

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

GM Lordstown Project

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1943

Rose Marie Ronci

Interviewed By

Stacy Fortner

On

February 14, 2001

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Oral  
History  
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The G.M. Lordstown Plant

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INTERVIEWEE: ROSE MARIE RONCI  
INTERVIEWER: Stacy Fortner  
SUBJECT: The G.M. Lordstown Plant  
DATE: February 14, 2001

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This is an interview with Rose Marie Ronci for the Youngstown State University Oral History GM Lordstown Project by Stacy Fortner at Rose Marie Ronci's home on February 14, 2001 at 1:00 pm.

F: Why don't you just start talking about your parents and your grandparents and where they came from and what kind of jobs that they had?  
s that they had?

R: Ok. My father was born in Italy and he came to the United States when he was 16 years old and ended up in Youngstown, Ohio. He met my mother who was born and raised in Youngstown, Ohio, in a little part of town called Brier Hill. Her parents both came from Italy but I don't know what parts. My mother was the oldest child of seven in her family. My grandfather worked in the mill at Sheet and Tube and my father worked at Sheet and Tube. And they had a family grocery store in Youngstown. My mother and father had four children – I have two older brothers and one younger brother. My father and grandparents decided that they wanted to move from the city out to the country, when my mother was pregnant with me. My parents moved to Fowler, Ohio and my mother remained at their homestead in Youngstown because they kept their home there. And so, I was born in Youngstown, March 24, 1926. We were raised in the country but my parents still had all their relatives in Youngstown.

This is my three brothers and my cousin who was an only child who is deceased now and our pet lamb on the farm. Of course, I was always kind of like the tomboy because I was the only girl. And when we moved to the country – I should have said this before – we left running water, bathroom, electricity, and the phone. When we moved to the country, we didn't have electricity, we didn't have running water, and we had no phone and no bathroom. We had an outside toilet, and that was always quite an experience. And it was always a way, when we got a little older, go to the outside john, and so I would not do dishes.

But in the summer, haying time, it always seemed around 4<sup>th</sup> of July, my brothers always had to help make hay. They always wanted me to be able to do something and we always had all of our relatives and whoever else they could grab would come out to the country and help make hay. And we had a lake behind us. It was a lake that was under a bridge and it was called Clark's bridge, and we used to pack our little lunches, and our parents and we'd all go down there around the lake and swim. Really shouldn't have called it a lake, it was really a pond. But it was right at the end of our property. And we also had a pond right on our farm but we were never allowed to go into it because it was a pond that was used for our cattle.

My father became a cattle dealer. He bought and sold cattle and we had a bull. And we used to – the lady cows would come and visit him... And then my father became a – he would pick up the milk for the dairy from the farmers. And he would milk every morning and every night. And you had a milk house and you had the cement troughs in it, and you had water in there. And the milk would go into the cans and sit in the trough. And in the morning when it was time for my dad to pick up the milk, they had milk stands what we called – and you would pull your cans out to the milk stands and he would pick them up and bring them to the creamery and unload them and bring the empty cans back. Besides running the farm, which was quite a thing to do.

We had an apple orchard, we had peaches; we had a peach orchard, we had a cherry orchard and finally after so many years we had a truck farm where we would go into the city at Westlake Crossing and bring our fresh produce. And I used to just love to go with my grandmother and grandfather and just get to see all of the city people and see everyone and just get off of the farm. I can remember my grandmother packing our lunches before we would get ready to go and it was fried peppers and eggs on homemade Italian bread. It was delicious.

Oh, let me see... what else can I tell you about our childhood... I remember my grandparents, and my grandmother and grandfather and my mother and father decided they wanted to split. My father wanted to be a little bit more independent and do things his way. And my grandfather felt that he just wanted to remain on the farm. So my parents rented a home about two miles from my grandmother's house and he did his own farming and still collected the milk. And that was how we lived. And I think about it now and I really don't know how we survived other than I know that my mother canned a lot and my father did make money doing that, but you didn't make a whole lot of money farming, but you did make enough to feed your cattle. I can remember when it was haying time; and this was the days where you cut you hay, then you raked it and then you made piles, and then the piles were loaded onto the wagon, and then they were brought to the barn. And there was a big pitchfork and there were the horses that were hooked up to this pitchfork to a pulley that would pull it up to the barn and drop it in the hay pile. And then the straw from the wheat, the threshers would come around and all the farmers would get together and help each other with the threshing and then the ladies would cook the dinner. And then the threshers would eat and then you always had a big straw pile.

And I can remember my grandfather then wanting to give up the farm and my father bought my grandfather out and they moved back to the farm. And my brother and I were probably about five or six at that time. And we were never allowed to play with matches or anything like that. And my grandfather used to come out help make the hotbed where he grew his own seeds and plants. And he used to light a fire, and you used

to take manure and straw and you used to cook this down to make a fertilizer for the garden. And my uncle was to go to the house and get matches, but he was kind of lazy, and I don't think he thought too much about it and he sent my brother and I. And we were very curious about these matches because we weren't allowed to play with them and we didn't know how dangerous they could be and we kept one when we brought them back to my grandfather. We kept one and walked back to the house. And we lit it on a stone. And by this time we were up by the barn; but we were by the chicken coop and the straw stack. And when we lit it; it kind of like scared us and I dropped it, I threw it. It landed in the straw stack. It caught the straw stack on fire. When I saw the fire, I grabbed my brother and we ran down to Clark's Bridge and we didn't know what was going to happen. But we could see smoke.

Well, it burnt down the chicken coop, it burnt down the rabbit pens, it burnt down the milk house, it just burnt everything on that one side of the farm but the barn. And the mailman was coming by, and at this time there was no fire department, so the mailman was coming by and he stopped to see what he could do. And my parents were crying and my grandparents were crying because they couldn't find us, they thought we were burnt in the fire. And he said, "Well, don't cry about it." And they said, "We can't find the kids." And he said, "Ohhh, don't worry about the kids. They're down at Clark's Bridge. They're sitting there throwing stones down in the water." We were afraid to go down by the pond, but we'd sit up on the bridge and we was picking up gravel, and throwing it down in the water and watching it to see what it was doing. Well all of a sudden we saw all of these people, my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother and father and they were all running. And we thought, "Oh, my gosh, are we going to get it." And then they started hugging and kissing us and we thought, "Gee what did we do?" We knew we did something wrong. But they were so glad to see us alive that they didn't punish us. And then the fire was still going at this time and they were still fighting the fire, all the neighbors were fighting the fire and then I started to cry because I was afraid it was going to burn the house and it was going to burn my pretty dresses. It was the time of Shirley Temple and my mother made a lot of my clothes, and every now and then for a special occasion I would get a Shirley Temple dress. And that's what worried me. Nothing else worried me but thinking that the house was going to burn and I was going to lose my pretty clothes.

So we... I am trying to think what else I can tell you ... I don't remember too much more about our younger ages. But I remember the war, and I remember going to school. And of course we all went to the same school. From the first grade to high school we went to Fowler school, and our uncles and aunts went to the same school. And of course your history kind of followed you in school. The teachers would kind of like stay forever and they would know your aunt; they would know your uncles. Then when my brothers, they would remember my brothers. When we came to school, they would know who we were. I was excited about going to school because I was going to be with a lot of other kids. Because as a girl, I think I led a lonelier life when it came to roaming or anything because I didn't have the liberties that my brothers had. They could get on their bikes or they could walk and they could get together with other boys in the neighborhood that maybe lived as far away as five miles. I wasn't allowed to do that; so going to school was a real treat, getting to be with a lot of different people from the area. We had a pretty good school life. My two older brothers graduated, they went into the service.

