

AN ETHIC OF RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK: THE DAILINESS OF RURAL  
WORKING WOMEN'S LIVES

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for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
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I certify that I have read this manuscript and that, in my judgment, it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Jonny, my wonderful husband who creates a space within which I ponder, explore, and continuously question life's offerings. You are truly one who embraces my bohemian spirit.

To my cat Emma, you make me laugh everyday.

To Mom and Dad, you told me since I was knee high that I could do anything I set my mind to. I carry that belief with me always. Thank you for instilling in me a love of books, travel, and life on this planet.

And to G., G., V., B., E., L., and M., great working women from my hometown, your stories inspire and humble me.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze stories about the dailiness of rural working women's lives from my hometown, McLeansboro, Illinois. *Dailiness* is a term Bettina Aptheker used when referring to "the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labors and in the context of subordinated status to men" (1989, p. 39; 1993, p. 86). With dailiness, daily work and women's meanings associated with their work are upheld as valid and illustrative of knowledge and meaning within their social context.

A qualitative narrative inquiry approach was used to gather and explore stories from each woman's life during the time she worked at a garment factory. Data collected included in-depth interviews with each of the seven participants. This study facilitated an opportunity for rural working women to voice their lived experiences.

The findings in this study present five themes about the patterns of meaning evident in the dailiness of women's lives. These themes are: (a) an ethic of responsibility and work, (b) a continuum of daily experiences, (c) competence, (d) connection, and (e) resistance. Recommendations are provided for further research.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

I grew up in McLeansboro, a small rural town located in Southern Illinois. Many women, including my Mom worked at Elder's Manufacturing, a garment factory. It seemed to me that women worked from the time they got up until they went to bed. The image of a pristine stay at home mom like June Cleaver in *Leave it to Beaver* bore little resemblance to my lived experience. Women took care of the family and house, worked on family farms, worked at the factory, fostered family and friendship relationships and volunteered at the school, church, or other civic organizations.

I looked up to these "factory women" because I saw them as proud and hard working, doing what they had to for their families. While they may not have had fancy titles or high paying jobs, these women had power and influence. By providing direction and leadership within their families and community, women got things done. They paid attention to what was happening within the community, were involved in building social networks, communicated, influenced, and just plain persevered through many roles and responsibilities. I was intrigued to know how these women viewed their lived experiences and how their understanding of themselves aligned, if it did, with my own. This study is a reflection of my interest and an exploration of that intrigue. In this chapter I introduce the study's background including the theoretical construct underpinning my research, the significance of the study, and the methodology and methods used.

## Background of the Study

Mike Rowe in his television show *Dirty Jobs* highlights ordinary men and women who perform jobs that “most people wouldn’t dream of doing” (Johnson, 2007, p. 3d). I love Rowe’s show because I feel an affinity to those people going about their daily lives, working hard, probably wondering what the fuss is all about. While watching the show, it seems to me that people highlighted seem almost bemused at the idea that their work would be of interest to a television viewing audience. Rowe is quoted as saying, “The people I meet have a pretty even world view, that quiet knowledge that comes from knowing that even though your contribution may not be understood or appreciated, it matters. They know that, and they are secure in that” (p. 3d).

In the big scheme of things, daily activities of rural working women and their thoughts about those activities may be under our collective radar screens. Yet, probably because I grew up in a rural area, I find these women fascinating and worthy of further attention and study. Within their dailiness are stories that illuminate our understanding of women. *Dailiness* is a term Bettina Aptheker used when referring to “the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labors and in the context of subordinated status to men” (1989, p. 39; 1993, p. 86).

With dailiness, daily work and women’s meanings associated with their work are upheld as valid and illustrative of knowledge and meaning within their social context. Aptheker drew on the standpoint theory of sociologist Dorothy Smith. In her own words, Smith (2007) described her form of sociology as “in and of the same world as that in which it’s written and read. . . . So it looks outward, towards discovering how people are

actually putting things together.” Standpoint is contextual, interested in making the invisible visible, and in revealing differences while considering there may be aspects of our situation that obstruct our capacity to see and really understand. Standpoint theory questions and analyzes how gendered social relations influence our knowing practices. Specifically, standpoint theory is interested in uncovering and revealing differences created in men and women’s lives. At its core, standpoint theory challenges the predominant androcentric epistemological bias with its focus on men and their ways of knowing at the neglect and/or exclusion of women. Standpoint theory directly challenges positivism and the predominant epistemological accounts for who can be a knower, the kinds of things that can be known, and tests for truth. Standpoint theory provides a means for examining how women construct knowledge within their social situation.

Aptheker’s (1989) emphasis on dailiness elevates and recognizes the importance of seemingly ordinary women. Women have the capacity to create knowledge and make meaning from their daily lives and experiences. Rather than victims, women are agents who use situational strategies and actions to get things done for their family, at work, and within their community. Instead of seeking an elusive homogeneous view of women, women’s diversity is acknowledged and accepted as unique to them, their social situations and experiences. Women’s capacity for response exists in women’s view of their own voice and power. The challenge described by Esteva and Prakash (2001) is for “people to grasp what they possess within them waiting to be revealed such as courage, intelligence and compassion” (p. 162). Standpoint theory supports a view of the world where we are a product of our shared experiences, learning, and adaptation to our

perceptions of what is going on around us. Many factors influence and form us, perhaps, even without our knowing or completely being able to articulate how they do so.

This study gathered stories from rural working women, a group of women who have received little attention post-World War II. Due in part to societal shifts associated with transitioning from an agricultural to an industrialized society, several studies explored rural life and women's experiences prior to World War II (Adams, 1994; Neth, 1995; Walker, 2000, 2004; Walker & Sharpless, 2006). The impact of agricultural reform and industrialization policies impacted gender roles and relations, hierarchy and class structures, work and the notion of self sufficiency, and community. By exploring the dailiness of post-World War II rural working women, we expand our understanding of the interplay of women and society within a rural context and how these women make sense of their experiences.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze stories about the dailiness of rural working women's lives from my hometown, McLeansboro, Illinois. This study facilitated an opportunity for rural working women to voice their lived experiences.

Underlying research questions included:

What were the women's daily experiences during the time they worked in the factory?

What patterns of meaning were suggested in the stories told by these women about their daily lives during this time period?

## Methodology

Using interviews, this study gathered and analyzed stories from seven rural working women who currently live in McLeansboro and who worked at Elder's Manufacturing. Narrative inquiry, a qualitative methodology was used for this research study. Narrative inquiry and researchers who practice it embrace certain beliefs about who can be a knower, the role of experience and stories in knowledge construction and meaning creation, the importance of being socially situated, and the primacy of hermeneutical experience. To that end, I propose the following working definition:

Narrative inquiry is a distinct qualitative research methodology that emphasizes the study of lived experience as expressed through narratives. Narratives are the primary schema through which people give meaning to their experience.

Knowledge construction and meaning expression are embodied, socially situated, and socially generated in response to a hermeneutic experience.

Narrative inquiry shares many tenets with standpoint theory. First, the starting point for narrative inquiry is a person's lived experience (Chase, 2005, p. 655; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxiii; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 40; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). The primacy of experience is consistent with standpoint theory where women are viewed as "social actors" and the research concern lies with "the subjective meanings that women assign to events and conditions in their lives" (Chase, p. 655). Second, narratives are the primary scheme by which people understand the world and give meaning to their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 17; Czarniawska, 2004, p. 3; Kahn, 2000, p. 59; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998, p. 7; Pinnegar & Daynes, p. 4; Polkinghorne, p. 11). Third, standpoint theory requires a mode of inquiry



that pays “explicit attention to the social relations embedded in women’s everyday activities” (Naples, 2003, p. 83). Narrative inquiry recognizes that context matters. Narratives are socially situated and are created within the context of a particular time, place, culture, and social situation (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 165; Bruner, 1990, p. 54; Chase, pp. 656, 657; Clandinin & Connelly, p. 27; Clandinin & Rosiek, p. 42; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 153; Josselson & Lieblich, 1995, p. ix; Kemp, 1994, p. 55; Riessman, 1993, p. 5). Fourth, narrative practice is a form of interpretive practice involving storytelling, resources used to tell stories, and the situation under which the stories are told (Freeman, 1992, p. 30; Freeman, 2004, p. 39; Holstein & Gubrium, p. 104; Josselson, 1995, p. 35; Josselson, 2004, p. 4; Josselson & Lieblich, 1995, p. ix; Polkinghorne, p. 125).

### Significance of Study

This study gathered and documented stories about the lived experience of rural working women adding to our knowledge about the dailiness of their lives, how they made sense of their experiences, and their contribution to the rural experience. By adopting women’s standpoint, this study served to counter the traditional male bias found in social science research. This study adds historical perspective to our understanding of rural women’s lives specifically post-World War II and women’s contributions within the broader historical context.

Social science research tends to focus on “public, official, visible, and/or dramatic role players and their situation” (Millman & Kanter, 1987, p. 2). The women included in

this study are everyday, working women. Even though “local settings largely populated by women” have received little attention (p. 33), these seemingly invisible spheres of social life are important (Collins, 2000, p. 202) because they provide us with a more complete historical record. By embarking on this study, the importance of rural working women’s voices and the importance of their daily lives were acknowledged and the boundaries of social science research expanded.

Joan Jensen (1981) drew our attention to the absence of historical descriptions of rural women’s lived experiences. While historians purported that rural women did not leave many written records due to illiteracy, an oral culture, and their long work days, Jensen proposed that the absence of rural women’s history was due to historians’ bias toward white males and a devaluation of poor and minority lives (p. xxi). In the national context, the National Women’s History Project (NWHP) was formed in 1980 to recognize and celebrate the diverse and historic accomplishments of American women. NWHP was founded because women are often overlooked in United States history. In their own words (NWHP, 2006):

To ignore the vital role that women’s dreams and accomplishments play in our own lives would be a great mistake. We draw strength and inspiration from those who came before us – and those remarkable women working among us today. They are part of our story, and a truly balanced and inclusive history recognizes how important women have always been in American society.

The goal of NWHP is to tell the whole story so that women can gain a sense of what is possible. This study facilitated an opportunity for rural women to voice their lived

experiences and in so doing honor their contribution to their community and the lives of those with whom they lived.

A historical record that generalizes lived experiences or that focuses solely on ethnographic details fails to portray a true sense of how women are feeling or thinking. Walker (2004) found that although government records and documents provide plenty of details, there were “few clues to what women themselves were thinking and feeling. Stories are powerful tools for understanding the ways ordinary people interpret the larger events shaping their lives and make sense of the world around them” (p. xv). By hearing stories, we gain access to a largely undocumented record of seemingly ordinary women, the world they lived in, and their own personal meaning. We “give voice to the voiceless” (p. xvii). This study provides an account of women’s lived experiences and their meaning and interpretation using women’s own voices.

These women’s stories expand our understanding of rural life and the impact of post-World War II on transition in the lives of rural women as they sought paid work off-farm. Walker and Sharpless (2006) pointed out our need to learn more about the work and family lives of women after World War II, particularly those who took off-farm work (p. 13). According to Adams (1994), the dominant stories of the history of American agriculture rarely included the impact of these changes on rural communities (p. 184). This study contributes to our understanding about rural women who worked off-farm post-World War II and the rural community within which they lived.

In summary, this study documented the lived experiences of rural working women and the totality of their contribution towards weaving the social fabric in a small rural

community. This research increases our understanding of how women made sense of their daily experiences by highlighting and illustrating the dailiness of women's lives. Most importantly, this study honors individual women who contributed to my own personal development and perceptions.

### Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter I of this study introduces the purpose of the study and presents an overview of the theoretical underpinnings and methodology for this study. Chapter II contains an extensive review of the literature. Topics covered relevant to this study include an (a) overview of standpoint theory; (b) rural American and rurality; (c) rural women, work, and community; and (d) transition to paid and unpaid work. The focus of Chapter III is to explain the qualitative methodology used to conduct the study, including an overview of narrative inquiry, an explanation of the research approach, limitations, and ethical considerations. Chapters IV through XI present data gathered from the interviews, participants' stories, and my observations. Finally, Chapter XII includes with an analysis and discussion of findings, recommendations for further research, conclusions and my experiences and reflections.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze stories about the dailiness of rural working women's lives from my hometown, McLeansboro, Illinois. This study facilitated an opportunity for rural working women to voice their lived experiences. The overarching theoretical construct for this study was women's standpoint theory. This chapter highlights key elements of standpoint theory including how women make sense of their experiences. Next, a description of the social context, Southern Illinois, Hamilton County, and McLeansboro is provided. A research summary describing rural women, work, and community pre- and post-World War II highlights the transition to paid and unpaid work and how that transition impacted gender roles and relations, hierarchy and class, self sufficiency, and community.

#### Standpoint Theory: A Feminist Epistemology

Standpoint theory, feminist empiricism, and feminist postmodernism are three epistemological strands that arose in the 1970s and 1980s (Harding, 1991, p. vii). Whereas feminist empiricism tries to correct bad science through an emphasis on scientific rigor and feminist postmodernism questions our ability to establish truth claims, standpoint theory is a critical theory focusing on constructing knowledge from the perspective of women's lives.

Standpoint refers to the belief that "there are some perspectives on society from which real relations of humans with each other and the natural world are not visible"

(Hartsock, 2004, p. 37). Specifically, standpoint theory is interested in making that which is invisible visible and in uncovering and revealing differences created in men and women's lives. Inherent is a notion there are obstructive factors within society, for example, gender, race, class, location, and their associative social norms and power dynamics which come to be viewed as natural, commonsense or "how the world works." Standpoint strives to reveal these seemingly natural aspects and directly challenges positivism and the predominant epistemological accounts for who can be a knower, the kinds of things that can be known, and tests for truth. Standpoint theory provides a means for examining the meaning women associate with their daily lives within a rural setting.

The section that follows sets the stage for standpoint theory by providing a brief description of positivism and its impact on epistemology. Key standpoint theorists and their approach to standpoint theory are described. Then, the key tenets of standpoint theory are discussed.

### *Setting the Stage for Standpoint Theory*

Modernity, rising out of the medieval world, fundamentally changed the nature of truth through science's insistency on objectivism. Historically, humanity's interconnection with creation was acknowledged and thought of as binding together self, society, and the cosmos (Goodman, 2003, p. 31). The scientific worldview presented a new way of validating and seeking knowledge through empirical observation and experimental testing. Goodman noted:

The practice of objectivity reflects a number of assumptions including that quantifiable aspects of phenomena are the important ones, ethical and subjective factors are incompatible with the scientific enterprise, objects including humans, must be removed from their context to be studied and that the ideal stance of the observer is one of disinterested distance. (p. 76)

This view profoundly influences our concept of truth and our ways of knowing. With objectivism, truth resides in the physical world leaving little room for our inner realm which is viewed as irrational (Palmer, 1998, pp. 19, 52). With objectivism came positivism which assumed that only what is physically measurable is real.

Positivism is a philosophy where knowledge and truth are discovered through application of a scientific methodology. Positivist approaches aim to create knowledge about reality through objective generalizations. Key tenets (Collins, 1993, p. 95; Collins, 1996, p. 227; Harding & Hintikka, 2003, p. xxix; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2004, pp. 5, 6) of positivism include (a) objective reality whereby reality exists independent of anyone's individual perspective; (b) ordered world whereby the social world is ordered and predictable, (c) objective knower/researcher where research methods require a distancing of the researcher from the object of study and an absence of emotion from the research process, and (d) value-free whereby ethics or values are deemed inappropriate. Positivism presented a view of objective reality independent from self, a reality that is out-there, waiting to be discovered. The person as an agent of their own understanding is discounted as a valid form of knowledge.

Our view of self and the self's right to knowledge claims were challenged by Descartes. *Cartesian dualism* refers to Descartes' claim that our consciousness and self

awareness are separate from the physical body. The implication of this concept was that consciousness is best understood through rationale thought and that only those ideas that could be proved by direct observation are valid. As described by Grondin and Plant (2003), “Descartes’ modern method reduced knowledge founded on tradition and prejudice as under suspicion due to the lack of certainty surrounding it” (p. 1).

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2004) challenged Descartes view of objectivism as a prejudice that influences our views of reality and truth. “Modern sciences is following the rule of Cartesian doubt, accepting nothing as certain that can in any way be doubted, and adopting the idea of method that follows from this rule” (p. 273). Consequently, there is a reliance on objectivism at the expense of other types of knowing found in other forms such as aesthetics, play, and human experience. Gadamer proposed that *erlebnis*’ or experience’s meaning “remains fused with the whole movement of life and constantly accompanies it. . . . every experience is taken out of the continuity of life and at the same time related to the whole of one’s life” (pp. 58, 60). Perception and hermeneutical interpretation are the tools by which we make sense of our experiences. Objectivism as the sole carrier of validity and truth becomes suspect when confronted with the interrelatedness of experience, interpretation, and understanding.

Positivism emphasized objectivity as the basis for knowledge and truth. This emphasis defined who can possess knowledge, how knowledge is or can be obtained, and what knowledge is. Philosophers, such as Gadamer, were not the only ones questioning positivism. Feminists, too, criticized and challenged what Harding (1991) called the “Western scientific world view or mindset” (p. 3). Particularly problematic was the



asymmetrical relations between men and women created by the Western scientific mindset as illustrated through binary oppositional language.

The structuralist views of binary oppositional thinking proposed originally by Saussure and expanded by Levi-Strauss sought to describe meaning as being produced by the mind through the setting up of oppositions that are then used to analyze and describe social rules and norms (Mascia-Lees & Black, 2000, pp. 70, 71). In contrast, post-structuralists see binary categories as defining and rationalizing existing, primarily Western, hierarchy and power relations (p. 80). Binary oppositional thinking categorizes people, things, and/or ideas in terms of their difference. Gendered categorizations often result in “contributions of women [being] overlooked or underplayed because the framework from which they are viewed does not recognize them as contributors” (Dubeck & Dunn, 2006, p. 56).

Our challenge becomes one of mediating binary distinctions in terms of justness, respect, and appreciation of differences. In so doing, we begin to mitigate the hierarchical or better than, tendencies seemingly inherent in binary thinking. Because, either/or dualistic thinking, characterized through categorization, creates inherently opposed, oppositional, intrinsically unstable relationships. As Collins pointed out each term in a binary gains meaning in relation to its counterpoint, binary thinking shapes our understanding of human difference, and binaries imply relationships of hierarchy, superiority, and inferiority (1991, p. 42; 2000, pp. 70, 71). Prevalent binary themes supporting positivistic Western thought includes male/female, reason/emotion, culture/nature, fact/opinion, mind/body, subject/object, and concept/natural attitude.

Binary oppositional language is an illustrative, pervasive means and example of the categorization and objectification of women as inferior to males. Specifically, this tendency will be illustrated when I describe the social situation using concepts such as urban/rural, male/female gender roles, public/private spheres, productive/unproductive work, and paid/unpaid labor as societal structuring mechanisms.

### *Women's Standpoint*

While feminist theory emphasizes our need to challenge sexism, racism, colonialism, class, and other forms of inequalities (Naples, 2003, p. 13), women's standpoint examines how the social relations of gender influence our knowing practices. Standpoint theory challenges the predominant androcentric bias and its focus on men at the neglect and/or exclusion of women.

An aspect of standpoint theory I find intriguing is its interdisciplinary nature. Scholars discussing standpoint theory have differing perspectives and come from different theoretical backgrounds. In this section, I introduce several key theorists including Nancy Hartsock, Nancy Haraway, Patricia Hills Collins, and Dorothy Smith. Sandra Harding's observations are woven throughout. Next, I introduce the concept of "dailiness" as defined by Bettina Aptheker, a historian who drew on Smith's views and whose writing illuminated my own understanding of the importance of rural women's daily lives as a source of knowledge and meaning construction. Finally, Carolyn Sachs' application of standpoint theory in exploring rural women's lives is discussed.

Drawing on Marxist historical materialism, Hartsock (2004), a political scientist, argued that epistemology grows from material life. Emphasizing that we are situated and embodied, Hartsock described how material life or class position structures and sets limits on our understanding of social relations (p. 36). In proposing gender as that which structures material relations, Hartsock observed that oppositional structures result in one being superior to another (p. 37). Constructions of self differ between what Hartsock referred to as *abstract masculinity* and a feminist standpoint. Abstract masculinity refers to a boy's process of differentiating himself from his mother, a process which establishes a "hostile and combative dualism" (p. 44). In so doing, Chodorow (1974) noted that a boy comes to view *feminine* negatively, as not masculine or male (p. 50). In contrast, a girl's construction of self tends to value everyday life and connectedness with others and the natural world (Hartsock, p. 45). According to Chodorow, a girl's identity develops largely in association with her mother's traits because "femininity and female role activities are immediately apprehensible" (p. 51). Standpoint is achieved when women struggle to expose these oppositional, hidden social relations.

Donna Haraway's background is diverse including zoology, biology, women's studies, and philosophy. Haraway (2004) proposed that "vision can be good for avoiding binary oppositions" and that all vision has an embodied nature (p. 86). Feminist objectivity is both situated and embodied knowledge (pp. 86-88). Consideration of a women's standpoint is preferred because it "provides more adequate, sustained objective, transforming accounts" (p. 88). Harding's (1991) concept of *strong objectivity* acknowledges that all human beliefs and assumptions are socially situated and that

starting with women's lives increases objectivity by revealing those practices that appear natural (pp. 146, 149, 150). Rather than a "logic of discovery," Haraway identified conversation as the means by which we consider our situation (p. 95) illuminating dialogue as an important integral aspect of knowledge construction.

Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) declared that no homogenous black women's standpoint exists (p. 28). Beyond gender, oppression may take many forms including sexual preference, race, class, age, nationality, ethnicity or any other assigned label or category. Collins used *matrix of domination* to describe the social organization of intersecting oppressions and *intersectionality* as the particular form of oppression (for example, race and gender) (p. 18). *Outsider within* describes the capacity for Black women to see relationships between dominant ideologies and actions including the underlying structures of white power (Collins, 1991, p. 35; 2000, p. 11). Harding (1991) expanded the outsider within to describe all women (p. 131). Collins (2000) challenged normative views of women's activism by crediting their daily struggles for survival as creating spheres of influence that subtly work to resist oppressive structures (pp. 201-204). A Black feminist epistemology consists of an emphasis on lived experience as the criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, an ethic of caring with an emphasis on personal expressiveness, emotion and empathy, and an ethic of personal accountability for a person's knowledge claims (Collins, 1996, pp. 229-236; 2000, pp. 257-265).

Women's standpoint, according to Dorothy Smith (1992), begins with women's lives, their experience, and their living (p. 90). Smith disagrees with Collins' use of

outsider within because in her view there are no outsiders, we are all co-participants (p. 94). *Bifurcation of consciousness* is a term Smith (2004) used to describe what occurs when women are asked to deny their experience as a source of reliable information and to conform to sociology's male biased concepts and methods (pp. 23-25). Smith emphasized binary duality as occurring when males are associated with the conceptual mode of ideas, whereas, work and women are associated with the natural attitude focused on physical existence and daily life. In short, women create the physical conditions for men to function (p. 26). Women, then, "mediate for men the relation between the conceptual mode of action and the actual physical, natural world" (p. 26). Harding (1991) claimed this is why men see women's work as a natural activity (p. 128). This raises the importance of starting from women's daily lives to identify and understand the interrelationship of self and social life and how women come to understand their experiences.

According to Aptheker (1989), "Dailiness refers to the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labors and in the context of subordinated status to men" (p. 39; 1993, p. 86). In this view, daily work and meaning associated with it are a way of knowing. Harding (1991) saw the exploration of dailiness as beneficial to women and men considering "if we start from the dailiness of women's lives, we will come to some understanding of both women's and men's lives" (p. 129). Aptheker's emphasis on dailiness elevates and recognizes the importance of seemingly ordinary women. Rather than victims, women are agents with the capacity to create knowledge and make meaning from their daily lives and experiences. Aptheker

(1989) too acknowledged the problems of oppositional thinking and its resultant polarity (p. 18). By examining the interplay of the social situation and women's understanding of it we can "recognize women's strategies for coping, surviving, shaping and changing the parameters of their existence on their own terms" (p. 14). In her discussion of women's resistance, Aptheker also challenged traditional views. Instead of emphasizing social justice and social change in terms of a political movement, Aptheker offered that "women's resistance is shaped by the dailiness of women's lives that comes out of a sexual division of labor that assigns to women responsibility for sustaining the lives of children, families including husbands, relatives, elders, and community" (p. 173).

Further:

Women are not essentially virtuous or more nurturing than men or more loving or caring or closer to nature. These ideas about life and about how to sustain it, about relationship and community and connection are generated by the nature of women's labors and these labors and the conditions under which they are enacted, subscribe a particular form of consciousness. (p. 247)

Carolyn Sachs, a rural sociologist, is interested in women in agriculture, rural women's work, gender and the environment. Sachs (1996) questioned what it is about rural that provides a distinct context for women and gender relations (p. 2). She rejected the notion of women as powerless as evidenced by their ability to "cope, survive, work together, and change their lives" (p. 7). Rural women know and interact with their local environments, their experiences and perspectives are distinct (pp. 5, 6). Knowledge is both situated and embodied. Sachs characterized resistance different from the norm. Traditional understandings of resistance define women's activities as (a) outside the

political realm, (b) accepting their subordinate role, and (c) situating women as victims (p. 26). Sachs argued that by viewing women as victims, we miss that “women are survivors and creators” (p. 25). Women often have multiple responsibilities which require them to do multiple things at a time, juggling many balls in the air simultaneously. Women have “the ability to shift from one preoccupation to another, to divide one’s attention, to improvise in new circumstances” (Bateson, 1989, p. 13).

By exploring the dailiness of post-World War II rural working women, we expand our understanding of the interplay of women and society within a rural context and how these women made sense of their experiences. Standpoint theory is an interdisciplinary theory whose proponents are grounded in differing theoretical backgrounds with varying perspectives. Yet, key tenets of women’s standpoint are described by their collective thoughts including (a) no homogenous woman’s standpoint, (b) gender as a central organizing principle, (c) standpoint as a place from which we view and interpret the world, (d) knowledge as embodied and socially constructed through interaction with self and social situation, and (e) dialogue as the means by which social construction occurs. These key tenets are described next.

### *Key Tenets of Women’s Standpoint*

Standpoint theory provides an alternative epistemology with different criteria for knowledge construction and validation. Narrowly conceived definitions of women have failed to consider how other factors such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, and physical ability intersect with gender to produce widely different

experiences for women (Mascia-Lees & Black, 2000, p. 15). There is no single, universal woman's standpoint, no one size fits all category of woman. Jaggar and Rothenberg (1993) emphasized that no essentialist standpoint or unique essence is common for all women (p. 76). Standpoint recognizes the diversity of women's experiences and how these are shaped not only by gender but many other factors such as race, ethnicity, culture, sexual preference, religion, age, physical ability, and/or economic background. This section summarizes and provides a description of the key tenets of women's standpoint including gender, social situation, situated knowers, and its dialogical nature.

### *Gender*

Gender is the central organizing theme of standpoint theory. A person's sex is distinguished from their gender. Sex refers to a biological difference or function, whereas, gender describes those social functions or ways in which meaning and evaluations are associated by members of a culture (Eagly, 1987, p. 5; Hofstede, 2001, p. 280). Some useful definitions for gender terminology are provided by Mascia-Lees and Black (2000, pp. xi, xii):

Gender roles are the social skills, abilities and ways of acting appropriately as members of a society depending on whether they are male or female.

