

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women's Herstory Project

Personal Experiences

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RUTH LUCE

Interviewed

by

Joyce Segreto

on

August 21, 1987

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: RUTH LUCE

INTERVIEWER: Joyce Segreto

SUBJECT: factory work, peace work, retirement,
World War II

DATE: August 21, 1987

S: This is an interview with Ruth Luce on Women's Herstory for the Women's Resource Center in conjunction with Youngstown State University Oral History Program. This interview is being conducted by Joyce Segreto at Mrs. Luce's home in Hubbard Township on August 21, 1987 at approximately 9:30 a.m.

Can you tell me something about your first job?

L: My first job was working as a bookkeeper at the Dollar Bank Struther's branch. It was not anything like it is now, I suppose, in the bookkeeping department. It was mostly working with the incoming checks. We would look at the checks as they came in, process them by machine, take them off the accounts, and file them away for their statements, and meeting people at the window to hand out statements, and things of that sort. I worked at that job for about two years. It was very handy in a way because I lived in Struthers. I was able to walk to work. I did not have that expensive transportation every day. The pay was sixty dollars a month, which was an enormous amount of money to me at that time.

S: What year was that?

L: That was in 1941. I got along pretty well on sixty dollars a month. There was not any expensive transportation as I said and I was used to not having any money at all. That was really great. I worked at that for probably two or two and a half years. The way I got the job was kind of interesting. I did not go to work immediately upon my graduation from high school. I graduated in 1938. The fiftieth anniversary of my graduating class is next year. I did not go to work right away because my mother had died a couple of years before.

I was the youngest in the family. I was sort of taking care of the house and keeping things going at home. My brother worked at the bank, but he got a teaching job. He had received his degree at Westminster College and finally got a teaching job. When he left for that job, I went down to the bank to see if they would hire me to take his place. I did not do the job that he did, but I started as a bookkeeper. I thought that was kind of interesting. I liked working, but I really did not like working with people's money at all. I found that kind of distasteful, but it was a job and I would have many good experiences.

S: What was distasteful about it?

L: I guess I was never one to really enjoy financial things and especially knowing and working with money. I cannot really pinpoint why. Some of it was supposed to be very secretive and I did not like that kind of work either. "Be sure that you do not say anything about this when you are out in the public." I just do not like that type of work. Otherwise, I enjoyed the people. I was the youngest one there. We had some good times.

S: Because you were the youngest one there, how did people treat you, your co-workers?

L: They treated me fine. There was one man, no matter who made a mistake, he would come trotting right back to you and show you your mistake, no matter who it was. That was sort of embarrassing. Otherwise, I got along well with him. We all got along pretty well. They treated me fine. When Merlin, my husband, was in the service sometimes I would go off on the weekend to see him. They were very cooperative.

S: Were you married at the time?

L: No, I was not. We were not married until 1944.

S: You were working at the bank, but you knew him.

L: Yes. I was going with him. He was in the service. I only worked at the bank for a couple of years. Then I went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad. I had a friend whose father was the ticket agent for the Pennsylvania Railroad. I do not remember what had happened that they were hiring, whether somebody had retired, quit, gone to the service, or what, but they needed a person at the ticket office. She suggested that I try to get that job and apply for it. That was a big improvement. That was ninety-five dollars a month. I did not know what I would do with all of the money, but that sounded pretty good. I applied for the job and got that job. It was not really hard to get a job in those

days because all of the young men were going into the service. Women were working in all kinds of jobs that women never worked at before. With that job, I had to travel back and forth to Youngstown on the bus which added to the expense, but not too much. You could buy a weekly pass for a dollar. You could ride the bus as many times as you wanted to. There was very excellent service. The public transportation was excellent in those days back and forth to Youngstown. In some ways I regret that it still is not the same, but a lot of things are not the same now.

That job was quite a bit different than the bank job. Bookkeeping was part of it. We had to balance our books up at the end of the day with the amount of ticket sales and the money taken in the drawer and things of that sort. I worked directly with customers that came in to buy tickets. There were only two of us in the office at the time. That was a very busy place during the war. There was an army depot not very far from here. That was a jumping off place for overseas. There were a lot of soldiers around town and traveling back and forth at that time. It was a very busy place. I worked with the public a lot. The man that I worked with was much older than I. We got along fine. I think that he sort of enjoyed working with me. He treated me very well. As a matter of fact, on some of his days off, he and his wife would invite me up to their place for dinner in the evening and sometimes during my lunch hour. They lived near the station. That was kind of nice to be well-liked. It was working different hours. I did not go to work until afternoon and worked until eleven-thirty at night. I took the last bus and that was the only way that I had to get home.

S: Were you living at home then with your parents?

L: Yes. I still lived in Struthers. It was during that job Merlin came home from overseas and we were married while I was still working. I worked a couple more weeks, then I quit the job because he was going to be stationed in Cambridge, Ohio. I wanted to be with him. A lot of people thought I was really wrong in quitting my job, but I did. I went with him.

S: Why did they think that you were wrong in quitting your job?

L: I was brought up in an old Protestant work ethic, Anglo-Saxon Protestant work ethic, and you should work hard all of your life. Once you got a job, you should not quit or leave it. A lot of people had that feeling that I should have stayed with my job and should have worked.

S: That is interesting because the idea we have now about that time for women was that women were not supposed to work. But that is not the case you are saying. Were women expected to work then?

L: During a war, yes. Maybe they thought I was being unpatriotic for quitting a war-related job. But it was easy for me to quit my job because I was taught that once a woman married, she was supposed to stay home and take care of her husband and the family.

