

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/ LLEISIAU O LAWYR Y FFATRI

Horrocks – Penarth Road, Mr Spencer’s leather factory, West Canal Wharf

Interviewee: VSE001 Rita Spinola,

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**Interviewer: Catrin Edwards for Woman’s Archive of Wales/ ar
ran Archif Menywod Cymru**

CE: Could you give me your name and date of birth please?

00:13

RS: My name is Rita Spinola, I was Rita Stevens and I was born in 1939, 9th April 1939.

CE: Great. Can you tell me a bit about your background, where you were born, your father your mother, their occupations...

00:39

RS: Well, my dad worked over Bailey’s dry dock, he worked there for years but before that his grandfather and all his brothers worked down the tugboats down, down Cardiff Docks. And my father had an allotment like they did in them days. My mother... he was born in Grangetown my dad, but my mother was born in Cogan. Now she was in the first world war my mum. I’ve got photographs of her in the first world war. They didn’t get married until they were in their late forties so I was the only child. My mum lost two boys at three days old and I was the only child. I was supposed to have stopped breathing and then they brought me back to life. And my father was on the tugboats then and he had this thing “Come quickly!” and they rushed off the tugboats because they thought I would die but here I am I’m 74.

CE: So Rita where were you born then?,

01:40

RS: I was born in Cardiff in St David's hospital and i was only 2lbs born and they never thought I'd live but there we are... what's to be.

CE: And where did you live when you were young?

RS: In here. My mum lived in rooms in the next street in Pentrebane street, she moved into here and I've been here all these years, so this is our home.

CE: So education – primary and secondary?

02:32

RS: Well, we never had primary and secondary when I was in school. I went to the Nash which is now called St Paul's school. I loved it there - bit nervous because the teachers were very strict in them days. I also worked there and my children went there, my grandchildren went there and I worked there for 38 years. It's now St Paul's school, it belongs to St Paul's church which I go to now. When I was younger I used to go to what they called the Windsor Gospel Hall was the chapel, cos I used to love that with the majic lanterns you know, but then when I got older I went in the guides and I used to have to go to church parade once a month and then when we got married I went over to to Germany to live for a couple of years, well 2yrs, 18mnths to 2 yrs and when we came back my eldest son was born in Germany and then I started going to St Paul's Church because my mother used to go there when she lived here and um I just like going to church. I don't always go on a Sunday I go on a Wednesday and I enjoy it., been going for years you know? We belong to the guild I got lot of friend in the church and I enjoy it. That's why I like Grangetown because, I worked in the school that's only down the road, I have my church, if we were snowed in we could walk down to the shops, the doctors, you could walk to the hospital, so this is why I love Grangetown – an its a lovely community.

CE: Could I just ask you about the school – you said you went to that school....

04:15

RS: 'Til I was 15. We didn't have primary schools then or two different schools. My husband did because the council schools... they did it they started to change it... the church schools never changed, so we stayed there til we were 15. We left school then and then we started work. And I start – I wanted to work in a place called Horrocks', but it used to be called the Peggy Anne, for sewing. I wanted to be a hairdresser but my mother said “no – cos you'll have rheumatics in your hands! ” and I've got them now and I never worked there. Anyway, I worked in the Crystal Laundry and I went there cos I thought I'll wait until they've got a vacancy.

CE: So you were 15 when you left school – why did you decide to leave then?

05:16

RS: Well that was the law – you had to leave when you were 15. You couldn't stay in school after you were 15.

CE: And how did you feel about leaving, you couldn't have gone on to do...

RS: No.

CE: Right. So your first job then after leaving school.

05:35

RS: My first job was at the Crystal Laundry and what I did I used to be pressing shirts, and I didn't like it, cos you could burn yourself very often you know? But I percerveered and I stayed there, because I had my name down to work in Horrocks' so I had to wait until there was a vacancy. You know I got on alright with the girls but it wasn't my job really, I wasn't fussed on it but I did it you know what I mean and then a vacancy came up then in Horrocks' which wen you first start.. you can't go straight on the machines, I used to sit on what they call a bench. It'd be a long table, there'll be girls along one side and along the other side and you'd learn to sew hooks and eyes on and you'd have to make loops for the belts to go through, you did that for a while which is all hand sewing you know, and then when there was a vacancy on the bench, now on the bench that was the same thing – it was a long bench with machines each side, I think there were twelve on one side and twelve on the other side. Now at the top of it there was an ironing board where somebody would iron, so you wouldn't actually make the complete garment on the bench – you'd start off doing one thing and then you'd put it in the next one and she'd do a bit more, so by the time you'd come to the end of the bench, the dress was made. But inbetween that if you did seams - they don't do it now they overock every thing – you would take it up and the woman on the end of your bench would iron the seam flat. 07:19 And we had a lovely relationship you know we all used to laugh and sing together, they had a nice canteen...

