

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women's Herstory Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 744

LAVON GORDON

Interviewed

by

Mary Hulme

on

October 25, 1987

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: LAVON GORDON

INTERVIEWER: Mary Hulme

SUBJECT: waitressing, husband, family, fishing

DATE: October 25, 1987

H: This is an interview with Lavon Gordon on Women's Herstory for the Women's Resource Center in conjunction with the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, by Mary Hulme. This interview is being conducted on October 25, 1987.

Lavon, could you tell me first of all where you were born?

G: I was born in Kentucky on July 6, 1931.

H: How many years did you live there?

G: I lived there until I was about . . . Well, I have been in Youngstown twenty-seven years.

H: So you went all through high school there?

G: Yes.

H: So why did you leave?

G: I married a Yankee.

H: He was from Youngstown?

G: He was from Youngstown.

H: What did you think when you first came up here as compared to being in Kentucky?

G: People were a lot different.

H: They were?

G: Yes, people were a lot different. It took me awhile to get

used to that.

H: How different?

G: Not that they were more unfriendly, I guess they were as friendly as we were down there, but just in a different way. They were not as friendly toward me as they were at home. You would have to, more or less, speak first and all that stuff and hope that they would speak back.

H: So you did not feel that it was quite as friendly an atmosphere?

G: No.

H: Of course, it was a smaller town too?

G: Yes. I was born and raised on the farm.

H: You were?

G: Yes.

H: How many students would be at your high school then?

G: I started school in a one room schoolhouse. I went there through the seventh grade. Then I went to Bloomfield. That is where I finished up at because that was the high school nearest me. When I first started, it was a one room schoolhouse.

H: Do you have very many memories of that one room schoolhouse?

G: Quite a few. Of course, that was from the first to the eighth grade. I remember a lot of things about how we used to pack our lunches and take our lunches. Anything we had laying around the house we would take for lunch in jars, dishes, or anything. Everybody would go outside and have their lunch. I did. I do remember a lot about school.

H: There was just one teacher?

G: There was one teacher. My teacher was Miss Katherine Hughes.

H: You remember that?

G: Yes.

H: Was she a good teacher?

G: Yes. I liked her a lot. She was really nice. We liked school so well that we cried when school would be out for the year. We would cry.

H: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

G: I have three brothers and there are four sisters besides myself.

H: That means there are eight children?

G: There are eight children.

H: Where were you in the eight?

G: There were five girls first. I am the fourth girl down.

H: Can you tell me anything about your parents? What did your father do for a living?

G: We had a good size farm. So my father was a farmer all of his life. My mother was just the mother.

H: Did she work on the farm?

G: Yes, so did all of us girls because we were the oldest. All of us girls worked on the farm.

H: How far from a city did you live?

G: We lived about fifteen miles from our town, our city, just a town.

H: Back to that one room schoolhouse, did you walk to school?

G: Yes, we did.

H: How many kids would you say might have been in that schoolhouse? Do you remember?

G: I don't know. That I cannot remember. I can remember things that happened in the school, but I cannot remember . . . There probably were about twenty-five, maybe, or something like that.

H: Do you think you can remember how old your teacher was?

G: Miss Katherine Hughes, she probably was around thirty-five years old or something like that.

H: To you, she was an old lady. Those were the days when teachers did not get married.

G: I cannot remember if Miss Katherine was married or not.

H: Do you think she stayed there for a long time at that one school?

G: She was there when I left school.

H: So you really don't know how long she stayed after that?

G: No, I don't really know.

H: Lavon, can you tell me the names of your brothers and sisters?

G: My oldest sister is Ruth. The next one is Ethel, May Jo, myself, and my youngest sister is Katherine. My three brothers are: Henry Vernon, Carol Ray, and James David. Those are my three brothers.

H: Your brother's name is Carol?

G: Carol Ray.

H: What kind of a person was your father? Can you describe him?

G: I could not describe in words the way my father was. My father was a good man. He was small. My father was little and short, but he was a good man, a real good man. He never disciplined us children; that was up to my mother. My father could just scold us and that would be the worst whipping that anyone could get in their life from him, just scolding us. My mother was the disciplinary one who really let us have it if we needed it with a little switch or whatever. She never really hurt us, but we minded her, believe me, because we knew to.

H: Did you feel close to your father?

G: I felt just as close to my mother. So that thing with the discipline bit about kids not thinking that they should be, that is what should be done more with kids this day and time, I believe.

H: Did you raise your own children that way?

G: To an extent I did, yes. I had them to where my kids would not say, "No," to me and they treated me like I was supposed to be treated like my mother, like your mother, and like I treated my mother, which was the way I think things should be. My kids, I never beat them and my mother never beat us either. She would strike our legs with a switch. She would let us go get our own switch to be whipped with. Sometimes we would get a switch that would break real easy, but we would have to go back and get another one. When you would have to get your own switch and you would get your legs nailed real good with those switches, you remembered the next time before you did that thing that you got a whipping for. I don't believe in beatings. I am not talking about beatings; I am talking about discipline.