I quit my job then. I came to Cambridge. I did not work down there. I imagine that I could have gotten a job quite easily, but we were just newly married and we really enjoyed our life together. Thinking back on it, that was probably the most carefree, happiest summer that we had ever had. That was in the Summer of 1945 because we were married in December of 1944. We really enjoyed that summer. He worked. There was an army hospital down at Cambridge. It was an orthopedic hospital. He worked in the boiler room. He was a stationary engineer. The hospital was very nice. They had picnic grounds and they had a lot of entertainment for the soldiers. We would take a picnic basket, travel by bus, and eat in the picnic grounds and watch the baseball games. We really had a good time that summer. We went for long walks out in the country. I did not work. We just enjoyed each other and the time together.

S: Was it hard to not work after having your own money and having a job every day?

L: Not really. I think back on that now; we had very little to live on, but we really did not think about it. We were pretty secure. When you are in the service, you really do not have to worry too much about not having a place to eat or stay. He was given extra money. So we did have an apartment. They got an allotment for that. We enjoyed that. I had not worked that long to probably get into the real groove of being a working person.

S: It did not feel like a career? It was just a job?

L: Definitely not. I suppose I expected when I did work that I would not work all of my life. I did not either. When he came out of the service, I did not go back to work. Our first child was born in 1946. I did not go back to work until I was about fifty years old. That was a real experience. I went to work for General Electric in the lamp plant over in Warren. Going to work in a factory at the age of fifty was very difficult. I did not want to go to work real bad. Merlin tried to encourage me to go to work because of building up more social security and security for myself in case something should happen to him. Right about that same time, U. S. Steel shut down. The first shutdown was not permanent. That was the first time in our married life outside of strikes that he was really laid off. It was sort of frightening. Our daughter had gone to work at the plant over there. She knew how to go about putting applications in and when they

were going to be hiring. I went to the unemployment office in Warren. It was three or four months before I got a job. I remember the interviewer said--Did I think that I could work in a plant and in a factory where the temperatures were well over one hundred degrees. The factory was noisy. I said, "Well, how would I know if I did not try." That was the truth. I said, "I would like to give it a try." It was a very difficult experience.

S: Did she say anything about your age at all?

L: Yes. She said my age was why she thought it would be difficult for me. I did say that I thought I would probably come to work more often than the younger ones because my family was raised and I was pretty secure where I lived. Some of the younger ones were getting pregnant and going off and getting married. I said, "Naturally, they do not come to work as often." I thought I would probably be a steadier worker than some of the younger ones. I said, "I will not know until I try." I was hired.

My first job was in what they call the paint room. There is a certain kind of bulb that they make that they spray the outside. That was not an assembly line job exactly, although we were expected to put out so many. That was something entirely new to me that you had to work fast and efficient. I was used to working at my own pace with nobody supervising me. The girl that was hired with me was used to factory work. There was no way that I could keep up with her. I would come home at night exhausted. I said, "I swear that girl takes some speed or something because I do not see how in the world she can work so fast." I am still not convinced she did not. It was pretty hard for me. At certain times, they would run certain types of bulbs on the line. They would need extra workers so they would take people off of other jobs and put them on these line jobs. That was the hardest thing that I did in all of my life. I would come home in tears. My hands would be swollen. They would ache. All night long I would be numb. The other girls tried to get me to go to the nurse. I said, "No way." I was afraid that they would tell me that I could not do the job.

S: What did you do on the line job?

L: The bulbs would come in kind of raw. The top had to be put on them. They had to be welded on the side. I think the job that I did was put this little metal cap on them. They were very hot. The metal cap was not hot, but they were hot. They came along steady. They did not wait until you got these little caps ready to put on. They just kept coming. You had to figure out how to be ready to put them on. I do not remember what they called the job. I remember the bulbs coming down on the line. The girl would spot weld them

up here. Then they would come along. A couple of us would put the caps on.

S: You did that all day. Did you get breaks?

L: Yes, you got a break. You would get a ten minute break between the starting time and lunch time, then another ten minute break between lunch time and quitting time. There was a person, a relief girl. If you needed to go to the restroom or some of the girls smoked, if they just could not stand it until they had another smoke, she would take your place. You could go off and rest for a few minutes. There was relief. If you were sick or something, you could get off the job. I was pretty shy and timid. I did not want to lose my job. I was afraid to do that very much.

S: How much did you get paid for that?

L: I cannot remember exactly. My first job was not much more than the minimum wage is now, about \$3.50 I think. Of course, it gradually went up. When I left General Electric at the age of sixty I think I was making a little over five dollars an hour. It helped out a lot at home. I really did not feel that I could do extra things until I started to work. That job was really a good experience for me. My husband had worked in a factory. He worked at U. S. Steel. Our daughter worked at General Electric. I really began to relate to them much better after I started to work. When he would come home and talk about some of the problems, then I could understand them better. It was a wonderful thing for me that I did work in the factory. I worked for ten years.

S: What helped you to stick with it? It sounds like it was an awful experience in the beginning.

L: It was. I remember going home from work some nights in tears because I had such a hard time. I thought--If those young ones can do it, I can too. I was determined. Also driving back and forth was kind of difficult. That winter was particularly a very bad, snowy winter. I started over in Warren. I would travel on the freeway, 82, the highway between Warren and Sharon. I would go up north and get on it. I remember one night that it was so snowy that I did not know if I would get home or not. Another night I did not know if I would get home or not. Another night it was so icy that I did not know if I would get home. I kept asking myself how could I do this for ten years. I was determined.

Merlin's work was very shaky down at U. S. Steel. If U. S. Steel did not completely shut down, he was going to retire. He is eight years older than I am. He was going to retire soon. With that age gap, what if something would happen

to him. I would not have very much income. I really felt that I needed to continue to work. My elderly father was living with us at that time. Going back to that old epic that women should not work, that was his belief. Once they were married and had a home, they should not work, but stay home and take care of their children. I did when my children were young. When he was with us, he felt that I should stay home and take care of him. He was nasty a lot of times when I had to go to work. He did not understand why I felt that I needed to work. He was here when I started to work. I not only had that problem, but the problem of my age and never doing line work before. I adjusted.

