

**MILL WORKERS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT:
LEWISTON-AUBURN, MAINE**

Jackie & Gerry Lafrance
(Interviewer: *Andrea L'Hommedieu*)

BCOH# 012
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Andrea L'Hommedieu: This is an interview for the Mill Workers Oral History Project on December 7th, the year 2005. This is Andrea L'Hommedieu and tonight I am interviewing Jacqueline and Gerry Lafrance. Jackie, could we start with you? I'd like to ask you your date of birth and where and when you were born.

Jackie Lafrance: April 16th, 1927, and I was born in Lewiston but I've lived in Auburn all my life.

AL: So you grew up in Auburn?

JL: Yes.

AL: What area of Auburn?

JL: Right here.

AL: Right here in New Auburn?

JL: Next door.

AL: And what was the community like at that time, was it sort of the outskirts?

JL: Outskirts, it was wooded. It was, there was nothing, just that one house, that's all there was.

AL: And were your parents both from this area?

JL: My mother was from Auburn. My dad grew up in Auburn but was born in Canada.

AL: And did either of them ever work in the mills?

JL: No, I don't believe so, no, they were more shoe shop. No, I don't believe they did.

AL: Do you recall if the shoe shops worked on shifts?

Gerry Lafrance: Yeah, she, you worked on shoe shop.

JL: Oh, just briefly, I didn't, just when I came out of school.

AL: Was it shift work like the mills, or was it more daytime?

JL: Oh, no, I think it was just daytime, from what I remember. I don't believe they had shifts in shoe shops. I'm not sure, though. I don't have that much knowledge.

AL: So, at what age did you go to work at the mill?

JL: Oh, let me see. I would say twenty, I would say about twenty years old. I started at General Office, and then I got transferred to, from General Office, I worked in the lab there, and then we, they transferred us to Bates, the Bates Division then, and they built a lab there and they transferred our, what was left of the General Office, they transferred us there and I worked there quite a while. I'd say, oh, I don't remember how long. But they closed the General Office and then, like I said, they transferred us to Bates.

AL: What kind of work did you do in the lab?

JL: Sugar analysis.

GL: Oh, my God, that's hard to explain.

JL: With raw cotton, we analyzed raw cotton and we were taking the sugar contents out of it, and we analyzed that. And I did that for a few years, and then I got transferred into the office and I stayed in the office until I retired, in the main office at Bates.

AL: Was that more clerical work?

JL: Yes, it was all clerical. When I retired I was in customer service. We worked directly with the salesmen in New York.

AL: And as a woman in the mill, was there any, were there issues about being a woman working in the mill?

JL: No, I don't think so. No, I don't remember. We certainly weren't making much money, but I don't think the men were either, so. I mean, they weren't know to, for paying an awful amount of money.

AL: Who were some of the people that you worked closely with over the years, do you, some of the supervisors or -?

GL: Norm Lemay, in the lab.

JL: Well, no, I worked for Ray Bissonette for years, under Irwin Berg, which was the office manager. And I worked for Stanley Bubier for a number of years. And I don't remember General Office, who was in charge. God, I think they're all dead, except for Ray.

AL: And what year did you retire?

JL: I don't know. I was in my late fifties. I didn't wait for retirement, I mean I didn't wait for retirement age, I just retired.

AL: Probably the early eighties, does that sound about right?

GL: Yes, yes.

JL: Could have been, yeah.

GL: Yes, because I think I retired in '89.

JL: It sounds about right, yes.

AL: Let me switch to you for a minute, Gerry. Could you tell me your date of birth and where and when you were born?

GL: July 21st, 1926. I'm seventy-nine.

AL: And you were born where?

GL: In Lewiston. I got a back history in, but anyway, yeah, I was born on Oxford Street in Lewiston, since I can remember.

AL: And is that where you grew up?

GL: Yes, I would say I grew up on Oxford Street, and then we moved to Lincoln Street, and then I went to the orphanage, at Healy Asylum, which is the Town Manor.