H: So when you say whipping, what is the difference between that and what you call a beating?

G: A whipping is something that you know your mother still loves you, but she is doing that for your own good because she explains to you that she has to whip you. I know people who say, like the psychiatrists who say stuff now about how people say,

"I am doing this because I love you." Well, if it is done right, it is done because you love that child. That is because you want that child to grow up to be the way you want him to be, not somebody who does not respect elders. When my children were growing up, my boys, I always taught them to respect older people or people who were older than they were because I said, "All of your life, you are going to have to contend with someone who is older than you are telling you what to do. So just remember that. You respect anybody and everybody who is older than you are because that is who you are going to deal with the rest of your life. You respect people who are older than you all of your life."

H: That is such an important thing to learn; it is. So you stayed on the farm in Bloomfield, Kentucky . . .

G: No, I was born and raised on the farm between Lexington and Frankfort. After my father got older and did not feel like working much, then he sold the whole farm to my brother. My mom and dad moved to Louisville.

H: You moved with them?

G: Yes.

H: Where did you meet your husband?

G: I met him at a skating rink.

H: In Louisville?

G: In Louisville.

H: What was he doing there?

G: Skating. He was in the service at Fort Knox.

H: How long did you go with him before you married him?

G: Not long enough. Believe me, not long enough because my mom and dad even tried to give me money to wait until July to marry him. They said, "Wait until you meet his family, then marry him." I said, "What does his family have to do with him?" Believe me, they have a lot to do with the way the kid is because if it were right now, if I would have met his old man and his mother before I married him, I would have never had him. I would not because he cannot see anybody with any decency and any respect coming out of a home like he came out of. You just cannot do it. If I would have waited until mom and dad told me to in July, I would have never had him.

H: How old were you?

- G: I was eighteen.
- H: So your mother and father did not want you to marry him?
- G: No, they did not.
- H: Not because of him, but because they thought you did not know him long enough?
- G: Because I did not know him long enough and they said, "Wait until you meet his family." I said, "What does his family have to do with it? I am marrying him." They said, "They have a lot to do with him." Then I did not understand what they were talking about, but now I know very well what they were talking about.
- H: You said that they were willing to pay you to wait?
- G: They told me they would give me so much money if I would wait until July. I was too stubborn.
- H: When did you get married?
- G: I got married January 16.
- H: How long do you think you knew him then?
- G: Maybe eight months or something like that.
- H: You were eighteen years old?
- G: Yes.
- H: How soon after you married him did you come back up here to Youngstown?
- G: We came here when my youngest son was five years old.
- H: So you did stay in Kentucky for five years?
- G: Yes. My youngest son is 33.
- H: When you came here to Youngstown, did you stay at home or did you start to work?
- G: I had to work.
- H: You did?
- G: Yes, right away. I went to work. I guess I had been here maybe, not too long, until I went to work.
- H: I guess one thing I should ask you and I forgot is, did you

work before you met your husband?

G: I worked as a waitress down there in a place called Hubie's, down in Louisville.

H: That was your first job, a waitress?

G: Yes.

H: You worked there for how long?

G: I did not work there too long. I was working there when we got married. After we got married, I quit my job. Then after he got discharged from the service, he and I both went to work for General Electric Parts Plant. I don't like to be still in one place too long.

H: Do you mean you don't like to work in one place too long?

G: No, I mean I like to move around . . .

H: While you're working?

G: Right. I don't like to be put in one place for too long at a time. I like to be on the move. When you work at GE, you work on an assembly line. You have your own place, you stand, and you work. I don't like that.

H: How many years did you do that?

G: I did that two years. Then I went back to waitress work.

H: And you were glad that you did it?

G: Right, but do you want to hear the funniest thing? I worked as a hostess at the Brown Hotel at Fourth and Broadway, Louisville. I was hostess there for the premiere of the movie, "Raintree County." I saw Elizabeth Taylor, Mike Todd, Van Johnson, Ann Miller, and the whole bunch was there for the premiere of the film, which was really interesting. I was the hostess in the coffee shop at that time at the hotel that they stayed in. So I saw them all.

H: Did you get to talk to them or just get to see them?

G: They came in the coffee shop, Tina Wilson and Van Johnson. Ann Miller, to me, is a much prettier girl than Elizabeth Taylor. Ann Blank, that is who I am trying to say, is a much prettier woman than Elizabeth Taylor. She has natural beauty, just plain, natural, without any make-up or anything; she has plain, natural beauty.

H: So did these people create quite a stir there?



