

LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI / VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR

Interviewee: VSW041 Patricia Ann Ridd,

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I was born in Milford. I moved to Swansea when I was 6 weeks old. My mother worked in Mettoys. My father was a coach driver, and then a lorry driver. I got two, three brothers, four sisters and I'm the eldest. I went to Terrace Road Infants, Cadle Juniors, and then I went to Swansea Technical School for Girls in Cockett.

How old were you when you left school?
Fifteen.

Why did you leave school?

I left because my brother was killed on Carmarthen Road, and I left to help my mother. And then I started in Addis then at fifteen. Brushes, it was a brush factory and you had to inspect the brushes. Like little hand brushes, you know what I mean, coming off the line. The machine made the brushes, you had to inspect that they was all right.

And what did you do with the ones that weren't?

I think they went in a box. The rejects. So I stayed there for two years. Then I went to work with my friends in Windsmoor's. It was a sewing factory. We used to do army clothes. Stitching them together using the sewing machine. You had people doing the cutting and people machining. The cutting room and then the machining. All different things. Not only army clothes but mainly army clothes. So I stayed there for two years, and I left then to have my son. I wasn't married, then my mother looked after my son and I went back to Addis for six months that's when we done the mascara brushes, inspecting them and I stayed there. Then I left and went to Smiths Crisps.

What did you like about Addis?

Everyone was friendly in those days, it's different to now. No one wants to know you now you know.

Was it people you went to school with?

No, it was people I knew, because I lived by the factory see. At the time I lived about two minutes away from the factory. Up in Garden City. I was brought up down there. Then I went to Smiths Crisps. You used to sit on the chair, and you had like a funnel. The crisps would come down from upstairs down the funnel, and you'd put the salt in. The little blue bags of salt and each packet of crisps had a bag of salt in. I left there then after six months.

Why did you go from Addis to Crisps?

Dunno, well you could go to anywhere then. You could get a job, you could walk into a job. You can't now, but at the time you could walk into any job. We used to wear overalls Wellingtons turbans. So I stayed there for six months. Then I went to Mettoys for half a day. I didn't like it at all.

Why did you leave Smiths Crisps?

I was bored, I think. Then I went to Corona. I stayed there for 26 years.

In Mettoys, you were saying it was the people that were watching you that you didn't like?

Yeah, too many people and too much going on. Really noisy. Then I went to Corona. I started on the line. Watching pop bottles going back and for.

They were filled by machine?

Yes. They were washed first. When they'd been washed, you'd watch them to make sure they're clean. Cause some of them had thick dirt on them that didn't come off in the washer.

Because in those days the bottles went back and got used again?

Yeah, they'd wash them first, and then they'd fill them. You'd start off here and you'd go round the line, see. And you'd end up putting the labelling. The machine did, you're making sure everything is straight. I started there. Then I went up the cellar room where they make the pop. You had big vats. I can't remember much about it but you had big huge vats. When you're making cider, the cider would come from down Devon, and the big lorry'd be outside pumping it upstairs.

What was your job?

Just checking. Making sure. Pumping the sugar in. Then I went on to the fork lift. When I first started there was a lady on the forklift. I think she went to the cellar room after. Barbara. And I went on the fork lift. Used to load the lorries, and what you do then, as the pop is coming out, you'd stack it on the pallet. You had to move the pallets away. The people had to stack them on the pallets. Then once the pallet was full they'd call you, and you'd move it out of the way with the fork lift. And they'd put another pallet down, then they'd call you to get more pallets. So that's how it worked, you had two sides see. To call you they'd just shout. It was like a warehouse. There were two sides, one doing like big bottles I think it was 40 ounce, and the other was

26 ounce. So you had two different stackers. So you had to see to those, and load the lorries. And you'd have another fork lift then loading the shop lorries, you know. Then I did that then for in about 26 years, I'd say I'd done it for about 15 years. Maybe longer.

And you really enjoyed this forklift?

Yes. Then I went as stock controller. They wanted a stock controller.

Why did you like the forklift?

Well, it was different things you know, and the fresh air. You were outside, see, I didn't like to be indoors all the time.

You didn't like being closed in?

