Daisy Johnson Interview
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Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
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DC: . . . like, where were you born?

DJ: OK. Highland Park, Michigan.

DC: Oh, OK. If you don't mind telling me, when was that?

DJ: March 8, 1926.

DC: Wow. OK, all right. In Highland Park. Were your parents from . . .

DJ: My parents—my Dad was from Sivas, Turkey and my mother was from Istanbul, Turkey.

DC: Oh, from Turkey. OK.

DJ: Uh huh. But they're Armenian descent.

DC: Armenian.

DJ: Uh huh. [Darabut?] and Meryem Zarzorian. They're my parents.

DC: When did they . . . .

DJ: Arrive? They arrived in—my Father came here first, I think around 1919. And he COD'd my Mother—gave five hundred dollars to a friend to have an Armenian lady come and be his wife, and she wanted to come because her sister was here. So she came and met my Dad on the second day of arrival at Ellis Island. And then ended up in Detroit, married in Detroit, and my Dad had a tea room near—on Manchester in Highland Park. Right across from the Ford factory there. And then I—shortly after that, why, I think I was about twenty-eight days old when they moved to Pontiac. And I've been to Pontiac ever since. [laughs]

DC: OK. So you were born in Highland Park but didn't stay long there. I'm going to ask some questions about things before you were born—maybe you heard from your parents and all. Let's see—when your Father arrived, did he come immediately to Detroit or to Highland Park?

DJ: No, my Dad worked—he worked on the railroad and then he worked in a tanning factory, I think in Pennsylvania somewheres. And he did labor work and ended up in Pontiac at the

Wilson foundry. And the first time I became aware of unions was when my Daddy didn't get to come home when they had the strike in 1934, '35. They had a sit-down strike. And we missed my Dad and we would take him lunch.

DC: OK. So you would've been pretty young then.

DJ: Yes. I think I was about maybe seven or eight years old.

DC: Right. OK. I'm just going to keep backing up. Did they talk at all about what life was like in Turkey?

DJ: Yes. My Father has lost his Mother and he had a daughter, and his Mother was massacred—killed by the Turks. And that's why they fled here to the United States. The—my half-sister, I guess, would be about two years old when she was picked up by a loving and caring Turkish family and then they put her into an orphanage and then somehow it was tran—English people took and put her in the orphanage there and took care of her, until she must've been in her early teens. And then she married and moved to Argentina—which I have never seen her. She had three boys and one of them tried to locate us after my parents had passed, and I understand he's in the steel business in Uruguay. And apparently he tried—he was in Detroit for Masco Corporation, and tried to locate us. But my brother didn't inform me about it till 10:00 at night. So I waited and called in the morning to Masco Corporation to find out, and he had just left that morning back to New York to go back to Uruguay. So I missed seeing this cousin.

DC: You said that your Father met your Mother at Ellis Island?

DJ: Uh huh.

DC: Now had they known each other in Turkey?

DJ: No.

DC: No, OK.

DJ: No. She just wore a tag. She didn't— they didn't speak any English at all. I didn't speak English until I went to school. Didn't know one word. In fact, my name on my birth certificate is Bydzaar Vartouhi. And the teachers could not pronounce it. And so as a child I could tell by the expressions on the teacher's face that she was naming names, but I didn't understand. And finally I seen she was disgusted, and finally I shook my head in the positive "yes" answer. And that's how come I became Daisy.

DC: Oh, so when you started school they started to call you Daisy.

DJ: Uh huh. Yes. I didn't even know the word "the" or any words at all in English.

DC: So, let's see, there's so many questions. As far as that goes, that means that you would've

grown up in Pontiac speaking Turkish.

DJ: Right. We didn't speak Turkish—Armenian.

DC: Armenian. Excuse me, bad mistake there.

DJ: But they were, at one time Turkey [laughs] was Armenia. Biblical times.

DC: Right. I'm learning as I go here, so I try to keep everything straight. Now did you have Armenian friends when you were growing up?

DJ: Oh yes. We lived in the very south end, southeast end of Pontiac. And we were with—our neighbors next door were Greeks—two, three Armenian families across the street. It was a little ethnic neighborhood. There was Italians, Armenians, Greeks, Mexicans. We even had a black family which we grew up with and played. There was no toys. Of course, it was the Depression days, too, and we made our own fun and enjoyment.

DC: But you spoke Armenian then.

DJ: I spoke Armenian. Mm hmm.

DC: How about with your Italian neighbors and Greek neighbors and all?

DJ: Expressions and hands and "come on" and, you know, motions. We got along very well.

DC: How long after your mother arrived at Ellis Island—how long after that did your parents move to Detroit or Highland Park?

DJ: Immediately.

DC: Immediately. Had it been . . .

DJ: The train ticket was purchased and I remember my Mother saying there was a big long ticket pinned on her chest and she—as they went along, they would just come and take a portion of it off. And it was the mutual friend of the family's, apparently, that introduced them.

DC: OK. And then how did they end up—or why did they choose Highland Park? How did they end up there?

DJ: Friends. Relatives. People from their own village that were already established here.

DC: OK. Did your Father ever consider getting a job in the Ford plant there?

DJ: No. No. They run the tea room. [laughs] When they say "tea room," I don't think it's the way we associate it. I think it was just like a little lunch room and maybe coffee and

sandwiches and a fast—you know, something they could get for them.

DC: Did he have any experience with that sort of work?

DJ: No, not that I know of.

DC: All right. That's very interesting. So would it be the poor workers who would come to the tea room?

DJ: Yes. Mm hmm. They were right across the street from there.

DC: And so they must have done that for five or six years.

DJ: Yes, and they did that for a couple of years. It was a number of years, and then I guess when I arrived they decided they better have a more steady income. And they came to Wilson Foundry and he was a core setter.

DC: OK. Did he—let's see—I mean, that would be quite a change from running a tea room. Did he ever talk about his work as a core setter?

DJ: I know it was very hot and—he never discussed, actually, other than we, as children, would love to go down by Wilson Foundry and look at that pig iron being picked up by the cranes and then moved into the building, and then hot molten iron that was melted, just being poured. And it wasn't too far from where my Dad worked, apparently. There was a big gate on Wilson Avenue and we would stand out there, outside of the gates and look in, because we could see my Dad just inside the doorway there.

DC: Oh, you could actually see him?

DJ: Uh huh.

DC: Wow. What was your Mother doing at that time?

DJ: Housewife. Raising children. My Mother never worked out.

DC: Did she help in the tea room in Highland Park?

DJ: No, no. No. I had a—my brother Mike, is two and a half years older than I. And then my sister came fourteen months after me. And then in 1930 my youngest brother arrived. So she raised four kids and stayed right with us and, of course, there was laundry and cooking and house—and we—of course, during the Depression we had roomers. So she did the washing and ironings for them, too, that worked in the factories here in Pontiac.

DC: So your Mother would've been pregnant when you moved up to Pontiac, it sounds like.

DJ: Yes.

DC: Yeah, OK. So I can see with the third kid on the way, I can see what you're saying about needing a more stable income and all that. Well can you tell me more about what it was like growing up in the Depression in Pontiac?

DJ: Very difficult because we couldn't speak English. There was no way of knowing how to get assistance. And till I already started school, I was just, what, maybe kindergarten, first grade, and I had to be the interpreter. And there were words that, when we went to the social welfare assistance, I didn't understand everything that they said. And I know that we were allowed so much food, like there maybe, if there was six in the family, four kids and the mother and father, six oranges might be given to us once in awhile. There'd be cornmeal. A few staples, foods, whatever, I don't remember just exactly. But I did love the oranges, because that was a treat. And of course, what I remember—another thing I remember during the Depression years, the government used to bring a truck around, Ovaltine. And all the kids were hungry, you know. And we would go from street to street, follow that truck, so we could have another cup of Ovaltine. It was many times, there wasn't hardly much to eat. And out of the cornmeal, and then even though the family next door were a Greek family, one day my Mother would bake the corn bread and line her five children and us four all along the sidewalk between the two houses. And we'd all get a square piece of cornbread. And then the next day, the other one would bake. So it was shared, so that the ovens wouldn't, or the heat wouldn't be used and the cost—kept cost down.

DC: It sounds—or, do you remember at all whether or not your Father's work was regular during the Depression?

DJ: No. I would say that the WPA—he did outside work. Working in the parks, Murphy Park [probably Murphy Park in Pontiac] was one of them.

DC: So he worked on the WPA for awhile?

DJ: Mm hmm. And I guess that's one way that we were given assistance. And the winters were very cold, and I think when I was about eight or nine years old I broke my leg on the school ground. And there was no insurance programs back then. And the principal—well the children, other children, friends, carried me home when my leg was broke there on school ground. And the principal came over that evening and seen that my folks didn't know about going to doctors and having it set or going to the hospital. They went to the grocery and got an orange crate of wooden slats off the box, and put it on each side and wrapped my leg. And when she came and seen that—and she said the house was very cold—my Mother and Dad thought this was a blessing that I broke my leg because we got a ton of coal delivered the next day and we had, and they came and they made sure that someone picked me up by the car and took me to a doctor's office and had the leg set. So it was the principal, Alice Cleveland, and I remember her very well. As I got older, like in the sixth grade, I was the one who rang the bell for classes to start. I worked in her office. I helped run the mimeograph for her. She taught me a few things in office procedures.

DC: So she took you under her wing.

DJ: Yes. She did quite a few. And the joys of the grade school, elementary school, was really fun, because every Christmas they always came with a piano player and a violinist and they played music for us. The children all went to school early to hear them. It was—well, no one had radios, there was no such thing in the individual homes then. Not even anything like that. So it was a treat to hear good music. And we learned Christmas carols and they taught us how to sing and everything. It was very fun.

DC: How did the schools accommodate so many children speaking so many different languages?

DJ: Somehow the teachers were very accommodating to our ways, and they would repeat probably a number of times until it finally soaked in. But, of course, you know as children you learn quick. You pick up things easily.

DC: Did your parents ever learn to speak English?

DJ: Oh yes. The first time I remember my Mother actually putting words together was, "Milkman, keep those bottles quiet." It was a song. I don't remember when it was, but that's what she was singing. She knew the milkman. His name was Charlie—worked for Detroit Creamery. And it was horse-drawn carriage truck, you know, that came around and delivered the milk.

DC: Why did your Father take a job in Pontiac? Why Pontiac?

DJ: That's where the work was and there was an Armenian community here.