JL: Yeah, it's on Ash Street.

GL: It's the Town Manor on Ash Street now, but it used to be Healy Asylum then. So from my home, that's where we went, that's where I went. So my little brother and I, we went there, and my sisters went to the Marcotte Home, three of them. And one was in the service, and the other one, I don't know where she went. And then the family broke up.

JL: Well, his mother died, he neglected to say.

GL: My mother died. She was only forty-one years old, and it was seven kids, nobody could take care of us. We had housemaid, but that was, they couldn't handle seven people. So they put me in the orphanage and they went the other way, so they broke the whole family.

AL: And so when did you go into the mill to work?

GL: Well, boy, let's see. I started Pepperill, I went to Continental, and then I went Bates, 1945, after I came out of the service. And that's where I put in twelve years in the weave room, five years in the dye house office – I got it all, this is a resume – and ten years as (*unintelligible word*) to Dexter Kneeland, chemical engineer, which he was in charge of the whole dye house, the drying range, the bleaching range, the whole thing. So I was learning under him. And then ten years as a lab colorist, that was my title, and resulting problems in every department at that time, so it's thirty, I can't even read, seven, well, like thirty seven years. But after I left I was a consultant, and I'm still a consultant to Fred Lebel in his own plant on the hill.

AL: The Heritage Weavers, Maine Heritage Weavers?

GL: Yeah, as a matter of fact I was there a couple of years ago and I made some bleach formulas for him. They got a new bleaching system, so he called me, and I'm still on the payroll on him, so that's what I've been doing.

AL: So you started in the weave room, and you did that for twelve years. What was that work like?

GL: Well, have you seen the design at the museum, have you seen those cards with a lot of holes in them? Okay, I used to repair those, that was my first job. So actually it makes a design. I don't know if you've ever seen a weave room, a loom, that's what they call it. Okay, so it makes, the card goes like this and makes a design, George Washington or Queen Elizabeth, whatever it is, makes the design. So if one of those cards would rip or something like this, I would go up on top of the loom and repair it. That was my first job.

And then of course built myself up a little bit, I was a weaver, fixer, and then the inspector, inspect. So what I used to do, go on the loom – of course you had about forty, a hundred looms, but I think I had forty looms, I would go on the loom and check the defects while it's weaving. So we have a weaver and a fixer, so I would check to see if it, the defect it was making on the loom and I would stop the

loom. This was in, that was my job, stop the loom, and of course the weaver didn't like it because this was piece work, and the fixer didn't like it because he had to many jobs.

So anyway, what I used to do is just stop the loom, mark down what the defects, what was causing the defects, and the fixer would fix it. And the weaver couldn't touch that loom until it was fixed, because defects on the material is no good, it's second quality. So that was my job for, oh, for so many years, forty, well I would say maybe ten years out of it.

AL: And then, and did you, so did you have a desire to change into more of the area of the dye house?

GL: Yes, that's right. So what I did, they told me that I could make ten dollars more on the second shift going to dye house office, so I applied for it, fought for it, I got it. I got the job, it was on the second shift but I didn't care, and that's where I learned, it was in the office, and that's where I've learned about dyeing and chemicals and everything, part of it. And then somebody in the lab decided to retire or quit or whatever, so I applied for that job, and I got it, which what they called second class assistant, so I went from second class to first class with Dexter Kneeland. I was in charge of the whole thing, after all these years. So when I retired I was in charge of the whole thing. I was a colorist and, well, I was doing everything.

But there was a time, there was time when they sold the mill, and as far as I'm concerned and everybody's concerned, and I know you're on the mic, I'm on the mic, it's, the people that bought the mill, they was looking for money. They didn't put any money in. They didn't, and I brought it up one time. They put all the money in, they didn't want to put any money in so they didn't buy any machinery, we didn't have any money supply to buy parts and everything, so, and in my case they hired outside people which they eliminated all the supervisors at that time, management from the top down. I think I was, myself and Don Taylor were the only two supervisors left at that time from the group that's been there for years and years.