They moved the coil plant here in Austintown. They consolidated all the coil departments from all of the lamp plants in the area. They put them in the coil plant in Austintown. I did not work at Warren very long. I asked for a transfer to the coil department so that I could be moved over to Youngstown, which was closer. They did that. The coil department is not line work. It is much different. It is more individual jobs in a certain area. I was moved to Youngstown in the Spring. In March or April I went to Youngstown. That made it much better and much closer. That is where I worked until I retired.

S: What year did you retire?

L: In 1980.

S: During this time that you said your father was living with you, did you have to physically take care of him? Did he require that kind of care?

L: Not at first. What he planned to do and he did do some of the time, he would spend part of his time with some of my older brothers and sisters. He called our house his headquarters because it was close to his former home. Not until the last year of his life did he have bad circulation in his feet and legs. He was able to dress himself and get around the house. I would bathe his feet and dress them. He was very good at taking care of himself. When I did work, when he would be here alone for lunch or something, I would put everything out and he would warm it up or whatever. He was very good about it even though he did not approve of me working. He always washed up his dishes and the kitchen was always very orderly when I came home. I know that he was lonesome. In some ways I can sympathize with him, but I had to lead my own life too. I could not let him deter me from what I felt that I had to do.

S: During this period that you were working, how did you handle doing all of the housework in addition to your job?

L: In the first place, I have a very good husband. He is very cooperative. There were not any children at home then. They were all gone.

S: How many children did you have?

L: Three. They were all gone. So that did not make it hard. I could not do it as well as I did before. I had to make an adjustment. I know all of these little gadgets that you see sitting around. I thought--I am going to make this housework as simple as I can. I took them all down and put them away. It did not seem like home to me. I got them all back out again. I did not do anything with them. I just let them sit there. There were a lot of things that I could not do.

S: So your husband helped you with the housework?

L: Yes.

S: How did he feel about that? Many men have problems with helping with housework.

L: He does not have any problems. He never did have any problem with it. He was raised on a farm where everybody had to pitch in and do their bit of the work. Although, I know a lot of farmers do not help their wives. I know that was the way he was raised. His brother was the same way. When there was a job to do, they did it whether it was a woman's job or a man's job. There was something to do so they had to do it. Although, I do not think Merlin did as much housework probably as his older brother. By the time he came along, there were a lot of them to do the chores. He retired much sooner than I did of course. He did a lot of the housework while I was still working. That made it very nice. I would leave part of the laundry and also a lot of the dishes. When he made the bed, he said he thought he was going to wear out the rug walking back and forth around the bed. When I retired I think he kind of resented it. He did not have as much work to do then. He said, "What am I going to do?" We had plenty to do.

S: How did you feel about retiring?

L: I was anxious to retire because he was retired. I thought that there were a lot of things happening that were going to pass us by if I did not retire. We would do these things together, the peace work for one thing. There were a lot of things going on at the university that I could not go to. Sometimes I would work afternoon shift and in the evening when some of these nice lectures came and things, I could not attend them because I was working. I was kind of anxious to get back into doing some of these things that I enjoy very

much. I wanted to retire while we were both young enough and healthy enough to be able to do a lot of things together. I think that has worked out pretty much that way.

S: You probably had a decrease in income when you retired. Was that a problem for you?

L: Yes, there was a decrease in our income. It was not a real problem. It is always nice to have more money. We did not need the extra car. When I was working, we had to have two cars. Shortly after I retired, we sold the car that I drove to work. It was nice to have two cars, but we did not absolutely need them. The expense of traveling back and forth was not so much of an expense anymore. We seemed to get along very well. Of course, we had to adjust a little. He gets a pension and social security. I did get a supplement. That was one of the agreements in our contract. I got a supplement to my income until I was sixty-two, until I went on social security. It was not very much because I did not work very long compared to what a lot of women worked. So even today I do not get a very large pension. I just get ninety-four dollars or a little bit more than that a month. That is not much, and social security.

S: Is that mainly the reason you worked putting in your ten years so that you could get social security?

L: That and just the security of knowing that I could get out and work.

S: You could take care of yourself.

L: Yes, I could take care of myself. Now at my age I do not know if I would be able to work very hard, not like that anyway. I often think of that. When I am working around the house, I get so tired when I do a pretty heavy job. I do not know how in the world I could do factory work now; I could not; I am sure not what I did. Some of the jobs are very demanding.

S: How old are you now?

L: I will be sixty-seven.

S: You look great.

L: Thank you.

S: Is your health good?

L: Yes.

- S: You look a lot younger than that and you look like you are in good health.
- L: I think I am. I get tired, but who doesn't. There is nothing wrong that we know of. We are both in pretty good physical condition.
- S: When you first worked you worked in the 1940's. What year was it when you went back to work the second time?
- L: In 1970. I worked ten years.
- S: Can you talk a little bit about the difference in attitudes toward working among women and anything that you can think of that would show a difference between what it was like in the 1940's to work and then what it was like in the 1970's to work?
- L: Let us go back before I was even working. When I was in high school there were very few jobs that women held. If you got married when you were teaching, you immediately were released. There were no married teachers when I was in school. I was out of school in 1938. I think there became a shortage of teachers because so many of them were going into the service. That is when they started to hire married teachers, and women began working in many more factories and other industrial related jobs.

Before World War II, work for women was pretty much restricted to teaching, store clerks, nursing, secretaries and other office work, telephone operators, post office clerks. Only a few factories hired women; one was the Mazda lamp plant which was a predecessor of the General Electric lamp plant, where my sister worked before she was married. The raincoat factory may have been operating in Youngstown then too; I'm not sure, but women worked there.

