

Nuts and Bolts: Stories from New Britain Manufacturing
Connecticut Humanities Ct at Work Project
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Subject: Martha Roulard
Company: Stanley Tools/Stanley Works

Martha Roulard, 81, sits on her living room couch, petting her cat, surrounded by the old records and Dean Martin movies from her younger years and tells about the chain she wore around her wrist as a safety measure against the faultiness of the machine she worked on. Martha would slide pieces of metal into the Stanley Works machine that produced the brackets that helped support the hinges of doors across America. Around her wrist a chain, at first glance maybe a sign of something worse, but its purpose meant for safety not subjugation. The chain attaches to a floor press, which Martha presses as the stamper stutters in its motions. Her hand is snatched away, moments before the machine suddenly slams down on the spot her hand had just occupied.

In the early years of industry, before the regulation of groups like the Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA), these scenes were not uncommon. Martha retains a scar on the meat of her right hand, where a drill passed into it while she worked a different machine running far too swiftly. She remembers the day her husband, since passed, found himself in the hospital after being knocked unconscious by a powerful smell in the upper levels of another company's factory, while doing a job meant for someone else. And despite being paying union members, they may as well have been paying money to a loan shark, so helpful were the unions then.

For many families coming out of the Depression, the life afforded by New Britain industry was better than anything they had known. Working in the factories was hard and often dangerous but worth it for the security it provided. And workers found pleasures elsewhere, like the trips to the beach Martha and her husband would take with one of the 12 dogs they owned over the long years of their marriage or in the dressing up and letting loose for the holidays as seen in the yellowing square photo Martha shows off. In it she wears a long leopard print winter coat over her floral-patterned dress, purse slung over her right shoulder, hair done up. Her husband, in his leather coat and slacks and shirt with a white tie, has his arm around her, left hand in his pocket. They pose in front of some crates and machines at Stanley Works. It's Christmas Eve. They have a party to attend. They were hard times, yes. But they were good memories.