So what happened is, they sold the mill again and they fired all of these people, they got rid of all these people, and Fred Lebel came over. And at that time I had trouble with one of the people they had hired at that time, it was a lady from college, she was a designer, she didn't know much about designing textile material, so one day she came up to me, I think it was after thirty so many years, she came up to me and she says, you got to go in the dye house and take over and help this gentleman. I says, no, I'm not.

I knew his background, he applied for a job at Bates, this is well known now, he applied for a job and his resume was false. He says he was a dyer, and he didn't know anything about coloring so, and I was told by my supervisor at one time, don't go downstairs, down below, (*unintelligible word*) downstairs, don't go down below, and he says, don't help him because he's not going to stay there. If we keep helping him out, he'll stay. I was told that by my supervisor.

Okay, the reason I was told not to go downstairs, and she came up and like I said, she hasn't been there for a year yet, and we always had trouble in the designing room, she was in charge of that. So anyway, I says I'm not going to go downstairs, and she says, oh yes you will. I says, no, I'm not going to go downstairs and do his job because he cannot do his job. No matter what I do downstairs, he cannot do his job.

So, I can tell you why the resume that he had brought in, but anyway, I'll skip that. So anyway, well, she looked at me, well, she says, you either go downstairs or, with a big O-R, or, what are you going to do? So I'm figuring if I'm fired, if she fires me I'm going to lose my severance pay and all this that's coming to me after all these years. If I quit, then I can have my severance pay and all this, what I have coming. Which I did. So I left.

So I went to Libby Mill, now if you want to go back, so I went to Libby Mill, I found a job at Libby

Mill, the same job only on second shift, doing the same, doing the coloring and all that bit, I was doing this on the second shift and I did this for about six or eight months or something like that. The mill was sold at that time, they got Fred Lebel back, Fred Lebel called me back, and he wants you, he says I want you to be in charge of the whole thing. I says, yes, I'll take it. After eight months.

But while I was at the Libby Mill, that little lady, I'm not going to mention any names, she came in around, I was working between, I think it started three to eleven or something like that, second shift. She came in at four o'clock with the manager at Libby Mill, she came in the lab. And I was so surprised, she was looking for a job. She was looking for a job. And I said, geez, and at that time I didn't know anything about Fred coming to see me, and I says I'll be damned if I have to work under her again, you know, I says, this is, you know.

But anyway I left, Fred Lebel came in and I told him, I says, yeah, I'll be glad to take over the job. So I took over the whole job until I decided to quit, retired. And then they sold the mill again, two Japanese bought it, and they broke it right down to nothing. They just tried to get as much, and they had a mill down south. I went down south and, you know, we checked it out. You were with me, when we went down south, South Carolina, next to Georgia or something like that. Anyway, we were going to Florida and we stopped by.

JL: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

GL: So anyway, we, so anyway they bought the place and they were after all the supervisors, and I had told them, I had my resignation, I already told them I was quitting in two months, I think it was in February or something like that. So we had this meeting and these two Japanese, they were millionaires, they had money, money was no object, but they did not want to spend money for Bates. They wanted Bates name, the name, that's what they wanted, and they fought, oh yeah, I think he went to court, that's why Fred Lebel changed the name.

So anyway, we had that meeting, this is a little bit off, but we had that meeting and he, that Japanese, he just blast all the supervisors. We had a meeting, or a supervisors meeting, different departments and all that, and he blast everybody. Oh, he says, you people don't know what you're doing and, you know, you should run the place and, you know. But, so.

AL: With all the different companies turnover, buying and selling, was the quality able to be maintained in the product, or did it -?

GL: Never could. They did not want to put money in the mill, that was the problem. So we didn't have any capital, we didn't have the money. We couldn't buy a part. If the machine broke down, we couldn't buy parts. So the machines stayed dead.

JL: But the bedspreads, the quality did go down, didn't it?