Sexual or gender stratification is the system of unequal access of men and women to a society's resources, privileges, and opportunities.

Gender asymmetry refers to the situation where men's and women's roles are not the same and their positions in society are not equal.



Nanda's (2000) study of cross-cultural gender variations revealed there are many different ways that societies can (and do) organize their thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality (p. 1). Particularly in anthropology, researchers began to uncover a wide variation in gender roles, in the value placed on activities performed by men and women, and in men's and women's access to important societal resources (Mascia-Lees & Black, 2000, p. 9). We take gender into account when attempting to understand how a society operates or how a person's identity and life experiences are shaped and how they construct knowledge. Gender is interrelated with other variables such as race, class, and location. The women of this study were rural, white, working class, and in their 70s and 80s.

Gender roles are those social roles defined by a culture or society for women and men. While social roles and behaviors considered feminine or masculine differ within societies, there are common trends among gender roles. Hofstede (2001) found that men tend to focus on achievements outside the home, assertiveness, competitiveness, and toughness; whereas, women are more concerned with home, children, and people in general (p. 280). Eagly (1987) described society's stereotypical beliefs in terms of men being more agentic exhibiting assertiveness, control, and independence, while, women are more communal due to their concern for others through exhibiting interpersonal skills, sensitivity, emotions, and expressiveness (p. 16). There is no one-size-fits-all gender role descriptive of a rural working woman. Instead, rural women, as discussed in later sections, negotiate their gender role within their families, marriage, and social context.

Gender ideology includes widely shared assumptions about how people are and what the relations between the sexes ought to be. Within society, there are shared expectations or norms about gender roles that describe or define qualities or behavior for males and females (Eagly, 1987, p. 13). Definitions of masculine and feminine are culturally constructed representing a sort of collective programming. These ideas shape norms about how people are supposed to behave resulting in automatic and habitual stereotypes. Others' value and general competence are inferred based on their sex and gender role. The challenge is that societal definitions of gender and social roles and the resultant associated behavioral norms tend to become reified and highly resistant to change (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 91). By exploring rural working women's lives, the social expectation or norms within a particular rural context are illuminated.

### *Social Situation*

To explore rural women's social situation is to examine how the social situation affects how and what a woman knows. Social situation, lifeworld, and culture are conceptually similar terms. The term lifeworld was a concept used by Husserl as the basis of all our experience. According to Moran (2000), Husserl began to see the lifeworld as a layer to be inserted between the world of nature and the world of culture or spirit (p. 181). Gadamer (2004) referred to lifeworld as the "whole in which we live as historical creatures" (p. 239). In other words, lifeworld is what allows us to develop our own cultural forms and understanding. Salzman (2001) noted that social relations and culture are often incorrectly treated as separate and independent realms whereas both

require interaction and the formulation of value (p. 154). Self, meaning, and culture were described by de Munck (2000) as “different facets or different faces of what it is to be human” (p. 2).

Culture consists of situated knowledge and experience (de Munck, 2000, p. 29). We exist in a spatial, physical location within a given time period. Context matters. Women’s lived experiences occur within and in response to a particular social situation or context. According to Salzman (2001), “Human actions are the source of organization and values” (p. 46). Or as Harding (1993) claimed, “Our grounds for knowledge are saturated with history and social life rather than abstracted from it” (p. 57).

In other words, the rural setting within which these women live is the context within which they developed their own cultural forms and understanding of what it means to be a woman. Bohm and Nichol (2004) used the term *tacit ground* as a reference to the shared meaning that holds society together (p. ix) where, society is based on shared meanings that make up our culture (p. 32). Women’s social situation is experienced as a rational, coherent unity when meanings are shared. Context is provided through the process of socialization. Socialization is the “means about learning the rules for behaviors appropriate to specific contexts through trial and error” (de Munck, 2000, p. 64). Meaning occurs as we strive to understand and make sense of experiences.

### *Situated Knowers*

By beginning with the world as we actually experience it, we acknowledge our situatedness as knowers including what is known and the way it is known. Standpoint is

a way of knowing that starts from women's everyday lives grounded in their experiences.

All knowledge is embodied. Smith (1987) wrote:

If we begin from the world as we actually experience it, it is at least possible to see that we are located and that what we know of the other is conditional upon the location as part of a relation comprehending the other's location also. (p. 93)

How do we understand our experiences? Grenz (1996) described meaning as emerging in a hermeneutical conversation between the self and our experience (p. 100). de Munck (2000) described five aspects of meaning: (a) meaning is constructed through the interaction of unconscious and conscious mental processes, (b) meaning consists of the interaction between mental representations and our perceptions of real-world phenomena, (c) meaning is monitored and directed by the self, (d) meaning making is a creative act, and (e) meaning means to have a point of view (p. 3). We can never escape our social situation, our historical context, or our being in the world. Meaning represents a relationship between our social situation and ourselves as situated knowers.

For this research study, I am asking rural working women to recall a historical period, a time in their life when they worked at the factory. Our personal histories and life stories are a means of understanding. The term *effective history* refers to this "acknowledgement of our consciousness of being effected by history and the manner in which we understand everything" (Moran, 2000, p. 252). In our efforts to describe, interpret, and understand, we bring all that has come before the moment into play. History, said Palmer (1969), is "seen and understood only and always through consciousness standing in the present" (p. 176). History is not something out there remote from us, it is personal and subject to interpretation. Our self awareness challenge

becomes the mediation between the present, our sense of ourselves, and our sense of our past. Gadamer (2004) noted:

History does not belong to us, we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self examination, we understand ourselves in the self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live [social situation]. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments constitute the historical reality of his being. (p. 278)

Historically effected consciousness has the structure of experience (Gadamer, 2004, p. 341). The prejudices Gadamer referred to are the underlying structure of assumptions or frame of reference providing the framework through which we describe and interpret experience with our horizon being what is available for us to see as bounded by our prejudices. Self understanding occurs when light is shed on our prejudices which otherwise work behind our backs. Gadamer described this as a moment of new understanding or a fusion of horizons, meaning that to acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond one's prejudices (pp. 304, 305). *Achieving a standpoint* is that moment when women see their self through another person's eyes within their social context. This is illustrated by Collins (2000) description of the outsider within:

Domestic work allowed African-Americans to see White elites . . . from perspectives obscured from Black men and from these groups themselves. . . . Black women's participation in constructing African-American culture in all-Black settings and the distinctive perspectives gained from their outsider-within placement in domestic work provide the material backdrop for a unique Black women's standpoint. When armed with cultural beliefs honed in Black civic society, Black women who found themselves doing domestic work often

developed distinct views of the contradictions between the dominant group's actions and ideologies. (pp. 10, 11)

Situated knowledge and our understanding of what occurs when a woman achieves a standpoint illuminates the critical nature of standpoint theory. By bringing our history to light, we potentially are confronted with our prejudices in light of other points of view or our social situation. Black women in Collins' illustration were able to see themselves, their situation, and the underlying ideologies at play within their social context.

### *Dialogical Nature*

A feminist standpoint is not something someone can claim but something that must be achieved (Harding, 1987, p. 185). Further, in describing this effort, "one must engage in the political and intellectual struggle to see nature and social life from the point of view of that activity which produces women's social experiences" (p. 185).

Understanding is dialogical rather than a linear, methodical process. Instead, Gadamer proposed the hermeneutical task as clarifying the conditions in which understanding takes place. Gadamer (2004) used the term hermeneutical circle to describe understanding as a "circular movement that runs backward and forward until something is understood" (pp. 293, 294). The circle refers to the coming and going of all understanding meaning the constant process of interpretation and re-interpretation of our understanding. Similarly, Follett and Graham (1995) described *relating* as a circular response characterized as "the-interweaving-between-you-and-me meeting you plus the-interweaving-between-you-and-me etc." (p. 42).

Gadamer (2004) recognized nothing higher than dialogue due to its art of strengthening where “what is said is continually transformed into the uttermost possibilities of its rightness and truth” (p. 361). Through dialogue, our prejudices are brought to light and made visible. Women engage with what they want to know and others in a dialogical manner rather than as disengaged or disembodied. Coates (1996) found that talk is primary in women’s relationships as source of learning to be a woman and how to be ourselves (p. 44). As Alcoff (2003) noted, “Truth emerges from relations and things are not actually encountered as separate, but always in relations of involvement” (p. 244).

Standpoint theorists’ starting place is the lived experiences of women who are socially situated. In doing so, standpoint challenges positivism’s insistence on objective reality as the only source of reliable knowledge and the androcentric biases and binary dualism inherent in the Western worldview. Harding and Hintikka (2003) emphasized that “we cannot understand women and their lives by adding facts about them to bodies of knowledge which take men, their lives and their beliefs as the norm” (p. xxix). Instead, achievement of a woman’s standpoint explores the social situation, validates women as situated knowers and embraces the dialogical nature of understanding.

### Rural America and Rurality

The early half of the twentieth century shifted the way of life and economy from a primarily agrarian to a hybrid of both agrarian and off-farm jobs. This shift had a profound impact on gender relations, the evaluation of status and class, self sufficiency,

and the role and importance of community among rural people. Walker (2004) noted that what we learn from rural women is “they saw themselves as integral to their families’ economy, their lives were local, and they were part of a transitional generation” (pp. 198, 199). This transition was largely due to agricultural and economic reform policies that asserted a patriarchal structure creating a gendered division of labor and responsibility that had ripple effects on rural culture, in general, and in the lives of women.

In examining the social situation for this study, I introduce rural as a concept by describing perspectives held in the United States about rural life. This is followed by a discussion of rurality as a way of constructing knowledge that is a complex interrelationship between people and place. In a survey conducted by the Kellogg Foundation (2001), urban and suburban residents were interviewed to determine attitudes about rural life and rural cultural values and rural residents’ perceptions of themselves and their communities. The Kellogg study showed that people perceive of rural America as a distinct way of life with a different economy, values, environment, and atmosphere (p. 1).

The rural economy is largely supported by service and manufacturing jobs; however, in this study, agriculture was viewed as the largest contributor to the economy although less than 11.7% of rural employment is associated with agriculture (Kellogg, 2001, p. 3). Rural America was associated with farms, crops, pastures and described as a place that is “serene, peaceful, and slow paced” (p. 4). Further, people thought of country living as “people living a simple life, without the material trappings of city life” (p. 4) denoting a distinction between urban and rural.



People who lived in rural areas were thought to be struggling to make a living, exhibiting the Puritan work ethic through self sufficiency, and representative of “American values” and the American frontier (Kellogg, 2001, p. 5). Rural communities were described as tighter knit with stronger families in contrast to cities (p. 5). Family, hard work, commitment to community, and strong religious beliefs were the top four phrases used to characterize rural America (pp. 6, 7). Whereas, the city and suburbs were associated with “sophistication,” rural areas were described as “behind the times” and old fashioned (p. 8). These findings are descriptive of what Cloke (2003) described as our “longstanding, handed down precepts about rural areas” (p. 1).

Although grounded in rural sociology, Cloke’s (2003) thoughts on rurality are reminiscent of standpoint theory. Cloke reminded that rurality is not homogenous, instead, rural areas are dynamic (pp. 2, 3). The body is active in knowledge construction and is a legitimate source of knowledge. Rural areas are not just known differently they are performed differently where rural people are “heterogeneous actors in relational settings in space in time” (p. 5).

My hometown, McLeansboro is located in Hamilton County within Southern Illinois. The southern part of Illinois is bordered on three sides by the Mississippi, Ohio, and Wabash rivers. This region hosts the Shawnee National Forest, family farms, coal mines and beautiful countryside. Sometime in the 1830s, Southern Illinois became known as “Little Egypt.” Some say this nickname arose because settlers from northern Illinois came south to buy grain during years when they had poor harvests in the 1830s just as ancient people had traveled to Egypt to buy grain. Where Little Egypt begins is

also a question. Growing up, I heard that Little Egypt begins south of Interstate 70 that runs from St. Louis, Missouri through Effingham, but the definitive boundary is unknown.

Culturally, Southern Illinois is tied closely with Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri which provided an immigration route from the east coast westward. Farming, coal mining, and oil field work were integral to people's lives. Life was filled with hard work. The region was described by Brownell (1958) as "an angry woman, black and beautiful, a glory and damnation" (p. 19). Brownell provided a rich description of the poverty, the lack of employment, the hard work of farmers, coal miners and oil field workers who padded the pockets of the rich outside of the region.

In reading about the region, I was reminded of the diversity of lived experiences in the United States, particularly in Illinois where the northern and southern halves of the state are as different as night and day. Perhaps, that is why Brownell (1958) coined the phrase, *The Other Illinois* as the title of his book. Adams (1994) contrasted this "otherness" as "poverty, character, and backwardness compared to the industrial and prairie regions to the north" (p. 206). Southern Illinois is different from the rest of the state. I went to college mid-state located four hours north of McLeansboro. By contrast, my roommate was from a suburb of Chicago located four hours north of the college. Our way of talking and our lived experiences were totally different although we grew up in the same state!

Yet, there is something about Southern Illinois that draws me in. Two words come to mind, resourcefulness and resilience. When I return home, yes, it is a slower

pace, a place where people speak with a southern accent. And, it is a place where I see goodness, I see the lines of hard work on faces, and I see respect that people have for themselves and others due to a life well lived. Adams (1994) captured the beauty of the region:

The Southern Illinois landscape, with its hills and hollows, its forests and farmlands and orchards, and its small towns and back roads, has a beauty that I suppose every rural area develops, that embeds itself in those who grow up in it, and that places its stamp upon them so no other place, no matter how beautiful and grand, can ever replace it. I frankly love this region. (p. xviii)

Adams beautifully captures the spirit of Southern Illinois in a way that resonates with my love for that part of the world. Words that come to mind when I reflect on my youth include family, friends, community, interconnectedness, faith, and the earth. All were sort of interwoven into this foundational way of being together, recognizing differences but realizing that we each depended on one another. Adams described her “deep attachment” to Southern Illinois (p. xviii), an attachment I too feel.

McLeansboro, the county seat, located within Hamilton County was created on February 8, 1821. According to the 2000 U.S. Census (n.d.), 8,621 people live in the county with 2,945 of those people residing in McLeansboro. Within the county, 98.2% are white and 51.7% are female. The median income for a household was \$30,496 with males’ median income of \$31,864 versus \$17,977 for females. About 8.5% of families and 12.9% of the population were below the poverty line. For women householders with no husband, 39.8% are below the poverty line. And for single women householders,

56.6% with children under 18 and 82.8% with children under 5 years of age are below the poverty line.

Hamilton County is home to many small towns besides McLeansboro including Dahlgren, Macedonia, Dale, Broughton, Bell Prairie, Blairsville, Delafield, Opdyke, and Piopolis. The county is bounded by Wayne, White, Saline, Gallatin, Franklin, and Jefferson Counties. It has approximately 432 square miles of rolling land. When the county was founded in 1821, education, religion, and agriculture were very important and the county was described as “thriving” (Hamilton County Chamber of Commerce, 1996, p. 12). Many of the small towns had their own schools. In 1874, the city decided to start a college called Hamilton College which was dissolved in 1880. Today, many of the smaller schools have been consolidated into the Hamilton County Unit School District which consists of Dahlgren Elementary, East Side Elementary, Hamilton County Pre-School, Family Resource Center, and Hamilton County Junior/Senior High School. Besides providing an education, athletics, music, theater, and other scholastic programming provide a source of recreation and entertainment for local residents. Religion was and continues to be integral to Hamilton County. Piopolis was formed in 1821 by Catholics arriving from Baden Germany. By 1876, there was Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Christian churches. Today, there are 56 churches listed in the Hamilton County phonebook. Church and religion still play a strong role in the community.

Agriculture, historically, was the predominant means of earning a living and taking care of your family. People grew crops, poultry, and livestock. Major crops

included corn, wheat, rye, oats, potatoes, and fruit such as apples and strawberries. The Hamilton County Chamber of Commerce (1996) said that in contrast to the 1950 census which still identified farming as the primary occupation, large company farming was predominant by the mid-1990s (p. 21). Many families put out a garden and continued growing vegetables for their own use. Other sources of income were lumbering, brick-making, coal mining, and oil field work.

Hamilton County and surrounding towns were hosts to a thriving garment industry. Enfield had the Enfield Garment Factory and Wayne City and Fairfield had garment factories. Additionally, McLeansboro had both Elder Manufacturing and Decatur Garment Company, a woman's dress factory. The #10 plant for Elder Manufacturing came to McLeansboro in 1928. Elder Manufacturing Company, Inc. has been in the garment industry since 1916. When it first came to town it was located near the railroad tracks on North Washington Street. The plant was later moved to Cherry Street and Rowan Drive in 1956. This plant manufactured men and boys shirts and provided needed jobs for both men and women in Hamilton County. The plant closed in 1978 and its operations were moved to Missouri and offshore.

Cooperative Extension came to town in 1914 with a mission to "assist residents in creating better lives for themselves through educational services dealing with agriculture, home economics, and natural resources" (Hamilton County Chamber of Commerce, 1996, p. 54). Aimed primarily at women, in 1961 the name was changed to the Homemakers Extension Association (HEA) whose mission was to "promote homemaking, family living, and better communities" (p. 54). Further, HEA existed to

“enrich lives of women of the county through learning, fellowship, opportunities to lead and serve, and creative use of leisure time” (p. 55).

Hamilton County was a vibrant community and is the location where the women I interviewed were born, lived, and continue to live today. A place they continue to call home.

### Pre-World War II: Rural Women, Work, and Community

Within the early half of the twentieth century, the throes of industrialization began to profoundly impact and change rural areas and rural peoples' way of life.

Industrialization and capitalism were tsunami like forces in the United States with distinct philosophical viewpoints, values, and ways of thinking. Agrarian areas were not immune from these forces as scientific methods were applied to increase productivity and capitalism's home economics suggested new roles, new values, and new ways of interacting. This section summarizes four studies which explore changes within rural agrarian communities: Adams' (1994) study on the transformation of rural life in Southern Illinois, Neth's (1995) exploration of women's efforts to preserve family farms in the Midwest, and Walker's (2000, 2004) two studies on rural women in the upcountry south and oral histories of county women.

Using document, photograph, and oral history review, Adams' qualitative social historiography undertaken in the early 1980s focused on farms located in Union County in Southern Illinois. Adams (1994) strived to “tell the stories of people who lived in the region and to comprehend how they came to be the way they are” (p. xix). Adams noted

that as “citizens of a relatively poor, marginal region, people were members of a relatively powerless group in the face of more powerful actors” (p. xix). In her description, Adams emphasized that “we experience ourselves as self-willed individuals, caught up in systems and orders beyond our power to control or to affect” (p. xxii). Notably, the impetus for her study came after Adams noted parallels between Latin American peasant women and rural women within the United States. In Latin America:

Farm women’s work intensified because men left farming for wage labor leaving women to do the subsistence production and to take care of dependent family members. Similarly following World War II, United States’ farm women found themselves with little to contribute to the farm operation and turned to off-farm jobs for cash income. (pp. xx, xxi)

In a qualitative social historiography, Neth (1995) examined the interplay of gender, family, and community, particularly interpersonal relations, during a time of intense change from family farming to agribusiness in the Midwest. According to Neth, “historical narratives, farm policy, and agricultural institutions were created assuming a male in the role of farmer and head of household, an assumption that ignored the interplay of the family and the neighborhood” (p. 2).

Both of Walker’s (2000, 2004) qualitative studies examined the transition and change that occurred in rural women’s lives as the economy shifted from primarily agriculture and farming to industry and commerce. In *All we Knew Was How to Farm*, Walker drew on interviews, archives, and family and government records to reconstruct a description of the rural women’s lives from 1919 to 1941. Walker’s 2004 collection of

sixteen oral histories described women's experiences in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the impact of modernization as told by them in their own words.

Based on these studies, rural, agrarian lifestyle was not immune from the systematic, intentional agricultural and economic reforms in the modern period of industrialization. Agencies such as the USDA along with rural reformers enacted agricultural policies with a vision that included an appropriate gender division of labor on family farms where men were engaged as business managers in commercial agriculture and women were engaged in homemaking (Adams, 1994, p. 186; Neth, 1995, p. 215; Walker, 2000, p. 101).

One example of such a policy was the Cooperative Extension Service, a publicly supported, informal adult education and development organization established in 1914 by the Smith-Lever Act. Cooperative Extension was approved as an adult education program to help people acquire the understanding and skills for solving farm, home, and community problems. In Holt's (1995) study of this *domestic economy movement*, she described the era from 1890 to 1930 as a "push for progress and reform. It centered on rural women and their education. It intended to transform and redirect agrarian society with women's cooperation" (p. 3). Holt continued, "Reformers generally agreed that farm women were the glue that held the rural world together. They were the catalysts for change" (p. 5). Thus, these programs deliberately targeted women to enlist them in furthering their agenda.

Walker (2000) noted that home demonstration agents, usually young, college educated women, were sent to rural communities to provide training. These young



women, seeing themselves as “social workers ministering to the needs of rural communities”:

Believed they were bringing a type of salvation to isolated farming folk in the form of knowledge of ‘modern’ housekeeping practices, instruction in subsistence and marketing strategies, and organization of community based relief efforts. They also faced the demands of a USDA bureaucracy that aimed to separate farming from homemaking and to help prosperous white farm families adopt urban middle class living standards. (pp. 98, 99)

Targeted directly at farm women, home demonstration work was an intervention which had at its core a vision of “appropriate behavior for women of a particular race and class,” a view which shaped the type of cooperative extension programming offered to farm women (p. 99).

Those in power and responsible for determining the vision and creating associated policies for agriculture and the economy used the language of progress and efficiency to advocate that agriculture should replicate industrial models akin to those in manufacturing (Adams, 1994, p. 183; Neth, 1995, p. 97). Rural people were stereotyped as being inferior and having a backward way of life (Neth, p. 107). Policy makers’ and reformers’ perceptions were:

The city represented corruption, evil, and social disruption but also adventure, progress, opportunity, and the future. The farm symbolized honesty, virtue, and social stability, but also stagnation. The future of the nation was clearly urban; the past was rural. (p. 107)

With a perception of rural as an impediment to the future vision, little care or attention was paid to rural life values including the interconnection of economy and social life,

particularly the contribution of women. The paradox being, that while rural values were upheld and contrasted with urban values, the future vision moved towards embracing an urban ideal. Agricultural reform and industrialization had a profound impact on gender roles and relations, hierarchy and class, self sufficiency, and community.

### *Gender Roles and Relations*

In pre-World War II, work was central, in a rural culture, to a person's identity, providing a basis for worth, and in giving a person's life meaning. Everyone worked. Women viewed themselves as producers, integral to farm life and economic contributors. Walker (2004) characterized women's lives as "dominated by endless hard work, the needs of their families, and the rhythms of the seasons" (p. xxv). Women and men viewed their work not individually but as part of a group effort (Neth, 1995, p. 18). Women emphasized flexibility, shared responsibilities and mutual interests within the family which served to elevate their overall status (pp. 18, 33).

Generally, women were responsible for maintaining the house, supplying food and providing child care and men were responsible for field work. However, these responsibilities were flexible with women negotiating various roles and responsibilities (Walker, 2000, p. 47). Neth (1995) called attention to how household labor was culturally devalued because although rural culture praised a women's ability to do men's work, a man was ridiculed for doing women's work (p. 27).

According to Neth (1995), the newer policies' underlying ideology included a belief that "to successfully alter rural production and consumption patterns, gender

relations and work cultures needed to be redefined” (p. 214). Women’s role as an integral producer to the family economy was redefined to that of homemaker and consumer. Adams (1994) described this change as a movement toward the “cult of domesticity” (p. 186). Essentially, new policies modeled a vision for rural women based on that of the suburban homemaker complete with ideas about “appropriate behavior” (Walker, 2000, p. 117). The domestic ideology, according to Sachs (1996), singled out women as the defenders of morality (p. 133). Walker noted:

Home improvement programming reflected the extension services’ belief that the farm wife should spend her time making a pleasant and attractive home for her family, leaving the productive, income producing activities to her husband, a middle class view. (p. 117)

This redefinition had the effect of lowering women’s status as workers and economic contributors within the family. Family interaction and attention to familial sustenance were replaced with isolated individuals focused on their own interests. This individual focus undermined family cohesion. The home was separated from production and became a “center of family consumption, where women met the larger economy not as producers but as consumers” (Adams, p. 186).

### *Hierarchy and Class*

Ultimately, male professionals defined masculinity and femininity in ways that transformed gender relations by reinforcing gender and class hierarchies (Neth, 1995, p. 215; Walker, 2000, p. 284). The very nature of how men and women’s worth and status were evaluated in pre-World War II rural areas changed. In rural culture, a person’s

work ethic was central and was interconnected to family, community, economic space, and land. A person's worth and status was dependent on others' perception of how hard they worked and their industriousness. Adams (1994) found:

Work did not just implicate the individual and that individual's technical competence and willingness to work hard, it was a defining feature of the most important relationships in which people were engaged, whether between kin and neighbors or employers and employees. (p. 3)

Women who were "too good to do hard labor" were considered snooty (p. 3). Families in the rural south would "lose status if they were perceived to be lazy, immoral or lacking in social responsibility" (Walker, 2000, p. 6). Underlying the work ethic were values focused on providing a level of subsistence for fostering and sustaining the family. A person's worth and status was closely tied to how hard they worked.

Middle class aspirations emphasizing income and the capacity to purchase goods replaced the familial focus and interaction of the rural culture. Women who worked on a farm were often viewed as "unwomanly" because their labor efforts "clashed with middle class status" (Neth, 1995, p. 227). Household work, separated from farm work, held that women who worked were inferior to homemakers.

Having disposable income to purchase goods, particularly for the home became the criteria by which social status was assigned. Women's former economic contribution and status associated with it was subsumed and trivialized by policies that redefined acceptable labor and encouraged women to define themselves by their ability to "improve the quality of life through consumption" (Neth, 1995, p. 9). Consumer dependency in effect replaced self sufficiency.

### *Self Sufficiency*

Adams (1994) described self sufficiency as interdependent with others within communities prior to World War II (p. 49). Indeed, self sufficiency and mutual aid networks were tightly interwoven. Being self sufficient was a virtue that emphasized caring for your own through the production of what your family needed such as gardening, raising animals, sewing, etc. An aspect of self sufficiency was the importance of “unpaid family labor critical to the overall functioning” (Neth, 1995, p. 3). Children were integrated into the labor process as soon as they were old enough (Adams, pp. 104, 105). Women and children worked alongside men to accomplish whatever needed to be done.

The concept of *making do* was a consistent theme in rural life referring to the practice of either doing without or making use of the goods at hand (Neth, 1995, p. 30). Walker (2004) described making do as “stretching scarce resources as far as possible” (p. xxvii). Women were valued and their importance in the family was reinforced by their capacity to make do. Making do centered on taking care of the family rather than just making a profit (Neth, p. 31).

Home production to meet the needs of the family and bring in extra cash was a key strategy women used to retain a central place in the family economy. This strategy emphasized minimizing the need for cash while simultaneously earning extra cash to meet expenses. A woman’s success in home production reinforced her contribution to the family. Production efforts included poultry and dairy, gardening, handicrafts, cut

flowers, and balancing budgets. Fruits of these labors were either sold to earn cash or exchanged through mutual aid networks for other goods and services.

