

Bonnie Gifford

The Real Rosie The Riveter Project

Interview 7

Interview Conducted by

Anne de Mare & Kirsten Kelly

May 6, 2010

West Muskegon, Michigan

For The

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Interview: Bonnie Gifford

Interviewers: Anne de Mare & Kirsten Kelly

Date: May 6, 2010

Place: West Muskegon, Michigan

De Mare: So, can we start? Can you just introduce yourself to me and tell me when and where you were born?

Gifford: Mi... wh... I'm... y... my name? Bonnie. Yeah, and I was born in Claybeck Township in... on a farm. And went to a country school, and then went to high school at Montague High, rode a school bus every day, so graduated from Montague High, number six from the top. I'm... Pete... I'm... I'm with Pete.

De Mare: Yeah. And how many, uh, children were in the family?

Gifford: Four girls.

De Mare: All girls?

Gifford: Mm-hm. My dad cried when the youngest girl was born, because she wasn't a boy. And, uh, three of us girls

all worked at The Continental, were Rosie the Riveters.

Mm-hm.

De Mare: All three of you?

Gifford: So, all three of us and we're still living. All three girls are still living. Sisters.

De Mare: Oh, wow. And what did you, um, we go back... before we get into the work at Continental, can you remember what life was like for the women around you when you were a child? What did your mother do and your aunts?

Gifford: My mother always stayed home with us and worked. You know, and raised three kids, and in... b... b... b... but uh, in the community, my aunts? Two of my dad's sisters didn't have children. So, they were just workin' odd... odd... odd jobs, can... uh, restaurants, and cooking for other people, and that... cleaning for other people, kind of that stuff.

De Mare: Um, do you remember when you were young, um, did you have any kind of role models? Were there any women that you kind of admired? Um, you wanted to be like? You imagined growing up like?

Gifford: There was one girl that used to come to the Stony Lake Dances. That... I was probably eight or nine, and she was, like, seventeen, eighteen years old. And I liked that girl and her name was Tonnie. And I said, "Oh, if only I could be like her when she grows up." But I... She was dark... dark hair and everything, so. And that... so... and I never get to look like her, just unless I dyed my hair.

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De Mare: Um, now you grew up on a farm, did you work on the farm?

Gifford: Mm-hm.

De Mare: And what kind of... what kind of farming did you do?

Gifford: Um, my dad just had just general farming. Cattle and, uh, he had a little apple orchard and stuff. Yeah, us kids we had to pick strawberries, we had to thin peaches, we had to pick cherries to the neighbors to earn money for school clothes. Pick 'em, you know, in lugs and stuff and

that was it. Went to catechism in summers and school in the winter. And that was it.

De Mare: Do you remember when you did that kind of work, how much money you made when you worked, uh, as a kid on the farm? When you worked for other people?

Gifford: For pickin' cherries? Yes. We picked a lug of cherries, twenty-five pound lug for twelve and a half cents. And one day I picked eight lugs and I made a dollar. Pickin' cherries. Yeah, and then we thin peaches to some of the neighbors, and then we got like forty cents an hour; that was pretty good- forty cents an hour for thinnin' peaches. And that wasn't hard work and I loved to do it.

De Mare: Mm-hm.

Gifford: Yeah.

De Mare: Why did you love to do it?

Gifford: Why? Because it was clean and you had to take a limb down and you gotta... had to put 'em like six inches

apart on one side and then on the other side of the limb so they wouldn't touch each other. And it just was nice. And there were a whole bunch of us in the orchard and we had a good time. But when you pick cherries you got dirty. Juice down to your elbows, you know. Sticky. It was messy. I never liked to do it, but I liked to do it for just a little bit of money that we made.

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: Mm-hm.

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Kelly: Was it pretty isolated- you can still answer her, but I'll just say it... what was it... the farms were... you were kind of really out in the country so it was... what was the times when you got together with other people or was that often or...

De Mare: Do you... do you remember kind of how it felt to be out in the... in the real rural areas? In terms of...

Gifford: Yeah, we... well, it was general... they had different things they did out there in the country. And, uh, played card games and stuff like that and, uh... Kids, we got to play and played a lot of indoor ball. For the neighborhood kids, they'd come over at nights and we'd play ball and softball and it was just a way... We had to go to church and we had to go to catechism and...

And every Saturday night my dad had to go to a dance. He was a beautiful waltzer, so we went to Stony Lake, we went to Harp; we went to Hightower and Boomer Valley. And he called for the square dances. And he got false teeth, and so we was up... and you know, our garage in Shelby, Kris, that we had, you know, above there... there was a... uh, a apartment building or big buildings and they had dances there on Saturday night.

And so my dad... my dad was... my uncle ran it so my dad was asked to call. You know, and he was a good caller and he had... they... he said, "I can't call tonight 'cause I just got my false teeth." And they said, "Well, get up there; they aren't gonna fall out." So, he took his handkerchief, and held it above his mouth, so in case his teeth fell when he called it, they would catch it. But they didn't fall, and he got along fine, so that was... that was kind of cute. And then it's so funny because later on in life they... they

took that off- the garage- and my husband and another guy bought that for their... for their business. So, where I danced above, was our business was below. So, another funny incident.

De Mare: Did you like to dance when you were younger?

Gifford: Oh, I danced all the time. I was dancin' when I was three to five years old. My dad said he raised his four daughters on a dance floor. 'Cause he always had to go do that. Family there... families went, you know, at that time. Now... now they don't do that.

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De Mare: Now, did you... Did you have a live band or was it recorded music?

Gifford: Live band. Mm-hm. Real good bands at Stony Lake, and good, good bands every place I went. No recorded music. Not in those days, no. And then they had square dances every so long, so then you had to learn to learn all those. And I learned all those and had square dance partners and had lots of fun.

De Mare: Sounds like it.

Gifford: Lots of fun.

De Mare: Um, now, can you remember how you found... how you found out about the... the wo... the... the work you did during the war? Like, how did you make your way from being a farm girl out there to having this job?

Gifford: Okay.

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: I worked at, um, after I graduated from high school I worked summers down the Stony Lake Camp- girls camp- and then I went to work at, um, Whitehall Forum where they did newspapers and printing press, and that's where I was when my girlfriend, one of my girlfriends, came on a Thursday night- she got layed off at the Whitehall Tannery, and she said, "Bonnie, tomorrow morning I'm pickin' you up and we're goin' down to The Continental. They're hiring off the streets in Arkansas," she said. And so she says,

"I'm pickin you up and we'll go down and put in our application."

So, Friday morning she picked me up- I had an apartment in Whitehall- she picked me up, then we went down to the employment office, put in our application. They said, "You're hired." Both of us. And they said, "You go to the doctor- this doctor- and get a little exam. And then I want you to go to Grossman's and pick out your, um, um, uniforms." So we hurried and went to the doctor, and then we hurried and went to Grossman's. But we couldn't get 'em that day, 'cause he said, "If you can get 'em, we could start work Saturday morning."

Then we went back to him, "We can't get 'em," because you had to... women had to wear 'em, so we can't get 'em til Saturday. So, they said, "Well, you get 'em Saturday, and you come Monday morning to work." So we went... both went there and got 'em and Monday morning we went to work and we both got a job, on the same job, on the same line; in the test house where they tested all the motors. Lotta noise. Lotta noise.

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De Mare: Can you, um, can you tell me what you meant when you said they were hiring off the street in Arkansas? I don't understand what you meant by that. When your friend came and said they're hiring off the street.

Gifford: Pe... people from The Continental had gone down there, and the people in Arkansas that didn't have jobs, and I happen to get my first boss was from Arkansas. Called him 'Slim' and he talked southern. That was my... that was our boss and we called him 'Slim'. And a very nice guy. Tall, you know, like the... the Arkansas people. Yeah.

De Mare: And what... what was the name of the com... the full name of the company? Can you tell me a little bit about exactly what you did?