At this time my mother started to work at Van Hoffel in Warren during the war because they started to hire women. And she was friends with the neighbor that lived next door and she wanted to go to work, so she asked my mother if she would like to go with her because she couldn't drive and needed a ride back and forth to work. My mother had never worked outside the home; she was always a homemaker, a mother and a wife. So, they went to work at Van Hoffel, and my two brothers were in the service, and my dad is trying to run the farm the best he could with my younger brother who was just about getting to the age that maybe he would be having to go in the near future. I remember quitting school when I was sixteen – I turned sixteen in March and I asked my mother, "I don't really like school. Do I really have to go?" She said, "Well, no, you don't have to go if you don't want to go but you're going to have to help here more." So I did. I more or less took over while my mother went to work. I would help her with the laundry and the ironing, and the cooking, and of course the cleaning. I hated to dust but I had to do that. By this time, my brother got disillusioned with school; my younger brother. So he figured if I could quit, a year and a half later then he wanted to quit. So then he quit school, too. Then, of course, he went into the service and I had three brothers in the service. My second oldest brother, Nick, was in the Air Corps – it was called the Air Corps at that time – he was shot down over Germany. He was a prisoner of war. My oldest brother was in the 95<sup>th</sup> Infantry and we didn't know if my brother was alive or not. We knew his plane was shot down; we were notified. My mother got a telegram delivered by the Postmaster from Nutwood telling us that my brother and his crew was shot down over Germany and they didn't know if there were any survivors or anything, that he was missing. So we didn't know for a long time but my mother had a list of some of the people that was on his crew. One of them was a State Highway Patrolman that was the pilot of the plane, and my mother went to the State Highway Patrol barracks and asked if they could look him up. They did find his home address, so my mother wrote to his wife. And she at this time had found out from somebody else that was in the same bombing that saw them parachute out. So we knew that they had landed out of the plane; that they didn't go down with the plane. I don't remember how many months it took before we ever got notification that he was a prisoner of the Germans. My brother doesn't like to talk about that experience too much. We were able to correspond with him and send him things, but he never ever received any of them because they kept moving him. Every time that they thought that they were going to be liberated, they would move them. And so these packages would be with the Red Cross. My brother was home for from being a prisoner of war and we were getting some of this stuff back from the Red Cross 'cause he had never received any of the stuff that we sent. That's how they kept moving him around and the packages just got kept with the Red Cross. They were pretty beat up and everything... but that was the experiences mostly of my childhood.

My two older brothers married and my aunt who always lived with us, was divorced and had a child and wanted to go to work. So she asked me in 1948 if I would like to go for a job. And I said, "Yeah, where are we going to go?" She said, "Let's go to Packard Electric. They're hiring." And my brother Nick who was a prisoner of war had worked at Packard Electric. So we went to Packard Electric and we both got hired. And I worked there until 1950. But in 1949 I met – I actually met my husband in 1948 right after I started to work at Packard Electric. I went dancing with my girlfriends. They invited me to go dancing with them, in Girard. And I went dancing with them and I

met my husband the first night I went there. That's really funny because it was really love at first sight. At least it was for me, I don't know about him – he says yes. I don't think he committed himself as much as I did when we first met at Avon Oaks.

And so I continued going back there and he continued going back there. And we were married in 1949. We will be married 52 years in July. And of course I got pregnant and my husband was a professional boxer. And he was going to New York as he turned professional – he was an amateur when I met him, he won the Golden Gloves in Youngstown for heavyweight boxing. And that was in 1948 and then he turned professional and he was going to go to New York. And of course I wanted to go with him. So, you didn't live together in those days, we eloped. And hopefully, I was hoping that I would be able to go with him. And we eloped and we had a few weeks at home before he left for New York. In the meantime, I'm hoping to be able to go, and I am back at work at Packard. And I'm pregnant. I got pregnant and I had a difficult pregnancy and wasn't allowed to travel. My husband stayed in New York until 1950. Because I couldn't go there, my husband decided to give up boxing and he came back. And then he got a job at Youngstown Kitchens in 1950 and then that's where he worked. And of course I stayed at home with my son. I had a very difficult pregnancy and a very difficult delivery. I was in intensive care for three days before my son was born with convulsions; I had toxemia.

So for five years we just lived with my parents. And we moved away for just about a year because my husband thought he wanted to live alone, just him and I and our son. And my parents' home was empty, it was just them. By this time my brothers are all married and away so we moved back with them and stayed there. And I had my daughter 5 years later and then in 1957 we moved here. We bought this home. This is the only home that we ever owned. It was going to be our beginner home; it's also ended up our ender-up home. My husband and I kind of made a pact, if anything would happen to him, I would sell. And probably go into an apartment. And if anything happened to me he would do the same. We don't really want to live with either of our children; we want to remain independent. Now, what am I going to tell you now? I could give you a little bit of background on my work history, if that's what you would want to know?

F: Ok.

R: When we were first married and I just had my son and I lived with my parents, my younger brother's wife's family had the restaurant called Sy Airport Inn. And her and I worked there on the weekends, as waitresses. And then a girlfriend of mine came to visit me one day, that had just gone through a divorce and she had one child. And she said, "Rose, I hear they're going to be doing some hiring at Liberty Steel. It's kind of like a kick-off from Mullins, and it's a shell plant. They're making the shells for the Korean War. Would you like to out there and put in an application with me?" And my mother said, "Yeah, go. Because we can take care of Ricky." I'd just had my son Richard who we called Ricky. And so we went and we got hired. And her and I worked there until we got laid off. But actually that was how we saved our money to buy our house. I saved \$5,000 to put down to buy this house. So we worked there, I think we probably only got to work there maybe only a little over a year and a half. And then of course the Korean War was over and that was the end of that plant.

So then I didn't do anything for a while and I had my daughter. And then we bought our home and we moved here. My daughter was born in '55 and my son was born in '50. Well then my husband was working at Mullins, and it was a nice plant and he enjoyed working there. But it seemed that they had a lot of labor problems. There would be strikes, or there would be layoffs. And of course we're living in this home and we're in debt. We're paying a mortgage and we're paying a car payment, and we're raising two kids and I found that I was going to have to, you know, maybe start to work again somewhere. And my husband worked at the golf course. Tamer Win, who were friends of ours, and he started to work there. And I got a job at Liberty, at the Penny's at the Liberty Plaza working part time. And we had it so that we never had to worry about a sitter or anything and I only worked a couple of days a week. But it was just enough to you know, kind of put food on the table and keep things going.

And I worked there for a few years, and somebody said to me, "They're doing some hiring at the little plant in Cortland called Warren Molded Plastics." And I said, "Geez, with my husband being off work, and things not going too good..." Mullins had moved away so this brought us up to the '60's and it was very difficult to get a job during the '60's, so I went to the employment office in Warren and I said, "I heard that there were some little plants that were hiring," and they said, "Oh, there's a plant in Cortland called Warren Molded Plastics that's hiring." I said, "What does it pay?" and they said, "A dollar and fifteen cents an hour." And I said, "Oh, my goodness. I don't know if it's worth me doing that." Then I got to thinking about it and I thought, well, I can drop my kids off at my mother's on my way to work if I'm on days, and they can get the school bus from there and they can go to school from there, and they can get off the school bus from there and I can pick them up and bring them home. And if I'm on afternoons, it could still work that way. I could drop them off there and my husband could pick them up. So I thought, I don't think I want the job, not for \$1.15 an hour. So I started driving home, and I thought, well, \$1.15 an hour for forty hours... I would at least bring home \$40. So I decided to go there and take the job. So I went there and took the job.

Well at this time, I think it was in '64; the minimum wage went into effect. And it was a dollar and a quarter an hour, for some of the places that weren't paying a little bit more. So we got a dollar and a quarter an hour. There was a lot of buzzing going on at the plant at this time. And the people that owned it, Mr. Cetrone, whose father owned a dry cleaner's in Warren, we he had given it up and he came out to work with his son at the plant. Well, they're Italian, and when he found out I was Italian, whenever I had my lunch hour, he always used to like to come in and have his lunch hour with me. So we would sit and have lunch together, and he would reminisce about his days in Italy, and we would talk, and we became quite close, his father and I. And so, like I said, at this time there was a lot of buzzing going on in the plant but I didn't know what it was about. And I was never approached because they thought I was a friend of the Cetrone's. They were trying to get a union in the plant. And I have always worked in a union plant; when I worked at Packard it was union. And when I worked at Liberty Steel it was union. And so of course as soon as I heard, after a little while when it slipped out that they were trying to start a union, I went up to the one girl. Her name was Joann and I said, "I understand you're passing out cards to get a union in here. I would like to sign a card because I'm very union, I want to belong to the union too." And she said, "Well, we don't know if we want to allow you because you're such good friends with Mr. Cetrone."



And I said, "Well that has nothing to do with me working here. I only know him from work and of course I want to be part of this. I think it'll do the plant good and I think it'll do us good. It'll get us some benefits," because we had none and I said, "I'm all for it. I've always been union."