Changing a women's role to that of homemaker and consumer trivialized her work as producer, decreased her involvement in labor activities, and diminished her influence and power due to her lack of economic contribution. Self sufficiency was replaced with an increasing dependence on cash to purchase needed goods. Women essentially lost their base for economic contribution to the farm and eventually turned to work outside the home and off-farm to supplement their family's income (Neth, 1995, pp. 11, 242).

### *Community*

Mutual aid networks and the sense of community they fostered provided security and a safety net for rural families prior to World War II (Adams, 1994, p. 52; Neth, 1995, p. 3; Walker, 2000, p. 53; Walker, 2004, p. xxvii). Fostering and maintaining these networks was women's responsibility. The burden of subsistence production and mutual aid networks were instrumental to farm families' survival and fell on the backs of women (Walker, 2000, p. 5). By visiting, exchanging work and products, and creating shared meaning through celebrations and shared life events, women wove the social fabric and created a sense of community. According to Neth, "people interpreted their daily lives by taking a holistic view that connected rather than separated and emphasized stability and continuity rather than change and distinctiveness" (p. 63).

Rural schools and churches provided another outlet for community assistance and a means of building social relationships. Churches, especially, could define and reinforce class boundaries. For example, Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches were associated with fashionable clothing, so people may not have felt comfortable attending there (Walker, 2000, p. 61). The rise of Pentecostal churches was in part due to their message of spiritual equality regardless of economic status (p. 61). Pentecostal churches were particularly appealing to women because women were able to take an “active role in building a community due to Pentecostalism’s emphasis on labor and piety as opposed to external criteria such as clothing” (p. 61). An interesting aside is that Adams’ (1994) analysis indicated that although religious beliefs and practices were identified, work was a more predominant theme.

Within mutual aid networks, there was a code of expected behavior grounded in the “ethic of generalized reciprocity” (Adams, 1994, p. 23). I often heard it expressed as “I’ll scratch your back and you’ll scratch mine.” Within a culture of reciprocity, “equality of exchange is assured by the acceptability of asking and giving” (Neth, 1995, p. 41). Adams expressed it in terms of balanced reciprocity, “an exchange given with the implicit understanding that the recipient will return something of more or less equal value sometime in the future” (p. 60). Giving and helpfulness combined with interdependence and a commitment to “look after your own” were valued and served an important function of joining people together (Neth, p. 41). Interpersonal relations and networks developed by women gave women a great deal of power and influence within the community.

The transition to a largely cash-based system ignored and marginalized the role of mutual aid networks in rural communities (Walker, 2000, p. 288). Neth (1995) described how policies undermined neighborhood and family survival strategies. “The new emphasis on individualism and the home as sanctuary from work disrupted community life and the interdependence between people that existed in a lifestyle where mutual aid had been integral” (Neth, p. 5). These shifts “diminished women’s pivotal role in organizing and maintaining mutual aid networks reducing their control over and visibility in community life” (Walker, p. 288).

#### Post-World War II: Transition to Paid and Unpaid Work

During and after the transition, women’s contributions were central to the family economy and its survival (Walker, 2000, p. 34). In describing rural women’s transition, I elected to use the same categories (gender roles and relations, hierarchy and class, self sufficiency, and community) that I used to describe women’s lives pre-World War II. By doing so, there is a richer basis for comparison and contrast between the pre- and post-World War II experiences. Secondly, due to the absence of broader ethnographic research that focused specifically on rural women’s lives post-World War II (Walker & Sharpless, 2006, p. 13), I drew on many different disciplines and sources to paint a picture and make sense of rural women who worked. This was a challenging and at times daunting task. Third, I have attempted to note where studies specifically focused on rural women. At times, there appeared to be an assumption of homogeneity (i.e., all American women or all white women, etc.) with little consideration for social location, race, class



or other differentiating characteristics. In considering women's standpoint, rural women's lived experiences are unique to their social context; homogeneity is not assumed. I begin with a description in the change of the domestic ideal and how that impacted expectations for women's roles.

### *Gender Roles and Relations*

Change in what was perceived as the domestic ideal affected the cultural expectation of the proper role for women. Referred to as the *cult of true womanhood* or *cult of domesticity* (Baxandall, Gordon, & Reverby, 1995, pp. 40, 41; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 31; Kemp, 1994, p. 5), women's family and societal roles were defined as nurturer, child bearer, mother, and the moral guardian of society. This view of women emphasized piety, purity and submissiveness with the burden for maintaining societal and household values placed on the backs of women (Kessler-Harris, 1981, pp. 35, 38; Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 50; Welter, 1966, p. 152). How to live, what to do, and who I am in light of societal expectations are questions for humans either male or female. This section describes eight studies about women's sense of self, identity, and meaning.

Mothering, according to Nancy Chodorow (1999), is a means by which gender is reproduced in girls. Using psychoanalytic, object-relations theory, Chodorow explored the ways that family structure and processes affected psychic structure and processes. Essentially, boys and girls, men and women, experience themselves and identity with certain roles differently because they were raised by women who mothered them. Chodorow distinguished child-bearing from mothering where mothering is performed by

the person, usually a female, who socializes and nurtures (p. 11). Boys and girls grow up with differing senses of self. Chodorow explained, “the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate” (p. 169). Because she is female, girls identify with their mother and her social and familial roles. In this way, a girl learns what it means to be feminine and how to perform roles associated with being a female such as one who mothers. Girls have, according to Chodorow, “a basis for ‘empathy’ built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not. . . a stronger basis for experiencing another’s needs or feelings as one’s own” (p. 167). Rather than separation from mother and individuation, girls’ identity is defined through attachment. Within the family, “women’s activities in the home involve continuous connection to and concern about children and attunement to adult masculine needs, both of which require connection to, rather than separateness from others” (p. 179). Chodorow goes on to say that a woman’s power is typically exercised within “face-to-face, personal contexts rather than legitimized power” (p. 180).

Two longitudinal studies exploring ordinary women’s identity formation was conducted by Ruthellen Josselson (1987; 1996) where she interviewed 30 women as college seniors, in their 30s, and in their 40s. Josselson (1987) described identity as multi-faceted and as an unconscious process, discovering meaning of self and others, a way of organizing and understanding experience, and something that unites personality and links a person to the social world (pp. 10, 11). At its core though, a woman’s “identity is always bound to one’s sense of connection to others” (p. 21). Central, Josselson explained, “is the commitment to a self-in-relation rather than to a self that

stands alone facing an abstract world” (p. 23). Placing others first, even if it means denying the self, is an example of this tendency. In the 1987 study, themes within women’s identity formation included distance from home, anchoring, web of relatedness, openness to growth and change, and working and loving (pp. 169-186). Drawing on Chodorow’s work, attachment represents the partial separation of girls from their mothers. Women’s tendency is towards communion or opting for “preserving attachment before pursuing their agentic needs” (p. 171). Women value their capacity in relationship over the expression of their own assertiveness. Anchoring refers to the attachment of women towards or in relation to that which they have separated from such as family, husband, career, or friends or a combination of these (p. 175). So important are relationships that women “balanced their needs and interests against the backdrop of an important other whose attitudes and preferences were weighed in the decision making” (p. 179). Women’s capacity for living with and tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty influence them. Relatedness was central to women’s identity. In the 1996 study, competence and connection were common themes in women’s lives. Competence is the “regions where she can be effective and do things of value” and connections are “important people in a woman’s life” (p. 178).

Traditional male and female roles produce divisions between the sexes and variances in their sense of self not necessarily to the betterment of either according to Jean Baker Miller (1986). On the one hand, men attempt to master passion and weakness for fear that “the pull will reduce them to some undifferentiated mass or state ruled by weakness, emotional attachment, and/or passion” (p. 23). On the other, women are

subordinate to men yet “the ‘carriers’ for society of certain aspects of the total human experience” (p. 23). Women have been delegated “not humanity’s ‘lowest needs’ but its ‘highest necessities’, that is, the intense, emotionally connected cooperation and creativity necessary for human life and growth” (p. 25). In their subordinate role, women have developed strengths such as (a) ability to tolerate feelings of weakness, vulnerability, or helplessness; (b) a sense of and attunement to emotional attributes within human activity; (c) a sense of close connection with others; (d) a cooperative tendency; (e) the creativity to enhance their self-esteem through other roles; and (f) an emphasis on giving to and serving others. Miller noted that “because they ‘know’ weakness, women can cease being the ‘carriers’ of weakness and become the developers of a different understanding of it and the appropriate paths out of it” (p. 32). While women may have an easier time turning to others for help, the downside is that they often have trouble seeing this capacity as strength or admitting to their own strength. Women are often so focused on the emotional needs of others that they fail to examine their own emotional needs. In contrast to women as givers, Miller described males as doers, people who do not question whether they give enough (p. 50). Serving others is such a strong drive within women, Miller declared that “women feel compelled to find a way to translate their own motivation into a means of serving others” (p. 64).

Girls’ development is marked by a series of disconnections between psyche and body, voice and desire, thoughts and feelings, and self and relationship (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, pp. 6, 7). In their longitudinal study, Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan interviewed first, second, fourth, and tenth grade girls to examine the crossroads

that girls seemingly experienced coming into adolescence. They found that, during adolescence, girls struggle to trust knowing what they know or feeling what they feel and with saying what they truly think or believe. Described as the “tyranny of the nice and kind,” girls are presented with a view of a nice girl as one who is “calm, controlled, quiet, that they never cause a ruckus, are never noisy, bossy, aggressive, are not anxious and do not cause trouble” (p. 61). To be a nice girl, girls tell stories with happy endings to mask strong feelings (p. 45), anticipate what others will think or say (p. 88), and believe that agreement is a better course of action rather than speaking their mind (p. 93). All of these nice girl strategies come at girls’ expense. Their double bind is that relational authenticity is lost when girls avoid voicing strong or negative feelings and yet when they do speak up a relationship may be lost (p. 165). On the up side, girls become masters at anticipating relational situations:

[Girls] quickly learn the various ways in which people show what they feel and think; they pick up changes in voices, watch eyes and faces closely, scan bodies and clothes, and learn to read subtle cues, including cues about what can and cannot be spoken, what should and should not be known. In this way, girls develop a sharp eye and ear for the disparity between what people say and what is really going on. (p. 170)

Brown and Gilligan found clues to voice in expressions girls used such as (a) *I don’t know* as girls struggled to name their experiences and to trust their knowledge claims (p. 4); (b) *Probably* when girls’ agreement was not as complete as perhaps stated (p. 96); and (c) *I mean* when they struggle but desire to communicate their thoughts (p. 128). How girls really feel is removed from the public sphere.

Exploring girls' anger was the subject of Lyn Mikel Brown's (1998) interviews with white working class, poor, and middle class girls from two communities in rural Maine. Brown offered the following thoughts on resistance and how disturbing it is, "resistance creates anxiety, not only because they are disrupting conventional sex-role socialization, but because they are disturbing the dominant culture's polarized construction of social reality" (p. 8). Angry girls fly in the face of society's dominant imagery of a good girl who is "calm and quiet, they speak softly, they do not complain or demand to be heard, they do not shout, they do not directly express anger" (p. 12). Brown found that white working class girls and middle class girls differ in their expressions of femininity. Middle class girls were concerned with popular kids' privilege and attention and took their strong feelings out of the public domain (pp. 101, 102). In contrast, working class girls femininity exhibited "toughness, and a self protective invulnerability to sadness and fear, an often indirect and unapologetic expression of anger, as well as a deep capacity for love and nurturance toward those who need them" (p. 69). Within their distinct physical and social locations, girls' have differing views and ways of speaking about and performing femininity, anger, and resistance. Working class girls describe feminine weakness in terms of "relational treachery, vulnerability and dependence" (p. 121), whereas, middle class girls more often describe themselves and others in terms of good girl or bad girl carrying with it's expression the underlying ideology of what makes a girl good (p. 122).

Voice, as described by Carol Gilligan (1993), is "something like what people mean when they speak of the core of the self" (p. xvi). For women, their voice often

defines them in terms of relationship and their capacity to care. Women's emphasis on relationship and care creates a dynamic where women feel selfish when they put their needs and desires first. "Sensitivity to the needs of others and the assumption of responsibility for taking care lead women to attend to voices other than their own and to include in their judgment other points of view" (p. 16). Gilligan asked a poignant question: "Why is it selfish to respond to self?" (p. xiii), a question that women often struggle with particularly when being selfish violates our ideal for how a good girl behaves. Identity for women then is defined in the "context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care" (p. 73). Nel Noddings (2003) described caring as a "displacement of interest from personal reality to the reality of the other" (p. 14). Caring then becomes the capacity to move away from self into another's point of view. Receptivity combined with an ability to see and act are central to Noddings ethic of care.

Women's ways of knowing are expressed in terms of a continuum of thinking about themselves, truth, authority, and preferred ways of learning. "Our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participants in it" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 3). Their findings were grouped into five perspectives on feminist epistemology that included: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge. A woman's sense of self influences both voice and silence. Belenky et al., found that voice was a metaphor for women's experience related to her "sense of mind, self-worth, and feelings of isolation from or connection to others" (p. 18).

In summary, these studies described women using terms such as attachment or connection, selflessness, relatedness, responsibility, and caring. Women's strengths were identified as cooperation, serving others, and an attunement to others and their situations. The metaphor of voice was woven throughout. Voice represented self, and silence represented women's dissociation with self as they questioned what they know, what they feel, and what they can say and still maintain connections and relationship. Doing what I should do replaced doing what I want to do. Finally, women's formulation of their femininity and its meaning is not formed in isolation but rather in distinct physical and social locations. The cult of domesticity and the doctrine of separate spheres go hand in hand. The inter-relationship of gender and class is discussed.

#### *Hierarchy and Class: Doctrine of Separate Spheres*

Post-World War II's doctrine of separate defined the public realm of paid work as male and the private, unpaid domestic realm as female (Danbom, 1995, p. 89; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 228; Kemp, 1994, pp. 5, 11, 12; Kessler-Harris, 1981, p. 14; Padavic & Reskin, 2002, p. 22). This doctrine defined who worked and who did not, further distinguished gender roles, and served to interpret what work is and what it is not. Whereas previously, men and women assumed joint responsibility for familial production activities and support, post-World War II, society expected men to support their families through wage earning. Men were expected to perform paid work outside the home, whereas, women were confined to domestic duties.



The domestic sphere came to be viewed as nonproductive, actions naturally performed by women, and actions done out of love for family (Kemp, 1994, p. 267). The impact of this doctrine was to render women's work invisible and to devalue it as something that women do. Societal tension and compartmentalization seemed to exist between increasing movement towards a market economy that emphasized a capitalist lifestyle of acquisition and consumerism contrasted with morality and the creation and maintenance of the social fiber. The traditional family supportive of this movement came to be identified as having a male breadwinner with a housewife and one or more children (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 248; Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 327) where "women's task was to preserve the humane, nurturing, collective, and caring aspects of an individualistic and competitive world" (Kessler-Harris, 1981, p. 15). Women were supposed to raise and instruct children and make a pleasant home for husbands (Danbom, 1995, p. 89). Wives were essentially relegated to creating a home in which men would be "served in domestic tranquility by a pious, devoted wife" (Baxandall et al., 1995, pp. 40, 41). Kessler-Harris described the ideal in terms of women assuming the moral guardian role so that men could assume competitive roles in the paid work world (p. 15).

During this time, women were expected to remain at home satisfied by their roles as housewives and mothers, even though this option was open to only a limited number of women who actually could afford to do so (Mascia-Lees & Black, 2000, p. 5). The doctrine of separate spheres was based on a white middle class ideal for women's roles. Poor or working class women had to work, further emphasizing hierarchy and class differences. Class is one of those concepts that seems to have multiple definitions and is

difficult to define (Correspondents of the New York Times, 2005, p. ix; Russo & Linkon, 2005, p. 5; Scott & Leonhardt, 2005, p. 8; Skeggs, 1997, p. 6). Some indicated that class is either absent from discussions as though it isn't a factor in daily life or is mythologized due to our belief in individualism, social mobility, and middle class as the majority (Zandy, 1990, p. 2; Zweig, 2000, pp. 1, 2; Zweig, 2004, p. 6). While watching a news program recently, the commentator talked about the working poor but the by-line text at the bottom of the screen said middle class impact. There seems to be this presumption that middle class is the majority and the typical placement of workers. Yet, according to Zweig (2000), 62% of the labor force is working class (p. 33).

Idealistic visions of the American Dream combined with middle-class ideals about women's roles denied the material conditions and situation of working class women. Within our culture we have a vision of individuals pursuing the American Dream, a concept that seems to imply anyone who works hard enough can overcome their situation and move towards the middle and upper class. My parents used the expression, "*pull yourself up by your own boot straps*" to imply if you work hard enough, your self sufficiency will ensure success, usually in monetary terms and you will have a better life than your current circumstances. Class, according to Zweig (2000), is about the power some have over the lives of others (p. 11). Zweig's rejection of upward mobility rests on the reality that "it is simply not possible for everyone who works hard and lives an exemplary life to rise above their working class roots" (p. 41, 42). The American Dream is just that, a dream, when we consider the challenges associated with race, class, and gender and their influence on our daily existence and possibility. The

matrix of domination is a concept that draws our attention to the trifecta of race, gender, and class, their interlocking nature, and the structural systems of power and inequality (Andersen & Collins, 2007, p. 10; Collins, 2000, p. 18). Marilyn Frye (2007) provided a powerful illustration emphasizing the importance of exploring the interconnectedness of race, class, and gender:

Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down, the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted. . . . It is only when you step back. . . take a macroscopic view of the whole cage. . . you will see. . . that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers. (p. 32)

A woman's sense of self is affected by race, class, and gender due to their definitions and combined boundaries on divisions of labor; employment and economic opportunities; access to economic, social, cultural, and symbolic capitals (Jensen, 2004, pp. 174-177; Skeggs 1997, pp. 8, 59; Tea, 2003, p. xi). Zweig (2004) acknowledged the "mosaic of class, race, and gender" by focusing class discussions on the use of power rather than income, education, or lifestyle (p. 2).

Class, claimed Langston (2007), is a culture, "your understanding of the world and where you fit in; it's composed of ideas, behavior, attitudes, values, and language" (p. 119). Several have gathered stories either about working class women or written by working class authors (Buss, 1985; Coles & Zandy, 2007; Tea, 2003; Thomas, 1981; Zandy, 1990; 1995). These stories provide a glimpse into working women's lives and working class culture. In contrast with middle class culture, "working class people are

raised with a more here-and-now sensibility, in activities and worldview; individuality (but not necessarily self) is downplayed in favor of a powerful sense of community and loyalty, and an internal sense of ‘belonging’” (Jensen, 2004, p. 174).

In a longitudinal ethnographic study of 83 working class women’s lives, Skeggs (1997) found that working class women’s self evolved out of internalized definitions of middle class respectability (pp. 56, 61). Conduct, manners, and a caring persona are earmarks of unselfish, dignified, respectable behavior for women. A woman’s capacity to care and thus be respectable is indicative that she is a “particular sort of person” (p. 67). Skeggs while acknowledging that women rarely speak of their class position noted that women do utilize strategies to appear respectable and “feminine” such as proper appearance, clothes selection, the way they speak, their actions, and care of their physical surroundings. Sadly, “working class are never free from judgments of imaginary and real others that position them, not just as different, but as inferior, as inadequate” (p. 90). Working class women’s dailiness is focused on survival rather than introspection where their “ontological security was found. . . not in being ‘individual’ but in ‘fitting in’” (pp. 162, 163). Langston (2007) too found that working class women see themselves as part of the larger family and community rather than an individual self (p. 123). Social norms and their expression of acceptable behavior in accordance with those social norms determined whether a woman was seen as respectable.

To examine how poor women find meaning, Fran Leeper Buss (1985) interviewed ten women, five white, three black, one native American, and one Japanese, ranging in age from 33 to 72 with half of them over age 65. Susan Contratto (1985) analyzed their

stories and offered these observations. Women exhibited a strong sense of purpose towards working hard and caring for family. Work is important, women often voluntarily worked towards improving living and working conditions (p. 11). Women experienced a sense of limitation due to inequity, exploitation, poverty, and absence of jobs (pp. 6, 7). Strength, drive, and determination buttressed instances of depression, substance abuse, resignation, and frustrated rage. Neither “paralyzed nor bitter”, their stories depicted women as knowing where they stand (p. 9). Buss described her sense of awareness of women’s vulnerability “created by the cultural role women have been assigned” (p. 14). Ultimately, Buss came to see these women as “survivors” (p. 14).

After interviewing 56 rural women across America, Thomas (1981) observed that ordinary women took great leaps of faith, mastered new skills, lived with their own uncertainty, and (4) were confronted with and responded to situations before they were ready (p. x). Most women were happy and lived good lives. However, women noted that there was not much to choose from so they made do with what they had (p. xv). Their personal power and identity was derived from providing for themselves, seeing the results of their work, and “from knowing deeply that each thing [they] do is part of a web of survival” (p. xiv).

### *Self Sufficiency: Double Day, Paid and Unpaid Work*

The self sufficient life of many women was replaced with the double day of both paid and unpaid work in post-World War II society. Gannage (1986) explained:

We can no longer think of women’s domestic labour as unproductive labour that follows women’s productive labour in the factory or that exists alongside men’s

productive labour. Rather, women's double day is made up of both productive and unproductive labour processes that are dialectically and inextricably linked in the same moment. (p. 18)

For women, there is no separation between private and public, there is only trying to figure out how to manage, get work done, and care for her family.

Making do, post-World War II, was still an important aspect of a rural woman's life as was minimizing the need for cash through production efforts. Women were motivated, in part, to work off-farm to control a portion of the family's spending, participate in the world beyond the farm, and to survive (Walker, 2000, p. 86). However, the increased needs for cash pushed many women toward paid, wage labor. Putnam (2000) using the DDB Needham Life Style data (1978-1999), explored two dimensions of women's employment including the amount of time spent in work outside the home and preference for employment outside the home (p. 196). Statistically, Putnam found that the increase in full-time employment of American women was attributable to financial pressures, not just personal fulfillment (p. 197). "Everyday women" were described as having to work out of sheer economic necessity to supplement income (Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 141).

Textile mills, according to Walker (2000), were the most frequent employers of rural white women (p. 86). Elder Manufacturing in McLeansboro was a garment factory, manufacturing men's shirts. Historically, factory work arose in the 1800s with many women working in factories (Kemp, 1994, pp. 152, 238). Women were drawn into textile production and the garment industry because weaving and sewing were traditionally women's work within the home. Also, Baxandall et al., (1995) explained

that women could be hired more cheaply than men, there was a shortage of male labor, and in mixed agrarian/industrial areas they did not want to draw men away from farming (p. 63). Again we see this tension between the domestic ideal and industrialization's desire for cheap labor (i.e., women). What women found once they entered the workforce was anything but rosy considering that societal values served to encourage employers' legitimization of occupational sex segregation and sexual discrimination. Employers also felt they could justify low pay for women because men supported them.

Occupational sex segregation refers to the assignment of tasks based on a person's sex (The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 2006, p. 89; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, p. 73; Kanter, 1993, p. 16; Kemp, 1994, p. 210; Reskin, 2006, p. 73). The "masculine ethic" elevated traits assumed to belong to white men (Kanter, p. 22). Expectation status theory describes how an attribute such as gender is entwined within the social hierarchy because gender ideology is encoded in gender stereotypes and status beliefs (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 637). Status beliefs are widely held cultural beliefs that link greater social significance and competence based on status resulting in a perceived legitimacy towards males. The effect of expectation status theory is that perceived legitimacy is attributed to males (p. 648). Therefore, sex segregation is legitimized resulting in some work being classified as women's work (e.g., office work, nursing, teaching, librarianship, and some factory such as sewing) and women being paid less money.

Jobs perceived as women's work were deskilled or devalued largely because women performed them (Kemp, 1994, p. 109). In a societal context where women's work was seen as something natural that women do, paid work was also devalued and

viewed with little more regard. Due to emphasizing males as breadwinners, married women's entry into the work force was treated as superfluous because their primary support was from their husband. The idea persisted that women who worked outside the home derived their social value from their home roles (Kessler-Harris, 2003, p. 303).

*Community: Social Capital and Social Networks*

Post-World War II, rural women's social networks, were important sources of power and provided access to much needed resources and sources of exchange (Kessler-Harris & Sacks, 1987, p. 79; Walker, 2000). Women built community by fostering and maintaining social networks. In so doing, the social fabric was knitted creating a sense of community and belonging. Neighborliness, according to Danbom (1995) by providing emotional and other support contributed to a sort of collective sense of identity (p. 91).

Social capital theory and social network theory provide the bases for understanding the mutual aid networks including structural considerations and their overall contribution to individual lives and community life, in general. While social capital and social network theories derive from differing schools of thought, Lin (2001) maintained that social capital should be conceived within the social network context (p. 24). Social capital generally refers to available goodwill, cooperation and expectations for action among and between people who are connected within a social network (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 23, 33; Bourdieu, 2007, pp. 2, 7, 8, 10; Burt, 2000, 2001; Coleman, 1988, pp. S98, S100, S102, S116; Halpern, 2005, pp. 2, 11; Lin, 2001, pp. 19, 39, 47; Portes, 1998, pp. 3, 7, 8; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993, pp. 1323, 1236-1332; Putnam,



2000, pp. 19-21). Social networks and the resultant social capital have value. The value that social networks provide is multi-dimensional and includes means to keep households going through provision of goods and services, companionship, community, financial and emotional aid, and assistance with information and finding jobs. Social capital is about people who are connected either individually or in groups or communities. Social capital is intangible because it exists solely in relationships between people. Connections are further characterized as social structures or social networks that facilitate actions and carry certain expectations. Connections are a positive asset providing access to resources that allow people to secure benefits. Finally, social norms including social obligations, reciprocity, and trustworthiness are an integral part of social capital.

A study of social networks reinforces the notion that people are connected through social structures or what Halpern (2005) called “webs of associations”, that include shared understandings of how to behave, interact, and cooperate. “Social fabric” is the term Halpern used to describe these webs (p. 3). The term ‘social fabric’ evokes images of women I observed quilting, sewing, crocheting, embroidering and the like, activities that were such a part of women’s lives in my hometown. When women did these activities together, conversation would be ongoing, food would be shared, and seemingly, the creative act was secondary to the interaction. Our collective social capital is built through women’s social interaction, the touching of lives in many ways, and their influence on their families and communities. Neth (1995) noted that people envisioned integrating work and living; rural women sought to connect the needs of families, communities, and farms, practices by which rural people together built flexible and

adaptive human connections. Women creatively navigated life and the community's complexity to weave a social fabric. They actively worked to create their social context, a dynamic process of shaping and being shaped by their environment.

This social fabric takes the form of community networks, defined by Wellman and Wortley (1990) as a set of active community ties, providing important social support in the form of emotional aid, small services, large services, financial aid, and companionship (pp. 559, 560). Social capital and social network theories offer a deeper understanding of what connections within networks look like and the importance of norms and sanctions in creating and sustaining the social situation in which a network exists.

Norms are rules or standards considered to be acceptable behavior in a social group. They are shared ideas about how to behave. *Embeddedness* stresses the role of personal relations and networks in generating trust and sanctions (Granovetter, 1985, p. 490). Interpersonal action is governed by social rules and obligations within a social context (Coleman, 1988, p. S95). Expectations for behavior evolve out of our social situation or cultural context.

