

VOICES FROM THE FACTORY FLOOR/LLEISIAU O LAWR Y FFATRI

**Smith's Crisps, Fforestfach - Abertawe/Swansea, Freeman's Cigar Factory -
Caerdydd/ Cardiff**

Interviewee: VSE020 Margaret Josephine (Jenny) Kendrick

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**Interviewer: Catrin Edwards on behalf of the Women's Archive of
Wales / Archif Menywod Cymru**

"My real name is Margaret Josephine Kendrick, but I've been known as Jenny for ages - about 50 years"

JK is and only child. Her father was one of twins and her mother was an only child. She therefore comes from a very small family. She and her mother were born in the Lake District. JK was born there because it was safer than Port Talbot at the end of the war, which is where her parents lived at the time. She then returned to Port Talbot and then the family moved to Cardiff.

1:09

JK's father worked in an architect's department of the county hall. Her mother was a mother and then she worked in some shops and then worked in a geriatric hospital in Cardiff. JK went to Llandaf Church in Wales primary school, then passed the scholarship then went to Lady Margaret's high school which was in Penylan, girls only grammar school. She was accepted at Manchester university to do English, but broke her parents' hearts by going to live in Spain in three years. She returned, decided she wanted to teach and went to Swansea University. She couldn't speak a word of Spanish when she went to teach conversational English in Spain but had managed to persuade the Paraguayan consul in Cardiff to write a letter in fluent Spanish applying for the job. She learnt Spanish while she was in Spain.

02:58

JK said that she worked in Smith's Crisps in Fforestfach, Swansea. She says that they'd finished four years of her degree course and while most summer holidays she would work in London because she could do shorthand and typing, because they'd all got teaching jobs in London starting after the summer, in September 1970. They decided to spend that summer in Swansea saying goodbye to it and get a job there. Word went round that Smiths' crisps, paid students a little bit more than anyone else. However she can't remember how much they were paid. Because of going to Spain she didn't go to college until she was 21, so this was when she was 25 in 1970.

04:12

They went to work there to earn money for the summer and to have some money to take with them up to London when they started teaching. She and her friends stayed in Smith's Crisps for 3 months - June, July and August. They finished their finals at the end of May and stayed on in their digs and worked there solidly for those three months. When asked if she knew anyone who worked there JK said no, but students know somehow.. she said the boys used to go labouring on the roads because that was good money, so they knew from previous students really (that it was good money.)

05:09

She said the factory produced Quavers and that she's never eaten one since, and Chopitos that she doesn't think you can buy anymore, which were foul. So there were two floors - the first floor was quavers and they were on that floor and the ground floor was Chopitos. When asked why the factory would take on extra workers at that point in time, JK says she doesn't know but she thinks it must have been demand for the product then thinks it would have been relief for staff holidays. So when asked if the factory closed down during the holidays, he said no it was open all year. When asked about shift work, JK says there were two shifts - 6am til 2pm, or 2pm til 10 week on, week off. So she says that they did both shifts.

06:10

When asked if they needed an interview or reference to work there she says no they didn't funnily enough. She asked her friend Lynne who worked there with her, and she said no, they just walked in and signed up from what they remember. They were the first to get there, they must have seen the manager or charge hand, and they said "you're the first so we'll take you." No reference or anything. When asked about training she also said no, they weren't trained at all, that they didn't need training to put 14 packets in a box.

06:55

She said that they started off on the conveyor belts. They brought down a box, and as the packets flew past them they grabbed 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14 over, done. She describes the process once again and says that's what they did for eight hours. When asked if the work changed at all, she says yes that they got moved.

"My poor friends were put on this ghastly thing, another conveyor belt where the quavers now not packaged yet - it was an earlier process than the boxing - passed through and over this sort of rancid fat and they had to lean over and pick out bad ones. Lynne, one of my friends, she was sick every half hour - awful. But they didn't speak to me for ages because I got promoted - as I said - talent will out! - and was picked to do weigh checking, which meant I had a clipboard and importantly strolled up and down, passed the machines that put the quavers into packets, and would say to the machine operators, 'I want to weigh this to see if it's the right weight and I would weigh it and put on my clipboard what it weighed, and then if a packet was too light or too heavy they had to adjust their machine. I'd stroll up and down doing this and I thought I was the bees knees!"

her friends kept on saying 'What's so special about you that they picked you for that?' When asked why she was promoted, JK says she doesn't know. She says she got chatting to the woman who was the main checker of packets, and she must have liked her, and decided to promote her. She says she didn't have any more money, but it was seen as a promotion.