No. And then I went on stock control. I used to check the lorries in and out. And then it shut down.

And you said before you liked it on the forklift because nobody was watching you all the time.

No, no. You knew your job. Yes, and it was like that in Walkers too, you know what you got to do, and you just get it done.

You didn't have people over your shoulder all the time checking you?

Yeah. Then they shut down, then they moved their business to Cardiff. No, Bristol, they moved the business to Bristol. And I went from there then. Cause my old manager in Corona was the manager in Walkers. So he got me the job in Walkers. So I went to work there. I passed another forklift test to drive the forklift in Walkers. I was loading the lorries there with crisps in the night. The same type of thing. Move them away from the people pack, stacking them and put them on the lorries, see. The lorries they come back and for all night, see. And like one would come in, then you'd have somebody come in say from Bristol on the lorry, and you'd have to load it ready. Night shift I worked. I liked night shift. Maybe because it was so quiet, and I was back and for and in and out, you see. And the office in Walkers was right by the outside. You're not in amongst people in the factory, cause it was crazy inside. Not so much that it's noise and people, it was so fast you know, a bit manic. So when I left there, then that was the end of my factory life.

Do you feel you were more keen on learning the forklift because Barbara was already doing it?

In one way, but in another way they say "do you wanna do it? Do you wanna learn it?" They wouldn't take on a forklift driver. You were in the company in the factory. They didn't advertise for a forklift driver. They ask if you want to do it. Barbara drove it first, but they let me do it. She was the first woman forklift driver there, like. She set the pace for men or women.

Do you feel there was anything about men did certain jobs and women did certain jobs or was there a mixture?

There was a mixture. See if they were short for stacking, you was doing a man's job. Crates were heavy. But you'd get so used to it you could do it. But that's the way it

was in Corona. I say Corona cause I was there so long. Whatever they were short of, and then in the night time they'd have you cleaning. And then you could do overtime like washing the floor, mopping the floor. And it was huge, know what I mean. It was just such a lovely place to work. Everybody was friendly. And I seen my ex, he was line manager and this week, we shut down in '92, his wife's in hospital in a nursing home and she's very ill, he lives down the Sandfields, he goes down the beach for a walk, and when he's walking up he calls in to see my friend. He called in Sunday, so that's going back fifteen years. It finished in '92, and I still see the boys was working there. You know what I mean. One of them's home from Australia as it happens, but I haven't seen him this time, he's only home for a week. It's like old friends, innit? They're very friendly. They asked me to do a reunion, but nobody seems to be doing it, and I don't want to do it.

I went to Butlins. I started in Corona I think it was 1966, it was the year of the Aberfan disaster, I hadn't been there long. And the gentleman I was on about, he had relations in Aberfan, so I think that was in the October, and I started then in June, something like that. We all went on a bus trip to Butlins in Barry when it opened. We all had a tour of the place, you know, they used to organise things like that then. We used to have dos like for people working there. Somewhere else. I was on a do, I think it was with them, when President .. I'm going back now to when I was having my son, so it may not have been with them, it may have been in Windsmoors, I was on a do with Windsmoors when that come over, do you know what I mean. In 1981 my son was born, so it was 1980. No. He died in 1981. That's where I'm getting confused. That's right, he was born in 1964, so that was in 1963. I would say it was in October 1963, I had him in April 1964. He was killed on a motorbike in 1981 and that's why I've got it confused. He would have been fifteen on the twelfth. That's how far back Kennedy died.

My brother was killed on Carmarthen Road, he was only seven. He was walking up by The Star in Fforestfach further up than the garage and he had a patch on his eye, and he was crossing the road and the patch caught his eye, and he was knocked down by a Douglas lorry. I was only fifteen when he died, in the March I think he died. He would have been eight in the May. I was fifteen in the July.

When you had your own son was it more convenient to work nights? Then your mother could look after him?