DC: OK, a combination then—the job availability and an Armenian community. Had there been an Armenian community in Highland Park?

DJ: There had been—not as strong as it was in Pontiac because of the labor. Although there was many there in Highland Park because that's where they first landed, you know, and set up housekeeping on Hamilton Street and Six Mile [northwest corner of Highland Park]. I remember them talking about it.

DC: Is that where you were born?

DJ: Mm hmm.

DC: Yeah, OK. That's very interesting. Did your parents talk to you about Armenia when you were young?

DJ: Hard times. Difficult times. And the oppression from the Turks. Yeah.

DC: Did they stay in contact with the relatives?

DJ: Oh yes. When they could afford it, they even would send five or ten dollars occasionally to relatives over there. But my Dad's folks, he doesn't talk—never talked about his Dad. I don't know. And other than he would say that they were from the cloth, the cross, you know. So whether there was something there that was not revealed to him and—not until just a couple of years ago, when I visited the lady that lived across the street that was Armenian, Mrs. Dukasian [sp?], she's in the Farmington Manor Care nursing home. She is a hundred and four now. And I've visited her occasionally and she tells me things about my Dad that my Dad never discussed. He said that his Mother was—she just had the one boy and that—very loving. And I asked her about, "Well what about his Dad?" And she said, "We don't talk about that." So I don't know what the connection is there, whether he might've been a priest, or—I have no idea! I can't say.

DC: OK. So that remained a secret.

DJ: Uh huh. Yes. It was just, the paternal side of my father was altogether a closed deal. And I didn't even hear him say anything other than he loved his Mother and he seen her killed by the Turks. And he didn't discuss too much of that, either.

DC: That would be very difficult, yeah. When you had people rooming with you during the Depression, were they Armenians as well?

DJ: No, there was an Albanian one—two of them were Albanians. And Armenian—we had a blind man. And I don't think there was—then we had a very young couple that had come up from Missouri. English-speaking. And from her—her name was Mary Mallory—and I understand she was a teacher. And we learned a lot of stories and English from her, because she was right there at the house.

DC: Did the people boarding with you stay for long?

DJ: Oh, I would say a couple of years. Mm hmm. Roomed many years.

DC: And how was the house configured? How did that work out?

DJ: Well, we had a real large living room and a kitchen and one bedroom, downstairs on the main floor. Upstairs there was one, two, three, four bedrooms and a bath. And as we were small, my Mother and Dad and the baby brother, they had the bedroom downstairs. And we were out on the floor in the living room. There were cots, you know—I mean, blankets and stuff was laid down and pillows. We liked it because there was a floor register, and we could be around that to keep warm.

DC: And so the roomers were up . . .

DJ: They had the upstairs, mm hmm. And in order to go through, they had to come down the stairway through the living room and out the front door. But there was no outside entrance for them. It was just right through the house.

DC: And then did your Mother cook for them as well?

DJ: She cooked only for the blind man. The rest went out and ate.

DC: Ate elsewhere.

DJ: Uh huh. Uh huh.

DC: OK. Were they also working at the foundry or at other places?

DJ: The blind man worked for the city of Birmingham, and I understand—much later, when I was able to help him—I remember he'd have a pension check and I would have to show him, and I would direct him as to where he was to sign his name on the check. But I never knew how much he received. I never turned it over. And I was not that inquisitive as to what his earnings were, or what he was given as pension, but I know there was a pension check. And then, let's see—there wasn't too many of them that—unless we had holiday food and there was plenty, they might've had dinner with us. And the custom with them, or with my folks, was the adults ate first. And then whatever was left was the children's portion. I guess they taught us respect that way, for the elderly. That was one of the key things. And today in America here, it's feed the children and then whatever's left [laughs].

DC: There's a big difference. Yeah. Do you recall having any feelings about that tradition at the time?

DJ: No, accepted it for what it was.

DC: Did you have any jobs around the house?

DJ: Dishwashing, floor washing, bed making, scrubbing the bathroom *every* day. *Every* day. And my sister was a little bit more of a tomboy than I was. Now I listened because I was the oldest of the girls. And so I was supposed to be the one to see that she did it. But she'd run out, she turned around and left, "Ha ha ha, you're stuck with the . . ."

DC: Oh, she was supposed to help you with those chores?

DJ: Mm hmm.

DC: OK. Well what would happen then, if she left?

DJ: [laughs] So mad—she would have her fun. I might've cried more.

DC: Would it have occurred to you to let your Mother know that she was not doing her job?

DJ: No. Then she'd correct me. "Why didn't you get her?" I knew better.

DC: OK. So you were supposed to keep your sister in line.

DJ: Uh huh. Right.

DC: Umm. That's a tough job. How about outside . . .

DJ: But you learned to be independent that way, I believe, as you get older. You learn from that, that you know that things aren't always going to be your way, and you accept it. I think that's why I'm still here and the rest of my family's all gone, even though they were younger. Mm hmm. I lost them early. Mike—everyone has died, everyone in my—Mother and Father and my two brothers and my sister all have died of heart attack. And so far, I can knock on wood, that I haven't had a heart attack. Although my doctor's treat me with prevention.

DC: Sure. The family history suggests that.

DJ: Right.

DC: Well as you got older, did you have any jobs outside of the home as well?

DJ: Yes, when I was—oh, I started maybe at twelve, babysitting down the street for an American family. And I don't think I received any more than twenty-five cents—this must've been before the war. And it was a nice job. I just had—there were two little babies that I used to take care of. When I say babies, one was in the crib and one was a toddler. I don't even recall their names, other than they were in Mrs. Young's house on Ferry Street.

DC: How long did you babysit at a time?

DJ: For the evenings, you mean?

DC: Yeah.

DJ: Maybe, anywheres from about 4:00 in the afternoon till about maybe 9:30, 10:00 at night.

DC: That's a long time.

DJ: Mm hmm. But it wasn't a regular daily thing. It was maybe whenever the lady wanted to go out, or whether she had some shopping to do.

DC: So it wasn't regular anyway.

DJ: Mm hmm. And it might've been—she might've given me ten cents or she might've given me twenty-five cents. It depended. That was about the limit. There was never a dollar bill handed to you!

DC: Yeah, not in those days.

DJ: No. And then I took a job while I was going to high school, as a nurse's aide at Saint Joe's Mercy Hospital in Pontiac. And I worked there for about—I started working there in December of '41 and I stayed there until July of '44. And during that time I worked in the—mostly obstetrics, in the nursery. But I have also worked on the surgical medical floor as an aide taking care of the patients.

DC: How did you get linked up with that job?

DJ: At school they announced that they needed help because the nurses, the RN's, were being, not really drafted—they'd been called to—and they were given lieutenant jobs and many of them, I recall as nurses went in right away and signed up. And when they announced it that the hospital needed help, gee, I thought, we only lived a few blocks from there at Jessie and Paddock, and this was just around the corner and up Woodward Avenue, you know. It was walking distance. So I thought, I could take that job. And we got started at twenty-five cents an hour and our meal was provided for us. I worked from . . .

DC: Were you going to school?

DJ: Yes, I was going to school, and in order to do that, the hospital had put me on a three to eleven shift. Eight hour. And I had to start school at 6:30. So I had typing class, because the typing class was overloaded and because my name was Z, Zarzorian, they took A through maybe J in the first—all the seats were, for the typists, was filled. Then they would allocate so many according to the number of typewriters that were in the school. And I, being in the Zarzorian—Z name—I was in the last class, which put it even earlier, so 6:30. They started the typing classes regularly at 9:00, and then they had an 8:00 and a 7:00, and then a 6:30 one. So we filled in on that shift.

DC: So how would you ever get your schoolwork done?

DJ: It was very good—I had two hours of study hall immediately after that, before the regular school started. In order to learn to type I had to take—go to school earlier. Otherwise school would've started like maybe 8:30, 8:45 or something like that. And I had two study halls. So I did my transcription and my shorthand notes right there. And then leave the school at 2:30 in the afternoon—school was over with—and I got the bus and went right to St. Joe's. Bus fare was—you got five tokens for twenty-five cents. So you could ride a week on that.

DC: So how would you find time to eat?

DJ: Well, at St. Joe's they always fed you, you know, at 5:30. I think they had—maybe you started at 5:00, but it depended on the—at that time we had student nurses in charge of the floor. We'd have the whole floor to do. You either had the west wing, which was pediatrics, or the main floor, which was the obstetric. And the nursery and delivery rooms also. That's what I spent most of my time—the three years probably, mostly there. Maybe

two or three months on the other floors were surgical or else—our patients were.

DC: What do you remember about your work on those floors?

DJ: I loved it. I loved every bit of it. It was caring for people. And I really would love to have been a nurse. But there again, my background stopped me.

DC: How so?

DJ: My Mother and Dad did not believe that their daughter would live under another roof during those years of schooling. Sister Mary Charles and Sister Mary Emanuel both insisted that I would be given a scholarship at Mercy College to be a nurse. But my folks—"absolutely not!"—that I could not go and live for one year under another building.

DC: Now would that have been instead of high school at that point, or at what point did you get offered the scholarship?

DJ: Maybe about the time that—the year before I graduated from high school. They told me that they would love to have me.

DC: So you would've been, what, seventeen or something?

DJ: Yeah, sixteen, seventeen years old. I graduated from high school when I was seventeen. Now, I listened to my folks. They said "no," and I accepted it. And I just told the sisters that I couldn't do that. And my sister was a little bit more rebellious. And when she got to be sixteen and seventeen, she came to work at the hospital and she only worked maybe three months when she was offered that job to go. And when she came home and told my folks that she accepted and she told the nun that she was going to go, my folks put up a big fight. And I remember the argument. It was terrible. And she just grabbed a little suitcase—I think it was just a duffle bag type thing—and she says, "I'm going!" And she flew out of the house, and she went to St. Joe's, and the sisters took her down to Mercy College. It was down in Detroit for a little while, I think off of Grand Boulevard in the east end, someplace there. Because I remember I went to visit her one time, and then went out on Six Mile—or it was University of Detroit, or Mercy College out that way. Yep. And she became the RN in the family. They were so proud of her when she graduated. When they had the graduation exercise, you know? We went and my folks were both happy as could be. They were really—I think it was the fact that in the old country they were told, you know, that a daughter should be kept under hand until she marries. And the thought of living somewhere else was just almost too much for them to—but then they accepted it.

DC: At that point did you ever reconsider and try to go back to be . . .