When I was finishing high school, I guess every girl thought she would clerk in a store, be a telephone operator, take nurse's training, go to college and get a teaching job, or get married and stay home and take care of her husband and family.

Actually I think World War II was the beginning of a change of attitude toward women working. Once they got out into the factories, railroads, et cetera, and began working at what had been traditionally men's work, and employers saw that women could do the work, they became more accepted. From then on, more married women were in the work force.

I do not know if I could have handled my job and taken care of my family, probably because I was brought up with that background that married women stayed home. I think I would

have found it physically very difficult. Although I know that when you are forced to do something or it has to be done, you find a way to do it. Just as taking care of my dad and working too, I did it. I really did not think much about it. I had to do it, so I did it. I would have found it very hard. I admire the women that work now and do have families to take care of. I hear some of them trying to juggle their schedules and figure out what they are going to do with the children while they [the mothers] are in school or while they are working. Yesterday I was out with a mother with two little ones. She was talking about her schedule. She has a student friend in school too. She was trying to figure out how she was going to work all of these things in. They certainly have my admiration because it takes a lot of energy to do all of that. I am not sure that I could have handled it, not as well as a lot of them do now anyway.

S: In the 1970's what was different about how women saw work or how they worked or anything, their attitudes?

L: I think women felt that they had to work. Working in a factory, I suppose, would be different than working in an office or something too. I know it is quite different. A lot of them had to work because of the inflation and the prices of things. To have a home or have the things that they felt like they wanted to have and should have, took two people working. A lot of women that were working were in one parent homes. They needed to work to support their children. I worked with a lot of women that were not married, maiden women. They were their sole supporter. I do not know about the attitude. It became accepted that women had to work much more than when I was younger. My dad finally accepted it. I remember being at a family reunion or someplace when talking about my work. I could not do something that one of my relatives told me to do because I had to work. He said, "Why don't you give up that job? You do not need the money that much." He is a very religious person so I said, "The Lord gave me the job so I am going to do it." He did not have much to say after that. It was a wonderful experience for me to work in that factory. It was probably one of the best things that happened to me because it helped me relate so much better to my family.

S: How did your kids feel? You are fifty years old. Mom stayed home all of those years, but now you announce you are going to work. What did they say?

L: Dan was still in college. Chuck was in college. They thought--You are going to go to work? I said yes. That was kind of a surprise to them. They accepted it. I felt so much better when I felt that I could go out and spend some money and not worry about it. I felt like I had some-

thing of my own. I really was not a person to go out and spend a lot of money. If I wanted to buy a new dress, I could do it. I did not feel guilty about it anymore. If I wanted to buy something for my sister or for my brother or any of my family, I could do it. It was really a joy to be able to do it.

S: To have your own money?

L: Yes. I never really said that this was my money. It was put all together. I felt like I could spend some and feel that I was spending something that I earned. I remember one Christmas, my sister lived in a house that had a fireplace. She enjoyed that fireplace. I thought--I will surprise her. I bought a truckload of firewood for her and had it delivered to her house. It was so much fun because she was so surprised. She enjoyed it so much. That was the type of thing that I liked to do.

S: Did your mother work at all outside of the home?

L: No.

S: You were raised with that attitude?

L: Yes.

S: Do you have a daughter?

L: Yes.

S: Does she work?

L: Yes. She worked right out of high school. Now you put them to work if you can. It is very difficult for the kids getting out of school now. I know.

S: Does she have a family?

L: No. None of my children are married. She is on her own. She lives in an apartment.

S: What do you think her attitude will be if she gets married and has a family?

L: I think she will probably work. She has worked so many years. I think she has worked seventeen years now. She will probably work as much as she can. She is used to that. I cannot picture her staying at home and doing housework, never.

S: When you were working during that ten year period from 1970 until 1980, besides your work at home, your housework

and the kinds of things that you had to do at home, and the work at your paid employment, what other kinds of activities were you involved in?

L: Not very much. I really took all of my energy for work and home and family things. I attended church as much as I could.

S: Was that a big change for you during the period that you stayed home? You were raising your children; you stayed home, and you did not have paid employment outside of the home. Were you involved in activities then?

L: Not a whole lot. I was free to come and go and attend things. I taught a kindergarten Sunday school class for a few years. I was never a "club" person, but I did try to maintain friendships. We tried to spend time doing things with our children and family. When they were very small, we read to them a lot, played games and went on trips. When they were older there were school activities to attend and see that they had transportation to school events. In the summertime we would have picnics back and forth, especially when our children were all growing up. We did things of that sort. I did not involve myself with any club activities or anything like that.

Once I started work, I could not do much of anything else until vacation time. It was awfully hard to crowd all of those things in on vacation time. One period during my working "career" in a factory, I was laid off. One thing that I wanted to do while I was laid off was kind of renew some of my friendships that I had let go. I could not possibly see these people. I made contacts with them. I did go and spend a day with different ones during that period. That was very nice to be able to do that. When I was working, it took all of my energy to work and to take care of my house, at least I felt that it did. Besides, you shop and do other things. I would go visit my brothers and sisters once in a while. Our children were out of town. That is about it.

S: During that period, did you ever get so tired or so stressed with it that you just wanted to quit?

L: Yes. There were a lot of times.

S: Can you remember particular incidents that happened that made you feel that way?

L: When I started the line work, it was very difficult. I kept asking myself if I thought I could stand that for ten years. I decided that I was not going to quit, but at least hang in there for awhile longer. It is a good thing that I did.