GL: Yes, it did, because we didn't have, yeah, because the -

JL: The equipment wasn't updated.

GL: Of course I was in the lab, I see all of this, and of course she's in the cotton department so she's, she analyzed raw cotton. So then they start buying cheap cotton, what they call the waste, that's the last crop, which is, of course she knows what I'm talking about, the last crop is not as good as the first crop in everything. It's got a lot of waste in it, to it.

JL: No, it's not the qual-, it's the length.

GL: The length, yeah, well, yeah, the longer the fiber the better the quality of your material than if it's

short. But that's, you get that at the end of the season, in the crop.

JL: Well I don't know about the crop.

GL: So anyway, this is what happened, so.

AL: And going back a little bit to the first time the mill was sold and a lot of the supervisors were fired, did they bring new people in to replace them with different titles? Or how did that work?

GL: Well, in my case they took, they asked me to take over. And when you take over, you're going to be in charge, like I had one, two, three department, or four, and I had what they called, I had the dye house, the bleachery, the drying range, and there was another department, oh, the screen print which was at Pepperill Mill, it was over there. So I had three or four, over four or five department to run, so that was my case. Then they called Gerry Letourneau, he was in charge of the spinning room, Don Taylor was the assistant manager at the time. So they called back some of the old fellows, Fred Lebel did that.

Of course Fred Lebel's been there for, manager for years and years, but he was never owner. Now he owns his own place, but he was never the owner, he was a manager. But the mill got bought and sold, but he had nothing to do except run it but at that time he wasn't running it, he was assistant. When they came in they brought these bad people, so.

JL: Bad people?

GL: Well they, they, if he, you know -?

JL: As opposed to good people?

GL: Well, I mean textile bad people, I mean they didn't, the knowledge, they didn't have any knowledge at all. You know, you got money and you buy a company, you bring your own people. And if they don't know what textile is, if they know about painting or, you know, plumbing or whatever, you can't do textile work. And that's what happened. And they didn't last, they didn't last a year. As a matter of fact, they didn't even last eight months because I stayed at Libbey Mill for about six to eight months, I don't remember right now, and I was called back to Bates. So they didn't last very long. And when I saw her coming at the Libbey Mill looking for a job, I says, (*unintelligible word*). So I don't know what happened. She was a nice person, you know, it's just the knowledge, she didn't have it.

AL: Now, you were involved in the both the bowling league and the softball league?

GL: Yes.

AL: Can you talk about those? I haven't talked to anyone yet who was involved in them.

GL: The bowling league, we went for years and years.

JL: Oh, we bowled.

GL: But when they first started the bowling league, I'm talking maybe -

JL: We had a combination of people from the mill and office, but people were all, oh, we had a good time, oh yes.

GL: But I would say it started maybe in the forties, in the forties.

AL: So was that a big social activity?

GL: It was one of the biggest, it was one of the biggest for Bates.

JL: That was, that was, we did, we'd socialize with these people.

GL: Yeah, this was a insider, the people working the mill, in the office and even the manager, Fred Lebel, I used to bowl, as a matter of fact we both were pretty good bowlers together.

JL: Pat, in the dye house.

GL: Oh, Pat in the dye house, he was in charge of the dye house.

JL: They had a good group. We had a good time.

GL: He was a good bowler, Pat. But softball, you played with the girl Hill Division, softball, and I played with the Bates Division, softball, mostly on the bench, though. I was not a good hitter, but I was good in the outfield, I could run like a rabbit.

AL: So there were some social activities associated with the mill that gave you connections with people from outside.

JL: Oh yes, we had office parties, we had Christmas, they had good Christmas parties then.

AL: Did they?

JL: Oh, yes.

GL: Oh my gosh, yes.

AL: Can you tell me about what they were like?

GL: Oh, my gosh.

JL: Oh, the office parties.

GL: We all had our little groups, so.

JL: I'd rather not.

AL: But the mill at that time put on the Christmas parties?