DJ: No. No. I had already started making—I went to work in the plant. This was—I was eighteen when I went into the plant. And I worked at GMC Truck and Coach.

DC: OK. Now how did you get that job?

DJ: Well, I was working at the hospital and all of my girlfriends were making fifty dollars a week and I was working twenty-five dollars for fifteen days. I wanted to make that big money. And I heard it over and over with my girlfriends that I chummed around with in school. And they were making big money at the plant. And back then we were froze on the job. Hospital work was froze. It was important. Plant work was important, and they had a freeze. You couldn't quit and just go anywhere you want like we do today. But then you were froze on the job. That's what they used—the term they used.

DC: Sure. So how did you manage to move?

DJ: So I used the excuse, because I walked home and it was 11:00 at night, and there were two bars on Woodward Avenue, or between the areas that I was walking to get home. One was the [name of bar?]—forget what the other one was. But anyway, I said that they always tried to pick me up. And I was not allowed to wear white stockings—nurses' aides were not allowed. White uniform, yes, and white shoes, but neutral stockings.

DC: Was that to distinguish you from the nurses?

DJ: Yes, from the student nurse. And then the RNs had the cap with the little black band across the top. That was the difference. So I used that—at 11:00 at night and the bar—people were coming out of the bars and that they were trying to pick me up.

DC: Had anyone tried to do that?

DJ: A couple times. But I would walk on the opposite side of where the bars were. I guess there's a little—I think right now there's a restaurant, there's—used to be Woodside Medical. There's offices on the opposite side from St. Joe's. And the credit union coming back this way towards Pontiac. And I felt more safe on the other side of the street. But then that was the side that—it was the north side of traffic coming from Detroit. So it was—people along there would see you and see the white uniform in the dark and would try to stop occasionally and ask, "You want a ride?" or, "Can we take you somewheres?" So I used that as my excuse that they tried to pick me up and I didn't want that and I had to have a *day* job. And I really wanted to work in OB nursery during the days, but it was *filled*. And they were all longstanding employees there. So I knew that since there was no way for me to be on days, so I was almost assured that they could release me. And Sister Mary Emanuel's in charge of nurses and you always had to go inspection before you went on the floor, to see that your shoes were polished and you wear your clean uniform and everything. So anyway, I told her, I said that I need to have another job, a dayshift job. And she said, "I don't know where to put you because you've got all your training right from obstetrics." And she said, "I'm just going to—I just can't use you." And I said, "Well, then release me." So she gave me a release and I went to Truck and Coach employment office. And at the—as I was going to Truck and Coach, walking, I passed my godfather's house and he says, "I'll pray for you, that you get a job." And I thought, "What was *that* comment for?"—that he was praying that I would get a job. Jobs were plentiful—it was wartime. And so anyway, I understand their time, jobs were hard when they came

here, to get. And I guess that that was still in their thought, that it was difficult to get a job. But I had no problem. I walked in and I told them I wanted a dayshift job. And they said all they had was third shift. And back to three to eleven again. And I didn't want that, because it messed up—I couldn't go anywheres in the morning, couldn't do anything in the evening. Time was tied up. And I really wanted a dayshift job. And finally they offered the three to eleven. That was the only thing available. And I looked back behind at one of the desks, Mr. Hire, who was our Eastern Junior High School principal. And I said, "Can I speak to Mr. Hire?"

DC: What a great name!

DJ: H-I-R-E. So anyway, he came forward and he said, "How can I help you?", and I said, "Well, I want a dayshift job but they're only offering a second-shift." And I says, "I just come off working at St. Joe's hospital on three to eleven and I want to work in the morning and be off in the afternoon." And he says, "I think we can arrange that." So I went to work at Truck and Coach and I started work probably, maybe like six to two thirty. And there since it was wartime and we had no knowledge of what the plants were like, the government was subsidizing GM—for each job that they was teaching, they were being paid, I guess, six hundred dollars. That's the way I was understand. So for many, many weeks I went to welding school there. I went to riveting school. I went to assembly school, and box line, hammering. So as it turned out, I took the job and my first job was welding. And we welded on the DUKW [pronounced Duck, an amphibious military vehicle produced in Pontiac during WWII] line with the amphibian DUKWs. And I did that for about, I would say about a month. And then I got transferred. There was—they needed riveters. And so I was transferred to the riveting and I worked on coaches. And I worked on side panels . . .

DC: What kind of coaches were these?

DJ: They were pretty big.

DC: Trains? Or buses?

DJ: Greyhound. I guess they were moving troops or something. I have no idea what they actually—but I know that they were Greyhound. And then I worked on the rooftops and oh, I *long* for those days. I was very slim and that's why they put me on the rooftops, too, because you—it's a curve and you have to be up there on top, crawling along. And did that for awhile.

DC: Well let's back up a little bit here. Tell me more about your training. You said that you learned to rivet and to weld and all these things and apparently for many months.

DJ: Not very long. They would just give me maybe about, possibly at the most, three weeks. Not three weeks—three days to a week's time.

DC: Oh, I misunderstood. OK.

DJ: And you do the jobs. Say, like when I was welding, I stayed on that job for about two or three months. And then they come along and tell you you're being transferred. So you go back to the employment area [tries to remember the building] or somewheres, I can't remember. I think they had it numbered. And you go back over there and then they tell you, "Oh, you're going to go to riveting school." And they give you the rivet gun and tell you to start. And you practice. You have a bucker [a helper who is on the other side of what is to be riveted] and you're using the gun.

DC: Was it mainly women in this school?

DJ: Uh huh. Mostly all women.

DC: OK. How many were in the school?

DJ: When I say school. . .

DC: Or the class.

DJ: Yeah, it was just a small, maybe there might be about ten or twelve at a time.

DC: Were they younger like you?

DJ: Mm hmm. They were all in my age—eighteen to twenty-year-olds. Once in awhile you'd run across maybe one that was maybe about like thirty-five or forty years old. And to me that was *old*, when I was eighteen. [laughs]

DC: Sure. Well did you like those jobs? Did you like welding and riveting?

DJ: Oh I did.

DC: What about them did you like?

DJ: What did I like about them?

DC: Yeah, what did you like about those jobs?

DJ: It was good money. Good money. And it was fast moving. I can't say that any of them were difficult.

DC: So they weren't hard to learn?

DJ: No. I think you're shown maybe two, three minutes or so, and then they'd hand you the equipment.

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

DJ: . . . you just, when you start for the first time using the air pressure on your rivet gun, you might get some dents where you are not allowed to have. Because any time—you had a little tool that you had around the rivet, and if there was any sign of it going in, you didn't hit it right. And you get the feel of it and finally get the right pressure to give.

DC: Did you know women who were already working in the plant when you went for this training?

DJ: No. No, I didn't know a soul.

DC: No, OK. So no one from your neighborhood or anything else was working there.

DJ: No.

DC: OK. Did you feel any—you know, caught up in the war spirit at all at that time? Did that affect you when you started that job?

DJ: Oh yes. It started when I was at St. Joe's. We had brownouts and they turned—all the lights had to be out and you were just given a flashlight with a very dim light to help. So you got into knowing that we could have an air raid. And of course, we were—the city had a program—air raid wardens and messengers. And I started out as a messenger. You would go from—get a report from this area—you were assigned so much. And I had from Paddock Street down to Auburn Avenue, to walk that area, and I would walk down Paddock all the way to Auburn and back over to Jessie Street and all the way down Jessie, back to Paddock. And you were to see that the lights were out in case if there was a raid—air raid or something. And if there was—as a messenger you don't work up to—you start out as a messenger. You take word from this captain over to the next one, relaying messages. You had to learn first aid and I don't know what all signals. They taught us things about impact of a bomb, where it would hit, where you could—you were safer right next to where the explosion was rather than away from it. And I don't know—there were a lot of these little things. So we were all into the war program, you know—knew about what was going on overseas and there might be—but of course we were fortunate not to ever have any. Other than that your brothers and relatives and neighbors were all in the service. Some didn't make it back. We did lose two boys in our neighborhood.

DC: You did.

DJ: Uh huh. One of them was the very first one, [Bobeck?] was his name, last name. And Tommy [Kapilion ?] was a tail gunner and went down in Germany somewheres. But we were well aware that the war was all around, and then of course by working in the plant, I didn't have—other than the DUKW line, and then I only worked on that for such a short

time. And we did love to—instead of eating our lunch in the plant, we'd go out on the trucks, Army trucks that were built, and sit in there. We just—it was fun days, really, because you're young and can do every—a lot of things.

DC: When you worked on the DUKW line, can you describe your coworkers? What were they like? How old? Were they men? Women?

DJ: There was one girl—she was from Pennsylvania and she was more of what I would say a fast girl. She liked to go to a bar, which that was not my class. And I knew not to run around too much. And there was an older lady, Margaret Hooper—because she even wrote me letters after she got so where she couldn't work in the plant. She moved up north somewheres and I got a letter from her and that's why I remember her name. And I worked with her for awhile. But just a short time.

DC: Were there any men on the line, too?

DJ: Oh yes. There was some men. Mm hmm. And the foremens were always there.

DC: What were they like?

DJ: Strict.

DC: How so?

DJ: Made sure that you was on the job and didn't break away. You had to be excused to go to the bathroom. And if part of your tool or equipment—and you run out or needed something from the tool room, you had to get permission, and then he'd tell you, "ten minutes," or whatever. You know, you couldn't run off. But that was something that you learned. They had a job to do, too, I guess, so.

DC: How did it compare with your supervision in the hospital?

DJ: [pause] They were outright—you seen where they were at. Whereas the sisters, you didn't know when they were coming on the floor. They weren't always there. They just accepted that you were doing your job.

DC: How did you feel about the—oh, go ahead.

DJ: One thing, at the hospital you always had to "Miss So and So." There was no first name. And in the plant it was always—there was nicknames and hollering from one end to the other and it was not that way at the hospital. It was altogether a different type.

DC: So more formal in the hospital?

DJ: Mm hmm. Yes.

DC: Which environment did you like better?

DJ: [somewhat sheepishly] Hospital work.

DC: Yeah. Yeah, still did.

DJ: Mm hmm. Hospital work was much better. But of course the money was there and I was making a dollar an hour. When you start at—when you're only making twenty-five cents an hour and jump up to a dollar an hour, you know, it was very good.

DC: Now were you still living at home?