- G: Only Tina Wilson and Dan Dailey when they got off the elevator. Dan was wearing red socks. That is his trait. He got off the elevator and pulled his pant legs up. She was looking saying, "Let it all hang out, Dailey. Let it all hang out."
- H: You heard her say that?
- G: Yes. Elizabeth Taylor was married to Mike Todd at that time. He is probably about three to four inches shorter than Elizabeth Taylor.
- H: And you saw them both?
- G: Yes, I saw them both together going through the lobby. That supposedly got to her because she was too uppity for anyone to talk to.
- H: So you were hostess of the coffee shop then?
- G: Yes. Right after that is when we came to Youngstown.
- H: You started working when you came here?
- G: I went to work first at Nick's Little Casino on Market Street.
- H: What was that, a little restaurant-bar?
- G: No, they called it the magical bar. The old man, Nick, who owned the place, was a magician. He would put little shows on behind the bar and stuff. At one time, he said that I could be his partner. We would go and do the stuff together. That did not interest me at all. I did not want any part of that because I had my job; I wanted to work. So then some things happened up there that I did not like too well so I left. I went to work at the Golden Dawn.
- H: That was how many years ago?
- G: Twenty-four years ago. It was twenty-four year ago the 8th of October that I went to work at the Golden Dawn.
- H: Did you ever consider leaving there over the years?
- G: No, but do you want to know the funniest thing? When I was in Louisville, I was looking for a job as a waitress. I went to an employment agency that was supposed to get you a job anywhere you wanted to go. I went there to get a job as a waitress and they hired me at the employment agency. I worked three days at the employment agency and I told them, "I am going to be fair to you and fair to me. Just get my job, because I don't want this job because I cannot stand to sit."

H: What are the things you like about waitressing?

G: Well, for one thing, you meet all kinds of people. When I say, "all kinds," I mean all kinds of people. The nice ones have the bad ones outnumbered. There are more nice ones than there are rotten people. Then you have some that you cannot please; there is no way. So I just quit trying. I just do my best and put the food in front of them and say, "Eat it up," because that is all you can do with some people. Some people you cannot please. I will tell you what I really believe; I believe a lot of people, the waitresses who work in waitress work, the biggest pay and the most money you make are your tips. Everybody knows the waitresses don't really make a fortune in pay. Some people, I believe, what they do is they sit and eat everything up and right at the end of the meal, they will find something to complain about. I believe they do that because they don't want to leave a tip. That is my own opinion and I believe that. They will eat everything; everything will be fine, and maybe they will get mad because you forgot to warm the coffee cup or because you did not bring a second cup of coffee or whatever.

H: They just look for something.

G: Yes. You don't run across that often or at least I don't because I don't have too many people . . . I don't have anybody really who I cannot get along with if I try.

H: Could you describe what kind of a place the Golden Dawn is?

G: It is a real nice place. It is not yet carpeted. We don't have carpet on the floors. If we put carpet on the floors, I quit, because that is when you get the clientele that you don't want.

H: What do you mean by that?

G: You get your loafers, your bums, your phonies, and stuff. Our bar is a down-to-earth bar. We don't have anything but families come in. The best families in Youngstown, doctors and their wives and kids, lawyers and their wives, judges and their wives, and right down to the very sewer worker comes in that Dawn. Everybody gets along fantastic. Everybody knows each other. Nobody is better than anybody else in that restaurant. I don't care if you have a shirt and tie on or if you have a pair of greasy, dirty, overalls or jeans; you are just as good as that person. That person will talk to you. That is what I like about the Dawn. You don't have people come in here and think they are . . . The other night, I had Mr. Renner and Mrs. Renner in there. He used to own the brewery here in Youngstown, the Renner Brewery. Bob Renner and his wife, they were in here the other night and he had a tux on, but yet he was in there. Our tile floor was not even clean. In the evening you spill stuff on the floor. It was not even clean. Yet he came in

with his tux on. He and his wife sat down and had a couple of bottles of beer. Bob got up and said, "We will see you, Lavon," and that was it. When they come in there, they come down to our class. When they come in there, they are just like we are. What they act like before, I don't know and I don't care, but they act like humans when they come in the restaurant.

- H: Could you tell us the name of your boss or the man who owns the place?
- G: Carmen and Ralph Naples own the Golden Dawn. They are my bosses. That has been in the family for fifty-some years; about fifty-two years the Golden Dawn has been.
- H: How do you describe them to work for?
- G: They are really nice people to work for. Ralph is a calm person. He does not show his anger. He never yells. On the other hand, Carmen is . . . I guess we clash because I am as hotheaded as he is sometimes. I will blow up. Carmen is the one who has a real short temper. I have learned over the years and stuff like that to cope with Carmen. It really does not make that much difference. Ralph is the same every day. He never changes. He is always the same. Carmen is a good man. It is just he has a little bit of a short temper.
- H: How many waitresses work there?
- G: I have seen them come and go. I don't know. There are two at night and two in the daytime. I am one of the ones at night and day.
- H: Over the years, you are the person who has worked there the longest by far?
- G: Yes.
- H: Has there been anyone who could even come close?
- G: No, not through the years that I have worked there. There is nobody who comes close, I don't think.
- H: So do you train new waitresses when they are hired?
- G: Yes.
- H: You have done a lot of that over the years I suppose?
- G: Yes, a lot of it.
- H: Is there any other job or career that has appealed to you over the years that you have ever thought of doing?