GL: The mill was at full blast at that time. We're talking about when the mill was running real good and making money.

AL: Forties and fifties?

GL: I would say yes, yes, oh yes, in the fifties, in the forties and fifties, very good.

AL: And so they sponsored the parties?

GL: Yes, they did, oh yes.

JL: Well, this was, I'm talking about the office. The mill people had their own party. I don't think the mill sponsored parties for the office, I'm talking about the office.

GL: No, they only, the only thing they did, once a year they would sponsor a picnic we used to have, picnics.

JL: The mill did?

GL: Yeah, for their people, yeah, we had a lobster and clam and everything, we used to go at the lake.

JL: Oh, really?

GL: Oh yes, yeah.

AL: I have heard of that.

GL: We did have, you know, but that was the good time they call it, you know. But when they start buying and selling the place, that was, selling or buying, that was it, it was going downhill all the time. As a matter of fact, let me see, the last time I worked in the mill I think the people owned the mill, or something, it was something, we had shares in the company. Which of course didn't amount to anything because there was no money, so just throw it out.

JL: You know, there were so many changes that I, I just, it's a blur.

GL: See, we used to have bonus, you remember, every year, we used to have bonus every year.

JL: We did?

GL: Oh yeah, boy, you don't remember that? Yeah.

JL: Bonuses?

GL: Yeah, oh yes.

JL: No, I don't.

GL: Oh yeah.

AL: Do you ever recall a strike at the mill?

GL: Yes. As a matter of fact, I was out on a strike, but I was in the weave room at the time.

AL: So in your, the early part of your career.

GL: Yes, and they had strikes, and as a supervisor then you don't, if there's a strike you stay in. As a matter of fact, I was supposed to go back in the mill, guarding the back door, which never happened.

JL: Well I remember that, I remember that.

GL: Because they decided not to have a strike at that time. But the one that I went, the one I got stuck, what I call stuck with, is they had a strike and it didn't last, I don't think it last more than three or four weeks. Because I applied for a job at the Libby Mill and I was in the card room. Never worked in the card room in my life, but I was in the card room, what's his name, oh, the manager there. Well, you were working in the weave room, I mean you were working at the Hill Mill at the time. Miles Godell, you remember him? He was personnel manager. So I went and see him, he gave me the job. He says, now, he says, they call you back after the strike, he says, you going to go back? I says, I don't think so. Which I did. Soon as the strike was over, I was back to my job. But that was in the weave room.

AL: What was that strike about, do you remember?

GL: Oh, I don't know, could have been -

AL: Wages?

GL: Wages, or it could have been -

JL: Or it could have been the wages, the pays -

GL: They always (*unintelligible phrase*), you know.

JL: The pays were, the pays were really bad.

AL: But I'm wondering how it turned out, did it turn out in the workers' favor?

GL: I would think part of it, some of it. Not much. In other words, you ask for a dollar, you get fifty cents, that's settled, you know, that's the way they work it.

JL: Is that when the union came in?

GL: Blais.

AL: Denis Blais?

GL: Yeah, Blais was the top man in the union at the time, and the office was at (*name*) -

JL: But is that what the strike was about, did that bring in the union?

GL: Oh no, the union was there but it wasn't very strong. And when he, Blais was one of those that he was a fighter, and he was fighting for the people and he was always, you know, every two years or four years he was always digging in there to try and get more money for the people or whatever, benefits, or. So, but I got caught once in that time, but it didn't last. Because I remember, I didn't stay at the, I didn't like that card room, I didn't like that one. It was, at that time it was all the lint flying around, so it was bad for what they call brown lungs and all that bit, so, and I was operating the cards, all the stuff was flying. But of course after I, when I quit there was no such thing, everything was all filtered out and everything, all the card rooms, you know.

AL: So that technology had changed over time.

GL: Yes, yes. When they got some money, you know, as years, they finally got some what they call system, system that would clean up and you could walk there and you couldn't see nothing after that, it was so beautiful. But it cost money. It was all filtered out, so. So there was my research.