CE: Can I take you back to when you first went there? How old were you when you went to Horrocks?

07:39

RS: I must have been going on for sixteen then, because I was in the laundry for about a year – I wasn't there long.

CE: Did you want to go to Horrocks?

RS: Yes I did?

CE: Why?

RS: 'Cause of sewing – I like sewing. I wanted to be a machinist.

CE: So on this first bench – it was liek a training for you then?

RS: No you just had to... Yes I suppose, - well it wasn't a training because you weren't on the machines, you were doing hand sewing, putting hooks and eyes on you see, then when there was a vacancy on the bench, you would go on the bench and they'd teach you how to use the machine cause of course they were very fast you know it's not like the ordinary machine - they were fast, so you had to learn how to do that, you know what I mean?

CE: And how long did that go on for – the training bit on the machine then?

08:33

RS: Not long really, because you just got on with it – you know what I mean? They gave you little jobs to do to get used to using the machine and you just carried on then. But I've got to be fair I did enjoy it there – there was a good atmosphere, lovely people to work for, nice canteen.

CE: What did the factory make?

08:58

RS: It made dresses, we didn't do sheets – I don't know whether you've heard of Horrocks' sheets cotton sheets? They did them, but our factory was just making dresses, dressing gowns we used to make a s well – we made them for Marks and Spencers and all other shops but Marks and Spencers always had their own labels – they had their special labels Marks and Spencers, but there was a bench with just one on which they would do the samples you know just girls on their own would do that but on the bench you'd done the garment from the startt, and when it come to the end it was finished then. That's how it was.

CE: And you enjoyed that work?

09:43

RS: Oh I did yes immensely. One of the presses – I must tell you this right – her name is Irene Spetti and Lorne Lesley is her real name but her stage name is Irene Spetti. She.. what's this Dickson now? She's married to him on the television.

CE: David..

RS: David Dickson yeh.. she's married to him she is, but she was over six foot and of course in them days you always had to clock in and clock out and we'd all be in a long

line and she would tower above everybody you know? Yes I really enjoyed it there we really have good times. They used to have trips - we down to Porthcawl in a bus and watch the fireworks, and we'd have dinner dances – that was my first ever dinner dance where I bought my first evening gown which we thought we were wonderful – having our hair done, then buying special shoes you know – it was lovely.

CE: And where were the dinner dances held?

10:48

RS: That was in the Connacht Rooms in the Capital – it was by the Capital Cinema – it was called the Connacht Rooms but it was a proper dinner and dance you know what I mean? It was really nice.

CE: What kind of music was it?

11:03

RS: Mostly... well with our age it was the Rock 'n Roll and all that, you know what I mean? It was lovely and um... well I'm trying to think... what was his name now?... the one that's deaf – we all used to be singing that on the bench... Johnny Ray? We used to be singing his songs, cos they'd have the radio on you see while we're working and then we'd be singing all of us you know, but I know I can remember Johnny Ray.. they were all singing.. we all used to sing to that.

CE: Did they have the radio on all day?

RS: They did yes. But then if the temperature was below 40 degrees, we weren't supposed to work, but we were lucky enough... I think only once or twice it was below you know? .. but um... 'cause it was such a big factory.

CE: And do you remember any of the programmes that were on?

RS: Oh no, I can't remember now. It's going back a long time. I know we used to listen to the radio all of us. no I can't remember the programmes.

CE: What year did you go there?

12:13

RS: I think it was '55, cause it wasn't long in the laundry and then I got this job in Horrocks'. 'Cause the dinner dance that i went to the first one was on December 30th '55.

CE: Were there any other members of your family working in Horrocks'?

RS: No.

CE: What about friends from the neighbourhood?

12.44

RS: Yes my neighbour.. my friend that lived a few doors up, she worked in the offices... um but I made new friends when I started there you know, it was great, it was good.