So we started. And we got the cards passed around, and they had gotten in touch with a union rep out of Cleveland and he had a representative down here by the name of Charley Street who would be helping us. And we had meetings at one of the girl's home when we first started, and then we used to go to Youngstown to have meetings at a place up on South Avenue near Kukuskie's Hall. It was United Steelworker's Union Hall. And they approached Mr. Cetrone that we wanted a union, and of course he balked. And so it was a walkout. And we all stuck together except a few people that he had brought with him from Packard because he had worked at Packard Electric, then Cetrone. And he brought a few of his people with him and of course they stuck with him and of course the rest of us - all but one person, she decided that she wasn't going to walk out with us. And the foreman went up to her and said, "Everybody's walking out. We're shutting the doors and its best that you follow." She became a very good union member after that. She didn't know what union was all about.

We really had a time. We had to be on strike, and it was a big mess. And it was mostly women that worked at Warren Molded Plastics and I'll tell you, as group of women we were really tough. We stuck together, and we had a lot of support from our husbands. Because some of their husbands were truck drivers and they belonged to the Teamsters, and my husband was a steel worker and with the Steel Worker's Union, and we had a lot of guidance from them other than from our leadership. But we didn't obey when the Sheriffs came and they got a restraining order against us and we were supposed to only have so many people, and if we didn't we were all going to be brought to jail. And we still didn't, we stood there. And we said, "If you're going to bring us to jail you'd better make better provisions because I don't think we're all going to fit in a police car." So the Sheriffs kind of like left us alone, and then of course it went through court, and then it was where we could only have so many pickets. And by this time, then, I became one of the union leaders with the girl that became Union President we got to sit in on the negotiations with Mr. Cetrone and his attorney and his Plant Manager. And it went pretty good after he finally decided that he was going to sit down and meet with us and go over our contract.

So we did get a contract, and we did get a little raise. I can't remember exactly what it was but it sounded like maybe it was \$1.45, or something like that. I ended up working there 5 years and when I left there I was making \$1.60 an hour. In the meantime, his plant had grown. He was able to get more contracts, he opened up another little division in Champion, and then we outgrew Cortland Plant and Champion Plant and he moved to Mineral Ridge and opened up a plant there. And I decided, that was in '69 that I never wanted to work again. And I don't know, somewhere along the line he left Mineral Ridge and I think they still have a Warren Molded Plastics in Salem, cause that's where Mr. Cetrone's new owner grew up. I don't know if he sold, or if he lost it or what happened but he's not in that company any more.

So by this time, I'm thinking, my son has graduated that year and my daughter was a freshman. And I thought my husband was working pretty good. He had gotten a job, after Mullins had moved away; he had gotten a job at Standard Transformer. And he



was working there. And he had worked there for quite a few years and I thought, "Oh, boy." We had used up all of our savings though, through all of these difficulties that we had gone through. I thought, "I'm never going to have to work again. Our house is practically paid for."

My husband had a friend that was working at General Motors, in Lordstown. And I can remember hearing about Lordstown coming here, in the '60's. And oh, everybody was so excited about Lordstown because it was really going to be a boom to the area because the steel mills were going bad and work really wasn't that good in this area. And someone had gotten my husband an application for Lordstown. And it had to be, I think it was '68 and my husband was still working at Standard Transformer. And he went out for the physical. And he didn't pass the physical, cause they were quite picky at that time. He was tone deaf in one ear, his right ear. And they told him that there was nothing that he could do about it. And then he had gone to his doctor and he told him that there was nothing he could do about it, and that he would never have hearing in this ear. So he never pursued going back out there again. And he continued staying with Standard. Well, sometime along the line, maybe in '69 – a friend of mine's husband who he golfed with worked out at Lordstown, and he said, "They're going to be hiring some women out at Lordstown because they're starting up the line and they're going to making a new car called the Vega." Well, my husband said, "Forget about it for me, because I didn't pass." And he said, "Well they're going to be hiring women – would Rose Marie be interested?" And he said, "Well I don't know, I'll ask her." And he came home and he said to me, "Honey, would you like to go to work at Lordstown?" I said, "Oh, gosh, yeah. Because they make good money out there. We could probably get some savings, you know and get some money up for when we're older." At this time I'm 44 years old and I thought, "I don't know if they are going to hire women my age?" And he said, "Well, you're not over the hill. Bob says they're hiring women and they're not discriminating against age." So I got an application and I filled it out and turned it in. I thought, "Well, I'll never hear anything from them." And this was in 1970.

And I can't remember exactly but it must have been in January sometime, I had gotten a call and it was in the evening. And everybody knew that I had an application. Boy, I told everybody. "Well, I've got an application at General Motors Lordstown and they're going to be hiring women and I think I'm going to be hired, and I'm just waiting for them to call." We get a phone call in the evening. And they said, "Hello, I'd like to speak to Rose Marie Ronci." And I said, "This is her speaking." They said, "This is General Motors Lordstown calling." And I said, "Aw, no this isn't, who is this? Who's playing a joke on me? They don't call you this hour of the night!" And they said, "Yes, this is General Motors calling." And he gave his name, I don't remember what it was, and he said, "You're scheduled to come in for a physical." And the physical was also scheduled for the evening and I said, "Oh, come on now. This isn't possible. They don't do these things at night." When I worked at Packard everything was done during the day. Any other job I had it was always done during the day. No one called at night. So I said, "Ok, I'll be there." Well in the meantime, after I hung up I called our friend that worked there and I said, "Bob, I got a call from General Motors. I'm to go there for a physical and it's in the evening and I don't believe that. I think that someone's playing a joke on me." And he said, "No, Rose, it's not a joke. It's true. You are going, it is true. They have already examined some women – and men – have already gone through physicals.

And we are doing so much hiring that we have to schedule it throughout the day and it goes into the evening." And I said, "Oh, okay." And my husband said, "I'll go with you." Because I had no idea what the best way was to get there from here. And at that time I think they were just working on 11 and 80. But my husband said, "I'll show you the best way for us to go. Because," he said, "I'd prefer you going through regular roads. Because if you have any problems, there will always be a house or something to help you rather than a stranger on the highway." So he went with me and he rode around with a friend that he had that worked there by the name of Johnny Marchen who was a, he had something to do with maintenance, and he had his own little truck or car or whatever you wanted to call it. And he brought my husband all around the plant and all over. I had never been in the plant. The furthest that I had ever gone into the plant was to the lobby, and then of course when I went in for my physical to the medical department. I had peeked in through the big doors and I could see part of the plant, but I had never been in it. So I really had no idea what was in there. I knew that we were going to make cars, and that they were making cars but I had no idea what it was like in there. Well we went through the physical and I passed. And a lot of people were turned down because they were quite picky at that time. But they were told that they could come back if they corrected your problem. If you weighed too much they couldn't hire you; if you didn't weigh enough they couldn't hire you. If you had high blood pressure or if you needed glasses, or if you had any kind of medical problem that I imagine they felt would interfere with your work performance you had the option of correcting it and coming back for another physical. And of course I passed everything so I was told that I would be called.

So I waited, and I waited. I didn't want to go anywhere because I didn't want to miss the call. My friends said, "Don't worry. If you miss the call, they'll call you again or they'll notify you by mail. They won't forget you." So I finally got called in August of '70. And there were a group of us that was hired in August of '70 and it was predominantly men and I think at the time there were 6 women in this group that was called when I was called. And we all went up into the cafeteria and we sat there and took our assignments down to different departments. And this, I can't think of her name but she was a redhead and so was I, and they took us down to this department. And I think we had, maybe, there might have been about 12 of us that they took to the trim area. And of course this was the first time that I really got to go into the plant. And I'm looking, and we're crossing over lines and we're going down on the aisles but we're crossing through some of the lines and it looked to me – it was just unbelievable. I just couldn't believe it. I had never seen an assembly plant like this before. It was nothing like Packard Electric. And I just couldn't believe it. I was going, "Oh, my God." And we're looking around, and of course the line was running and of course there were all these men on the line, and of course they were all yelling when they saw a couple of women in this group, "Hey, Lady!" "Hey, Lady!". And we're going down through the plant and they dropped me off at trim 1. And I don't remember if they left anyone else there or not but then the group went off to other sections of trim. And my foreman met me and he said to me, "You're going to be working on trim 1 but you're really assigned to trim 3 and your foreman is Art Campbell but you're really assigned to this area because we think the job can be done better here on trim 1." So I was down at the end of trim 1. And they introduced me to my utility man. His name was Cecil. Of course Cecil was more my

age. At this time, almost everybody on the line was in their 20's. And you know what the 70's was like – no, you don't because you weren't born yet – but my son was raised in the 70's. But it was the 70's and most of the workers were in their early 20's and they were all young men and I was the only girl on the line and I'm working and looking around. And some of them had long hair; most of them had long hair. A few of them had their hair cut short but it seemed like the year for the long hair, and jeans and you know, kind of like the radical 70's. And I'm looking around and I have a son 21 years old and I'm going to be working with 21-year olds. My foreman, I don't think was much older than 20, I would imagine that he was in his 20's. I thought, "Boy, this is going to be quite an experience, you know." I get along real well with people, but we didn't know how the men were going to accept us. Of course they had told us when we had gone through our orientation that they wanted everyone to act mature. And they wanted the men to be respectful to the women, that they wanted the men to respect the women and that we were to be treated as ladies. And of course our foreman told me the same thing. He said, "I expect you to be treated as a lady on my line and if there's ever a problem I want to be told about it." And I thought, "I'm not going to have any problems." And he assigned me to my job – this air hose. And I was to be shooting two screws into a part that had to go into a glove compartment and it was a job that didn't have to be done every car but I just wanted to make sure that I was going to do a good job.