Earlier in the interview I mentioned being laid off for a short time. When I was called back to work I was put on a different job. This is normal procedure. My new job was an S machine operator. They are machines that take raw wire and spin it into coiled wire for the filaments in light bulbs. Each operator has a row of these machines to run. There were sixteen machines in my row and the operator was expected to keep them running as much as possible. A new operator was given two weeks training, then put on her own. That job was very hard for me to learn and again I went home in tears and completely exhausted. So it would have been very easy to quit then but I stuck with it and gradually learned how to keep my row of machines running without too much mental and physical exhaustion. So, again I was glad I didn't quit. I stayed on this job until I retired.

S: I know through other people that you have been very active in the peace movement. I would like you to talk about how you got started, what you have done.

L: The Youngstown Peace Council was organized shortly before I retired. Merlin was involved in it. My very first knowledge of it was when I attended a United Nations meeting with my sister-in-law. Sister Betty Sundry was there and was passing out fliers about the Guns or Butter Conference that they were having. They asked if there was anybody there that was interested. I said, "Yes, I am." That was my very first experience with the peace council. I think I was still working then. I was on afternoon turn. That was how I happened to attend the United Nations noon meeting. I think there was a speaker that day that Grace thought I would like to hear. I attended that Guns or Butter Conference with Merlin. They were always on a Saturday, so I could attend that. When I am retired, I said this is one thing I believe in and so I am going to get involved. I started to attend the meetings. The reason I believe in it, I suppose, is mostly because of my religious background. I was brought up in a very religious home, Protestant. I thought that when we learned about God's love and brotherhood to man that he meant it. We were supposed to be that way. That is the way that I thought that people should live. I taught a kindergarten Sunday school class for awhile. I remember one of the little songs that we sang, "Be Ye Kind, Be Ye Kind to One Another". We taught the children to be kind to one another. How could you teach that to a child and believe in atomic bombs that should be dropped to kill everybody? That did not fit together.

S: Would you sing that song?

L: "Be Ye Kind, be ye kind, be ye kind to one another." It

just repeats. "Be ye kind, be ye kind, be ye kind to one another." That is all that it is. You cannot teach that to a child and send them off to the army in a few years and teach them to kill. No wonder they are crazy, mixed-up kids. Probably it was my religious background for one thing that made me believe in working for peace or wanting to work for it. Merlin was in the service. We were married while he was in the service in the Second World War. As a young child, I heard all about the First World War, all of the people that were killed, all of the soldiers that came back. We were not married very long and then it seemed like there we were in the Korean War. Something is wrong. This is not the way it should be. I started to read about Hiroshima and Nagasaki and what it was like when the bombs were dropped. That really struck me. All of that devastation. How could people do that? How could people really want to kill that many people and cause all of that destruction and devastation? That was wrong. I think it is still wrong. I think that it is a sin to even think that way. It was not very hard for me to get active in the peace movement.

The very first "job" that I did in the peace movement was collect signatures on petitions for the freeze; that is a freeze in the manufacture of nuclear weapons. I really enjoyed that. We would go downtown. I would get two or three people to go with me. Merlin and I worked together on this. We went down to Federal Plaza when there were still a couple of stores down there. It was very interesting. We would approach people. When we were putting our sign up, even the very first time, somebody saw the sign, The Freeze Petition, and they followed us right up to where we were and "How can I sign that?" they wanted to know. We barely got set up when we got people wanting to sign our petitions. It gave us a chance to really talk to people one-to-one. We were very surprised at how willing people were to sign and how anxious they were to sign. We had a lot of interesting experiences. We found that it was mostly the working people that were most willing to sign. If a man approached you or a woman approached you well-dressed, they looked like they were maybe a lawyer or manager of an office or something, it was not very often that you would get a signature from them. The working ordinary people and especially the black community or the hispanic community, we would tell, "We feel that money should be spent for education or housing or medicine." They agreed with that. It was no problem. We felt money should be spent for that instead of for all of these atomic weapons; they did too. We got a lot of signatures. The first day we ran out of petitions. We packed up and went back a few other days later. We always had a lot of success.

Merlin wrote a little skit about it, even about some of the people that came. We had one young man that came and we approached him. He said, "Why don't they blow it up? Drop a whole lot of those bombs and start all over again." That devastated us at first when he said that. You had to realize where he was coming from. He did not have work. He probably had had very bad experiences in his life. He did not think life was worth very much. Merlin talked to him a little bit. I think he was a black fellow, which does not make any difference or anything. It could have been anybody. They have had those sort of experiences in their life; that might be the way they feel.

I remember a young child. How do you explain an atomic bomb to a nine or ten year old when they ask you? That was a challenge. I tried to do the best that I could. I explained that if they dropped one of these maybe in Cleveland . . . Did he know where Cleveland was? Yes, he knew where Cleveland was. I said it would even destroy probably Youngstown too. That was pretty bad. There were many challenges. It was a very interesting experience collecting those signatures.

The last presidential election, we had a door to door campaign. We tried to hit each section of the city as much as we could. That was an interesting experience too. What we asked these people to do was when they voted for their presidential candidate, would they consider the candidate that was opposed to atomic weapons and atomic war. If they would consider that, they would sign the petition. They were called freeze voters. They would consider that and would vote for the freeze. The first neighborhood that we went into was out in Canfield. It was a little more affluent neighborhood than some of the other parts of the city. We were not quite sure. I was very nervous that morning that we went out. I will never forget it. It was one of those real cold March mornings. We were all bundled up in our longies. I even wore my gloves. My hands were so cold. The birds were all singing. The birds were just coming back. The birds were singing so merrily out there in Canfield. The very first door that we knocked at, "Oh yes, why don't you come in." They brought us in and signed the petition. They gave us a donation. I could hardly believe it. I do not know why I should feel that way when I feel in my heart that everybody should feel this way. Still you are surprised when you get a reaction like that. We had very good response in that whole neighborhood. Of course, not everybody agreed with it, but we allowed people to have a different opinion if they felt that way. We told them if they felt that way, if they did not feel that the freeze was the thing to do, they could feel that way. We did not agree with that. I found it all in all a very interesting experience.