- G: No. I went to a business college in Louisville for awhile, but I figured it was going to waste my money because I would always go back to waitress work anyhow. So I just dropped the course and went back to waitressing.
- H: One thing I always liked about waitressing is I always felt like I had money in my pocket.
- G: You do, you do always have money in your pocket. When you run a household like I do, you have to watch that money in your pocket because that is the money that takes care of you. You don't have that money to spend every day if it is used right because there are times when people like myself have to make their own living and stuff like that. You cannot spend that money each day. That is not really your money to spend every day. You have to save it. Everybody gets their paycheck every week and you get your pay every day, but you have to save that money. If you don't at the end of the week when you have to pay bills, you don't have anything left to pay bills. You have to remember that that is your wage for the month or for the week.
- H: Have you felt that you could make a good living as a waitress, enough like you running your own household?
- G: Yes, I've done okay for myself.
- H: Did you feel that you could make enough money as a waitress?
- G: I am doing pretty good, yes. I don't want for too much. I think I do just as well as anybody could do, a woman making it on her own.
- H: Do you find that your income is steady or does it change according to the seasons?
- G: We have different times of the year that our business is not as good. In the summertime, of course, when everybody is on vacation, then around the holidays, it would slack off a little bit. In general, we are always busy at the Golden Dawn as a rule.
- H: Do you ever think about when you will retire?
- G: Lord have mercy! What will I do if I retire?
- H: You don't think about that at this point when you are going to retire?
- G: No, not really.
- H: Because one of the pitfalls I always thought of waitressing was that there is no benefit structure. You don't have a pension.

G: You are right there.

H: As far as providing for yourself, at this point you . . .

G: That is when you might think about finding an old man just to marry for that reason, who has a good . . . Somebody who cannot boss you around too much.

H: Have you ever met men through your job as a waitress who you have dated?

G: No. I never dated anybody from work.

H: Have you had men ask you?

G: Oh, numerous did. Most of them are a lot younger than I am who have asked me to go out. Maybe that is the reason I have not gone out with any of them, because they are all a lot younger than me. People have a tendency to forget that I am much older than what they think I am.

H: Why do you think that?

G: I don't know, probably because I get along with the young as well as the old. I get along with the college students sometimes better than I do with the older people. I get along with the younger ones.

H: You are described as quite a character. When anyone talks about Lavon at the Golden Dawn, a smile comes to their face. Why do you think that is? You have a lot of personality. Your approach towards life, what is it?

G: I really don't know, except that I will tell you what a lot of it is is I, myself. I never try to be somebody who I am not. I am always just plain, old Lavon and that is it. I say the first thing that comes to my mind. Some girl was in there the other day who was in there seventeen years ago. She looked at me and she said, "Yes, I remember you from seventeen years ago. I was sitting there and was eating. I left a little bit of my food on the table. You looked at me and you pointed your finger in my face and you said, 'You are supposed to eat your food. You are not supposed to waste it, now eat it.'" She said, "That was seventeen years ago and I remember." I could not begin to tell the things, the funny things, that have happened in that Dawn because we would be here all day, tomorrow, and the next day. Maybe when I retire, I will write a book.

H: Really, did you ever think about it?

G: Oh yes, I have thought about it. I really have thought about it. It might have to be short stories, because I don't know if everything I would want to talk about would fit into a book.

- H: Have you ever written anything?
- G: I have never written anything, but I have written a lot in my brain and in my head that I think would be nice to write about.
- H: Why don't you just tell us a couple of stories that might come to mind?
- G: I will tell you one thing about it. I cannot talk too freely because if I did I would probably start a Hatfield and McCoy on the north side. I would have to dig a big, deep hole to hide in. One funny thing strikes me that I remember well. This was about fifteen years ago. A man came in the Dawn. He was an older man, probably around sixty-five or seventy. He might have been seventy. He had on a real long coat. He came in and he sat down at the table by the men's room. He ordered spaghetti and meatballs. At that time I was quite a bit younger. I was just having a good time. He just started chasing me all over the Dawn. I was running all over the place to get away from him. I had other things to do besides him following me all over the Dawn. So I finally got him to sit down. When he sat down, he ordered spaghetti. So when I set him up, I put a place mat on the table, silverware, and all of that stuff. I put down the cheese shaker and the pepper shaker for the spaghetti. We had a ketchup bottle on the table, salt, pepper, sugar, and all of that stuff. So I brought his spaghetti out and he ate. He was getting ready to walk out the door. My boss who was working that night was Ralph. He looked at me and said, "Lavon, where is all the stuff off the table?" I said, "What stuff?" He said, "The sugar, everything." I said, "Gee, it was here just a minute ago." He went to the front door and inspected that old man. He had the sugar shaker; he had the ketchup, the salt and pepper, and everything down in his coat. When my boss started pulling all of that stuff out of his coat, that was really funny. Ralph said, "My Lord, have mercy!" I said, "Yeah, Ralph, he would have even taken the table if he could have folded it up in his coat. He could not get it."
- H: He had no explanation for why he did it? He just did it.
- G: I guess he needed that stuff at home. I don't know why he did it. Maybe he just did it. I think he had that coat on purposely because the pockets went all the way down to his feet. My boss buried his whole arm pulling out that stuff. There have been so many funny things that have happened.
- H: How do you find things have changed over the years? Can you still walk in there any night now and the same kinds of things can happen with people like they did twenty years ago or have times changed?
- G: Things have stayed about pretty much the same. I am on my third generation of people there. I waited on moms and dads, then on