09:04

When asked if there were many students there, JK says there were only the three of them. She says that their relationship with the other women was 'brilliant!' She says that they said when they'd had students in the past, the students had been snooty. But they said that they were just a laugh, she thinks that because two of them at least came from pretty working class backgrounds - they were pretty grateful that they wouldn't have to spend their lives doing that kind of work - and they used to 'have a laugh' with the factory women.

"Then the machines broke down which was fairly frequent, they used to pick up brooms and form a skiffle band sort of thing you know, the women just thought we were fun. So very good relationship we had with them."

09:59

When asked what else they did, JK says that

"The worst thing if our machines broke was after we'd cleaned them, we were sent downstairs to the Chopito line which was considered to be a rougher element you see. And we didn't like this because there were huge sacks - I suppose they about 4' high of Chopitos that had been discarded and we had to open these sacks, the smell was horrific and go through them picking out any individual Chopitos that weren't bad, to be re-

packed. I mean, the health and safety of that must have been appalling. That's why we never ate anything like that again. That was a dreadful job that was - we hated it. So if we heard the cry - 'Girls down to the Chopito line we'd go - Oh no!'

10:33

When asked if they were given the same jobs as the other women, JK said yes. She says that they just learnt up by copying. The first day on the conveyor belt, everything piled up because they were all slow. She says the worse thing was their feet because they were standing for 8 hours - they had terrible pains in their feet when they got home.

11:32

When asked to describe the first day she says the smell was mostly of fat and it was noisy because of the machines and the women talking and because Radio 1 or whatever was always on. They all used to sing to the radio so it was very noisy. That was the main impressions she got. She says the building from the outside is quite impressive and palatial. It's empty now - it went over to Walkers and then it's been empty.

"It was quite nice looking from the outside with a bit of green around it, but inside it was like any factory, not very light really. There were quite a few windows, but the electric lights were on - just the noise really as much as anything and all of us in white caps and overalls."

When asked if she remembers any of the songs they played, she sings a couple - one by Mungo Jerry and the other was Lola by the Kinks. She says those were particularly popular because they were 'bouncy' as people were packing things. She says they all knew the words and they would all sing. She says "Really it was essential that they had the radio on, because it kept people spirits up." When asked if it enhanced the work she says yes it did definitely, "the rhythm as much as anything, and it meant that everybody could sing along."

JK says that she doesn't remember anybody being in charge which she thinks is strange. "I asked Lynne, I said 'Do you remember if there was any sort of man striding about bossing us round?' and she said 'No - not really.' We seemed to be left to our own devices, but we must have been... and if ever the music was turned down, everybody would cry out and yell 'Turn the music up!' you know because they wanted it loud."

14:25

When asked if she was aware of any time and motion people she said "No, only somebody yelling at you to get a move on... that was the time and motion!" She says the toilet breaks were very strict. "On the first morning, I think we would have started at six, I was still then on packing the boxes and this girl came up to me at about 8 o'clock and tapped me on the shoulder and said go to the toilet. So I said "No thank you I don't want to go..." and she said 'Yes.' she said 'if you don't go now... I've got to replace you on the conveyor belt,' she said 'You've got to.'" She says you had an allocated time

"Looking back on it, I don't know how they managed if they had a period or something... because you can't always time when you want to go to the toilet can you?!" She thinks she remembers that more than anything on the first day. She says they all used to smoke in the toilets and with all that fat it was very dangerous.

15:35

When asked about facilities, she says there weren't any really. There were toilets and pegs for you to hang your clothes on. She says that it was a hot summer and everyone used to strip off to bra and pants because the overalls and hats were nylon, and they'd sweat a lot. There were a few toilets but looking back there weren't that many - only about 6 cubicles. There was also a room that they called the canteen, and JK says that it wasn't much bigger than her lounge (she lives in a cottage). She says that she asked Lynne again about what they used to eat on their 20 min break, and her friend replied that it was a sandwich or a bacon butty. She doesn't remember proper cooked meals, but remembers tea or coffee and a butty. She says that they only had a 20 or 30 min break in 8 hours. She thinks it was 20 min. She says there were no morning or afternoon breaks. She says it was either about 89 or 10 in the morning or if you were on the 2 - 10 it was about tea time. She says that's why their feet were so bad. She says there were no showers.