My mother more or less brought him up. He come to live with me not long before he died. Cause he started working with me. He didn't know I was his mother see he thought my mother was his mother. I've got a sister, see, there's only six months between him and my sister, so when he came to work with me I had to tell him. He went a bit potty. He come to live with me when he was about fifteen. Cause I'd moved to Blaenymaes then in a flat, and then I moved over here in 1980, and he died 1981. So he didn't know for long, but he did know. Before that, he thought I was his sister. But he never clicked, see. It's only six months between him and my sister. He's fifty now in April and my sister's fifty in October. But they don't work it out, boys. Girls sit and think it out. My mother worked as well, but when the kids were at school, in Mettoys, though she had one the same age.

We used to have weekly pay in a pay packet. A little brown paypacket. Not like it is today in the bank. A pay slip in a brown packet.

Cash in it and a payslip as well?

Yeah.

Do you remember how much you were paid?

Can't remember.

Do you remember any pay rises?

Must have had them but don't remember them. I think we all had the same pay. In Walkers, if you had a forklift, you had different wages to on the lines.

And different on stock control?

Yeah.

What did you spend your money on when you were fifteen?

Going out more than likely. Used to go with my friends to town. Didn't go drinking in those days at fifteen. Used to go up the park

Did you go dancing?

When I was older. Not when I was fifteen. Used to go to the Townsman when I was older.

Did you go out drinking when you were older?

Went out drinking when I was 18. Only to town.

Cinemas?

Not much, I don't watch films now.

Did you have to share your wages with your family?

Yeah. I had to give my mother money. My mother was bringing up my son as well. I was still living with my mother. I lived with my mother till I moved to Blaenymaes. And that was when I met my husband, I think. I must have been about 30 odd.

Did you get any perks in the factory?

We used to swap pies for pop. In Walkers you could buy boxes of crisps cheaper. Don't know if you could buy pop, don't think you could. We used to swap pop for pies. In Walkers you could buy anything that they made. In Addis you could buy seconds. Brushes, anything that they made, like.

Trade unions.

I was in unions can't remember which. I think it was only a union in Walkers. And I was in a union in the university. Everyone had to join in the university, and in Walkers I think there was a lot in the union. You had to because of the way they were. If there was no work, you had to have the night off, you didn't have any option like. So you was losing the money. If they didn't have any orders, you had to go in and had the night off, or you had to clean. You had to do it whatever job needed doing. All

night cleaning the machines. Not nice work. You didn't have an option. If they wanted you in, you had to go in.

Were there any industrial disputes or strikes?

Not where I was working.

Was everyone treated fairly?

They were all treated the same.

And did people on the line get on with the managers?

They were all friendly.

How did you feel about the managers yourself?

They were all right. It was good, you know. Anything wrong, they'd sort it out for you.

You had a uniform in Smiths?

Yeah.

Then Walkers?

The first time you went there, you had Wellingtons, overall down there and a turban, the second time I went there, it was a white hat, it was looser, know what I mean, and overalls. No uniform in Addis. In Corona you had an overall, a buttoned up one.

And they supplied them?

Yeah. They didn't supply safety shoes. They did in one of them, mind. I think it was Walkers. You had to have safety shoes, cause it was all wet, see.

Were there any accidents ever?

I cut myself, I've got a scar somewhere, in Walkers. And I had acid over me once, was in hospital. In Corona. Cleaning stuff. Cleaning acid what it was, it's like you're on fire. So when I went in there, they found out I was allergic to tetanus, that's how they found out because of that. You thinks you're burning. We used to clean the end of the machines.

It splashed in your face, did it?

I can't remember. Must have been in my face. I never got scarred. I remember my head seemed to be burning, know what I mean. Cause I was in hospital then. About two days.

And what did they say about that in work? Was it just seen as something that happened?

Yeah.

They didn't try and stop it happening again?

No.

You didn't get any compensation or anything like that?

No, no.

Did you ever have any talks on health and safety?

In university you do all that. But not in the factories.

No, not so much. You do have health and safety meetings. You had those in Walkers more than anywhere. It come in after in Corona.

Those would be with people on the line and health and safety reps would it?

Yeah, you got to be careful with all the machinery and that, see.

You'd have a meeting in the canteen or something like that. Different shifts, cause there was three shifts.

And you'd have had health and safety in your forklift training?

Yeah. I've got the certificates, I'll look for them after. And I'll photocopy them for you and photographs as well.

How about temperatures and heating and lighting where you were working?