Gifford: What I did?

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: Okay, when I first started I... I was workin' there... after the... I was workin' the four cylinder motors. They tested them. And after they run some long, then they

put 'em on our line- it's was big, big line- and sideways. A guy had to use the big, um, lift truck... lift thing that was hooked up to the ceiling. And he'd lay 'em sideways on these little buggies, and the buggies would slide. And the..

When I first started I took the oil pans out and washed 'em. And I had to use a electric thing to pull out every plug, you know, that put... put 'em on there. And, um, then after we got really busy, then I... I moved on by where my girlfriend was- Abby, her name was. And then we took the... tightened up the bearings, with the wrench, uh, like... like a 'T', and we had to tighten 'em up and put the cotter pins in after we got em tightened in the little holes there.

And then put the pliers and bu... bend those ends back so that so they wouldn't come out, you know, and then they were pushed on down to the... they, uh, he examined them to see if there was any, um, water in the little oil that was left. And then when he got done, then he passed them on down and they put the pans back on, 'cause the pan was tipped up on side the rollers so it went right with them. And then a girl would be down there puttin' the pans on, and then they went to the... to the paint line. Sprayed... they sprayed... they washed 'em and spr... paint... dried 'em and painted 'em and then they went to shipping.

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De Mare: Wow. And what were the engines for? What...

Gifford: The four cylinder ones were used for, um, lift trucks for all the army camps and war and stuff. And we put a lot of 'em through there, international harvests and all. Then the six-cylinder line behind me, they used those for jeeps. And then the great, big ones that roared all the time, night and day, you know, they used those for tanks. For the war.

De Mare: Wow.

Gifford: So that was it. That's what... I did that for 'bout two and a half years.

De Mare: Wow.

Gifford: Mm-hm.

De Mare: And you said that all the... that two of your sisters also worked with you.

Gifford: Yep.

De Mare: Did you get them those jobs...

Gifford: Yep.

De Mare: ...or how did that work?

Gifford: Yes, I did.

De Mare: Can you tell me that story...

Gifford: Yeah, I will.

De Mare: ...and how it happened?

Gifford: I got... I, uh, was... I got hired in April and my sister, Billie, was working in Montague High School, in the office. And so when she got out the first of June- and I had an apartment- I said, "Why don't you come down and put your, um, application in. Maybe you'll get a job." So, she come down and we went to Muskeega, she rode on the Greyhound Bus, and went in there and saw a bunch of young

kids come out, and they wouldn't take their applications. And Billie thought, gee, I thought, "What in the heck's wrong? What's the use of me comin' over?" But she said, "I made up my mind. I'm goin' in. I'm here." So, she went in and they hired her. She started right away. She had to get a uniform.

So then, Eleanor, the, uh, uh, she worked at the grocery store in Rothbury, she lived there with her husband, and, uh, she was only makin', like, fourteen dollars a week, and I said to Eleanor, "Why don't you come down here and put your application in?" So she did. She got in right away, but she got in the lab. Rr... I don't know what kind... I don't know what kinda work she did. But she was in a lab.

And so then, that fall, I said to my dad, "When you got," you know, he just had to milk cows, he had the field work done and everything else is all done, and I said, "Why don't you..." He used to work at The Continental before he got married, and I said, "Why don't you go down and put your application in." So he went down, put... and he got hired right away. So that... that was it. But he just worked winters and then when he... and then he had summers he had to work on the farm, y'know. So he just worked one winter. But he liked it down there.

And he went back to put it in again after he... the next November, and they... they did it all different. You had to go to the city one to get... to apply for a application. And they would send you where everybody wanted you. You couldn't go to Continental, y'know, you had to go where they sent ya'. So, they sent him to Lakey's, but he said, "I will not go to Lakey's." Lakey's Foundry, 'cause you... it was hot... was... he thought... He said, "I will not work in a foundry." He had a good job at The Continental, but they wouldn't do it. They wouldn't put him back in there. So, then he just quit, eh, for good and he never went back to try. So, that was the end of our workin', and we all worked there 'til the war was... what... practically over with and ...

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De Mare: Wow. So it really... so the... so the... the eight... the hiring office was hiring not just for Continental but for...

Gifford: For the whole city.

De Mare: For the city. So, all the defense jobs that were...

Gifford: Yeah.

De Mare: ...going on...

Gifford: Yeah.

De Mare: ...there was a central hiring that took place.

Gifford: That's right.

De Mare: Interesting. Okay.

Gifford: When you had to go where they sent you.

De Mare: Right.

Gifford: And if they didn't hire... if you didn't want it there, they didn't wait. Take somebody else...

De Mare: Right.

Gifford: ...for whenever they come in. But before that we just went to the Continental office and that went a lot better.

De Mare: Do you remember when that was? When you started working?

Gifford: Uh-huh.

De Mare: When was that?

Gifford: April first of nineteen forty-three. Uh-huh.

De Mare: April first, nineteen forty-three. Okay. Now, I wanna go back. You were living on your own in an apartment before you got that job. Before...

Gifford: Uh-huh.

De Mare: Now what were you doing for a living? Tell me again what you were doing for a living.

Gifford: I was working at the Whitehall Forum, which was a newspaper office and a printing office and we did, um...

Whitehall Forum was the name of their weekly newspaper, we did the Montague Observer, and the Labor Review from Muskeega, and then we did other printing orders and stuff, and that, so...

De Mare: And...

Gifford: ...I worked there.

00:13:49:14-----

De Mare: ...and what did you do there? Did you work in the offices or did you work in the... where did you work?

Gifford: I worked in the back where they did, uh, but I did a lot of, uh, oh, I did... I wrapped pres... their orders out and I run kloogie machines and run some of the small, little things.

De Mare: What's a kloogie machine?

Gifford: Where they, uh, had small orders. Like they had a order of thirty, might have thirty or forty, and then you just put them one at a time, and pull it out, put one in.

I run that... they... they call the kloogie. And, oh, the kloogie was bigger. That was the hander. The kloogie, I... they used to do ballots, you know, for elections, and my boss said to me... he said, "Now you watch and count those so there isn't any missin'." So, my job was to sit there and watch that thing, clickity clickity clickity click and I had to count to make sure there was not one missing. That was the job. Took a long time but it was easy.

I sat there and I did other little things. I made, uh, pictures to put in the newspapers out of metal and stuff. I... I, uh, melted all that metal and stuff. And then I put... they come in big vats, you know, big vats. And then you had to lay those down in there and pour the metal in the big thing and leave it sit for so long. And when it got dry, you pick it out. Then I had to cut those all out with a saw, I had to wear glasses so I wouldn't get metal in my eye. All kinds of things. Just everything.

Stacked papers and put address... and the... and when you address the papers, every week you ran a... a... ad... address... where there address are, there was a machine, uh, well, yeah, you run it with your foot. So, I had to take all their Montague Observers, I had to work nights. Couple nights before the paper'd go out. And I had to put every paper in there so every address got in. I'd clickity

clickity cl... And I had to keep files for the things so everything was in order. I did the neigh... I did the Whitehall Forum, I did the Montague Observer and I did the Labor Review. Easy job, but there was that clickity click, clickity click, clickity click. I can still hear that clickity click.

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De Mare: And how much money did you earn doing that work compared to when you took the job down at... at Continental?

Gifford: I... first... when I first got the Whitehall Forum I made forty cents an hour. And then I was there about three months and then they gave me forty-five. And then I wasn't there quite a year when Abby came and got me. She said, "Come on." So, I went. I said, "Yeah, heck, why not, you know?" So, then we started out with fifty cents an hour at The Continental but we made more with the bonuses.

De Mare: Can you explain how that worked?

Gifford: Well, it went by how your, um, how much work you put out... your department put out. And we got paid every

two weeks, and Jim Sullivan was the head guy and he would come out and put on the board what our bonuses were. And we always made more with the... on the bonus then we did on the regular pay. So...

