to sign some sort of pre-agreement stating that you would give up your job when the men returned?

K: No, because I got laid off. If I did, I don't remember. I would have done so, but I got laid off because they no longer needed me. That was it. They couldn't offer me equivalent wages and then when the compensation was over in

April. . . . It worked out perfect because then I got to spend time with Jack and I went out and got another job. No, I was not the least bit bitter. It was just a fact of life and that was it. I thought really, nothing about it. I knew it was temporary. I was hoping it was temporary. I was glad to do it.

L: Do you remember your last day there?

K: No. I do know that it was just a couple of weeks before he got back. It was like it was meant to be that way so that I would be there when he got home. No, I don't remember the last day.

L: When was that? What year?

K: Jack got home December of 1945, so this was the fall [of 1945]. The exact date, I don't remember. I was home, maybe, two weeks. Something like that. I spent that time getting ready. I remember going downtown and buying a new hat. I had a fur coat, a real fur coat, that he had gotten me. He'd sent me the money to get it. I had a fur coat and I bought a new hat, a white hat. It was in the winter and I bought a winter white hat. That's when women wore hats. I went down to the train station all dressed up with this fur coat. This white hat was real high. I thought I was good looking when I was young. I was all dressed up when he got off the train. I hadn't seen him for a year and half or something like that. He hadn't shaved for days. He needed a hair cut and he was a mess and I thought, my God, I'm all dressed up and look at him. I guess he was drunk for a week when they knew they were coming home.

L: Did you work afterwards?

K: Yes. After the compensation was over, I got a job at Fish Dry Cleaner on East Federal Street. It was a cash and carry store. People brought their clothes in and came a few days. . . . We didn't clean them there, but they were picked up there. They were brought there and picked up. I worked there until I was maybe, three months pregnant with my first child. He really didn't want me to work when he got home, but I didn't have that much to do. The house was clean and I didn't want to sit in it all day long. I used to walk a mile to the bus and take the bus downtown to go to work and then ride a bus home, and walk home. And he got home maybe a half an hour before me from work.

We did not have a car. He rode to work with [a friend]. He worked for Diamond Steel. We got our first car about a month before our first baby was born. We got our first refrigerator and our first car right before we had the baby.

For the baby's food, we had a refrigerator. Until then, we had an icebox. Our first baby was born in 1947. That's how long I worked there.

L: Did you work any more after that?

K: No. I was very busy. I had nine pregnancies in 19 years. Our baby is going to be 24 and our oldest granddaughter is going to be 23. So, I was busy. I raised a big family. When the new babies came along, I watched babies while the others went to the hospital to have theirs. We have 7 children and 14 grandchildren. [We have] 7 living children.

L: What do you like to do for hobbies? What keeps you busy today?

K: If I manage to get my housework done and my cooking. . . I'm not too well. We both have a lot of problems. I have arthritis very badly. I take care of my house. I work a little bit with crafts. I have a big family, so, like at the end of this month, one of our daughters will come from Indiana with her baby. Last Sunday, a daughter came from Kent who is working on her master's [degree]. She's got a baby. But, we're busy. The grandchildren come here. In the summer, about two or three weekends out of the month, we have a couple kids for the weekend. We have a birthday party this week to go to. Our one granddaughter will be 8. Like last week, there was a party on Sunday where 4 of them had their birthdays together from two families because there's so many. There's 31 in the family and by the time . . . I'm busy, believe me.

We're busy. We have enough to keep us busy. We're planning on going on an extended trip to New York and to New England to where we went when we were first married. Up into Boston and that area. We're planning on that.

As the kids were raised, I was very busy. I'm very, very busy with just taking care of them. I had kids involved in baseball and different things. Now, like in the spring, the grandchildren will all be in programs in school. Two grandsons played football. We went to the games every Friday night. They're both out of school now. As the kids are in things, we're involved in that. There's 31 people so there's always something going on.

L: Do you have fond memories of working in the mill.

K: No, not fond memories. I felt that it was an important job. I didn't think that my job was particularly important. It was important because it was helping the boys in the service. I don't have fond memories. It was like you were

there fulfilling a job. I have a good feeling for the fact that I felt that I did something that helped the boys. I didn't think I was important. I thought the job was important.

I do have good memories of the man that I worked for because he was very, very nice. He never once used a harsh word and he was very nice. I do remember being very impressed with his family life. He was one who never looked. . . . There was a little bit of hanky panky going on and some of the women that were working in there with the men, but he wasn't one of them. I felt that he had a good marriage. The women were lonesome. That's a good memory. I was telling him just the other day how nice this guy was. I said, "He really had to have a good marriage because he was really a nice guy."

L: How do you feel today when you drive around the valley and you see all these mills that are closed down?

K: I think it's terrible. At first, I blamed the men for being greedy because they wanted everything, but now I blame management as I see what's going on with all these companies buying up other companies and everything and I think, really, they have done wrong to this area. I really do. Although, they haven't hurt too many people in this family because they aren't into this type of thing, but one of our daughters--the one that's going to get her degree--her husband was college material but he didn't go to college because his family had come down from generations in the mill. He was training in the roller mill and he made like \$37,000 a year. He's coming up into his job now. He sells some kind of rollers for printing, but he never got that job back again.