Reciprocity refers to the accumulation of chits based on action (Coleman, 1988, p. S103; Halpern, 2005, p. 11; Plickert, Wellman, & Cote, 2005, p. 2; Portes, 1998, p. 4; Putnam, 2000, p. 21). The ethic of reciprocity is often called The Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Generalized reciprocity means I'll do something for you without expecting anything back yet expectant that you will do something for me in the future. Underlying the notion of reciprocity is the expectation of

unspecified obligations. Obligations may be repaid in a different timeframe than when the obligation is incurred and the timing of the payment is unspecified (Portes, 1998, p. 7). People may reciprocate in kind to what they have been given or may reciprocate with something deemed equally beneficial (Plickert et al., p. 4).

Within any social structure there are sanctions associated with expected norms of behavior. Good reputation, particularly attributes such as trustworthiness, honesty, and integrity are examples of positive sanctions. Sanctions can also be negative and serve to alter a person's reputation through such means as gossip and exclusion from the group (Halpern, 2005, p. 11).

Although I found substantial research on both social capital and social networks, much of the research looked at organizational contexts or urban rather than rural settings and lacked a comprehensive discussion about gender. Lowndes (2004) went so far as to declare:

A lack of interest in gender dynamics has tended to produce male bias rather than gender neutrality and has often replicated the traditional masculine/feminine public/private split where it is assumed that women's activity is outside the political world of citizenship and largely irrelevant to it. (p. 47)

Echoing the sentiment, Gidengil and O'Neill (2006) noted there has been relatively little sustained critical analysis of the social capital concept as it relates to women (p. 2). The literature fell into roughly three categories: (a) societal role of women, (b) the impact of women's movement into the workforce on social capital generally and on the nature of women's networks, and (c) the unique social capital profiles of women.

Women's societal role as moral guardians, or the societal caretakers, was found in social capital and social network literature. Providing social support and social connectedness were seen as women's work. Gender was the only personal characteristic directly related to social support, particularly emotional support, in a combined quantitative survey (n=845) and qualitative interviews (n=29) performed by Wellman and Wortley (1990). Society, for the most part, defines keeping up with relatives and friends as largely women's work.

Collins (2000) described the importance of women-centered networks and their activation for socialization, reproduction, consumption, emotional support, economic cooperation, and sexuality (p. 183). Women are superior social capitalists compared to men according to Putnam (2000) because they traditionally have invested more time in social connectedness, informal conversation, and other forms of schmoozing (pp. 95, 195). Almost paradoxically, there seems to be this tacit acknowledgment of the important role women play in society. Jeremy Rifkin (2007) declared women as "the mainstay of civil society for more than 200 years, volunteering their time to create the social capital of the country."

Women's movement into the workforce impacted social capital generally and the nature of women's networks. Impacts included increased demands on time, the types of networks created, the time available to foster relationships, and the nature of their community involvement. Essentially, women's movement into the workforce and the associated demands on their time impacted their ability to build networks. Women's movement from the home into paid work increased women's opportunity for making new

connections within the work environment and decreased the amount of available time to foster relationships and new opportunities within the community (Putnam, 2000, p. 194). Gidengil and O'Neill (2006) argued that "gendered patterns of employment, the demands of combining work and family responsibilities, and lack of valued attributes such as financial resources and political contacts all affect the type of associations that women join" (p. 5).

Putnam (2000) distinguished between two types of social connectors, schmoozers and machers (p. 93). Machers are those who make things happen in a community engaged primarily in formal networks, whereas, schmoozers are described as those who spend hours in informal conversation and communion (p. 93). Historically, Putnam asserted, machers were disproportionately male, educated and engaged in paid work, however, with women's entry into paid work, employment, not gender became the primary factor influencing formal versus informal community involvement (p. 94).

Community members differ in their structural locations, operate in different contexts, have access to different sorts of resources, and deal with different sorts of contingencies (Wellman, 1985, p. 161). Wellman's quantitative survey (n=845) and qualitative interviews (n=33) explored the effect of paid or domestic workforce involvement on social structure, network ties, and available resources. *Reproducers* are housewives heavily engaged in domestic work but doing little paid work and *double loaders* are working women heavily engaged in both domestic and paid work (p. 162). Both reproducers and double loaders have responsibility for domestic work and function as social hubs, making and maintaining community ties for themselves and their families

(p. 174). Reproducers have a full-time job of taking care of their husbands, children and home while also maintaining friendships. Reproducers are positioned within densely bonded networks which exchange many resources (p. 171). Community work is integral to Reproducers because they rely heavily on informal, non-monetary exchanges with others (p. 173). As expected, double loaders are heavily engaged in both paid and domestic work giving over most of their evenings and weekends to being their husbands' "best friends" (p. 173). Demands of their paid and domestic work often limit their time and ability to nurture neighborhood relationships (p. 175).

While women are generally more embedded in social networks than men, the makeup of their networks are different. Women tend to be engaged with family and non-family informal social networks, whereas, men have more co-workers and business connections. Using the British General Household Survey (n=7857), Lowndes (2004) determined that women have differing social capital profiles than men. This survey explored social capital indicators of trust and reciprocity, social networks, social support, and civic engagement. Women were slightly more likely than men to know and trust their neighbors, to speak on the phone frequently, to see relatives, and to seek favors from others (p. 51). Lowndes characterized women as being "generally more embedded in neighborhood specific networks of informal sociability" (p. 52). In describing women's social capital profile, Lowndes noted that women's profile is more suited to "getting by rather than getting on" (p. 59). Women used informal activity and networks in the immediate community to provide a resource for their own and their family's health and well-being (p. 59).

Differing in composition than men's, women's networks focus more on family and non-family whereas, men's connections were with co-workers. Caiazza and Gault (2006) found that the nature and composition of local networks are rooted in the patterns of women's lives, including their traditional and often primary responsibilities for maintaining home and family life (p. 100). Informal networks play a more central role in women's civic lives and women are more likely to be involved in groups focused on education or helping the poor and homeless (p. 103). Findings from Caiazza and Gault's study included (a) women place political stock in communal values such as community and looking out for others, a communal form of social connectedness, a backbone of social capital; (b) women tend to develop social capital informally in the private sphere; (c) women with a preference for communal bonds look beyond personal or professional self interest; and (d) their lower visibility affects both how men and women are perceived as relevant (pp. 119, 120).

A gendered society refers to how beliefs about masculinity and femininity are built into our daily structures of life and work (Kessler-Harris, 1981, p. 69). Beliefs about rural life as secondary to the urban middle class ideal resulted in a push towards the cult of domesticity and doctrine of separate spheres. Both philosophies profoundly impacted men and women's definitions about gender roles, hierarchy and place in rural America.

Many women turned to paid work in addition to their domestic responsibilities due to post-World War II changes and increasing emphasis on consumerism. The prevailing gender ideology greatly impacted women's access to employment

opportunities including what type of work was performed, pay, and advancement.

Women who worked were challenged societally by a view that women were not supposed to work. Perceptions of male inadequacy if wives worked added to their pressures. While the 1940s and 1950s seemed to reinforce gender stereotypes and sex segregation, women's consciousness continued to evolve and change. For many women who had been working to provide for their family, they were aware that they could work and also needed to support themselves.

The role of community, social networks, and social capital remained important to women's double day. Largely absent in the discussion of women and work is the role of women in civic and community organizations and the overall importance of their participation in community life. While much is said about a double day, rather than a compartmentalized day of public/private, paid/domestic work, women in rural communities experienced a continuum (Wright, 1995, p. 216) from the time they got up until they went to bed consisting of paid work, unpaid domestic work and community work. Wright actually proposed the phrase *triple shift* when referring to how women combine paid, domestic, and informal community work (p. 216). The gendering of social network connections impacts men and women's access to advancement, influence, and power. Rosaldo, Lamphere, and Bamberger (1974) suggested:

Women, like men, are social actors who work, in structured ways to achieve desired ends. . . . close attention to women's strategies and motives, to the sorts of choices made by women, to the relationships they establish, and to the ends they achieve indicates that even in situations of overt sex role asymmetry women have a good deal more power than conventional theorists have assumed. (p. 9)



Women, have learned to multi-task, paying attention to multiple demands. Bateson (1994) described this as a sort of peripheral vision saying that “although women may have been less likely to initiate significant change than men, they are highly resilient in finding ways to respond and adapt when change is thrust upon them” (p. 87).

### Chapter Summary

Chapter II contains an extensive review of the literature. The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze stories about the dailiness of rural working women’s lives from my hometown, McLeansboro, Illinois. This study facilitated an opportunity for rural working women to voice their lived experiences. Underlying research questions included:

What were the women’s daily experiences during the time they worked in the factory?

What patterns of meaning were suggested in the stories told by these women about their daily lives during this time period?

Topics covered relevant to this study include an (a) overview of standpoint theory; (b) rural America and rurality; (c) rural women, work, and community; and (d) transition to paid and unpaid work. Within dailiness, stories women tell about their daily lives are valid and illustrative of meaning and sense of self within their social and physical context. Standpoint theory strives to highlight, and make visible gendered social relations and how they impact our understanding. Standpoint, in challenging positivism, reframes who is a knower, the kinds of things that can be known, and truth tests. Pre-

World War II and post-World War II studies described societal shifts associated with transitioning from an agricultural to an industrialized society including the impact of agricultural reform and industrialization policies impacted gender roles and relations, hierarchy and class structures, work and the notion of self sufficiency, and community. In Chapter III, the methodology used for this study is described.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze stories about the dailiness of rural working women's lives from my hometown, McLeansboro, Illinois. This study facilitated an opportunity for rural working women to voice their lived experiences. A qualitative narrative inquiry methodology was used. This chapter describes the methodology, research approach, data collection, data analysis, research participants, limitations of the research design, and ethical considerations.

#### Research Methodology

The purpose of this study suggested a qualitative, narrative inquiry methodology. Qualitative research was described by Marshall and Rossman (1999) as "suitable for those studies focused on individual lived experience, on society and culture and language and communication" (p. 60). Certain assumptions about human action and interpretation are inherent within qualitative research. Qualities of human science research identified by Moustakas (1994, p. 21) included:

1. Recognition of the value of qualitative designs and methodologies as not approachable through quantitative approaches.
2. Focus on the wholeness of experience rather than its objects or parts
3. Search for meanings and essences of experience.
4. Obtain descriptions of experience through first person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews.
5. Regard the data of experience as imperative in understanding human behavior.

6. Formulate questions and problems that reflect the interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher.
7. View experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and of parts and whole.

Qualitative research includes various methodologies including biography, narrative inquiry, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study to name a few (Creswell, 1998). Narrative inquiry is an interdisciplinary methodology encompassing many diverse disciplinary approaches and analytic lens (Chase, 2005, p. 651; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 1-17; Czarniawska, 2004, pp. 1-3; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993, p. 17) including such fields as psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, science, literary theory and feminist theory. Selection of narrative inquiry was due to its appropriateness for my research questions and its complementary nature with standpoint theory. Like standpoint theory, narrative inquiry arose within social sciences in response to “the unraveling of the certainties that upheld positivistic science” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 26). In particular, Chase (2005) described “an explosion of interest in women’s narratives accompanied by challenges to assumptions about research” (p. 655) when describing feminist research and its relationship with narrative inquiry.

### Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry was distinguished from narrative by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) with inquiry being a process of collaboration between researcher and participant and narrative referring to a phenomena and method (pp. 2, 4). Later, rather than defining

narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) elected to describe “what it is by creating a definition contextually by recounting what narrative inquirers do” (p. xiii). Moen (2006) described a narrative approach as (a) a frame of reference, (b) a way of reflecting during inquiry, (c) a research method, and (d) a mode of representation (p. 2). My struggle with Moen’s definition is in trying to discern and sort out theoretical underpinnings from implications for research method. Perhaps challenges in describing and defining narrative inquiry is what led Chase (1995) to note disagreement over what constitutes narrative and Riessman (1993) to claim there are a “spectrum of approaches” rather than a single definition or method (p. 25).

The phrase *narrative turn* was used to describe researchers’ turn towards narrative inquiry, its key tenets, and endorsement of its suitability for the study of human behavior (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narrative inquiry and researchers who practice it embrace certain beliefs about who can be a knower, the role of experience and stories in knowledge construction and meaning creation, the importance of social situation, and the primacy of hermeneutical experience. To that end, I propose the following working definition:

Narrative inquiry is a distinct qualitative research methodology that emphasizes the study of lived experience as expressed through narratives. Narratives are the primary schema through which people give meaning to their experience. Knowledge construction and meaning expression are embodied, socially situated, and socially generated in response to a hermeneutic experience.

Each element of the proposed definition is discussed: experience, narratives and knowledge construction, social situation, and primacy of the hermeneutic experience. In

supporting the proposed working definition, I described the theoretical underpinnings and then the research approach.

### *Experience*

The starting point for narrative inquiry is a person's lived experience (Chase, 2005, p. 655; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxiii; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 40; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). This view directly challenges positivism by embracing both objective and subjective reality and a person's agency in constructing knowledge. Gadamer (2004) emphasized how the scientific model discredits ways of knowing other than those supported by objectivity (p. 73).

The primacy of experience is consistent with standpoint theory where women are viewed as "social actors" and the research concern lies with "the subjective meanings that women assign to events and conditions in their lives" (Chase, 2005, p. 655). A feminist approach to knowledge building, according to Hesse-Biber et al. (2004), "recognizes the essential importance of examining women's experience. . . . taking a critical stance toward traditional knowledge building claims that argue for universal truths" (p. 3). In examining the interaction between knower and known, Alcoff (2003) concluded that in Gadamer's view "truth is immanent to the domain of lived reality rather than completely transcendental to any human practice or context" (p. 248). Our experiences are unique and personal and include interactions with self, others, and our social situation or context.

Gadamer (2004) proposed that an adventure "is positively and significantly related to the context . . . lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength" (p.

60). Experience may be viewed using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 3-dimensional model that includes situation, continuity, and interaction (pp. 49, 50). The personal and social interact with the continuity of our past, present, and future in a given situation or context. Our present experience may be in the here-and-now but our life is experienced on a continuum.

Through reflection, we draw our experiences out of memory (van Manen, 1990, p. 37). Our perception of an experience is never "a mere mirroring of what is there" but rather an understanding or interpretation (Gadamer, 2004, p. 79). The importance of experience is that "everything that is experienced is experienced by oneself, and part of its meaning is that it belongs to the unity of self and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life" (p. 58). Our experiences combined with our reflection and recall of those experiences provides coherency and meaningful unity for our sense of self. Our construction of knowledge and sense of self is constructed and expressed through narratives.

### *Narratives and Knowledge Construction*

A basic premise of narrative inquiry is that narratives are the primary scheme by which people understand the world and give meaning to their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17; Czarniawska, 2004, p. 3; Kahn, 2000, p. 59; Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 7; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11). As such, narratives are embodied. As Riessman (1993) noted "stories do not mirror a world 'out there'. They are constructed, creatively authored, rhetorical, replete with assumptions, and

interpretive” (p. 5). Our self is actively constructed (Freeman, 1992, p. 20; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 3). Narratives are illustrative of the “fabric of our self”, we are or become the stories we tell about ourselves (Freeman, p. 25). Meaning, as expressed through the stories we tell, represents a coherent, integrated series of connections drawn from our experiences and memories in response to a given situation or interface with another (Holstein & Gubrium, p. 140; Riessman, p. 2).

A narrative is a description of a lived experience. Stories are powerful tools for understanding “the ways ordinary people interpret the larger events shaping their lives, stories help a person make sense of the world around them” (Walker, 2004, p. xv). Women’s narratives “reveal the frameworks of meaning through which individuals locate themselves in the world and make sense of their lives” (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 22). A person’s stories are value-filled describing their past, present, and future, hopes and dreams, elation and sad-filled moments.

Through the telling and retelling of stories to themselves and others, people express their lived experiences helping them to understand and create a sense of self (Czarniawska, 2004, pp. 5, 11; Kahn, 2000, p. 60; Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 120; Riessman, 1993, p. 2; Walker, 2004, p. xv). Telling a story is a complex, reflective practice that involves memory, recall, past experiences and social situation. Gadamer (1976) described memory or “the capacity of retention as allowing us to recognize something as the same, this capacity combined with language represents a familiarity and acquaintance with the world itself and how it confronts us” (p. 63). However, as Walker noted, memory is not pure recall, there may be “distortions, omissions, rearrangements,



and occasionally outright fabrications” (p. 190). As we experience something, our brain assigns meaning to memories and associates or stores them with similar knowledge.

Recall is an interpretation of an event. Walker identified ten implications of memory to consider when analyzing people’s stories (pp. 190-195):

1. Memories can be reshaped by the circumstances of their recall, by triggers.
2. Memories’ shape and content are determined in part by the way the brain organizes memory.
3. Single events will be forgotten or incorporated into memories at a higher level of the hierarchy making recollections more thematic.
4. People have both generic and specific memories about events.
5. Our own self consciousness may influence how memory recalls.
6. Archival memories are those that are ‘rehearsed, readily available for recall’, these may be further away from reality because they are the ready answer perhaps conforming to the public version of the past.
7. People tend to construct stories that portray themselves in a flattering light or may tell a story influenced by who they think is listening or might listen in the future.
8. Women are likely to shape their stories around society’s expectations for women’s lives.
9. People respond differently to different people and their stories may vary depending on who the listener is.
10. Recollections from the past are influenced by the *now-ness* of now and the life experiences between the actual occurrence and the time of telling the story as reconstruction, interpretation, and re-interpretation influence the actual story.

When considering the relationship between memory, recall, knowledge construction and the stories people tell, the notion of truth is also inevitably explored. If, as Chase (2005) noted, “Speakers construct events through narrative rather than simply refer to events” (p. 656), the truth of a story lessens in significance. Within narrative inquiry, it is the story’s plot rather than the story’s truth or falsity that is significant (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 166; Bruner, 1990, p. 44; Chase, p. 656; Czarniawska, 2004, p. 8; Freeman, 1992, p. 25; Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 261; Riessman, 1993, p. 64). As Freeman noted, “Even if a particular life-historical narrative is a manifestly mythologized and fictive rendition of that life, it may nevertheless provide useful information about how personal experience is organized in a given locale” (p. 25). Rather than focus on truth, narrative inquiry focuses on what stories reveal about the construction of knowledge, meaning, and the social, cultural, historical circumstances within which the narrative arose.

The goal of narrative inquiry is to explore meanings of lived experiences as expressed through the stories people tell. Narratives or stories may be oral or written. The level of detail provided may vary from a short story about an event, a longer story about an aspect of one’s life, or the story of one’s whole life (Chase, 2005, p. 652). Regardless of the length, narratives are distinctly oriented toward past actions and are organized around a set of consequential events (Bruner, 1990, p. 43; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 4; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 11; Riessman, 1993, p. 3). Narratives afford an opportunity to explore how people

understand actions or events because the stories told are dependent on a person's experiences and their interpretation of those experiences. According to Aptheker (1989):

Stories are one of the ways in which women give meaning to the things that happen in a lifetime, and the dailiness of life also structures the telling, the ordering of thought, the significance allocated to different pieces of the story. (p. 44)

Narratives, by their very nature, share certain features including (a) orientation, (b) plot or complication, (c) evaluation, (d) resolution, and (e) coda (Chase, 2005, p. 655; Riessman, 1993, p. 18;). Orientation provides the context and provides reference to time place, situation and participants involved. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) stressed that the scene positions the narrative within a particular cultural and social context (p. 8). The complicating action describes the action or sequence of events. The plot provides the narrative's overall coherency by relating the events to the whole (Bruner, 1990, p. 43; Connelly & Clandinin, p. 9; Czarniawska, 2004, p. 7; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 19). Polkinghorne emphasized that the "plot gathers together events into a coherent and meaningful unit, and thereby gives context and significance to the contribution that individual episodes make toward the overall configuration that is the person" (p. 152). The significance, meaning, and point of the story are expressed in the evaluation. The resolution describes what happened and the impact or results of the event. Coda returns both the narrator and listener to the present moment. A listener assesses the coherence, integrity, and credibility of a narrative by tacitly evaluating how a narrator follows these features (Czarniawska, p. 10).

### *Social Situation*

Our view of the world and our construction of self are products of our learning, shared experiences, and adaptation to and incorporation of our perceptions of what is going on around us. Societal factors influence and form us, perhaps even without our knowing or completely being able to articulate how so. For example, while Aptheker (1989) described women's stories as having distinct meanings (p. 45), power was described by Czarniawska (2004) in terms of how other people "concoct narratives for others without including them in a conversation" (p. 5). Anderson and Jack (1990) emphasized:

A woman's discussion of her life may combine two separate, often conflicting perspectives: one framed in concepts and values that reflect men's dominant position in the culture, and one informed by the more immediate realities of a woman's personal experience. (p. 11)

By gathering women's stories, we are able to explore individual, social, cultural and organizational narratives.

Standpoint theory requires a mode of inquiry that pays "explicit attention to the social relations embedded in women's everyday activities" (Naples, 2003, p. 83).

Narrative inquiry recognizes that context matters. Narratives are socially situated and are created within the context of a particular time, place, culture, and social situation (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006, p. 165; Bruner, 1990, p. 54; Chase, 2005, pp. 656, 657; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 27; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 153; Josselson & Lieblich, 1995, p. ix; Kemp, 1994, p. 55; Riessman, 1993, p. 5). Human understanding is not decontextualized but exists within the context

of narrative and shared by members of a community (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 27).

There is interplay between self and context in knowledge construction. Polkinghorne (1988) expressed this interplay in terms of an individual's construction of knowledge and meaning and a cultural context expressed in narratives illustrating societal values, shared social norms and beliefs, and cohesion (p. 14).

### *Primacy of the Hermeneutic Experience*

Narrative practice is a form of interpretive practice (Freeman, 1992, p. 30; Freeman, 2004, p. 39; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000, p. 104; Josselson, 1995, p. 35; Josselson, 2004, p. 4; Josselson & Lieblich, 1995, p. ix; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 125) involving storytelling, resources used to tell stories, and the situation under which the stories are told. *Hermeneutic experience* was used by Gadamer (2004) to describe the dialogical, interpretative nature of understanding as it arises in response to a given question or situation.

According to Josselson (1995), "Only from a hermeneutic position are we poised to study the genesis and revision of people making sense of themselves" (p. 35).

Hermeneutics' task is to construct a possible interpretation of "the nature of human experience based on reflection on lived experiences" (van Manen, 1990, pp. 37, 39).

Hermeneutics in this sense is an ongoing process of understanding grounded in the art of interpretation. Gadamer (1976) defined the task of hermeneutics as that of "an opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance

for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all the various forms in which this understanding manifests itself” (p. 18).

Understanding is not a linear, methodological process. Instead, Gadamer (2004) used the term *hermeneutical circle* to describe understanding as a “circular movement that runs backward and forward until something is understood” (pp. 293, 294). The circle refers to the coming and going of all understanding, meaning the constant process of interpretation and re-interpretation of our understanding. The idea is that one’s understanding as a whole is established by reference to the parts and understanding the parts are by reference to the whole. Not the whole or any part can be understood without reference to another. Understanding, then, is an interpretation of our past and its continuing influence on our present in relation to a given situation.

Narratives are a distinct form of discourse, a “retrospective meaning making” (Chase, 2005, pp. 656, 657) that are shaped, constructed, and performed in response to a given social situation. Moran (2000) described the hermeneutical project as self understanding (p. 251) where understanding takes place in response to a question, conversation, or situation. Interpretation and dialogue are representative of how the self is continually mediated and constructed. As Holstein and Gubrium (2000) noted, “Interpretive practice comprises both the how’s and what’s of reality construction. . . . self construction isn’t merely extemporaneous . . . it’s methodically articulated through talk and social interaction” (pp. 94, 153).

Narrative creation is an interactive performance socially situated with a specific purpose given within a particular setting to a particular audience. Goffman (1959)

emphasized the performative nature of self indicating that a person uses information “to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what [s]he will expect of them and what they may expect of [her]” (p. 1). This implies that the participant, researcher, and the social situation are co-participants engaged in a dialogic, interpretive act (Kvale, 1996, p. 125; Olson & Shopes, 1990, p. 196). Salzman (2001) described the researcher as “a subjective participant” where the basis of knowledge is dialogue between the researcher and the [participant]” (pp. 121, 122).

The participant and researcher engage in a hermeneutic experience illustrative of Clandinin and Connelly’s 3-dimensional model described earlier where each tries to discern what the other means by what each said within their social situation. In so doing, each brings their past, present, and future to bear on the social interaction. The nature of response is an interpretive, collaborative act between the participant and researcher with each participating actively (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 201). In narrative practice, the researcher tries to interpret and discern the inner world of a person, locating what was said within a social context, and analyzing what was said in light of research questions (Freeman, 2004, p. 39; Josselson, 2004, p. 5). Both the participant and researcher create meaning, construct a self, and negotiate power (Olson & Shopes, 1990, p. 196). The ultimate goal of the hermeneutic experience is to “unearth and highlight meanings present in communication” (Josselson, p. 4). The hope of hermeneutic experience relative to understanding via dialogue and interpretation is “not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but

being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were”  
(Gadamer, 2004, p. 371).

### Research Approach

Topic selection and conceptual design for this research study was an iterative, analytical, and interpretive process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 22). Before beginning data collection, Chase (1995) advised:

We need to begin with, or at least work our way toward, some sense of the broad parameters of the other’s story, the life experience, [she] seeks to make sense of and to communicate. And we do this by articulating what makes this group of people’s life experiences interesting in the first place. (p. 12)

Towards that end, this dissertation represents decisions I made so the theoretical framework described in Chapter II, research methodology and research approach generated data appropriate to my research questions (Marshall & Rossman, p. 22). The research approach, as described, provided a roadmap for systematic narrative inquiry that facilitated a better understanding of the dailiness of rural working women’s lives. Elements of my research approach included interviewing as the primary data collection method, initiating field notes and contact summaries to capture and summarize my interpretive and reflective impressions, transcription, analysis, and writing.

### *The Study Participants*

Participants for this study were selected using a hybrid of both purposive and snowball methods (Babbie, 2004, pp. 183, 184). Based on an Elder’s Factory Roster



dated 1972 and Mom's knowledge, there were approximately 100 women varying in age from 50 to 90 still living from among those who worked at the factory. These participants were selected because I had access through Mom and a personal interest because my Mom worked at Elder's. My criteria for selection included women who worked at Elder's Manufacturing and still live in McLeansboro. Seven women were interviewed and all have lived and worked in McLeansboro for a long period of time.

### *Interviewing*

I used unstructured interviews to gather stories from seven women who currently live in McLeansboro and who worked at Elder's Manufacturing. Through interviewing I was afforded access to participant's stories, thoughts, and memories in their own words (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 19).

Interviewing was an appropriate strategy for gathering and capturing stories of people's lived experiences (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2002, p. 149; Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 61; van Manen, 1990, p. 33). The purpose of interviewing was to "attempt to understand the world from the [participant's] points of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 1).

Twelve aspects of qualitative interviewing were proposed by Kvale (1996) as illustrative of the mode of understanding within the interview context (pp. 30, 31).

1. Lifeworld – everyday lived experience and the participant's relationship to it.
2. Meaning – Interview seeks to interpret the meaning of central themes in the life world(s) of the participants.