CE: And did you need qualifications.. did you have to show them you could sew?

RS: Well no, they taught you to sew.

CE: Right. It wasn't something that you'd learnt in school?

RS: No, no. We did have sewing lessons in school but not like they do today.

CE: What kind of interview did you have for the job?

13:25

RS: I remember going into the office and just chatting you know, they asking me all questions.. and I think we had to take our school card you know - we used to have a leaving card in them days you know from school - we took that. But as I said I was lucky enough to get the job.

CE: And were there other girls from Grangetown working there?

RS: Yes and there was people from up the valleys as well used to work there because I made friends with a girl Sheila Nash and she lived in Ystrad Mynach and she married one of the mechanics that used to repair the machines you know? 'Cos we went to the wedding, cos we went to a couple of weddings we used to all go as a group like, we all went as friends.

CE: So were you mainly women who worked there?

14:18

RS: Yes – even the ones that was cutting out, you know cause there was a big table with the material on and they had these electric cutters which they cut out, but they were all women, they were.... and the packers, as I say the only men really were the mechanics and the boss – I can't think of his name now – we very rare saw him, very rare, he never ever... you only see him walk through and just looking at things and gone you know? So there wasn't... mostly women.

CE: The mechanics – what did they do?

15:01

RS: Well if the machines broke down they'd repair the machines.

CE: And the packers were women you said?

RS: Yes.

CE: What was your exact work in the factory – describe it to me?

RS: Machinist.

CE: And did you do that all the time you were there?

RS: Yes until they closed. Unfortunately they decided to close and we were all in a terrible state because we loved it all of us. And we had a party and we were all singing “We’ll meet again” you know – it was lovely. Yes I was there until it closed.

CE: And when did they close do you remember?

RS: That I’m not sure of – I’ve got to think now. Maybe 58/59 I’m not sure to be honest. Might have been 59/60 – I’m not quite sure about that. But then when they finished there of course you had to go to a place in Westgate Street now, there was a place there where you had to go and sign on as it was then. Then I had a job then in West Canal Wharf...

CE: Can I just ask you before we leave Horrocks - can you describe to me what it was like on the first day when you walked in?

16:48

RS: Oh – I was very nervous, I’m always a nervous person anyway I mean as you get older you learn. I was very nervous and I just sat there sewing.. I mean you wouldn’t speak to anybody. Eventually you get your confidence and you start chatting, but I was very nervous, but that was how I was.

CE: What was the building like you know the sounds the smells..?

RS: It was a very big building and like I said you can imagine when you first go there you see all these machines, lines and lines of machines and places where they’re cutting so it was a bit ‘wow!’ you know? But as I said they were so friendly I thoroughly enjoyed it.

CE: You said they played music but was it noisy there?

RS: Not really... well it would be with machines I suppose. Cause some.. they're not quiet.. but not... well we got used when you're sewing, you got used to it .. they had the radio on...

CE: How did you feel about working there?

RS: Loved it.. I loved it yes.

CE: Can I just ask you how did other local people view factory work? Like status to compare with working in a shop or something? Was it all on a par?

18:25

RS: Well how can I explain? Now some people now, they've always worked in offices right, like my friend did Marion – she was in the office - but that wasn't me. But I worked in a factory. In them days like a cousin of mine said, when I worked in the.. “oh you're not working in a factory!” you know what I mean like it was degrading. But I didn't think it was degrading cause I enjoyed it. Factory work was what... we're all different that's what I find.. if we was all intelligent... well we couldn't all work in an office could we? So in my mind, we've all got different ways of living. I was quite happy to work in a fa.. some people would say “Oh I wouldn't work in a factory..” but I loved work in a factory. I wouldn't want to work in an office. So that's the way I feel about it you know. But you know, it's just how we are.

CE: And it's skilled work isn't it?

RS: Yes it is yes.

CE: Can you describe a working day – what did you do as a machinist?

19:35

RS: Well you'd clock in obviously and then go and sit down by your machine and you'd start machining away, then they'd have a break uh which you could go in the canteen for about... a cup of tea... I think about quarter of an hour, I'm not sure, but then you'd carry on.. then lunchtime then we'd go in the canteen but sometimes we'd go for a walk because it was more countryfied then so to have a bit of fresh air we'd go for a bit of a walk around before we went back into the factory, do you know what I mean? Then you'd only have one small break in the afternoon and then you would finish then like you know? I used to ride a bike to work I did you know, and you'd go and get your bike and ride home. But um.. that's all it was really.

