

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

GM Lordstown

Personal Experiences

O.H. 2048

Elizabeth "Bessie" Spangel

Interviewed By

Erin Timms

On

April 18, 2002

ARCHIVE  
Oral  
History  
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INTERVIEWEE: ELIZABETH "BESSIE" SPANGEL

INTERVIEWER: Erin Timms

SUBJECT: GM Lordstown

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This project is being funded by the Ford Foundation.

T: This is April 18, 2002. This is an interview with Bessie Spangel and it is on the General Motors project. It is at her home in Liberty and it is about a quarter to four.

T: Could you tell me a little bit about your background, where you grew up?

S: I was born in a little village, South Londonderry, Vermont and my father worked here in Youngstown, so we lived on a farm, the foothills of the Green Mountains. We moved to Youngstown when I was four years old. I went to St. Edward's School and then from there I went to St. Columba and nothing particular about my childhood, except it was a happy childhood.

T: About what time was it when, you're four, so about what year would that have been when you moved here.

S: That would be about 1925. I think I was four. I'm pretty sure I was four.

T: What did your father do for a living when he worked here?

S: He worked for a saloon downtown. He was a bookkeeper for it, but it was a relative. His uncle owned it, owned the saloon on East Federal Street.

T: What was the name of it?

S: I don't know. I have no idea. The owner was George Cox.

T: Did your mother work?

S: She was a registered nurse, but she stayed home with us.

T: What was your first job?

S: In high school, when I was a sophomore, as soon as I was sixteen, I applied to J.C. Murphy Company downtown and I would work Saturdays. That was my first job.

T: Where else did you work at?

S: I worked there until I was married. I really went all the way up from being a clerk on the floor to being the bookkeeper in the office, and from there I was married.

T: Did you quit your job after you got married?

S: About six months after.

T: When were you hired out at General Motors?

S: First of all, I was hired in the restaurant area and that would be in 1971. At that time there were a few women working out there. But when I tried to get hired out at General Motors in the plant, they told us that there was a rule against women from the cafeteria working in the plant. I thought that was an unfair labor practice, so I wrote to the National Labor Relations Board and I wrote them that I felt that we were being discriminated against, so they made a decision on it. They notified General Motors that they must hire women from the cafeteria if they applied. So, it went on for a while and they didn't hire anybody. They just received it but they didn't act on it, so then I wrote back again to the National Labor Relations Board

and said that nobody has been hired, so they wrote the company again. So the company, then, took applications and I was one of the ones that was hired.

T: How many women were being hired about that time?

S: As many as they needed. There were maybe, at different times, there would be thirty at a time within a period of say, 30, 60 days. They came in as they needed them.

T: What was it like when you first started at General Motors?

S: It was tough. They sent me over to the truck plant and put me in what they call steel city, and it was the body shop and I had never done work like that before. You had to haul bumpers, fenders, everything and you had to weld. It was what everybody said it was. Nobody wanted to go into the steel city, but I survived.

T: Do you think that they often placed women in specific jobs, maybe, so they couldn't handle it?

S: At that time most of the men had the better jobs, so we picked up the slack. Everything goes by seniority, so any person can bid for the job but you must have enough seniority to cover it. If you have more seniority than the person on the job, then you can have that job. So, most of the men have seniority on the better jobs.

T: What was it like? How were you treated?

S: Nice. Really. We were a real family in the body shop. Everybody took care of one another. There was a good rapport. It really was. We were laid off from there about, I think I worked there maybe six months, then we had a general lay off and I was called back then to the car plant when I was called back, so I worked on the final line. That's the last line on GM before the repair. That work wasn't that hard. It was demanding but it wasn't that hard.

T: Were you always active in the union?

S: You become active because you're only as good as your union. You are your union. In fact, I became a member of the women's committee and we did a lot of things, and then going from the women's committee, I also joined the Coalition Labor Union Women. That was an adjunct of the U.A.W. Our senior woman vice president was always a vice president of national C.L.U.W., so our motives and our goals were the same as our union principles. I became involved with my women's committee. I also went on to become the chapter president of C.L.U.W. and I became the state vice president of C.L.U.W. for a number of years. Within my own union I was very active. Our members, we have a good rapport.

T: Did you try to encourage other women to become active in the union?