And I'm on my job and pretty soon someone comes over and says hello and introduces himself. I can't remember his name now, but he was the committeeman for the union. And he said, "I'm the union committee man for your area." And he said, "Of course you're not a member of the union," but he said, "I'm here if you need me." And he said, "In 30 days you will be able to be a member of the union." And he said, "I have a wife that works at Packard Electric and I would want her treated fairly and I want to see you treated fairly." And he said, "And if there's anything I could do for you, all you have to do is have someone call me." I wasn't allowed to call but I could have someone call for me. And so I had no problems. I made up my mind that when I started there that I was going to do my job and I was going to prove to everyone on the line that I didn't need their help. But I didn't want them to know that I felt this way, that I could do my job and be able to do just what they were able to do. And I found that it wasn't all that hard for me. I adapted very quickly - I had worked in an assembly plant before and I had worked with men before, and women. It didn't faze me a bit. And I sort of like made a lot of real good friends. And they would look out for me, my co-workers, unbeknownst to me. They were watching everything that was being done to us.

And one day the foreman came over to me and said, "This job is not going to be in this area any more," he said, "but I have a job for you." And he said, "It's going to up at the beginning of the line" And he said, "You're going to have to work on this side of the car and then you're going to have to walk in front of it and you're going to have to work on the other side of the car." And I said, "Ok." He had someone show me what I was supposed to do. And at this time I still hadn't had my 30 days in and I really just did whatever they told me and did it the best I could. Well unbeknownst to me this was a no-no. When you worked on one side of the car, your jobs were to be only on that one side of the car. And if you worked on the other side of the car, your jobs were to be on that side of the car. So I was doing what I was told, and this one fellow that was on my line that we kind of worked near each other and I had just met him when I started to work on

this job. And his name was Ron. Very nice young man and we kind of like bonded. He was Italian and so as I so we had something in common. He was maybe a year or two older than my son but we just kind of clicked. And I didn't know but he was watching out for me and all of a sudden the foreman comes over to me and he says, "Rose," he said, "You're only going to have to do the job on this one side of the car from now on." And I said, "Ok. Alright." So I didn't know what was going on but unbeknownst to me Ron had called the union committee man and then put in a committee call on behalf of me because they had me working on both sides of the car which, you're not supposed to do that. So then later on I did find out that he did this on behalf of me, which made me even more and more good friends. I became real good friends with the union president; he came down and introduced himself. At the time it was Gary Braynard. Thought the world of him. Wonderful, wonderful union president who moved on to better things in our union. By this time, I made real good friends with one of the inspectors on the line who is now our vice-president of the union. Copper, Darryl Cooper. And he was an inspector so he went from line to line and inspected. And we became good friends. Made good friends with the people that I worked with. Never had another woman on the line for a long time. They didn't do that much hiring, and there was maybe like only one woman on each, throughout the plant. Never knew what the body shop looked like, never knew what the paint shop looked like, never knew what final process looked like. I more or less just stayed in my area because it was all so new to me. And when lunchtime came we just sat in our break area and ate. And then came the big day. 1970, September. When they had the big strike. September the 14<sup>th</sup>, I just made my 30 days so I could become a union member. It was the proudest day of my life, I became a union member. And of course the plant all walked out and I was still on day turn and we were all to go to the union hall. And that's where everyone went, and immediately met a lot of different people then. And I met a lot of different women that were working there in different departments. And of course they immediately assigned us women to jobs; didn't want us on the picket line. Assigned us to doing things at the union hall, signing people up for different things that had to be done. Different people had to report, and different organizations that we could get help through. We more or less were to help there and that's what we did. And of course the strike went on till November, it was quite a long strike. It went on 'till November and we went back to work I think it was the week before Thanksgiving. And then they did a whole lot of hiring then and they brought down a whole bunch more people and a whole bunch more women. And they brought another woman to my line and it was the first time I had met one of my very best friends, Valerie. We became real good friends and they brought her on our line and her and I kind of bonded. She was from Campbell and we're still friends to this day. We go to the retiree meetings together, we have lunch together, and I have gone to her children's weddings and vice versa. And things were a little radical, I would say, in the 70's. We didn't - General Motors' employees didn't have a real good reputation in the 70's. They did this hiring in November and then they said, "We're going to do more hiring." And by this time, my son who was 21 decided that he wanted to get married. And they had brought his graduating class out to the plant in '69 and brought them to the plant and he said, "Oh, Mom! I would never, ever want to work there." He said, "It's a jungle!" Well, he comes to me this one day and says, "Mom, I hear they're doing some hiring." And he was working at a little rubber molding plant in North Jackson at the time. He had

graduated school and was working there. And he said, "Do you think that maybe you can get me an application." And I said, "Well, I'll ask my foreman because the foremans are going around, they are asking if we know anyone that wants a job and they were handing out applications." And I said, "I'll see if I can get you an application." And my nephew who had graduated at the same time as my son said, "Do you think you can get me one, Aunt Ro?" And I said, "Yeah." So I ask my foreman and he said, "Yeah, I'll get you a couple of applications." So I had them fill them out and I brought them back in and turned them in to Personnel and my son and my nephew both got hired there in December. And it was before Christmas; they both got hired in December. And lo and behold they brought my son down into the trim area so we got two Roncis down there in the trim area with the same initials, which wasn't a very good idea, I don't think. But anyway he got hired and my nephew got hired and my nephew ended up in paint and my son ended up in trim. And of course things were settling down, and he got kind of like pushed here and there. And I sort of still, as far as seniority went was still able to hold day turn, and stayed more or less in the trim area. And I went from various jobs in the trim area. Some were pretty decent, and some were a little harder than others, and some took more training than others. But at that time they always had someone working with you, you would always have someone alongside of you, training you. And when they felt they could leave you alone, they would take them away and they would leave you alone. Basically we were treated, I think, pretty fair by both the union and the company. And then it come to a time when there was a layoff and my son ended up over in the truck plant, in the body shop. And that's where he stayed. And I still kinda like stayed on days. And then there came a time, I don't even remember what year it was, but there was quite a few people laid off and I had to go to afternoon turn, to the truck plant, to the body shop. I had never been in the body shop before, never been in the truck plant before, let alone the body shop. And that's where I ended up, on afternoon turn. And that was an experiance in itself, after working in trim and then going to this with the huge, mammoth, welders that I didn't even know what they looked like. And I can't remember how long I worked there but then it didn't seem like I worked there very long -- and I got called back to the car plant and got called back to the car plant on day turn. Because they started calling people back. And I was able to remain in the car plant. I ended up on a door pad job, stamping out options for the door pads that would go onto the assembly lines and then they would be put into the car. And my job was to stamp out what needed to be done to it then I would have to give it to two fellows that worked on either side of me and then they would put whatever trim on it and then these parts that had to go on it and then they would put it in the car. And then another real nice young fellow that I became good friends with, in fact two of them. Jim McKnight who I think is still working there but I think he may be ready to retire. And Bill Anderson, and I don't know if he is still working there. I kind of lost track of him. But we did this job for, I can't remember how long we did it, how many years I did it, and then the job was moving to make it probably easier and better, they moved my job to hard trim and I had the option of going with my job or staying in soft trim. And I had never been in hard trim and never worked in hard trim but I would see hard trim when I would come in through the plant because when I would walk in I would go to the left and I would go to trim, and go to the right it would go to hard trim. So my job ended up there, in the snake area and it was right at the main entrance right at the main lobby. And I worked there and I know



the men were so glad to have a woman on their line. They said, "Oh, boy, we've got a woman on our line, now. We're going to have homemade cookies and pie, and we're going to have food and she's going to bring in this and that for us." And I said, "Not really, unless your wives want to do the baking and send it in because I don't have time to do those things." And lo and behold they did. We kind of like, once a week we would have kind of like a little snack-treat. We would all bring in something, dessert, different things to snack on and during our lunch hour we would have this. But that's where I ended up other than when the plant went down to one shift and I ended up in the truck plant again. It was quite a challenge. And I was having some difficulties myself and I just couldn't handle it. And I took a leave of absence. When I asked if I could have a leave of absence they told me yes, I could have three months leave which took me off of their books all together. I got no unemployment and no health benefits and no health insurance or anything but my husband had all of these things. So it was ok. And three months went by, and I still didn't think I wanted to go back to the truck plant and I took another three months. And then -