De Mare: Interesting.

Gifford: That worked out pretty good.

De Mare: And was there, in terms of the, you know, the... the way that the labor worked with the management, were there any... was there a union involved at the...?

Gifford: Yes.

De Mare: There was. Can you talk a... so... so you joined the union?

Gifford: Yeah. You... you were s'posed to really join it- and after thirty days- and they told me when I went in there, some of the guys, they said, um, "Don't complain about anything. Do whatever they tell you to for thirty days. Don't complain about a thing. Be good. And thirty days when you get in union, you're fine." So, thirty days

you're automatically in the union. And so they said, "Well now that... you gotta go to union meeting to do this, you know, you got to join. You gotta be sure. You gotta go there. And then you better be careful 'cause they do funny things to you, they make... they might make you get up in front and do funny things. And you might... you might... they might... they might do stuff to you." So, I was kinda scared. I went and... We went and... Abby and I went, and made... we... it's just nothin'. Nothin'. It was just a regular old meeting. They did that to scare us kids, us girls, you know.

Oh, hey, I gotta tell you somethin' cute, too. When you work at... when you first went there, on your shoes you know, and I worked there a few days and I... one morning, I put on my shoes and my heels were painted. A red. And I don't know when anybody did that 'cause there was a line behind me in the malor, and the both of us girls had our heels painted. And so when all the girls that were, that they could touch, the men painted their heels. And so we wore painted heels.

And when I got a get new pair of shoes or... he... 'cause the other ones were worn out, they got soaked with oil, so I would, uh, went there again. Next morning, mm... I looked, and my heels were painted. And I don't know who did or how

they did it. 'Cause they had to reach through there,
through... through the opening there to do that. And why
did... and both of us girls didn't know it, you know, how
come they did that? We still don't know. But you always
got your heels painted, on the shoes, your back of your
heels were always painted red. You were Rosie the Riveter,
see? You were red.

00:18:32:12-----

Kelly: What kind of shoes were they? What... what... what
were...

Gifford: What?

Kelly: What kind of shoes were they when they...

Gifford: I had loafers. Regular... regular loafers, yeah.
You know, and then... and then we'd heel in the back, they...
they had it all painted right along the... And you...

De Mare: Guess you would, I mean...

Gifford: And if we'd've crossed our legs or somethin', we'd've gotten it on our... on our uniforms. But then the uniforms... we kind of... us girls got... we didn't want to wear... so about six months in a... that we wore a... everybody wore slacks; you could not wear a skirt in the shop. They had to wear slacks. And that's how come I always wear slacks, just to remember to wear slacks.

De Mare: I wanna go back for a minute and talk about, uh, to... that's really funny. I wanna go back and talk about the, um, the pay and the union and what happened on the floor. So, when you were... when you joined the union, did... was it... it was men and... what... do you remember what union it was? What the name of the union was?

Gifford: C.I.O. The C.I.O.

De Mare: The C.I.O. Okay.

Gifford: Yeah, the C.I.O.

De Mare: And, um, and, uh, was there any issue with the women... the women were expected to join the union just like the men.

Gifford: Oh, yeah.

De Mare: Absolutely.

Gifford: Mm-hm.

De Mare: And do you remember were the men and the women paid the same amount of money?

Gifford: I...

De Mare: Or did you not know?

Gifford: They were paid the same. As near as I know. "Cause I know some of the men and... and they said, "Well, we get the same pay you do. You get the same pay we do." They said. So, as near as I know that's what they told me. Now I know... I never see... I never saw their paychecks.

De Mare: Yeah.

00:19:57:04-----

De Mare: Now, and on the floor, how... what would you say the percentage of... of the men and women working was? You know, how many women were working, how many men were working on the floor.

Gifford: On my... on my floor?

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: Or in my part?

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: I would say there was a few more men.

De Mare: A few more men than you.

Gifford: "Cause they did, uh, there... there was... the women didn't work on the great big motors. They kept track for 'em. I know a couple girls that kept track of things after the men told them. But they never touched the motors, as near as I know. But on a six-cylinder down to four-cylinders there wa... uh, I used to go over... jump over and help Paul Cook when he'd get behind if we got caught up.

I'd jump over and help him. He did the same thing with the... with the deal taking the rods and putting the cogs in 'em. But not very often. There was no women on that one, except for the inspector was a woman.

De Mare: Okay.

Gifford: Grace.

De Mare: And what was the... what was the relationship like working with the men? Was it...

Gifford: Good.

De Mare: It was good?

Gifford: Mm. Yeah, they were good to us. Only one... before when we first went in there, when Rosie was first brought in, in the mornings when you'd walk in there, they used to holler at you, "Well, there... there comes that one Rosie." Or, "There," you know, "There... there's another..." Or if it was a new girl, they'd say, "Oh, we got a new Rosie." They would holler out 'cause we had to walk through the aircraft department, which was all men, to get

to our dept... to get to the test house. So, we... though we... they used... used to get hollered... And the first morning I went in there, with... I walked with Abby and I walked in there and someone said, "Hey, you old chiefie's and girl you," some men hollered. And I looked, and it was of the farmers in Claybacks that was a friend of my dad's. So, here I... "Hey, you old chiefie's and girl," he said. So, that was another shock. Got caught right away.

00:21:40:12-----

De Mare: What was the attitude of... of, like, your... Obviously your family was supportive of you going, because they all came with you.

Gifford: Oh, yeah.

De Mare: But what was the attitude of... of... towards the women who worked in the factories?

Gifford: I... I'd say it was good. They appreciated us. They didn't fight... One time... and you know I have that poem out. I... I'll have to look and see if I can get it. One time in our... we got a paper out ev... every so often for our

department, and some man had wrote it in there about the women workers. He had writ a poem and it was all about us, you know, where they ju... we just come there to flirt with the men, and do this and do that. And, uh... if I think that I can get it before I left 'cause I had it out the other night but I mighta lost it. And then one of the inspectors- a lady inspector from our department- answered it. You know, in a... in a rhymed poem, what women were there for. And the sheet is so yellow that you can hardly read it, but I found it the other night, so. But I don't know... I hope I didn't throw it away with that stuff.

De Mare: We'll take a look for you because it'd be interesting to see it.

Gifford: (overlapping) Yeah, you'd be... it's cute. Yeah.

De Mare: It'd be interesting to see it. Did you... did it... can you talk a little bit about what it was like to be a young woman at that time and earning your own money and living on your own in an apartment. Can you talk about what that was like for you coming off the farm?

Gifford: Yeah yeah. It was great. It was fun. Because I uh, joined the bowling league, so we had, uh, I was on a bowling team. I liked that. And, um, we had... once in a while we had parties, uh, like, a half-a-day go to some hall in Muskegon and have a part. Yeah. And I liked it and I... 'cause I moved to Muskegon. I was staying with a lady. We rented... my sister and I rented a place to stay with her 'cause she... her husband was in the service. And we went to dances on Friday nights and we went out to Finn Lake to another dance on Saturday night. So. It was just... it was just a lot of fun, bowling and all that kind of stuff.

00:23:39:11-----

De Mare: Were there, um, I know that so many of the men were overseas... Was there... what was it like to try to, like, be dating at that time? And what was your social life like?

Gifford: Uh, no dating. No, I didn't date 'cause I had a boyfriend in the service.

De Mare: Where was he stationed?

Gifford: He was stationed... after he got... in India... no, first he was in Iran. And then he was in India. And he worked on, um, the... he did... didn't see action and he wasn't in battles, but they protected the China/Burma/India route so that nobody would, uh, come over there and bomb that. They watched that. And then he drove, um, or he drove a truck; lot of trucks. Went in to town and get supplies and stuff. But he was trained to, uh, pick off the injured and the dead from the fields. That's what his training was; in the ambulance. But when they went to go overseas, their outfit was left. Their orders got lost. So then they got put in to this other order, so he didn't have to pick them off, which he was happy about.