S: Yes. Many did but a lot of them had homes and children and that kept them from getting involved in the union activities. It isn't that they didn't want to but they didn't have the time and your perpetually tired when you're working so many hours too.

T: Through the years, did you participate in any of the strikes?

S: I participated in one strike but that was mostly only at the union hall, maybe taking forms or helping out a little bit. I never walked the picket line for the union. By the time, by '73, it was when I was hired in. Most of the strikes were over then. I did walkout one night. We had a walkout and I was penalized a week for that. They gave me a week off of my job for it. We all walked out but I was the only one on my line that was penalized. I don't know whether that would tell you anything or not.

T: Do you remember what you walked out for, what it was over?

S: There was a dispute between the union and the company and it was probably about grievances, un-honored grievances.

T: How do you feel about all of the misconceptions concerning autoworkers?

S: I think people don't really know, they have to go in and work that line and feel how hard it is. Autoworkers have a definite purpose in mind and that is building a perfect car. Nobody ever turns out shoddy work and that's a misconception that people have. We all take a pride in what we do and turning out that car no matter what part we have to do, whether it is putting in a screw or something else, we try to do it as perfectly as possible. I think that's one of the great misconceptions. I think they resent, many times, the money you make, but you work for every penny you earn out there. I can't think of anything else.

T: I should have asked you this earlier. How old were you when you got hired out at General Motors?

S: I was about fifty.

T: What was the average age of most of the women being hired at that time?

S: They were young to older. Many of them were 19, 20. Many got in because they had somebody to speak for them. Many of the young hirees got in because they had friends or relatives or families and if you don't have a friend or something it pretty hard, pretty tough getting in. Sometimes you call in some of the favors you need and ask because everybody... and not everybody can take the work out there. In the early years there were a lot of people that just quit. Later on they didn't because good jobs are hard to find, but when they first started in the early years many young people quit.

T: I posed a question a lot of times to a lot of the men that I've interviewed: How did it affect your job when women came in to the plant? A lot of them discussed how the jobs became easier because the plant would have to make sure that everybody would be able to do the job. Do you feel the same way?

S: That's as untrue as I could think. The jobs were never changed. The men already had the best jobs. We got the hardest jobs. I heard how the women at the truck plant had to pick up great big heavy tires and nothing, every bit of work, I know every bit that I did, even when I started out in the body shop in the truck plant those bumpers were heavy. I got no help. The men watched me do all these hard jobs and they always bid for the easy jobs, but the women did their share. In fact, sometimes I think they did a little bit more.

T: Do you feel that when you are a woman, particularly in a male dominated field, do you feel you have to do more?

S: No. I think we feel we should do the same. I don't think we should be given any special favors. We shouldn't ask for a job if we can't do that. If the man can do the job, then if you want that job you better be able to do it. Don't ask for any favors at all. I think the men, after awhile, they came to accept us because we did what we had to do. We did the same jobs and it's hard for them as well as it was hard for us.

T: How do you think General Motors was affected by the closing of the steel mills in the 1980s, particularly Lordstown?

S: I don't know if they were affected at all. I really didn't feel the impact of it. I knew that about it. I heard a lot of people who were really feeling sorry that they had lost their jobs, but I don't think that it affected us in any way.

T: I meant more maybe with the negotiating rather than like directly affecting the line, but as far as not...

S: You mean negotiations. I don't think so. I don't think it affected our negotiations. Our negotiations are hinged on national U.A.W., and as it goes for one plant it goes for all plants across the United States. So, I don't think it had any impact on it.

T: You mentioned being laid off. Were you laid off a few other times?

S: The one time I was laid off. The first time was from the truck plant and that was for six months. I don't really now remember why the layoff, but I remember that we had the big layoff. I think that was in '77 and we were laid off for a year.

T: What did you do in that time period?

S: I went to school. I went to Youngstown University. Picked up courses. Took another French course. Took a CPA course, an accounting course. Different courses to fill in, because it was hard to get a full schedule. It was mish-mosh like. You had picked the one program or another. You just couldn't get like you were going straight liberal arts. You know exactly what you do. You didn't have an agenda, in other words. So it was a little, but it was good because you kept busy.

T: You said that was the second time you had attended Youngstown University?

S: I went before I was married. I was taking a liberal arts course.