(brief interruption)

so I went back for another three months which brought me up to nine months and Joe in the office thought that I should either report back to work or I should quit. I wasn't ready to report back to work and I wasn't ready to quit so I asked for a union rep and he went in and talked to them and I don't know exactly what he told them but I got another three months. So which brought me up to nine months, and when my nine months were up it brought me up to January of '83. And I reported back to work, and unbeknownst to me I was laid off. So I went on to being laid off and I was off until March of '83 and they were putting the second shift back on and I was called back to work. But in the meantime they had made a mistake and had called my son back to work. They went by the initials instead of the Social Security Number. And when they saw him they knew it wasn't him that was supposed to be there. So then they - I think they kept him because he was going to be called anyway and then they called me. And then I did go back to work and after being off almost a year, I went back and thought, "Oh boy. My first day back, I'm so glad to be back to see everyone." And I got up early that morning - I got up at 4 o'clock in the morning because I allowed myself an hour from home to work. I would leave my house at five to make sure I was at work before six. Which I was always there on time, no matter if it was snow, rain, or sleet. I never, ever was late for work except if it was an emergency that something took place here I was late for work.

I have to tell you this because this is a funny story. The one day I reported to work and I was late and the foreman wanted an excuse. And I said, "Okay." And I gave him my excuse. And he said, "No, I really want the truth. I don't want a joke. This is serious, I really want your excuse." And I said, "Well, this is what happened, Art." I said, "My husband had already left for work and our toilet had overflowed and I had a mess to clean up in the bathroom. And it had gone through our bathroom to the basement, and I had a mess to clean up in the basement. I just couldn't come to work and leave that mess and I cleaned that up and that's why I'm late for work." And he said, "Ok, now tell me the truth." And I said, "That is the truth." And he laughed; he thought that was so funny. But that was the truth, that's really what happened.

So anyway, getting back to my first day back after being off a year, by this time I had lost a year's seniority - I had thirteen years but I had lost a year of seniority because

of my leave of absence because I got no credit for being off of work. And I came home from work that day and I said, "Oh, it was nice being back to work." And my husband said, "Are you sure that you really want to go back?" By this time – in the meantime he had lost his job and then gotten a job at Reactive Metals in Niles. And he had gotten his two years in there. And I said, "Yeah, I think I can continue to work a little while longer." So I went to bed early that night which I was always in bed a ten o'clock at night because I was up at 4. I got up the next morning and I was so tired. I thought, "Oh, my. This is terrible. Why am I doing this? Do I really want to do this?" But I got dressed and I walked in the plant and I'm looking all around and I thought, "Oh, gosh. Do I really want this?" And I thought, "Well, I'll give it a try; I'll see how it goes." The line was moving real slow because we were just gonna start putting the second shift back on and day turn and afternoon turn were kind of working together until they got retrained to put the afternoon shift back on. And I stuck it out. And I think it was like two weeks and I thought, "No, I don't think I want to do this anymore. I think I'm going to retire." So I spoke to the retiring representative which was Bill Fitzgerald and I said, "Bill, I'm really thinking of retiring." He said, "Rose, you have enough time but you're not old enough. You're only 57 years old." I said, "Only!?" He said, "You have to be 60 in order to retire off the line and keep your benefits; your insurance and your benefits." I said, "You know, I really don't think I could work three more years." He said, "Are you sure?" He said, "Think about it. And then come back and we'll talk again." I said, "Ok, I'll think about it but I am so tired." I said, "I just don't think I could do it anymore." And so I came home and I told my husband about it.

Well anyway I thought about it and I went back in and I talked to Bill again and he said, "Well, you'll be giving up a lot. You're not going to be able to retire. You're going to have to sign a release that you are quitting. But then when you become 60, you can come back in and sign up for your pension." And he said, "And if you take your pension at 60, you will take a reduction, but you can sign up for it." So then I gave my foreman my two weeks notice and I told him that I was going to be leaving in two weeks and he said, "Ok, I'll get somebody to do your job and train them."

Well I always got a razzing that, I don't know why but it seemed to be that every job that I did or anywhere that I went into the plant, I kind of like adapted to it. And it always looked easy to anyone else. And it just didn't look like it would be hard for anyone to learn. Because after I learned it, I just – you know, after you do a thing over and over again, 70 and at one time 80 times an hour when we were making 100 cars an hour – it just became automatic. So everyone always thought that the jobs that I had were easy, and I think we all looked at other people and thought their jobs were easy; until we had to do them. And then we knew we had to learn to do them and found out that they weren't easy when you first started doing them but that they got easy as you did them. So everyone thought that this job was easy because I stayed with it and went with it. And it wasn't really hard, but it was – you had to be on your toes and it was something that you had to do every job. It wasn't a thing that you could maybe miss a car, or not do anything. You had to build these up and have these door pads ready to go onto the line and put into the car. And by this time this is what my job was. I had to stamp them out by this time, because they had cut the line speed down and it did away with a lot of help. And I had to put it on the line then. And it was a hanger that we had to put it an and it had to go up to where someone else took it off and put it in the car. So



the job looked easy to everyone else because I had done it so long and it was easy for me. So they brought a person down and I told him what we had to do, how we had to read every broadcast that came down, and what had to be done – what color had to be picked and what had to be stamped on the door pad. Because the door pads were all the same, except for the options and the only difference was the colors. So you had to read the broadcast to make sure of the right color and the options that had to be stamped on it. So I told him what we had to do and he stood there with me, and worked with me all that day. Didn't look too enthused about it, but did it. Next day, I went to work and said to my foreman, "Where's my helper? Because you know, I am leaving in two weeks." I don't think he believed me. And he said, "Oh, I don't know where he is." So then he came back to me later and said, "He doesn't want this job." I said, "Oh, okay, are you going to bring someone else, Nester?" His name was Nester, Chuck Nester. He said, "Yeah, I'm going to get someone else, Rose. Don't worry. I'm going to get someone else." He said, "I'm going to see if Marge on afternoon turn wants the job." Because her and I had worked together on it on day turn and she was a good worker. And he liked her because she was a good worker. And he said, "I'm going to ask Marge if she wants to come on days and take your job." Well I guess he got in touch with her and he asked her if she would like to come on days and do my job on days and she said no. Her work schedule was better on afternoons. She always worked afternoons and she preferred afternoons. That she wanted to stay on afternoons.

So he found someone else. And they came down and they worked a few days. Well by this time they take them, they bring them to work and learn the job and then you don't see them for a while and I don't have anybody. Nobody is learning my job. And by this time I'm getting more and more tired. I found that my body got so relaxed from my easy life that I had for a whole year, getting up in the morning, lounging around in my robe, watching TV, and not knowing what it was to have to get up and do anything. I found that it really was taking its toll on me. And truthfully, I went to work then the second week, which was going to be my second week giving them notice and I said, "Chuck. I'm sorry. I can't finish out this second week. If you can get someone I'll do my best to help them today but I don't think I'll be here tomorrow. I'm going in and signing my final papers." And he was very, very disappointed. He said, "I'm very, very disappointed, Rose. I really thought that you would really stick it out for two weeks." And I said, "Well, Chuck, if you're disappointed in me, I'm very disappointed in you, too. Because I thought you took me seriously, that you really were going to get someone here to really learn this job." And I said, "I don't think you fulfilled your part of the agreement. You really didn't bring anyone to really learn this job. And I don't think I can do this job justice, and I don't think I can handle this anymore and I really am leaving today." So nobody knew I was leaving. No one on the line knew I was leaving. They all knew I was going to be there for two weeks, but no one really knew. And of course when you quit off of the line, you're not recognized as a retiree. You just go in and sign your release and that's it. You leave there until you're ready to come back and sign your papers for you pension. So I went out that day and I signed my release and I left.

