

Intro to Arcade

Well, you see, this is how it is. I finished up the ninth grade and, well, school already started up again and I didn't figure I'd be going' back. 'cause my dad says to me, "You either go back to school or you get a job." I guess I wanted to work 'cause I walked the two and a half miles down to the plant hoping to get hired. After sitting outside for quite some time, this guy come out and said, "You want a job?" And I said, "Yeah." So I went in to work. I think I reminded him of his daughter. There was about seven other women out there looking to get a job too. One woman started crying'. She says, "I've got two kids, and you're so young. How come they're picking you and not me?" I said, "I have no idea. Young people need work too." This other girl I know who works here, her mother knows the hiring guy so she didn't have any kind of problem getting in. I suppose that's the way it works. If you know somebody and they pull the strings a little bit for you you can get in. They didn't have me fill out no forms or nothing; I just went straight to work on the bacon. They did show me the plant though. Somebody walked me through the floor, and there were so many doors. There was nothing but doors. I thought, gee, where am I? It's so entirely different than any experience I've had. And there's just a horrible odor all over the plant. I had to start out making cartons to put the bacon into, and then I moved to packing the bacon. I'm only ninety-five, ninety-six pounds, and I have to pack these five pound boxes of tidbits. You have to stack them up, up over your head, and you have to put a heavy iron plate on top of them. You glue the top shut, and this iron plate has to go on top to hold them all down. Well, I can't lift those plates above my shoulders, so a couple of the men in the bacon room come over and lift them for me so I don't lose my job. I'll make over six dollars a week too. That's more than my cousin Mary makes working at the restaurant. I think she only makes two or three dollars. 'Course we have to come in

a half hour early, all of us, and sew up our overalls and things. When the half hour is up and we have a bunch of them sewed, then we go and punch in on the clock. They told us we either do that or don't work there 'cause they can find somebody else to do our job. Hope I don't lose my job.

Intro to Docks B

Just about every week it seems they switch us from one job to another. You just have to go wherever they tell you. Good thing is, Roosevelt said they have to pay us so much an hour – but they still don't do it. Gee whiz, sometimes we get paid on a Friday; sometimes we get paid on Wednesday. Sometimes they'll say, "Now, we're going to go to Thursday to pay you." And if you want to work a different job than the one you have, you have to ask the boss if you could have that job. If he wants you to have it, you get it. If he doesn't, you don't. But, see, there are different jobs for men and women. The kill, for instance, has both men and women working over there and the work is altogether different. When I went over there to work, I didn't realize how much harder those women have to work than on our side. Our side was sausage, dry sausage, bacon, smoked meat. Casing is over there too. I ran casings. Now I just cut ears off – and that's supposed to be a man's job. And they have a different way of sharpening your knife. I could sharpen a knife sharp enough for my side of the packinghouse, but it's sharpened with a different edge over here, and I can never keep my knife sharp enough.

Intro to Wall B/Ground

See, you have to work sixty days before you can get any sort of rights. Rights to bid on better jobs, better pay, that sort of thing. But what the company will do to you is let you work, say, fifty-eight days, and then they lay you off. Well, you have to be laid off a certain number of days, two weeks I think it is, and then you lose all the rights you built up. Then they call you back and you have to start right back at the beginning. One woman I know, Velma, she's been working over three years and still doesn't have any rights. So a lot of us have been meeting at this couple's house down there by the packinghouse once a week or so just to see if maybe we can do something about it. We don't talk too much about it. Never in the plant, because you never know who's going to report you. And of course you never talk in front of the foremen. A lot of us meet at the restaurant and play cards after work or when the plant slows down; we talk about it there too. Some people are scared to get together. It's not that they don't believe in what we're doing, they're just scared of losing their jobs. Scared of what the company will do to them. It's mostly the older ones who are afraid. I guess the younger workers have a chance at getting another job.

Intro to Loggia and Fire Escape

A lot of us are getting tired of working for nothing and trying to raise a family. No seniority you might say. No maternity benefits either. If they have the goods on you, you don't have anybody to protect you or anything. So we decided the only way was to unionize. Individual people can't go and talk to the company. That's when we pinned our steward badges on and went in and started organizing. We instructed all our people that was organizing not to say a word on the job. We'd

catch them during dinner hour, lunch period, or if it happened to be in the restroom at what they call gang-out period. One guy, they claimed was talking on the job. They fired him. So we sent word down that at three o'clock everybody's supposed to leave the job and go on out, up on the hill. And I looked out the window and I could see them already walking out. Oh, I was leery about going, but I did. After a few days the company even got a bus and went around to all these small towns to pick up workers to come operate the plant. And the people on the bus, when they were coming in, would lay down and cover their faces so you couldn't see who they were. A couple of times the union members would barricade the street with their cars so the bus couldn't get through. It got to be somewhat violent and then of course the police were called. I can't say it did much good in the way of benefits, but I think we really got our message heard.

