

Eileen Nortman

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IA: This is January 28th, we will be interviewing Eileen Nortman, E i l e e n N o r t m a n. We are in Lisa Fine's office at MSU, interview will be at 4:00.

IA: Um, we usually start the interviews just by asking some background information about the people and where they came from and that kind of thing.

IB: Actually, we have a lot of that already, because we've already interviewed Doris. But um, we can get it again I suppose. Um, were you born in the Lansing area?

Nortman: Williamston.

IB: In Williamston. And did you go to school in Williamston as well?

Nortman: Yes.

IB: High school.

Nortman: Grade school, high school, yes, all one school.

IB: Oh. Okay. Um, and your parents were they from the Michigan area?

Nortman: Yes.

IB: And they were born in the United States.

Nortman: In Michigan.

IB: Okay. And the same with your grandparents? I think one of your relatives is from Germany, right?

Nortman: Yeah. My grandfather on my dad's side.

IB: Okay, great. Um, what we are mostly interested obviously is your experiences at the Reo all about, so why don't you start by telling us um, when you first started working at the Reo.

Nortman: Gees that must have been the whole sum of 17 years old.

IB: Okay. Was it right out of high school when you went there or you were still

Nortman: Well I was 16 I turned 17 in October and then I started working.

IA: Hum, and you were still in school when you were working?

Nortman: No, I graduated when I was 16.

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IB: Oh you graduated.

Nortman: Then ah, all you had to do was fill out an application and go down and take a physical and when you were in the shop.

IA: Where did you take your physical at

Nortman: No they had a doctor right there.

IA: Right there at the factory.

Nortman: Right there at the factory. It was on Baker Street.

IA: Oh the first

Nortman: First aid.

IB: Now they needed to go and they were quick about hiring, you said ... hiring people because of the war.

Nortman: Right.

IB: With World War II. And we would be able to figure out your age this way but what year was that that you started?

Nortman: Gees I graduated in 1940, '42.

IB: So '43? 1943?

Nortman: That's a long time.

IB: Yeah it is.

IA: It doesn't seem like

IB: And why did you, did you pick the Reo or did it matter that it was the Reo?

Nortman: Oh I was working at a dime store and I was only getting 20 cents an hour.

IB: A dime store in Williamston?

Nortman: In Williamston.

IB: Ah huh. Behind the counter?

Nortman: Well it was everything. I was stocking shelves and (loud banging) just a little bit of everything. And everybody said you should go to a shop, you get a dollar more. (can't hear)

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IB: And it didn't seem um, like you were stepping down to work in a factory from working in a store?

Nortman: Not really.

IB: It didn't bother you.

Nortman: No.

IB:

Nortman: ... going to be permanent.

IB: Okay. That made a difference or just for the war.

Nortman: (can't hear)

IB: Ah huh. Did you do it for patriotic reasons too besides just money?

Nortman: Well I had 1, 2, 3, I had three or four brothers.....

IA: So in a way this was a chance for you to help the war effort a little bit.

Nortman: A little bit. I was doing grinder... trucks

IA: You were doing what kind of

Nortman: Line. Yeah, big old Reo trucks had where they shift the gears, they had splined to get your gears in and that's what I did.

IA: Hum, s p l i n e?

Nortman: Spline, spline.

IA: Okay.

IB: Now you said you were making 20 cents

Nortman: An hour.

IB: an hour at the dimestore, and you were making \$1.20 at Reo an hour. That's not bad for anybody.

IA: Did you work, they had what two shifts going then.....

Nortman: Ah, I started at 7:00 in the morning, we was out of there probably about 4:00 in the afternoon.

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IA: You didn't have to work the swing shift?

Nortman: No. I don't think many women do that, you know.

IB: Working at night, because it is dangerous, or they thought it might be dangerous?

Nortman: Well, you know, people didn't have cars, you walked.

IA: You walked from

Nortman: No we pooled it.

IA: Oh car pool.

Nortman: See they had gas rationing on.