17:15

When asked whether the heat was a problem, JK says "It was colossal and being students... and I was... I suppose I still am quite political, we were always saying 'This is too hot - you shouldn't be working in these conditions..' cos it was a heatwave, and 'you should form a union..' you know 'why haven't you got a union here?' and they'd say 'Oh - were not interested in that. We're married women...' and 'It's all right for you - you'll be gone in 3 months but we've got to keep in with the bosses.' And you know they weren't interested at all in anything like that."

She says "The conditions were absolutely..... you were passing out and at the end of your shift you were reeking of this oil. And Lynne reminded me that between us we bought the biggest bottle of Cologne we could find and when we came off shift we would douse ourselves in this Cologne cos you couldn't wash - there were no washing facilities - I can remember rubbing it into our hair and everything." She says that they weren't allowed a bath every night at their digs, and there was no shower, so it was mostly strip washes. JK says "Most of that summer we stank of oil." She says that their other friends would comment on it.

When asked if there was any weekend work, JK says there might have been but there wasn't for them.

19:11

When asked about the factory fire, JK says that it was very risky there, because of all the hot fat. One day they were told to get out quickly because a fire had started. She thinks it was put out pretty quickly but she can remember them all outside on the ground outside the factory and some women smoking. After it was put out they were sent back in. The three of them asked whether it had been checked for safety - they didn't know the term health and safety then. The other women said 'Come on...' and that it happened quite often. So they all had to go back in and carry on as normal while a bit of clearing up went on around them. There was no check whether it was safe or not. She says 'Today people would be horrified by the conditions I'm sure.'

20:38

When asked if anyone was injured in an accident, she says she doesn't remember an accident. There wasn't anything sharp and there was no cutting involved. And she doesn't remember anyone being burnt on the hot fat, but that doesn't mean that they weren't. She doesn't remember it while they were there.

She says most of the staff had been there for ages. They seemed to keep their staff probably because they paid more in wages. There was a bus that picked up around Swansea and took everyone to Fforestfach and back again. She thinks that made it a desirable job and some of the women had been there for 20 years.

21:36

JK says she can't remember how much her wages were and her friend doesn't either. She can't even remember the wages being handed over. All she can remember that the wages were quite good for a holiday job. They had to pay rent and they went to the pictures. She thinks they were better off than when they were students, because their grants didn't go for, but she wasn't as well off as she had been in previous summers when she worked for the temp agencies in London, but she made a lot of money then. She said that when she'd applied to do the job in Spain she did a shorthand typing course in Cardiff College of Technology and Commerce, which meant that she could get lucrative shorthand and typing work through agencies.

23:13

When asked what she did with her money she says they went for a pint and went to the pictures and visited friends. She remembers seeing the film of Madam Butterfly, with Japanese actors sung in Italian and propping her eyes open because she'd been on morning shift. She says the kind of things that you did in Swansea and 'Swansea wasn't exactly buzzing in those days.' She says that their college friends had gone home so they were seeing friends outside the university. They went to the beach down in Gower, but that was mostly at weekends because there wasn't time to get to the beach in the week.

24:27

When asked how she coped with the work, she says "Fine. Quite frankly a monkey could have done it. It was absolutely mind numbing and if it wasn't for their cheeriness and the music... I don't know how they stuck it." She says it was good for her, because when she started teaching she remembers telling the children about her experience. She says a lot of teachers go from school, to college and into teaching, and have never worked in the working class world and know nothing about it. She felt that everybody should do something like that before they go to college or after, for a year, so that their in touch, especially if they're going to be managers and bosses. She says that working in the factory "It made a big impression on me, how important education was and... you know.. God - imagine being stuck in a job like this for the rest of your life." She says it made you realise how some people spend their lives. She says at least the boys were out on the roads and they had the fresh air and a variety of jobs to do..."but I thought - those women. Just doing that all day long."