Nobody knew what had happened to me and I had phone calls then, from different people that knew me and wondered what had happened, if I was sick and where I was. I said, "No, I really went in and signed my paper and I really quit." And that was the end of that era. And that was March the 14<sup>th</sup> of 1983. I retired on the same date, the

14<sup>th</sup>, as I started. And I never went back to the plant then until I was 60 in March. I was 60 in March, and signed all the paperwork to start getting my pension. And then I started receiving my pension. And by this time, a lot of my friends, especially a lot of the women that I worked with... My best friend Valerie had gotten hurt at work. She had gotten her hand caught in the chassis working underneath the car. Her torque gun flew loose out of her hand and it ran it against part of the car and the torque gun and it had tore ligaments and things in her hand. And I saw throughout the plant different guys, not only girls, that had had different little injuries in the plant and had to go on workman's compensation. Which the company gave them a hard time with; which most companies I understand do. And I think a lot of them – most people I think had a legitimate reason for being on workman's comp. And I had developed a problem, too, with tendonitis. And that was another reason that I decided to leave there, because I was having trouble with my hand. But I never went on a workman's comp. I went on a sick leave at one time with it, but then returned back to work and was returned to the same gun and the same job. I had problems throughout with tendonitis but never had a workman's comp case. And when I returned back to work, I wasn't working with guns but I was using my hands a lot. You know, and pressing the buttons to start the stamping machinery. But I noticed that I was getting this weakness in my hand again. And this was another reason that made me decide that I should get out of there.

And a lot of my friends, like I said, had been out on workman's comp and another good friend of mine had a lot of back problems. She had hurt her back, and her arm. And I always felt quite lucky that I came out of there with no injuries. And of course my son was the same. My son never had a day missed for a workman's call. And my son is retiring March the 1<sup>st</sup> of this year. He had thirty years in December and he is retiring March the 1<sup>st</sup>. And my nephew worked there a couple of years, and he was a tiny little kid. It just wasn't his line of work. He went into being a wine salesman. And he is now a national wine salesman. He has, he's with a wine company that is all over the United States. That's what he's doing now.

Well in the meantime, getting back to my son, they started hiring through the lottery for summer help. And a lot of people got hired for summer help. Well then it just got to the point where it was so involved with hiring summer help with people that worked there always trying to get their kids a job there so that they would be able to earn money to go to college or whatever. So I think they came through with this lottery. And I don't remember exactly what year it was but I think it was four or five years ago. And my son said to me, "What do you think about Erica, my daughter?" Who's the only grandchild that I have. I have step-grandchildren but she's my only natural grandchild. And he said, "What do you think if I put her name in the lottery?" I said, "I think she'd be a good assembly worker. She's not real excited about college, and I think maybe she would like it." She went to college for six months, thought maybe she wanted to go into accounting, but in the meantime she had a child and found it very hard to go to college and study – which I am sure you're aware of, how hard it is to study – and if you have children it's even harder. He put her name in the lottery and she got called. And she went out for the test, which they put them through a test, and she passed the physical. Which they put them through a drug test. I think they more or less had an aptitude test, and I don't exactly what the test involved but it wasn't handled through General Motors at all. It was handled through a company that they hired to do this. And she qualified.

So she did get called for summer help and at this time she had a baby. And she's only five foot five, only weighs about 102 pounds. She's a great worker. She adapted to everything that they put her on, all the foremans seemed to want her because she's a good worker, and when her 90 days were going to be up they asked her if she was going to go back to college. And she said, "No, I'm not going back to college." They asked her if she would be interested in full time work and she said, "Yes." So they told her that they would call her for full time work. So she got called for full time work and she went to the stamping plant, which was bad for her. It was very, very noisy, and after working in the car plant in its quiet and being on assembly... She did work there, and then she got laid off. Then they called her back to the assembly plant. She went back to the assembly plant and they did tell her that if she ever got called at the stamping plant she'd go back. But she said, no, she liked the assembly plant because that's where she started. So she stayed there, but she did get called back to the stamping plant but she turned it down and stayed at the assembly plant. Well she's still working at the assembly plant; she's on midnight turn, she has two children now. Her oldest just turned seven and her other child is another little girl that will turn six in June. So I have three generations at General Motors. And we are all very grateful for the opportunity to have worked there. We feel that they gave us an opportunity and we feel, and I am sure that I am speaking for my son and my granddaughter, that we fulfilled our part of the bargain. We've been good workers, I think we've given them a fair day's work and I think we've made fair wages. And I think, of course I lost my benefits, but my granddaughter appreciates her good benefits with her two daughters because she is a single mother. And my son of course is going to reap the harvest of his thirty years there and he is quite grateful, too. And like I said, I think we all did a good job. And I don't know what more I can say.

I love General Motors' products. We drive two Cavaliers. My first car that I bought was a Chevy; in 1949 I bought a brand new Chevy. We have owned Cadillacs. And of course when I retired we gave up Cadillacs and went to two Cavaliers. We are on our 4<sup>th</sup> Cavalier and we have owned other Chevy cars. And the only other car that we bought that wasn't a Chevy, is that we bought a Ford one time and we bought a Plymouth one time. The Ford was used, the Plymouth was new. After working with General Motors and driving a Plymouth, I can always say that I am very proud of the work we did at General Motors because I could see the quality, the difference in the quality of the General Motor product as compared to the Chrysler product. Although I'm not knocking it because I know right know that I think they are the three leading car manufacturers and I think Chrysler - I am sure that they have come a long way with their product. But the one we had was inferior to General Motors.

So I have a lot of happy memories. I can remember the year that we were given awards at General Motors for working there ten years.

F: This was for ten years working there?

R: Uh huh. And I can see in 1970, we were awarded, and the writing was on the back of this, this award for our workmanship and quality of work at General Motors. It was an uncirculated coin collection. And of course what I showed you was a sterling silver bracelet with a General Motors logo with three little rubies.

And, I don't know what else I could tell you... Throughout my years that I worked at Lordstown, a Woman's Committee was formed because the women thought that maybe we should have some sort of a committee and kind of like compare notes, and sort of bond, and meet other women that worked for General Motors, because some of them worked on afternoon turn. At that time, we only had two shifts, day turn and afternoon turn, and of course we had three plants, the stamping plant more or less was not in our local. But the women were invited to join our Women's Committee if they chose to. And so I got to meet a lot of other women from different shifts at the plant that I had never known.

These are some of the pictures... in 1985... by this time I was no longer there and some of the other girls were no longer there but they decided to have a 15 year reunion and so we had a fifteen year reunion at Alberini's and these are some of the pictures.

F: So when you weren't working did you show sides...

R: Yes, I remained friends with many of the girls there and remained real good friends with my friend Valerie and we started going – they had formed a retirees' meeting, you know they have a retirees' club there – and then we got, I don't know what year we got wind of it but then we started going to the retirees' meetings. And then we see a lot of the people that we worked with. If you notice at the retirees' meetings, most of the men bring their wives. A lot of the women bring their husbands but a lot of their husbands, like mine, have their own retirees' meetings and my husband is a golfer. And in the summertime Monday is one of his golf days, and in the winter its breakfast day. And so he comes to the retiree meetings mostly with me but my best friend Valerie had become a widow then so my husband feels, "Oh, you and Val go. That's your time for you and her to get together and have lunch and gab..." Every now and then, well at this last meeting one of the other girls that I had worked with – Emma, Emma Bell – she had just retired. She was another one of the first group of women hired there. And of course she was quite young, so she was able to get her thirty years. So she just retired. So my friend Val and Emma and I were all sitting together. A lot of the people don't come to the retirees' meetings although we have a full house. And it is quite packed and we do have a good group of people, good group of retirees. And once a year the retirees has a Christmas party at the Itam Club in Youngstown. And it costs us two-fifty a person and we are allowed to bring a guest, which costs us five dollars. And it's a dinner and it's a dance. When we get there we turn in our two tickets that we bought and we get two raffle tickets. And our raffle tickets are then raffled off and we get twenty dollars if our ticket is chosen. And sometimes I've come out of there with both my husband and me winning twenty dollars apiece, and they give different prizes – different people donate some different things. And we have a real good time, we get to see a lot of people that we don't usually get to see; maybe only once a year or once a month. We have a real good time.