T: You said General Motors had originally supported you. Did they encourage you to go to school during that time?

S: Well, no. That was one of the agreements between the union and the company that they set up these. There was some kind of a money. I'm trying to think now. It was so long. I haven't even thought about it. We were given some kind of an allowance and we were given a lump sum and we had to spend that lump sum and if you were given too much you had to repay it back. So, many people had to repay it back, but we were given the choice of going to school and we did. We took it.

T: Did you find it beneficial?



S: Yes, it kept me busy. I didn't really put anything to it other than my mental attitude. It's amazing how many people at GM go to school. Many get their degrees and never leave the company.

T: Returning to some of the ideas of the union. What do you think about a lot of the concessions the union has had to make?

S: I really don't like concessions, really. I think that you do a lot of things because you have to do them. They feel that they want a product and I think they have to make concessions. We don't like them, and sometimes I don't feel they're fair, but we need a product. We need a plant.

T: Who do feel was the most effective union rep that you had?

S: Al Alli was a great union rep. He was our shop chairman for years, as long as I can remember. All the years that I was there, I'd say he was about the best union rep we had. And I have other ones. Jim Tripp was a good rep for me. Ray Lewis was another good rep. Had a lot of great men out there, like Tony Scandy. He's our first shop chairman.

T: How did you see management? How did you deal with management? Did you ever have any issues working the line?

S: Oh, yes. In the early years, they had a different attitude. It was like they had a real bias against the people in the plant. They made it hard for you, when so many times they could have made it easier. I think the general attitude of the foremen was bad. They didn't realize that they could all work together. When it finally came that we started to work together, they changed their attitude. I think everything had a positive approach.

T: How did you get along with your line manager?

S: With my line manager? My foreman. Good. When I had an argument with him, if he was right he was right, but if I was right, I made it known that I was right. I always had a good relationship and it doesn't matter who they are as long as they are fair. Bernard was mine and he was a real nice guy.

T: Did the women out at General Motors bond together? Did you notice that there was a lot of companionship or a good repertoire between the workers?

S: Yes. The people in your own department, in your own little line, because the department is a series of lines sometimes, parts of lines. With your own line you really set up a relationship that is more like family. Actually, you see these people more than you see anybody in your family. When they come in and tell you they've had something going on at home and they're having trouble, it could be the men or the women. When they're having problems, you feel their problems too. It's amazing how much of a family you become.

T: Did you ever participate in any off-site meetings with friends? Gatherings and stuff other than at the union hall?

S: Maybe around election time, you go to celebrate elections someplace. We went to conferences. We went to meetings out of town for union meetings. I was very active in my C.A.P. counsel, which is a legislature wing of the U.A.W. At one time I was an officer in it. I was an officer for quite a number of years and you get involved in politics, so you go to meetings and follow any policies that the union has. As of now, we're opposing NAFTA with fast track legislation, which one and three-tenth million of people have been laid off in the United States according to NAFTA. These are all jobs lost to American workers and there is a new thing that they're going to bring all of Central America into the picture so we have a focus against it with the political wing. We try to set policy and we approach senators

and congressmen, and ask for their support. We elect people who are in agreement with our views.

T: Have you ever been not in agreement with the union's views? Have you ever been against your union or found fault in some of the ideas or programs that they are looking to, specifically political?

S: Not really because we form our own politics. You might not like one person or disagree with their politics, but as a member of a Cab counsel you must act as one. So, if you're going to make any statements, you must do it without the cap counsel. It is an own personal thing and then you shouldn't bring the cap counsel into it. Most of all, we really are one voice.

T: You're still active, then, in the union today.

S: Yes, I am. I'm still a member of the retirees and I'm still a member of the C.A.P. counsel. I just went to the state federal convention for the Federated Democratic Women in Ohio and I'm the *labor chair* for that organization. I brought up about NAFTA and asked the women of the federation to contact their senators and congressmen about opposing NAFTA, so at the convention they made a motion that we would oppose NAFTA. The whole convention of the Federated Democratic Women of Ohio voted for it, so that was really a plus.

T: One of things that has come across in many of my interviews is a strong union idea about General Motors. Even though we mentioned concessions, General Motors is known, particularly Lordstown, for strong union activity.

S: Yes.