CE: How long did it take you to get there?

20:25

RS: Only about 10mins cos it's only up the road for me. Sometimes we used to come home dinner times in the summer when the weather was nice – I'd ride home and my mother would have my dinner ready and I'd be right back then you know but then when i got more friends with the girls, I didn't bother. we used to stay in and have a chat and go and have a walk around you know. But... as they say... and they'd have sales then. You could buy the dresses do you know what I mean? And they were reasonable.. I mean the dresses in them days... you'd have a circular skirt and if you think.. the material would cover the whole of this floor – that's how big they were. Lovely... lots and lots of material in them – lovely dresses an dressing gowns.... but the dresses were always lovely. Well made they were.

CE: And did you get.. you got a discount did you?

21:16

RS: No what it was they would have a sale and then you could buy them cheaper then do you know what I mean? So...

CE: How many times a year then?

21:32

RS: I would say about twice a year, but you could buy.. they'd bring other things into the factory as well then do you know what I mean? – their sheets, pillowslips, you always had a good sale – it was worth buying. They were lovely clothes, really nice clothes. And their sheets... I mean everybody that got married they gave them Horrocks' sheets for a wedding present.. they lasted years – they were lovely.

CE: So was the factory a nice place.. what I mean is it sounds as if you had a lovely time there and you liked the work – building wise and facility wise was it a nice environment to work in?

22:13

RS: Yes – cos we had a lovely canteen, I mean i think it might have been in our days a modern one do you know what I mean? Because we had a lovely big canteen, nice toilets, place to put your bike so i think yes the factory was really good,

CE: Did you think they were good employers?

22:29

RS: Yes, I did yes, very good yes.

CE: How many of you worked there – have you got any idea?

22:44

RS: Got to be a few hundred, because there was 24 on each bench – that's the sewing part, and there must have been about 10 benches, then they had a row of people doing samples, then they had people doing the hand sewing like I showed you, then they had people who cut out, then there's packers, um there was people who done overlocking, people who done zips, I'd say a few hundred easily. Work that out – quite a lot really.

CE: That was a lot of people to lose their jobs wasn't it?

23:28

RS: Yes it was. Everybody was really upset because we were all friends do you know what I mean? So, it was upsetting.

CE: Were there married women working there?

23:51

RS: Yes – a few married working there and as I said a few of us got married. as I said Sheila Nash married Peter who looked after the machines you know?

CE: And did you get married when you were there?

24:07

RS: Yes .

CE: What year did you get married?

RS: '59

CE: Were you encouraged to goto nightschool when you were there?

RS: No – well I didn't. You didn't need it with sewing. Obviously people in the office perhaps did you know, cos they had different views then with different things.

CE: Can you remember how much you were paid a week?

24:39

RS: I think it was £2 something, £2 - 7 - 6 something like that – I'm not quite sure. It wasn't a lot. You know when I say to my grandchildren they can't believe it. Bout £2 something I think it was which was good money to us in them days and it was a job...

CE: I was going to ask – how did that feel?

25:25

RS: We were quite happy with that – it was fine.

CE: Was it piecework...?

RS: No. I didn't go on piecework – no. Some of the girls did – the ones that done the samples, but ours was just a wage like you know – you just did your job every day.

CE: Did you say you've still got a wage slip?

RS: I have somewhere but I'll have to find it. I'm sure it was £2 odd we had.

CE: Did you have a pay rise when you were there at all?

25:44

RS: I can't remember to be honest with you... I'm not sure. I should imagine we would have had. Not much though I don't think... I can't remember having one.

CE: Were you all paid the same do you think?

RS: Oh yes – we were all paid the same yes... apart from the piece workers obviously you know? But everyone else got paid the same. Even the ones that done the pressing you know with the iron doing the pressing the seams.

CE: And the cutters out as well?

RS: I would think so – yes.

CE: What did you spend your wages on?