3. Qualitative – The interview seeks qualitative knowledge expressed in normal language.
4. Descriptive – obtains open nuanced descriptions of different aspects of the participant's life worlds.
5. Specificity – descriptions of specific situations.
6. Deliberate naiveté – the researcher exhibits an openness to new and unexpected phenomena.
7. Focused – particular themes.
8. Ambiguity – participant's statements can sometimes be ambiguous.
9. Change – the process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness and the subject may in the course of the interview come to change her descriptions and meanings.
10. Sensitivity – different interviewers can produce different statements on the same themes.
11. Interpersonal situation – the knowledge obtained is produced through interpersonal interaction.
12. Positive experience – a well carried out interview can be an enriching experience for the interviewee, who may obtain new insights into her life situation.

When viewed as a mode of understanding, certain characteristics of the interview experience are noted including (a) interactive knowledge construction between participant, researcher, and interview context; (b) researcher's responsibility for creating the 'space' or conditions for the interview; and the (c) importance of listening and questioning. Each are described, followed by a description of how I conducted each interview. Narratives are constructed in relation to the participant, researcher, and

interview context Kvale used a miner and traveler metaphor in distinguishing two theoretical understandings of interview research:

Miners seek objective facts to be quantified whereas the traveler “wanders through the landscape and enters into conversation with the people encountered”. The traveler acknowledges the potentialities of meanings in heard stories and new knowledge and insight to be constructed. More importantly, the traveler enters into the possibility of both the participant and researcher being changed through the reflective processes of question and answer. (pp. 3, 4)

Personal narratives are context sensitive and are constructed collaboratively between the participant and researcher within a specific interview context (Babbie, 2004, p. 300; Dahlberg et al., 2002, p. 154; DeVault, 2004, p. 232; Kvale, 1996, p. 127; Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 164; Riessman, 1993, pp. 9-11; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 12). Interviews are sites of knowledge construction and meaning making. Influences on knowledge construction within the interview context include the researcher’s perspective and capacity to create a suitable interview context, ask open questions and listen. As Polkinghorne noted, “The story is the result of the total interview situation” (p. 164).

To be a traveler suggests a certain outlook and theoretical perspective of the researcher. The researcher is an active participant (Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, p. 216). My perspectives were revealed in how I approached and interacted with each participant. My goal for each interview was that it resemble a conversation (Kahn, 2000, p. 61) while conveying that I wanted to “understand the world from the participant’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of [their] experiences and to uncover their lived world” (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). I wanted to create an experience resembling Gadamer’s

(2004) law of the subject matter where we enter into a dialogue and are then carried further by the dialogue, so much so that it is no longer our will that is determinative but the law of the subject matter at hand. As a researcher, I felt responsible for creating a context within which the participant wished to participate (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 164). Each participant's openness to conversation and sharing was determined by how she perceived me. Interviewing required "interview practices that give considerable freedom" (Riessman, 1993, p. 55) to both the participant and the researcher.

Since we met in their homes, participants were in their own world so to speak. This was important so that each felt comfortable. According to Anderson and Jack (1991), we should "consider carefully whether our interviews create a context in which women feel comfortable exploring subjective feelings that give meaning, allow women to explore unwomanly feelings, and encourage women to explain what they mean in their own terms" (p. 17). Babbie (2004) noted:

You need to ask a question, listen carefully to the answer, interpret its meaning for your general inquiry and then frame another question either to dig into the earlier answer or to redirect the person's attention to an area more relevant to your inquiry. (p. 300)

My capacity to listen and pose questions was essential (Chase, 1995, p. 12; Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, pp. 216, 217; Josselson, 1995, p. 4; Riessman, 1993, p. 54; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 136, 137). The "way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview shapes the relationship and therefore the ways participants respond and give accounts of their experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 110). An important aspect of conversation that I hadn't thought of was the importance of verbal and non-verbal cues

such as *um hm*, *yeah*, laughter, and/or head shaking to indicate that I was listening, understanding, and engaged. My silence would be reacted with a questions such as “*Do you understand?*” or “*You Know?*” Coates (1996) found that in women’s conversations “brief utterances, yeah, mhm, that’s right,” signal conversation participants of one another’s continued presence and involvement (pp. 142, 143).

To create a dynamic where the participant is invited to tell stories and takes responsibility for answering questions, I tried to ask questions using language and wording that make sense to them, not filled with sociological language and terminology (Chase, 1995, p. 3; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133; Josselson, 1995, p. 4). When possible I worded questions broadly striving to ask participants to describe experiences in their life. Follow up and probing questions were used in encourage participants to describe, explain, and provide further detail (Chase, p. 19).

An “active interview occurs when information is exchanged in both directions, the format is relatively unstructured and the emphasis of the interviewer is on listening to whatever the informant says as opposed to guiding and controlling the conversation” (Kahn, 2000, p. 61). By listening, a participant is empowered (Hesse-Biber & Leckenby, 2004, pp. 216, 217). Successful interviewing is a dialogical, interpretative act, an interpersonal situation, a form of interaction in which human knowledge evolves through dialogue (Kvale, 1996, p. 125).

### *Conducting the Interview*

Pre-interview participant selection, screening, and scheduling were done. Mom and I reviewed the Elder's Factory Roster using the criteria identified in Participant Criteria and Selection to identify a preliminary list of possible participants. Individuals who no longer lived in McLeansboro and those who my Mom felt were unable to participate due to family situation or other health issues were specifically excluded. Although there were other women who met the selection criteria, based on the nature of extensive interviews as required in narrative inquiry and my time limitations, I chose seven participants for this study.

From the list of possible participants, I contacted seven to reintroduce myself, introduce the material included in the Participant Consent for Interview form included as Appendix A and asked if they would be willing to participate. My attempts to set appointments in advance were met with laughter and the following typical comment, "*We don't need to be so formal do we? Just give me a call when you're in town next time and we'll get together.*" At that moment I realized my need to be flexible and sensitive to the culture. Scheduling is perceived as something you do with, for example, doctors, not typically something you do to have a conversation with someone. I sent each participant an advanced copy of the Participant Consent for Interview form with a cover letter included as Appendix B. Mom told me she received phone calls from a few of the women after we talked expressing concerns about remembering details and not being able to answer my questions. Having an ally whom participants trust and feel free to talk with to alleviate their concerns is important for this type of research. While the women have

known my parents and me for a long time, the concept of being interviewed and asked about their experiences is foreign. The care I took to describe the study and the types of questions were inadequate compared to talking with a peer to alleviate their fears, someone they trusted to say, you'll be okay. Research scenarios, where a total stranger was to go into a setting, would require even greater relationship building with a key ally or allies.

Interviews were conducted in each woman's home either around the dining table or in their living room. The format followed for each interview was a period of catching up conversation, introduction and discussion about informed consent, comfort questions, core interview questions, a transitional question, and closure (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 114-120). Since I had not seen many of these women since high school, we spent some time catching up on each other's lives. To dive into the business at hand would have been perceived as rude and too formal. Initially, I described the Participant Consent for Interview form, asked if there were any questions and again validated their interest in participating. This felt awkward because it seemed like a formality. One woman commented, "*I'll sign it, I trust you.*" All participants signed the Participant Consent for Interview form included as Appendix A.

Comfort questions are easy questions asked to get the participant talking (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 117), put them at ease and to create an atmosphere where women feel knowledgeable (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 25). Using the Interview Protocol included as Appendix C, each participant was asked background questions. My sense was that these questions did have the effect of putting participants at ease and set the

stage for what was to come. Some without prompting dove into stories in response to the background questions. All interviews were digitally recorded.

Interviews are something I have done a lot of in my job so I'm comfortable with doing them. However, when I started the first interview I was afraid. Interviews I do for work are mostly who, what, when, where, why, and how types of interviews. One of my fears was that I wouldn't ask good questions. Fortunately, our collective conversational styles were pretty in sync because even when I asked poorly worded questions, women told stories and gave examples. What I mean by conversational style being in sync is that my experience is that Southern Illinois people's forms of expression tend to include word pictures, metaphors, and stories. The dialogical nature of conversation really came in to play here. Since the participants knew I was "one of them" and my manner of speaking is familiar even though my accent is not as pronounced as it once was, I sound familiar to them. Additionally, I know people, places, and events that they're speaking about. So there's this sort of shorthand manner of speaking that occurred between us and a tacit understanding of the unsaid.

Using the interview protocol, I performed the core interview. Any pretense I had of interviews proceeding in a linear fashion according to the interview protocol was quickly diminished. Participants started where they wanted and told stories in the sequence they wanted to tell them. Our conversations were more like a hypertext experience jumping from one memory and story to another. It seemed as though a participant would hear their words, be reminded of something, and then go there. I discovered I was even more comfortable with this than how I envisioned the interviews



proceeding. One participant even mentioned, “*I don’t know how you’re going to make sense of this, we jumped around a lot.*”

I closed each interview by asking each participant if she had any questions, summarized highlights, described next steps and timeline, and thanked the participant for her time. Typically after I turned the digital recorder off, the participant would share other things they didn’t want recorded, talk about their family, or show me photographs or other objects in their house.

Following each interview, I transcribed the digital recording, generated a cover letter (see Appendix D), mailed a hardcopy transcript to each participant for review, and initiated a contact summary. A list of questions to clarify, fill in missing information, and/or to augment the first interview was initiated to support the second interview.

The purpose of the second interview was for each participant to have the opportunity to comment on their transcript, add further thoughts and reflections, and to describe their experience of the process. A digital recording was also made of this interview. Following this interview, I transcribed the digital recording, recorded field notes, and initiated a contact summary.

### *Field Notes and Contact Summary*

Field notes were a tool to enhance memory and to record external impressions and internal perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xiv; Ely, 1991, p. 80). Detail in field notes is important. Field notes enabled me to reconstruct the physical environments or settings in which I conducted the interview and to record

aspects of the interview that cannot be discerned from the transcript such as dress, demeanor, and other observations (Kahn, 2000, p. 65).

Ely (1991) described the researcher's generation of field notes as their conversation about what occurred, what they are learning, including insights and suggestions for future action (p. 80). Generation of field notes is an interpretive act involving the researcher in a back and forward movement between the experience and the researcher's interpretation of that experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 84). Field texts "help fill in the richness, nuance, and complexity of the landscape, returning the reflecting researcher to a richer, more complex, and puzzling landscape than memory alone is likely to construct" (p. 83).

I used a notebook to take brief notes during interviews and to record observations, feelings, and reflections throughout the study's progress. Ely (1991) reminded that "plans, questions, enthusiasms, doubts, and ruminations are all part of the process" (p. 71). Thoughts were recorded, particularly changes in my thinking (p. 74). Field notes provided an opportunity to reflect and self evaluate and to record hunches, ideas, insights, and observations, and early impressions regarding what was happening (Kahn, 2000, pp. 65, 66). Field notes were written as soon as possible after each interview. The greatest value of my field notes was to capture questions and observations as they occurred throughout the process. As I would talk with and email others about my research, those ponderings and initial summaries were incorporated into my field notes. I had the visualization of a multilayered onion as I thought and re-thought concepts and my experiences with the participants, with their spoken words, and with the transcriptions.

Contact summary sheets (see Appendix E) were initiated after a contact with participants to summarize the contact (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 51). Using a contact summary sheet provided a systematic way for me to reflect on and record initial impressions. According to Miles and Huberman, the goal is to summarize main concepts, themes, issues, and questions (p. 51). These were less useful than I had anticipated. I use the notebook method in my business practice to keep track of thoughts and activities, so recording field notes was a practice I was already disciplined towards doing. The contact summaries felt like a double effort for things I was already writing down in my notebook.

### *Transcription*

All digital recordings of each interview were transcribed by me (Dahlberg et al., 2002, p. 166; Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 206). Transcription is an interpretive practice and ultimately is my narrative of what happened (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 55; Riessman, 1993, p. 13). The primary audiences for the transcriptions were the participant and me. Kvale (1996) noted that the style of transcribing depends on the use of transcriptions (p. 170). Transcriptions were a written record that allowed each participant to confirm the accurate capture of their stories. Transcriptions also served as a memory trigger for me.

I debated the merits of outsourcing the transcription process versus doing it myself. Riessman's (1993) words convinced me to do my own transcriptions when she stated, "it is not a technical operation but the stuff of analysis itself, the 'unpacking' of structure that is essential to interpretation" (p. 58). Admittedly, I found the transcription

process to be quite tedious and time consuming. I used a three step process that included (1) listen and type, stop and go back as often as I needed to get much of the spoken word typed, (2) same process but at a higher listening speed, and (3) listen and edit a printout of the transcription. In the third listening, I incorporated dialectical edits. In the first and second listenings, I, without thinking, edited the spoken word to read and sound better. In the third listening, I intentionally edited to make the transcriptions more true to the conversation. Multiple listenings were invaluable to my hearing both the participant's words within an audible context but also for picking up nuances about the back and forth nature of women's conversations, generally. Transcriptions generated from interviews were created using the following guidelines:

1. Interview Metadata: Each transcript was identified with the date and length of interview, date of transcription, interviewer, and participant name, digital recording file name.
2. Typing instruction: I changed as little as possible to capture the southern Illinois dialect and nature of our conversations. I tried to accurately represent each speaker's words, conversational quality, and speech patterns. I typed contractions as spoken (I'll, not I will) and included filler words like "er," "um," "and then," "you know,".
3. Made transcripts easy to read and understand. I used square brackets [ ] to enter any necessary explanatory text that was not on the digital recording. For example, hand gestures and facial expressions.
4. The first draft of the transcription was reviewed two additional times against the digital recording for accuracy.

5. Allowed the participant to review the transcript. I generated a cover letter using Appendix D and sent the letter with a copy of the transcription.

6. Field notes were generated as I went through the transcription process documenting the process and noting my thoughts, feelings, and questions.

### *Analysis*

Qualitative analysis is defined by Babbie (2004) as the “non-numerical examination and interpretation of observations, for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships” (p. 370). Further, the aim of data analysis is to discover themes or patterns, patterns that point to theoretical understandings (p. 376). Ely (2007) expressed the aim of narrative research more eloquently when she said it is “the attempt to understand our participants deeply” (p. 582).

Analysis is not a one time, linear process but an iterative process that began prior to writing this research proposal (Kvale, 1996, p. 190; Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 151; Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 16). Plots or themes are described as the output of analysis (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 177; Riessman, 1993, p. 60; van Manen, 1990, p. 78). Typical questions asked when analyzing narrative interviews include consideration for how the stories are organized, why the person develops the story this way in conversation with me, and the single overriding story providing unity and wholeness (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 60; Riessman, 1993, p. 61).

When performing detailed analyses of the transcripts, *The Listening Guide* provided a systematic, rigorous approach that helped me avoid the pitfall of reviewing for

content or to support theories described in the literature review (Reissman, 1993, p. 61).

*The Listening Guide* is a relational, voice centered approach to analysis and understanding (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003, p. 157). In describing this approach Gilligan emphasized that

Each person's voice is distinct – a footprint of the psyche, bearing the marks of the body, of that person's history, of culture in the form of language, and the myriad ways in which human society and history shape the voice and thus leave their imprints on the human soul. (p. 157)

*The Listening Guide* is based on a framework in concert with standpoint theory and narrative inquiry, a framework that acknowledges the interactive, embodied, and socially situated nature of knowledge construction.

Rather than a single thematic coding, *The Listening Guide* uses a “series of sequential listenings, each designed to bring the researcher into relationship with a person's distinct and multilayered voice by tuning in or listening to distinct aspects of a person's expression of her . . . experience within a particular relational context” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 159). This approach guided me on a journey through multiple listenings trying to grasp subjective meanings beyond the content for each participant. It was an approach that allowed me to use multiple lenses through which to review, analyze, and interpret participant's stories. The notion of listening implies too that rather than reading, I was actively engaged in each person's stories (Gilligan et al., p. 160). What follows is a description of each step.

Step 1 Listening for the Plot: The purpose of this step was to get a sense of the setting including who is involved, what is happening, when and where things are

happening. I paid attention to my subjective experience and response to the participant's interview making note of any emotions, reaction, thoughts, or feelings.

Step 2 I Poems: This step focused on listening to the "I" who is speaking. To create I poems, I first highlighted every first person "I" within the transcript along with important accompanying words and then transferred these occurrences in the order they appeared in the text into a Microsoft Word document (Gilligan et al., 2003, pp. 163, 164). I read through this list several times to get a sense of the person and who they were when they said "I". Then, I highlighted, using a different color highlighter, "you," "we," "he," "or she" statements. I read through the transcripts several times taking note of when "I" was used and when the participant used or switched to "you," "we," "he," or "she". According to Gilligan et al., the I poems move "subjectivity to the foreground, providing the listener with the opportunity to attend just to the sounds, rhythms, and shifts in this person's usages of "I" in . . . her narratives" (p. 164). This step was the most challenging because I wasn't used to reading or listening in this way. I read and re-read studies that used the Listening Guide to get a better feel for its application. I found Brown and Gillian's (1992) discussions on voice most useful particularly with regard to usages of phrases such as I don't know, probably and I mean (pp. 4, 96, 128). Coates (1996) insights through conversational analysis of women's talk helped also (pp. 155-172).

Step 3 Listening for Contrapuntal Voices: This step "offers a way to listen for counterpoint...or the multiple facets of the story being told" (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 166). These listenings were considered in relationship to my research questions. Contrapuntal voices may be complementary or oppositional (p. 167). "Contrapuntal

signifies that. . . two voices are strongly differentiated and embody different perspectives (Sorsoli & Tolman, 2008, p. 498). I read through each interview four times, one time for each contrapuntal voice listening for the following contrapuntal voices (a) woman as feminine, (b) woman as worker, (c) woman in relationship, and (d) woman in community. Step 3 was a fun step because by the time I got to it, I had listened to and read the transcripts several times. As I listened, I underlined the text using different colored pens so that the transcription revealed each voice. Then, I prepared a list with excerpts of key phrases coded by feminine, worker, relationship, and community.

Step 4 Composing an Analysis: This dissertation includes an analysis of the highlighted and underlined transcripts, field notes, and contact summaries to answer what I have learned about my research questions including the evidence on which I base my interpretations (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 170). The output from Step 3 was used as a starting point for this step. Information was added from field notes and contact summaries.

### *Writing*

The transition from the field to writing was challenging (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 122). I wanted to provide a general sense of my goals for the dissertation. My intended audiences for the outcomes of this research study were my dissertation committee, peers and non-academics who are interested in rurality, gender, and/or community. As I approached the writing project, I kept in mind that when I said “I”, I was connecting with the rural working women who participated in this study (Clandinin



& Connelly, 2000, pp. 122, 123). It was important that their stories be told in ways “that cleave as closely as possible to the essence of what and how they shared” (Ely, 2007, p. 569). Ultimately, I wanted to communicate in such a way that those who do not know, but who are interested in understanding, may understand what it is I am talking about (Wolcott, 2001, p. 68). I wanted to invite the reader to see, through my eyes, what I have seen (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 117; Wolcott, p. 31).

### Limitations

Although my study met the proposed purposes of exploring the dailiness of rural working women’s lives, there were some limitations that are important considerations when reviewing the findings and the conclusions. All research has certain limitations that must be acknowledged and addressed by any research study (Babbie, 2004, p. 186).

Limitations of this study included participant selection criteria, use of Mom as the primary access point, time passed since event occurrence, and my own biases.

Seven participants were interviewed constituting a limited selection. Although the interviews elicited a wealth of rich stories, the small number of participants provided a somewhat limited amount of data. Participant selection criteria and the small number of interviews may have discounted women with insightful stories to tell.

Use of Mom as the primary access point introduced limitations due to her biases, our relationship, and her role within the community and among these women. Mom has her own relationship and views of the women who worked at Elder’s which might have skewed selection. As her daughter, she wants me to do well which might influence her

selection towards those women who she perceives might provide good information as defined by her. Mom's relationship with the greater community, in particular the women she worked with at Elder's in her supervisory capacity, might also have skewed both selection and my reception among participants. Since my Mom was a supervisor at the factory, participants might balk at describing an event which involved Mom.

Another limitation was the distance between my home and my research site. Because I traveled to McLeansboro for this study, I was not able to meet with my participants frequently, and my interviews were restricted to the two weeks I was there. I arrived there for the second interview during a snow and ice storm that caused additional delays and time restrictions.

It should be noted that participants recounted experiences that transpired some years ago. Memories' were filtered through years of new experiences, insights, and observations. Finally, my own biases were perhaps a limitation when trying to present the data in an unbiased manner. This brings me to my own biases which include my memory of growing up in McLeansboro, my interfaces with these women, my life experiences since then, and my role as a researcher. I have a strong bias towards viewing rural women, particularly these women, as strong and agentic. I was challenged during analysis to ask what these women were saying versus how what they say fits my views and/or theoretical construct. I selected The Listening Guide as an analysis tool because I felt as though it would give me a structured way of focusing on their stories first rather than my interpretation. Secondly, I have not lived in McLeansboro since 1979, I currently live in an urban area, and reentered McLeansboro as a researcher. For these

women, I am Mom's daughter first and in a somewhat quasi-outsider role. While I was received as a 'hometown girl', there was a subtle understanding of differences due to my life experiences, where I live, and that I am pursuing a PhD. A strength is my utmost respect for where I come from, these women and their influence in my life. Also, I chose narrative inquiry as the methodology, in part, due to its underlying respect for participants and the collaborative nature of research generally, a philosophy that I think plays to my strengths and personal beliefs about people, my respect for them, and the type of interaction I wanted to have with them, one that created a safe space for them to tell their stories.

### Ethical Considerations

My goal was to balance each participant's dignity, privacy, and wellbeing with the scholarly community's call for accuracy, authenticity, and interpretation (Josselson, 2007, p. 538). I recognized that social research represents an intrusion into people's lives particularly with regard to personal information, thoughts, and feelings that may be unknown to friends, family, and the community (Babbie, 2004, p. 62).

All participation in this study was voluntary. My goal was to do no harm to the participants. With that said, the personal interaction between the participant might have had an effect (Kvale, 1996, p. 109). Participants might have felt uncomfortable, vulnerable, or experience negative feelings during or after the interview. Efforts to alleviate possible discomfort included (a) striving to create a 'safe space' for the participant; (b) allowing participant to review, edit, and comment on the transcript from

our first interview; (c) reassuring participants that there are no right and wrong answers; (d) reiterating that all information is confidential; and (e) reminding participant that they may cease participation in the study at any time.

This research proposal was reviewed and approved by Gonzaga University's Internal Review Board (IRB) prior to any data collection. A copy of their approval letter is included as Appendix F. Informed consent is the means by which a participant based their voluntary participation on a full understanding of the possible risks (Babbie, 2004, p. 64). Considering that the age of potential participants varied from 70 to 90, some participants may not have had the autonomy or capacity to provide informed consent, in which case, these individuals were excluded from the study. Prior to contacting any potential participants regarding study participation, I asked Mom for her assessment on their capacity. I have a high degree of confidence in her input due to the size of my hometown and the fact that my Mom knows most of the women and their families that still live in McLeansboro.

Participants were free to discontinue the interview at any time and they had the opportunity to review their transcripts following the first interview. All participants signed the Participant Consent for Interview form included as Appendix A indicating they were aware of the benefits and risks.

Anonymity and confidentiality may be of concern to the participants. Anonymity is when neither the researcher nor the reader of the findings can identify a given response to a given participant (Babbie, 2004, p. 65). Due to the method of the study, anonymity is not possible. Confidentiality is a more appropriate consideration. Babbie defined

confidentiality as when the researcher can identify a person's response but promises not to do so (p. 66). Each participant was informed that all information will be reviewed only by my dissertation chair and me and then only with all names, places, and identifying information removed or disguised (Josselson, 2007, p. 542).

### Chapter Summary

The primary strength of this study was its qualitative approach. Conversation is a powerful means of gathering rich and textured stories. During interviews, I had the strongest sensation of one of those old fashioned teeter totters that I so loved on the playground. Two people moving in concert, back and forth, the natural ebbs and flows of conversation. I remember at times feeling as though we were jumping around a lot from topic to topic, experience to experience, only to realize much later how our words fit together in a mosaic representing that particular woman. And now I realize that story gathering follows a creative, intuitive interwoven path rather than a linear, chronological summation. Each woman found her own way to describe her experiences and the stories told represent who she is today. That is the power of narrative inquiry.

In Chapter IV, I present my background. In Chapters V through XI, the stories of the seven participants are shared, offering insights into the dailiness of their lives.

## CHAPTER IV

## MY STORY

*“You’re from Southern Illinois aren’t you?”*

In 1999, while trying to get a role on a project team, a project manager asked *“You’re from Southern Illinois aren’t you?”* How’d he know that? I asked myself. He first noted my accent and then observed *“you have a way about you.”* Prior, I had experiences where I thought I saw the world differently, yet attributed those differences to personality rather than a result of upbringing within a specific locale. At the time of this study, I am a 46 year old woman who lived in McLeansboro, Illinois from birth until my early 20s, in Mt. Vernon, Illinois until age 25, and then moved to urban Phoenix, Arizona. I thought about this and many other things as I drove from St. Louis to McLeansboro to interview women for this research study.

Half the fun of traveling to my hometown of McLeansboro is getting there. I flew into St. Louis, rented a car, and took I-70 across the Mississippi River into Illinois. I-64 is a main thoroughfare through Southern Illinois because it connects Missouri and Indiana. Traversing through rich farm and pasture land, I was drawn into the natural beauty surrounding me. Passing through Mt. Vernon, I remembered when I was little our trips there were a treat because it was the nearest big town with nearly 12,000 people. We’d travel there to go to Woolworth’s or Montgomery Wards to buy things we couldn’t buy in McLeansboro. As I exited off the highway at Belle Rive, exit number 89, I remember thinking *“almost there, watch for deer.”* Deer are thick in this part and frequently cross the road. This narrow two lane road led me to Highway 142, a road I

have traveled many times down through the years, a road that led me into Hamilton County, past towns with names like Dahlgren, Delafield, and finally into McLeansboro.

Locals often describe McLeansboro as the hub of a wagon wheel due to its position relative to other towns. Highway 242 leads north to Wayne City, Highway 14 runs east and west taking travelers to Carmi and Benton, and Highway 142 runs sort of northwest and southeast between Mt. Vernon and Eldorado. Downtown is designed as a square with the massive courthouse occupying central focus. One of my favorite buildings is the McCoy Memorial Library built in 1884 on the southwest corner of the square. It is a beautiful architectural building, a place I spent many hours in because I do so love books.

When I was growing up, the Square was filled with businesses integral to residents' daily lives, a hardware store, lumber yard, grocery store, banks, dime store, a P.N. Hirsch, and several restaurants. Mom and Dad always tried to buy local when they could. However, today some buildings stand empty. People continue to buy local when they can, however, many travel to neighboring towns to Super Wal-Mart, Loews, or other businesses to purchase items needed for their daily life.

Things I notice along the way include how drivers of passing cars wave a finger or nod their head as if to say, *"hello, I acknowledge you"*. On my way to Mom's I stop at the local McDonalds to get a cup of coffee and there are a few tables of men sitting there cussing and discussing the world as they experience it. This is a daily routine for them and others who gather to talk and swap stories. In response to a seeming stranger in their midst, I hear one ask the group, *"who's that?"* A man who thinks he knows me

indicates, “*I think that’s Bernice’s daughter.*” And in my mind I think of the power of being acknowledged as a local’s relative as if to say, I must be okay if I’m a relative of Bernice. The Southern Illinois accent and manner of speaking is something one might notice. To my ears it sounds melodic and familiar, comfortable, a strong audible indicator that I am home.