26:27

JK says that they clocked in in the morning. She says that they were never late cos they were on the bus. She says that if you missed the bus then it was the end of the world, because if you missed the bus they would have had to get out to Fforest Fach under their own steam and they were in Bryn y Môr road, which was right the other side. She can remember running down Bryn y Môr road at 5.55 dragging her friend Rena and shouting 'C'mon we're going to miss the bus!' But they didn't ever miss it. She said that Rena would often get to bed at 2 am, but she and Lynne couldn't do that if they were on the early shift. She says they were always tired and remembers nearly going to sleep in the cinema so well.

27:41

She says that the uniform they wore was supplied by the factory. It was a button through dress type, she thinks with elbow length sleeves and a cap. No special shoes. She thinks that could have been quite dangerous. She says that they tried to get the women to press for a cotton uniform because it was so hot and the nylon was unbearable. But they wouldn't rock the boat in any way. She thinks they were used to it. The women used to laugh at them.

28:38

JK says that some of the women had worked there for years and were in their 60s. She says they were the brightest, and cheeriest of the lot. "There was woman who used to get on the bus - she must have been late 50s. She had blonde dyed hair piled up in this elaborate do.. every morning at 6 o'clock.. this elaborate do, made up to the nines. On she'd get, big kiss for the driver, 'Hello girls!' ... and she'd be bouncing down the aisle, and we used to look at her and think how do you do it? I mean they were so tough those women... really tough. They had homes to run and everything and they were doing this shift work and they were always so with it and bright. They would have jumped over our heads."

29:46

When asked if some of the women had children JK says yes but didn't know how they were cared for. She thinks that she and her friends would not have been very interested in the women's family life then. She supposes that the children were in school and the women's mothers cared for them when they weren't. It wasn't something they thought about, but obviously they did because there were women of all ages working there.

30:27

When asked how many of the worked there JK doesn't quite know. She says there were two floors with at least 30- 40 on each floor. So maybe 80. There were men but they operated the machines and she thinks the charge hand must have been a man but she doesn't remember him at all. As long as things were going well he didn't appear. The men weren't on the conveyor belt.

31:34

She thinks there was a 'teasing' relationship between the women and men - 'quite flirtyish... light-hearted really.' When asked if she thought it went further, she says she doesn't think so because everyone was stuck to their position. The machines were one end and the conveyor the other, so they would only mix in the break. She said that it wasn't like when she worked in London in offices where the sexual harassment was terrible. She thinks that everyone else in the factory was married except for them. She says that they weren't treated differently to the other women by the men. She says that she was very aware of that kind of thing because of her experiences in London but wasn't aware of anything like that in the factory.

33:11

The women were wary of them the first few days because they'd had bad experiences with other students, then when they realised they were 'quite mad' and not snobby, they got on well then. There were one or two who were 'a bit snidey about us being students but on the whole they were good fun.' She doesn't remember what the women's language was like because she and her friends swore. So it wasn't any worse than their language.

34:08

When asked if there were any official or unofficial perks, JK says that the women would steal packets of Quavers. 'The packets would come out of the machines joined together and the machines would cut them and separate them, but sometimes they didn't and a long string would come out which were thrown aside and what the women used to do and we did it once or twice was.. if they had a coat, they would wrap these things around them, cos you'd be sacked if you were found to have stolen... wrap these strings around them, and I never remember being searched or anything... we only did it a couple of times

cos we had friends with a little boy.... But there were no other perks - you weren't officially given any." She remembers that she did a summer job in Freeman's in Cardiff, and that they were given cigars and cigarettes cheap. She used to give them to her father who was 'thrilled.'

35:23

When asked if she was aware of any rules and regulations JK says no, they got on with the job. She says nobody seemed to get sacked and they were just expected to do what they were paid to do and everybody did because they didn't want to lose their jobs. She says that they weren't supposed to smoke, but they did in the toilets and it happened all the time.

36:10

When asked about social events JK says no, they didn't have social events. They just went home, they never went out for a drink or anything. She says she enjoyed working at the factory but she wasn't sorry when they finished. She says again the worse thing about it was the feet and she would be crying with pain. She says it was a bit of an adventure and of course they knew that they weren't going to be doing it for very long. She says that she would have hated to have to work there for ever.