DJ: Yes. Mm hmm. And when I started making the good money my mother told me that I'd have to give her ten dollars a week for room and board or take the choice of putting the money in the bank and only using two dollars a week. And two dollars a week was for personal hygiene: toothpaste and then [short pause] uh, Peri-pads, or whatever you want to call them.

DC: Would you be allowed to go to a movie or something like that, too, if you wanted to?

DJ: Had to keep within your two dollars a week. And movies was twenty-five cents then. And you didn't have too much because you were putting nine hours a day, six days a week in the plant during the war years. Women were not allowed to exceed the fifty-four hours a week. But that was enough—nine hours a day and six days a week. And you needed that one day to do your own laundry and pick up your room and visit with your friends and all that. All in one day.

DC: Did your family go to church?

DJ: They went to church and they taught us during the—right up until the Depression, my Mother took us every day—every Sunday—by bus to Detroit to the Armenian church. And then the Depression hit and then we quit. But she seen to us that we went to the Wilson Avenue Methodist Church. Every Sunday we were dressed in our nice clothes and better shoes, because back in those days I remember many summers were barefooted, and tennis shoes for winter during the Depression years. And there was no such thing as a boot or a shoe, but you did have cotton long stockings. Altogether a different style, way of living. And, I don't know, we just did the best we could with what we had then.

DC: When your Mother gave you the option of either ten dollars, what was it, a week I guess, room and board or the two dollars spending money, which option did you choose?

DJ: Put the money in the bank.

DC: You did, OK. Now was that scheduled to be your money?

DJ: Yes. It was open up your own account, own name. Community National Bank. And my

money went every week. Every Saturday afternoon to the bank.

DC: OK. So does that mean that your parents absorbed your room and board then?

DJ: Yup. Mm hmm. As long as I lived there—and of course the food was prepared for the whole family and you ate. But actually I had quite a bit of money and then I became seriously ill and no insurance. There wasn't insurance back then in the plants. I had a ruptured artery and I laid in a coma from Christmas Eve till January 19th, not being aware.

DC: When was this?

DJ: 1949.

DC: OK. My goodness. What happened?

DJ: I was going with a boy that was wanting to go to Christmas Eve mass. He was Catholic. And so I had a car. I'd even bought a car. The reason why I got the car was Chester Williams's son was killed in the African campaign and the car was brand new.

DC: How did you know Chester Williams?

DJ: Lived four houses over from me.

DC: Oh, he was from the neighborhood, OK.

DJ: Neighborhood. And I used to catch the bus at the corner, at Wilson and Jessie. And I always caught the bus there to go to town.

DC: Was that by their house?

DJ: Yes, closer to their house. Because at the one end—we lived near Midway and the bus didn't stop. It picked up every other street. So . . .

DC: His son was killed you said?

DJ: Yes. And it was in June of '46. And I was going to catch the bus to go to town and Mr. Williams was sitting on his porch and he says, "Daisy, would you like to buy Chester"—young Chester's—"car?" And I knew it was in a garage on Wilson Avenue. Because when he went into service, he had just gotten it out, bought it, and was sent overseas. And it had been in the garage for a number of years. It was a 1940 Chrysler Windsor Brougham. And cars were hard to get in '46. They were—in June, hardly anybody had nice cars. And this was a nice-looking car. And Chester hollered out, "Daisy, you catch the bus all the time," he said. "Wouldn't you like to have your own car?" And I says, "Why? What do you got to sell?" And he said, "I'm going to sell Chester's car and Abe Pigon [sp?] run the grocery store around the corner. He wants to buy it but," he says, "he'll be reckless and I don't want to see that car messed up." He said, "We've watched

you for years and we'd like for you—if anybody, for you to have." And I said, "How much do you want?" He said, "A thousand dollars." And I says, "OK." I went home. I walked back home and told my Mom I'm going to the bank, I'm going to get a thousand dollars out and give it to Chester. I'm going to have a car. And my folks—and my older brother was in service, and so we never owned a car in our family. And I thought, well my Mother's strict rule's paying off now. So I bought a car.

DC: Did she support that decision?

DJ: Yes. Mm hmm. And so I think I had three thousand dollars in the bank. And I took a thousand out and then I kept a hundred out. So I took eleven hundred out at the time. And I thought I'd need gasoline and I needed different things—make sure that I had, you know, everything going good. And I had the car and I kept it right up until 1952. I got married in '51. November 3rd of '51 is when I got married to Bob Johnson from Harrisburg, Illinois [near the southern tip of Illinois]. But he was up here.

DC: We're going to sneak up on that, but there's some connection between this car and your artery.

DJ: OK. So when I was sick, I had saved all that money, you know. And there was no insurance program. So I had to use—hospital bill was $2800. And I had to use my cash money in the bank to pay my hospital bill. And so I almost had depleted—but I did have a little bit of money left when I got married.

DC: Yeah. That's an enormous amount of money. How did you end up rupturing an artery?

DJ: Well, as I started to say, I was going with, George Kelly was his name, and he was Catholic and he wanted to go to Christmas Eve mass.

DC: Right. That's where we were.

DJ: And so when I went over there to pick him up and we were going to go. And for some reason, when I started the engine up it didn't sound right. And this was—snow was on the ground and late at night, but it was a street light. He lived on the corner of Chandler and something—I forgot what the name of the streets. But anyway, as I turned the engine I said, "It doesn't sound right." And he was sitting there in the passenger seat. I wouldn't let nobody drive my car. No way was—because Chester had talked to me and said that he wanted to make sure that that car was in good condition all the time. He didn't want to see it dented and banged up because it would hurt him. And so anyway, when George says, "No, there's nothing wrong with the engine." I said, "Yes, there is." And I rolled the car window down. And as I rolled the car window down, I felt like I was going to start regurgitating. And something—and it was like, to me, I thought it was warm bile. And just leaned my head out the window and started throwing up. And then I had white gloves on—you know, ladies used to wear. [slight chuckle] So I went like that to wipe what was left, and the street light caught my glove. And I said, "That was bright red!" I said—he said, "Yes, that's nothing but pure blood that you was pouring out." I passed out. He

drove me home. Got home and I started to get out of the car and I fell out. I had lost so much blood apparently, it weakened me.

DC: It's amazing you're alive.

DJ: And my sisters had just graduated from nursing, and I remember them laying me down on the couch. My sister was out with her friends and when she came in, I tried to get up and I started throwing up again. And my sister said, "Mama, burn everything—the rug—that she's brought up blood on—the towels. Burn it. It's bright red. It's got to be TB." My sister said that bright red blood coming from the mouth is TB. And that was a dreaded sickness, you know. So anyway, they rushed me up to the hospital and I have no recollection until the 19th of January. And I just was laid out, and apparently my sister and her friends, who were all nurses, twenty-four hours right around the clock. Because they never knew when it was going to start doing it again.

DC: Did they do surgery on the artery?

DJ: No. And I had Joe Christie [sp?]—who was supposed to have been a very good—I guess he's mentioned in the Army medical books as one of the best doctors that was in the service. He was the doctor that took care of me. And he himself when I came to, he said, "I don't know what, but," he said, "we couldn't touch you. Every time we tried to lift you up to set you up, you'd start in again."

DC: So did they say it was a ruptured artery?

DJ: It was a ruptured artery.

DC: But they couldn't repair it?

DJ: No, back then apparently they were afraid to touch anybody with that. Start bleeding.

DC: Did they give you lots of blood?

DJ: Twenty-six pints of blood—one day. In one day.

DC: One day?

DJ: In one day. As quick as they was putting it in, it was coming out. Well what they, Dr. Christie told me later was that calcium had built up and calcified and went up against the artery—that right at the end of the esophagus, the opening of the stomach, and coming from the heart, where it's all meeting right there. And that's what burst. They didn't know if it was the heart or what it was. And when I came to, I was just like I am right now. Just as good as can be. And when I got in the car to start the engine, apparently that's what was acting up, and I kept thinking it was something else that was going wrong, that it was the engine of the car. And it wasn't.

DC: Oh, so you were—really. OK. How interesting.

DJ: Uh huh. And somehow, no surgery, nothing. They did X-rays and everything. That's what—they said that they had to bring the X-ray equipment right up there because they couldn't even move me. They were afraid to move me even. And one lady in the hospital—I don't even know who she was, but she was up and down the hall apparently—she said, "The bed was just as flat and straight and all we seen was that black, black hair. Otherwise, we wouldn't know anybody was in that bed." And when I went home he stressed that I had to have twelve hours sleep every day. Had to eat a lot of liver, a lot of blood-building foods. And he said, "We don't know if it'll happen five minutes from now or whether," he said, "if you make five years, you're over the hump. But for five years we're going to watch you." So every month I went in for X-rays and that.

DC: How long did you stay in the hospital after you came out of the coma?

DJ: About two weeks.

DC: So did you not spew up blood in that time? How did they make the decision to send you home?

DJ: I guess just got a little stronger.

DC: What a story! Goodness gracious.

DJ: First of all, they thought maybe then it was ulcers. And they started giving me half and half, milk and cream, and that made me throw up. And no matter what . . .

DC: Throw up blood or throw up . . .

DJ: Milk *and* blood, I guess. And so they decided not to give me anything. And, oh, I longed—I remember that I longed for a grape. Something cold, my fevers—well they were taking my temperature under my arm and I know that after a hundred and five they never put the thermometer in your mouth. It's always under the arm then. And—but for some reason, I'm here yet today and have never had another one. But if I get indigestion real bad, I take a Tums right now. I'm not going to have that funny feeling.

DC: Yeah, it must still conjure up memories of that.

DJ: Uh huh. But look at, from 1949 to now. A long time.

DC: So you made it over the hump.

DJ: Fifty years ago.

DC: Yeah. Well, my goodness. So many questions there. Did you still have your job waiting for you when . . .

DJ: By this time I was working at the union hall.

DC: Oh, OK.