As far as the company doing anything for the retirees, I don't ever remember them doing anything for the retirees. I don't know if they have anything other than our union. Once we retire we're strictly with the union retirees. And there's a lot of things that went on during the time that I worked there, but all in all I would say being a

minority; which the women were considered a minority when we worked there, that most of the time – 99% of the time – we were treated fairly. Maybe once in a while we would get a bittersweet remark from maybe one of our own co-workers that had a brother or someone that didn't get hired there. And when some of the women were hired there I think maybe some of the men may have resented it. But there weren't that many that showed it. I only had one encounter with somebody that was a little resentful. And I did my job, worked great with him, did my job. When he found out that we were going to do our own work and didn't expect them to do our work for us; and I won his respect. But all in all, I don't know what anyone else's thoughts would be on that subject. But we had to do our fighting; we had to do bidding for jobs like everyone else. Nothing was given to us. We had to work for them; we had to earn them.

I was approached by Whitey Ford, he was the president at that time, I was approached by him. Would I be interested in being the insurance alternate, that they needed an alternate to take a half a day a week to be on the line to take any calls when our rep would be busy at a meeting or doing something else. I think that the union recognized that maybe it was time to get the women a little more involved in the union, too. So I was appointed to be the alternate, and at this time I still had a daughter at home. I had a mother who had cancer, and I'm the only daughter. And I think that everyone tried to share in the care of my parents but I think the burden of it fell with me. And I was presented with three books of all the rules and things that I was going to have to learn and do, and I was presented with the fact that I was going to have to be very active in all the union meetings and be very active and I was going to have to go away to college for two weeks. And after I thought about it, I did pro and con, and I did get a little bit of resentment from a few people that a woman was appointed as an alternate. And I didn't feel, when I weighed it all out I felt that my number-one priority was to my husband, my children, and my parents. So I went in to Whitey and told him that I didn't want to keep the job. Anna Biggens became the TNS Rep. And she went with the international and of course she's retired now. I dearly loved Anna Biggens. The first time I met Anna Biggens was in the Women's Committee and her and I had bonded and we became real good friends. And we see each other at the retirees' meetings and any union function that we're able to go to. And that was kind of a plus, and still maybe kind of a negative things that happened to me.

But all in all, it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy working there for the men, not only the women. A lot of the jobs were very difficult. And a lot of the jobs you had to get into the car, and do your job and sitting on raw metal. And I can remember coming home with black and blue marks on the back of my legs. And I would go out to my car and it hurt so bad that I couldn't even sit – that's how bad it hurt. And I would go back and I would tell the different people at work and they would say, "Oh, you'll get used to it. You'll get used to it. We're going to make a pillow for you, we're going to help you." So my utility man made me a padded apron. He went down to the cushion room and he took one of my aprons and he put a padding into this apron and he gave it to me. And I put it on frontwards. And he said, "Oh, no, Rose. You tie it backwards. And when you get into the car you're going to sit on that and you're not going to be sitting on that rough, hard metal." And he said, "It's going to go easier on the back of your legs." Well we did that and it was easier. And we found out then that they were all doing it then, all the girls – even the guys, cause the guys suffered with the black and blue marks, too. But I kind

of think that the guys were too proud to wear the aprons. But we girls weren't too proud; we did it. We got a lot of bruises, a lot of aches and pains and had a lot of jobs that the guys would say, "Boy, am I glad that you're doing that because my fingers are too big. I would have never been able – we had to do it, but it looks like that job is meant for a woman." The hardest job that I think I ever had was in the body shop when I had to handle these huge welders. I don't even know how much they weighed, I had never seen anything like them. And they were on hangers and you had to use them, and you had to move them, and you had to put them onto the metal part and weld that part on, and then take it off and then be able to do the next job. It was quite difficult. I found it quite difficult. And I think that there was probably a lot of other people that found that job quite difficult. But it could be done. It wasn't that you couldn't do it; it could be done. But it was very hard, and very difficult for me. I'm five foot four and I weighed 120 pounds when I worked there. And I think I had as much strength as anyone else. And like I said, it was the only thing I found difficult for me. But other women did it that liked it that didn't find it difficult at all. And they didn't like trim. But I think I got spoiled because I got hired in trim and I just adapted to trim. And a lot of women, I'm referring to women because I am a woman, a lot of women got hired up in the paint department and they liked it, and a lot of women got hired in the chassis area and they liked working there. And a lot of women worked in the body shop over in the car plant and they liked the body shop. A lot of them chose to stay there. A lot of them never cared if they ever left there. And a lot of them chose, when they had the chance, to leave that area – its quite noisy, quite dirty. Although most of the jobs were clean.

This is similar to what I would wear to work; you know, a pair of jeans or stretch pants and a tank top or a shell. Mostly protecting your arms in the body shop, you would wear long sleeves for that. I mostly liked to wear long sleeves and any job that you could do and wear gloves; I liked to do that. Because I like to keep my hands protected as well as I could. I tried to keep them as nice as I could. So all in all, it was quite an experience. Have you ever been out there, and walked through the plant?

F: I think I was once out there with the Girl Scouts. It's been quite a while.

R: I think it would be very nice if your teacher would bring your group out there to tour the plant. Especially now that you're going to be interviewing with people that work there. And I think you would get some concept of what it was like.

Then of course another thing that I would like to add too is that when they first hired women, we had no restroom. And the only restroom that we could use was in the lobby of the plant. The men had restrooms, because it was predominantly men. And I think the first women that were hired there was in July, but I don't know the date. I have a picture of the woman that was supposed to be the first woman hired there, too. But anyway, we had to walk all the way out to the lobby and use the bathroom. And we would have to walk through the whole plant. Because I was way down on three and I had quite a walk to go. And you would get whistles, you would get the guys yelling at you, "Hey, Lady" and whistling. But all in all I think they treated us with respect. Because I think a lot of them looked upon us as, "Gee, that could be my mother. She's my mother's age." And all in all we were treated decently. Then finally they did take some of the restrooms and divide them so that some of them could be used for women and some of



them could be used for men. So we finally got our own restrooms, which was nice. That was a nice thing to have. As far as other things, our eating area in the cafeteria, it was all co-ed. But having our own restrooms seemed rather nice. Because you would meet some of the other women in the restroom, too, that worked in other departments. And there weren't that many of us, especially on day turn when I first started there. Right now I don't know how many women they have, and that would be nice to know because I'm sure there's quite a few. But I don't know how many were there when I left, and totally, I don't know how many they did hire. But we did have some good times. And some bad times, but mostly good.

F: Do you remember what any of the issues were during the strike when you were first hired?

R: Well one of the issues was wages. I think health benefits... Because our wages at that time were pretty low, and that was our first big raise. And you know, truthfully, I don't remember what we got hired at. I wish I could remember that. But we did get a big raise. And I think a lot of the issues also were; the assignment of jobs and the workload. The more, and I'm sure its – I found this with most of the companies you work with – the more they could get a person to do, the more you had to do. And a lot of it was justified and a lot of it was overwork. And of course, it all evened out and having the union, and filing grievances, and having time studies and everything to study jobs and make the plant productive and to make it fair to the workers, too. I benefited by a lot of the things that we get, by the wages and the benefits. And I think, I don't know if there was any other thing, but I think those were the main issues. The main issue I think was the wages, and the workload. Because talking to some of the men when we got hired there, talking to some of the men that worked there, that got hired there in '66, those are some of the people that you should talk to. Because it was bad. It was bad for them. If you couldn't do a job, I guess they fired you. From what the men had told us, they were told if they couldn't do it then they could just go home and not come back. And a lot of men went in there to work and they had never worked in an assembly plant before. Because the assembly plant at General Motors, in Lordstown was altogether different then the assembly plant at Packard. When I worked at Packard Electric, I worked on the self-grading machines that made the harnesses for cars, and at that time they didn't even have an assembly plant there. But after I left there, then Packard Electric went into assembly, where all this was done on an assembly line. So a lot of the men had never worked in a car plant and had never worked on an assembly line. And a lot of them were big, tall men, heavysset men. A lot of them found it difficult, I'm sure, to get in and out of the car. A lot of them found it probably difficult to do the work, because they didn't expect this, I don't think. But talking to them, and we would get it thrown up to us, lots of times when we would complain to our co-workers, "Should have worked here in '66. You've got it made to what we went through in '66." So they have a lot of good stories to tell if you could get to talk to some of them. That would be interesting.