T: How do you feel about it, because you're obviously so active about it? Do you feel that you have to be?

S: No, it's something that grows on you. As a homemaker, even when I owned a business, I was sort of sheltered because I was still married and still raising my children. You went into this other world and you think well look at all these people, look how labor is, the misconception on labor views. It's a whole new world that's opened up to you, so you sort of expand under that and you try to help other women and other men at this similar situation.

T: During the 1980s, did you participate in a lot of the off-site meetings between management and the union?

S: No. That's shop committee. I was never part of shop committee. They relay it back to you what's going on, but that's where you put faith in your union. You try to elect people that are smart enough and fair enough to deal with management, so you put your faith them and expect them to come through. The U.A.W., the national, has always been a great negotiator. We've been one people. It doesn't matter the color. We're united. That's the one great thing about the U.A.W.

T: Did you see any safety issues while you were out there?

S: Are there safety issues? Yes. Especially in the paint department, but they corrected a lot of that. There had been a couple of deaths out there that were unnecessary. Mostly in the paint department, the chemicals, the toxic fumes and they had classes on that. Management and the union got together on that issue and we had classes. Every worker was made aware of whatever they would be up against and to watch out for things and to report things. It was a dual effort on both management and labor to take care of this issue.

T: Did you ever see any accidents out there?

S: No. I heard about them in detail. No, I never had one in front of me.

T: How did you feel about the small imports that were in fluxed in the 1980s? How did that affect you out at General Motors?

S: I always felt very strongly about imports. I feel that they put American workers out of jobs, and our workers are very creative and most of the material that comes in is an inferior quality. I think it's the wages, the slave labor wages that really bothers most people. There are people having to work hours behind locked doors ruining their eyes, their health for low wages that they can hardly exist upon and if they even try to unionize or do anything for their own welfare they completely get terrible treatment. I still look at labels and try to buy American, and sometimes it's very, very hard. I've been known to go into a store and say "I'm sorry I can buy nothing in this store. I can't find an American label in here." If I do that I feel that I must do it.

T: How do you feel about General Motors having plants in Mexico now, particularly producing the same car?

S: I feel that it's you multi-national corporations that are greedy. They want the best of two worlds and they don't really care about the average worker in the United States. They want that money. They don't really care about the Mexican people. Petitions may have helped them a little bit, but they're not getting the wages. I think it's greed.

T: Did you see an improvement in the working conditions over the last few years when you were there?

S: Yes. Everybody watches out for one another and I think management took a more active role in having a happier worker, realizing that that worker does a better job when they're content. I think the conditions were improved.

T: What do you think about robots taking the place of workers, the automation?

S: It's probably inevitable. You cannot stop progress. You could look at the amount of manpower that's out there now. What is it? 4,800 or something like that and we used to be 10,000 or 12,000. 12,000 early, then 10,000 and it has gradually gone down. It's hard to stand in the way of progress and some of the robots do a good job. I mean, they lift pretty heavy steel. What can I say?

T: Were you affected by a lot of the plant's history of labor relations when you went out there? Did you feel the tension when you first started in 1973 coming off of the wildcat strike of 1972?

S: I think working in the cafeteria we always waited on the people in the line. We had had those same tensions because it affected us. If the plant didn't work, we were out of work. Coming through the line, buying their food they talk to you. We knew everything that was going on. Then they would sit at the tables, you would hear their conversations as you were taking care of the tables. They stressed all of us because we felt that it was a tough thing. It really was, but the workers were united in feeling that they should go out. They felt that the wildcat strike, as they called them, were never really wildcat strikes. They felt that they were worthy strikes and they had to have them in order to get what they needed. As I say, management was a tougher person to deal with in that working time. They didn't work with us.

T: Were there any other women that actually went over, switched over from the cafeteria to the line after you?

S: Someone before me. Some had extra help from somebody. I finally had a friend at the union that spoke up for me and that's how I got in. It had to be a beginning...I think that there

were three before me and they were all from the truck plant. They weren't from the car plant and then I was hired. I was probably about the fourth one hired.

T: Did you find it more difficult to get hired than most of the men found it to get in? Did you find it more difficult getting into the plant than men?