AL: Are there other people that either of you remember working with that just stick out in your memory as someone that would be, maybe they've passed away, they'd be interesting to talk about?

JL: Oh gee, a lot of them passed away.

AL: I mean, people that you worked with.

JL: Were close with?

AL: Yeah, or -

JL: I remember working with Marion Gibson for years and years.

GL: Oh yeah, she worked in the office for years.

JL: Terry Sylvia, Sylvio? Sylvia?

GL: Sylvia.

JL: Sylvia.

GL: Sylvia, I golf with her brother.

JL: For years. Yvette Blais. God, there were so many of them in that office that, I worked in the main office and there were a whole bunch of them. It was pretty, the atmosphere was good in the office, I mean we weren't pressured. It was comfortable, you know.

AL: Maybe not being pushed as much as, say, if you were on a loom?

JL: No, no, nothing, ever, never, I don't ever remember being pushed. No, it wasn't, we didn't have that atmosphere, not in the office at any rate.

GL: In my case we, in the weave room we had what they call second hand overseers, so you have one second hand per shift, and the overseer would be on one shift, covering all three shifts. Of course, the second hand would report to the overseer, that's what their title was, overseers, and of course then it went to superintendent after a while. But anyway, and I went through all of them. I can name you (*unintelligible word*) -

JL: Steve Crowley.

GL: Steve Crowley, Roland Tardiff and Joe Lee, Joe Lee was one of them, and he gave me a problem, but he was there.

JL: Larry Sullivan.

GL: Larry Sullivan was my boss in the dye house, in the lab. He was superintendent of the whole thing, and of course when they called me in I took over the whole thing.

AL: And who was the person that taught you the dye technique?

GL: Dexter Kneeland.

AL: And who was he?

GL: He was the, what do you call it, I think I got him here.

JL: He was a chemical en-

GL: Okay, ten years with Dexter Kneeland, chemical engineer from Bates, he went to Bates College [class of 1918], and he, from Bates College, he started at Bates, and we're talking almost a hundred years ago, it's quite a ways back, and he took over, he was in charge of the lab. His office was in the lab. In other words, we had a little cubbyhole, they call it, and that's the office and the lab is this way. So he was up there, upstairs on the second floor, and he would be in charge of all the department. And I don't know, he just thought I had good eyes for colors, which I didn't even know, so he decided, he says, some day you want to take my job? I says, yup.

JL: Of course there was a lot of schooling in between all this, he had to attend.

GL: Oh yeah, oh gosh, because I didn't have any knowledge of chemicals and dye stuff, except what I learned there.

AL: Now, did Bates help sponsor your education in those areas?

GL: They did.

JL: They did, they did.

GL: As a matter of fact, I went to Lowell Technical Institute.

JL: For years.

GL: For years I went there, and of course I didn't have too much experience in management and supervision, so I went to CM-, which they called CMVTI at that time. So I graduated from there, so I went there at night.

JL: He attended, you attended a lot of classes there.

GL: So I went there and I graduated. Because if you don't graduate, you got to pay your tuition. See, that's the way they fix you up. So Roland D'Amour was with me in that class, (*unintelligible phrase*), so I graduated from management and supervision category, so I learned that. And of course traveled from, was it Monday, traveled from here to Lowell Technical, Lowell, Mass. to the Lowell Technical Institute, and that's where they had all these chemists, professors. Because Lowell was well known for the wool industry over there, so they still had all these professors up there. So at night we went to class, drive all back. We'd stop at Portsmouth and get a, and Tuesday morning we were back here to work. We traveled, we'd get up early in the morning and I was in the mill at eight o'clock, do my whole, you know, work all day. Did that for -

JL: Did that for years.

GL: There was no end to it.

(All speaking at once.)