Cold in Walkers. A lot of trouble with it in Walkers.

In Packaging?

Yeah. But where I worked in Corona, we had a fall of snow and all the bottles froze. I can see them now. I may have a photo of them as well. Back in the '80s. All the pop froze in the bottles. You know now you've got dates, there was nothing like that then. We used to bottle for Tesco, just put Tesco labels on them. So when people says things to me, you know, like Heinz Beans, I says they may be Heinz but they haven't got Heinz label. And you know Walkers do onion rings for Marks, and you'd do the same ones for Tesco. Just the label isn't it? Same thing inside. People don't believe you. Tesco lemonade is Corona. I say buy anything, cause most of them are the same.

What about changing rooms and toilets and canteens that sort of thing?

In Walkers, that's the last factory I worked in, so that why I remember so much about it, you went into the cloakroom to change. And then upstairs the canteen was. You'd have your breakfast. When you worked nights, you'd have your breakfast about 12 o'clock in the night like. It was all back to back.

So Walkers had a canteen open 24 hours a day, did they?

Yeah, yeah. There were three shifts, see I worked 10 till 6. 10 till 6, 6 till 2, and 2 till 10. Nice food you know. You had breakfast, then you had dinner. It was just the wrong way round. You had to pay. It was a canteen type of thing.

Not like going to a cafe?

No, it was cheaper.

Did Corona have a canteen?

I can remember vaguely. With Corona you had a little changing room. The Welsh people would be talking in the room, and we used to change there, it was smaller than Walkers, not so big a place I think.

And food in Corona?

We must have had a canteen, but I can't really remember where the canteen was. We always had a canteen in the factories where I worked. We'd have our dinner hour, sit in the canteen. In Corona I'd sit in the canteen, or bring in a slice and sit outside, see.

So do you think the facilities were basically the same for the men?
Separate changing rooms.

Did they play music where you were working?
In Walkers they did, specially in the night. They had the music on. It was hits, something like Swansea Sound. Standard music, not records.

It was very noisy in some of the factories?
It was noisy in Walkers. The machinery. In Corona the machinery was down there, it come onto the belt and you sat down by there, then you had a warehouse and another big warehouse, where the shop was kept, shop stuff.

The machines were away from the inspection lines so it wasn't so bad?
It wasn't so bad as Walkers.

In Walkers you were right by the assembly lines?
Yeah.

How did you manage to talk to your mates if it was so noisy?
I worked nights see, and I was loading the lorries. There was only about three of us there. They was all in there, so we talked to them in the canteen. In the breaks. If you worked in the factory you could talk.

What about smoking?
You smoked in the canteen. That's where you could smoke. You couldn't smoke in the factory.

Do you think you've had any health effect with your job at all?
Not really, people say you go deaf with the noise, but not really. I think it could be because I was working in and out, you see. I wasn't permanently in the factory like. Like when it was stock control, you could walk out. Only time I was really in there, was when I started.

Were there any problems like sometimes with men and women working together?
No, just mixed in, I was more with the men, cause I was out with the lorries, see.
You never had any hassle from the men?

No. Cause all the drivers, like you had ten, twelve. Shop lorries you know, so they was all men drivers, like, you didn't have any women driving the lorries, no.

No incidents of men hassling women? Or women hassling men?
No. We were like one big family there in Corona.

You weren't married when you worked in the factories?

I was married when I worked in Walkers. I got married when I was working in Corona.

How did your husband feel about your job?

He worked nights in the bakery, see. It was better when I went to Walkers, well, it wasn't better, he used to go at four o'clock in the morning, I'd be coming home at six o'clock. So I didn't see him much. I got married in 1984 so I was in Corona for 8 years. I was married and then I was in Walkers. It was only those two factories I was in [when she was married], as I said, I never seen him when I moved to Walkers. Seen him on the weekend. [laughs] But he worked Sunday morning.

Was there any way it affected your relationship apart from not seeing each other?

No. You got used to it, know what I mean.

What about holidays, how many weeks holidays did you get a year?

Two I think it used to be in the beginning, we didn't have much holidays, then it went to about four in Walkers.

Did everybody have the same time off?