37:26

When asked if they encouraged women to take part in a union, she says yes, that they used to say "You've got to form a union.' The women would say that it was typical of students. She talked about their talks with the women again. She says she wasn't involved with student politics, but later on she got more involved with feminism. She talks a bit about student politics. She says that because they studied sociology, they were aware of how important unions were. In their last year they'd been chased to join the teacher's union and they'd done that. She says that she didn't come from a union background but she just knew everyone should be in a union and thought they'd have better conditions. She talks a bit about women and teaching and unions. She thinks that they thought unions made trouble and they were frightened of strikes and demonstrations. She talks about going on marches when she started teaching before the teachers wages act.

40:55

When asked if she was looking at the women from a feminist point of view then or was it burgeoning, JK says probably. She says the three of them were very independent, her father brought her up to be very independent. They were expected to into higher education and have a career. When asked if she worried about the women because they were 'workers ' or because they were 'women' she says it was both. She thinks that she felt that if there'd been a lot of men there they'd have been more involved. The men on the machines tended to be married men in their 40s. She was worried about the general

working conditions anyway and she felt that the women were down trodden. They didn't think they were.

42:40

JK doesn't remember exactly when she worked at Freeman's but it was while she was at college, so between 66 and 70. She thinks that it was a Christmas break because she used to go to London in the summer - maybe 67 or 68. She said that she worked in the office because she could do shorthand typing. They seemed to have good conditions at the factory on Penarth Road. She says that she doesn't know what went on in the factory, but she knows that there was shop and they gave you tokens and you could buy cigarettes and cigars cheaply which she used to get for her dad, because she didn't smoke then. She says that she worked in so many offices that she doesn't remember much about it. She says that she worked 9 - 4. She thinks offices are much the same and she thinks it was quite a big office - her were quite a few of them. She talks about other jobs. She thinks she most have done shorthand typing and probably some clerking, filing, and invoices. She said she could earn good money working in an office. She says she had to make her own way there on the bus. She thinks it was pretty good there. There were social things going on because it was over Christmas although she didn't get involved because she didn't know anyone. But she thinks it was seen as a good job.

46:41

When asked about the camaraderie of the women working in factories, JK says that she didn't know about Freemans but 'they seemed a jolly lot' and there were lots of men working there as well and they all seemed ok and happy in their work. She thinks it was a good firm to work for and better than Smiths. She thinks it was a cleaner environment, but she doesn't remember going into the factory much. She wasn't aware of any unions in the factory.

47:30

When asked what she learnt about life JK says "I learnt that there were some hideously boring jobs around that demanded no skills but lots of fortitude. I learnt a lot about the way that groups of women, together can make dull and tiring work fun, I learnt there was a lot to be done in health and safety... and I learnt how lucky I was that I didn't have to do it for very long." She talks about having working class friends and that she saw a different side of life and the way that kind of work limits you, whereas if you go into a profession you progress. She saw another side of life and it informed her feminism. She talks about living In Bristol and teaching and going to a feminist group in Clifton. She says it was very unfriendly and middle class. She talks about feminism and class.

51:40

JK says about working in a factory that for a lot of people they are quite happy with it , and in some factories where they're compiling, building and manufacturing it's skilled

work and quite satisfying. She says that if you didn't have a good education, no qualifications, and you lived in an area where everyone worked in factories and you saw a factory job as a job for life for life and accepted what went with it. People were also mobile because there were so many jobs. Then it was seen as what everyone did. For her it opened up her eyes to see how fortunate she was, but she did worry about very very bright women working there. She says that she got friendly with one girl who thought she was lucky that she would become a teacher. She told her that she could go to evening class and train as well but thought that she probably wouldn't, because of her family expectations. She says she was very bright and could have gone further and she remembers thinking that was such a shame. She says that in those days you were a little bit of a product of you area and your circumstances. She says that she had several friends who weren't allowed to stay on in school and do o levels, because education was waste for girls and their parents made them leave. She talks about a clever friend being made to leave school and work. She feels that some were trapped in that world even if they were capable of more, but the majority of the workers felt lucky to have a job.

54:44

When asked whether it was a liberation as well JK says, I suppose so. She got the feeling that most of them enjoyed it and it gave them that extra buying power. And some of them would need to work cos their husbands weren't earning enough or off work. Again she says because they were so young, they didn't really look into the family circumstances. They didn't ask those questions because they weren't very interested, but most of them made the most of it. For herself she says it was an eye opener, 'thank god I don't have to do it!' and what a great crowd they were. She left with a lot of respect for working class women.

56:22

END OF INTERVIEW/DIWEDD CYFWELIAD