26:40

RS: What did I spend my wages on well... as I said for our dinner dance we went and bought these special shoes with all glitter on – I remember saving up for that, and we had this first evening gown you know, the big skirt and that, and we had our hair done special, but we wa'n't like the girls today – like they want to buy everything – we didn't do that we were pretty good. I saved a bit – I never went mad you know what I mean? Cos I never... I only went to a youth club which that's where I met my husband when I was 15.... but that's all I went because I met him and I didn't go far - if he was on leave we'd go to the cinema you know, we'd go into town for the cinema and we'd go to the fireworks display with the Horrocks'. Obviously you'd be buying things then you'd go on the shows and whatever but that's all. You never spent like they do today you know what I mean?

CE: Do you remember how much the cinema was in those days?

27:44

I'm not sure if it was 2/6d – it was 1/6 and 2/6d I think. That seems to ring a bell and a 1/-, 1/9d – see I'm just thinking of the prices now.

CE: Where did you go usually? Did you go to one special cinema?

If my husband was on leave we'd always go into town, into Cardiff like, see whatever film was on and we'd go and see the Empire or the Odeon – one of those we'd go to. I mean we had a cinema up the road here which was the Ninian cinema which I only went when I had my children, for my night out my husband would mind the children and I'd go with my friend and watch a film that's all – up the Nin we used to call it then no we only went into town... and what we used to do in them days... we used to call it window shopping cos they never had the shutters then did they.. so we'd walk around looking in all the shop windows... “Oh I'd like that.. yes..!” whatever. But we didn't spend much money in them days.

CE: Did you go into town by bus?

RS: Yes – we went in on the bus. Course 10 o'clock when the film did finish, everybody'd be standing cos they always played The Queen then, and you'd be waiting for it to finish cos you had to run and catch a bus.

CE: Did you share your wages with your family?

RS: Yes – I did give my mother something – I think it was 5/- - I can't remember offhand

CE: Can I just ask you about Trade Unions – were there any unions?

29:40

RS: There was a union yes and we all had to join it – we all joined the union anyway.

CE: Do you remember what the union was?

RS: No - can't remember no. Because when it was... that's how I set about it being cold – it had to be a certain temperature cos of the factory was such a big place, because that was to do with the unions. They said it had to be at a certain thing. I can't remember exactly what it was – that's all I can remember about the unions.

CE: So there were no disputes or anything?

RS: No.

CE: Did you feel fairly treated?

RS: Yes, I did yes.

CE: Did you have to wear a certain uniform for work?

RS: No.

CE: So you could wear...

RS: Ordinary clothes – whatever you wanted.

CE: ...and whatever you wanted?

RS: Yes

CE: Do you think the work was dangerous in any way?

30:51

RS: No, no. I mean I did sew, when I was first learning like your saying, I had the needle right through my finger, do you know what I mean? Well you just got to learn haven't you – you need to stop, and then they're pulling the needle out then, do you know what I mean? But em – they had good first aid as well I mean I got to be fair. One time I was running across which I shouldn't have done when it was our break, and it was raining not like the leaves are now and I slipped and fell on the back of my head and knocked myself out. And well they took me in the day... the room there and I was there for a while, but i got to be fair they had good first aid – they did yes. That's what makes me think it was more modern in our days to what... do you know what I mean... to some of the factories you know?

CE: Can you remember any of the rules and regulations there?

RS: Well you weren't allowed to be late - you had to be clocking in. But there was no really rules.. I mean you couldn't be late, I mean you had to have good excuse for not being in work, but appart from that there was no really rules, every thing was fine do you know what I mean? You had a good supervisor...

CE: Were you ever made aware of health and safety issues?

RS: There was no health and safety.. the only thing issue was as I told you with the temperature with the union – that's the only thing – there was no health and safety then.

CE: And how was the factory heated and lit do you remember?

RS: I can't remember the heating, but as I said it wasn't really cold but then when we had the bitter cold weather it would be cold cos it was a big um... how can I explain, you know how they do Asda's these buildings... like Asda's – prefabricated. It was a great big factory, I mean... I can't even remember about the heat - all I remember that we were told this time because it was cold, if it was below 40° we weren't allowed to work, but I can't remember what heating was in there. I think they had the big long lights you know, because of the sewing – you had to have bright lights because of the sewing.

CE: So like strip lighting?

RS: Yes.

CE: Were you allowed to chat while you were working?

RS: Yes you could chat and sing. That's what I said it was lax – it was really nice.

CE: Do you remember what you talked about?

RS: Probably boyfriends and you know youth club and things you know, music we'd talk about music like I said, there'd be certain records we'd like and we'd talk about that you know.

CE: Things haven't changed that much then!