No, you had to run the factories, didn't you. They didn't shut it. They never shut the factory. But taking different times.

Did you get paid when you were on holiday?

Yeah I think you would, because you were full time, you worked full time.

So where did you go on your holidays?

Didn't go far. When I got married I went on holidays more than when I was single, I never went on holidays when I was single, went to Porthcawl or somewhere like that, but never abroad. I went abroad when I was married.

When you were single did you go on holiday with mates from work?

We went to Porthcawl, I think we went down to Llanmadoc, for a week say. With friends. Nowhere abroad, you didn't have the money then, did you. Rent a caravan a couple of us and go down there. Yeah, tidy. You don't mind a caravan. First when I got married we used to go in a caravan, we started going abroad then.

Did you ever have to have a day off for other reasons? Like personal reasons?

Yeah they did give you the time off as long as you gave them notice.

Did they pay you if you had to take an extra day off?

No, they cut you a day, or a day out of your holidays.

You couldn't make it up by working extra hours?

No.

Did you walk to work or get a bus?

Walked. I was close to the factory.

What time did you leto ave home go to work?

At Corona it was about half past seven in the morning. Had to leave about seven. It's only about ten minutes. I worked in Corona when I lived in the Garden City and when I lived here as well. When I lived in Garden City it's five minutes. Walkers is only a quarter hour's walk. It's coming home in the mornings, it's close.

Did you have any sports clubs, social dances?

No.

What did you enjoy about working in factories?

Everybody was friendly I think. You just got on with your work. The work you had to do. You didn't have people watching you all the time, you knew what you had to do.

Why did you decide to leave?

They closed down.

Any closing down parties?

No. We all knew we was going. I have asked about doing a reunion but nobody wants to.

You keep in touch with people?

Yeah, see them around.

When you're looking back how do you feel about your time there?

Corona I'd say was the best place to work, they was like family, and you see them now and they make a big fuss of you. Very friendly. From the drivers down to the people on the floor. I was there the longest I think. 26 years.

How do you think people not working in factories felt about factory girls?

I don't suppose they liked us. My friends worked in the factories. One of my friends has moved to Norway, she worked in Windsmoor's. Some people could be funny, couldn't they.

Did other women working in the factories have their mothers look after their children?

They must have. We had a lot of older people working there as well in Corona. All the Welsh people was. Like there was one line of youngsters, and the others that made the bigger bottles of pop, they was the older women. And they seemed to be all Welsh. Youngsters on one line and the older women on the other.

So they'd had their children already?

I was say 20 when I went there, they were about 40 say or 50.

So there weren't really any women there between 25 and 40?

No. On this line were the youngsters and on that line was the older women. Barbara on the forklift she must be about 10 years older than me, so she was working there but that line seemed to be older people. Maybe they wasn't, they seemed old to me at that time.

Did they ever suggest you might want to go to night school or anything like that?
No.

No idea of taking you up the next level?

No. I came out of school at fifteen. I went on to be a stock controller. That was before computers. It was the first time I used computers. Before that you had to write it all down. Then just before they shut down I think the computers come in.

So when you left school you didn't have any qualification?

No. But I still got a good head. Countingwise and things like that.

For stock control did they give you a test before you got the job?

No. What it was, the line manager used to do it, and I used to watch him and come and help him. In the end I was doing it myself. Instead of him. Do you know what I mean?

You learnt on the job?

In Corona we learnt everything by watching, like you get on the forklift and you get on that and you've got to do it. And then you take your test. Didn't take your test and then get on it. You'd get on it and then you'd take your test. They wouldn't do it now, would they? Tests for everything now.

So you're glad you did work in factories?

Yes. I enjoyed it in the factory, you meets people. Same in the University, all the students. Different people all the time. Not like in a shop stuck in the same place. In Corona you had to go round, see. Watch the empty bot

ties, watch the next stage, and all the way round the line, like. But you could talk.

You're the sort of person likes to keep on the move, chat to people?

Yeah. I must have enjoyed factory work, I worked in factories from 1961 until '98. I worked all my life, I've never been on the dole. Well, you didn't then. Like I said, you could walk out of one job and walk into another.