their children, and I am waiting on their children's children now. I am on my third generation of people.

H: Do you start conversations with your customers a lot? Do you like to talk with them?

G: I just talk all of the time.

H: You do?

G: Yes.

H: What hours do you work?

G: I work a split time right now. I have been working this one shift for probably about seven years. I work in the mornings from eleven until two. Then I go back at four-thirty and work until ten. Then on Saturday nights, Monday nights, and Friday nights I will work until one.

H: Does that bother you having that split up with the working day like that?

G: Well, sometimes it does because you don't really get a chance to do too much when you work a straight turn, but I figure-- Hey, you have to work. I am not a person who could ever sit around and not work. I have to work.

H: Can you describe what a typical day is like? When you get there at eleven o'clock, what do you do?

G: I get there at eleven o'clock and all the work is not done at the Dawn; the setups and stuff, like the water and everything, I have to do that. Then from about a quarter til twelve or twelve o'clock from then on until two o'clock, it is busy. I mean busy! You can hardly find a place to sit down.

H: Waiting at lunchtime and dinnertime is different, isn't it?

G: Yes, definitely. The thing of it is when you are a waitress, you have to know. You have to be able to look at people and tell what that person likes, if that person likes to be talked to or if that person likes to be left alone. I guess I am a phony to an extent because I can go from talking about anything and everything. I can tell just by looking at my people what kind of a person they really are; if they are a talking person, they like to talk to a waitress or if they just want to give the order and be left alone. I think that is important.

H: Do your moods come into it? Are there days when you just don't want to talk to anyone?

G: There have been days, of course, in the last past year when I

lost my son. It was rough on me to try to be . . . But, of course, I think that is the only thing that really helped me survive my son's death, was my job keeping me busy at all times.

H: What happened to your son, Lavon?

G: My son had cancer.

H: He died?

G: He died a year ago. He was buried last December 13th.

H: How old was he when he died?

G: He was thirty-three.

H: You have how many children?

G: I have three sons. I have two younger than David.

H: He was your oldest son?

G: He was my oldest son.

H: Through the years of being a waitress, how was that raising children and working?

G: At one time, my oldest son was fifteen and I had a baby-sitter for the three boys. My oldest son was bigger than she was, but she was older. I thought--She would have a cooler head than he did. It was like that later on even after he was fifteen years old. I wanted somebody with him.

H: How many years were you a single parent? You were divorced.

G: When I divorced, my youngest son was fourteen.

H: You were working full-time at that time?

G: Yes.

H: So you had three boys and you were working full-time when you were divorced?

G: Yes.

H: Did that conflict with raising your children? Was that hard to do?

G: Yes, sometimes I have guilty feelings like now that I had to leave them in the past when I should not have left them. I was working. When you have to work, you have no choice. I really don't know what is wrong. I know all of these people here in town, all of



these politicians; I know everybody. When it came time for my divorce and I got my divorce, I did not get any support money. They know me as a person. They probably have a better outlook on a waitress' life than most people do because they know me and they know me for what I am and I have been a waitress ever since they can remember. I think that makes a difference, that appeal.

H: Are you proud to say that you are a waitress?

G: I certainly am. That is why I hate to see girls try to do waitress work and they cannot, because to me it is a profession. It is the one I chose. To see people who say, "Anybody can do waitress work," that is not true. Anybody cannot be a waitress. They can try and they can do maybe a halfway decent job, but unless their heart is really in it, they cannot do a good job.

H: What do you think are the characteristics you need to be a good waitress?

G: In the first place, like I said, you have to be able to tell what type of person they are if you can, whether they are people who just like to be left alone or if they are people who you can talk to or whatever. I have regular customers who come in who I talk to just like I . . . like Jeanie and Jack McNally, Attorney Jack McNally and Jean McNally. They went to Ireland about two weeks ago. She brought me these linen hankies from Ireland with the shamrocks on it for me to wear on my uniform next St. Patrick's Day. They have a house in Ireland. He told me that any time I want to go to Ireland, I was welcome to use their house. I have so many friends from the Dawn. David and Butch come in there from work. Alice Hill runs the free clinic. They come in the Dawn every Tuesday night after they get through with their work at the clinic. She has been running the clinic now for quite a few years. All of the nurses volunteer their time on Tuesday night and people who want to help in the clinic. They volunteer their time and go down and help. They all come to the Dawn after. They have pizzas, french fries, and draft beers. There are two who come in there, Dave and Butch Hayden. I don't know Dave's last name. They are two of my customers who stand out in my mind a lot. Alice Hill stands out. I like the McNally's who I was talking about. There are people who really stand out in my mind as customers and as people. I don't think they really look at me as a waitress. They look at me as somebody, I don't know, who brings their food and stuff, but as a friend also.