Intro to Alcove/Cave

Well, the company promised the men their jobs when they came back, and pretty much they all got them back too. Some of the women wanted to keep the jobs. There's some men's jobs that are pretty hard for a woman to do, but there's a lot of men's jobs that shouldn't be men's jobs. Cutting those ears off – that was a man's job, really a man's job. But pulling the bacon around on those hooks to cut off the fatty end – that's all you have to do – that's a man's job, which should really be a woman's job. I tell you what though, there's one foreman who thinks his job is just to be over women. If he gets his eye on you and wants to go out with you, you either go out with him or you get the dirty jobs around here, like slicing liver. Taking that cord off the liver. And no matter how long you've worked here, if you don't want to go out with him, those are the jobs you get the next day. It just depends on how he likes you if you get a good job or a bad job. I know one girl went out with him. Jeepers, creepers she really had it made!

Intro to Wall and Ground

Now the company wants to do time studies on the line. They brought in these efficiency men – proudfeet, as we call 'em. And they just stand there timing. They time you when you're coming and going, time you when you go to the bathroom.

They stand outside the bathroom with a stopwatch and if you take over six minutes they dock you six minutes of pay. And if somebody don't stay on the job or whatnot, they say, "Well, you can eliminate that person." So when they came everybody tried to stay on their job because if they didn't they would just eliminate them. When I was on the line on the cutting floor there was five people on there and we all stuck together, we never left our stall. We were there on time, we did the job the way it was supposed to be done and all of us stayed on that job. We was suspended two times, but we still hung in there together and we did win that time study. We all managed to keep our health and not get hurt that whole time. I mean, that's the key – we just stuck together. It was a long fight, but in the end we won. Guess maybe that's why I became a union steward.

Intro to Wall C

It's tough learning to do your job right. See, I'm left-handed, and most of the jobs, knife jobs, you can't do left-handed. They don't like left-handed people and most of your steamers and water things are on the opposite side than you are. My foreman wants to get rid of me, because he said, "Well, I'm gonna put you over here opening these lungs, and if you can't do that job, out the door you are going to go." Those lungs, you know, they have all these little holes that you have to cut open. Well, there happens to be this little, short, heavy-set fellow that most people like. He knows what's going on, and that's the first person I've really gotten to know. He told me that he'd help me keep my knives sharpened and that this supervisor was this way and that foreman was that way and so on. He told me all of the bosses who don't play fair. We have this one supervisor that always says, "I can train anybody

off the street." But when you ask him about training somebody on some of the jobs, you get a completely different answer. He'll say, "Oh, no, I couldn't put so-and-so on that job, because they don't know how to do it." If it wasn't for the skilled help showing me everything I probably would never make it. After they started timing us though, when the new people came in, no one had time to help 'em and they just put 'em on the line with no training at all and a lot of 'em were expected to keep up. And they just couldn't do it and that's why they get injured. Every time the union gets us a pay raise, the company just turns up the chain speeds a little more and cuts more workers out. They never allow the time to break anybody in. When it does slow down though, you can work an hour on the job and they'll come down and tell us, "Well, I think we'll keep you. Now, you girls get the pail and wash the windows, the walls." So we were chore women too! But the dexterity of women, I think, is a prime factor of why they put the women in a lot of these areas that we consider a woman's job. Especially because of the dexterity of your fingers. And boy, I really worked hard. I was taught that you don't ever quit a job. You always have to work. And sometimes I come home at night and cry to my Ma, "Mother, I can't do this job." And she always says, "You can do anything for \$2.42 an hour."

At the start of the war, the company started a dehydrated dog food department. I got laid off from my previous job and then I went to work over there in the dog food department for a short time. Fortunately, I was switched to the storeroom on account of there's not too many men left to fill those jobs. For every man that leaves for the service seems like they hire two women to do one man's job, depending on what the job is. And there's lots more men's jobs opening up. Sure does pay a heck of a lot better. When I looked at my first thirty dollar check I thought I was wealthy I've never seen that much money before. Sure is gonna help around the house and with the kids and all. The most important thing isn't the money, but your job security. That's what everybody wants. Job security. You know what though, our new washing machine has just been a miracle.

Intro to Driveway/Trailer

Finally, after these big corporations came in and bought us out, they started selling off all the profit – anything that made money. And that's when they drained us, that's when the company went bankrupt. Those years after the bankruptcy were mostly terrible. Everybody hated to go to work and most of us older people, we just hung on there because we were just trying to get our thirty years in. There was a lot of people that quit too, got better jobs. It wouldn't have mattered if we worked for nothing, they just didn't have the product flow to make money. In the last few months, the arbitrator in Minneapolis ruled that when the company took our half

pension away they had no right to do that, that we were still under contract. But then the pension committee appealed it, and as of this date we haven't received nothing.

Intro to Muscle Cars

Well, I guess looking back on it all there's not much I really could have changed. Most of us didn't realize at the time what those benefits and insurance meant. We were just working for the almighty dollar. Maybe we should have worked harder for those benefits instead of concentrating on keeping our hourly wage up. Then again, there's still workers only making a few dollars for what they do. One thing I guess I'd tell all the young workers today is to stick together. Look out for your fellow worker, especially the little guy below you. We all had to start somewhere. One thing too is to make sure you know what's going on and that everyone's represented. One thing we always used to say is, "Don't let one person or two people look like the monkey. Put the monkey on everybody's back."