DJ: I worked in the plant from 1944 until ’45, when they went out on the big strike in November ‘45, GM. And they told me—word got around during that strike that if you don’t go down and picket, you’re going to be assessed one dollar. And I learned to hang onto that money. To this day that’s why I still do. But it’s an evil thing—you should start living it up, too. But anyway, I didn’t want to pay the dollar assessment. I wanted to do the picket duty. And there wasn’t too many women on the picket line, because it was wintertime. And we did have a little bonfire, I remember, and the men standing around talking and joking and—just with the picket signs. And after we finished that one day on the picket line, they said, “Go to the union hall.” It was over on Mount Clemens Street, but it’s now University Drive. “Have a cup of coffee and a donut because you’ve been out in the cold.” And someone said, “Come on, let’s go.” So I went down to the union hall. And I was downstairs having coffee and donut when one of the office girls came down to either see chairman of the shop committee or somebody, picket captain, or a message for him. And she says, “What are you doing down here?” And I said, “Well I did picket duty and they told me to come down and have a cup of coffee and a donut.” She said, “We need you in the office. You don’t need to be out on the picket line! You were one of the best typists in our typing class. Come on upstairs in the office.” So the picket captain turned around and said, “Well, you serve your picket duty by working in the office, doing what they want you to.” It was one day a week. So whatever day they had me scheduled to do picket duty again, why, they said, “Go upstairs to the office.” And I had no idea, but I was typing records—membership records. And I stacked them all up. And I have no idea that they were checking—that the office girls that evening would be checking the work that two of the girls off the picket line was typing. And they said, “Daisy’s work is the best. We want her. She did the most and no errors and she’s got it all in there—whether they were transferred from Pontiac Motor or Wilson Foundry, 653, 658, Dodge Main, different places.” So, I had all the information that they had wanted. I took it off the record card. It was for four-year periods. And it was to be a new four-year record. And so I got the job at the union hall. Now the war ended. My brother came home from service.

DC: Where had he been in service?

DJ: Germany. Started off in Normandy beachhead, France, Belgium, and on to Germany. And then when he came back, he was in the anti-aircraft division. I wrote enough letters, I would think I would know his number—serial number—but I’ve forgotten because I worked in bookkeeping and numbers don’t mean a thing to me today. Anyway, he came home from service and was right in the midst of the strike and he said, “You’re not going back in the plant.”

DC: Why did he say that?

DJ: Woman’s job. See, we were from the old school apparently, the way our folks raised us.

You only went in the plant because the boys were all away. Now you let the boys—guys—go back in the plant and you take the office job. And so I went—the strike ended in March of '46 and I knew the picket captain, Darryl Stump, and he was running for financial secretary. And he said, "Daisy, I'd like for you to work at the office." And I says, "OK." And as it turned out, that same afternoon on the job in the plant, the foreman says, "Go home." It was half a day—everybody—the line was to be down. So for two or three days that one week, the line went down early. We didn't get eight hours in. So the very next day after we had been down a couple times, he come around and says, "Go home. No work, the line is down." I said, "I'm not coming back. I got a job." He said, "What do you mean, you got a . . ." "I got a job already! I'm working at the union hall." So I went to work at the union hall.

DC: So you weren't laid off, but you just chose to . . .

DJ: No. Uh huh.

DC: Had there been any layoffs in your department? Or I guess you just got off the strike, so.

DJ: Yeah, we had just come back and so really the layoffs were later, after I went to work at the union hall.

DC: Did any of the women that you worked with stay on at Truck and Coach?

DJ: Oh yeah. Mm hmm. I knew . . .

DC: They were able to keep their jobs?

DJ: Mm hmm. Right up until they were pensioned.

DC: OK. All right.

DJ: Now, I went to work at the union hall and I think one of the first things—the boys were back from service and they were wanting their vacation pay—was paid on July 1, and the government—GM wouldn't—didn't want to give them their vacation pay. But yet they were supposed to be holding their seniority and status while they were in service. And there was—the boys all came down to the union hall and they had manure spreaders and all this kind of—and little signs made up and everything. They had a parade in Pontiac when they came. And I remember that there was so many of them. There must've been a good two, three hundred of them.

DC: You said manure spreaders?

DJ: Yeah!

DC: What did they do with those?

DJ: They wanted to let them know, GM is just putting out . . .

DC: Playing the you-know-what.

DJ: Uh huh. So anyway, I went to work at the union hall.

DC: Did you want to stay in the plant or did you want to go to the union hall?

DJ: No because Darryl Stump—and then he was elected. He was chairman of the shop committee. He was my picket captain. And then he's the one who said, "Daisy, would you like a job at the union hall? Because we checked your work and your work is really good. And the girls in the office want you." And so I chose to—and what my brother said, "You better give your job up in the plant and work in the office."

DC: That had an impact on you?

DJ: Uh huh. That did mean something to me, too. But see, later on the union didn't go that route, you know, the women coming back out of the plant. If you had the job, you got your choice to stay. It wasn't—your job was a temporary situation. They didn't react that way.

DC: In other words, that you were able to stay if you wanted to?

DJ: Yes. Mm hmm.

DC: OK. The last job you had, if my notes are right, was working on those coaches. You said you were up top and you said you liked that.

DJ: Uh huh, I liked that. It was good work.

DC: Yeah. But which did you like better, that kind of work or the typing work?

DJ: Oh, typing was easier.

DC: Easier. OK, yeah. What about the pay between the two jobs?

DJ: Well see, this is what—Darryl Stump, when he—and he was elected financial secretary, he says, "I'll give you the same wages you were making in the plant. You're going to make the same amount of money." I think it was a dollar eight cents. We were making a dollar, and when we had the big strike, I think there was an eight cent hourly increase. And so they started paying me a dollar eight. And the office girls were not in the union. So I was paying union dues to the union hall and working there.

DC: Oh, were you the only one doing that?

DJ: Yes. And then they decided—that summer they decided—this was probably in June, the first of June, I think—they decided they better get the office workers organized. So then

they—we've been under so many local industrial unions. We've been in the Office and Professional Workers Union. We were changed—United Office and Professional Workers, UOPWA. We were under—changed regularly, but we did join the union.

DC: Which one did you start out in?

DJ: That's the one I can't remember whether—might've been Local Industrial Union, LIU.

DC: Sure. What was the reaction to the UAW local . . .

DJ: The girls and all?

DC: Yeah, how did everyone react to this organizing drive?

DJ: Real good.

DC: OK. Was there any opposition to it?

DJ: No. None whatsoever, because when you work for the union, you want to be a union member, too. You want to be affiliated with them.

DC: Yeah. It would be ironic if that weren't the case. Yeah.

DJ: And then—there was—we had a big meeting on Grand Boulevard. I think that's when International broke away from us—International Office Girls that worked at Solidarity House. They pulled rank and pulled out. They didn't want to come under the same contract.

DC: Was this later?

DJ: Yes, much later.

DC: I want to go back to the war years for a couple questions that I jotted down. Did you have any interaction with the union when you were working on the DUKW line or as a riveter or on the coach line? Did you have any interaction with the union at all?

DJ: No, other than we knew that the committeeman—we gave him his—what was it, a dollar a month, dues. I think that's what it was. And we just went down to see him once a month to give him our dollar. I never went to the union hall before. I'd never seen hide or hair of it until I was on the picket line and then was asked to go to the union hall.

DC: How did you feel about the strike when that came up?

DJ: I thought it was all right. You know, I had—it was supposed to be improving—the shop—I was on the box line, and . . .

DC: What exactly is the box line?

DJ: Box line? It was packing. There's wrapping and packaging. But it was parts that were put into boxes to ship overseas for their trucks that broke down, different things. And we had to put all this equipment in the box. And then with the box line, we just hammered and closed the box. We had a job, just putting the wooden crate up there and just nail it down.

DC: So you were working on that at the time of the strike?

DJ: Uh huh. At the time. And it was around—and by this time I was back on the second shift. I was on three to eleven.

DC: Had you gotten bumped off of first shift?

DJ: Yes. Mm hmm. When you got transferred, you went according—and you didn't buck or fight it because the pay was always good, and we just learned to accept being transferred regularly because the government was reimbursing GM and we were shifted quite regularly on different things.

DC: Do you have any idea why you were shifted so regularly?

DJ: Yeah, because of that money that was coming from the government to the General Motors. We learned that later. You know, I mean, we didn't know at the time but we thought, "Now we're going to learn this. Now we're going to learn that."

DC: Oh, so it was the money for the education to train in there.

DJ: Mm hmm.

DC: OK, I see. So you were still technically learning these different elements.

DJ: Mm hmm.

DC: I see. OK. But anyways, you were on the box line at the time of the strike.

DJ: Uh huh. And it was around 9:30, 10:00. It was right after the lunch break. And they said that, "I think we're going to—they're going to strike and we have to leave the plant." And I can't remember whether it was 10:30 or 11:00, but it was close to quitting time. And we all left because the whistle blew and it was time to go. And I remember going home and then that was the end of working in the plant.

DC: Yeah. Did you know at the time that that would be the end?

DJ: Uh uh. No. Because I—you know—thought I was going to—I thought that was going to be a good job to have. But then when the offer came and my brother came home and said what he did, why, I chose to go with the office.

DC: Did your parents have any position on where you worked?

DJ: No. No.

DC: Was your Father still working at Wilson Foundry during the war?

DJ: Yes. Mm hmm.

DC: OK. Did he stay right on through that?

DJ: Mm hmm. And he stayed until they closed up and Kaiser bought them out—Wilson Foundry out. And he went to work—let's see—when he—a week before he—before they sold out, he lost the first joint of his third finger.

DC: What happened?

DJ: I think something—somebody pushed the line down, a core or something. And just nipped him. Apparently he hadn't moved fast enough. I don't know what it was. But I know that—and let's see—it was after my Mother—my Mother died in '57. And I think right about that time he was sick, got pneumonia or something, and my husband said, "Your Dad's going to come and stay with us." And I said, "I sure you want my Dad?" And he said, "Yes," he said, "because I know Eloise"—which was a sister-in-law—"probably wouldn't take care of him as good as I would." And he says, "I'm going to have him come over." So my husband went and got him and brought him over. And this was another big thing with our family, the idea—they wanted me to marry Armenian, but I had bucked. And so when I married American they just couldn't believe that he was as nice a guy. And they accepted him wholeheartedly. And he was very good to them, too. And when my Dad came to live with me, he was sick and my husband was laid off. I'm trying to think of the year—'57, '58?

DC: It sounds like it could have been '58, right there.

