

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

JR Freeman – Cardiff, JR Freeman – Port Talbot

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Archif Menywod Cymru

00:28 *So tell me a little bit about your background, where you were born, your father, your mother, what they did for a living, any siblings that kind of thing.*

I was born in Neath. My father was in the forces, and my mother was a nurse, so we did a lot of travelling around. I have one brother, one sister and one sister that's passed away.

00:59 *And did your mother work at all?*

Yes, she was a nurse, in Llandough hospital.

So tell me about your education, where you went to primary school, secondary school that kind of thing.

I can't remember much about primary schools, I was in a different primary school every year, every 2 years, so I can't remember much about that until I moved to Penarth and then I went to St Cyres school. But primary schools, there were so many I just didn't keep up.

How long did you stay in school, when did you leave school?

16.

Did you want to leave at 16 or would you have liked to have stayed on?

I ummed and arred about it. I only ended up with 3 O-Levels so I thought well that's it, I will leave, and because I was sort of heavily involved in gymnastics then I wanted a job that I didn't have to worry about it. I just wanted something to earn some money and not think of anything once I closed the door, so that's why I ended up in JR Freemans.

Ok so tell me about that then. Did you know anybody who worked in Freemans before you went to work there?

Not at all, didn't know a soul.

So why did you decide to go to Freemans?

Because the money was very good. And it was just somewhere where I could go, do a job, not worry about it and come home. I didn't know a soul.

When you went there, did you have to have any kind of interview?

I had to have an interview and an IQ test, and it was quite formal really considering it was a cigar factory, I thought you would just walk in. But no you had to do their tests and you had to be well dressed. So it was fine you know. I didn't expect the IQ test I must admit but that was fine.

03:42 *That's interesting. Why do you think they were doing IQ tests?*

I have no idea. I guess to make sure you're not that much of an idiot, I suppose, I don't know. I don't know if they carried it on or what, but I know when I started it was an IQ test.

So did you go there straight from school then when you were 16?

Straight from school.

04:15 *Do you remember what it was like when you walked in on the first day?*

Actually I can remember going in and first of all you had to go not into the actual factory itself, you had to go into HR and report in there, and you had a little walk around the factory and then there was all departments that you would go into. And I ended up the making department. And there were 5 of us starting in the making department and I remember all this noise, all these people, I had never heard so much noise or seen so many people all together. And they put me down in the training department where the others were learning how to work the machines, and I just went there and just helped people, if they want this, a fetching person basically for 3 weeks.

05:50 *So were you trained at all to use the machines?*

Yes I was trained. After about a year, sorry about a month, they put you on the machine to have a little go. And then after about 6 months, you could do the job with your eyes closed, it was that sort of a job. You had to have targets, you had to get so many cuts out of a leaf, so it was all sort of controlled. And there were some very clever girls there, that had just come out of university and couldn't get a job, Freemans was the place where everybody could get a job. They loved it, some stayed there, some never left. They just got on with their jobs and you know degrees didn't worry them at all. After 2 or 3 years, they thought they'd never get back into the work force.

Like you say it is a job you could shut the door on?

Yes, you just shut the door on and it, the hooter went, you'd put your card in, walked out of the door and that was it til the next morning, put your card in and click on again. It was a lovely atmosphere, they were a great bunch of girls. When I first started there I was a bit shocked, some of the girls had rollers in their hair, and nets on their hair rollers in, they'd stay like that all day, and then go home, take their hair out and go out for the night. But as things went on, I would say after about working there for 2 years, all that stopped. I don't know why, nobody ever said anything but it just seemed to stop.

08:35 *Hairstyle changed?*

Hairstyles could have changed yes, I don't know. Perhaps they weren't so bouffant.

Because you went there about '64 didn't you, by about 66, it was more straight?

Yes so that could have been why they didn't come in with their rollers in.

So tell me what exactly did you do?

I started off as a machinist. And then because I was there for so long, and if your machine broke down, or if there was no filler or there was no leaf, they'd put you into different jobs. So some days I would go in there and they'd say this week you're in the stripping room, and I'd go in and make a terrible job of it but I'd try and strip the leaves. And then you'd go quality control. And then packing room. But basically I was a machinist, but a jack of all trades.

Take me through a days work as a machinist. From when you started in the morning, what time did you start?

Started at half past 7 in the morning.

And you clocked in you said?