H: Have you ever established friendships from your job that you have seen people outside of the restaurant?

G: No. I had been invited to a lot of things from my customers, but I don't really have the time to go because I really have

only one day off. I take off one day now during the week. I guess the guys think that I am getting older and I deserve another day off.

H: Do you mean you used to work seven days?

G: No, six days and always off on Sunday.

H: But now, you take one day off.

G: Yes, one day off during the week. If I am lucky, I get off every other Saturday night.

H: You do?

G: Yes, every other Saturday if I am lucky. Just like I said, there are a lot of my customers who don't look at me as a waitress, more or less like a friend or something. I probably get away with more than most waitresses could because of that. I am not talking about getting away. I mean if I get busy or something and I cannot get to them right away . . . The main thing of being a waitress is to always let somebody know that you know they are there. I don't care if it is just putting a glass of water in front of them or a drink and a menu and saying, "I will be with you in a minute," if you are busy, which I am caught very often being really busy. You have to let that person know that you know they are there. The way you do that is you just take a menu and maybe ask them if they want a drink and get them a drink. Then you go and take the other orders and you get back to them and they are completely happy as long as you let them know that you are there. That is one thing I found out being a waitress, that you have to let people know that they are seen and that you know they are there.

H: What about some other qualities that you think a person needs to be a good waitress?

G: You have to be a friendly person. You don't have any business being a waitress in the first place if you are not a friendly person. You should not even try to be a waitress. You have to know the type of person you are handling. You have to know that because you cannot walk up to somebody and start yakking to somebody who might bite your head off the next minute. I have so many of the same people all of the time that I don't have much of a problem. We do have different ones come in.

Another thing about being a waitress is you have to be clean and neat. If you are not clean and neat then . . . When you go in a place to eat, you want somebody to be nice, clean, friendly, and smiling.

H: I used to find always that I would be like a diplomat working between the cooks to get the food out . . .

G: That is another story, working with the cooks. It is a wonder they all don't walk out of the kitchen at times because I have been there long enough that I will not bring anything out of the kitchen unless it is the way I want it. I drive those cooks up the wall. I get real nervous because I know how I want it, how I want my good. I am back there trying to tell them, "I don't want it like that, I want it like this. I don't want that many potatoes on there because it does not even look nice. Wipe that plate off. Don't put that piece of lettuce in there; it does not look right in that bowl. Make sure you wipe the plates off." I drive them crazy in that kitchen and I know what I do, but I cannot help it because I am dealing with the public.

H: They are kind of separate from it even though they think a lot of their job.

G: They are, but they are a very important part. From the beginning part, they have to do it right. That is the pits when you go into the kitchen and cannot get what you have ordered and you cannot get it the way you ordered it and the way you want it and to look the way you want it to look. You get into the kitchen and maybe you will have one who really wants to do a real good job and make everything look nice. On the other hand, you have the other one who doesn't really care. She has a job and that is it. When you are a cook or a waitress, you have to care. You have to care about what is happening and what is going on. You have to care about what your food looks like. You have to care about how the plates look that you bring out. That is bad when you cannot get a cook who will work with you.

H: You have been in this place now twenty-four years. Can you remember moments in history that you experienced while you were working, maybe things on the television?

G: Yes, definitely. The day that John F. Kennedy got shot, I was there then. I had not been there very long when he got shot.

H: Do you remember the reaction of the people out there?

G: You would not believe. There is an apartment upstairs. My boss' sister lives upstairs, Carmel Naples; she lives upstairs. She called us. We never had the television on at lunchtime because it was so busy that you could not hear it anyway. So she called us first and told the fellows to turn on the television set because John F. Kennedy had just been shot. When they turned the television on, it was just totally terrible. Everybody was just in shock.

Then I remember over there about ten years ago when the governor was elected governor the first time, Celeste. We had national television in there. We were broadcasted nationally on television.

H: Why was that?