My mind is swirling with memories of my youth. I was born in 1961, the youngest and only girl with three older brothers. Dad ran a backhoe and worked on the oil field before starting his own backhoe business when I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade and Mom worked at Elders. Before I went to school, I stayed with a babysitter who lived across the road from my Granny and Granddad’s house. We’d watch Captain Kangaroo and she’d often fix me a macaroni and tomato dish for lunch. When I was four, we went on a two-week family vacation and saw North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. I truly believe that it was this trip that instilled in me a sense of wonder and curiosity for traveling, a sense that remains with me to this day.

Age four was momentous because I started kindergarten at East Side Grade School. I loved school, everything about it I enjoyed. I confess I did get in trouble one time for coloring the table purple. I did it to see what it would look like and I love purple! And my teacher would get on to me sometimes because rather than join in with the others on the playground I’d stand on the sidelines and just watch what others were doing. Early on, I was curious about people, what was going on, how they interacted and reacted to one another. I guess I was a little odd that way. After kindergarten, I went to



stay with a lady who lived near the grade school. After my nap, she'd make me fried apples, one of my favorite dishes. Mom would pick me up after work. We'd stop at the store or run other errands on our way home. Now I realize that these excursions with Mom taught me a lot about how the world works and how to think about and do things.

Both Mom and Dad worked hard and their days were long. It seemed to me that Mom was the first one up and the last one to go to bed. In the summer, Mom would awaken me before she went to work at the factory. Deep in my sleepy consciousness I'd hear her saying, "*Alicia Diane, it's time to get up.*" Mom was not to be denied, she'd persist in this manner until I became conscious enough to have a conversation. And in her typical Mom-way, she'd describe what she had done that morning, what I was to do in the morning before she came home at noon, and what she was going to do over her lunch hour. Because she knew it was possible I would forget everything she said, she would leave a list on the kitchen table. Mom thought of everything. Over her lunch hour, she'd grab a bite to eat, do some chores, and prepare yet another list of tasks for the afternoon. After Mom got home from work, we might work in the garden or help Mom can vegetables.

Generally, we all pitched in to help with whatever needed to be done either inside or outside of the house. My sense was that you do what you have to do. Besides working jobs, Mom and Dad raised cattle, hogs, and chickens and grew vegetables in a huge garden. My brothers and I took care of the animals since Mom and Dad both worked. My takeaway from their example is that you work hard to take care of yourself. A strong work ethic and self sufficiency are key virtues. With housework, laundry, ironing,

working in the garden, preparing food and canning, and taking care of animals, it seemed as though the days were filled with endless activities. Mom was the master planner and scheduler who identified and prioritized tasks, recruited us kids to help, and then monitored the overall situation.

I remember being asked to clean the bathroom, set the table for dinner, and help clean dishes. Cooking was something I learned early particularly after I got an Easy-Bake oven. I liked the colors, textures, and what seemed to be the miracle of mixing foodstuffs all together and creating something wonderful. Your relationship with food is different when you're involved in the total process. It seemed like a co-creative act. Eating food was a social affair and was also used for celebratory purposes such as birthdays, holidays, or Saturday night. We often had grilled steaks, baked potatoes, salad, and onion rings many Saturday nights. Of all the domestic chores, cooking was and is my favorite.

Being nice and polite and respecting others and self were important to Mom and Dad. They had a million expressions to convey their expectation of what that meant. They'd say things like, "*What do you say?*" or "*Mind your P's and Q's*" to remind us to say please and thank you. Somehow I knew that part of being civil and proper included looking people in the eye when speaking with them, having a good handshake, minding your manners and being polite. "*We all put our pants on one leg at a time.*" What typically followed this phrase was some expression regarding no one else being better than you and you're no better than anyone else. The gist of this expression was to not think better or worse of yourself than others and to treat all people with respect. "*Don't*

*judge a book by its cover*” meant that part of respecting others is to try to see beyond their external appearance and/or their circumstance. *“You Can Catch More Flies with Honey Than You Can with Vinegar.”* Being nice will get you farther in life than not being nice. These sayings are voices in my head that I guess will never leave because I heard Mom and Dad say them so often.

Spending time with family was important too. Granny and Granddad lived in the same town. Granddad worked in the oil fields and Granny worked at P.N. Hirsch. They raised hogs and always had a big garden. When they needed help, we’d go over to help out with whatever chores they might have. And, if I was sick my Granddad would keep me. Heck, half the time, he’d come in, give me a glass of coke, and then we’d be off to the hog barn. Life wasn’t all work. We’d often gather together to celebrate holidays and birthdays or just be together. Most of these gatherings included lots of food often from our garden. A meal at Granny’s might be something like fried chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans, cole slaw, sliced tomatoes, homemade cinnamon rolls and dinner rolls. It doesn’t get much better than that. Following lunch, we’d play cards or games or sit around listening to Granddad’s or Dad’s stories. Both told colorful stories. We took care of one another, worked hard, managed to get things done for both families and have a lot of fun in the process.

Time was also spent with friends and being involved in community activities. Once in awhile, Mom and I would go have lunch with her friends. We’d go up to the local café where our lunch selection was always the same, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, cream gravy, green beans, and iced tea. In my mind’s eye, I can still smell that

meal's goodness and fondly remember sitting at the table with those ladies. Around that table, I'd watch and listen to Mom and her friends as they chatted, laughed, and shared information on everything from gossip, how-to's, and what was happening in the community. Time together was important for gossiping, information sharing, to get the pulse of what was happening in the community and most importantly for Mom's renewal. On Sunday's we'd go to church. Mom was the last one out of the building. She'd talk to everyone, find out what was happening in their lives, share a laugh and when needed, offer encouragement.

Besides an orientation towards food, work and relationships predominate my thinking about growing up in McLeansboro. Work was a central activity in our daily life. There are days when I feel as though I've worked forever. Both my parents worked so us kids were given chores at an early age. I grew up thinking I needed to figure out ways to make money. By the time I was 17, I had washed cars, worked hay crews, detassled corn, worked for the forest service, raised and sold chickens and eggs, decorated cakes, and cooked in the nursing home. My current work is consulting, I have been doing that for over 24 years. Work was always balanced by family time. There was always time for family and friends, all joining together to celebrate, tell stories, play cards, eat food, and build a life together.

Education and school were important. I love to read and learn. Plus school provided many outlets for my exploration of music, theater, athletics, and scholastic activities. I tried a little bit of everything. I don't recall being associated with any one specific group, instead, I tended to flit like a butterfly between groups enjoying all types

of people. One of my favorite memories is when a group of us went to London, England on a theatre trip. Oh my gosh, it was so much fun. We saw many plays, visited museums, ate different food, and simply enjoyed the city and each other. While I didn't know what I wanted to do when I grew up, clearly, travelling and seeing the world was one of my life goals!

There was no question I would go on to college. I heard from the time I was little that I would go to college because Mom and Dad never had the opportunity and because they believed that an education created possibilities. So, following high school I went to college in Lincoln, Illinois. I loved every minute of it as my horizons expanded toward subjects I had never studied or heard about. My college roommate was from four hours north of Lincoln and a city girl. We were as different as night and day in some respects. I felt not as sophisticated as her because her experiences and exposure to life was so different. Because I was from a *po-dunk* place, some kids joked about whether I had indoor plumbing and if I had to put shoes on to come to college. I laughed because I knew they were teasing. Thinking back, I was never overly concerned or comparative about external things like clothes or possessions because I understood that within any group the possibility exists that some are going to have more, some less. My angst was about being able to conduct myself properly in social situations and not measuring up academically. Fellow students had read and heard of things that I had never heard of and had experiences that I couldn't even imagine. So I worked hard. I quickly found that my Mom and Dad's emphasis on manners, politeness, and having a sense of humor were paramount and that my education had prepared me to compete academically in a college

setting. While I may not have read about some things, I knew how to read, research, think, and communicate. My skills for doing school were good and I used these skills extensively when I entered the workforce.

Early on I found myself in jobs where I was one of the few women on technical, non-secretarial, staff, working mostly with engineers. They did not quite know what to make of me, a woman and a non-engineer, working alongside them. I quickly learned that the only way I was going to survive was to study and learn how men thought so I could anticipate questions I might be asked. It's funny now when I think of it. I would take home codes and standards to read so I could understand the technical content and lingo and understand what they were saying. I worked hard at learning how to exceed expectations. I intuitively understood that while my male colleagues might be able to say "*I don't know*" in a meeting, I couldn't. My saying those same words might be met with questions about my competence. So, I worked hard at understanding how they interacted and adapted my style in such a way that I could excel in their environment. Competence became my sole motivation. I would beat them at their game by learning their areas of expertise and communicating effectively. This is where my being good at school really paid off because what I needed to do was use skills I had already honed through my education.

In 1987, I moved from Southern Illinois to Phoenix Arizona due to a job transfer. What a difference! I remember my first weekend going to Wal-Mart and being astounded at how many different types of people I saw and all the different languages I heard spoken. It took me awhile to adjust to city life because I felt so disoriented. The

pace was much faster, there were more options and choices, and I struggled with feeling disconnected because everywhere I went I didn't know anyone. In Southern Illinois, I'd see people I knew or knew someone they knew. Not so in Phoenix and this is still so today, I go about my daily life and rarely see anyone I know. Where we work, play, and live are all geographically dispersed, it's easy to be alone here. The physical place also challenged my psyche and sense of place. Desert is a totally different physical sensation both visually and physically than my native Southern Illinois. It took me awhile to adjust.

A bigger adjustment for me and I think I'm still adjusting is how people interpret my niceness especially in the business world. *Being nice* is something I had drilled into my head since I was little. Mom and Dad would say, "*If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.*" And so, after years of this, I tend to be indirect or silent in my observations, rather than direct and forceful. People don't seem to realize that silence has many faces. At times, I am silent to buy time, to figure out what is really going on. At others, silence is a way to not impose my views on someone else. It's funny, in the world of ideas I can debate with others freely and quite enjoy doing so. In my job, I can mediate conflict or be direct with people about their behavior and their impact on others. But when it comes to interaction with others, I consider whether I can speak my mind freely or whether I'll be viewed as selfish, inconsiderate, or stuck on myself. People's perceptions of niceness often translate into perceptions of naiveté, unassertiveness, or a lack of toughness. I am by nature easy-going and nice but neither of these correlates to personal weakness. I resisted this view by leveraging their underestimation of my

abilities towards getting stuff done. Sometimes I stay silent just to see what people are really thinking or to get them to “*show me their hand*” so to speak. It sounds terrible as I hear myself saying this but I figure I might as well use their stereotype to my advantage. My silence is multi-faceted, yet people seem either uncomfortable or judgmental about it.

When I first came to Arizona I was on a steep learning curve about how the world works. Who I am today at 46 represents some sort of hybrid between my rural upbringing and my urban experiences. I probably am tougher today because I’ve had to adjust and adapt to work situations and life in an urban environment. Eventually, I returned to school to get an M.S. and am now pursuing a Ph.D. And although on the one hand I feel like I’ve changed, in some ways I still feel like that kid from McLeansboro. Doors have opened, opportunities have presented themselves and I’ve made choices. I guess we all have our own biography. And this is mine. I brought who I am, my experiences, and their influence into these interviews and the research study.

The subsequent chapters present data from participants in narrative form. Chapters V through XI present stories from seven women in the following manner: introduction, when I say I, biographical details, daily life, work history, and reflections. I debated the separation of daily life from work history feeling as though I was embracing public/private, paid/unpaid distinctions. Rather, grouping the stories in this way made sense for clarity purposes. The introduction reflects my observations of the interview.

Each participant chapter includes a section entitled “when I say I”. Each includes an abbreviated I-poem meant to give you a sense of each participant through her use of the word “*I*”. My choice to abbreviate was simply due to the large number of usages



from 300 to almost 600 and the degree of repetition. Studying usages of the word “I” was a fascinating exercise and a daunting task. Trying to describe the multi-faceted complexities of *me* who is described when *I* is used by someone else is particularly challenging. My experience of the process was akin to being within the hermeneutical circle with the sensation of back and forth movement between isolated I-statements to conversational context.

I-statement analyses provided a unique glimpse into how these women see themselves and make sense of their world. Participants expressed their selves in relation to worker, wife, they, me, you, and circumstance. I as worker or I in terms of action or work was a predominant theme throughout our conversations. Participants disassociated themselves from the actual doing as evidenced by reverting to a passive voice such as *you* or *you’d* when describing how they did certain things. When talking about their marriage or home life, participants would begin with a definitive I-statement and then switch to a *we* or a *he* description. Women’s lives were intertwined with that of their husbands. When describing life’s circumstances or a process, participants often reverted to passive voice using *you*, *we*, or *they*. When talking about people with whom they had a relationship, participants provided their name and usually some indicator of who they were related to or where they lived.

Narratives often included references to oral or written speech or hearing, such as *I can’t tell you*. These phrases were used in conversation as a means of telling the story and usage of a specific phrase had a unique meaning. Telling someone to do something or relaying definitive information was expressed as *I told*. For merely telling what she

said in the story, *I said* was used. For content emphasis, a woman would say, *I tell you* or *I tell you what*. When merely expressing her opinion participants would use *I'd say* or *I still say* if more emphatic. *I was told* and *I talked to* were devices used to describe general information gathering with a variation of *I never heard* when totally new information was received. When a woman could not recall minute facts within a story, she might say *I can't tell you* or *I couldn't tell you* as if to say, I can't remember those details.

Participants often used phrases that suggested struggles with what she knows and what she was sure of. Stories were filled with I-statements around thought and thinking, knowing, memory, certainty, and clarification. "*I'll have to think*" was used when responding to a question or trying to remember details. This phrase worked as a hedge to buy her time to reflect. "*I think*" was used both when a participant was speculating "*I think it was Second Street on the corner*" and when expressing her opinion "*I think kids ought to be taught stuff*." "*I don't know*" was sometimes used to express a lack of understanding about why a thing or person is a certain way. Knowing phrases were used to express knowledge of a fact *I know* versus *I've known* which was used to express knowing a person. *I know* was also used to express an understanding of what was being said; whereas, *I don't know* was used when unsure of the details. *I just can't remember* or *I don't remember*" was used when grappling with saying the specifics such as years, specific dates, names of people or places. *I never will forget* meant a woman was sure of her story. Sometimes *I don't know* was said when a woman hadn't seen anything like what she was describing. For example, "*She's got a good memory like I don't know*."

A variety of phrases were used to express certainty or uncertainty. *I guess* was used to speculate on a fact, a date, or a situation. In contrast, *I believe* was used when a participant was sure. *I'm going to say* was used when guessing or speculating. Clarifying phrases such as *I mean* or *I don't mean* were generally used when correcting herself as she was speaking.

Women ranged in age from 70 to 89. All were married with children and have lived in McLeansboro most of their lives. Only the two younger women still have their husbands. Most of them began working when they were 11 or 12 and continued to work off and on throughout their life. Three women are still working in their 70s, one retired at 80, and three retired in their 60s. Three women have some college and one is currently taking college classes.

All names have been changed and italics represent each woman's words. To the largest extent possible, I have used her words complete with dialect using brackets to clarify content. These seven women provided their stories, stories about the dailiness of their lives during the time they worked at Elder's Manufacturing. Memories evoked in the course of conversation are not nearly as compartmentalized as suggested by the previous statement. Our conversations tended to jump around from that time to earlier times to today in a natural way as conversations go. I have organized their stories providing a brief introduction, I-poems within "When I Say I," and biographical details, daily life, paid work, and reflections about herself and life today.

## CHAPTER V

## AGNES' STORY

*"I wasn't doing one thing I was doing two."*

Admittedly, I was nervous driving to Agnes' house. This was my first interview and of all the participants, I could not recollect ever meeting her. Mom mentioned that Agnes called to express concerns that she might not be able to answer my questions. Mom reassured her that it wasn't that type of interview, she'd do just fine. When I called to set up a time, Agnes stated that I would get to see *"how a poor woman lived."* I wondered why she said that and what perceptions she had of me.

Agnes met me at the door. We said hello and I introduced myself. Agnes asked, *"did you have any trouble finding the place?"* I smiled to myself because that question seemed so familiar. The front door of the house enters into a screened-in porch and then into the living room. The porch, with its glass windows and comfy sitting chairs, looked like a great place to read and watch the day go by. Family photos decorated the walls and available surfaces in both the porch and the living room. A wooden clock hung prominently in the living room, this clock would be the focus of one of Agnes' many stories.

In the living room, Agnes had set up a card table indicating, *"I didn't know what you might need."* I thanked her for her thoughtfulness and we chit chatted for awhile, she in her chair and me on the couch. Agnes began:

*Yes, I know where they lived. I've known your folks a long time. I worked with [your mom] at the factory. I've known your folks always. I couldn't remember, I*

*don't remember you at all. But, I talked to, I don't know who it was, I talked to some woman and they said they worked with you at the factory or . . .*

Agnes' words reminded me of the importance of relationships and *being known* in McLeansboro. What was actually said in her words was while I may not know you, I know your folks and what I know of them is why you are here. She consented to the interview because she knew my folks, she called my Mom for reassurance, and just to be sure she talked to someone in the community who knew me.

I enjoyed Agnes' sense of humor and her storytelling. Agnes had a ready laugh and told many stories without much prompting on my part. Even poorly worded questions beginning with how, what, or why were responded to with a story. In contrast to my first visit where Agnes was more tentative initially, Agnes had a list of things she wanted to tell me when I came the second time. If I were to characterize Agnes, I'd describe her as friendly, funny, and accepting of her situation as just the way it is, as frustrating as that might be at times. When asked to describe herself, Agnes responded, "*Get by the best way you can, cause that's about the way you had to do it.*" When asked what she would want others outside of McLeansboro to know about rural working women, Agnes noted, "*It's a small place and it's a busy place, you have to work.*" *[laughter]* Here is her story.

When I say I...

Drawn from her words, the following I-poem emerged summarizing her life.

*I was born. I was born.  
I went to school.*

*I got married.*  
*I mean. I decided I'd get married.*  
*I married. I worked.*  
*I had my daughter.*  
*I stayed home. I didn't go back to work.*  
*I never will forget. I stayed home. I done the dirty work.*  
*I had worked. I didn't work. I just as well work.*  
*I got in town. I went to work.*  
*I can't complain. I done a lot.*  
*I lived.*  
*I guess I'm alright.*  
*I don't do anything anymore.*  
*I've gotten so lazy.*  
*I don't do anything anymore.*  
*I'm thankful I had it.*  
*I had to have something to do.*  
*I got a chance.*  
*I like to work.*  
*I'm here. I'm able.*  
*I knew. I said, I told you I was right.*  
*I laugh.*  
*I still say. I'm thankful.*  
*I guess I'll live.*  
*I don't know. I hope so.*  
*I tell you. I'm thankful I had a job.*  
*I really don't know.*  
*I guess.*  
*I got a little more money ahead.*  
*I learned to save money.*  
*I never did get away from work.*  
*I wasn't doing one thing I was doing two.*  
*I've lived.*

### Biographical Details

At 89, Agnes was the oldest woman interviewed. She was born, raised, and continues to live in Hamilton County. Currently, she lives in McLeansboro. Agnes married at 17 and was just shy of 56 years of marriage when her husband passed.

When they were first married, her husband and she lived with his folks and both worked outside the home. On the day of this interview we had 3 inches of snow with 3 inches of ice which triggered a memory for her about them getting to work.

*Oh God I never will...this snow reminds me of it. When we lived down there 'course that was just a lane through there. I went to work that morning and it was just about that deep [motions with her hand]. I fell down and I cried and I done a little bit of everything and I finally got up there where we got [Mr. F.'s] horses. There was a house at the end of the lane and we couldn't get ours out. 'Cause it was too far and we borried his horses and he took them to pull the car out. We had our car up there that's the reason he done that, but anyhow, why he brought me to town and I went to work and my clothes was wet as anybody's. Well, [Miss F.] thought so much about it, I had these boots and she crocheted me some. . . socks. That day I went to work, I went to work wet because I couldn't get to Mom's 'cause I was on that end of town [motions with her finger] and she was over here [points across the street]. It was time for me to go to work once I got there. It's a wonder it didn't kill me, but it didn't. [laughter]*

At some point her husband and she moved out of his folks' house into their own place and raised dairy cattle while continuing paid work. Agnes' told this funny story about them milking cows together. In reliving the story, I watched her face go from laughter to thoughtfulness to a sense of loss over her husband, as she reflected on her sense of fun in light of her life today.

*It was just a great life on the farm. I did love it out there. Me and him had a lot of fun. We was milking one night, I was sitting behind him, I was sitting there and just milking away. He turned away and throwed a big cup of milk up my dress tail. We had more fun over that. He said, well you wasn't moving very fast. We had lots and lots of fun. I guess we was so crazy we just didn't know any*

*different. I'd say we had a good life. I got no complaints whatsoever. It seemed like it's been a long time since he's been gone.*

Agnes experienced tough times and lack of choices. *"Anything there was to come along, people back then had to work. You didn't pick your jobs. You took what you could get."* During the early years, Agnes worked at the factory 7 years and then stopped to have and raise her daughter in 1943. Around 1953, when her daughter was in the fifth grade, they sold the farm and moved to town where she currently lives. Agnes described the transition of moving from the farm to town, *"Oh, yeah, it's a big difference [town versus country living]. Yeah, it sure is. A big one, I'd say it's a pretty good place to be after all."* Her mother and father lived across the street. She returned to working at the factory in 1954. When I asked her why she went back to work, she replied,

*I had worked before and then after my daughter come along I didn't work. Then after we moved to town why, I just as well work as to set at home. So, anyway, she was about old enough to start to school by the time I got in town and the lady lived across the street kept her.*

When the factory closed in 1978, Agnes continued working for an additional 20 years. She finally retired in 1999 at the age of 79 and still lives in the house her husband and she purchased in 1954.

### Daily Life

Agnes' daily life was filled with activities from the time she got up until she went to bed. The word *work* was used quite often. As Agnes described her life, I found myself envisioning an independent, self sufficient woman who, in hard times, worked all



day to care for her family and make ends meet. Her sense of humor was contagious.

And, in spite of having worked hard her whole life consistently said, *“I had a good life.”*

Agnes kept busy caring for her family, caring for animals, gardening, doing laundry and working outside the home. When not working, Agnes crocheted, embroidered quilts, cooked and played cards with friends and family members. Early on, Agnes and her husband raised cows and pigs. Both shared in the responsibility and workload associated with taking care of animals. *“Well, the main thing I did was get up and milk the cows. We milked cows and sold the milk. Oh, about 4:00 in the morning [was when we got up].”* I particularly liked this story where Agnes described herself as doing the *“dirty work”* and where the theme of work and fun reappeared.

*We had pigs for awhile. Now I was home at that time when we had them. But, anyway, he worked then he'd come home. Well, we had the cows to milk again. But then, when the barn had to be cleaned, why I would do that after he went to work. And, you know, pile [manure]. When we got the piles so high [motioned with her arms]. I never will forget one night. We had a calf to get out of the barn and he took off after it and he had it on his boots, and when he went after it to catch the calf so it wouldn't get away. He went over that and filled his boots full. Oh honey, we had lots of fun. 'Course, I stayed home. Well, as I'd said, I done the dirty work while he worked.*

When asked if there were chores her husband did that she did not, Agnes mentioned helping to prepare the garden.

*He [my husband] helped in the garden. We had a horse and a plow. He worked the garden, get it planted and then after it came up, we all pulled. Everybody had a hand in it. Well, that's all right. It's good for kids to work. Everybody ought to be made to work.*

Gardening was something Agnes did throughout her life to raise food. Everybody helped with the garden. We talked about how similar my experiences were. My Dad would prepare the soil using a rotor tiller and a hand plow and even us kids helped at an early age, we all had a part in planting and harvesting food.

Following work, Agnes did housework, took care of the garden, and did laundry.

*Oh well, honey, housework had to be done [when I got off work], garden had to be took care of. If I had stuff in the garden I had to take care of stuff. Canning and do things like that.*

The two stories that follow describe Agnes' challenges with doing laundry. Initially, Agnes did her laundry by heating water on the stove and washing clothes in a tub. In town, she took her clothes to the laundry and would send her daughter on her bicycle to check on the wash. Agnes recalled when her daughter's bicycle was hit by a car when going to the laundry to check the clothes. Shortly, after her husband passed she renovated her house with new appliances.

*Yes maam. I didn't have a washer when we lived in the country. I got the washer after I moved here. We had the water on the stove and put it in a tub and then it didn't make any difference how cold it got, we hung them on the line. They'd freeze and you had to pull them loose. He never liked clothes hung in the house. I don't know why, he had a horror of it. So we never done none of it. . . . Of course, I was putting them on the line. . . . Sometimes, they was damp and the stove would finish drying them out.*

*And, before I got it [the washer], why, my daughter she got her a bicycle and she'd ride her bicycle. And I'd send her to the laundry to see about our wash and send her to the store. . . . After, well, after [my husband] passed away I got my*

*washer and my dryer and my...put in my bathroom, put in my shower and my new kitchen cabinets, or sink, not cabinets, sink.*

Agnes did certain things on certain days in part to accommodate other people's lives and schedules. For example,

*I usually did my laundry on Saturdays. 'Cause when my daughter was in school at Carbondale, she'd bring her clothes home. I'd do her laundry on Saturday, do the wash. I'd go to church, come home, do the ironing. 'Cause she'd go back on Sunday evening. So I had to do that. I hated to work her to death. 'Cause she had her books and stuff to take care of.*

As I listened, I thought about how Agnes' made do with her laundry situation and put others, especially her husband and daughter, before herself. I was somewhat bemused that she mentioned she hated to work her daughter death due to her books yet Agnes was working full time and taking care of the household work too.

Little time was spent participating in organizations or in volunteer activities outside the home. When I asked about this Agnes explained,

*We all stayed pretty well at home 'cause you had to go to bed and go to sleep so we could get up and get going the next morning. Well, on Sunday we'd get up and go to church, Sunday School and church.*

She went on to say "Oh, I went to a women's thing that they had for a little while but I...I decided that I was done. . . . I can't take a lot of that stuff." Once Agnes decided she was done, she was done. She was quite decisive about how she spent her time outside her home. But then went on to say, "*We went to bed early. Well, we didn't get to bed as early after we moved here. He went to bed at 7:00. Shoot, get up to eat breakfast and be gone.*" I was curious about how she got everything done she had to do in a given day.

*Well honey, you just have to do what you can do when you can do. I have gone home and started putting wallpaper on and things like that. It might take me a month to do it but I'd finally get it done. I don't do anything more, I've gotten so lazy, I don't do anything more except work puzzle books.*

We both laughed over her saying she was lazy. Yet, I felt that because Agnes was no longer working, she perceives herself as lazy. She placed tremendous importance in working and identifying herself as someone who worked. I wanted to know more about how she approached her work. She couldn't describe any sort of deliberate prioritization or planning. She had so much to do and just worked until she got it done.

Part of her time was spent crocheting, doing embroidery and sewing.