DJ: '58, I think. And I had house payment, car payment, insurance, all kinds of bills. And every penny—and I watched—I was not a spendthrift. I watched every penny. And every penny was accounted for. I didn't have one red cent to spare. And I was working at the union hall and Otis Lawrence was the president of Local 658, which was the Wilson Foundry local. And they were folding up. And Otis said to me, "Daisy, why don't you get an attorney and take your—have your Dad—because he got hurt just before we closed up." And I says, "Oh, Otis, I cannot afford a red cent. Please, I cannot afford an attorney. Every penny that I have is accounted for and I don't have any extra money and I cannot hire an . . ." He says, "The attorney I'll get for you won't ask for a thing until there's a settlement. And whatever he gets, then he'll take his share out of that settlement. And whatever's left will be your Dad's." So they wanted to know—the attorney came and interviewed him, you know, and said, "Yeah, you worked thirty-seven years, I think, in the foundry and we know there's got to be dust in your lungs and I'm going to have you go to a

lung specialist. Going to have you checked." The lung specialist was in Detroit and I says, "I don't have money for gasoline to run him to Detroit and run him to this doctor and that doctor." I told the attorney just exactly the way I felt. And he said, "No, no," he says, "We'll send a check." Well the checks were coming from California from Kaiser's, and I couldn't understand. He said—and it included gasoline—they give you like, maybe, twenty dollars and then give you ten dollars for lunch included in it because you're going to be away for the doctor's office in Detroit. "Gee," I said, "I'm almost making a couple dollars even over and above. We won't be eating that much." So I took him. And then they finally had the hearing in Pontiac, at the city hall. And they agreed to pay my Dad $7500. And I says—well I start—when they came up with the settlement, would he accept $7500 and not return to Wilson Foundry in case if they should ever open up again. Well, my Dad was already in his seventies, and he says, "No way." He says, "I can't go back." And I said, "We'll accept." And whoever was on the panel decided, "No, we're not asking *you*. We want you to translate it to him and tell him that he won't be able to ever come back to Wilson Foundry if it should ever start up." Said, "Tell him that." And I told him in Armenian. So my Dad says, "Daisy, I want you to understand one thing. I worked there for thirty-seven years. I was never able to put three thousand dollars to one side and now they're doubling it and giving me extra. $7500! I sure will settle because I didn't have that kind of money at all."

DC: Now was this settlement for long-term disability or was it for that fingertip?

DJ: No, they just paid like maybe five hundred dollars for the fingertip but they said over the long term of whatever—lungs or whatever they had found, I don't know what the—but they had agreed to pay him $7500 for settlement.

DC: When did the settlement finally be reached? Or when did it finally come about?

DJ: Uh, I would say close to 1960.

DC: OK. So it took a little while for it all to work through.

DJ: Mm hmm. Took a couple of years. But he was tickled to death.

DC: Yeah, that's amazing, really.

DJ: And yet I don't believe there was ever a day that my Dad missed work.

DC: Did he remain a core setter throughout that time period?

DJ: Mm hmm.

DC: Was he a member of the local union then?

DJ: Oh yes.

DC: Did he talk much about the union at Wilson Foundry?

DJ: Well, every once in awhile if there was difficulties, I guess, that they would just sit down and work it out. But I don't think he ever filed a grievance-type thing or anything like that. He did whatever, you know, he was told and . . .

DC: And then did—it sounds like the President of the local union was the one who pushed for him to get linked with the attorney. Do you know if the local did similar work for any other employees at any point in time?

DJ: Yes. Yes, they did. Mm hmm. Because when my Dad got his money and deposited it in the bank, the check, he was so happy and he told his friend that he played cards with. And his friend worked at the foundry, too. And so he says, "Well, who do I see?" So he said, "Go see Otis Lawrence . . ."

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DJ: . . . not till 12:30 and it's just down the street at the senior center. They're going to come and take the seniors' glamour shots. I don't know what glamour shots are but I just said—every so often I'll have a picture a made.

DC: Why not? That sounds good. It seems like you're up for a lot of different trips and activities and all that.

DJ: Oh I do. Well, I guess because I worked from 9:00 to 5:00 for forty years for the UAW, that I just feel like I can do the housework under—evenings, you know. You learn to space your work out and enjoy it. So I go from—I leave the house by 9:30 sometimes and I don't get back till about 3:30. And then I'm home, and do what I want.

DC: That's great. You deserve that.

DJ: And I kind of think that this is one reason why I'm living longer than the rest of my family, is because I keep myself occupied with things and volunteer a lot of work there at the center.

DC: OK. The senior center?

DJ: Mm hmm.

DC: Yeah. Since we have a little over a half hour here . . .

DJ: That's OK. We got more than a half hour.

DC: Yeah, I guess we do, don't we?

DJ: I can go until twenty after twelve, as long as you . . .

DC: I think I can make it. I might have to get another refill here, but I'm OK for now. Let's see. There are a couple things that . . .

DJ: Yes, Otis Lawrence was very helpful to helping other foundry workers get a little compensation for their . . .

DC: That sounds like a huge development. I want to jump back and talk a bit more about your work at the union hall, and then how you met your husband and all. You mentioned that it was an issue in your family that he wasn't Armenian. You said he was from Illinois, is that right?

DJ: Mm hmm.

DC: OK. Well, let's see. Well tell me—you would've gotten sick and have been in your coma when you were working in the union hall. Was that job still there waiting for you when you got out?

DJ: Mm hmm. Yes, it was.

DC: What was it like to return to work after having been so sick?

DJ: Very good. Everybody was—well, they came to the hospital regularly, apparently, and they were very good to me. They brought me gifts and flowers, you know. I couldn't ask for a nicer group to work with. And that's why I hung in for forty years with them. And the only reason why I left—towards the end, we did have some conflict.

DC: What was the conflict about at the end?

DJ: I was a bookkeeper and I had made my payroll taxes out. And I gave the check to the Financial Secretary to have it deposited at the bank. And I said, "It has to be deposited *today*." And apparently he misplaced it. And about a month later, a penalty check was due to the government for three thousand dollars. So I wrote the check for the penalty and I put on the stub: "Penalty for late payment." And the President, when he was signing the check, he says, "Why is this late?" And I says, "Oh, I don't want us to talk about it." And he says, "I want to get down to brass tacks. I want to find out why." I says, "I gave it to the Financial Secretary." So he went and approached the Financial Secretary and they had words. They were political opponents looking for—picking things. And so the Financial Secretary offered the information that he'd gotten it from another bookkeeper's car. So he went to her. I'm Bookkeeper A; she's Bookkeeper B. And so he went to her and asked, and she says, "Well, he had it and somehow he left it in my car." She knew about it. So he fired her. So the President fired Bookkeeper B. The Financial Secretary came to

Bookkeeper A, to me. Suspended me. Why did I even let him know that it was a penalty? So I was suspended. And Bookkeeper B filed a grievance, won her case, and got back. So then I filed a grievance for being suspended for one week and I won the case—because I had nothing to do with it. I had done my job, and so I was given—returned to my job. But when I returned, the Financial Secretary said, "You're not going to do the books, though. You're going to go upstairs in the attic and clean the attic." So in the meantime there had been a change. The Financial Secretary had become President. And he is the only one who has the right to hire and fire. So he was now President and we had a new Financial Secretary. And the new—when the day—the President says, "You're not going to do books, you're going upstairs to the attic." And I knew, don't ever buck the President or the big wheel. I says, "OK, I'll go up there. But I want to know one thing before I go up. What are you paying me?" And he says, "Oh, I'll have to pay you your bookkeeper's wages. You're still going to be classified Bookkeeper A. But you're going to be cleaning from now on." So I went up to the attic. And when I went up, I said, "Do you mind if I have a cup of coffee before I go up?" So I got the cup of coffee and the new Financial Secretary came to me. He says, "Here's today's newspaper. Go up there and just sit. Don't do anything." And he was on the same side politically with the President. So I thanked him and I said, "But I'll put some of the old umpire decisions and put them in alphabetical order, numerical order, whatever." I says, "I'll do some cleaning, but I am not going to be carrying those big boxes and stuff that the janitor has brought up, you know, to get out of the way." So anyway, I went up there and I think I was up there about two weeks. And all I did was read the paper. I did needlepoint. I was paid my wages. And committeemen, rank-and-file members, they all came up to see me and visited. It was really nothing. No work at all.

DC: A joke, yeah.

DJ: Uh huh, really. And then something come up that no one else could do. So the President came and said, "Daisy, I need you downstairs." So I went downstairs and I was down there for about six months. Back to my job again. And thank God that I was going to church, at Congregational Church, and the minister talked to me. He said, "Daisy, close the drawer on that part of life. Just go about like nothing ever happened." So I went back and I worked six months. Got along fine with the President, the new Financial Secretary, everybody. And finally they hired a new girl and the President again was taken up with this girl, too. See some—I hate to say this, but you know, have a little fancy, try a little something new. So anyway, this new innocent girl, she comes in and became friendly with him. And she was going to run the computer on the W-2s. And I says, "Don't run on the actual W-2 that we get from the government. Run a blank copy and let me check to make sure that we've got everybody's earnings proper." Well, she had—a committeeman that only had maybe about less than two hours union time, like maybe no more than twenty-four, thirty dollars. And it come out like four thousand eight hundred dollars. And I says, "He's not even an active member! And yet you've got . . . ." I says, "Cindy, why did you put this on the actual thing? I told you to put it on the blank one!" Well she went running to the President, and the President told me, "Don't be so hard on the other employees." I said, "Now I've got to turn around and ask the government for more copies. And they want them one right after the other." I said, "Now we'll have to do it all over again on the

new ones and it's going to just make it a little bit later in our members getting their copies out"—you know, mailing them out by the end of January. And he said, "Don't be so hard. Just let it go, let it go. Don't worry about that." And I went home and I was talking to my brother—my brother was living with me—and he says, "Don't come home with crying the blues about your job. I don't want to hear none of that." He said, "You've got forty years in there. The union pushes thirty and out. Get the hell out of there. But if you go back and work, I'll tell you one thing: I don't want to hear you tell any problems that you have." And I thought it over and I—yeah, that's right. Thirty and out. They're pushing that. And I got forty and things are changing. I think I will go ahead. So I called the Financial Secretary, which I liked very much, and I told him, I says, "You know, last year on my vacation you had me come back one week earlier than what—and you called me down to New Orleans and told me you needed me. I came back. I had to pay extra because I had one of those special flight things for so long and had already confirmed for the flight. I had to pay twenty dollars extra because I changed the date of departure. I says, "I came back early. I didn't say nothing." And I said, "So I didn't use one week of last year's up. I'm already four weeks due, past due for this year." I said, "Do you mind if I take two weeks vacation so I can get over this here?" He says, "Certainly, Daisy. I understand." So I said, "Let me have it in writing." So I wrote it out, "I'm taking two weeks vacation." He granted and signed it. And it was to be effective the next day. So I just took the vacation, took the time off. And then the day I was supposed to come back, I said, "Now I'm using my regular vacation." So that occupied the whole month of January of '85. I wasn't there to do the heavy load. I took the vacation and I says, "And I am now resigning and retired—taking my pension as of the first day of February." So I bowed out. And then I think it was—they was having a party and one of the seniors retired that I worked with in the plant was going to go, but she didn't want to go to this party alone. She wanted me to go. And there at the door at the party was the President. When I walked in, he said, "Daisy, what are you doing here?" I says, "I was invited as a guest of Lila [Stangas?]. So I decided I'd come. She wanted somebody to go with her." And I said, "Donny, I got to tell you one thing. You have done a big favor to me." I said, "You made life miserable the last few months there at the union hall." I says, "I have enjoyed this nine to five, the daylight, the sunlight, and I am enjoying every minute of it. Thank you very much." I hugged him and give him a big kiss and told him, I said, "I really appreciate this here now, my pension." And I have—my life is very good.