S: I told you I had to send that application on discrimination to the National Labor Relations Board. That's the only way I got in. They would have that agreement. You see, it was a secret agreement and they are not allowed to have secret agreements. The cafeteria is run by Profit Foods. Profit was a former director of General Motors so when he retired, he put his cafeteria in all of GM. This was an agreement that they would... they wanted their experienced workers to keep working in the cafeteria. They didn't want them down on the floor because they didn't have anybody to serve all the people who go down on the floor. So, I guess working is a lot different. When I made cashier, and I was making, I think, \$1.92 an hour. Well, when I was hired in at GM I made \$5.17 an hour. I couldn't believe it, but that was the difference at that time in 1973. They were only making five-something an hour.

T: Do you think it has changed for women out there now?

S: I really don't know much about the women out there now. The friends I know, the ones that are still active, still in the women's committee, they're the same. I think that they would probably be educating the younger women coming up and the young women of today are pretty smart. They do their job the same as the men, and I think General Motors is very lucky to have women.

T: How do you feel about General Motors having a general manager now?

S: I think it's great. She can do just as well as the man, maybe better.

T: One of my interviewers, who's still out there, he has five years until retirement, he was telling me that it's one of the things he sees, a trend that's happening out at General Motors for women can do anything in management out there. He's noticing there's a rise of women becoming managers.

S: But, they have to have the ability. That's what's important. Sometimes men overlook that ability and if they want it bad enough themselves, let them step up to the plate.

T: How did you feel about the van plant closing in the 1990s? Did it affect you?

S: No. The only way I felt about it is because I wanted all the people that were there to be sure of their jobs. They came over to the car plant and that was quick. I think it was time for the van plant to be phased out. As long as those members are secure in their jobs and it didn't hurt them that was great. We care about their benefits, their welfare.

T: How do you feel you were treated on the job, being a woman more specifically?

S: There's a lot of difference being as a woman and as a personality. Some people just are like chalk and cheese—they don't get along together. As far as doing the job, I think it's pretty good. I think where you are in this one would be to act with personality. It's not with people doing the jobs. Between jobs people are stressed out and sometimes they bring their troubles to work because they don't stay at home, especially a young man going through a troublesome time in his marriage or a woman in a one parent family. I find young men, it affected them very deeply and they would be hard to work with, but most people, as I said, they were expected to get right to the job. As long as you did that job. If you aren't up on your job and I'm using an expression aren't up, which is what it was. They would come and say, "Hey, what's happening with you. Straighten up." One worker would tell another



worker if it was something that was wrong with them personally, so you sort of looked out for one another.

T: Did you ever find your job monotonous or have problems finding your job monotonous on the line?

S: The only job I ever hated was on final line and it was putting in the gas. I had a couple of jobs on my line that were really bad. The one gas one was really bad because you got all the fumes from the gas, although I didn't do that gas job. I did an oil job down below, next to the gas, but there was water running under a grid. I had to work on a grid. This water ran down to a wall and went down into a sump pump and the overflow from the gas would go into that and we'd get the fumes all the way down and they nauseated me all the time. I finally got off that job after I don't know how long. The next job was really bad because I put the fluid in the car and it screwed on. There was an overhead press button and when that filled up it would spray down on me. So many a time, I had it spray down on me and then the girl across from me had the water job. She pulled the water. Well, then hers would spout off and hit me, so one day I went home drenched. Just drenched to the skin with all of this greasy water. I got out of that area and that was a plus. That's the only bad job that I had, but that was on account of the equipment not working. It wasn't on account of the people doing a bad job.

T: What was your favorite job?

S: Oh, I think the last job I had.

T: What were you doing?

S: I retired from the cushion room. I put bolts in the cushions. Big bolts like this. It was with a big gun. It wasn't a bad job.

T: How do you feel about Lear Seating now?

S: About what?

T: Lear Seating, because they have eliminated the cushion room, haven't they?

S: They tried to do that for many years. They're U.A.W. now. I don't like their wage scale. I think GM got what they wanted there. They got a lower wage scale. I think Lear is ready. They're still U.A.W. They have our meetings with ours. None of our regular cushion room transferred over to Lear. They all stayed where they were at, at the GM plant. Everybody I know stayed.

T: That was your last job.

S: That was my last job. Of course it had a few side effects.

T: Like what?