RS: No, no!

CE: Were you allowed to smoke while you were working?

RS: No – they could smoke but not in the factory. They could smoke in the canteen, cos I never smoked it didn't appeal to me, but they couldn't smoke in the factory but I think they could smoke in the canteen you know?

CE: Did you suffer any long term health issues from working there do you think?

RS: No.

CE: How did the women treat their fellow male workers?

RS: Fine – they used to laugh, lark about and joke with them, they were fine.

CE: Was your husband supportive of you working – did he mind, did he want you to work?

RS: In them days you did, you just did, you just automatically worked didn't you, you didn't even think about it. I mean once you had your children then you never worked cos

you had to look after your children. That's the unfortunate thing of today, the youngsters they've got to go to work and it's a shame cos they're missing a bond with their children. I really don't like that – I really think it's hard.

CE: How many days did you work – did you work week-ends?

RS: Monday to Friday, only in the week – we didn't work Saturday.

CE: And do you remember the hours you worked in the week?

RS: I think we started at 9, and we had hour for lunch I know because sometimes I used to come home and I think we finished at 5. I would think so – I think it was a 40 hr week, so how would that work out then? Would that be right then? I've got to work it out.

CE: Yes.

RS: Yes – Monday to Friday it was.

CE: And so there were no shifts or anything like that?

RS: No – no shift work.

CE: Did you get any overtime?

RS: Sometimes – if they were rushing.. they wanted certain things out, sometimes you would you know, you might have to work an hour or so that's all but not very often, it was mostly.. because there were so many people there it was pretty good you know?

CE: And did you have a holliday allowance with pay?

RS: Yes – I think we had holliday pay?

CE: Do you remember how much you had in a year?

RS: I don't remember now - no.

CE: And bank holidays?

RS: Yes we had bank holidays. Yes we had them off.

CE: Did the factory.. some factories especially up the valleys used close down...

RS: They used to close down didn't they...

CE: Did that happen?

RS: I'm trying to think now, did it close down...? I can't really remember to be honest.

CE: OK. And did you used to go on holidays?

RS: No – not really because in them days you didn't really go on holidays. We'd have—when I was a little girl we used to go on day trips you know on the buses, but when we were married we never cos my husband was in the army, so we didn't go on holidays... We'd go down with his Nana – that's right – we went to Porthcawl for a week in a caravan. One time we could say that we had a week's holiday.

CE: And when was that?

RS: Oh I don't know – years.

CE: Couple of years after you were married?

RS: Before we were married we went down there. We went down cos she wanted to go.. we went with her for company, so she could have the caravan you know?

CE: Were you allowed days off for personal reasons – funerals or things like that?

RS: I can't remember... well when you're younger you don't... there's no funerals really unless it's immediate family. I was Ok – I didn't have to have time off for fumerals – no. Whether they did I don't know.

CE: So you can't remember having to forgo a days pay for having a day off for personal reasons?

RS: No.

CE: You were talking about the dinner dances – were they organised by the company or the workforce?

RS: The company organised it.

CE: And did you pay for those or did the company pay?

RS: Do you know I can't remember – I don't know whether hey paid because friend came obviously, we would have had to pay for friends. Whether we paid or not I can't really remember. You know in them days it was a proper dinner dance – it was lovely you know?

CE: Were they local band who played?

39:39

RS: Yes it was – they usually had a live band there.

CE: Do you remember any of them?

RS: No, not really. Long time back now.

CE: Do you remember what you had to eat then?

RS: Oh gosh – you're joking – no. It would be like, you'd have soup wouldn't you, then you'd have your main meal and your sweet and that and I don't know whether we had after 8 mints and things like... I don't think we did, but we'd have... it was a three course meal do you know what I mean, you know proper dinner as I say, a dinner dance. It had to be done properly do you know what I mean?

CE: How many times a year would that be?

RS: Only.. that was a Christmas one.

CE: So you were allowed to take people?

RS: Yes if friends wanted to come, they could come as well.

CE: Right so who did you take?

RS: Oh my husband – I took my husband with me.

CE: Every time?

RS: Yes.

CE: Not local friends?

RS: No because my main friend Marian, she worked there anyway – she was in the office.

CE: is there any one event that you remember from your time in the factory, like a visit by a famous person, anything like that?