Clocked in in the morning, go to your machine, sit down, sometimes you had another person at the end, which was called your buncher and I was called the roller. And we'd have a little chat "what's the target today?". And you'd start and the music would start playing. The buncher would start up first, because she had to bring the cigars into you to put the top leaf in, and you just rolled and rolled until break time. You go for your break, think it was 20 mins, have your break, come back in, and start the process all over again, singing your head off to the music if you could hear it, chatting to people, whatever's going on. The mechanics might come around to and say if everything's fine and you might say no this isn't working, that isn't working. And then lunchtime, the whole floor would switch off and each department went separately, so the stripping room would go, the making room and the packing room all different times. And you just go in, have your lunch, a good chatter. And start back to work and if you were near your target and you think right you start slowing down a bit now, and you'd have a couple of breaks have a cup of coffee. But if you were behind and if there was a spare girl floating around then you'd say "Susan can you come over here and have a go for me while I go to the toilet or have a coffee break". (unclear) then about half 3, machines would start to close down, and you would clean your machine. Five to 4 you looking at the clock thinking right 4 o'clock knock off time and back home.

12:52 *So you were actually rolling cigars were you?*
Yes.

Right how did that work on the machine?

You had a dye in the middle, and you had a cigar leaf and you just, bunch the leaf, and put your leaf up and roll it on the dye, an arm would come across, cut it out, another arm would take the leaf over to behind where the actual bunch as they used to call it would be in the back, roll it around, arm would come over, take it across, they would all roll down, then you would pick them up and put them in a tin, I think the tin held 500, and it would be like that all the time.

Whats a bunch then?

A bunch, we call them bunches is where you have a machine and there's a filler, and all the tobacco would go in there, the buncher would have her little bit of cigar leaf, not as good a quality as the actual top leaf. And she'd put it on her little dye, the filler would come up over, the dye would cut, go across, put it in like a cigarette, roll it all up, then the bunch would be passed over and put it into the drum. And that would go around and wait for the roller to roller it. You both had to work at the same speed, if you didn't work at the same speed then you were out of sync.

What's the dye then?

The dye is the actual sort of cutter. You'd have a silver plate and in the middle there's a dye where you sort of put your leaf over, and depressed when the roller cuts, the arm comes back, its like a cut out and it cuts out and sends it to the back. I didn't think I remembered all this.

What was your target a day then?

A lot. I can't actually remember. I think 500 in a tin. About 10 tins, so that 5000.

Were these the mannikin cigars?

Mannikin. Then the bigger cigars (unclear) cigars, those. Bigger ones again. If your machine was broken then you go to the next machine whichever you did.

On the whole you had the same machine?

On the same machine yes.

16:38 *Can you explain, sometimes you'd have to go to the stripping room, what happened in the stripping room?*

In the stripping room, the first time you just go in they give you a bundle of leaves, and they show you how you get the leaf, the 2 sides of the leaf and you get the vein and you pull the vein off and wrap it around you hand. And then you have a right leaf and a left leaf. It was quite complicated there was a technique to that, when I used to go in they'd say "oh my god here she comes again" because I used to rip

the leaves to shreds. But actually in the end I got quite good at it. But it was fine. But if I was moved then to quality control, where your tins are made on the actual floor, they were taken to quality control, and that's where they were called boarders. They would take them out of the tin, roll them out on a board and check for any faults, and if they had faults they were given back to the machinists. And if there was more than 5 you're in trouble. And sometimes it was something you didn't really notice because it was a machine fault so you do that and you just board them all up and just keep counting. And they must have been counting thousands and thousands a day, because if you think 1 person was making 5000, 200 in a room, they just were constantly up, they'd take them out, put them on the board count them, I think there was 25 in each section, so there'd be 50 in a row, then just board them all up and send them off to be dried.

Do you remember how much you were paid as a kind of basic wage? Did you do piecework and bonuses did it work like that?

No bonuses, you had a bonus at the end which was for everybody. So just piecework, just flat rate. So if you know you're going to reach your target then you either say to yourself and your partner right we can make another 1000 today but we'll keep those for tomorrow, and have an easier day tomorrow. It all depends on how could the team work, and sometimes because we finished early on Friday you'd keep a few back every day so Friday you go in and perhaps you do no work because you would have reached your target everyday. I think they'd cottoned on to that in the end but in my day that's what we did.

Do you remember how much you were paid then when you first went there?

£4.70 I think. Used to go home, give it to my mother, and have it all back by Monday that sort of thing. No £4 and that was an awful lot of money in those days.