GL: So what happened, what happened is they took this college, they decided there would be no more, textile was pretty far gone as far as these old professors, they weren't making, if you don't have too many in class, you know, they're not making any money so they decided to cancel the whole thing. So now it's, I think it's a type of an engineer, I don't know what, it has to do with, well, engineer, machinery.

AL: Mechanical engineering?

GL: Mechanical engineering, I think that's what it was. It's mechanical. So that was the end of my traveling. But that was enough, that was enough to put me where I wanted to be. So it was kind of rough to start. It came out all right, I was happy.

AL: Were there any events or things that happened in the mill while you all were there that stick out in your memory, in broad terms?

GL: Oh, there was little stuff.

AL: Little things, anecdotes that you have?

JL: Well, you didn't, if you didn't get along with your boss, it was very easy to move from one department to another.

GL: Yeah, this is one of the problems.

JL: I went from the lab to the office, to the data center, back to the office.

GL: As a matter of fact, in the lab she was working with the same department, not in the, in the same room but different department. See, when you were in the analysts.

JL: They closed down the general office.

GL: Which was a research lab, it was a big research lab, very big money in there.

JL: Very big, and they closed that down and they eliminated all the help there and they kept just a handful of us and they built a lab which happened to be off -

GL: In my department.

JL: His lab at Bates, and they moved us there. And from there, after a while I wasn't getting along too well with the boss so I got transferred to the main office, and I stayed in the office. And then after a while, they took my job and it was, when the computers came out, and so my job was put on the computers so I went to the data, they built a data office, so I moved there. And then eventually it went back into the office again, so I moved back in the office.

GL: She was a telephone operator for a while.

JL: Oh, I was a relief operator, yes, I forgot that.

GL: And these are one of those push things.

AL: Oh, yes.

JL: I was the relief telephone operator with Evelyn Wood. She was the operator there from day one.

AL: That name is familiar.

JL: Oh, it must have. She was miss ambassador over there, and let me tell you, she ran it.

GL: Yeah, she was good. But she was a nice person, though.

JL: But, and I trained on the cords. Oh, my heavens.

GL: Push, yeah, plug up the holes.

JL: Oh, my heavens. And I had to relieve when she, you know, when her break would come up I'd be there. When she was out sick, I'd replace her. If she was, go on vacation I'd be the relief operator. So I did that most of the time that I was in the office, so that was a big part of my job that I'd forgotten.

AL: Did people ever play pranks and things at work, or was it pretty serious?

GL: No, if it was it wasn't serious. There's a lot of things, you know, I've seen, but. As a matter of fact, when I decided to retire, well no, it was when they had asked me to take over and I went and, and I'm

one, more or less bow of the wood, they call it. You do it, you know, I ask people to do something, I don't tell people to do something. That's my, I've learned that from CMVTI, don't tell people, ask them. If they refuse, then tell them, then you tell them, you do it. You know, you ask him first.

And I've learned that from CMVTI, the teacher over there, he was a contractor, built houses. And this is each class I went, so, and when I mentioned that, you know, I told him, you know, because they ask you questions and I told him, I says, well, I don't like to tell people what to do. I says, I'd rather ask them and if they don't want to do it then I tell them to do it. And if they don't want to do it, then they move. So he says, you must be from Bates Mill, right off. We were three or four of us, D'Amour with us, there was four of us.

And we all looked at him when he said that, you know. He says, well, he says, when you hired a person, this was the teacher, he says, when you hired a person to build a house, he says, I want somebody who will go on the roof, he says, I don't want one guy taking one board on his back and walk up the ladder, he says, I want a bunch of boards going up. I say, yup, that's nice, you know, I says, you're the boss, you're the contractor, you're the boss, you tell these people what to do, good, I says. Are you, I says, are you under contract? I says, if a man does not do what you want him to do, I said, what do you do, you fire him.

You can't do this at Bates. We have to have seven, and I went through this, we have to have seven penalty against this man. The only reason we, the only time we can fire him, if he does damage to the material or, that's the only time, the first time, there's no excuse. But if he does something, okay, they go to the union, you fight this out, that's number one chance, okay, we'll give him a chance. And they can go seven times before you can fire a person.