DC: It sounds like until then, you had really enjoyed the people you worked with.

DJ: Oh, I did. And I still do. You know, it was just one incident and now—I maybe shouldn't even have this on writing, but Cindy had filed a grievance. Sexual harassment. And she was awarded the money and the funds of the local union are down like this. So whatever she got, no one has discussed. No one has said. I don't know. But it had really depleted—I left with—when there was over $282,000 to the good. Last week I found out there's only $60,000.

DC: Was that a recent suit?

DJ: A what?

DC: Was that a recent lawsuit or was that a long time ago?

DJ: About a year, two years. And some of the seniors are now asking me and I says— and when they brought it up on the membership floor and they made me an honorary member of the local. I'm liked. I like them too. And I've devoted my life, really, working for the UAW. I like it very much. And they were very good to me. And now they've—asking me about the finances and the Financial Secretary couldn't answer. So I said, "If you don't mind, I'll get up and state a few things." Where—how the money comes in and how it goes out, how it's allocated out to different funds. And I says, "Retirees still have their funds—but maybe they don't have it today, but the amount is there." So the Financial Secretary even thanked me, too, for helping them out.

DC: Well, I'll jump way back here. What was your husband doing when you met him?

DJ: My husband was working in the plant. And my girlfriend and I were in a fashion show. Arthur's Downtown Pontiac Women's Apparel had a fashion show. She was the bride and I was a bridesmaid in the fashion show. She invited her boyfriend to come to the fashion show to see her as a bride. She was going with him for eight years. Very pretty girl, too. And so he didn't want to go to the fashion show alone, so he took a guy that he worked with to come. And that's where I met them. After the fashion show, he wanted to know if I'd like to have a cup of coffee. And I did. I went out with the four of us and enjoyed chitchatting. And then I think it was a week later there was something else come up and another girlfriend of mine turned around and said that, "Oh, I like that Bob Johnson real well." I said, "Where'd you meet him?" And she says, "Oh, running around with Pauline and Pauline's friend, John [Christophe?], had his friend with him." So then Bob calls me up and asks me to go out. And I said no. He said, "Why? Why don't you want to go out?" I said, "Hey, if you're going with Betty [Poulist?], you just go with Betty Poulist. Leave me alone, I'm going to go with somebody else." [laughs] Conceited? I don't know what it was. But anyway, I said no, I wouldn't go. Then by my being hardnosed about it, maybe that attracted him more or what. I don't know. But anyway, we went to the Globetrotters at the Olympia in Detroit—basketball game. And that's—on our way coming back home, he proposed. And I says, "Wait. I have to ask my Mother and Dad first if I can be engaged."

DC: How long had you been going out at that point?

DJ: About—let's see, from March until July.

DC: Oh, short time. OK.

DJ: Mm hmm. And then we married in November. And we were married for twenty-one years and he passed away. I've been a widow for thirty years.

DC: I'm sorry. Oh my. What was your parents' initial reaction when you told them about his proposal?

DJ: They knew that I was hard against—they had brought two Armenian boys and wanted me to go with them. And I just couldn't see it. I knew my life would be different. I would have to be more submissive or, you know, have to go along with whatever he says. And I thought, "With an American I can stand for my rights, too." I felt.

DC: You felt able to make that distinction and to tell them that? Or did you just think it?

DJ: Mm hmm. No.

DC: You told them that?

DJ: Mm hmm. I said, "If he wants me to do the floors today I can say, 'I'm not doing them today, I'm going to do them tomorrow.'" [laughs] You know, I don't know what it was with—maybe by working for the union, you learn to express yourself more.

DC: So you feel like you have some rights.

DJ: Right.

DC: OK. That's interesting. What was your husband's job at the plant?

DJ: He worked on the truck line. And he didn't have too many years. He had 9.9 years. If he'd had one more month, I would've been pensioned. But then I have all my benefits from my union job. In fact, they are better than the guys in the plant.

DC: Really?

DJ: Mm hmm. My prescription is only two dollars per prescription. The guy in the plant is five dollars. There's—I have—and then the President that I had such hard feelings for at one time, he wanted the best insurance program and he applied for Blue Cross Blue Shield, but they wouldn't allow him to have the executive capacity Blue Cross because there wasn't enough enrolled in it and they said you had to have at least five. So he enrolled the office girls, who did not have insurance. Now four of the office girls' husbands worked in the plants and they had it through the plant. And since mine was deceased and I was on my own and there was no insurance program, they included me and the janitor, the financial secretary, the vice president, and the president. So there was five. So I have executive Blue Cross Blue Shield. So he done me—that's what I tell him, I said, "Well, you done me a lot of favors." I said, "I'm tickled to death!"

DC: That's really something. You say your husband had 9.9 years in the plant. Which 9.9 years were those?

DJ: He started there in '51. I think in January '51.

DC: Shortly before he met you, then.

DJ: Uh huh, because I met him in March. And two days after my birthday, I said, "Boy, he . . ." After we married, I told him, I said, "You lucked out: you didn't have to buy me a birthday present that first year." [laughs]

DC: So did he work 9.9 years from there then?

DJ: Uh huh.

DC: And you said he was laid off in the late '50s.

DJ: Intermittent, yeah. '58, '59.

DC: Were there other times when he was laid off, as well?

DJ: Oh, yes. Yeah.

DC: Do any stand out in mind?

DJ: I don't even know whether they're model changeovers and stuff like that, you know . . .

DC: Oh, the standard layoff every year.

DJ: Uh huh.

DC: Yeah. It sounds like the one in '57 and '58 was longer, though.

DJ: Yes. I think it was a bigger gap. There was quite a bit of layoffs then. And they didn't hire very many those years.

DC: Right. What did he do during those layoffs?

DJ: Assembly. Truck assembly.

DC: I mean, when he was laid off.

DJ: Oh, when he was laid off? Worked as a bartender at 707, which was a bar a block down the street from us.

DC: How about all those model changeovers? Did he do anything during those times?

DJ: He always went back to the bar.

DC: OK. The bar was there for him to go work.

DJ: Mm hmm. Because it was a husband and wife deal, and they liked a little gap—she liked

to stay home for a little while occasionally, too.

DC: Yeah. Did your husband like the assembly job at Truck and Coach?

DJ: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah, because he came from Harrisburg, Illinois [southern Illinois, east of Carbondale], and his Father was a baker. But there was only coal mine work down there. And he didn't want to go in the mines. And so that's why he came up here, because his aunt lived here. And he came up here to Pontiac and worked in the plant and then got acquainted with John Christophe and was a friend.

DC: Had he come up before he got that job in '51?

DJ: No.

DC: That was his first time up, OK. Did you ever go down to Harrisburg?

DJ: Oh yes, I have my citizenship. I made many a trip. The first year that we married, I had been there three times. And so one of the neighbors said, "Oh, you're a citizen of Harrisburg now because you come down regularly." And it was a more quiet, rural area. But he had worked as a projectionist at a movie theater, and I guess somebody by the name of O. L. Turner owned the movie theater there in Harrisburg and the family owned some of the coal mines. It was just a family oriented town, you know. And if you were in, you were in. If you were out, there was nothing.

DC: Had his family been involved in the coal mines?

DJ: His grandparents were.

DC: Grandparents, OK. What about his parents?

DJ: No, his Father was the baker at . . .

DC: Oh, the baker, you told me that. I'm sorry, yeah.

DJ: Thank You Bakery.

DC: OK. So his family was already easing out of the coal mines.

DJ: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. But Mrs. Johnson—her family, they even had coal mine rights and stuff from the—her side of the family. They were Irish and I don't know. Hensley's [sp?] were their name. But anyway, they had—I remember that after my husband passed away, many years later, and when she had passed, they had sent me papers to sign off the coal rights or mineral rights and stuff. I don't know—that they were selling the land or something.

DC: Yeah.

DJ: Mm hmm.

DC: Yeah, that's a complicated thing. I had grandparents in southern Illinois, as well, and they had those kinds of . . .

DJ: Oh, did you? Oh, whereabouts were they from?

DC: Fairfield, and Effingham

DJ: Fairfield, just a little north. Uh huh.

DC: Yeah. So I've been in that part of the country a bit. They were farmers, although they actually leased the land. But yeah, I've been there a bunch.

DJ: Yeah. I never seen a penny of it. I don't know. I think the rest of them got some of it, but . . .

DC: I think the mineral rights and their farm were worth about ten dollars or something. [laughs]

DJ: Whatever.

DC: Yeah, they didn't find much.

DJ: Well there was coal. It was being mined—what do they call them? Strip mines, too?

DC: Yeah, that affects the land in a big way. So did your husband have any desire to go back down to Harrisburg?

DJ: No.

DC: He wanted to stay in Pontiac. OK.

DJ: Mm hmm. We went and visited his folks regularly while they were living. And his Mother was still living when he passed away. And then I think it was about five or six years later after his death, she passed. And there was nobody other than my sister-in-law living there. And she passed away last September. So there's no reason to be going.

DC: Right. Let's see. Where did you live when you got married?

DJ: On Elizabeth Lake Road, over in Pontiac. And then we lived there for four years. And then we moved into the house that I'm still living in [on Linda Vista, in Pontiac]. We bought the house in 1956.

DC: Why did you make that move to the current house?

DJ: Well, the other was rent.

DC: Oh, it was rented. OK.