S: Shoulder injury. Putting those bolts into the seats, you had this big gun and sometimes when they came from the factory, the seats would have foam inside the holes, so when your putting a bolt in it's like going into concrete, so you have to push, and push, and push. It was the fault of the cushion. It wasn't the fault of the gun or the bolt. It was just that the holes weren't clean, so I really got a bad shoulder out of that.

T: I'm always told this, so I guess I have to ask, since I have also done a lot of manual labor in my life. Everybody always tells me, "You'll feel it when you're older." Is it true?

S: Yes, right. We always say this. No one comes out of GM without an injury. It's the repetition. There were two bolts and you put in one then you put in another then you secure the other one. Those come pretty fast, so it's time after time. It isn't just once in a while. So when you get a mess of bad cushions, it's just that constant... It just wears down in your bones, so I always have a sore shoulder.

T: What do you think of GM's employee benefit package?

S: I think it's great. I don't think anybody can find any fault with it. I wish everybody were as lucky as we are. We can thank our U.A.W. for bargaining, taking care of us.

T: What did you do at the end of your shift after work was over?

S: Usually I came home because it was early in the morning. I usually came straight home and I'd get something to eat, read, wind down and then try and go to sleep, because your body is all tied up.

T: You mentioned that noticed some of the changes in the company's attitude toward the employees. Did you notice a change in style as far as how fair they handled things particularly when they got Saturn and some other companies?

S: I don't know. Saturn was so long ago, for me anyhow. I know that at first we were worried about what the car would do. We thought it would bother our supply and demand, but I don't think it ever affected us too much. We saw some and it was a pretty well made car. In fact, some of our people went there to work. I don't think it really affected us too much. Is that what your question was about?

T: Yeah, I was wondering if they changed their management style?

S: There was theory where they were trying to work together. I don't know if that was around Saturn time or not. I do know that there was a definite change. I don't think I have the years down. Maybe the men remember better than I do, but I do know there was a time when there was a thing that they would that they would work together. That went with the shop committee. This was totally under the shop. Then we would get certain reports back over there, and sort of attitude that maybe it would happen maybe it won't. But, there was a definite change, and we made concessions and they made concessions. We were always

afraid that our concessions were more than their concessions. I think it's worked out. They have a better relationship today.

T: What would you change in management if you could?

S: Well, I don't know. Not working in the plant it's hard for me to say right now. I don't think I'm qualified to say what management... because I know what I would like them to let me know.

T: What's that?

S: A more honest attitude with us. I think that's about it. I think that you can't step in and tell them how to run their company completely. That's part of their own profit loss. We want them to make money but not at our expense. As I say, right now, I don't know actually how I could change management. Being on the floor, I would know because I would be working with the supervisors and everything and I would know what their attitude was because that's always a reflection of the management. You probably have a better answer from somebody that's working at the plant right now.

S: How would the men you had interviewed... what would they change?

T: He had told me that since he had been there 25 years he five years away from retirement, he just sees all of the changes as far as with the robots. Since he's seen almost everything from the beginning to the end, he feels that he's being phased out and he felt that a lot of time he sees people walking around with clipboards and all of these managers who get benefits when they eliminate a job and he feels a lot of the pressure that's going on right now.

S: That would be stress. I can see that going around because that is those clipboards and those people. You have some people that are just looking for ways to eliminate a job. They don't realize. They never worked a line. They don't realize how hard it is, so they try to get in

good with the company and eliminating a job is one way of doing it. He's been there 25 years. He's probably had about the same time I, so I can see, but if he has five years left, I don't see him being phased out.

T: He's not worried about his job. I think he sees it as a cycle. With what's going on, I guess to him, I think he's kind of sentimental about it. I think it makes him feel insignificant. Everything that he's done just isn't that...

S: Yes, yes. I can see that. Honestly, we resented the robots, but the thing is we have to accept them. They're going to be here and what do you do with kind of a society that we have. I mean, the economy we have. We're going to have robots and people resent that. They always have. It's sad, but we have to own a machine to take over your labor, but then you have to be kind of adapted to changes and you have to maybe get the expertise to make a robot. I mean, you have to get a different expertise. That's what our young people are going to have to do.

T: With the man who repairs the robot, I guess.

S: Yeah, you have to have that man. That's right. In fact, that's one of the things they said to us when they brought robots in. You know, get your perspective right. Be sure that you make yourself so that you're essential to this robot.