De Mare: (unintelligible)

Gifford: Yeah. He... Yeah. Yeah.

00:24:45:07-----

De Mare: Um, what... did... did working... can you talk a little bit about, like if... if working in the factory felt... how you felt about what you were doing for the war?

Gifford: Yes. We all felt... that's really one of the reasons why I went. I was feeling that I was helping the boys. And we were all- all the girls did- so that, uh, they were feeling that they was helping the war effort. You know, by... and they couldn't get in... the boys were all being drafted, you know, at eighteen years old and they couldn't get workers in the shops and... nobody complained about the girl... me working. I never got any complaints from any bosses. They were all good to me and... And one time one of the bosses said, um, "I saw your name in the paper, Bonnie." And... and I said, uh, "What... what'd I... What'd I do?" "Well, you won ten dollars in Grand Rapids at that bowling tournament," he said. So I had to go down to some bowling alley and pick up my ten bucks.

And then that same guy was out at the White Eagle where we were dancing, you know, it was kind of a bar but they had a good band there and a singer and everything. And... and so, I was doing the jitterbug with a girl. And so the next Monday I went to work, this Jim- same guy- come up to me. He said, "Well, I see we got another jitterbug in the fam... in the 'partment. He said, 'cause they had another one. Alice Reener. And he went, "Boy, she was good." He said, "Well, we got two jitterbuggers in the

fami... in the 'partment now," he says, so. It's good that he was there. He was there and he saw me. Uh. Uh. That was another funny thing. I got caught.

De Mare: What is your, um, do you have, like a, kind of, y'know, like your most vivid memory of working there? Of something that happened in the... in the factory itself? Do you have a memory that you'd like to share?

Gifford: With working at the shop?

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: Yeah. You know, I can't think of any...

De Mare: You don't have to but I'm just curious.

Gifford: Yeah. I don't...

De Mare: (overlapping) 'Cause I think...

Gifford: ...think there was anything funny. Just...

De Mare: Well, I...

Gifford: We just had to work and keep going and keep the motors going through and, uh, some of the days we'd put a hundred and twenty-three or hundred and twenty-four- we count... we kept track of how many we put through to see what we were doin'. A motors a day would go down our line.

00:26:42:21-----

De Mare: How many hours a day would you work?

Gifford: We worked, uh, eight hours a day. Well, they had three shifts goin'. So I worked the first shift- eight hours. And I was thankful I got the first shift right away. And, um, so we had to work, uh, eight hours and you could work on Saturday cause you could only... the girls could only work fifty-four hours a week. So, on Sunday, if you wanted to work on Sunday, which I worked... tried to work every other Sunday 'cause I didn't want to work every day- I worked on Saturdays and then on Sundays, we would just work six hours to get all our hours in... some... make a little bit more money. Uh-huh.

Kelly: What did... what did you do with the money that you were earning? So you were earning more money than you had ever earned, really.

Gifford: I put it in the bank. So I... when I... my... after the war I had... I had about... was... in my bonds, I had about two thousand five hundred dollars. And I bought my furniture for our apartment and I put a thousand dollars on our house when we built it. Out of Continental money.

De Mare: (unintelligible)

Gifford: And I bought clothes. I bought a fur coat and all nice clothes and everything.

De Mare: Um, one of the things when we've been talking to some of the other women, they talked about the rationing that was going on during the war. Um, can you talk a little bit about that?

Gifford: Rations? Yeah.

De Mare: Rations. Yes.

Gifford: We had to have a... a... we had the regular little coupon books. You had... Sugar was rationed and a lot of canned goods. You couldn't buy bananas. They were had to get. Pineapple. All that stuff was hard to get. And... but you could only get so many, um, you had to show your points when you want canned vegetables and canned fruit and stuff. And sugar; it was one of the main ones, yeah. I... I had those little books. I remember when I lived in Whalen, I remember walking up the Whitehall School to go get my little books so I could buy vv... food. That was interesting. And gas was rationed, too. So, but I didn't have a car so I didn't have a...

00:28:44:19-----

Kelly: Were shoes rationed?

Gifford: Pardon?

Kelly: Were shoes rationed? Rrrr... rrrr...

Gifford: No, they weren't rationed, but you had to... we got the shoes that didn't... they were called 'ration shoes'. They weren't made... the soles weren't made as good and the...

the... the leather- no leather. It was all funny food or funny things, you know. It felt rough... material. Yeah, I had some of those shoes, too. Yeah, I did. But the loafers were pretty good. If you could... if you really needed 'em, they would give you 'em for work. Yeah.

De Mare: Can you... can you show us the picture of yourself and... and some... and show us the, um, what you used to wear?

Gifford: Yeah. Yeah. This is me. And it's a blue... it's a blue uniform. And it has a drop seat. And we had to work it... we had to wear 'em at first. You had to wear it or you couldn't work, if you didn't get 'em. So we had to buy 'em to g... and I bought two pairs at first. At first I... I think they were, like, six dollars. Yeah. And we had to wear 'em. Yeah, and that's me, y'know, the whole thing. Yeah. We were called 'Rosie the Riveters'.

00:29:55:23-----

Kelly: And can you tell...

Gifford: Did you get it?

Kelly: Mm-hm.

Gifford: Uh-huh.

Kelly: Can you talk about pa... like, the significance of pants?

Gifford: Yes.

Kelly: Can you talk about that... that... how... how that happened and...?

Gifford: Um, they, um, we had to... we had to unbutton them in the back to drop 'em in the back. And you know you always felt, 'Gosh, what if those buttons slide open, you know, when you workin', you're go... go like this, you know, in a way, I... I... if they slide open.' But they never did. Yeah. Oh, that was... they... And they were blue at, uh, Kirsten. They were blue, you know, for... medium blue. Mm-hm. They're pretty. Yeah.

Kelly: And did they... and so you... you were talking about pants versus skirts.

Gifford: No, I liked the pants better.

Kelly: But did you have to start with wearing skirts and then you switched to pants or was it always...

Gifford: No, you had to... you had to have it. You had to wear pants right... you had to have 'em. We had to wait one day to get 'em. 'Cause, uh, we could've gone to work on Saturday but they said we couldn't get the uniforms. So when she... we couldn't get 'til Saturday. So, we went to work on a Monday.

De Mare: But...

Gifford: But you had to have 'em. But nobody wore skirts in there.

De Mare: And did... but was the... did people... 'cause people still wear... did people still wear skirts, y'know, in their private life? Did people still wear slacks, you know...

Gifford: Well, slacks, yeah. They wore skirts, too, you... y... a lot of people wore skirts, I mean, if you're all at one place if you want, but a lot of people wore slacks.

They... the... that's how slacks and pants got in to goin'. I nnn... But I always liked slacks before, um, my girl, uh, my cousin went to Chicago and she come home with a pair of navy blue slacks that had red and white down it. And I said to mother, "I gotta have a pair... pair like that." So I bought a pair. And that's how I... I was wearin', likin' 'em already in ninth and tenth grade. And I said, "Well, that helped. That helps me wearin' these slacks, you know." You're more comfortable. You aren't comfortable with a skirt workin', y'know. And at... at Whitehall Forum and the tannery, too, the girls all wore 'em... all wore slacks. Yeah. You're movin' and stuff, and you can't move... what... wha... what if... if... if it flies, y'know, y'know? And all of the fans around. Yeah. It was fun. Fun, fun.

00:31:57:07-----

Kelly: How was were you dad, you know, so you had four girls...

Gifford: Yeah.

Kelly: ...and this farm, and you all... you all went off to work and you... you were wearing pants and... was it a big

generational shift between your parents and... and you girls, in terms of, you know, did... did your dad support you workin' out in the...