DJ: And we was ready for a brick house, hardwood floors, and a basement, so that's what we looked for. I really wanted a fireplace, too, but this subdivision was just built and it was right in town and close by everything. And I'm still satisfied with it there, even though it's all-black. It's been all black for twenty years and I love my neighbors. They are all good to me. And neighbors even say, "Every kid in the neighborhood wants to come to your house." And they come and sit, ten and twelve every night. They even bring their soup bowls—they're having soup or they're having dessert or something. They leave their house to come to my house. I tell them stories and I tell them about different things, and I try to teach them more about getting along and not swearing—stuff that they pick up from their homes. I try to make a better life for them a little bit, maybe down the line.

DC: What was the neighborhood like when you moved in?

DJ: It was all-white neighborhood.

DC: It was all-white, OK.

DJ: Mm hmm. All young. We were all young.

DC: Did it resemble at all the little Armenian group that you had come from?

DJ: No, no. No. There's not any Armenian—although I had one of my bridesmaids about three blocks away, when she married. She was the youngest one of the bridesmaids and I really didn't want her as a bridesmaid but my Dad insisted. So she was sixteen and I was twenty-five, and there's an age gap there, you know, and I—"Oh no! I don't want her to be in my wedding party!" My Dad said, "Her folks in the old country were good to me. I want her to be in that wedding party!"

DC: A little bit of family obligation there. I'm just thinking about what you mentioned about the transition in your neighborhood. When you were working in the plant, were there blacks and whites working?

DJ: I wasn't in when we were in this neighborhood. Oh, in my old neighborhood! Oh yes. Oh yes. Oh yes. Hayes Jones family lived . . .

DC: And how about when you were working, like on the DUKW line and riveting and stuff; were there blacks and whites working together inside Truck and Coach?

DJ: I don't think that there was any—not until I went to motor assembly line. When I started out, DUKW line there wasn't any, and there wasn't any on the coach riveting. I think in motor assembly and stock departments I started seeing a few.

DC: How about the box line?

DJ: Yes, there was—there was a few. Mm hmm.

DC: But predominantly white it seems.

DJ: Uh huh. And I got more acquainted with more of the factory worker when I went to the union hall. And as they came in, I got to know many, many black workers.

DC: So what was it like when your neighborhood went through the transition from being all-white to almost all-black?

DJ: Boy, the whites scampered unbelievable. Almost overnight. I would say within two, three months. When one went, it went like hot cakes.

DC: And what did they say?

DJ: My brother-in-law lived two blocks up the street from me and he says, "I'm getting out." Well, it was the riots. And what was that, '58?

DC: In Detroit, you mean?

DJ: And they was acting up a little bit in Pontiac. Not much.

DC: In '67 or so?

DJ: '57?

DC: '67 was the big Detroit riot.

DJ: Yeah. It was about then. And it just—l*shew*!

DC: And why did you stay?

DJ: Why did I stay? I like that fifty-eight dollars a month house payment, insurance and taxes included. And it was a house that was just fine for me. And it still is good to me, because it's three bedrooms. I have two spare bedrooms, I have a nice living room, I got my back patio, I have a nice yard, I have nice neighbors. I can't ask for anything better. I have no fear, never have. They're all good to me. And I'm good to them.

DC: It sounds like your neighbors did respond from fear—your previous neighbors.

DJ: They did. I think it was. But my brother-in-law said he didn't want his kids going to school with [whispers] black kids. They went to Clarkston. So be it. And maybe it's because I didn't have any. I don't know.

DC: You didn't have children.

DJ: No, I didn't have any children.

DC: Well tell me more about the specifics of your job at the union hall. What did you like about it? What didn't you like about it?

DJ: It was a variety of jobs. I started out dues clerk. When I first went there I sat on a high stool at the counter. It was real up high, and we just wrote receipt after receipt after receipt. People coming and pay the—and then the check-off came later.

DC: Oh later. OK. Gotcha.

DJ: Uh huh. Check-off came in, I think, March of '46. And I kind of set up the system of—first they was going to go alphabetical. And I said, "No, because we have too many Al Browns, too many Joe Smiths." I said, "Social security won't change. Let's set the files up social security-wise." And we did and the checkoff came in that way. And so Laura Bird and I, she—there was only two. Well, there was a bookkeeper, Pat [Coin?], Nellie was the secretary of the President, and two dues clerks. That's four of us at the time when I went to work at the union hall. And Laura and I, we could post the check-off, and back then there was at least twelve to fourteen thousand people at Truck and Coach. And we could post that within two or three days. But we were both *fast*, and we had a little stamp that had check-off. And each month of the record card, it was posted. So then . . .

DC: What was the compliance with the paying of dues before the check-off? Did most people pay their dues?

DJ: Oh, yes. There was—we had a section in our files that was one month behind, and then delinquent, and then had to pay your readmission fees. And every once in awhile if there was something come up, there was assessments. I don't think we have that anymore. It's just one monthly dues.

DC: No special assessments in addition. What were the assessments for?

DJ: I think they would have certain programs, like they'd—if Chrysler had been out, GM people would have to pay a dollar more assessment.

DC: Oh, OK, to help out the people on strike.

DJ: Uh huh. That's the way I remember that it was just to help out other UAW plants that were down. But now they have that certain percentage of when they are out on strike, they're given a check.

DC: Were there any other parts of the job that you found particularly challenging or interesting?

DJ: I enjoyed—when I first started out was the dues receipt, which I liked, and that improved my penmanship. [laughs] And then I think—went on to be Secretary to the President. And I think there was Pat Daily and Norm Mallory, Jack Hodges, Andy Wilson—I can name quite a few. And I liked that job because I was understanding the problems of the guy in the plant because I was doing the umpire decisions in cases. And I knew what was going on and then what the shop committee would—whether to accept and advance the case or to drop it or whatever.

DC: So you were handling those cases?

DJ: Uh huh. I liked that, a little bit, because I got to know more about the works of the union. And then the bookkeeper was in the family way and she—it was the highest pay, and I says, "Well I'm going to advance myself. I'm going up there." And the Financial Secretary at that time wasn't too sure of me. And he says, "I have to trust you with all the funds of the local." And I says, "Well, I'll handle it." And he said, "No, you don't understand what I mean." And I think that he was indicating that maybe he didn't think I was trustworthy. I don't know, but that's what—I got that impression when he questioned. And then I learned the job and I despised math, but yet I did time sheets, payroll. And I learned to—that was a challenge to me. But of course I had the adding machine, too. That helped. And I could multiply and divide on it, which was very good, too. And I liked that. And I did that for the biggest part—I would say at least thirty-five years of my years at the union hall.

DC: Did you ever wish you had gone back in the riveting and the production end?

DJ: The only time I would like that is when I found out that my sister-in-law only put ten years in the plant and her pension check was better than mine with forty years. And we didn't have an adjustment in our pensions until this past winter.

DC: For the whole time you've been . . .

DJ: For my forty years, I was only getting $520 dollars—in which I put a hundred and fifty in withholding taxes. So I was going home less than four hundred. And I learned to manage on that and still made out until I got to be where my Social Security kicked in. So I'm doing fine.

DC: OK. Yeah. But if you had been in the plant you would've been doing better financially.

DJ: Oh, much, much better. With forty years! I hope to tell you I would. But my pay was good. When I left February 1 of '85, I think my weekly paycheck for thirty-five hours was like $520, more than what my pension is. And that was from a week—weekly income. And so my social security kicked in and it's good. My wages was very good. Thirty-five hour work week.

DC: Why did your husband stop at 9.9 years?

DJ: Died.

DC: Oh, is that when he died? I'm so sorry. I thought that he died much later than that.

DJ: No, no, no.

DC: OK. So how long were you married?

DJ: Twenty-one years. He was forty-four when he passed away.

DC: Something's not adding up for me here. Maybe you can explain—I'm sorry for being a doofus here.

DJ: It's OK. Fine.

DC: You were married in '51? Is that right?

DJ: Yes.

DC: OK. And he just started work in '51.

DJ: Yes.

DC: So there must've been a long break in his work time at some point, because . . .

DJ: Oh yeah. He was laid off for two years at one time. And I think—yes, he did. I just remembered that he—for a short period, maybe a couple years, he worked as a janitor at West Bloomfield schools, High School. That's what he did.

DC: OK. Because he would've died in, what, '72 or something like that?

DJ: He died in January of '72.

DC: '72, OK. And so if he started working in '51 and he only had just less than ten years in, there are ten or eleven years that . . .

DJ: Yeah. The gap.

DC: So he did some work as a janitor.

DJ: Uh huh.

DC: Can you remember other things that he might've done?

DJ: Just the bartender, janitor, and—oh, wait, he worked—wait a minute now—at Joda Tool and Die.

DC: Jona?

DJ: Joda: J-O-D-A. It was a little job shop and it was right on Huron Street, right behind the union hall. We was on Mount Clemens Street, and [Huron St. was] the street right behind. Because he could go right out of the union hall parking lot and down—and that was hit and miss job. You're working one week and you're off a week, according to the way the guy had work for them to do.

DC: And what kind of work did he do there?

DJ: Maybe I'm not correct in saying this—is there such a thing as I.D. or O.D. grinder? [internal diameter and outside diameter grinding—the insides and outsides of parts]

DC: Well, there are lots of grinder jobs, so I can ask around and see if anyone knows I.D. or O.D. I'm not the best with all that.

DJ: It was like—a skilled-trade-type job, maybe, that—it was pretty good. And he worked there for awhile and then they moved out towards Lake Orion. Off on Indian Wood Road or somewheres.

DC: Was that a union job, the Joda?

DJ: No. No.

DC: So it's right in the, right next to the union hall . . .

DJ: Little job shop, little building on the corner there. It wasn't.

DC: OK. When was the last time he worked in Pontiac Truck and Coach?

DJ: Uh [pause], he was working there when he died.

DC: OK, so he actually did go back.

DJ: Yes. And he was off on sick leave for about a year.

DC: All right. So it sounds like he must've done these other things for a good long time, then got back in . . .

DJ: Uh hmm. Uh hmm.

DC: . . . at Truck and Coach, but then got sick. OK. I'm sorry to keep pressing it, I was just wondering what happened to the missing decade.

DJ: No, that's all right. No, that was about it.

DC: Judging by my watch, you probably better get moving.

DJ: Oh, OK.

DC: This tape's about to run out as well. But I really appreciate you spending time with me.

DJ: I hope it was helpful.

DC: Very helpful. In fact, I might want to talk to you again this time but it's going to take awhile to get this all transcribed . . .

End of Interview

Daisy Johnson died three months later, on October 27, 2002.