I had one guy, he went to a psychiatrist, something like that, there was something wrong. He was (*unintelligible word*), dye house, rough. And he, what he did, a couple of times, of course I was in charge then, what he did, the overseer came and see me, (*unintelligible phrase*) or second, whatever you call it. Anyway, he came up to see me, he said, we got a problem downstairs, he says, this guy just jumped on this guy and he was choking him. That's physical, no way. So I went down and talked to him. And he looked at me and I knew it was coming, I said, did you physically fix this guy here, did you try to choke him? He says, I did not. So I went and got the guy. So I says, all right, now what's going on between the two of you? He said, the overseer said that you tried to choke him, and you're saying he did not. So what happened? He says, I'm not going to say nothing. This was, that's it, plain.

I found out later that he had an apartment house, and this guy here, with a little brain damage, he told him that if he says that to me about him choking him, he was going to burn his house, his apartment house. And he would, and got away with it because he went to see a psychiatrist. I think it was twice a month he went to see a psychiatrist because he had a problem. So he ended up, him and I, he ended up, him and I, he says, before you're through, because I was retiring, he said, we'll go in the alley. I says, go ahead. You know, that's stupid, you know, it doesn't solve any problem.

So I had three guys, they were going to take me in the alley before I retired. Even the engineer, because, you know, you have work to do, the machines are there, and I made a requisition to have that machine fixed to the engineer, go to the engineer, he sends a crew upstairs but he doesn't tell them what the problem is. So the guy comes up to me and I says, well, this is what's happening, the gear is stripped, you got to take it out and put a new one it, that's it. Now, he comes up and he's telling me that I'm telling his people what to do. Well, I says, you didn't tell them what to do. They came up to me to ask me what was wrong, and I just explained them the whole thing. Now he's, and he was one of my best friends, best, you know, we had, as a matter of fact I was golfing with him (*unintelligible phrase*).

JL: No name.

GL: No name, so I said, no. So I says, it was one of my, and here, from that day on he was my enemy.

He wouldn't talk to me and everything.

AL: It sounds like part of the, the mill set it up so that it was very hard to fire people who didn't do their job.

GL: No, you couldn't do it, no, the union was so strong.

AL: The union was very strong?

GL: The union was so strong, you couldn't fire anybody unless, well, there's another, I can go on and on.

JL: You know what, personally I think the union didn't have people that knew what they were doing. I don't think they had, anybody could go up and be a, what were the?

AL: Represent the workers?

JL: They represented the workers, and I don't know, are they getting paid or something? But they'd take anybody, they weren't trained. So they had people that didn't -

GL: No, they always nominate somebody that didn't know all the rules about the union and your, you know, so they didn't know anything.

JL: They didn't know what they were doing, so I don't, I think the union itself -

AL: Got in the way?

GL: But (*unintelligible phrase*), if you're one of the officers in the union, and each department had their own steward, what did they call them, steward? Something like that.

AL: Shop steward.

GL: Well, anyway, shop steward, yeah, okay, that's the word. So they got, in each department they had their own. And if you go to them, and what I was going to say, the thing is you cannot, if there's a layoff, you can't be laid off, I mean, (*unintelligible word*), if there's a strike, they cannot be out. Even by seniority, because everything's got seniority, the lowest man goes out, you know.

JL: You mean they can't get rid of them.

GL: You can't get rid of them because of strikes.

JL: Because they were shop steward.

GL: Because they were shop steward. He could be the only one left, but he would be the one, and he could have been, just started, because he got elected, you know, he was a good spokesman and all that bit. You got elected, you just been there maybe a month or something like that, and your seniority's not there, you know, top seniority is not there. So you'd be there and all the others, old timers been there forty years, they're out on strike or whatever. But that's the union, that was the union then.

JL: I think it gave them authority and that.

AL: Thank you both very much.

End of Interview

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