Gifford: Oh, yeah. They were happy that we all... we usually all got out to get... get a job and everything. Now, they... they were happy and went along with everything and very agreeable. "Just don't work too hard," they said... said. "Well, no, you don't work... you work... don't work too hard at..." But, we did have to put in a lot of hours, though. But I tried to get it so that I'd get... got one Sunday off every two weeks. That's... 'Cause you gotta have a day off, you know. You know, you just can't go all the time. I lost weight, but that was all right. But, uh, yeah, that's...

De Mare: Do you wanna... do you wanna show us your... your, uh, do you wanna show us these and explain to us what they are?

Gifford: I... I'll... I'll just show you one.

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: Oh. Yeah, these were the pay stubs from our...
from our checks. I saved... and I saved 'em all just to be
funny, and every... my sisters said, "What are you doin' that
for?" I said, "Well, I think it's funny. I'm gonna save
'em all."

00:33:16:09-----

De Mare: What is that?

Kelly: Oh, here's the ration...

De Mare: Oh, wow.

Gifford: Oh, good.

De Mare: You found it.

Unseen: (unintelligible)

Gifford: Yeah. Yeah. That's it. That's it. That's his,
yeah.

Unseen: (unintelligible)

Gifford: Yeah, that's what they look like. Yeah.

De Mare: You wanna hold it up for the camera?

Gifford: Yeah, yeah, is...

De Mare: Can you open it up?

Gifford: Yeah. This is a... the, uh, a war ration book for food.

Kelly: Can you say that one more time? This is a... this is a war ration...

Gifford: War ration book, number three, here, it says. For... for food. Now, that's what they look like, yeah, uh-huh. Isn't that funny? See, and look. When you... when you want something you had to tear off those little nubs and you gave it to the store. Yeah. Oh, yeah, and you know another thing we did? Um, the men had trouble getting cigarettes. And so, us girls, they said they'd pay us to go to the store and ask for cig... cigarettes. And I'd take 'em shop so they'd give us a little bit for getting' them

cigarettes. Some of the men that couldn't get 'em, you know, couldn't get enough. Yeah. Yeah.

00:34:30:02-----

Gifford: Yeah, that's it.

Kelly: Thank you. Thank you for that.

De Mare: (unintelligible)

Gifford: I've been savin' 'em. (or: I haven't seen them.)

Kelly: Can you show that... can you show your big... your big thing of all the ones you saved?

De Mare: It's this... the pile of your... the pile of your pay stubs.

Kelly: Yeah, just show that big bundle.

Gifford: Oh, this is my big pile of pay... my pay stubs. Is that what you call 'em? Pay stubs, yeah, pay check stubs, yeah. I rolled 'em all up and saved 'em. Just for fun.

And they thought... they thought I was foolish for doing that, but I think it's funny. Oh, I broke the rubber band, this old one.

De Mare: And so can you read us what's on one of the pay stubs? What it says?

Gifford: Yeah. It, uh, you got it? Okay. It gives the date... the pay period ending. And what is this? This one here's August the fifth. And then it gives your actual hours, which was a hundred and five hours and one fourth. I must've been late or somethin'. And then it gives, uh, my regular earnings. Now, you want that, too? My regular earnings on this one was sixty-eight fifty-one. I musta had a... That's the regular earnings and the bonus earnings were ten dollar... uh, no, I got a hundred and four dollars and seventy-three cents. So my... And my overtime earnings was twelve-o-three, why, I don't know. And my gross pay was a hundred and five dollars and seventeen cents for two weeks.

And they took out social security- a dollar eighty-five. They took out withholding tax- thirty-three dollars and twenty cents. They took out for the U.S. bond eighteen seventy-five. The hospital or insurance was a dollar

forty-five. And the union was two dollars. And so my net pay was a hundred and twenty-seven dollars and eighty-two cents for two weeks. Not much. Not now. But, god, we did a lot with the men, and the groceries weren't that high, now, and everything. And I... while I was workin' I... I... Well, I made sure I bought a fur coat, and I bought a bedroom suit- outfit- and too... took it out to my parent's home. So I had a bedroom outfit if I needed one, after the war. And then I saved the rest for furniture or whatever I wanted to do with it. So, that was it.

00:36:48:16-----

De Mare: Wow.

Gifford: Mm-hm

De Mare: Um, what was... do you... do you think that the... I have just a few questions about how it... do you think that working during the factory really connected to the... the larger war effort? Do you feel like that changed you or affected you in your later life?

Gifford: Oh, yeah, it changed me. I was always a little bit shy, y'know, a little bit. And I think being out with a bunch of people and getting' big and goin' to these bigger places and bowling- I think it strengthened me to get out into the world, you know, gave me... Have faith in yourself, you know, just don't hold back, you know. And I think that really helped me. And especially at a war plant I thought I was doing a good job, you know, and they never complained about my working, so I thought, "Well, I must be all right. I'm doin' good, so I must go ahead, go ahead, go ahead." Yeah.

De Mare: Do you that it was, I mean, and this is, I don't mean to project this but, I mean, do you think that... that that was the experience of a lot of women around you?

Gifford: Oh, yes. Mm-hm. A lot of 'em. Mm-hm. Well, some of 'em didn't stay too long, either. I don't know whether they didn't like it or what, I don't know. But... but not very many. They all... they stayed... they had girls in my department. Nice girls. Nice women. And the women that worked at... that I went... I was happy I didn't get that job- was, um, when these motors were running they had to set the tappets. They had to sit on a stool and they had a

couple a different pairs of pliers and those things that... things would be jumping up and down there near you. And I, I hate... what if... I said, "What if I did...?" I would've quit that job, I think. I just hated to watch them do that. I was so glad that I didn't have to. And that I got the job that I did. It was dirty, but that's okay. But to get in there... and we all... everybody tried to do their part and they were all very friendly, you know. You'd go to the restrooms and everything and everybody's friendly, "How're you doin'?" And this and that, you know. It just... it just gave me a lot of push to go to... for myself...

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: ...you know, 'cause I was always a little bit shy, you know, around people. Not really at a dance, but, I mean, when I'd come to, like, schools or... or programs or speakin' or something.

00:38:54:16-----

Kelly: Do you remember where you were when you heard that the war ended? Tell her.

Gifford: Oh, where I... where I was when the war ended? I was home. And I had... I... I... I had quit. I was home, yeah, at my mother's, mm-hm.

De Mare: So you quit your job before the war was over?

Gifford: Yeah, mm-hm.

De Mare: So, can you tell us the story of why you left the... why you left?

Gifford: I was married and had a... Was pregnant for Darlene. I hated to leave but I... just the way it was, yeah. Yeah. Oren came home and we had such...

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: I... I should... shoulda known better, but I didn't. I liked my job, though. I really liked it. I liked the people and everything down there. And it gave me a great experience.

De Mare: Did you work after that or did you just...

Gifford: No. I was a stay-at-home mom. I wasn't workin'. One of my girlfriends that worked at Hellmann in Whitehall, uh, she... she was married, too. She only had one child. And she said, "Bonnie, come on down." She says, "They're hiring at-" uh, uh. She says, "I'll get ya' a job in the inspection," she said. "No," I said. "I... I'm not gonna leave my kids with anybody else. I wanna be with them." And I did. I stayed with them. And they all did good. They're all doin' better than I am. Darlene and Gene and Bonnie-Lynn. Yeah.

00:40:18:19-----

De Mare: Do you think that going out into the world the way you did, um, informed how you raised your own daughters? Do you feel like you had more of a sense of the... of independence and wanting to instill that in them? Can you talk about what it was like to be the mother of young women?

Gifford: It... no... it... I... it didn't seem to bother me. I don't know, they probably complained about a lot of things, my kids, but I don't... They're all doin' good and they... doin'... they're doin' great and... and they didn't seem... have

any... If they had any complaints they didn't tell me about it, so. Maybe they will yet before I die. I'll get Darlene started on it. "What'd I do wrong, Darlene?" I'll ask her.