In 1964 that was a good wage.

That was a very good wage, better than all my other friends that were working in offices or anything like that, that was good.

And did your wages go up every year?

Every year the wages went up, with inflation and above. It was a very well paid job, very monotonous but very well paid.

21:30 *How did you feel about working there?*

To be honest, when I first worked there, I thought oh my god you're working in a factory, you shouldn't be working in a factory, there's a lot better things you could do. And then I would listen to all my friends saying what they were earning and I just thought, I can go out and buy myself a dress every week and go to town, and what am I working for, for the love of it or for the money and I decided I was working for the money. And it took me about 5 years to really admit to people that I worked in a factory.

22:22 *Did you feel that other people looked down on factory work then?*

Yes I did for the first few years, I really did, they'd say where do you work and I'd go up Penarth Road and I would just change the subject. But as I got older and I thought well Im doing a job and Im getting paid, and I think my confidence grew. And as you say in the end, the people there were from all different backgrounds, all different abilities, university students to people that just didn't have an O Level but everybody just got on and it was a great feeling.

So was there a good camaraderie there with the other women then at work.

Yes. People say about bitchiness and factories, I'd say one thing, well I never noticed it. It was a great time, there was always something going on, there was always people telling jokes, and everybody there would help anybody. If you didn't have much money to go on the bus home, Betty there's a shilling there, somebody else would say oh I have got a shilling. They'd help you out more than any office people would I think.

So where was the factory, did you say this was the one on?

Penarth Road.

So this was the new factory was it because there was an older Freemans factory wasn't there?
Yes.

24:24 *Where exactly on Penarth Road was it?*

Right in the middle. JR Freemans took up quite a lot. Next to some garages that were there. I haven't been to Penarth Road for ages now.

The bottom bit is it? Where the garages are now?

Yes. You know where, I don't know if its still there, you know where the post office used to be, just a little bit down from there.

How many of you worked there do you think, when you worked there?

I don't know, thousands I would have thought, all in all, taking on everybody.

And was it mainly women?

Mainly women, The mechanics were men, the charge men were men. That did change towards the latter. It was very hard to get on an upper scale if you weren't a man in Freemans first of all. Women they had to be on the machines or whatever they were doing, and it was all men that were in charge, in the end that did begin to change, we had charge women. I think there was 1 women mechanic and higher up the bosses one was a woman, but it took a long time for that to happen.

Were the men paid more than you were?

Yes.

And were you aware of that? And did it bother you or did it come to bother you because you were obviously a skilled machinist?

To begin with no it didn't bother me but in the end I just thought why are they getting paid more than me. Once you've been on the machine for a while you could fix it yourself, you knew what they would do. They would just float around all day with a screwdriver in their pocket, and just go sitting down waiting for something to happen, and there were a lot of them you know, they'd be in charge of 4 machines, 5 machines, and all they would do, right machines did go wrong, so they would fix it or they would have to then call a fitter. I think the mechanics weren't qualified mechanics, they were just odd jobbers if you know what I mean they held a screwdriver, they could tighten a few knots, they could loosen a belt but if the machine really went down then they called the fitters in that would have to come in and repair it. But the mechanics in the end I thought why are they getting paid a lot more money than us.

28:14 *Were you aware, were there any time and motion people in the factory or didn't that apply?*

Time and motion yes. Time and motion did apply. We all worked to time and motion. They'd come round and check and everything had to be, should I be saying this, you'd work much slower and to the book when time and motion came around. If there was something wrong with the machine, well if you were quick you could just get in and take it out and carry on working. But when time and motion came down, down would come the handle, you'd get up from your chair, you'd go around the machine, take that piece out, come back, sit down, check everybody alright, yes, put the handle back up and start again. If you want to get your leaf out, you'd stop the machine, open your drawer, take your bundle out, make it flat, smooth it. All things that you were supposed to do but nobody did, not actually when you were on the machine, you just kept the machine going all the time. Yes they used to time and motion the mechanics, never seen them walk around so much. They'd be there everything alright, or that doesn't look right there, but.

Were they the ones the set the targets for you everyday, you know how many cigars you were supposed to make?

Yes I think that the machine is set at a certain pace, so they would know how many cigars that could turnover a day. Whether you could keep up with the machine or not that was immaterial but you had to meet this target. Some never did it you know, some were always up in the office, they couldn't meet the target, they couldn't do this. And there was a lot of dropouts because they just couldn't meet the targets. It was just like "oh no not another telling off".