He felt that he didn't need a college education because his father worked in the roller mill and that's one of the highest paying jobs. That ruined them. There wasn't anyone else [close to us] working in the mill that were affected. He was like groveling for a few years. He didn't work at all. He went from place to place to get anything. It was bad on his morale. It was very bad, because he was raised with everything. He was raised an only child.

Let's face it, some of these people in the mill really made it pretty wealthy. His family was one of those and he had everything. When our daughter was dating him, he gave her a brand new car. And now, they've got one car that's twelve years old and the other one, the company furnishes his car, so he's never going to get back up where he was in his 20's and he's only in his 30's. They live in New Middletown. He had \$10,000 when they got married to put down a down payment

on a home. He'll never hit that height again. Do you know what I mean? That's the one I really saw it affect the most. Others in the family have gone into other lines of work, so it really didn't affect them.

Our one son married a girl whose father was a superintendent in the mills, but he was retired because he had a bad heart. He's dead already. So, I mean, I didn't see that family, although she lives here in Struthers and she lives in a wealthy section and she has a beautiful home. She's a widow.

Our son-in-law, it really affected him. Really, it affected him. But, his father today was laid off. He wasn't old enough to retire, and he works in Lowellville on a very menial job. He gets half of his wages from the mill and then he's got this menial, really dirty job in Lowellville. It's some kind of plastics factory. It's an unsafe place and he's been hurt three times. That family, I saw get affected by it as far as what they have coming in. They're not poor or anything because they were well-set then, but I saw it affect that family.

I think that the government should have done something to prevent what happened. I really do. I think there's something very lacking to have an area like this go like that. That's how I feel. He never liked the mills. He got out of the mills, so it hasn't affected our wages, although we're not wealthy. But it hasn't affected us. He just didn't like the mills. When he retired. . . . He's an electrician now for the electrical union. But, he worked hard for that, too, after he got home.

L: Do you have anything else to add about your experiences in the mill?

K: I think it was great that they let the women do it, but they needed the women. I'm glad for the experience. And I'm glad, especially now that they are shut down, because that's part of history. There's people who knew me for years that don't even know I worked in the mill. I don't really talk about it. I think it's a sad thing, what has happened with the mills. Very sad. My father didn't work in them either, but I think it's very sad, because this valley . . . everything was the mills. If you didn't live near the mills, somehow you were connected with them.

L: What do you remember about the pollution from the mills?

K: We had a lot of soot. In later years, we got storm windows and that helped it. The soot would come in and sit--and this was big, thick, black soot--it would come in and sit on the

window sills. But, so did every other town. We had relatives in Pittsburgh where we would go in the summer to visit them on the train. They had the same thing. They worked in the coal mines. We had uncle who worked in the coal mines. They had a lot of dirt. They came home with really dirty clothes. It's in your washer and everything like that. But, people worked hard for their living then. Most of them came from Europe and that was better conditions than they had in Europe. So, nobody really complained.

I can remember from my neighborhood, everybody moved out to the outskirts, Liberty. The hollow was . . . the kids there went to Rayen High School. My brother went to East High School. Then some people moved out to Liberty as the neighborhood started to get shabby. Some of them moved to Boardman and Austintown. People moved away from the steel mills and left there. Then, YSU started buying up that property as they expanded. Even up on like, Scott Street, they bought that all out. But, I don't remember anyone complaining about the steel mills. Even the women. They were glad to have a living.

I can remember our next door neighbors. Every Sunday, you could smell their spaghetti sauce cooking. They were Italian. Every Sunday, Italians--I don't know if you know any of the older ones--they always eat some type of spaghetti on Sunday. I mean, nobody ever complained. They raised their kids, and nobody ever complained about the mills. We had [a neighbor] who was a policeman. The girl married a policeman, but his father worked in the mill.

Everybody was just connected with town, and no one really complained about the dirt or pollution or anything that came with it. I don't think we had as much garbage on the street as you do today. Everybody's got four or five bags out there on the street, today. We all had a garden. The pollution is a different type of pollution today. The garbage is there. All these people in Poland have these gorgeous home with the BFI right there. That's where we sold our house in Poland and came here. They've got that pollution right there. You don't know what's in that ground. I think it's much worse today. That's how I feel.

We all had our little bit of grass, maybe three feet in front of your porch. My father had a very, very beautiful garden. A little piece of lot like we had and he had a garden at one side of the house. My mother canned for weeks out of that garden. That's the way it was.

Those women all worked hard. Their hands showed that they worked hard. Most of them had bare floors and they scrubbed them with lye water. Their floors were white. I felt we

were fortunate when I was a child, because we had linoleum all over our house. We didn't have bare floors. Some people had bare floors and yet there were other people that had more than we did.

L: Mrs. Kemper, thank you very much.

K: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW