

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
CCSU Students Sean Begin and Eric Bedner
Interview Subject: Martha Roulard
Factory subject worked at: Stanley Tools/Stanley Works
Date of Interview: February 18, 2014
Location: Martha's New Britain Home

We interviewed Martha Roulard on Tuesday, February 18 at 10 a.m., at her home in New Britain. Martha is a single, silver-haired woman who will be turning 81-years-old on Feb. 28. When we talked to her she was dressed in a gray cardigan-like sweater and purple pants. She shares her home with three cats, but no dogs despite the "Beware of the Dog" signs in the front windows of her side of the two-family home she lives in. The walls are covered with pictures of family members and religious relics. She has a collection of what looks to be about two dozen Dean Martin VHS tapes, along with more in the hallway. The living room from which we sit and talk with her has several trays of candy around, from which she grabs a piece before offering us some (or coffee) and sitting down to talk.

Q: Why don't you start by telling us how you got your job at Stanley Works and Stanley Tools?

"I was working for Cannaris – this was a cigarette place on Lafayette Street – when I got out of school. From there I went into Grant's making the popcorn and selling cookies. And then from there, my husband who was working at Stanley Tools, he was a trucker over there, he got me the job."

Q: And what did you do there?

"There I was in the dipping room. And if you don't know what that is it means you use acetate and acetone for dipping handles of screwdrivers. They're clear, some of them are black, some of them are orange. It depends on what they are, really. And I was there for a year. [She shows us a photo of her taken at Stanley Tools on Christmas Eve in 1950. She has another one taken with her husband as well.] Then after I worked there a year I went to Stanley Works and I worked there from '51-'56, I worked there five years. I worked on machines making the brackets for the doors. Now they would just give you a piece of metal and it forms the hinge. I worked on that and then when there wasn't enough of that they put me on... I'm trying to think now. I was inspector for inspecting the parts as they came off the machine. And then I was on the drilling machine where counter-sinking the holes for the brackets that we had for the doors. I was there for five years from 1951 until '56.

Q: And then after '56 did you have any other work outside the factories or did you stop working at factories or stop working at all?

"No, after that I was sent out to apprentice because I got laid-off over there [at Stanley Works.] And I only stayed there [at the apprenticeship] because I had no way of getting around. When the buses came at 11:00 at night, if you weren't out there you would have no way of getting home. And this is out in Kensington. My husband had to take me and

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
CCSU Students Sean Begin and Eric Bedner
Interview Subject: Martha Roulard
Factory subject worked at: Stanley Tools/Stanley Works
Date of Interview: February 18, 2014
Location: Martha's New Britain Home

he had to go to work in the morning. He not only worked there, when he stopped there he went to Fafner's. And he was working there for 28 years. He retired in 1985. After that my husband says 'No way, you're going to stay home because I'm not getting up in the middle of the night I've got to go work in the morning.' So I stayed home after that."

Q: Now you said you were an inspector on the line?

"Well this was at Stanley Works. That was inspecting pieces of metal, you know, the things that came off of the presses. If it was good it was in one box, if it was bad it was thrown in another. That's scrap, already junk."

[She starts petting her cat and we talk a little about her three cats Tiger, Bear and Babe. In the recording of the interview you can hear the cat purring. She talks about the 12 dogs she and her husband had, as well as the rabbit they had, before

Q: Did you take any sort of personal pride knowing the impact you were having?

"Oh yeah, because they knew that I had done good work over there. And when my husband couldn't get there to deliver, because he was a trucker... then when he went to Fafner's he was a barrel tumbler and he had to bring in sand and sawdust and stone. He had to carry all that in for Fafner's. And he was there for 28 years, like I said. I don't know how many years he was at Stanley, he left right after I left. He had long years over there. He did a lot of different things. He had to give girls work besides doing the other stuff. The stuff that went into the barrels was supposed to be metal stuff; I don't know what the heck the stuff actually was. But anyway, he had to do all that tumbling and add all that stuff. It was a heavy job. He had to pull what was called a wagon with skids on them. And he would work on them and bring them to a lot of different departments. He did a lot of things, a lot of heavy work. Believe it or not the sweeper got 10 cents less than him. I said to my husband, you should have got a sweeper, it wouldn't be killing you. Because it was a dirty job, a heavy job. In the winter time he outside in the snow bringing in the stuff."

Q: For your position, was the pay similar to your husband's? Was it more, was it less?

"At that time, we were only getting a dollar something per hour... a dollar something per thousands of pieces that go into the machine. My husband was getting I think around a couple of dollars. It was very cheap. He used to bring home pay; it was maybe thirty or forty dollars a week. It was bad."

Q: That still wasn't a lot in the 1950's.

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
CCSU Students Sean Begin and Eric Bedner
Interview Subject: Martha Roulard
Factory subject worked at: Stanley Tools/Stanley Works
Date of Interview: February 18, 2014
Location: Martha's New Britain Home

“No it wasn't because they took out the union dues and income tax and FICA. By the time you come home with the pay, where is it? And you had bills to pay so it made it hard but we managed. No matter what.”

Q: Now, you were part of the union, too?

“Yes, I had to pay union dues, also.”

Q: Did you find the union helpful to you guys?

“No, my husband was hurt a couple of times and the union didn't even want to go in and bother with him at the time.”

Q: Was it mandatory that everyone had to be part of the union?

“Yeah, it was. And I know my husband was hurt a couple times. And he almost died one time. They used to tell him sweep the floor, do this, do that, clean up. He was doing the trucking work as it was and they made him do other jobs. [She talks about how he wouldn't even get a chance to sit down and eat lunch, they'd be asking him to get up and do work.]

Q: Was that a common thing to happen?

“No by right they shouldn't have because they had other people to do those jobs. They didn't like it because he was sitting and not working. It was hard for him and he had to put up with the smells there. HE would come home with dirty clothes looking like he was working in a coal mine.”

Q: What kind of smells?

“Well, let's see there was the stuff from the oils that they used. You had the bigger machines with stuff in it, I don't know what you would call it, they had the steel in it. They had all the oils before they got it into the machines. And the, of course, all the stuff he was using because he had to use sawdust, he had to use sand, he had to use stone.”

[She tells the story about how her husband was sent upstairs and passed out from a smell, from something in the air and how they had to help pick him up and get him to a doctor. He had been sent to do someone else's job that wasn't doing it. He got no help from the union for what happened.]

Q: They didn't really care much for safety only for production.

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
CCSU Students Sean Begin and Eric Bedner
Interview Subject: Martha Roulard
Factory subject worked at: Stanley Tools/Stanley Works
Date of Interview: February 18, 2014
Location: Martha's New Britain Home

“Sounds like it, at least for him. I don't know about other people.”

Q: Now what about you, were you persuaded to override safety measures to get more work done?

“No. The only thing I had to worry about was we had to be chained up on the big presses at Stanley Works. And as you put your hand in there with the piece, the machine would stutter. And if you didn't get your hand out of there before time, [claps], no hand. And that happened to a man in there one time when he was on these big presses. And he wasn't there very long and it took his hand off. I was working the other presses for counter-sinking. We had to wrap our hands with tape because the stuff coming out of there was so hot because we were drilling holes. My machine was going too fast and I went to do it and it drilled right through here [she shows a spot of the meat of her hand where the drill passed into]. A little bit more it would have hit my bone but it didn't. The only thing that happened is when it's cold out this finger will get cold.”

Q: What happened after? Did you go right back to work?

“Yeah, all they did was wrap it up and I went back to work. I was never sent home.”

Q: Around that time OSHA was just beginning?

“I don't think OSHA was there. I don't think they were there at that time. I don't think so. I don't remember anybody coming around. We only just had the setup man that did all the work. When that happened, they had to do my machine over again to lower the speed on it.”

Q: So it took you getting really badly hurt before they said they would do something about it?

[laughs]

Q: You said you were chained. What do you mean by that?

“It was a chain that had to be on your wrist as you were putting the pieces from the machine into the press. It had to be laid in there, and this way when the machine came down it would form the hinges. The chain is supposed to pull it back.”

Q: Pull the piece back?

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
CCSU Students Sean Begin and Eric Bedner
Interview Subject: Martha Roulard
Factory subject worked at: Stanley Tools/Stanley Works
Date of Interview: February 18, 2014
Location: Martha's New Britain Home

“No. Pull your hand back away from the machine. The trouble is that if it started to stutter, you better get your hand out of there quick because you don't know when it's going to come down all of a sudden. It did this a lot of times.”

Q: Is that what happened to the gentleman who lost his hand?

“Well that was not that kind of a machine. He had rolls of metal, and that was going through the machine. He didn't understand what he was doing I don't think because he was new. And I think he was a foreigner at the time.”

Q: Was it wrapped around your wrist like a handcuff?

“No, it was just like this here [makes a motion around her wrists to show it was like a bracelet or a handcuff]. Just enough to close it in there and yank your hand back because it was a long chain.”

Q: Was that all automated if it worked like it was supposed to?

“If it worked it would pull your hand out of there. But I used to watch that thing. When I heard it tat-tat-tat-tat, I took my hand out of there quick, and down it came. My husband used to load the bins up with that stuff.”

Q: You said you were paid by how many pieces you made?

“Yeah, it was only a dollar-something for a thousand.”

Q: How long would it take you to do a thousand pieces? Could you do a thousand in an hour?

“It's supposed to be done in an hour, but a lot of times, like I said, that machine, you never knew because you had to be more careful with it. It wasn't only that, but you had to use the press with your foot, and that would yank your hand back. It was rough working there.”

Q: Were you always under pressure? Did you always have your bosses over your shoulder?

“Well, they would always come over just to check on you to see how much work you were doing, to make sure that you filled up a box, and then a trucker would come and put another box on top, and then you'd fill it as you were working. You worked as fast as you could to try to make something. But I never made much money there either -- 30 dollars

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
CCSU Students Sean Begin and Eric Bedner
Interview Subject: Martha Roulard
Factory subject worked at: Stanley Tools/Stanley Works
Date of Interview: February 18, 2014
Location: Martha's New Britain Home

or something. It was rough during those years. People don't understand today. They want 10 and 15 dollars an hour. Try working back then when it was only a dollar and something, you know. It's really rough."

Q: Did the union ever go on strike when you were with them?

"Ummm... they may have. I don't think they did when I was there. They were laying off because of the... I think some of the work was not coming in or something or whatever. I don't remember what it was now. Hey this is the 1950's you're talking about. It was rough."

Q: Did you socialize a lot with the people you worked with?

"Oh, yes. I had a lot of lady friends there. We'd go out to eat for dinner time. We only had a half an hour. We'd go over to a restaurant near the factory. It was just a little diner, a little luncheonette, and we'd go there to eat. I got along with all the girls. Most of the girls I knew there are all gone. I remember there was Josephine, and there was Mary, and there was Amelia, and there were oh so many other girls that I knew...Margret."

Q: So there was a big female working population?

"Yeah. Well some of them were doing presses and others were doing inspecting."

Q: Did a lot of the women working there have husbands there too?

"No. They may have been other places. I never knew of any of them who had their husbands working there. They used to work outside. But I got along good with them. We had a lot of fun. We were glad when it was time to eat."

Q: Did you do social things outside of work?

"No because they all had their own things to do, and I then I got my husband too you know, when you come out of work. With us we would go to the park. We would take our dogs all the way out to Avon, the river out there, and we would have a picnic on the weekend because we weren't working, you know. That's how we enjoyed ourselves."

Q: Is there anything you'd like to talk about your work that we haven't asked you?

"I don't know. I don't know what else I can tell you."

Q: Did you enjoy working there?

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities CT at Work Project
CCSU Students Sean Begin and Eric Bedner
Interview Subject: Martha Roulard
Factory subject worked at: Stanley Tools/Stanley Works
Date of Interview: February 18, 2014
Location: Martha's New Britain Home

“I didn’t mind it. I didn’t mind it. There was a little bit of money coming in anyways during that time. We just did what we had to do and paid what we had to pay. We always had a rent. We never had the kind of money that they do today to have a house.”

[Discussion about family -- where they were born, when they came to America]

[Martha is a first-generation-American]

[Martha talks about the death of her husband and other family members]

Q: Do you have children?

“No, I lost two that I was carrying. One I lost while working on the presses.”

Q: You were working the press while you were pregnant?

“Yeah, that’s how I lost it. That was in ‘53.”

[Discussion about pets and family]