IA: Oh that's right, you got four gallons a week or something.

Nortman: So you got these little tickets and that's all the gas you got, so you pooled your ... with somebody else or you borrowed your brother's car or something. I didn't have a car.

IB: But you pooled with other people who were coming into town?

Nortman: Right.

IB: Um, did you have to get trained?

Nortman: Ah, I had an older man train me and it didn't take probably maybe an hour.

IB: And the person who had done the job before you was a man? A man usually had done it before.

Nortman: It was sort of heavy.

IB: Heavy work.

IA: Was it?

Nortman: Those lines were heavy.

IA: It must have been kind of tough to get used to

Nortman: Well I

IA: Did you have to wear any protective gear?

Nortman: Ah we had um, goggles and sort of a net.

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IA: That was the net on the back part to keep your hair up.

Nortman: My hair was

IB: So you didn't think it was hard work. I mean it was hard physical labor, but it wasn't hard to learn it or anything like that?

Nortman: No, it wasn't anybody could learn it.

IB: Anybody could do it.

Nortman: And as far as the physical, they wanted to make sure that you were able to do the work. And you stood on your feet all the time.

IB: Ah huh, all day.

Nortman: You didn't get any break except to go to the bathroom.

IA: So they had bathrooms for women?

Nortman: Oh you sort of watched the men go in and wait until they got out.

IA: Oh, because it had been a men's department so there wasn't any bathrooms for women.

Nortman: We used to go with two girls you see.

IB: You were going to go in together. Yeah.

Nortman: Yeah.

IA: Well that's interesting.

IB: Did it have showers for you?

Nortman: No.

IB: They didn't have showers either. So you came home pretty grimy.

Nortman: Yeah, you were dirty.

IB: Yeah.

IA: That is silly, that shops, you know that

Nortman: It was like an oily smell. You had to wear shoes that had ah, steel things on it, so if you dropped anything you won't hurt yourself.

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IA: Oh steel toes. Did you ah, where did you get steel-toed shoes?
Did a lot of the shoe stores sell them or

Nortman: No, the shop sold them, but you had to buy them.

IA: You had to buy them. Were they very expensive?

Nortman: I don't remember.

IA: I wonder what they did about, there were coupons for shoes too
during the war, I wonder did you have to give one of your coupons
when you bought those shoes to work in?

Nortman: Ah, I can't remember. Anyway, if you was working there, they
recommended ... shoes.

IA: Yeah. How long did you work, was this the only job you had when
you were at Reo for the war?

IB: Yeah. But it is slime grinding.

Nortman: It is just like when you shift your car, well if you look at big
old Reo truck you can see those ... when you shift.

IB: Okay.

Nortman: I mean if you ever seen a big old truck and you had to
make sure they were just precise

IA:

Nortman: (can't hear) just so

IA: And you were grinding off rough edges or something so the gear, it
would open the gears.

Nortman: Right, it was really delicate work.

IA: And you had to hold it up when you did this or

Nortman: No you put it on a machine.

IA: I see.

Nortman: And you had two little things that ah, that held on and then you
just There was a little wheel

IA: Like a little

Nortman: A little

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IA: Oh okay.

Nortman: And you just right back down and you thought it was just right, you get measuring.

IA: How long would it take you to do each one truck say?

Nortman: Ah, you mean as far as the slime, it took us probably 45 minutes for one slime.

IB: To work on one, that's a long time.

Nortman: We were not on piecework.

IA: Hum, hourly rate.

Nortman: But a lot of people there were on piecework.

IB: Ah huh, were there a lot of other women in the same department with you?

Nortman: Ah, I'd say there is probably

IB: Was your sister with you there?

Nortman: Oh she was over in the other, ...

IB: Oh she was in a different place.

IA: So when you hired in they split you up?

Nortman: Yeah, well she was on some kind of a grinder, but ah, I can't remember what kind she was on. She (can't hear)

IB: Right, we are going to call her though. How long did you work there, the rest of the war?

Nortman: No. I got sick and bought me a car and went to California.