What would happen to them if they consistently didn't meet their targets?

They were fired. I think 3 warnings, or they would take you off a machine and try and find you a job in another department that wasn't so quick. But most of them then just go "oh gosh I'm up again, I'm gone tomorrow".

31:40 *Was the work dangerous at all? Were the machines dangerous at all for example?*

Yes there were a few fingers lost. You know doing things that you're not supposed to. As you say, you've got to produce so many and you would say right, say a machine was rolling and you could see that was stuck there, if you timed it right, you'd just go in, pull it out and just throw it away. But there were many a girl that lost her fingers.

You remember that when you were there?

I remember, I remember one girl in the machine next to me, on a (unclear) machine. And she was trained to clean something out and blade just came across or the machine got stuck in the jam, and just cut 2 fingers off. Yes it was dangerous work and it wasn't dangerous work you know. If you stuck to the rules then you were fine. But it could be. Or an arm could just come over your fingers, say you put that leaf on, and you left your hand there too quick, an arm could come over and roller it. That was usually just a pinch or a bruise. If it did it would bounce back. But sometimes if your hand was a bit lower, a few bruises and fingers lost.

What would happen, did people have compensation for that if they lost fingers?

I don't know. Because they would go down to the nurse, into the hospital and we'd never seen them again. This one that was sitting, I never seen her again so I don't know.

34:09 *That's really sinister isn't it?*

I never seen her again, whether she went to another department or what no.

Were you unionised in the factory?

When I first went there, there was no union in the factory. After about 2 years there was a union started up and I did join. I did come out of it just before I left to get married, I just looked at them and thought this union it became a management union, in the beginning it was for the workers but as it went on I just got so disillusioned with it that I just dropped out.

Were there any disputes there?

There were a few disputes. Like too much noise. I think we walked out once too much noise. And then the heat, it got so warm in there that, once it reached a certain temperature we could all, we did in the beginning, reach a certain temperature, union say "right all out til it all cools down", all the machines were switched off and then we'd all go back in. But things changed, the coolants came in, and sort of air conditioning, but those are the only disputes that I can.

And the union at the beginning sorted them out did they?

Sorted them out. So they'd go round and just say it's too hot in here can't work in these conditions, calling them out. And after a few years as I say things did start to improve.

36:36 *So you say it became a management union, what do you mean it sided with the management more you think?*

Yes it definitely, to me it just wasn't, you'd say I can't remember such things, but you'd go and say this isn't working, this isn't right and they'd say fine, bring it up at the next management meeting and you'd never hear anything back, everything from then on was done behind closed doors and I don't know, it just wasn't for me in the end.

What union was that, do you remember what it was?

Must be something like, (unclear) of tobacco and I don't know, I can't remember.

Tobacco workers?

Yes union, something like that.

How did you get on with the men in the factory, how did the women and men get on? Was it ok? Was there harassment on either side?

I can't say that I was harassed. But there were some men that just fancied the women and that would just keep going up and you know sometimes they would report it and say "so and so just wont stop asking me out all the time and I don't want nothing to do with it". But then again nothing much was done about it, they would perhaps call somebody in, but a week later somebody else would be harassed. Mind you it was the same with the female side as well that they would say "oh he's lovely there" and they would you know start trying to chat them up that sort of thing, so it worked both sides.

39:00 *Was it more than chatting up? Was there any physical harassment going on, I mean both sides now?*

I didn't see it but I heard about it. On both sides. I didn't see it so I can't really say but it definitely was going on.

What kind of women worked there? Were you all young women or were there older women, married women?

When I was started there I was young 16. There wasn't that many youngsters there at 16. So I think I was nurtured quite a bit. Then so they were all 19, 20 and a lot of older women that I was quite surprised at, you know I was expecting to see a room full of young people but they weren't, they were very young, in their 20s and then the married ones and then the older ones who had been there for years, I think they must have transferred from the old factory to there.

And do you think the older women did they came back maybe after they'd had children?

I think a lot of them did come back after having children. I don't know if Freemans was a very good place for having time off. Again if you were late or you didn't turn up 3 times a month you were sent to the office and a warning and if it continued to 3 months you were out. So if they had children and they were ill I don't think Freemans was a good place.

They weren't very sympathetic?

No they weren't sympathetic with time off at all.