A lot of men that I worked with, when the steel mills, when Sheet and Tube went down and a lot of these men were in their late 40's and 50's – a lot of these men were older than me – had to have jobs because they weren't able to retire. And they were able to get hired at General Motors on the assembly line. And they found it a little



difficult after working in a steel mill. But they adapted. Because I trained one of the fellows, for my job, and he had three days to learn the job. And he wanted to prove that he could do it because he needed the job. And he worked, and I took pity on him because he was working too hard. I felt sorry for him, I would tell him, "Slow down a little, take a little break here. I can handle this. You don't have to learn this job in one hour, you know. It's good that you're learning it but don't – you're not used to doing it – don't run yourself ragged trying to do it, because I'm afraid you're going to have a heart attack." But after the three days, he just moved on – he moved on to another job. I lost track of him and I don't know where he ended up. But, with his knowledge, I have a feeling that he may have even ended up in skilled trades. Because when they came out of those jobs in the mill and came out of some of these places, these men had a lot of skill behind them. And we had a terrific skilled trades crew out there and I am sure that a lot of them ended up in that because they had the knowledge. I don't know too much – you had to qualify to get into skilled trades and you had to pass a lot of testing, and it was open to anybody. Women could have qualified for skilled trades along with the men. And I understand now that they do have quite a few women in skilled trades. But when we first started there of course there weren't any. But I think the women are right up there with the men now when it comes to job classifications and doing a job out there. They never had a woman foreman, and one of the girls that I had worked with became a woman foreman. And did quite a good job. And I think now they have a Plant Assistant Manager that is a woman. So they've worked their way into the automotive bill, too. So the women held their own out there and I think they're all doing a good job and I think that they're pretty well recognized.

So is there anything else that you wanted to ask me? I can't think of anything else – there's just so many different little stories but I mean, I don't know as to what they would add to it. But if there is anything you would like to ask me, feel free.

F: There seems to have been a reputation in the steel mills for gambling in the plant. Did you recognize any of that when you were working at Lordstown?

R: What was the question?

F: At some of the steel mills, some of the employees were known for gambling. Did you ever notice anything like that while you were at GM?

R: Such as what?

F: Just gambling over sports, or any other...

R: See when I worked there they didn't have the lottery, and the only thing that I can remember gambling on was our check number. And we would put a dollar in and it was like – a poker hand – whoever had the best poker hand would win that. And I do think maybe a lot of times during lunch hour, and maybe on their breaks, the guys used to play cards. But I never saw any money; I just think they like to play for fun. I don't know if they ever gambled on sports or anything like that. I know I didn't and was never approached to get into anything like that. There may have been football pools, and

basketball pools, during that time. I don't remember getting into any of them. The only thing I remember getting into was the check lottery; you know – the poker hand. And I don't know what they do out there now. My son works with a group that plays the lottery together; they have a lottery collection. But other than that, no, I don't.

If you wanted to ask me about marijuana during that time because it was to 70's and I know it was quite popular during the 70's; it was the Vietnam War and there was a lot of that going around. I never witnessed any of it, although there was supposedly some of that going on, but I never witnessed any of it. We were allowed to smoke on the line. I never smoked. We were allowed to have coffee or pop on the line if we had a place to put it. But I never felt that I knew anyone that did drugs, personally. I imagine that there may have been a lot there that did. But I can't ever say that I knew any of them. If they did, I wasn't aware of it. But it was rumored in the papers and a lot was written about it. Lots of times, the Vindicator didn't always look too positive upon us. And I always admired your teacher because he more or less had a pretty good outlook – Russo?

F: Dr. Russo.

R: He always sort of painted a pretty fair picture of the General Motors workers, from when I started reading his articles. I don't know, other than that, about the gambling part. That's all I can vouch for.

F: How do you think working conditions have changed over time?

R: The working conditions out there? Talking to my granddaughter, and to my son, I would say from what I hear from them and some of the people working there... I would say maybe some of the working conditions have gotten better. It's always been considered a very safe plant to work at. I'll say that. Safety was always number 1 at General Motors. I would always say as far as safety went. But we always used to laugh sometimes about the line, that if anyone dropped dead on the line they would pull them off and keep the line running. That was always something we would laugh about because production was number one – there was nothing that should interfere with production. They always wanted that line to keep going, because that's what keeps them competitive, and that's what makes them money. I still think a little bit of adding work to jobs is still going on. If it could be done the company still likes to do that. And to keep the quality of the work up, I think that sometimes people still have a legitimate gripe and they still have to have the union called and have their jobs timed and looked. Because I think that anywhere you work they're going to – if they think you have half a minute to spare they want you to use it. I still think the working conditions are pretty fair, but I think that there's room for improvement. And I think the company probably feels that way, too. I think they would like the workers to do more if they could.

F: How do you think the worker-management relations have changed?

R: I think they've changed a lot. Yes. Because during the '70s it was bucking all the time. The working relations between the union and the company was terrible. If they could get a foreman – and lots of times, I don't think the foreman really liked what they

and looking forward to probably getting a part time job somewhere. So I don't know if there was anything else you wanted to say?

F: No. Anything else you want to add before we go?

R: Not unless you can think of something that you might want to know that I didn't think of.

F: I think you covered everything that –

R: As far as the way that I might want to add to that, the way we dressed, when we worked there. We wore slacks, or jeans. And they told us to protect our arms. A lot of the jobs, you didn't have too. You could wear a shell or short sleeves. I always wore slacks to work. I noticed then after I retired from there, and the men always wore jeans, and then I don't know as it was a rule but I don't remember when I worked there anyone wearing shorts. But I do know that when I left there in '83 that the men were starting to wear shorts and so were the women. Except in the body shop you had to wear the safety glasses and the long sleeves, you know.

And we were told, and I think I said this before, that they wanted the men to treat us as women and the wanted the women, you know, to act as ladies. And I think if you acted as a lady, you were treated as a lady. I don't know if that's going on out there now, because I've found out just having a young granddaughter myself, that – And I know you are a young person, I don't know how old you are –

F: 23.

R: Ok. You look at things a lot differently than we did. I think morals are a lot different today then they were when I was working there. All in all, I like the generation and I can see it; but then I can also look back at my generation when I was growing up and my mother comparing hers with mine. So it does go on. I think it becomes, I think freedom, I think you become more liberal. I don't see anything wrong with it. The morals are sometimes to be questioned but that's everybody's choice. You probably feel the same way. There's a lot of girls that probably wouldn't think of having a child out of wedlock or living with someone, where today you know, its being done in Hollywood. And its being done by all the people that the younger generation should be looking up to, and its acceptable. I accept it, you know, and I think that most people are accepting that now. But when I started at the plant in '70, it was altogether different there, too. Then the 70's started the revolution! Do you agree on that?

F: Yes.

R: I wish, some of the names of the people that I can remember. And I have a lot of good memories. And like I said, my husband and I – he had it hard, he had two plants that closed on him. And we still had a daughter to raise, and we still had a house payment to make, and he still wasn't old enough to retire. And by me being able to work at General Motors it was a big help. Like I said, this was going to be our starter home

when we bought it in '57 and we're still here. I was able to save some money and we are happy with our lives. And we are happy with our health – we both have pretty good health. I don't feel that General Motors harmed my health any – if anything, it made living a little better for me, by allowing me to have some money and allowing me to have a pension. Which I would have had none from anywhere. When I worked at Packard, I was able to take the time I had at Packard and add it to my General Motors retirement. So I was able to add that there. So I was able to retire with 14 years with my pension. I don't get the big high pension that a lot of people get, but when I left there I was only making eleven dollars and some cents an hour.

Now, I don't think anybody's making under twenty dollars an hour. So you can see how the wages have gone up. But I think it takes every bit of the money to live on. I know it does for my granddaughter. She's raising two daughters, and she's running a nice home, paying nice decent rent. She's paying a preschool because her little girl is in preschool half a day and in kindergarten half a day. But she went on midnight turns so that she could be there to get them off to school. Their father does stay with them when she's working. And so she's benefited from her good wages. And I'm sure my son is going to benefit from his good pension. And like he says, "I earned every bit of it." And I agree, I earned every bit of it.

F: Thank you very much. I really appreciate this.