S: Did you have anyone that called you a communist?

- L: Yes, all of the time. I have not had to really answer that too much. If I did have to answer, I would say, "We do not ask anybody's politics when they work for us. We hope the communists are for peace too. We should work together." That does not really bother me. The mentality of the politics in this country is, if you don't go along with everybody else you are a communist. I do not let it bother me. I do not think that is the issue. The issue is working for peace no matter who you are or what your politics are. I do not think that we should label.
- S: Many people as they get older get more conservative. In our country conservatism is associated with being for a strong defense and all of those kinds of things. What is different about you, that you see, that you did not get conservative and you work in the peace movement? What do you think is different?
- L: I think it is what I read about Hiroshima and Nagasaki and what I observe that is happening with these young men who have gone off to Vietnam in the war and the attitudes that people have towards each other. Think about that little song I sang. They are not kind to one another. They want to kill one another. Just because somebody has a different color skin than you have, just because they have a different belief than you have, just because they believe their government should be different than your's, there is no reason why we should go off and kill them and destroy their country. I believe that we should learn to work together. This is a very beautiful earth. I am a nature lover. I do not believe that any of it should be destroyed, humankind of any of the growth or animals on this earth. I do not know whether that would be considered not conservative or not. I suppose that it was my religious background partly that helped there too. I think that everything should be preserved as much as possible. I would like to see future generations enjoy this life just as much as we have and enjoy the scenery of this beautiful country and all that there is to see and do. There is so much of it to see yet. I would like to travel and see more; maybe we will get to.
- S: Have you had a chance to travel?
- L: We travelled around the United States a lot. I have never had any desire to go abroad. People do not understand that. Maybe I do not either. There is so much to do and see here. We really have travelled quite a bit. We discovered the beauty of the land. When I think that there is a possibility that that whole thing can be destroyed I find that very devastating. The beauty of the Glacier National Park or Yellowstone National Park . . . or even Ohio has a lot of beautiful spots. All of these birds that we enjoy every day here, to think that that could all be destroyed in just

a matter of minutes, I find that very difficult to live with sometimes.

S: Do your kids work in the peace movement?

L: One son has been more or less a little active, but none of them are very active although they probably agree. They feel the same as we do. There again you have the young. They have their own lives that they have to take care of and find their little niche in life. They have gone with us on some of our marches and things. Do you remember the big march in New York in June of 1982? Our one son was with us. He lives in New York. We stayed at his apartment. He went with us on the march. He goes to some of the Washington demonstrations and rallies. None of them are as active as we are. I could not be active like that if I was not retired.

When they dropped the first atomic bomb in Hiroshima, we were living in Cambridge at the time and were just married the December before. I did not give it much thought. I was so glad that the war was over. I really did not realize what had happened. The war was over. That was great. There was a big celebration. I will never witness anything like that ever again. I really did not realize what type of weapon that was. I was just glad the war was over. Now we could get back home and live the way we were supposed to live, not be in the service and be down with the army in Cambridge. Cambridge was a nice, little town, but I wanted to get back home and get started with our lives. I did not really think about it much at all until several years later after all of the children were born. They were young. When I read the book about Hiroshima that really opened my eyes and mind as to what really happened. I was just as glad as everybody else that the war was over. I did not think about all of the people that were killed and all of the people that were injured.

Now when I see some of the films, especially of the children and all of the skin hanging and all of the terrible burns, I cannot look at some of it. I think maybe after you have children of your own and have a home maybe it does hit you harder. You think maybe some day that will happen to my child. Maybe some day that could happen to my city. That really makes you wonder if that is the way it should be. I know that it should not be that way. I feel that I should use as much of my energy and knowledge as possible to see that that does not happen. Sometimes you feel like you are treading water, maybe not even barely treading water. I cannot stop. I feel that I have to carry on. Even though it is small, I do as much as I can.

I know at our Hiroshima commemoration just a few weeks ago at Wick Park, one of the ministers that rededicated the first tree that we planted there in 1982 mentioned that from the time that tree was planted until today, the bombs were still being made. There has not been any atomic war. They are still making the weapons. You wonder if you have accomplished anything. I tell myself-- What if we were not there? What if there was not a peace movement? What if there was nobody to watch what is going on in our government and in Congress? What if the congressmen did not know if there was a peace movement out there and that there were people that disagreed with the things that were going on? I am sure it would be much worse than it is now and possibly there would have been an atomic war. Possibly they would have used some of the atomic weapons because there have been several times when they were threatened to be used. Every president so far has threatened to use an atomic weapon. I am sure that they would not have hesitated one minute if there had not been people out there opposed to that. Who knows what it would have been like? I do not think we can stop if they have not stopped manufacturing those terrible weapons. Another thing that relates to how I feel about it too is especially all of the unemployed and all of the people on welfare and the terrible inflation and things that we have; now it is all directly related to all of the money that is being spent on weapons. All of our tax dollars are going in the wrong place. Not all of them, but the large portion. If they would use more of our tax dollars for education, for example, maybe we would not have so much unemployment. People would be better educated and better able to hold jobs. Of course, the jobs have to be there.