Kelly: Yeah, I don't think it's... I don't think it's about complaint. It's... it's more that, you know, I think about Mom raising two daughters, like you raised two daughters..

Gifford: Yeah.

Kelly: ...and... and, like, we'll... the experience of being Rosie for you, in kind of being independent and then doing this... Did that... did you have any lessons from that that you wanted to teach your own daughters?

Gifford: Oh.

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: No, not really, I, uh, just, wh... Everybody's different, you know? Darlene was different and Bonnie-Lynn was different. They aren't... they weren't alike, you know, they're all different. You have kids, they're all

different. Uh, Jay-D was... they're all different. And you have to do it all over again, you know. You have to go right... right along with, uh, what they're doin' and acting like and... But they never caused too many problems. Gene... Gene used to give us a few headaches, but not bad. And he never got caught in the law. And Darlene was good. Yeah, she was always... they were always on home on time and they went on dates and, I don't know. No big problems.

00:41:58:14-----

De Mare: When you think back to yourself at that time when you were working, when you think of yourself as a young woman- how old were you when you started working? Do you remember?

Gifford: When I started workin'? In forty-three? I was born in twenty-two; I must've been twenty-one when I started. Workin' at the... at the shop. At the Continental. I worked before at Whitehall, I worked at the summer camp at Stony Lakes, uh, for two or three summers. They always... that lady from Missouri... Missouri always called me and let... or sent me a letter to... if I could come back and work with her. So then I finally had to write back and say, "No, I'm

workin' in Whitehall, I can't come." So then she got somebody to take my place. She was a nice lady. Her husband run the Camp Winnemoka at Stony Lake, Orwig's. And when you go to Lake Michigan, Kirsten, there's a house on the right hand side there with a barn and stuff?

Kelly: Mm-hm.

Gifford: That was Mrs. Orwig's girl camp. She had about twenty little girls there. From ages from about eight to twelve or so. And we worked in the... My cousin and I worked there. Summer.

Kelly: What... What did you do? What was the girl's camp? What would they do?

Gifford: Well, they, um, they had little... they had little lessons. Everyday they had les... and they all sang. And they had singing groups. And they do... they did little sports. They played ball and all kinds of that stuff. And um, we had to, um, clean their rooms. And some of 'em slept upstairs in the barn, and some slept in a corncrib, and some slept in the house. And they had a fireplace there. They always had a meeting in the morning and they

did singing and did different things for the kids to do. Games. And they... and then they'd go out and we'd have to pack sandwiches for them and they'd go out in the woods and eat out in the woods and have a fireplace and sing and dance and play. And, you know, it was just: entertain the girls. It... And each counselor had so many girls to look after. Nice counselors, too. From Missouri and all over. Nice counselors.

00:43:55:02-----

Kelly: Do you remember at the time that you were a Rosie, do you remember what the media was like? What the, you know, were there commercials or posters or...?

Gifford: I don't think there was any commercials or posters or anything about it. It seems like it was just automatically... It started in, as I remember, in Detroit when the big... when they were working on those big bombers. And that's as... as how I remember it; the startin' and everything. And it just kinda went wherever the defense fact... factories were. But, it... I... you didn't think anything about it. You just, you just went to work, and you did it, and it's what you had to put up with and that's what we

did. Just put up with it and... When somebody might holler at ya' in the morning once in a while: "Hi there, Rosie. How're ya' doin' today?" You might hear that when you walk through aircraft but that kind of wore off. Then they qui... then they kind of quit it after about six months.

De Mare: How do you think it changed or do you think it changed the way that, uh, the way that women were treated in the work force, or basically were seen in general? Because it really was this coming out, of this huge number of women who hadn't left the home. Can you talk a little bit about what you experienced or what you saw around you?

Gifford: I... I, um, there was a couple of elderly women that set those tappets, you know, I said... that I told you about? And I... I talk... talked to them... and one was from Kansas City, and she was elderly, she was about forty-five years old and I just, How come they hired her? But, uh, she was nice and I talked to her and I, uh, I talked with her as an elderly woman. And, uh, I was surprised she was there but she... she said she just wanted to get out and help the boys, you know, and just... Everybody was gonna help somebody. And that's some and it did... didn't bother me with other people there.

It just... everything just... everybody worked together. You talked about the bowling. You talked about eating lunch or going out to lunch or... or dinner. We used to hurry up and run to that one restaurant and eat in a half hour. We'd hurry up and walk. We had to walk quite ways. And they... when you entered that... that restaurant they sat down and that... the woman was right there. She was just runnin'. They had the dishes all this... perch or whatever they... They had two menus and you picked which one you wanted and they run back there and get it and set it there and boy you ate and paid and out you went. For forty-five cents. And if you had ice cream 'cause sometimes we'd order... quick order ice cream or pie a la mode, then it was twelve cents extra. So that was a real, fifty cen... cents or something. Now, that's pretty cheap. So then you had your meal, your hot meal for the day, you know, you really didn't have to cook that much at night.

00:46:39:12-----

De Mare: Did a lot of people travel to the area? I know you said people came up from Arkansas to work there, so were there a lot of people that traveled from a great distance to work in the factories?

Gifford: I... well... Ludington. Some of the men and girls came from there. Couple women who... they rode in a station wagon, they come there. I think it was six. Six of them. I know they were from Luddy. And Kent City, and Grand Geva, Spring Lake, and Montague and Whitehall and Shelby and Hart. You know, a lot of them working...

De Mare: And...

Gifford: ...way far away.

De Mare: And you, uh, you rented a room, you said, in the house of someone who's husband was away at the service. Did a lot of people like how did people live? I mean, did a lot of people rent rooms and rent rooms out?

Gifford: Yeah.

De Mare: They did.

Gifford: They did.

De Mare: Obviously that doesn't really happen so much anymore, you know, we don't really operate that way.

Gifford: Mm-mm.

De Mare: Do you remember what you paid for rent?

Gifford: Yeah. When... when I lived in Whitehall, me... I was workin' at the... at the Forum, I paid three and a half. For a room and a little kitchen, but I had to go downstairs to the bathroom, through... through their kitchen. That was in Whitehall. And then when we... then Billy... Billy and I stayed there for a while. And then when she moved in they charged us six dollars a week. And it was kind of nice; they had... had carpeting in, and the kitchen, we had a table and kerosene stove. We had to buy our own kerosene. And we got our heat and our water and it... it was nice.

And then we moved to Muskegon. We went to stay with a girl that... she had her ad in the paper. She wanted boarders 'cause her husband was in the service. And, um, her name was Helen Mier. And she had a little girl. Rudy. And we stayed there for a while and then she wanted to go to work, too. So then she went and got a job at Seal

Power, so then we had to get an apartment. So we went...
went and got an apartment.

00:48:32:00-----

Gifford: (con't) Yeah, it was nice in Muskegon. And
then we stayed in Muskegon three apartments a... and on... on
a... street. Uh, Williams street, Wesley street... aah- what
was the other one? Stan, help me. They all began with W.
God I forgot the other one. Ah. Williams. Wesley,
Williams, Stan, what was the name of that street? It was
near his house. If I looked out my bedroom window I could
see his backyard. But I didn't know... didn't know him, you
know.

Unseen: It was called 'Windsor'. Windsor.

Gifford: Yeah, Windsor. Win... Windsor. There ya' are.
They all began with W. Yeah. Seven, uh, seven six nine,
eight six one, and eight four one were the numbers of the
three places that I stayed at.

Kelly: You have an incredible memory.

De Mare: You really do. You really do.

Gifford: I, eh...

Kelly: Do you want a little glass of water or something?

Are you getting...

Gifford: It's pretty dry. Why, aren't you done yet?

Kelly: No... no... Close.

De Mare: Just a... Just a couple more questions.

Gifford: Yeah, I'll be all right. Yeah.

