

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

WOMEN'S HISTORY

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1790

RUTH CESSNA

Interviewed

By

Beth Burr

On

February 5, 1996

## RUTH CESSNA

Born in Oil City , Pennsylvania on January 20, 1930, Ruth Cessna spent the first ten years of her life her. Her family moved to Erie, then on to Phoenix for two years, then back to Erie, where she still resides today.

Ruth started working at an ice cream parlor at the age of fifteen. She retired from General Electric in 1990, at the age of sixty. She worked consistently for those forty-five years and raised six sons. She was married at the age of twenty-one but she is now legally separated.

Ruth is enjoying her retirement. She walks every single day for exercise, but for the most part she relaxes. She is happy to not have a schedule to follow.

Ruth has done an extensive amount of traveling. It was done mostly for pleasure, but she went to Brazil on business. General Electric sent Ruth as part of a team to help a plant there better its productivity.

Ruth feels that women today are more independent than they used to be. She feels that one of the reasons is because of failed marriages. Although the reason may not be positive, she's happy to see more opportunities for women.

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INTERVIEWEE: RUTH CESSNA

INTERVIEWER: Beth Burr

SUBJECT: Women's History

Date: February 5, 1996

B: This is an interview with Ruth Cessna for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. The topic is Women's History and how life has changed for women of the years. The interview is being done by Beth Burr at Ruth's home on Juniper Street in Erie, PA on February 5, 1996.

Tell me where you grew up and what you did for fun.

C: I grew up in Oil City until I was 10. We moved quite often so I really couldn't tell you too much about the neighborhoods. After we got to Erie things were a little different. We spent six years there. That's all I can say about my childhood. After we left Erie I went to work.

B: How old were you when you went to work?

C: I was fifteen.

B: What did you do?

C: I worked in an ice cream parlor outside of Phoenix, Arizona. A short while later we decided to move back to Erie.

B: How old were you when you decided to come back to Erie?

C: I think I was seventeen.

B: How long did you live in Phoenix?

C: We were there for two years. I wasn't crazy about it because at that age it's hard to try and make new friends so I quit school.

- B: At what age or grade did you quit?
- C: I quit in tenth grade. We went back to Erie and I worked at several jobs until I went to General Electric. I did my years of work there.
- B: How long did you work there?
- C: About 34 and a half years.
- B: Tell me about the size of your family and what your parents did.
- C: There were just three of us girls. Dad was a tool and dye maker. My mom worked in a couple different shops.
- B: What about national events? How did they affect your family?
- C: I don't remember too much about the Depression. We were pretty young. I wasn't born until 1930 and I think that it was just beginning about that time.
- B: What about the war times?
- C: We had moved to Erie before the war started. I think I was about eleven. I remember having to get food stamps. I remember bits and pieces. When you are that young you don't worry about those things. My uncle was in the war, though.
- B: How old were you when you got married?
- C: I was 21. I met him at General Electric.
- B: Talk about your family.
- C: I had six children. They were normal boys, not too many broken bones. I had to work. When you have a big family you need two paychecks to survive.
- B: Were there a lot of women that worked at GE?
- C: There were a lot.
- B: Then it was probably a misconception that women stayed home.
- C: Yes. That is very true. I think the war was what started that. When the men left the women had to go to work to bring in some money. I think that now women are more independent. There are more chances for women to survive out there.
- B: Why do you think things changed?

- C: I think because marriages weren't working out and there were a lot of divorces. Women needed to take care of themselves out there.
- B: What about expectations of women back then as compared to today?
- C: I think in the home we were expected to do everything. That was their job. Today it is more sharing. You share everything when you get married especially if there are kids. Even if there weren't kids, if you work together then there would be more time to be together.
- B: Who is your role model?
- C: Nobody in particular. There wasn't anyone I really looked up to. I mean, my mother did teach me a lot of things. She was a good role model for that. She always had a clean house and was a great cook. I really didn't look up to anyone.
- B: What do you do today?
- C: Very little. I don't do anything more than I have to do. I enjoy my retirement. If I want to be lazy all day then I can be. I go walking every day to get exercise. I don't have to do very much housework. So if someone calls to go do something then I am almost always available.
- B: Is it nice after working for so many years?
- C: It's great not having to be on a schedule.
- B: Through GE I heard that you could go to training after you retire.
- C: Yeah. I went to Brazil.
- B: What did you do there?
- C: We went out there because they were having problems with their workers. They were becoming too laid back. They were trying to take people over that could show them ways to do the job so they could have some more productivity. They weren't putting out enough work. We tried to do this for three weeks and I don't feel that we did anything. They send people all over trying to change work styles. I did enjoy it. They people were very different.
- B: Did you have translators?
- C: Yes. There were a couple people there that would help us out. The workers in the shop mainly spoke Portuguese, but the people in the offices spoke English. When you travel you'd be surprised the people who spoke English.

B: Do you vote?

C: No, I don't.

B: Are you registered?

C: I was, but once we moved I never got around to registering.

B: I asked about the voting because women haven't always had the chance.

C: I don't even like to talk about politics. I read about it just to know what is going on but that's about it.

B: What do you think about the feminist movement?

C: I think that women have more rights than they used to. I really think that they are going overboard. I believe that it's a man's world and when you push it you are only asking for trouble. I don't think that we should take a backseat in the working world, though. Abortion, I don't believe in it, but women do have the right. People make too big of an issue when they talk about things like that.

B: Is there anything you would like to add?

C: I don't think so.

B: Okay. Thank you very much.

End of Interview.