IB: Oh and how long did it take you to get sick of it?

Nortman: Ah, I think I was there probably two years.

IB: Two years, oh that's not, that's a long time.

IA: So the war was, was over?

Nortman: It was getting pretty over, right down.

IA: It was in the summer maybe that you left?

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Nortman: Ah, we left in the fall.

IA: Oh ah huh.

Nortman: And then came back and I joined the Navy.

IB: Oh joined the Navy oh. Were you single the whole time you were at Reo?

Nortman: You bet.

IB: Yeah. Um, did you join the union?

Nortman: We had to.

IB: You had to. It was a closed shop.

Nortman: It was a closed shop.

IB: Yeah. So they checked the dues out of your wages?

Nortman: Right.

IA: That's what I was just going to ask you.

Nortman: Yeah, just like you do here.

IA: Just like they do now.

IB: And did they have any problems while you were there?

Nortman: No.

IB: Everything was pretty smooth.

Nortman: Yeah, and people wanted to work and help the cause and I didn't see any problem that you were aware of when I saw a lot of things going on, but I mean

IB: And that's what we want to know about. What kinds of things did you see going on?

Nortman: Oh these men that married play around with these other girls.

IB: Oh.

IA: Oh.

Nortman: You've seen

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IA: Oh sure nothing changes does it?

IB: So having women in the shop was a little disruptive?

Nortman: For some.

IB: For some of them, that's true, we shouldn't generalize.

Nortman: I'd say probably 10 or 15 percent.

IB: Ah huh.

Nortman: You always had, you still got to work.

IB: Was it mutual or were they bothering these girls?

Nortman: Oh I think it was mutual.

IB: Oh they did.

Nortman: I'm sure they did. Because there wasn't very many men around you know.

IA: Yeah, most of the men had gone away to the war.

Nortman: Ah huh. It was interesting. But, you know, after a while it is the same old thing. And I was happy that I wasn't in the shop all that

IB: Oh you mean the kind of workplace that it was.

IA: It is monotonous is that what you are saying.

Nortman: I've had it and my sister and I decided we've had it I said I'm going to California. So I bought an old used car and went to California. (laughter)

IA: You were lucky to find a used car to buy.

Nortman: And well, we had a couple flats going out.

IA: Did you? Tires were hard to come by too.

Nortman: Oh yeah, they were.

IB: And the roads weren't so great back then. You know interstate highway system.

IA: You must have gone out 66. Route 66.

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Nortman: It took us about a week to get out there. But we did
There was another girl went with us.

IB: Oh you kind of shared expenses

Nortman: Yeah, nothing was really expensive. It is just that we couldn't
get stuff.

IA: Yeah, yeah.

IB: Now there was a lot of propaganda around then '44 for people to
not do, just the thing that you were doing.

IA: But don't quit, don't give up now, we need your production more
than ever. But obviously it didn't have an impact that much on
you.

Nortman: Well it did, but you know, it is just like you sit at your desk so
long, you got to get up and move.

IA: Yeah.

Nortman: And and you are on your feet and you are getting, you are not
getting any younger, I'm not going to work there forever. And ah,
I said I'm going to take a short vacation My sister took a
short vacation and got married.

IA: But no pressure was put on you by your supervisors or fellow
workers not to quit?

Nortman: Ah, this older guy thought I should stay because my brother was
overseas and a couple other brothers on the ships.

IB: I was just talking about.

Nortman: But you know kids

IB: Sure you were probably what 19 or

Nortman: Oh just

IB: Nobody as much.

Nortman: You know, really, I was looking for and sure you was
working, had a whole bunch of contracts he said (can't
hear) Once you got home the only thing you could
do was go roller skating.

IA: Roller skating was big then. Do you remember any the women
.... on the job or I've heard that machines were old and

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Nortman: Yeah, they were old.

IA: And, of course, during the war they couldn't replace the machine or

Nortman: Well, um, in right there where I was I never saw, but I heard certain sections they used to cut off fingers on presses. And you got to watch them (can't hear) but I mean you can cut your fingernails real close on those grinding

IA: Oh gosh.