De Mare: Okay.

Kelly: Are you okay? Okay. (unintelligible)

De Mare: Okay, um, were... do you think that you learned to do things at that time that you learned skills whether they were actual physical skills or... or life skills that were helpful to you in the rest of your life?

00:49:48:16-----

Gifford: Oh, yeah.

De Mare: And can you talk to me about that a little bit?

Gifford: Well, I was gonna say, your, you know, I, um, wanted to go to business college when I graduated from high school. Eh, because I was liked bookkeeping and typing and all that stuff. I wanted to do that, but my parents didn't have the money so that I had to pick up what I could. And so I thought then when I got over and got a job I'd go back to school, but I never did that. I got interested in other things. Bowling and friends and all that kind of stuff. Going and going, movies and... you... you lost interest. Then that was the end of it. That was the end of it. Yeah.

But I, I think it really helped me to get out. Like I told you before it gave me a little push that I'm not... I... I'm good enough to go further, you know. So it gave me a little push. It helped me a lot, being... working with a bunch at the shop. That I was... felt like I was doin' somethin', and just built up a little more morale.

Kelly: I'm sorry, one... one of the things that we started seeing as... as we interview all these Roses is: we started understanding that a lot of the changes for women, in women's rights and things of the, like, sixties and seventies...

Gifford: Mm-hm

Kelly: ...like that couldn't've really happened without so many women going to work as Rosies.

Gifford: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Kelly: Cc... can you talk... what was that time like when later in the sixties and seventies where...

00:51:17:07-----

Gifford: Yeah. Well, I think, um, a lot of women, like I say, didn't really have the push... some... there were some push... pushy women, you know, there were some... some are just: go. But I think it helped a lotta ww... women. I know a lot of the girl... the two girls that have died now that on my... on my, uh, that worked on my line... she... she was always

holding back, too. And she got where she was just expanding, you know, and just let... let loose, you know, lettin' out, you know, just how to go. Yeah. And I... I think... I know this on her, she... maybe she knows this on me, too, I don't know... But I think it just... it did... you're just as good as the men are, you know, you're just as good. Before you're a... you always felt the men were better than you, or bigger than you, or something. You... way back, you know, men always had, when women couldn't vote, you know, you always thought, "Well, maybe we're a little bit under the men," you know? But it gave you the idea that you were just as good as they are. And that's it. You're just as good as you were. And you worked right along with everybody and if I could... that one man complained, 'cause he wrote a poem, if I can... If I can find it real quick like I'll show it to ya'.

De Mare: But I jus... there's just really one or two more things. I mean...

Gifford: Okay.

De Mare: ...and then we can look for those other...

Gifford: Okay.

De Mare: When you think back to that time, when you think back to that young woman who was twenty-one years old, and was there any advice, like, now looking back with your whole life, is there anything you'd like to say to her?

Gifford: To a woman?

De Mare: To you. To yourself.

Gifford: To... to myself.

De Mare: Yeah...

Kelly: (overlapping) Back at that time...

De Mare: (overlapping) ...what would you say?

Gifford: (overlapping) Yeah, back at...

Kelly: ...when you were a Rosie.

Gifford: Okay.

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: Well, I would say that, uh, I did pretty good, and I... I told myself, I did tell myself, you gotta save money. You can't spend all your check, you know, like a lot... lot of them are doing? And just spend it and spend it and spend it. Nah. And I made my mind... I... I saved money every paycheck. That's was one of my goals. I'm gonna save money so if a... this war ever gets over, I got somethin'. A little bit, you know.

And... Then I supported myself and I bought a lot of clothes I told you about. Fur coat- it was two, three hundred dollars. And bought lots of nice clothes and purses and makeup and I had, um, thirty-four sweaters after the war. And I had twenty-seven brassieres, after the war. Oh, that's not goin' down there? Don't you put that towel down there.

00:53:42:11-----

Gifford: (con't) Well, you know you could buy a sweater for a dollar ninety-eight and one time I was... I was downtown there at Newton and I saw this one shop, I think

it was at Beverly's, as a sweater that kinda long hair and it was a dollar ninety-eight so I took it. And I had to... to get back at the shop. I had to leave it in where the guard was; I couldn't take it in the shop. Can't take anything in there.

So, then my... when I went home I showed it... I picked it up, I showed it to Helen Mier, the girl who was... well, she said, "I want one like that. I want a yellow one. Will you... will you go pick me up one around noon?" So, I had to... to next noon... I had to go way down there and get her a yellow one so she could have one like that sweater. Mine was blue. So that was... just some of the things you do... crazy.

Kelly: (unintelligible)

De Mare: Can you talk a... can you just talk a little bit about how you felt about the war itself? Um, it was such a huge event, um, and I think that something that it's... it's hard for people now to understand how much it was part of everyday life for people.

Gifford: Mm-hm

De Mare: 'Cause now w... our wars are not part of our everyday life. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Gifford: Yeah. Well, on a Sunday, when the war... December, when we were bombed, and when I heard President Roosevelt on the radio say, "We're at war. We're at war," he says. "We're gonna do it." And you know, I shook. I shook and I was just shaky all over, 'cause I, you know, war, you know, I never... I was only... what was I? About eight... eighteen, nineteen years old, or was something. Kinda young. And I... I shook. I remember just shakin' terrible, when they de... in the... in the house there and whenever, for a while there.

And then my dad got to talkin' bout little bit, you know, and he kinda soothed everything down. It really, and they did it, and "We'll... We'll win. We'll win," he said. "Don't worry about it. We'll win." And so, we did. So. But I re... I still to this day, when I think... you think of that, how I... I shook, shook, shook like this. 'Cause I thought war was killing and, you know, what are they going to do to us? Are they going to bomb us even more and what are we gonna...? I might die and all that kind of stuff you're thinkin'. But, I got over it.

00:55:57:04-----

De Mare: It was a very immediate feeling.

Gifford: It was very... it was very sss... it was a very sad day at our house. We were... we were at home when we heard. Very sad day. And how they bombed and killed all the people at Pearl Harbor, you know, that... that was so sad, very sad. I know I... I didn't like it a bit. But you kind of learn to get... you had to learn... my dad... Dad kind of smoothed it over and talked to us. Up, my mother, too.

De Mare: And then what was it like to have your boyfriend at the time overseas?

Gifford: Just there. I... I went out dancin'. I... I... he knows I like to dance, mmmm, Oren was not a good dancer. And he... he didn't care. He said, "You." I said, "Can't you tell the beat?" He says, "It's all a bunch of noise to me. Just a bunch of noise," he said. And I thought, 'Oh, heck. I'm... I... I... he know I liked to dance and I'd been dancin' for year. And, uh, so, I said, "I'm goin' to dances. I don't care." And I did. We all went and he still went when my mom and dad went, we went. And then when I got a lot older we went and Billy and... Billy knew,

and I usually went with some girls and... we had to dance, 'cause, uh, this is it, you have to dance. Square dance or round dance and Shoddish or whatever they're doing. I remember doing the Shoddish- the German Shoddish at my grandpa down at Stony Lake. I was about five, six years old. You know how the Germ... I don't know if you've ever seen it.

De Mare: I don't think I have.

Gifford: You've seen it, haven't ya', Kir? Yeah. It's a cute little dance. I remember doin' that. My Grandpa Holtz. Uh-huh. That way I just had to go. Uh, he got... he never... he knew... he knew I went.

Kelly: How do you think it's different now with the war, like what times are like, what... how is it different then to now when you're... there's a war now and...

Gifford: I know it.

Kelly: ...and you all think about it?

Gifford: I don't like it. I don't like it. I just... I hate it. I just hate war. I just don't like it. And I think it's stupid, you know, and I... but we won the war, you know, in so many years, and they aren't winning. Or they don't... well, they might be winning some of it but, uh, you know, we're still in it, you know. Why are we in it so long? I just don't understand that. I don't like that part of it. But, I'm not supposed to talk about war, so.