What about you then, did you need time off for your pursuits and how did that work?

I did. I'd go in, I'd be completely honest with them, actually before I took the job I did say to them that I was involved in sport and that I may need a bit of time off now and then. I might throw a sicky every now and then. But I would say to them Im going to Cardiff sports centre today and Harold Wilson is going to be there and I say "I've got to be there, I've got to be introduced to him" and they'd fall over backwards. So I used to lots of things like that thinking an important thing, and I think who's going to be there, and if someone's important I'd just keep throwing that name in and then I was let off.

43:00 *So was this unpaid leave then you'd have?*

Unpaid leave yes they wouldn't.

In a way then you were able to go to sports meetings?

Yes I try to negotiate. But no if I had an hour off then it was an hour unpaid, if it was a day off it was a day without (unclear). I did get into trouble once though. I went on a youth holiday, in Dinefwr, remember Dinefwr gardens, we used to stay there. And the television people came around, and they wanted to interview people of all different backgrounds, and I was selected, and I had to talk about Freemans. I was only about 18 and very young, and any case got back to work now and it was going to be on television, so I said to one of the bosses I said "could I have the morning off please Im on the television at half past 9 or 10 o'clock talking about JR Freemans and my work". They went white. They said what did you tell them "oh I just said things that happen in the factory", they said yet they could have the time off. I didn't know that all the bosses then were sitting in their office watching. Well I told them about the antics we got up to you know. Like they had this big things that are full of filler and how when they're empty jump in them and race round all the factories, and things that we used to get up to that we shouldn't be getting up to. Well I got back in, I was

quite pleased with this performance that I'd said, I did say good things about it as well and all I said "oh yes but its the way it was edited was the trouble". But I did get into trouble for that. But it was good.

What about holidays then, you talked about your unpaid leave, how much holidays did you have a year?
2 weeks.

46:03 *Did the factory used to shut down?*
Not when I was there no.

So you could choose when you could have your holiday?
You could choose yes.

And what did you do with those 2 weeks?

I either went away with a gang of girls from work, we'd go off to Butlins, or Porthcawl I can remember going the caravans down there, or if I needed it I used it for gymnastics and go away with those. But that was it. I think we shut down Christmas, I think it was Christmas day, Boxing day and I think we were back in work the next day. No New Years day off, no New Years eve, it was just those days worked.

47:05 *What about Easter then and the other bank holidays, did you have those off as well?*

Easter, it would be like the bank holidays. No Easter holidays you'd have the bank holiday off, so it'd be the Monday, back in work on the Tuesday. Unless there was overtime and you wanted to go. But 9 times out of 10 we had the bank holidays off.

Did the company used to arrange any kind of trips during the year or the summer? Did you go on company trips?

I can't remember company trips as such. But they did organise social events. We always did one a month a social event, it was always it's a knockout, skittles, a dance, whatever, dart team whatever there was always something going on.

Did you used to join in in those?

Oh yes. It was a good time. It was a very sociable life. You know it was really was nice, there was always something going on.

Good gang of people then?

Yes male and female. The ones that joined in were absolutely spot on. Everybody went out for a good time and was great. Lots of these things were subsidised by Freemans as well, so skittles, you'd go up there, and all you had to pay for, was perhaps if you wanted a drink. But the food, the actual hire of the place would all be put on.

49:13 *What about Christmas time, was there a Christmas party or a dinner and dance anything like that?*

Always a dinner and dance, that was usually coincided with Miss Manikin the beauty contest, which always caused trouble every year. You had your ones for it and your ones against it. And that's the only time there was any nastiness got around. It was a good night on the whole. But again everything paid for, you'd go out to the Top Rank or a hotel and it would be very very nice.

And Freemans would pay for that would they?
Freemans would pay for that.

49:59 *So why were people for and why were people against Miss Manikin?*

I think some thought "what she got that I haven't got" but wouldn't put themselves forward, there's always a bit of jealousy. But a lot of people there believe it or not, just, they didn't like to see women in bikinis and bathers, they just didn't like you know some of the older generation. But I think it was stopped after a few years because it just wasn't the thing to do, the women on the floor didn't think it should be done so it was stopped.

How did you feel about Miss Manikin then? Did you think it was ok or did you think it was a waste of time or frivolous?

I thought it was a waste of time. But I just laughed at them and just going down, if one of my friends had entered I'd cheer them on but no I didn't really agree with it no.