Nortman: But I didn't have any problem.

IA: Do you remember if there were any women that were stewards or committeemen, committeepersons I guess we'd say now? Any women that were really active in the union?

Nortman:

IB: We haven't really heard that, but I thought

IA: We haven't the thought just occurred to me shortly before she came in and Usually you think of the men being in the union you know.

Nortman: But just like here. You got to

.....

Nortman: You teach?

IA: Yeah, I teach here. Um, what about the clubhouse? Was there a lot of stuff going on there?

Nortman: Yeah, it was like a bingo and they had dances.

IA: Ah huh, so that was something other than roller skating.

Nortman: But I didn't ...

IA: You didn't

Nortman: Well once and a while, one you got home why you didn't want to come back in.

IA: Yeah. You didn't have gas either and tires and stuff to

IB: I have to think in those terms, I don't think in those terms like that.

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IA: Well different times.

Nortman: But there were a lot of times if we wanted to do anything, we had a friend who lived not too far from there, we'd go and take a bath or something and change your clothes and go out. That was a long time ago.

IA: Yeah. Did you pick Reo for any particular reason or did you just end up there because they were hiring?

Nortman: You know how we got started why don't you go

IB: Right. Right. But why Reo, I mean there was other factories in town too?

IA: and that's what made you think of Reo or

Nortman: No they were hiring, but they was just

IA: Oh ah huh.

Nortman: You know people say go to the Olds but I don't at the time I wasn't paying any attention to Olds. We

IA: Oh so you thought more in terms of Reo. It was a local.

Nortman: Well Reo was making trucks and Oldsmobile was doing something else but I don't recall.

IA: They were making ammunition, big shells and

IB: For the wars.

IA: Ah huh.

Nortman: Are you from Lansing?

IA: Yes.

IB: Shirley's mother, no I'm not, Shirley's mother worked at Reo.

IA: And so did my dad.

Nortman: Is that right?

IA: Yes, my mother worked out in the receiving department and then after the war the lawn mower department.

Nortman: They did make lawn mowers, didn't they?

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IA: Yup. They were making them actually years before

Nortman: That was Lansing

IA: Um, no, I haven't. In fact, I've seen the Silver Lead their new big warehouse there where the Reo used to be. But it is the strangest feeling even now to go by where the Reo stood and see that. Big vacant lot. You know the clubhouse is gone and everything is gone and

Nortman: They should have held on to that clubhouse.

IA: Yeah.

IB: I wish they had I would have like to have seen it, I never even saw it.

Nortman: Where are you from?

IB: I'm from New York.

Nortman: Are you?

IB: Yeah, and I didn't come here until I started working here in '85, so it was a long time.

Nortman: Oh it surely.

IA: Yeah '81 didn't we, November of '81. Um,

Nortman: I enjoyed working there.

IA: You did? The girls were friendly and

Nortman: Yeah, I worked with an older group. They were most guys

IA: But you worked mostly with older men. And they treated you okay?

Nortman: Oh yeah. I was just one of the kids, you know.

IA: One of the kids.

Nortman: They helped you out. They did. They were....

IA: Well that's good.

IB: We've heard that from some of the men we've interviewed too when we've asked them, you know, like they worked before the war and after the war, how did you feel about it when the women came in. And they said we helped them out, and you know, we thought of them

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as daughters or sisters or so we had to check it out from the women's perspective, (laughter)

IA: There were a lot of older women too that went to work in the shops.

IB: Yeah, but they weren't doing something physical like you were doing, probably sitting and sorting or doing something like that.

Nortman: There was a lot of, there was quite a few women.

IA: Ah huh, so even though it was monotonous you think that it had a, there was a good atmosphere.

Nortman: Oh yeah, I'm sure there was. I am that is just part of history here.

IA: Did you get a pay raise while you were there or did you

Nortman: I'm sure we all did. I can't remember exactly. I think I was earning \$1.35 an hour.