- G: We have such a wide clientele of people, a different clientele of people who come in there, like I told you before like the blue-collar worker, right down to your gutter workers, right up to the attorneys, and all of that stuff. So that is why they had it there. Professors from the college and teachers from the college are in there all of the time. So that is why they had it there, because they thought it was a good place to have it. So they had it there and that was the . . .
- H: They were covering the election from the Golden Dawn?
- G: They were covering the election nationwide from the Golden Dawn.
- H: Did they talk to you?
- G: Yes. The funny part about that whole evening was my mom and dad in Louisville, Kentucky. They never knew that I worked in a restaurant where they served alcohol, which they were very much against. I was going around and I was all prettied up. I thought I had on a pretty jump suit. I had on a red corsage which Jack McNally had brought me to put on for that night. So I was running around all night long with those trays of beer and drinks. I ran around all night long, stooping way down, carrying my drinks around because I did not want my mom and dad to have a heart attack in Kentucky.
- H: Were they watching?
- G: They watched, but they never saw me because I stayed hidden. I was afraid they would see me. That place that night was mad. We had people standing on the booths. Anywhere they could find a place to stand, they were standing, on top of the booths, probably on top of the car, and on top of the jukebox. Anywhere they could find a place to stand, that is where they stood. People who I had never seen before and who I have never seen since were all there that night.
- H: Was it NBC or CBS?
- G: NBC, I think.
- H: Are there any other famous moments in history that you remember experiencing while you were there?
- G: I was there when Nixon got thrown out of the White House.
- H: You remember that?
- G: Yes, I remember that. People were talking about that; people were talking about stuff and everything and everybody was passing their own opinion. Everybody had a different opinion about everything.

- H: What would be the frustrations of being a waitress, the hard part of it for you?
- G: The frustrations, I think, you bring on yourself.
- H: How so?
- G: Because it is the attitude that you have and the mood that you have. You go to do a job and you go do that job. There are days that I don't feel like really smiling, but I am nice. I am decent to people. There are days when I don't talk as much as I do, but not many days that I don't talk. I rattle on and on. My boss told me, "I think you were vaccinated with a phonograph needle." I had been called motor mouth. Sometimes I talk and two hours later my mind catches up with my mouth. That is everyday business in the Dawn. Everybody says they come to see the Ralph and Lavon show on Saturday nights when we are working by ourselves.
- H: How about when you go home on a Saturday night after you have had a busy night, you have talked to people all night, you walk in the door and you are there by yourself?
- G: I am here by myself.
- H: How does that feel?
- G: Heaven.
- H: Why?
- G: When I go in, the first thing that I do is pull my shoes off when I go in the kitchen door. Then I go in the bathroom, I get cleaned up, and I put on my nightclothes. I plop down and turn on the television set and that is it. People say, "What do you do on your time off?" What I do is go someplace different; I go home because I am at work most of the time. I do something different. I stay home because when you work so much, you are just glad to have a day off.
- H: So you run your own home yourself. You take care of all the business of running your home and cleaning your house. You don't get any help with anything like that?
- G: No.
- H: Is there anything else about your life or your work that you would like to talk about that is important to you? Do you still have a close relationship with your sons?
- G: Yes, I do. Of course, things have not been the same. I will never be the same since I lost my oldest son because on Sundays we would all get together and I would make Sunday dinners. I think

I have made maybe one or two Sunday dinners since he has been gone. It is never going to be the same.

H: Did he have a family?

G: Yes, he has two children. One is seventeen and one is eleven.

H: Are you close to them?

G: Yes, I am, but I find that I am not as close as I used to be because I find it hard to go over to his place. I cannot go over there. My son was so different the year before I lost him. Maybe some day I will be able to go to his house, but I don't know when.

H: Did you feel that your customers were aware of that happening?

G: They could not have been nicer. They were all aware of it. Everybody was so nice.

H: How soon after that happened did you go back to work?

G: A week. I went to Kentucky for a week with my family. I stayed there for a week. Then I came back and went right back to work. People were really nice. Of course, when I am at work and stuff like that, you would be surprised the people who were not even aware of it because I just went ahead and did my job. I stopped in the mornings at the hospital and saw my son when he was in the hospital. I stopped to see him on the way to work lunches. I would go home and go back to work that night.

H: Would you say that is the hardest thing that has ever happened to you?

G: That is the worst thing that has ever happened to me. I lost my mother in November. As a matter of fact, she was buried the 9th of November. My son was buried the 13th of December. When I went home to my mother's funeral, I could not even take my mother's death because I knew what I was going home to face. You love your mother dearly. I did my mother. I loved my mother dearly, but there is nothing compared to losing a child. There is nothing. You cannot get away from it. It is there every minute of every day; it is there. Everybody will say to me, "You are doing so well." If they only knew. If they just only know the grief that I have. When I am by myself and when I lie down at night, it has to be the pits. Just like I said, I love my mother better than anything on this earth, but when it came to losing my child, there was nothing to compare with losing him.

H: Is there anyone who stood out in your life who has helped you deal with this, who has given you comfort right through this?

G: No.

can be good at almost anything if you try it and set your mind to it.

H: Your pride is that you are a waitress?

G: Sure I am.

H: You don't hesitate to say it?

G: That is right.

H: You see it as a profession and you see yourself doing it professionally?

G: It is a profession. I have not done bad at all.

H: So if you could do it over again . . .

G: I would not do it any differently as far as my working life, but the other part of my life would probably be very different.

H: How so?