*I've made several [afghans]. I used to do a lot of crocheting. Honey, I made 26 or 28, I forgot what, embroidered quilts when I was working at the [factory]. . . . I sewed quite a bit too. I made all my daughter's clothes when she was in college. I'd buy the better stuff and make them, couldn't buy it for that. We'd get the material pretty cheap. I found out I could do it.*

This story was especially poignant for me because Mom made many of my clothes. Like Agnes, Mom would search for better quality fabrics to make clothes for me. When Agnes was talking, I envisioned Agnes' daughter as an extension of herself and was quite moved by Agnes' desire to provide "*better stuff*."

Agnes had a pet dog up until she moved to town. Her telling of this story was reminiscent for me also because I had pets my whole life and when we moved to town, my pet dog was killed in a similar fashion. As she told this story, I could empathize and feel her sense of sadness over this event.

*We had a dog. When we moved to town, why the dog got out and a woman run over it. She couldn't help it. I mean. She'd been to school to get her kids. Dad and Mom lived there and we lived here. When they was in the yard, the dog went over there. When we was out, it was over here. We never got any more. She just, she was just a pet. But we thought an awful lot of her. The woman was just killed about it. She couldn't help it. No, you can't help it when a dog runs out in front of you. We thought she was gone when we first moved here. She was gone for a week or better. Somebody had her locked up. When she came home, she got loose. So we know that somebody had her locked up but we don't know who. But, we was just afraid she was gone. Anyway, why, we never did get no more. I said what's the used to get 'em cause they come around this corner here, this block going to and from school and you can't keep a dog in a place without tying them up or containing them in some way. No, I don't want one.*

The expression of her pet as just being a dog is in contrast to her saying she thought a lot of her. How often we do that with respect to the passing of an animal. As though, since they're not human it's somehow silly to be so tied to them. And then, immediately, Agnes demonstrated a sense of empathy for the woman. In spite of her loss, she realized that it was an accident and that the other woman felt terrible. Perhaps, Agnes' weighed the woman's feelings and the nature of the event over and against that of an animal and her feelings for that animal. In a practical sense, Agnes' seemed to express a reality about dogs, they run out in the street. Yet, the emotion in her story revealed her love of that animal. Loss of her dog impacted her so much, she never had another pet.

Agnes reminisced fondly about her daughter and grandkids, her parents, grandparents, and friends and co-workers. Agnes balanced her descriptions of working hard with the fun she had, telling a particularly funny story about a friend she worked

with and with whom she still visits. Agnes' eyes would light up when she spoke about her daughter and grandkids. As a child, her daughter expressed an interest in books and in being a teacher. Her voice was filled with pride about her daughter's accomplishments especially when she said "*boy, she made [a teacher].*"

Agnes prepared a list of stories that our first time together prompted about her Dad and Mom. When I arrived for the second interview, she told this story first.

*Well, honey, to start with, Dad and Mom dug their basement with a shovel and hauled the dirt out and dumped it out and so forth and finished their basement. Of course, she had trouble with water seeping in. It was damp, I don't know. Anyway, it was damp. But, she had her washer, dryer down there. She, well, in fact, before she got sick, she washed and done laundry for people and you know made extra money like that and of course she made a garden and she canned everything she could find her hands on. And, you know things like that. I just...she worked at one time, she didn't work full time, but she worked part time at the flower shop over here...you know, after [the factory]. Well I don't know how long for, that was after she worked at the factory a few weeks. Cause she didn't like that. Anyway, just stuff like that. And, she sewed and made grandkids clothes and stuff like that.*

Both Agnes' Dad and Mom worked outside the home and worked to make a garden.

*Yes, she [Mom] worked at the factory. She worked 30 years. She worked, well she worked a little bit and she decided she didn't like it. So she quit and come home. Anyhow, that's the way it went. Course, my Dad was, took care of the streets here, he was the head street man. So, and she made a garden and stuff like that after work. And so forth.*

Agnes' Mom also crocheted and did handiwork. At one point in talking about her Mom, Agnes brought out a rug that her Mom had made when working at the factory. It

was an oval rug made out of white cotton string that came off the boxes at the factory.

This particular rug was white as snow and as soft as chinchilla.

*My mother . . . the boxes [at the factory] came in, I don't know 6 or 8 maybe in a pile tied up with a string. And my mother saved the strings and made rugs out of them. I'll show you one of them. I'll bring it to you. I have no idea how many she made. Them was just strings and she took them and crocheted them together. They've been washed until it looks like it's fuzzy. I had that laying out there and I thought I would show you. She made all kinds . . . some long, some square, some circles. But she had one of them things a'going all the time when she was at home. . . . I don't know what she did for it [made the rugs]. It was just a string and she crocheted them in. I don't know just exactly what she done to it make it that way. It's laid out there I guess ever since I lived here.*

Her mother also crocheted afghans and sewed. “*Mom made that one right there [an afghan]. That one with all them colors, she made that. She was always making something. She done quite a bit of sewing. She sewed things...dresses and things for us girls.*” Agnes told a funny story about her Mom's canary birds and her trip to Benton, a neighboring town, that resulted in her Mom and friend buying a dress.

*Oh, birds. Mom raised canary birds. At one time, she had 20 and she'd sell them. You know. Her and a neighbor woman used to go to Benton to buy 'em and they'd take 'em down there and sell 'em you know. One time, they went, they bought a dress, they thought they was getting something different than anyone else had. They got one just alike. When they got home, I think they found 3 or 4 already in McLeansboro. They was disappointed 'cause they, you know didn't get to, weren't the first ones.*

Agnes lost her mother in the past year, her loss is still fresh in her mind. *“My Mom passed away a year ago in April. And if she had’ve lived to September, she would’ve been 105 years old.”*

Agnes and her family celebrated birthdays, having picnics, and doing Christmas together. Agnes was particularly close to her Grandma and Granddad. She emphasized how she was the *pet*, how she’d maneuver to spend weekends at their house and reminisced about their life.

*I spent a lot of time at Grandma’s if I could go. I was born there. My dad was in service. Mom was living there with them. I was born there. . . . Grandpa and Grandma was always good to me. . . . Of course, we went to Grandma’s. I was Grandma’s pet.*

Her grandparents had a big garden and shared in the responsibility for caring for it.

*Grandma and Grandpa always had a big garden in time for winter. Well they had, what we called a cellar, and he had a big, he had a thing from here to the wall [motioned with her hands] and about this wide and so deep [motioned with her hands]...he’d fill that with potatoes in the winter or apples or something like that. A lot of times, he’d dig a place out in the garden part and then he’d put straw in it and put potatoes and cabbage and celery. Grandma raised everything they was to be. He took care of everything like that [tending].*

Agnes marveled at the idea that her Grandma wouldn’t use a thimble to make her quilts which led her into talking about how she also wouldn’t learn to milk a cow. I laughed out loud at Agnes’ shrewdness concerning how if you don’t know how to do something, you won’t have to do it.

*But she [Grandma] had a time a trying to get quilts made. She wouldn’t use a thimble. How would you go to fix a quilt without a thimble? With a needle, well.*



*She never used one [a thimble]. And she never would learned to milk a cow. They always had a cow and they had a neighbor that had a big place you know where they kept her. Go over there and milk and bring the milk home you know. But she wadn't going to learn to milk. If she did she'd have to do it [laughter]. Yeah, there's a lot of truth in that. [laughter]. Don't ever start if you don't want to do it. That's right.*

When her Grandma got sick, Agnes' Mom went to stay with and take care of her providing an example to Agnes of the seeming natural order of things where daughters take care of their mothers.

*And Grandma had pneumonia fever killed her. She, Mom went, they just lived a couple of blocks up there up the street [motioned with her hands]. Mom went and she'd go and stay nights with her. She wadn't working at that time. She'd go stay nights with her. Of course, she [Grandma] didn't like milk. Grandma didn't know it. But she was a givin' her milk. But she couldn't swallow stuff. She took a white cloth and dipped it in the milk and let her suck it off. I can't remember it just hearing her tell it. Milk for to drink don't sound good to me.*

Before her daughter was born, her husband and she moved to a house in Enfield, Illinois. Enfield is about a 20 minute drive east of McLeansboro. They were friends and spent time with a couple who lived near them. In describing her friend, “*Oh yeah. Yeah, we was friends. [Her daughter] was born in January and my daughter was born in August. We was friends long before either one had kids.*” Agnes described their friendship:

*We had a couple that we were friends with, we was together ever weekend. You know, people'd just go and have fun. We used to play cards, sometimes we'd cook. One night we went to, the boys decided they wanted some hamburgers. Well they was a little place on the main part of town, so the two of us decided*

*we'd go to town and get hamburgers. We left the boys at home. By golly, we's almost just barely did have money enough to pay for them. We told them they couldn't have theirs 'cause we'd borry'd money to get them. [laughter]. Gosh, you never used to have much money. You done well to have enough to get a loaf of bread if you could get one.*

Agnes and her friend have been friends for over 63 years. They continue to be friends to this day still writing letters and talking on the phone. During the second interview, we talked and discovered that her friends' daughter played the piano at the church I attended when I lived there. It's a small world, especially in McLeansboro.

### Paid Work

Agnes started working outside the home around 18 years of age and finally retired at 79 or 80. Her only break from working outside the home was from the time of her daughter's birth in 1943 until 1954 shortly after her husband and she moved to town. Agnes' work day started at 7:30 AM until 4:30 PM with two 15 minute breaks and a lunch break. Each woman was paid by the piece for what they could produce. Agnes worked in the pressing department. Agnes described her job in relation to the overall process.

*It was five of us on the lines and it went to the other end. I usually worked on the front end that was a press for the sleeves, passed to the cuffs. And, I'm not sure, sometimes I think I buttoned the buttons. The next girl done something else, I don't know. Then the next girl stretched it out and pressed it, the next one folded them and the one at the end. No, the next one they folded them and pinned them. I've forgotten what the last one done. But there was an examiner there. They*

*examined them, cut off the strings, do whatever they had to do to them. Then that's when they went back and they put them in the boxes.*

Men worked at the factory in areas where they opened up material, cut the parts, and put the final shirts in boxes.

Agnes described the physical environment as hot. *"Boy, I tell you it was hot in there. We had one fan for the whole thing. And, it was on one post and nobody could get it except the ones who stood right under it."* During lunch, women would eat, crotchet, and talk. One day their clock quit working so the women pitched in to purchase a new clock. This clock now hangs in Agnes' living room.

*Our clock quit at the factory that we used so we pitched in a quarter a piece and bought the clock [motioned with her hand]. That's the clock that we picked. When we got another clock, maybe it's when we moved [to the other factory location].*

Hard work at the factory was accompanied by laughter, fun and a good time. Lasting friendships were formed at the factory. It was a place to make friends and to socialize. The factory was a place where the women worked hard, told jokes, and made a life together. Earlier, she had mentioned that they gave her a shower when she left the factory to have her daughter so I asked her about celebrations, birthdays, and things like that. *"At one time, they took a spell, where we made potato salad, everyone liked potato salad, and then each one would go back and get him a cup. So much money. Anything to have a little fun."*

Agnes told a funny story about ladies who worked near her. I laughed out loud at the joke. This was her example of how much fun they had with one another.

*Why yes. We had a good time [people at the factory]. I still get a kick out of it and her in the nursing home. One morning I went to the bathroom and I came back. While I was up there the girl said, "Open your mouth" and I opened I mouth big as could be. And she said, "well that's the first time I ever saw. . . horse's teeth in a horse's ass. [laughter] When I went back the girl was there back right in front [the girl who worked near her]. Me and her was always into it, 'cause what one didn't think of it the other one did. I said to her. Open her mouth. She just turned around and opened her mouth real big and I said, the first time I ever seen teeth in a horse's ass.*

She continued on about their laughter and about the boss' reaction to catching them laughing. While the one girl got a bawling out, Agnes did not. She explained that the boss and her mother lived near and knew each other illustrating her perception of how people treat people they know versus ones they don't.

*We laughed and the boss come up there and he gave her a bawling out for laughing. Well, he had lived by my mother, they [my mother and he] knew one another well. He'd catch her. We's always laughing. I tell you.*

Agnes then described how that incident has struck with her lifelong friend and her to this day even though her friend is now in the nursing home. Agnes ends the story reminding that while they had fun, they worked hard too.

*I never see that woman. The last time I saw her, she don't know, at times, she knows a little. But a very little. She said, well who are you? Well, I'm your horse friend, why? And, she said, oh my God. It tickled her to death. She knew me then but by the time I was gone she didn't remember I had been there. I could just sit down and cry because me and her had more fun than you could shake a stick at. Oh, we had a lot of fun. We had a whole lot of hard work too.*

Agnes showed me photographs that she had of people who worked at the factory. As she went through the photographs, she remembered each person's name and would add additional information such as where they were from, who they were married to, their health, or whether they had passed.

During her time at the factory, the women organized and went on strike. In speaking about the Amalgamated Union and the closing of the factory, Agnes was the most directly open about her feelings relative to how she was treated.

*Yes I was there [when we did the strike]. We just done a lot of talking. They left it up to the big shots to get it straightened out. We went to the court house. I don't know, it seemed to me like we went a couple of three days. Yeah. We went up to the court house [and picketed]. That union wasn't worth a hoot. They fixed things to suit their self.*

Her emphasis on the words *big shots* was particularly pointed. I asked how she benefited from the strike. *"Well I didn't see any [help]. They was supposed to help us. We was supposed to get a pension when we got out of it."* Later on when we were looking at photographs of people she worked with, Agnes pointed out pictures of some of the bosses. She distinguished one as *"from somewhere"* and two others as *"both here."* Elder's corporate headquarters was in Missouri. There were two male bosses who were born and raised in McLeansboro and other bosses who came from Missouri. I interpreted the here/somewhere distinction as a reference to local and essentially an insider versus non-local and an outsider. More trust is associated with a local than an unknown person from somewhere else. The union organizers were generally from the St. Louis, Missouri area. When referring to a picture of another boss from Missouri, Agnes noted, *"They had*

*certain times that they come. Every time they came they changed something to do it some other how. Some of that good stuff.*” The expression of *some of that good stuff* was accompanied by an eye role.

In 1978, the factory closed. It came as a surprise even though the bosses from Missouri kept saying it was going to happen. As she described, their words became like *the little boy who cried wolf*, workers just didn’t believe it.

*Honey, we heard that from the time I started to work that they was going to close that factory down. We didn’t believe it. . . . I don’t know why. Every whipstitch, the main guy’d come out and they’d tell us they was going to close. So we didn’t believe it. But they did, they closed it. Some of us. . . . I should have had my full pension but I didn’t get it. That’s for sure.*

Shortly after the factory closed, Agnes returned to work to a job and remained in that job for another 20 years. I asked her why she went back to work and continued working until she was 79. Her story illustrates her strong work ethic and efforts to save money and provides a glimpse into how her friendships helped her get her last paid job.

*Honey, that [work] makes you happy. Being moving. Sometimes you get aggravated and wish you didn’t have to. They was a needing a girl over there. My beauty operator told, well her sister-in-law at the time, she’s not her sister-in-law now. You might know them, I can’t tell you his name now. [Mrs. C.], she was a [last name] and she married to [Mr. T.]. [Mr. T.’s] wife, at the time, was running the monument shop and they didn’t have anyone over there to take her place. [Mrs. T.], we played together when we was girls, was doing beauty work at the time. She told another girl, her sister-in-law, that she believed that if she asked me, I didn’t have any work at that time, that I’d come over and work for her. And, she told her she’d come and ask me about it. She said, do you want to go to work. You got work. Of course, I just worked Saturdays or if she was going*

*to be gone a day. Well, she'd take vacation or something like that. Why I worked. I didn't work every day over there. It was a big help. Every penny you make is that many saved.*

### Reflections About Herself and Life Today

Agnes expressed her outlook on life, “*Well, what's the use to be grouchy. You just as well be happy.*” Typically, Agnes would balance a negative comment with a positive one. When asked why she went to work, Agnes stated, “*Well, I had to have something to do. I got a chance.*” She asked me if I knew a particular lady who happened to be a floor lady, a person who supervised the production line at the factory. I said I did. Agnes followed with, “*She didn't like me too well.*” When I asked her why she replied, “*She wanted to boss and I didn't want to listen.*” [laughter]

The majority of her stories emphasized her hard work and struggles. She was cognizant that McLeansboro didn't offer a lot of opportunity or choices. Yet, she wasn't singling herself out, in her mind everyone worked because they had to.

*Work don't hurt anybody. Yeah. Well, I tell you what. We had to work if we had anything. They don't give you anything. No, they don't give you anything. You've got to work for it. I'm thankful I had a job and could work. But, I know we had a...lots of hard work too. They expected you to work. You had to work. Oh, it's hard work. It was hard work. I lived through it. So I guess I'm alright. Well, honey. We worked because we had to have the money. We didn't make much money back then. Everybody had to work. We done well to live. I don't, right off hand, I don't remember anybody [who didn't work]. Anyway, we just managed. But, we had a good life. And, I can't complain.*

In her mind, everybody worked, worked hard, in McLeansboro. As she said, “*Well sure. It has to be done [working and raising a family].*” She took pride that she could work, “*We kept it going [your work]. I’m thankful I had it. I could’ve been a lot worse off than I was, setting home a doing nothing, why, we had a good time.*” Many different times, Agnes seemed resigned to the life she lived in a place where there weren’t many choices or chances, a place where at times even though frustrated, she felt powerless to change anything. When I asked her about a hard life of work, Agnes noted, “*Yeah, but we all have, find ourselves up against a rock and hard place and figure out how to go around or over it.*”

*There’s something going on all the time. I still say I’m thankful it was there and I had a job, otherwise, I wouldn’t have had it. There’s nothing in McLeansboro for anybody. We just take what’s what. We just all done together whatever. Sometimes you get aggravated. But it don’t do a bit of good. It don’t change one thing. . . . It’s something to keep you going.*

In this season of her life and at age 89, she reflected on her daily life, memory loss, and others passing.

*I like to work. And I can do, and try to do everything I want to or have been until the last...well, I’m getting too old. I’m going to have to settle down and be an old woman instead of being a kid.*

She’s cognizant of memory challenges. Yet, I found that while she was telling a story, she didn’t hesitate. It was as if she was reliving the moment.

*I’ll start to tell things. It goes somewhere else. I may sit there awhile and it might be alright. It’ll come back to me and sometimes it don’t. It makes me so*



*mad to get ready to tell something and then you can't think of it. It'll just be gone. Where does it go?*

Agnes has now lost her Grandma, Grandpa, Dad, Mom, and her husband. She reflects on the difficulty in losing her husband. It was interesting to see the daughter introduced yet again in another role, that of looking after her Mom with her Grandma. And then Agnes, reveals her self sufficiency yet again noting how she's different than her mother.

*It would be hard [losing someone]. There's not anything you can do to help. You can't change it. That's the way it's supposed to be. I guess. It seems that that's the way it is, I guess you just get used to it. When I come home after [my husband died], Mom told my daughter that she was going to come over and stay with me at night. And my daughter said, now Grandma, I'm going to tell you she's going to have to stay there, she might as well start. Of course, I'd been with myself two months. She said you just leave her alone and she'll make it. Of course, I went when my Dad died and stayed two full weeks with her. She fussed for me to come on home. I felt like that she needed someone with her. Of course, I felt different when it came to me. It was a different story.*

Many people Agnes knew, some who worked at the factory have now passed away.

*She was [a lady she worked with at the factory], I'd say, I believe I'm right, she passed away just not long back. Well we've had a lot of them to pass away. There's a lot of them. I tell you, I don't know. I don't know what you can do about it, that's just part of life. You hate to see them go.*

Finally, I asked her what's changed the most for her. She provided this insight into her life and then continued talking about her life in McLeansboro generally.

*Oh, honey, I really don't know (laughter). I guess I got a little more money ahead. I learned to save money a little better maybe. But, I never did get away*

*from work. I mean I wouldn't say I worked out. But I worked. If I wasn't doing one thing I was doing two.*

*'Course, everything has changed. The world's no more than like it was. I know it's not for me and for you. It would still be different. It's changed, really changed a lot. And, I don't know whether it's good or bad.*

When I asked her to describe some of the changes she's seen she described the busyness of people's lives, television, and changes in her neighborhood. *"I think kids ought to be taught stuff. . . . They have so much outside [activities]* Agnes expressed concern over television. *"Oh yes. I think TV has ruined the kids. A lot of them. Maybe not all of them.* Agnes' nostalgia appeared due to a sense of loss of a simpler life where people visited and played cards and kids played together and had relationships with people in her neighborhood.

*Our neighborhood's not like it used to be. Used to be every house was full. We had a lot of neighbors and stuff. Course, people's kids played together. And our Dad and Mother both visited at night, played cards and done stuff like that. To me, it's just home.*

And finally, Agnes noted *"It's a good place to live. I've lived here all my life."*

## CHAPTER VI

## MARGERY'S STORY

*"I like to look on the bright side."*

I was eager to see Margery. She and I attended church together when I lived in McLeansboro. I remembered her as someone with a big smile and a positive outlook, someone pleasant to be around. Her bird feeders out the back door were filled and many pair of cardinals were enjoying a snack. I entered in through the enclosed back porch into the kitchen. We sat at the kitchen table. We guessed it had been since the 1970s since we last saw one another, a long time. I felt odd speaking with Margery about her life because I had always been around her as a young kid and teenager.

We chit chatted for awhile and then began. I would characterize Margery as family oriented, a happy and content person, someone who recognizes and respects diversity and differences in others. When asked how she would describe herself, Margery described herself as *"just happy-go-lucky. Just make the best of what comes along. Hope you made a right decision."* When asked what she would want others outside of McLeansboro to know about rural working women, Margery noted, *"Women that took life as it came, made the best of it, the good with the bad and there was always more good than bad really."* This is Margery's story.

When I say I...

This I-poem is a representation of her life.

*I was born.*

*I started [to work].*  
*I quit [work]. I had her. I didn't go back.*  
*I stayed and worked.*  
*I got pregnant.*  
*I quit. I went back.*  
*I worked somewhere else.*  
*I finally retired.*  
*I love my neighbors.*  
*I wished, I'd never have started.*  
*I felt like, I never had enough time.*  
*I hadn't been working, I'd had more time.*  
*I guess it worked out.*  
*I had a lot of good friends.*  
*I have a lot of friends.*  
*I don't know.*  
*I don't know what to say.*  
*I remember one time I walked the picket line.*  
*I was lucky. I had a good job.*  
*I was just exhausted.*  
*I got where, I come home, I'd go take a walk.*  
*I don't know.*  
*I didn't think about it I just did it.*  
*I liked to travel.*  
*I quilt.*  
*I used to make the kids' dresses.*  
*I learned a lot of things.*  
*I always need to be shown.*  
*I don't know how to say it.*  
*I didn't have to do that (barter).*  
*I went to church.*  
*I had a lot of support.*  
*I never really wanted to move. I like to visit.*  
*I was always glad to get home.*  
*I always went to PTA.*  
*I tried to stay in touch with the kids' school.*  
*I had a good husband.*  
*I went to work. I went to work.*  
*I was treated pretty good.*  
*I didn't feel like I had any enemies.*  
*I think.*  
*I could have done more, I'd been home, I hadn't worked at all*  
*I don't worry about that.*  
*I guess.*

*I wasn't missing anything.*  
*I was always working.*  
*I was working.*  
*I quit.*  
*I liked my work.*  
*I think back, I wished, I hadn't gone back.*  
*I did. I kept a going.*  
*I've always been optimistic.*  
*I mean.*  
*I'm not a pessimist.*  
*I like to look on the bright side.*  
*I never thought poor me I have to get up.*  
*I never did feel like that.*  
*I 'm just glad I was able.*  
*I'm not very good at words.*  
*I'm not real good with words.*  
*I just hope.*

### Biographical Details

Margery, currently aged 84, was born in Hamilton County in 1923. Margery married in 1939 at the age of 18. Margery had two daughters. Margery spoke positively about her husband:

*We did [just see things that needed to be done and just did it], we really worked together good. Yeah. I had a good husband. He was a good Dad to the kids. He always took time to play for them, to play with them.*

Margery had her first daughter within the first year or so after she was married. *"The oldest one was probably about 4 year old when I started [to work]. The other one, I quit when I had her and went back. I didn't go back until she was about 6 years old."* I asked her why she went to work. Margery replied:

*I don't know, just wanted to work I guess. Needed the money. And my husband went to service and I stayed and worked. When he came home, we worked*

*together. We built the house and we decided we'd try and have another baby. So, I got pregnant. . . so I quit [work] for awhile. . . And I went back later on.*

Margery mentioned insurance as one of the benefits of working at the factory. In total she worked at the factory for 27 years, remaining there until it closed in 1978. Within six weeks after the factory closed, Margery began working at the dress factory and worked there until they closed in 1983. In 1983, she began working at the nursing home and stayed there until she retired at the age of 63 in 1986.

### Daily Life

Margery's daily life was filled with activities including laundry, ironing, cooking, cleaning, and gardening. As she described her life, I saw her and her husband working together to have a family and build a life together. Early on both Margery and her husband worked at the factory. She explained their day.

*Busy! [laughter] Well, my husband worked there too, for awhile. We'd get up, I'd fix a breakfast. . . . I guess around 5:00 [AM, we'd get up]. He always wanted [scratch] biscuits for breakfast. So, I always fixed breakfast. And then we would go to work. . . . We'd take the girl to the babysitter. We'd come home at night, why there's always, get supper, then mop the kitchen, wash and iron. Lot of times I'd be done mopping my kitchen at 11:00 at night. It's just things you had to do. And you just did it. You didn't think.*

When asked how she got it all done Margery responded with a specific strategy of doing some things on the weekend so your weekday wasn't so busy.

*I don't know [balance], it's just something you had to do, you never thought about it. And Saturdays, there would be laundry to catch up on, you know.*

*Everything around the home that you tried to do so you wouldn't have to do it at night. It was work. You just had certain things you'd do on one day and certain things you'd do on the other and a lot of times like laundry or cleaning, I'd try to do it maybe when I came home Friday night so I wouldn't have to spend all my day Saturday if we wanted to go somewhere. There were always certain things that had to be done.*

I asked Margery how she learned her approach to her housework. She couldn't elaborate on how she got things done except to say she just did it.

*How did I learn how to get it done? I don't know. I didn't think about it, I just did it. You know, after you worked your 8 hours, you'd come home. You got so much to do. So you don't think, you don't stop and think. You just take off.*

Another strategy Margery used was to do things on her lunch hour. *"I'd have clothes in the wash and when I came home for lunch, I'd hang them out. And, that probably was one of the first things I'd do when I got home, I'd bring the clothes in."* As time passed appliances changed the way some things were done. While Margery noticed a decrease in how long it took to do some things, she did not believe that the amount of things needed to be done decreased. For example:

*As far as the washer/dryer it made it easier... Well, no not really [the amount of work didn't change after getting the washer and dryer]. There's still jobs that you had to do. It just didn't take quite as long to do them you know. It was easier. Yeah. But you know, we used to iron things that we didn't really need to (laughter) 'Cause I guess it was the way we was raised. If our Mom did that you did that you know. I used to iron sheets, pillow cases. I'd hate to try and iron a sheet now. You just get in the bed and you wrinkle them. [laughter]*

Margery acknowledged that her husband took care of the outside. Margery painted a picture of a husband who helped her out around the house. *“Well, he took care of the outside, you know, and everything like that. And, he’d help me some in the house. Like help me with dishes and anything I would ask him you know, he’d help.”* Working the garden was something they all did together. *“We worked as a family . . . used to make a garden. We’d all get out and work in the garden. And, things like that.”* They put out a garden because:

*That’s the way we was raised. Everybody made a garden. We were both raised in the country. And, when we bought this house there was four lots here. So we made a garden, not huge, but we had a garden.*

Asking whether they ever bartered with others using goods from their garden, I encountered Margery’s self sufficient streak, *“No we never did that [trade stuff]. If we had extra we’d give it away. I didn’t have to do that.”*

Theirs was a family that enjoyed animals, playing and spending time together. Animals were a part of their lives. *“We had about everything, I guess from cats, chickens, a little lamb, one time we had a little pig, all kinds of stuff right here in the kitchen.”* Margery would host birthdays and family get-togethers, *“Well yeah. We had birthdays and family would all get together. Most of the time it’d be here. I had people all over the place.”* When the fair was in town, her husband and she took the kids to the fair. Reflectively Margery adds, *“I think it [my kids’ favorite memory] would be our birthday dinners and holiday dinners. Family would all get together. ‘Cause, then all of us would be together. Kids’ playing.”* Her husband and she liked to travel together.