IA: I don't know why this never occurred to me before, but I wonder if they had any kind of bonuses when you went to contracts or any kind of thing that filtered down or did they ever come around to your department and say we made our quota and I want to remember, they used to have flags that they put on top of the buildings when they made their quota or something. The government used to give them a big flag and E for efficiency or something.

Nortman: Yeah, they did.

IA: Did they ever come around to your department, anybody congratulate the workers or

Nortman: Not

IA: Okay, I just. All of a sudden that just flashed into my mind that I remember those green flags flying at the top of, every so often there would be one run up the pole there or over at Olds too.

Nortman: That was an old building. Those buildings were old when I started. Because that building was years.

IA: Where did you park? Did you have to park and walk quite a ways to get to your department?

Nortman: We parked right across the street where there is a Dairy Queen now, Dairy Queen, I don't know if it is still there.

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IA: Yeah, I think so. On Washington?

Nortman: On ... Street now, yeah around Washington.

IA: So, the part of the building you worked in was also facing Washington or down Baker?

Nortman: Down straight in front of Washington.

IA: Oh.

Nortman: ... down.

IB: Downstairs.

Nortman:

IB: Was this your only experience working in a factory? In your work life?

Nortman: Ah huh.

IB: After that you never went back to working in a factory?

Nortman: No.

IB: Even though the money was

Nortman: A lot of women are still in it for the money.

IB: Yeah. But you didn't want to go back.

Nortman: Un huh. No.

IA: I think she was off to adventure. And why not when you are 19 or 20 or whatever.

Nortman: Yeah do what you want to do, you are only around once and I'm doing what I want to do now.

IA: Ah huh.

Nortman: I'm busy but

IA: Are you a hockey fan?

Nortman: Oh yeah.

IA: My husband has a funny saying he went to a fight and a hockey game broke out. Do you have tickets?

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IB: Are you kidding, you'd probably kill for tickets.

Nortman: They had tickets selling yesterday.

IA: They did?

Nortman: Bowling Green

IA: Oh.

IB: Oh so they didn't have enough of their own people.

Nortman: So we (can't hear) I Well they exactly

IB: They are not scalping tickets you are saying.

Nortman: No. (mass talking) No, it is a lot of fun, it is a lot of hard work. But,

IB: Did you do mostly when you went back to work, did you do mostly um, office kind of work?

Nortman: Not really, I worked at Mahogany Farms.

IB: Oh.

IA: What is that?

Nortman: It is a beef cattle farm that is out here in Williamston, Omega Chemical They had all these white fences, it was between 52.

IA: Oh I know what you are talking about, yeah.

Nortman: Those white fences.

IA: Ah huh.

Nortman: I worked out there. I kept their records and took care of the guys. No I didn't. (laughter)

IB: Well did you so it was kind of like an office.

.....

Nortman: But we was outdoors, I mean I didn't go out and check.

IA: Oh oh.

Nortman: With these guys are breeding cattle, I'd check It was records but you had to keep em. Yeah.

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IA: What did you do in the Navy, any

Nortman: Well I went to school in the Navy. I started at Great Lakes and went to Charleston, South Carolina and I started going to school. That's right you know.....

IA: So you got your skills from the Navy? Because you didn't want to grind ah, the rest of your life.

Nortman: Oh those ... grinders I think the probably still got some around though.

IA: Oh.

Nortman: Because you know, those big trucks you could see it.....

IA: You know there are still those old Reo trucks on the road.

Nortman: I seem them. The Army has a few of them.

IA: Yeah they do. And they are still building Reo trucks in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Nortman: Oh are they?

IA: The Reo Giants they call are called, they only build one model and they are almost hand built practically. Jack Donovan .. factory um, because we've interviewed several people who have said that when the Reo finally went broke, there were people and they were just crying for those trucks. They wanted those trucks, the phone would ring right off the secretary's desks, can we get one, can we get a part, can we can we get anything, you know, we want whatever we can get.