G: I would never marry a damn Yankee to begin with. I would have never come to Youngstown. Probably, I would still be in Kentucky. I cannot say anything about Youngstown because I have met a bunch of wonderful people here. All of the people who I know are fantastic people. Of course, to my kids this is home. This is my home too. When I refer to Kentucky, I say, "Go home." The only thing of it is, to me, it is a profession. It is a good profession if you handle it right. If you handle it right and do your job right, it is a profession.

H: As far as retiring some day and not having a pension and things like that, that is not something that you worry about yet?

G: No, I don't worry about it yet because as many years as I have worked, my pension cannot be that bad. Then I have an insurance thing that I have fixed up for myself.

H: You did on your own?

G: Yes, I did on my own.

H: How about the friendships that you have developed over the years with the women who you have worked with, other waitresses? Has there been much of that in your life?

G: No, not really. The one girl who I work with now, Esther, she and I went to a show at Ponderosa Park to see T. G. Shepherd this summer. I don't make it. No, I don't, not really.

H: You go to work and you are usually busy all night?

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G: No, not really. The one girl who I work with now, Esther, she and I went to a show at Ponderosa Park to see T. G. Shepherd this summer. I don't make it. No, I don't, not really.

H: You go to work and you are usually busy all night?



G: Yes, that is right; we are busy all night.

H: And you are tired at the end of the shift?

G: Yes, definitely.

H: Even still today, after all of those years on your feet, you are still tired?

G: Yes, but it is good tired. It is not like you lie around all day and you are tired. A lot of people lie around all day long and they are more tired than I am and I put in a full day's work. I am sure that there are people who lie around all day long who are as capable of working as I am.

H: Right.

G: They prefer lying around rather than working. I am an eight to five.

H: One other thing that I always thought about when I was a waitress, because I was one for thirteen years, was that you always work nights, you always work weekends, and I kind of resented that. I always felt like I was separate from the rest of the normal world out there having their nights off, having their weekends off. Has that ever bothered you?

G: Now I get every other Saturday off. I usually schedule my plans around the days that I am off.

H: Is that a recent thing or did you used to always work Saturdays?

G: I used to always work Saturdays. There were plenty of times in the summertime . . . I like to fish; I love to fish. I guess that is my hobby that I put down. That is my hobby, I guess, fishing. I love to fish. I would resent sometimes on Saturday night when we were going to go fishing and spend the night or camp overnight, I couldn't go. I resented that sometimes. I felt bad because it would be so pretty outside and I wanted to go fishing. I could not go overnight because I would not be able to.

H: That seems like an interesting thing. You like fishing which is something in which you sit and you are quiet while you are doing.

G: Well, maybe that is why I like it because I am so wound up and so upheaved. It is just only one day though. I would not want that as a steady diet. That is fine for relaxing one day, peace and quiet in one day, but I would not want it for a steady diet, fishing.

H: This has been a really good interview. I want to thank you

very much for your time and your enthusiasm here. Is there anything else you want to add?

G: The only thing is if you would have brought the tape recorder to work and followed me around for a day, you would probably get stuff on there that you would not believe.

H: Maybe we can still do that. That is a good idea.

G: If you would do that, you would probably get run over at lunch-time.

H: Yes, probably; I could not keep up with you.

G: That is right.

H: Do you have to do any physical fitness stuff to keep in shape?

G: No, I do sit-ups at home.

H: You do?

G: But that is all. That is all I do.

H: Because you are on your feet all the time.

G: Yes. I don't need to run; I don't need to jog; I don't need any of that stuff because I probably do fifteen or twenty miles a day.

H: You think so?

G: Oh, absolutely; I am going to get me one of those little meters that you put on you and you check the time.

H: You are going to figure out what it is.

G: There are so many things that have happened at the Dawn while I have been a waitress that I cannot even think of anything really. There have been so many things that I wish I could just think of one that really stands out in my mind. The election day did. I know Sandy. I know all of them when I see them, but I don't know their names. I don't remember names that well, but I remember faces.

H: Maybe if you think of something after this is over, you can add it to anything that is important for you to have on this story of your life as a waitress. You can add it later. I really want to thank you very much.

G: You are most welcome.

We were real busy one time. We had two guys come in, Gary and

Jerry. They were electricians. They came in to order something and they had to have a salad and had to have dressing with it. They ordered the Italian dressing. I took it over, they said, "No, we don't want the Italian; we want the French." I brought the Italian back and took the French over. They said, "No, we want the Italian." So for the third time I went over to get the Italian dressing. They were just being cute. So I just loosened the lid. The one had a habit of picking the bottle up and shaking it real hard. So I loosened the lid on the dressing bottle and set it down. Just as I set it down, he picked it up; he grabbed that bottle; he shook it back over his head, and he filled his buddy's face full of Italian dressing. It went down his back and I said, "Gee, it could not have happened to nicer people." They don't know to this day that I did that. That was just my way of getting even.

END OF INTERVIEW