I remember one day we were collecting signatures for the freeze position. I was sitting down at the YW. A lady came along and I explained to her what I was doing. She said, "Oh yes. I will sign that. My son just got his engineering degree at the university. The only place he could get a decent job is working for the defense department. He works for the MX missile. He is working on the MX missile project. I do not agree with it at all. There just is not any other kind of work for him to do. My husband would not agree with it. He would not sign this. I will." If they would put some of our tax dollars to work in a lot more constructive things than weapons and things for a war, there are a lot of places it could be used. We could improve the housing situation in Youngstown. We could improve the road situation. When the school system wants to make some improvements, where is the money? They have to pass another tax levy. People are just not willing to give anymore for that kind of tax money. Too much of it goes for the Pentagon. That is the way I feel about it. The whole health situation too, a visit to the doctor's is almost devastating for

anybody that does not have any kind of health insurance. It is devastating. It is getting way out of hand. There are a lot of areas where our money could go in better use than for armaments.

S: This is going to change topics a little bit. Can you look back and think about anything that we have not talked about yet that was really significant in your life and not necessarily just from one thing? Anything that comes to mind, any events?

L: I was young during the Great Depression. I will always remember that, how difficult that was. My father had a little real estate office down in Struthers. That was a very difficult time. I remember my mother was ill and died during the Depression. I was young and did not realize all of the problems that my dad had. At one time he thought he would leave the house and go back to the bank. I remember he approached us children and told us all of that. That was devastating to a child to think that you were not going to have a house to live in. I said no, he could not do that. I was very young. He did not do it. I do not know how he ever managed. That is a very frightening thing to a child. There are a lot of children going through that experience now. I know how it must feel to them. I lived in the same house all of my life. For my dad to come and all of a sudden say the house is going back to the bank, there were we going to live? I will always remember the Depression. I remember one Christmas time he would not even give me a dime to go to Youngstown on the bus. When you do not have a dime to go to Youngstown on the bus . . . I did not want to buy anything. I just wanted to go to town to see all of the excitement. We never had any money to spend. In some ways I think the neighborhood was closer. Children played together a lot more. It was a lot better than what the children have these days. Our games were not games and things that took a lot of money. They took a lot of imagination. I think children today are missing a lot of that. We would play hide and seek at night. I do not know whether the kids play that anymore. We would jump rope. We played other games that did not take any equipment. If we could get a bat and ball that was great, but not very many people could afford to even buy a bat and ball. I remember sometimes the kids would take socks and tie them together real hard to make a ball and take a stick. Children would learn a way to play no matter how much equipment they had. Sometimes we are inclined to give them too many things to play with rather than let them use their imaginations. We used our's. There were a lot of children in the neighborhood. We really had some good times. We did not realize all of the financial difficulties that our parents were having. We were just having a good time with each other. In a way I will always remember that, during the war the patriotic

feeling and all of the work and the busyness of everybody. Everybody had work. Everything was booming. I think that is one reason now why a lot of people still feel that way. If there was just a war we would get started; we would have a lot of employment. I do not believe it is true at all anymore because of these new, modern weapons that we have. It is hard for some of the people probably my age that lived in say Struthers, Campbell, or Youngstown that knew how the mills were running then. Everybody worked. Even some of the women were working in some of the mills then. Some of them feel that same way. I do not think they have read about Hiroshima and Nagasaki the way I did. So probably those two things: the Depression and the Second World War. I mentioned them before.

S: If you could change anything in your life what would you change?

L: That is a difficult question. I do now know if I would change anything. I wish I was better at communications, both written and oral. I can think of a lot of things that I would like to write down, but I just cannot because I do not have the skill to do it. Some of the things I remember relate to people. Probably I would change my education. I would try to get better educated and learn how to do some of those things and be able to do them better. That is probably about all. I don't think that I would want to be younger or older. I think that I would just like to stay the same way as I am now. I know that I will get older. I cannot be younger and I would not want to be young now. Young people today have it very difficult. It is a very difficult time to live through. Employment for one thing, it is very difficult to find employment for the young people. The whole moral problem or moral issues are so different than when I was young. At least I was not exposed to much of it anyway. I do not know how I would handle some of the issues that the young people are facing today. They have to be pretty strong morally and physically to handle a lot of the issues and problems that they have to face.

S: Do you think that it is harder to be a woman now than it was when you were a young woman?

L: No, I do not think it is. I think women have a lot more opportunities now. When I was very young my father and all of that generation felt that the women were their property. I did not like to feel that way, that I belonged to somebody. I do not think that women today feel that way. If they do get married and their husbands feel that way, they do not stay married very long. I think that is the way it should be. I do not think that they should have to "belong" to somebody. I think they should feel independent. I do not think it is more difficult. I think it is probably a little easier maybe

in some ways.

S: What do you worry about in the future?

L: Of course the older you get, the more you worry about your health and what will happen to you if you become possibly a stroke patient, or suppose I lose my mental ability, because I see it all of the time in older people. I visit my sister in the nursing home who just lays there. Merlin's sister has Alzheimer's disease. That is a constant worry to anybody I would think who gets older. You do not want to be dependent on anybody. Your health is probably your biggest worry. Another constant worry now is, Merlin worked for U. S. Steel. He gets a pension from U. S. Steel. We just experienced LTV and what happened to all of the pension. It turned out pretty well, not one hundred percent. A good many of the men that worked for U. S. Steel feel that U. S. Steel is just watching to see what happens with LTV. If they can get out of paying their pensions they will do the same thing. It turned out all right so far, but it still always hangs over your head that something could happen that would take that pension away. If that happens you only have social security to live on. Living will become very difficult. I do not know how you could manage; of course when the time comes you will somehow. You do not want to think about that. You do not want to try to be without. Even though our children are grown up and gone we do help them quite a bit financially and in other ways as much as we can. I am glad that we can do it. We would far rather feel that we can help them than for them to help us. It is a much better feeling.

S: How old are your children now?

L: The oldest one is forty-one. It does not seem possible to me either. There is three years difference between all of them. One is thirty-eight and the other one thirty-five. They are grown. They should be on their own. They are pretty much. They have little projects that come up once in awhile that take a little extra that we are glad that we can help with.