Who started it, was it the management that started it and why do you think they?

I don't know. It started one year, I can't remember when, but I think it only lasted about 3, 4 years, and then it stopped. It must have come from management, it must have done because it wouldn't have come from the actual floor.

And who went in for it? Was it the girls from the floor, was it the office workers you know, did everybody go for it?

All of them. Anybody who wanted it, entered. You know some you didn't even know because they were from all departments and some from the offices, you wouldn't know three quarters of them. I don't know how they got selected, you just entered it was that sort of thing.

52:48 *Can I just ask, did you have to wear a uniform or overall for work?*

Yes a green overall. Like a pinny sort of, put it on, it had short sleeves and a tie around.

And was that provided by the company?

Yes that was provided by the company.

You told me about the injuries, were you ever made aware of health and safety issues there? You know how hot were they on health and safety do you think?

I don't think they were very hot on it all. Not in the beginning. I would go perhaps into the filler room and you've never heard as much noise in that room, you couldn't hear each other speak. And it wasn't til after the unions when it first started back up, got involved because they'd be losing their hearing that they'd have to wear these muffs. But in the beginning, it was really really bad and they were always going in there and measuring the decibels and there wasn't many women that worked in there, I think 4 and about 4 men at any one time but the noise was deafening. It was just these huge, about as big as this house, machine just making filler, grinding everything up.

Do you think it affected your hearing at all?

Yes I have been for I've got a hearing aid upstairs, can't hear the television very well, and it has affected my hearing a lot. I think they did start to wear ear muffs as I was finishing but no they did go in to the (unclear) room they did end up having ear muffs on there but for the making room it was years before they started to wear them, they just said it wasn't loud enough. But I would have thought that many people would have lost hearing for working in that sort of, you know some description of pitch.

You said they played music as well on top of that?

On top of that. That had to be blasted out to cover the music, plus the girls then would be singing to drum out the noise of it so it was just a mad house really of just noise.

56:28 *So did everybody sing?*

Most people sang, yes. One person didn't, but most people just sang along.

Was it records or the radio, do you remember?

Do you know I think it was the radio. Yes I can remember all the different songs would come on.

Do you remember what the songs were?

Gosh. Sonny and Cher, You wear my ring. That sort of era, and everybody would just sing along to it.

Do you think it helped with the work, that singing?

Yes. It was monotonous work, and anything to break that monotony you did, good or bad you did it. But no it was fine.

Were you allowed to talk while you worked or was it impossible to talk because of the noise?

You shouted. You couldn't talk like this. Say you wanted to talk to your partner there, they did away with those in the end, you'd literally have to scream, "how many you done?", and you'd literally scream at each other to hear, but then they did away with the buncher and then it became a mechanical one, so in the end you're just on a machine on your own.

So even more noise then?

Even more noise.

58:39 *Were people allowed to smoke in the factory?*

Not on the factory floor no, but in the canteens. No they couldn't do in the snack bars. No they couldn't in the canteen they had smoke rooms. And you had to go in and it was a little box built in where people went in to smoke. I never smoked, I only went in there once with a friend, oh fumes, absolutely terrible. And they had one or 2 of these in each department, and that's where everybody used to smoke. So when you think about it, even though it was a cigar factory, you could smoke but they didn't give you the opportunity to smoke much apart from these rooms.

That's quite forward thinking?

Yes it was, you know. If you think that's what they're doing now. In these pubs they're building shelters where you can go in and smoke and that's what they did. But then they did away with those, and I'm positive it was a no smoking factory. I think more or less, it wasn't for health reasons, I think it was for safety reasons, you know If anything happened, then the factory would go up

The whole supply of tobacco...

Would go yes, fumes for everybody then. No it wasn't for health reasons it was for health and safety really of the factory.

Rather than the workers?

Yes.

Do you think they were good employers on the whole, or were they bad employers, what's your feeling about them now?

I could say they were good employers and most people that were there would say that as well. Because the ones that, most people stayed there for years, there were a few that came and went, but the majority of the people stayed for years so I would say they were good employers.

1:01:30 *Was there a kind of family feeling there do you think?*

Yes there was you know. It was.

Did you feel sort of looked after in a way?

Yes you were. You know if you had a headache you could go down to the nurse and say headache. There was beds where if you were really ill you could lay on there until you felt a bit better and you were sent home if your temperature was high enough or if you were really ill. And they would then say how are you getting home, and they would take you home if you were ill. But yes we were looked after.