Nortman: My sister, Doris, worked there just about up until the time when they closed the door.

IA: Yeah.

IB: In the office, she was upstairs in the office.

IA: She wasn't working there when you were though, she came later, right?

Nortman: She got married, she was down in Mississippi with her husband.

IA: Oh he was in the Service down there?

Nortman: And I don't know what she did.

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IB: Oh my goodness.

IA: Long ago and a different world.

Nortman: Well, you know, when they get married they go their way. It was a different (can't hear) Even my twin sister, she ...

IA: .. not my favorite... St. Pete's and Miami of course,

Nortman: Too crowded.

IA: Do you remember, I know it was a long time ago, but do you remember who your supervisor was then in that department? What department was it? Was it called

Nortman: (can't hear)

IA: Just call it the grinding department.

Nortman: And I don't remember who my brother-in-law....

IA: Oh he did. Did he

Nortman: He is still alive too. me and my older sister.

IA: Oh who is your older sister, I thought Doris

Nortman: Virginia.

IA: You have another one?

IB: This must be a big family because you said you had several brothers.

Nortman: Yeah, I had six brothers and four sisters.

IB: See I'm an only child so A brother-in-law, Cord Lasher.

Nortman: And he lives over behind Greenlawn and right across the street from Ingham Medical.

IB: Oh and your sister, your older sisters name was Virginia Lasher?

Nortman: Ah huh, their last name was Lasher.

IB: L a s c h e r.

Nortman:

IA: I wonder if he

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Nortman: He's an older man. He worked there for a long time.

IB: At the Reo?

IA: I wonder if he would consent to an interview sometime.

IB: Yeah, yeah, you might write him a letter first.

IA: Yeah, we'd just, yeah. We won't bring you into..... just say that we knew he worked there and

IB: Did he work there first, is that, do you think that might have been the reason why you ...

Nortman: He wasn't married to my sister then.

IB: Oh he wasn't, okay.

Nortman: See that's where I knew him from. He was

IB: Oh, up with your sister.

IA: Did she work there too?

Nortman: No.

IA: No.

Nortman: She didn't.

IA: He didn't meet her through, did he meet her through you?

Nortman: No.

IA: Oh it is a small town, isn't it.

Nortman: You know it isn't a very large town.

IA: No.

Nortman: Ah, I don't think the telephone book.....

IA:

Nortman: Or else they changed it.

IB: Okay, but we would write them a letter first, we wouldn't just call them out of the blue. So,

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Nortman: Their son's name is Meridith. And he address. John Meridith do you know him? He works over at MSU.....

IB: Oh really, oh.

Nortman:

IB: You just got your hockey tickets, right?

IA: Don't lose them. (laughter)

Nortman:

IA: I have story-telling tickets if anybody wants those.

Nortman: Her last telephone number was 323-0060.

IB: Okay, you said they were on Greenlawn.

Nortman: Greenlawn.

IB: Okay, you don't know the number?

Nortman: No, but ah, you could call her son and

IB: Okay, alright. We'll find her.

Nortman: I got basketball tickets here see. Not parking tickets. I take my brother to a game, he's never been in My son needs this because he doesn't want to pay those big old parking. They charge like 10 bucks to park close.

IB: Yeah.

IA: Do they really?

IB: Yeah, my husband has the basketball tickets and he usually parks here and walks.

IA: I didn't realize it was that expensive.

Nortman: Well see, he don't get the money.

IA: Now you said you were on hourly, but a lot of the other workers there were on piece.

Nortman: Right, piece.

IA: Was it because, was it the women that were on

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Nortman: Some of the women were on piece.

IA: Oh they were too. Do you remember why some were on hourly and some were on piece?

Nortman: Mine was so precise they didn't want you to rush. Yeah it had to be just right.

IA: Okay. So it depended on the job.

Nortman: Right.