T: Did you ever consider going into the trades when you were out there?

S: I think I was over the age. I would have done it. I would have done it if I were, but I was over the age for trades. There is a limit. It's a good way. Many of my sisters went in.

T: So, you said a lot of sisters went in.

S: Yes, some of them. A couple of women from our women's committee; they're still in there. I don't know, about four of our women that went in and they like it. They like it a lot.

T: Is there a higher respect level for the trades than somebody who works the line?

S: No. They think they're special. We see they're not working all the time. They only work when the line is down, so they sleep a lot and they're greedy. They'll work 72 hours a week even if they sleep half of those. I shouldn't have said that. I'll be in trouble.

T: No that's all right.

T: Did you ever notice that there was a lot of screwing off out at GM? There is that image, I guess. Everybody conjures up what people do on the line? What is it like?

S: It was different earlier. There was a lot screwing off on the line. A lot of going on in the parking lot and things like that, but as people get older they change too. As the workers became older, they became more family oriented and lot of younger people quit. There wasn't as much parking lot and on the line. Sometimes it was very humorous to see all the little affairs that would be going on. You'd be watching on the line, watching these people having a good time, but they still did their work. What can you do as long as they're doing their job? Like in a lot of places, there's always a lot of gossip. We still built a super car and when they gave us the right materials. They talked about the Vega, but they gave us second rate steel for it. We built a good car but when you have materials that fall apart, what are you going to do?

T: Yeah, a lot of the people I've talked to blamed less on the employees but more on what engineering problems they may have run into. It's easy to say on a board that this is where it should go, this is how it's going to work and you've got 2 seconds to put in.

S: It doesn't do it. Like that one job where I had that thing coming down for me, I had how many engineers over there everyday. They come over and they stand, they talk and they talk and they talk and they talk and they talk. Finally, they built one thing for it and then I think it

took about one day for the whole thing to break down. So you have a lot of engineers standing around, but not knowing what they were doing. The first on the line, they'd ask him. If they'd asked me how I could have corrected, I would have told them but they didn't ask me.

T: That should have been one of the changes made in management. Ask the employees how to do it.

S: Most or almost all of the employees will tell you just exactly. I think that is one of the things that they did do later on. They had more input.

T: Did you work the line the whole entire time you were there?

S: The whole entire time.

T: Did you ever feel you were treated different because you were older when you came in?

S: No. The one time when I had a lead off job on the backseat line and the one fellow went to Bernard, my supervisor, and said, "What are you giving her that job for? She'll never keep up." Bernard looked at me and said, "You don't have to worry about her." That's all he said to him, "You don't have to worry about her," and he didn't. I didn't know that until later on, until somebody came and told me what Bernard said. This was a young guy, but the thing is he wanted the job himself. That's what it all amounts to, when it comes down to it. Most everybody does their job and does it well.

T: That was the only time you ever felt like you had hostility?

S: It wasn't hostility, because I didn't know about it. Oh, I had hostility. I had one person who disliked me intensely, however I became friends with him later on. I don't think I want to discuss that.

T: What other activities and groups were you involved with?

S: I involved with the Ladies A.O.H. Irish group. I organized that division for Youngstown in 1986. Our original division folded. I was on afternoon shift and couldn't attend the meetings so it went down hill, so they asked me to organize a new division. Then we called our meetings for Sundays. We've had a ton of meetings ever since. I am the president of the L.A.O.H. I've been very active with the F.D.W.O., John F. Kennedy Club and Coalition of Labor Union Women. I'm secretary now for our local chapter.

T: There's been talk, especially through the last ten years about a backlash on women, particularly women in labor don't get recognized as much as they should.

S: It depends on your union, like the U.A.W. They are very good at recognizing all their women. I know we have a women's department and we have a vice president that always vice president for the nation C.L.U.W. We've had some very strong women in the labor union. Our first vice president on the national level for the U.A.W. was Olga Madar and she was a terrific woman for women's rights. She insisted that both blacks and whites be given equal rights as far as women were concerned. She became the first national president of the Coalition of Labor Union Women. I think we've had some very strong women. This woman I was telling you about, Anna Biggins, she rose from our ranks at Lordstown. She was the chair for our women's committee, a tremendous woman. She started out on the line and she became a representative for the region and she retired from that a couple of years ago.