How did you get to work by the way? Where were you living then?

I was living in Penarth. I caught the bus in every morning which I paid for. But there was a lot of people that were bused in from the valleys, that all came in. But no because we weren't living that far away we just came in by the bus. But there were loads that had special buses.

Did the company pay for those buses do you think? For the valley buses? Were they company buses?

I think they were. Im not sure whether there was so much was taken out of their wages a week but it was very minimal, you know. Yes I think it was as a minimum like 50 pence a week, 10 shillings a week. That seems a lot. No but I think it could have been that but they were earning good money, and they could never get back and fore to Cardiff for that.

1:03:39 *Were the facilities good on the whole then do you think then?*

Yes. Canteen was very nice, even better for the men, the charge hands.

Did you have different canteens?

Different canteens. The floor workers were in the big canteen. And the charge hands, the foreman had another ,and the office workers had another room and management had another room which was silver service. Yes it was all that. Then it was the charge hands, your foremen, your training instructors went into another room which wasn't silver service but you were served. And in the normal workforce had to queue up in the canteen.

So was the food the same do you think?

Food was different, definitely different.

That's appalling isn't it?

Yes. The food in the canteen don't get me wrong was fine, it was edible, it was quite good. But then you'd be standing in the queue watching them go from the kitchen with a dome of beef and all the trimmings, and you'd just think oh god, and that would be with the charge hands and foremen and things like that as well. They all had better food than us, whether they paid more for it or whether they didn't pay for it at all I don't know. But when I moved when I got married and moved down to Port Talbot Freemans, I did 2 years there, that was a different kettle of fish.

1:05:59 *So there was a Freemans in Port Talbot as well?*

Freemans in Port Talbot as well.

Right I didn't realise that

Didn't you?

No

No there was a Freemans in Port Talbot. There was the old factory then they built this brand new factory and a lot of fitters, the charge hands, the foremen all moved down to Port Talbot to get things going properly. And I never fitted in in Port Talbot. Because when I got there I knew all the bosses, all because I was with them when they were just floating around, putting a bit of filler in or sweeping the floors. Of course they go "oh look hello Tryphena", and I'd go "oh hello Mike how are you?". And I don't think they liked it either, because I knew where they came from. they were quote snooty in Port Talbot and it was, no, they didn't like it that I knew where they started from. And we've all got to start somewhere haven't we.

So did you take on a different role later? Did you train or were you a supervisor?

Never wanted to be. I was asked many a time. But then again it became more responsibility and because I was involved in sport I wanted to take my days off when I wanted to take the days off if I could. And if I had that responsibility I couldn't, If I was in charge of a group of women, I cant just say Im going off to London today so I just didn't bother.

So how long were you in Freemans in Cardiff?

In Cardiff. 16, I got married at 28, thats 12 years. And then I moved down to Port Talbot and I did another 3 years there.

That's a long time. Did you keep in touch with your friends from Cardiff?

Yes. Not all of them. But my close friends yes.

1:09:05 *And are you still in touch with them?*

Yes, we don't see each other very often but facebook , email, phone we you know always keep in touch. Because they were a good group of girls.

Did you make friends when you came to Port Talbot as well?

I made acquaintances, I didn't make friends in Port Talbot, I made acquaintances.

After you left the factory, did you ever go back and work in a factory again?

No never.

So looking back then, how do you feel about the time you spent working in the factory?

I enjoyed it. Sometimes it was hard work, sometimes it was very easy. But most of the time it was quite enjoyable, and as you said they looked after you really.

1:10:26 *Did you find the work boring though?*

Oh ever so boring yes. I used to sit there and if I had an exam coming up I'd be sitting there reading a book, you know. So I passed a lot of time like that, as long as time and motion weren't around to see me reading. But you could....

An exam for your alternate career, your gymnastic career was it?

Yes. I was doing a lot of different exams, so I was able to do a lot of that in work because if you did your job well nobody bothered you at all and I was pretty good at the job and I would just get on with it and cause nobody any trouble and that was it. It was a nice time, I say the first 3 years I was embarrassed about working in Freemans, by the 5th year I was fine about it. And I went on to do youth work and other things after that, but I think that time I learnt a lot about people, you know, I learnt how to mix, how to adapt to different people, it was a good learning curve. But I found it a good learning curve in any case.

72:30

END OF INTERVIEW/ DIWEDD CYFWELIAD