IA: Okay, that's interesting. Because we have talked to a lot of people, they changed almost everybody to hourly after the war. You probably didn't know that because you weren't there, but before that I was just curious. I thought everybody was on piece, I didn't realize there were hourly workers too. So this is interesting to know that. So people who had very like you did, precise kind of work. They were paid by the hour.

IB: Were there any attempts made to speed you up at all? Make the work faster?

Nortman: You couldn't really speed it.

IB: You couldn't, okay. So you just worked at your own.

Nortman: I wasn't the only grinder, there was sort of like a circle.

IB: Okay. A whole bunch of you working together.

IA: Did the truck come along on a line in front of you?

Nortman: Yeah, we didn't have a line.

IA: Oh.

IB: You just got these things to work on one after the other.

Nortman: And then they wood box or something so it wouldn't hit anything.

IA: Oh, I see and then

Nortman: They didn't assemble it right there.

IA: No, then it was taken to the assembly line. But let's say you spent an hour and a half on the line, would somebody come over to you and say wait a minute, are we having troubles.

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Nortman: Then they'd help you.

IA: They would figure out what was wrong.

Nortman: Or it could be in the machine.

IB: So they had a basic idea of how long you should

Nortman: Yeah, you had what they called a basic setup.

IB: Okay.

Nortman: If you had problems, you know,

IB: So that's how they kept you at a certain rate.

Nortman: You averaged out about the same.

IA: Did you ever have some that just wasn't going to work or wasn't smoothing out or whatever

Nortman: Yeah we scratched them out.

IB: Someone scrapped it, okay.

IA: If you had too much scrapped, did they come over and see what was going on?

Nortman: No we just we just scrapped it all the way

IA: No I know, but if you were having troubles or something.

Nortman: It could have been out of somebody else's work too.

IA: I guess that's what I was thinking. If the pieces were coming to you they hadn't been done correctly before they got to you, I was wondering if there was a lot of those or just ...

Nortman: They had inspection regular inspection The last one you more or less was the last one.

IA: Oh okay.

Nortman: And they had them precise Because it had to work when you were going to That's about all I did. It got very boring.

IB: But you said the money was good.

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Nortman: Oh the money was good. I don't think we paid any income tax. If we did, I don't remember.

IB: Ah huh, so what you made you took home. And could you spend it the way you wanted to?

Nortman: Oh I paid for my room and board and

IB: You paid some room and board to your parents.

Nortman: My grandmother.

IB: To your grandmother.

Nortman: Then we got a little house by ourselves.

IB: Who is we?

Nortman: My two sisters and I.

IB: Oh you and your sisters.

Nortman: I always We grew up and

IA: You kind of wanted your own place after living in a family of ...

Nortman: It worked out better that way too.

IA: Ah huh.

Nortman: You were earning your own dollars. But we didn't have wheels to go all over the place, you know.

IA: Lansing, was there a bus line that went from Williamston to Lansing?

Nortman:

IA: Oh that's right, I heard Doris saying something about her not

IB: Yeah, I think I probably

IA: ... safer then.

Nortman: Oh yeah. We didn't have any problem. We never thought of anybody getting hurt.

IB: I have to tell you something that one of the people we interviewed said. He said, I'm not going to mention his name, but you know who I'm talking about. All the trouble in the world today is

because they let women into the factories and all that stuff.
(laughter)

Nortman: Is that right?

IB: That's what he said. They should never let them in there.
Because they got to earn their own money and that's the source of
all the problems that we are having today.

Nortman: Poor me. (laughter)

IA: Well there is probably somebody that still says the vote did it.
(laughter) Let the women vote.

Nortman: Oh I can believe it.

IB: Yeah, he said you know, he didn't have any, he didn't have any
problems with this, that they should get the same pay and you
know, he

IA: But he just thought that women starting to earn their own money

IB: was the problem, independent.

IA: Then the family started, maybe

Nortman: Yeah.

IB: And so that's another reason why we are interested in the woman's
perspective on that, you know, the women themselves that were
actually in the shops and the kind of atmosphere they had there.
These are the kinds of men they are working with.