RS: Well the only famous person that I know as I told you was Lorna Leslie, cos she worked with us you know, and she was a scream – she'd have us all singing... always laughing she was, she was really good.

CE: And what did she go on to do then?

RS: Well I don't know, because we all split.. once the factory closed that was it, so everybody went... but then she started to sing then under Lorna Leslie, that's what she was doing singing, so after that I don't know.

CE: Did she bring out any records?

RS: Oh she did shows I think, she done concerts, obviously she must have done records because she'd done shows you know.

CE: And you didn't go and see her?

RS: No, no.

CE: Are you in contact with any of your former workmates from Horrocks?

RS: No unfortunately. I've got photographs of them, but unfortunately no.

CE: You mentioned that you went on work trips to the fireworks in Porthcawl – did Horrocks put the buses on for them?

RS: Yes we had to pay, but it was an evening trip that I went on with my husband. There was a bus load with the girls would take their boyfriends, go to Porthcawl and watch the fireworks and go on the shows, just a great night out you know?

CE: Was that an annual event?

RS: Yes it was yes.

CE: On bonfire night?

RS: Yes.

43:20

CE: So you left Horrocks.. what year was it again?

RS: '59, '60 it was after I got married. And then like I said we had to go to this place in Westgate Street, and eventually I found a job in West Canal Wharf. Now after working in Horrocks' such a lovely factory, I couldn't believe it cos you went in this little door, and as you went in there was all coal at the back and then you went up these stairs and then you turned right and there was this room with.. there was only two machinists and then when I started that would have been three, the boss Mr Spencer and one boy, a Greek boy cutting out, and we were making school satchels, handbags and sometimes we'd make purses but mostly it was school satchels.. and there was three girls on the machines and it was big machines, heavy, same as we had in Horrocks' but a bit stronger, but you had to... we had an oily rag, you had to oil the seam and then machine it. It was

OK, nice girls and we used to chat and all that business, but after working in Horrocks' it was entirely different because we'd have a break and turn the machines off and the boss would make the tea and then we'd have this bowl, and everybody would use.. wash our hands in this bowl, to have our cup of tea and whatever – the same bowl. And then this one time I picked up impetigo from the oil. I must have had a pimple and scratched it and I had impetigo on my face. It was dreadful. I told the boss – 'That's fine...' he said. We still all washed in this bowl and still all used the same towel, which these days you just can't believe that... It was OK – I enjoyed it there. As I said I left there then cos my husband was in Germany and I went to Germany to live then. That's when I finished work completely.

CE: Was the factory called Spencer's?

45:58

RS: I'm not sure what it was called but the boss' name was Mr Spencer. He used to make school satchells and handbags, purses... but it wasn't a big place as I said there were only three machinists and a boy cutting out and him so that was only 5 of us in this.. which was the factory. I mean it was... a lot to be desired after Horrocks' I mea there was no restroom, no first aid or anything I mean.. I can't even remember where the toilet was to be honest with you... know what I mean, you just can't believe it, you just wore this pinny... white pinny... you just can't believe it - how they got away with it in them days! There was other factories 'round there which was... they used to call it the butter factory and there was another place that used to do bras and knickers... I tried to get in there but of course most of our girls had already got in there so that was my next.. and I wanted a sewing job you know? So that's why I worked there.

CE: So the water in this bow- was it hot at least?

47:06

RS: Yeah – well he'd boil a kettle and put water in and add cold so we'd all use the same bowl of water.

CE: So did it take you a while to get rid of this impetigo?

RS: Oh yes it did take me a while cos.. it was horrible it was. But I still went to work see, I told him but he said "No - that's fine." Still washed my hands in the bowl.. you can't believe it can you? You just can't believe... but there you are.

CE: So who did he supply with these...?

RS: To be honest with you I don't know. All i know was that I worked there so I don't know. They were school satchells but whether it was for a shop or... I don't know.

CE: So how big was the place then?

RS: Oh only tiny. There was only just one room – that’s all it was. As I say there was three of us on the sewing machines.. probably four.. four sewing machines, one table for cutting out and a little table where he was sat and there ‘d be a table in the middle to wash our hands. So it wasn’t big.

CE: So how did you feel working there?

RS: Well I enjoyed working with the girls but I didn’t feel as if I was clean there, do you understand me? After working in Horrocks’ it was entirely different., you know?

CE: How long were you there then?

RS: I’m not sure – about 18 months I think cos then I went to Germany.