T: What do think that you did for the women's movement, especially for going out there?

S: I hope I moved it a little bit forward. I think the main thing with women with women now is equal pay for equal work. If you go into an office, even on a state level or on a local level, Mahoning County level, men sometimes make more than women do on the same job. Men get special treatment. If you're doing the same job, it should be equal pay for equal work.



It's very important. That's one of the labor women's rules. We were lucky because we were paid the same, but it's not that way everywhere. I think women today make maybe 71 cents to a man's dollar and that's unfair. Perhaps in a professorship, ask at YSU, what a woman professor makes and what a man professor makes. Is there any difference? I have no idea. Is there?

T: I think their union has found out some problems on that in the past and I think a lot of that has been equaled out, particularly because women are actually the majority at most universities. They're very strong, actually, so I think YSU's union is particularly thought to be... which actually the U.A.W. supported the union out at YSU.

S: Yes. We have a Professor Rossi. He's been a great friend of ours.

T: What do you think the U.A.W. should do for other places, similar to YSU? For other struggling unions?

S: The best thing they can do is go into a plant and organize it. That's the best thing. Then you will have U.A.W. Not too many people realize that they'll get other unions in that are not equipped to do as well or have the same goals in mind. I think they can help other unions by advising them. Whether the other union wants that or not, sometimes that's hard to tell. The best thing a group can do is if they go to the U.A.W. and ask them to organize for them and that way you might get the U.A.W.

T: I just remember the Superior Beverage strike several years ago and the U.A.W. was very active in supporting them even though they were Teamsters.

S: Yes. Well, we do support locals and we do go. That's part of our Cab Counsel. We go and we demonstrate. We march for them, like we did for Kmart when they want to be unionized.

It doesn't have to be the U.A.W., but we do support their efforts. Oh good, this one was nationally.

T: Well, it's not as apparent with the U.A.W. A lot people see that unions are slowly, slowly being almost phased out or I guess not looked upon in the same light. How do you feel about that?

S: I think it's their loss. I think they hear all of the mumbo jumbo from the great Republican wing that says you don't need a union and when they are in office, they're traditionally anti-union. They stack the National Labor Relations Board for the decisions. They stack the courts and it's all for that money. It's what it amounts to. These corporations don't want to be tied down to agreements.

T: We're having to negotiate with another party.

S: Yes, yes. Like Wal-mart. How big of an organization are they and their people constantly vote against having a union, but if you go into the store how many of their articles are part of the United States? You can find very few things that are purchased here.

T: I bought a couple of articles actually on the exact subject that were produced by I don't know if it was the U.A.W. union, but one of the union magazines had put out about Wal-mart, how they're closing down businesses in the United States.

S: Yes, they are. It's sad and the American public sometimes don't want to hear you when you say, "Look at the label." There are many good products that we do sell that are American made and we try to push those, like in our union newspaper will have a list of the places that we should buy or where we can find things.

T: Any regrets concerning your work choices?

S: No. I'm very happy that I worked at GM, very proud of it and I think I left in a good way. I left a lot of friends, who are still my friends. It's a great way of life, because it is almost a way of life. You know them as well as you know the people that you live with.

T: I know sort of like working manual labor and I have a hard time explaining to people. I think I felt liberated. Do you feel that they?

S: Wondering when the shift was going to be over. Oh my god, one more hour. Yeah, it's tough sometimes. Like you say you asked me if it was automated and monotonous and sometimes it does, but you will have a friend, maybe, that's working across from you and you'll start talking. You while away the time with conversation to relieve the monotony and you sometimes have hours drag, especially they'll call line time. It'll be ten hours or nine, eight. You know you're going to be in there for ten hours. Then they'll call nine, eight and you'll say oh how great I get home twelve minutes earlier. It is monotonous.

T: How do you beat the clock? How did you stop yourself from having a watch?

S: You don't. Some nights you might watch it. I said if it becomes tedious some night or something is bothering you and you want to get home you might watch the clock, but ordinarily you don't. Anybody at some time or another watches the clock.

T: Anything else you'd like to share?

S: I can't think of anything.

T: It was really, really a wonderful interview. I'm really grateful that you were able to do this.