IA: Did you have a decent place to eat. You talked about not being
able to go to the restroom until

Nortman: Oh they just had like a couple tables ah,

IA: Right near where you were working?

Nortman: No sort of like in a cage.

IA: Oh, in a fenced in place, area.

IB: So it would be safe.

Nortman: Yeah, safe so nothing was flying around.

IB: Flying around.

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IA: Oh oh, that's good. Was it very far from your work area?

Nortman: Not really.

IA: Oh.

Nortman: You could see where

IA: You could see your Did you get what 20 minutes or half hour or

Nortman: Probably 20 to half hour. You couldn't, I mean all you had to do was eat lunch and go back to work.

IB: Did you mix at all with the people. people that you ...

Nortman: They were pretty cordial.

IB: Really?

Nortman: Ah huh.

IA: I remember too that people were buying war bonds during the war. Did you buy bonds working there at Reo, did they take it out of your check. I mean you had to consent to it.

Nortman: I don't remember that. I know I bought bonds, but I don't know. I think the Reo did it.

IA: Oh but the Reo did it, because my mother bought bonds.

Nortman: She did.

IA: And I think, I remember them having big bond drives. Somebody important would come to town and come down to the Reo and talk to the workers and I don't know that they talked to all of them, but

IB: Did you think you you said that it was okay because you knew you only had to do it temporary, you know, the routine of it, did you think you were in a place a strange place for a woman to be when you were there? this is not really

Nortman:

IB: Yeah. Did you feel that way there?

Nortman: The group I worked with were pretty nice guys. I mean they treated me like a kid. And they were very helpful, so

IB: So you didn't think about it that way

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Nortman: No.

IB: necessarily.

Nortman: But they hated to see me go.

IA: Did they?

IB: Oh that's nice.

Nortman: I think most of them.

IB: Because they were older guys, right. Well we've interviewed some people who did work during the war, but they were probably young like you when they were there. You know they were in their teens or twenties, so

IA: ... I wish somehow it were possible to talk to someone who worked there earlier on but ah,

Nortman: that's the

IA: Can you think of any of the other, you mentioned that, so this leads me to another question, can you think of any other women that you worked with that you still see that you think might be willing to talk to us or

Nortman: I didn't know, once I lived here, I don't think I ever went back.

IA: Okay.

IB: There is a lot of, you know, we a lot of people through organizations they still get together, a lot of people that worked there.

Nortman: I know Doris does. And I went golfing with them I didn't..... I worked with a bunch of

.....

(can't hear)

IB: Did you think the work was, you said again it was temporary, so that kind of puts it in a different light. But did you think this is dirty stuff, you know.

Nortman: Oh yeah. I thought it was dirty.

IB: Dirty, and that may be a reason why you didn't want to spend....

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Nortman: Well this one guy that had been there for 14 or 15 years, he was the same.... ah,

IB: Was there any satisfaction that you could get from looking at oh, the lines that you had grind that day and Was there an element of that to it at all?

Nortman: I took a ride in one of them.

IB: You did?

Nortman: Which is interesting.

IB: Yeah. So you can see what you did, how what it contributed.

Nortman: I wasn't the only one

IB: Ah huh.

Nortman:

IA: That's interesting and then you get a feel for the finished product.

Nortman: Right.

IA: This is what I helped to do.

Nortman: .. good idea.....

IB: But that can only go so far. Right, they may not work for 14 years.

Nortman: No.

IB: For you at least.

Nortman: I'm not one for sitting around on the job.

IB: Yeah.

Nortman: Well, that's about all I can remember.

IB: Yeah. You described it as kind of like an episode. Do you think it had any affects on the rest of the jobs that you did later or

Nortman: I knew I never wanted to go back there.

IB: You didn't want to go back to a factory. Okay. Even though the pay was good?

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Nortman: Even though the pay was good.

IB: Okay. You said there was more important things than the money.

IA: Oh okay.

IB: Yeah that's it.

Nortman: Well I'm sorry it took me so long to get together with you guys.