CE: Did you keep in touch with any of those girls?

RS: No because the one woman was a lot older than me (dog barks) and the other girl.. no I never because I went to germany to live then see, so when I came back then I had my son and in them days you didn’t work til they were in school, do you know what I mean – or in nursery or whatever.

CE: Do you remember how much you were paid?

49:19

RS: Oh no I can’t remember. Probably about the same cos it was the same type of wages wasn’t it in them days. I’m not sure to be honest.

CE: Could you chat and listen to music?

RS: Yes. You could talk there but of course there were only three of us to chat to. We used to talk do you know what I mean? But I didn’t enjoy it like I did Horrocks’ you know? There was a great atmosphere in Horrocks’.

CE: Where did you used to go for lunch?

RS: We just used to stay in the factory... I never came home.. because it was in town we’d stay there and have a snack, and then start work and then come back. I think... I’m not sure what time I finished there... I’m just trying to think what hours they were... it was probably 9 to 5, but we didn’t go out – we stayed in the factory for the hour you know? Just chatting.

CE: Was there an union there?

RS: No.. no. (She laughs)

CE: Apart from the impetigo, what kind of boss was Mr Spencer?

50:38

RS: He was OK.

CE: Fair?

RS: He was alright. How can I explain.. he did get a bit moody at times but.. as I said after working in Horrocks' nothing seemed the same, do you know what I mean? I wasn't as happy there as I was – I mean I worked there cos I needed the money, do you know what I mean? But.. And I got on with.. cos as I say there were only two other girls to chat to, but there wasn't the atmosphere and you wasn't laughing and joking like you were in Horrocks' – it was like a life – but there it was work and that was it, do you know what I mean?

CE: Did you have holidays there - do you remember?

RS: I probably did but I can't really remember, cos we wouldn't have gone away then, so I'm not sure about that. Obviously we had bank holidays and things like that which they did then.

CE: Any social life?

RS: I used to go to ayouth club – that's where I met my husband, and we used to go to the cinsems.

CE: What I mean is – there was nothing organised by the....

RS: Oh in the factory – no, nothing at all like Horrocks'.

CE: You say you weren't particularly happy there but were you bored, was it monotonous or...

52|:14

RS: Well I wouldn't say I was bored because I used to like sewing, but I used to get a bit fed up sometimes because there was no laughter and joking, it was just work, doing the same thing do you know what I mean? He wasn't the happiest person, do you know what I mean? So it wasn't as nice – no.

CE: How did you get to work there then?

RS: I used to catch the bus to work.

CE: So no bike into town?

RS: No I'd catch the bus then.. the bus on the corner took me straight to the monument,, I'd catch a bus home then

CE: What was West canal wharf like in those days?

RS: There was plenty of work there cos like I said the bus used to be packed going to work and coming home, cos they'd be going to the place where they made the bras and the knickers, and then there was the butter factory so there was a lot of people finishing work the same time and we'd all be on the bus – it'd be busy like, like.. you'd chat to people on the bus you know?

CE: Did you like working in town at all?

RS: I didn't mind cos it wasn't that far, do you know what I mean?

CE: you left because your husband...?

RS: He was stationed in Germany and I was having ... I'd just become pregnant then and we went over to Germany to live. So that's why I left you know? How long it went on after I don't know - the factory – cos as I said it was only a small factory.

CE: And how long were you in Germany for?

RS: About 18 months/ 2 years.

CE: Did you ever go back and work anywhere else, Rita?

RS: No – well I had three children, and then when my youngest was about 6 or 7 I started in St Paul's school, which used to be the Nash, as a dinner lady and I worked there 38 years. I retired now last Christmas – I've been off this year. But I loved it – I love working with children. I think if I'd have had my time over again, like they have all these opportunities today. I would have worked with children, cos I do like working with children and handicapped children as well. So I think.. I enjoyed doing what I did but I think.. after working with children.. I think that's what I would have loved to have done.

CE: Looking back over your life and looking back to Horrocks' what would you say?

RS: Oh – I enjoyed Horrocks', don't get me wrong, it was lovely, I did enjoy it. As I say they looked after their staff and it was a good factory.. it was, but... now I do like working with children. But I'm not saying I didn't enjoy Horrocks' – it was really good.

55:31

END OF INTERVIEW/DIWEDD CYFWELIAD