00:58:13:09-----

De Mare: Why not?

Gifford: Your hus... your... your dad was in it. Stan was in it. He went... he had a tough time over there. That's why he walks with a... a... his legs are all numb from the Brown Rot and all that kind of stuff; malaria, rabies. Otherwise, he's all right but his... his legs... has to walk with a walker. But he'd been through hell.

00:58:36:16-----

Gifford: Uh, Can I give my maiden name?

De Mare: Sure, you can give it...

Kelly: (overlapping) Yeah. You...

Gifford: Oh, okay, you can hear it. I... I was Bonnie Tithiessen and I married Oren Gifford. Yeah. And what was I supposed to all tell ya'?

De Mare: You were supposed to tell me where... what you did during World War II.

Gifford: Oh, World War II. I went to the fact... well, went to the Continental and worked there, in the, uh, in the test house, for two, 'bout two and a half years, then I quit. (Unintelligible) Yeah, it was nice. It was nice. It was a gre... great experience for me. It gave me a lot of push, you know? You're... you're all right. You're okay. So that's... that's the feeling I got.

And I liked it there. I got... liked the girls. We got along good. And liked the bowling and the parties and goin' out with all the girls. Yeah, I had more fun when I went with girls at a dance. I wouldn't go with a guy, 'cause, uh, I didn't want... he... If you go with a... a date,

then they wouldn't ask... no... nobody else would ask you to dance. But I danced with everybody.

The men... boys would all come up. I used to have at Stony Lake three or four dances promised ahead of time to somebody, y'know, you'd promise this guy, promise that guy. Then he'd remember them, too. They all remembered them. And you get to dance with all the good dancers, 'specially one with (unintelligible); boy, was he ever a good dancer. I liked that. So, I... I just liked to go. 'Cause I wasn't gonna stay at home and sit and mope in a room while my boyfriend and he didn't ask me to go, so, he didn't care. "You go ahead." He was goin' out. Did things- shouldn't've done. But that's how it goes. That's how it goes.

De Mare: That's wonderful.

Gifford: She knows.

De Mare: (overlapping) Let's go see if you can find that, uh, find that... find the poem and stuff...

Kelly: (overlapping) Yeah, let's see if we can find it and some...

01:00:19:21-----

De Mare: ...we have the, what the...

Gifford: Can... can you read all that?

De Mare: I think I can read it.

Gifford: With the... yeah...

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: Yeah. And thi... thi... one... the one is a boy's and then the girl answers it.

001:00:28:04-----

Gifford: And she'll read it; I'll just sit here. 'Cause I...

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: ...I... I can't read it fast enough for that.

De Mare: That's all right.

Gifford: It's too little.

De Mare: Okay. So this is... this is the poem that one of the... the men... men workers wrote...

Gifford: It'd be... yeah...

De Mare: ...about... and then there's a... the answer is the poem that the woman wrote back.

Gifford: Yes.

De Mare: And this is... The paper is dated Thursday, December 30th, 1943, Continental Motors, Local 113 UAWCIF.

Gifford: Uh-huh.

De Mare: Poem number one:

How I would like to get up in the evening,

After the sun has stopped it's shining,

And meander to the shop I work in,

And find the dames had stopped their whining.

If you ask me the truth, and believe me,

I have failed to see one yet

That was worth her weight in baloney,

Blond, redhead, or brunette.

I like to look at the bumps in her sweater

On the blond with the empty dome,

But I prefer to have mine in an apron

Who's brave enough to stay home.

There's many a... a glandless old monkey

That's already blown his top,

Because he got a smile from blondie,

That dizzy dame in the shop.

She expects her rest period in the morning,

And two or three in the afternoon,

And will ask the boss tomorrow for a layoff,

To go see her hubby soon.

And... and many's the boss that's gone goo-goo,

Over dames that don't wear skirts,

And forsaken his dear old mama,

The one that irons his shirts.

So listen, old pal, and heed me,

If you have any brains and guts,

Just forget the mole in inspection,

For she's after your money and just plain nuts.

Gifford: That's it. That's it.

01:02:01:09-----

De Mare: And how... how did you feel when you read that the first time? Wow. Okay, and the answer was written by one of the women workers.

The women's place is in the home
On that we all agree.
And were conditions different
That's where most of us would be.
It seems that there's a... a certain war
That's taken most our men
And we're just filling in their jobs
'Til they come home again
We're not here just to show our forms
Our clothes, our curls, our faces,
We're here to do what should be done
And still know where our place is.
We may all kid and joke a lot
To make a brighter day

But underneath we're pining for
Our husbands far away.
They're giving everything they've got
They're sacrificing all
And if you've heard of army slang
They're really on the ball.
And while they fight for freedom,
There's money we must earn,
And if you think we're liking this,
Boy, you've a lot to learn.
As for asking for time off
When hubby's furlough's here,
Remember you're at home each day
With those that you hold dear.
And if you're a sing... If you are a single man,
There's something mighty wrong;
You must belong to the 4F class;
You're hanging around too long.
I've noticed that there's seamen
When working are no whiz,
But if you think you're hurt, boys,
Join up and see what work is.
I've heard the country's wanting
More womens in the plants,

And don't forget we're women
Even if we do wear pants.
Where is this inspection
You have to write about?
If something new has been added,
We're anxious to find out.
You can't be so ambitious-
To hear and see so much,
To know just what we do and wear
And how we whine and such.
You might have written to that- no, wait a minute-
You might have written that to get
A good old laugh or two,
And I'm not kidding, brother,
The laugh is all on you.
There's one thing that sure bothers me,
And I think it's just a shame,
A fellow who can write so well,
Will not sign his name.

01:03:52:21-----

Gifford: She signed her name, didn't she?

De Mare: Uh, I don't see it here. Um:

This may not touch your feelings,

I'm sure that it won't,

But we work for our money,

Even if you think we don't.

I hope the guy that started me

To write this little stuff,

Will let all this soak in

And tell me if he's had enough.

That's...

Gifford: I know the girl... I know the woman that wrote

that; she was an inspector. I knew her.

De Mare: Wow.

Gifford: Her name's Adia.

De Mare: That's kind of amazing. I'm gonna read the little thing that happened, the way that these two things were introduced in the paper. It says, 'Department 49 Motor Test. Christmas has come and gone, and we wonder now if everyone will settle down to the business of winning the war. It seems as though a lot of employees thought that

the war was over last week, as eighty-eight men and women were absent from Department 49. Perhaps they were all sick- what do you think? We think that most of them were giving Hitler and the Japs a break. Well, now that's off my chest.' Do you recall what that's about?

Gifford: No.

De Mare: No.

Gifford: It was... the... evidently, I didn't know there was that many missing...

De Mare: Yeah.

Gifford: ...from work. But in... in a week, was that in a week?

De Mare: Yeah, it was a week, that's what it said.

Gifford: In a week?

De Mare: But it's then... then it goes on to say, 'Last week one of the night men thought he would tell the women where

to head it at with a piece of poetry. It was placed on the bulletin board. We are now sending it in along with the answer that one of the women wrote. We feel that it answers the fellow and we hope that this settles the matter.'

Gifford: Yeah.

De Mare: That's really... that's really nifty.

Gifford: (overlapping) (unintelligible)

De Mare: That's really nifty.

Gifford: I... I should get a copy of that 'cause it's getting yellow. I wonder if, uh, Mark could do it on the copy machine?

De Mare: Oh, yeah.

Gifford: He does a lot of stuff..

De Mare: Oh, yeah.

Gifford: ...my son, yeah.

De Mare: Oh, yeah.

Gifford: Yeah, 'cause it... that's so yellow. And I found that the other day in my stuff, so. Yeah, I knew that girl that did that one. I know there was quite a few missin' that month or week or whatever it was. It wasn't me. I was there.