S: Do you think about being a widow?

L: Yes. Merlin's brother just passed away a couple of months ago. We witnessed what his wife is going through. Yes, I think about that a lot. I think Merlin does too because he is older than I am. Just living in this house, for example, can be very difficult for me. There are so many things in this area that require hard, physical work that I could not do. Just our water system alone has to be regenerated. It takes almost constant attention. Looking

at it, I could not do it. I think about it a lot although I cannot say that I am prepared for it. Even if you sit down and say I am going to do this and this and this, I do not think that you are ever prepared for anything like that. I think about it a lot. I am the youngest one in my family. He is the youngest one in his family. We see how they are all getting older. My oldest sister is an invalid. There are only two left in his family. His sister has Alzheimer's disease, which really means he is the only one left. I think about it. I try not to make that predominant in my mind. I still have to live each day and try to enjoy life.

S: Have you enjoyed life?

L: Yes. We have had our problems. Anybody that has had families of course has problems. It has not all been a big joy. We have enjoyed life together very much. We had a lot in common. Merlin was raised on the farm. I cannot picture him living in a city block or a city house with so many square feet to take care of. My parents were farmers. I was raised with all of that type of thing. It wasn't too hard for us to find some common interests. The peace movement was a very common interest. We have enjoyed that. We enjoy trips together. We did quite a bit of traveling with our children when they were young. We took two trips out West. We tried to travel as cheaply as we could. We did our own cooking on the road. I think they enjoyed it. We would like to travel more. It seems like we have less time now than we ever did before. We were just talking about that the other day. I got kind of disgusted because we have such a terrible time trying to work in a time to go visit our sons in New York. It should not be that way when you are retired, but it seems like it is that way. There are so many activities that we just cannot seem to get all worked in. We will get there.

S: What advice would you give to a young woman today? Say she is high school or college age, what kind of advice would you give to her?

L: First, I would say get as much education as possible. I do not think that every high school graduate is college material. You do not have to go to college sometimes for education. If you are college material get as much education as you can. Sometimes you cannot really use all of that for your job and sometimes it does not help, but it is a tool that is there for applying for work. Not only that, but college life itself I think is an experience. It is a wonderful thing for people and all of that material. There are other types of education that they can get too. There are a lot of jobs that are not college jobs that do take special training. Nurse's training now does take college

education, but there are a lot of other jobs in the hospital that do not take college training. I cannot think of as many women's jobs as young men. I guess they are open to young women too. I always thought that I would like to be a carpenter. I think that it would be fun to build something. So I do not see any reason why women could not learn some of those skills too such as welding, carpentry work, just as long as they are physically able to handle the tools and things. You really need a skill these days even in the food industry. Merlin's sister worked at the school cafeteria. She was always telling young people to work in the food industry. That is an industry that there is always going to be work in, every aspect of it from the seed that goes into the ground to the food that is cooked to eat. All the way along the line there are a lot of opportunities. Some of it takes some extra education and extra knowledge. She enjoyed her work. I think that would be very interesting for young people.

I would tell them not to be in a big hurry to get married. Life is a lot different than it was when I was young. I cannot say I disagree with it too much now. When our children come home with their partners that they are not married to we try to accept them. It is not quite the way that we would like to have it, but I understand. Maybe that is for the best. I would tell them not to be in a big hurry to marry or to have children. Enjoy your life first. I guess that is what our children are doing because none of them are married and none of them have children. I cannot say that I really sat down and gave them that advice. Of course, we would like to have grandchildren. I think that I would try to tell women that they do not have to have all of those things that are advertised to be happy, all of those material things. You do not have to have two cars. You do not have to have a video cassette. I would not have time for all of that stuff even if I did have it. I do not even watch television very much; when I do I fall asleep. I do not think that it is necessary to have all of those things to really enjoy life. To me a walk up the road out in the woods is just as enjoyable as watching a television program. It is more enjoyable. We go for a bird walk every evening, sometimes in the morning if we can. Material things, I do not think are what make you happy. I think that you are happier when you feel that you are doing something for somebody else or trying to make this world a better place to live. It does not take a lot of material things to do that. It takes a lot of energy. I feel that is one bit of advice that I would try to tell people. You do not have to have a lot of fancy clothes, just be comfortable.

S: Do you think that women have a lot of discrimination to

deal with in the workplace?

- L: Yes, sure they do. I know that just in my factory work that question would come up a lot, "Why should she have time off just because she is pregnant? If she is pregnant she should not be working. Why should she be paid because she is pregnant or for her to be home with a child? Why should she want the mechanic's job? Some man should do that; that is supporting family." I said, "She has a family. She is supporting a family. She can do the job. She has just as much right to it as anybody else." There is a lot of discrimination in work. If you work factory work that is organized and has union protection and union contract, it is much better than anyplace that does not have a contract. You have something to fall back on and something to support you. Of course, I have never worked anyplace else so I cannot verify any of the rest from experience, but I have heard a lot of it where I worked.
- S: What kind of advice would you give young women now about how to deal with this discrimination?
- L: If they are in a factory job with union protection, file a grievance. Probably follow it through in every legal way that you can without being completely devastated financially. That is probably one of the most difficult things to do. I remember a few years back we heard about the situation up in Michigan someplace. This was in a bank. The women were not permitted to have the job or were not accepted on the job, but they were supposed to train a man for the job. The women decided to go on strike. In a bank, of all places! It was not organized or anything. They stayed outside of the bank and picketed. I am sorry to say that I cannot remember exactly the outcome. I believe that they did not get the job and they did not get their jobs back, but they would not go back to work. I admire them. It is very hard to do that. I guess that is a pretty good case of discrimination and one of the ways to fight it.

END OF INTERVIEW