*I liked to travel. We both liked that. We both liked to get out and drive. Usually every time we'd have a little bit of time, we'd just get in the car and take off. We both liked to do that so that was good.*

Ultimately her retirement at 63 was due to their love of travel.

*[He] had retired and he wanted to go to Florida every winter, well I was always working and it got where a couple of winters he went without me while I was working over here. So we decided that that wadn't good. So I quit.*

Today she quilts, she was making a wedding ring quilt. Years ago she got together with women from church. She saw this as an opportunity to be taught and shown how to do things. *"I was the youngest. But, I just did that for awhile. They didn't keep that up too long. I wish they had've [kept it going], I learned a lot of things. . . . I always need to be shown [to learn]."* She's sewn her whole life. *"I used to make the kids dresses, you know and things like that. I started out and I remember making my first dress with my Mom helping me."*

As far as activities outside of home and work, Margery went to church and participated when she could in PTA meetings.

*I wasn't that involved but I always went to PTA meetings and helped in any way I could. But I wasn't like a president or anything like that. I always went to their meetings. I tried to stay in touch with the kids' school.*

Margery found encouragement, support, and friendship from her neighbors, people at church and the community in general. *"You can always count on if you need any help with anything. That's one thing about a small church, small community. Everybody knows one another and something happens to one family why . . ."*

Margery had two neighbors she enjoyed. She described that her daughter had polio and her neighbor had a son who had polio years before. *“Well, she would come over every morning help me give [my daughter] exercises cause she knew what to do and everything, you know. I had lot of support, a lot of help like that you know.”*

She attended church and described her activities there. *“We used to have a lot of parties at night or something you know. Sometimes, we’d go to different people’s house and have a supper or something and maybe have games or something. Halloween, we’d dress up.”* Her husband’s sister babysat for them.

*Most of the time, we didn’t have to worry about it, finding someone [to babysit]. It was a busy time but we had a lot of good times. I had a lot of good friends. I have a lot of friends. And even, many still call me now at my age you know. But, we’d get out and go places together. And, it wasn’t all work. It was, you know, it was hectic at the time.*

### Paid Work

Margery described her job at the factory. *“Most of the time, I sewed buttons on the fronts. Sometimes I did button holes, but the buttons was my main job.”* She saw her role within the unit and understood how her performance impacted the unit, the girl down the line, and ultimately, the shirt’s completion.

*We each [men and women] had different jobs. We had four units and each unit made a shirt. It’d go all the way down and then it would be finished, totally finished. And then it would go back to the pressers. They’d press them and box them up and then on the unit, each person did a different thing, I’d do button holes, we’d be sitting side by side. And our work would go to the next girl. She’d*

*pick up fronts and sew them to the back and then they'd go on down, and sew the collars on. Then it got to the end of the line. We'd have four units going at the same time. So we did a lot of shirts. Lot of times I'd do, maybe, I'm guessing so many shirts a day, put buttons on that many shirts. You worked fast.*

*We worked like on a unit. We'd have a lady that would examine the fronts and then she would pass them to us, we'd sew the buttons and button holes down, and they'd go to the next lady and she'd sew the front to the back. And it'd go down the line like that to complete a shirt. A lot of times if there wasn't enough buttons to keep me busy, they'd put me on something else. Maybe I'd make button holes, maybe I'd go over in another unit and do cuffs.*

Margery was paid by the piece. Margery was conscientious about doing a lot of pieces because of her impact on the girl down the line.

*The next girl had to have it. If she had to wait on me, why that'd make me, wasn't good for me. So we would do a bundle. There'd be so many dozen in a bundle. And you'd hurry and do that bundle so she could take it sew it onto the back.*

Women could talk and visit while they worked but Margery indicated there wasn't a lot of visiting because "you had to pay attention to what you was doing."

Within their day they had breaks and a lunch break at the same time together.

*You'd take a break. And you could sit wherever you wanted. And a lot of them smoked. They'd have a place in the back where you could sit on these benches and maybe we'd take a cookie, and have a cookie and coffee, smoke, and talk....I did come home for lunch. Hurry and eat a snack and get back in time before the bell rang. Then you'd work till the bell would ring at night and everybody'd leave.*

Margery described co-workers as being like family. She defined family as helping one another out.

*Yes [it felt like a family]. 'Specially the ones who worked close to you. You felt like it was your family. And we would help one another if we could. Something, you'd help them with their job, we'd help them.*

Margery recognized and accepted individual differences “*Every once in awhile, you ran into one that didn't have a very good attitude. You just took care of them.*” When asked how they were taken care of, Margery replied “*Steered clear of them. Try not to [spin them up].*” She went on to say:

*No, usually not [they didn't change]. There's just people, they're just kind of down on everything and everybody. They don't see any good in anything. They're what you call pessimists. There wasn't anyone. . . they got by just like we did. And I'm sure you know people who are just sort of unhappy people.*

The main bosses were males, the floor ladies were females. Margery paints a different picture for each.

*We had a good boss with [Mr. P.] He knew us and we knew him. He, I guess, had compassion. He kind of stood up for us. Even though he was supposed to be for the company. Yes [he was sort of an advocate]. We had girls who worked the floor and they'd be like maybe a boss over us. Sometimes, we'd have some that make it kind of hard for you. Maybe she'd like one of the other girls better. Well, In the end it worked out all right. 'Cause, most of the girls would band together you know, just stick together.*

Margery was not confrontational but rather preserved her relationships through silence.

*No, I just didn't [confront people]. Some of them did. Some of them would argue with them. I just figured that wouldn't help anything. Maybe make things worse. Maybe make them pick on me more. Overall I was treated pretty good. I didn't feel like I had any enemies. Some people I like better than others. And I'm sure some people like other people better than they did me. But, I think that's the way*

*it is anywhere you work. Some people you like, others you can just hit it off with, some are kinda. . .*

Margery described diversity among people who worked at the factory in terms of age, religious beliefs, race, and necessity of having to work. Margery appreciated differences in people and their circumstances.

*Some of them were really young and some of them were old. When I went to work, there were some that had been there for years, you know. . . . Yeah, different people from different walks of life. You might work, sit right next to a girl who went to a Catholic church. It just didn't make any difference really. We was just friends with everybody. . . . Some of them [people at the factory] really didn't need to work, but they wanted to work. Some of them wanted every day they could get they needed it. It was harder on some of them than it was others. . . . Each family is different you know. You can work right next to some lady you know and her family's all together different when you go home.*

After a long day at the factory, Margery was tired. She reflected,

*You'd come home so tired. I was just exhausted from hurrying so much. I got where when I come home at night instead of coming in and starting cooking and cleaning. I'd go take a walk and you'd walk a few blocks down the street and come back. And, I don't know, it kind of got rid of the stress.*

When asked about a highlight for her working at the factory, Margery described the time when they went on strike.

*I remember one time when we had a strike at the factory. I walked the picket line. And, we'd stand there in a line. One of the girls wanted a raise. And, the company wouldn't give it to her. So, we went to the office and we talked to [Mr P., one of the local bosses], he said the only thing I know to tell you is to call it quits for awhile...So, let's just shut it down. So, he made the announcement.*

*Course, the union had to come in. . . . I don't remember how many days we were off. It was a few days until we got it settled. And we went back to work. . . . Oh yeah. We all belonged to the union, it was unionized. So we had, everybody had to stick together. So, we went back to work.*

She described her feelings about striking and the weirdness of it. Margery acknowledged and accepted that not everyone wanted to participate.

*In the long run, we did [benefit from the strike]. It was kind of a weird feeling being outside the building walking. I don't know how to say it. It was kind of a weird feeling to be out there and be walking by and see them. . . . It was kind of strange to do that [strike]. Some of them didn't want to do it. That was alright, you know.*

Finally the factory closed. Margery indicated it was not a surprise because everyone had been given notice. It wasn't too long after the factory closed that Margery went to work at the Dress Factory. Margery got her job there because her sister-in-law and some other women she knew worked there. So, she said, *"I went in, they just hired me."* She further explained how some went to work at the Dress Factory and some went to Albion to a dress factory there. *"I don't know, we just leaned on one another."* Margery remained there 5 years until they closed. *"I worked there till they closed."* [laughter] Then she went to the nursing home and worked there until she retired at age 63.

### Reflections About Herself and Life Today

Margery has a positive outlook toward life. In her own words describing herself:

*I've always been optimistic. I mean I'm not a pessimist. I like to look on the bright side of things. Does that answer you? . . . I never thought poor me, I have to get up and go to work every day. I never did feel like that. I'm just glad I was able to get up every morning and go. But I, I do know people, I have known people that, well they just they didn't want to do this or they didn't want to do that. They weren't very happy.*

Margery questioned her decision to work while her girls were little. She engaged in this dialogue:

*Well I don't know what I would have done [if I hadn't worked at the factory]. I mean. I don't know whether I'd tried to work somewhere else or stay home. Lot of times, I wished I'd never started. I felt like I never had enough time with the kids. And one night, my daughter came home from school. They were having some sort of a play the next morning and she had to have some kind of an outfit. Well, I sat up till midnight making her a dress so she could have that for school. And if I hadn't been working, I'd had more time to do things like that. But, I guess it worked out all right.*

*But you wonder back what you would have done different you know. But you don't know. I think back and I wished I hadn't gone back to work after [my daughter] was born. But I did. I kept a going. At the time you know you're in the middle of it and you make a decision.*

*I wished I'd be home with 'em [the girls]. But, I think all Moms that worked felt that way. You know. But they never did say I wished you wouldn't work. Don't go to work or something.*

*You know. I guess there's two sides to it. In a way, it's hard on women to work. But I don't know that kids are any better off when their mothers don't work.*

*[It's hard for women] To leave their kids every day, you know. 'Specially when they're little. [I said, there seems like there's always this. . . Margery finished the sentence] tug.*

*I think women that work are just as well off. I mean I don't feel like the family hurt you know in the long run, maybe some of 'em didn't manage right or something but it might have happened anyway.*

*I, I think my kids turned out just as well as ones that their mother didn't work. And, oh probably I could have done more with them if I'd been home. And, it's just the way it was. A lot of things you don't think about until years later. If you wonder how it would have went if I hadn't worked at all. I don't worry about that though. And there's, anymore there's more women work than there was then, I think.*

Margery described liking her work and laughed when she admitted “*once you start [working] you can't quit.*” If her husband hadn't started going to Florida, she noted, “*I liked my work. You know, I probably would have worked longer if it hadn't been for that.*” After she quit working, it took her awhile to get used to it. Still today, she said, “*I think, yeah, even now, I miss getting up going to work. Yeah. I've always got up early to go to work so I still get up early.*”

Reflecting back, Margery described the impact on Elder's when it left town. “*When Elder's left town, there wasn't that many jobs. If you didn't work at the factory, there just wasn't much for women.*” Later on she said, “*But it wasn't a bad life. It was busy and it was rough times. Some times harder than others. . . . It was a busy time for women.*” When speaking about herself, she noted, “*Yeah, [I was pretty self sufficient].*



*My husband was good to help me.*” When talking about people working today, she commented:

*I don't think that people should just give up on everything. But there wasn't enough work today. I think we do have it a lot easier. . . . Today, there's things are just more available. . . . And your cooking, lots and lots of people eat out, bring home, eat pizzas and stuff you know. And, they don't cook as much. But I don't know that we have a lot more time than we did. Seems like we's always pressed for time.*

She expressed concern over her neighborhood. “*Now look at it [the neighborhood]. It's all built up....It used to be a really good neighborhood. Our kids played together and everything. Anymore, it's a mess.*” In closing she said, “*Well, we was busy but you know you can look back and we had time for one another and we had, maybe we just made time. We had time to do things with our family.*”

## CHAPTER VII

## MARGARET'S STORY

*"That makes you feel good when you see somebody that you'd worked with."*

I was in school at the same time as Margaret's kids and she worked with Mom at the factory. Today, she lives in a comfortable two bedroom apartment. Her apartment is cozy, filled with artifacts from her life. We sat in easy chairs with a table and a lamp in between us. I confess when I was little I was afraid of her because she has these intense blue eyes and her manner seemed quite direct. With that memory, I was a tad nervous. Yet, I found her quite engaging with a ready laugh and I so enjoyed our time together.

Margaret is a process thinker, one who thinks in terms of how things work together and are interconnected. Her demeanor is friendly yet there's a business like reservation about her. I was moved by Margaret's feeling that friendships at the factory was her favorite part of working there. Margaret's challenge as a floor lady was that she perceived that others may not have liked her because of her role there. When asked to describe herself, Margaret responded,

*I'm just a plain ol' lady. Is all I can think of. I like to read. I like to go to church. I like to visit with people, and read, and sew, and crochet that's about all I can think of. As long as I keep busy, I'm alright.*

When asked what she would want others outside of McLeansboro to know about rural working women, Margaret noted, *"I don't think you have anything bad to say, they were all good workers, they, everybody worked hard and took care of their own basically. I didn't have any fault with everybody. They probably did with me."* Here is her story.

## When I say I...

This I-poem is an expression of her life.

*I was born.  
I went to school.  
I went to work.  
I had always done housework since I was 11 years old.  
I did housework. I worked all over town.  
I was a floor lady.  
I knew all the other jobs.  
I surely didn't ask for the job.  
I didn't even think about it.  
I remember they called me.  
I didn't like it.  
I'd think.  
I'd quit.  
I'll quit.  
I thought I won't have any money.  
I had to work.  
I worked.  
I would do my work.  
I miss that old place.  
I miss it being here.  
I thought I was lucky.  
I thought I had plenty.  
I'm not very good at explaining things.  
I don't know.  
I think being with the people and the other ladies.  
I taught a lot of them.  
I never was an outside person.  
I did the housework.  
I helped him  
I helped him.  
I'd help him.  
I was outside then.  
I guess we didn't know any better.  
I retired.  
I describe myself?  
I like to do.  
I'm just a plan ol' lady.  
I like to read.  
I like to go to church.*

*I like to visit.  
I keep busy.*

### Biographical Details

Margaret was born in 1939 and moved to Hamilton County when she was five years old. Margaret began working outside the home at age 11 doing housework for people “*all over town.*” She started working at the factory in 1938 at the age of 18

*Well, I had a cousin that was working there and I had always done housework from the time I was 11 years old I did housework for people. . . . And, so this cousin of mine talked me into going down and putting my application in and I did and they hired me right away.*

Margaret married in 1939, three days after her 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. She quit working at the factory in 1941 when her husband and she moved to where he was stationed in the army. Margaret found a factory job there where she repaired soldier’s clothes. In 1943 she returned to Hamilton County and was re-hired at the factory.

She continued working at the factory until 1958 when they adopted their son. She stayed at home with him until he was 13 months old and returned to work at the factory. They adopted a daughter in 1960. Margaret continued working at the factory until they closed in 1978. After the factory closed, Margaret went to work at the Dress factory in Wayne City and worked there an additional 20 years. She retired at 62.

### Daily Life

Margaret’s daily life was filled with cooking, cleaning, laundry and outside work. Before work, “*I cooked breakfast, washed dishes, and made beds, all that good stuff.*”

[laughter] After work, *“the first thing I did was cook supper and wash the dishes and do whatever I had to do then. Do laundry, ironing, all that stuff, cleaning.”*

Margaret got up around 5:00 AM and went to bed at 10:00 PM. When asked how she got it all done, Margaret replied, *“I don’t know. It just became a habit. You’d just do it, you know. You had to do it and you did.”* One strategy she used was to do certain things on specific days. For example, *“Saturday, you had to do your cleaning. . . . Oh yeah [I did certain things on certain days]. You had your church and rest on Sunday. That’s just the way the weeks went.”*

Her husband and she had a 100 acre farm where they raised cattle. There was plenty of work to be done there. While Margaret noted that her husband did the work outside, she helped with whatever needed to be done.

*He always did all the work outside with the animals. I never was an outside person. I remember when I was a kid growing up. My mother always did all the work outside out but I did the housework cause I didn’t care for that stuff. But, I did it at home. I worked in the garden, planted the garden, and all that. One time I helped him, one summer I helped him in the field plowing corn one day. One day. And I got out there in the field and I was driving that tractor and I looked back and one of the rows would be pretty well laying down. The corn would be down and I’d get off and they had like shovel things on the back and I’d pull them out and try to bend them, you know, and of course I couldn’t but I’d try and get them off that row that wouldn’t stand up after I plowed it. And I told him that something was wrong. Well, he had missed a row when he plowed the corn. And I didn’t know it. So I pretty well covered up a row. We used to, I used to go out and help him shuck corn cause we didn’t always have a corn picker. He’d pick corn by hand. And do things you know. Things that needed to be done.*

*If they needed to be fed, I'd feed them. We never did milk. We always had several cows but we never did use the milk. We gave it to the cats and everything. Somehow we never did use that very much. I'd help him. I remember when we moved down there. He came home from the service in 46 in February and we moved down there in April and there wasn't any fence. It was 100 acre field. We fenced 60 acres and we went out and cut the wood, posts, you know and got the wire and then we put that wire all around that 60 acres. And we had these big rolls of barbed wire and he'd put a stick through that and I'd hold one end and he'd hold the other end and roll it out and we'd go back and nail it to the post. We did quite a lot of work down there.*

I laughed at her saying she wasn't an outside person, yet she managed to do a lot of outside work. Margaret emphasized that if things needed to be done, you did them.

They put out a big garden. *"Yeah, we had a big garden and I did canning and all the stuff you had to do you know."* They tried to use everything they grew and exchanged excess food. *"You didn't have any spoilage [with the garden stuff]. . . . We exchanged garden stuff but not milk or eggs for anything. We always chickens though just for our own use."*

When I asked Margaret what her family did for fun, she remarked,

*We's just like any other family I guess. I don't know. Isn't that strange, I can't even think about what we did. . . . Birthdays, Christmas, and whatever happened in church we was always there. The kids always went to Bible School and all that stuff.*

She was somewhat involved in Home Extension except the meetings were held when she was at work. *"Home extension, I was in that. I really wasn't in that until I quit. They had their meetings in the afternoon so I couldn't go. [Now ], I'm in that and VFW and*

*Women's Missionary Union at church.*" Margaret's mom taught her many things including how to sew.

*Yeah, my mom had taught me how to sew. And I had one of those pedal machines, you know. She always made my clothes. Of course, I was the only girl and had 2 brothers. She was real good about telling me and teaching me.*

Her mother-in-law kept the kids.

*My mother-in-law kept them. When [my daughter] was about 2 years old, dad, well he died before that. My mom sold the farm out there and bought a trailer and moved down there. She kept the kids. She'd come over of the morning and stay with them until they got old enough.*

#### Paid Work

Margaret left the factory in 1941 when she traveled with her husband to where he was stationed with the Army. She noted:

*When he was in the army. . . . I was up there with him, and I worked in a factory there that repaired soldier's clothes. 'Course that gave me something to do and a little extra money. They paid 75 cents an hour there and I came back when he went overseas and went back to the shirt factory [Mr. P.] hired me. He wanted to know how much I made at the other factory when I was gone. He said, you'd better stay there 'cause they don't pay no more than 40 cents an hour here. That's McLeansboro.*

Her expression of "*That's McLeansboro*" speaks to the limited options and low pay for people generally and women specifically.

Most weeks they worked Monday through Friday and an occasional Saturday.

*"Oh, we went to work at 7:30. . . . Sometimes we worked on Saturday morning. And I'd*

*go in and unlock the door and the boss didn't come just a few of us was there working."*

The factory employed around 300 people, men and women. There were a higher number of women than men employed.

*I think there was four or five in the cutting women, two mechanics and I can't remember how many there was in the laundry. I think three or four men in the laundry. Of course, there was a supervisor over them. And then, of course, [the two local bosses were there]. There wasn't a lot of men.*

When she first went to the factory, Margaret sewed.

*I sewed the yoke down on the front of the shirt. You know, it came up from the back and they had the yoke already on it. And then they put the button and one girl put the button holes in and the other'n put the buttons. And the girl then sewed those together on that front yoke. So then I sewed that yoke down. The sleeve setter took the shirt and put the sleeves in it and it just when on through the line that way.*

The nature of production and piece work was such that your production impacted the overall flow of work and the women down the line who was waiting on you to do your job. Margaret was quite proud of her ability to efficiently do her job and process many dozens of shirts in one day.

*Well, one thing if you had a hard day and you didn't... You'd get behind with your work. This work would come down this chute and they have to, if you couldn't keep up with the work behind you then they'd take out like a bundle. There'd be so many shirts, dozen in a bundle, you know, like ten or twelve dozen in a bundle or something. They'd take them out and then a lot of times, I would do my work and take an extra bundle and work on it in between from the girl behind me. I remember one day, I did 200 dozen, in one day. That was a lot of shirts. Well, there was one other girl who did 200 in one day. So, that was quite a deal.*



Eventually, Margaret was promoted to floor lady. She explained:

*Well, the only sewing job I had was that I sewed down the collar after it was put on the shirt and I sewed that down, that band there along the collar. That's the only thing I did. But I knew all the other jobs anyway.*

I asked her if she liked to think about process and how things fit together. She replied without hesitation, “*Yeah, see how things progress [is how I think].*” She described her role as floor lady in terms of the overall process.

*But then I was over the...where the shirts was put together. There was another lady over the parts, you know they made the collars, and cuffs, and the sleeves and the other parts. And they were brought over to the units, they was called the units, and there was four lines of girls all the way through. And, they started at the end and put the box pleats on it and hemmed the other front and went to the pocket setters, and examiners, the button and button hole girls, the yokers and right on through. Front tail hemmers, and joiners, and sleeve setter, and girls where they sewed down the sides and then the collar girls and the girls that sewed the cuffs on and the front hemmers, or tail hemmers and final examiners and then it went into the laundry where they put it together. Ironed it. That's the way it was done. . . . The men did the cutting. They worked in the cutting room. And they had one girl that was over them that worked in there. And, well of course, [Mr. P.] was over, sort of over that department, the cutting and in there, you know. And, then they had a man that put the button and button holes in the collars and cuffs and... well, I don't know. Of course they had mechanics there.*

Besides supervising the daily production, Margaret taught incoming workers how to sew or how to sew in the factory way.

*Yeah. Sometimes you got sort of frustrated. Some of them was pretty hard to teach. They didn't want to do it your way, they wanted to do it their way. Of course, there was only one way to do. Yeah, I taught a lot of them.*

And, sometimes Margaret took care of people who worked for her.

*I remember one girl was there and she sewed her finger. I had to take her to the doctor. They got the needle out before I took her to the doctor. Little things like that happened. One girl got sick one day and I took her home.*

When I asked Margaret about what stood out for her being at the factory, she replied, “*I think being with people and the other ladies. We had fun. . . . There was [a lot of friendships formed there].*” Yet, sometimes Margaret would want to quit the factory because of the way people would talk to her. “*Some of the people are hateful. They talk hateful to you. There’s just some people that way, that are just born that way, I think. To be hateful. And we all used to always get along pretty well.*” Her role as floor lady and having to tell people what to do seemed to put her at odds with friendships.

The factory provided a source of being together and celebrating one another’s lives. “*Oh yeah, we had birthdays. And if anyone retired, we had a big meal. Everybody’d bring food in.*” And with the women you worked close to, you would talk and share your day together.

*We was fairly close together. We talked a lot. When I sewed the collar down. I worked, there was another lady worked beside of me that did the same thing. We had a bin that the work came down in that bin. And we was just that much apart with that bin. We could talk.*

Margaret thought the bosses were good but noted a distinction between the out-of-town men and the ones were from McLeansboro. “[Mr. S.] was nice [he was from Dexter, Missouri]. But, I think everybody felt close to [Mr. P.] ‘cause he was hometown and [Mr. S.] was from out of town. He was a little different but he was nice.”

Margaret spoke a fair bit about their getting the union at the factory and its impact on their pay. *“But that was a good thing that that happened. It was good for the town, good for the people cause we were working for nothing.”*

*That was when we were trying to get the union. When I first went to work there I was lucky if I made a \$1.00 a day. We had this line that whatever went out of the line that’s what you got paid. And if the two ladies up there didn’t produce much you didn’t get paid much. I made around \$5.00 a week but I’d always done housework for \$3.00 a week so I thought I had plenty of money. \$5.00. That was a lot of money then. Well then, we wasn’t paid by the piece, it was whatever went out of the end of the line. After we got the union, you had your little ticket that you cut off and it had the dozen on it and that’s how much you made, it wasn’t what everybody else made.*

The women organized, marched and picketed around the square, and prevented a trucker from leaving the plant with his loaded inventory.

*I remember it as well as yesterday. We all left the factory one day and walked around the square, marched around. We wouldn’t let the trucker, Mr. J. was a truck driver, we wouldn’t let the truck leave. It was loaded and, they couldn’t go. And, but I can’t remember how long we did that. And I can’t remember the date. You know, I don’t know how that ever started. They had this lady come over from St. Louis come out here. I don’t know how it started. I think it was the men had their union here and they were kind of the head of it. We had our first meeting. Some of the men went to the meeting that belonged to this...that was AFLCIO I think that they belonged to. They went to our meeting just to hear what was going on. I can’t quite remember when it was.*

*A lady came here from St. Louis and a couple of men that came that were organizers you know and we had this same lady that she came every month when*

*we'd have our meetings and she came and talk to us, went through the plant and see if anybody had any complaints.*

The immediate impact of getting the union was that their wages were raised and they got insurance. Years later, Margaret once again was the company spokeswoman sent to Washington to negotiate “*with the men up there*” for a 75 cent increase.

*Do you remember when the 75 cents per hour wage raise went in? I can't remember when that was. They sent me to Washington to negotiate with the men up there about our 75 cent increase. I met a lady from Fairfield and two other ladies. . . . We flew out there and was there like three days and met the congressman and others and different ones. We got the wage increase. Not because we did it, there was a lot of people there. . . . I think it was [19]54. I'm not sure. I think it was around '54. Course, they'd already had the union quite a while then you know.*

*We didn't have to do much of anything [in Washington, DC]. We just attended the meeting and they explained all of it to us, the minimum wage, and that everybody needed to vote for it. Then, we came back and told the people at work what had happened and of course they were all happy. Of course they was happy that it was going to happen.*

The factory closed in 1978. Part of the plant was moved to Dexter, Missouri and part overseas. Margaret was offered an opportunity to go work in Dexter. However, as she said, “[*My husband*] wouldn't move. *He said, no, we can't do that.*”

After the factory, she initially went to the dress factory in McLeansboro to apply for a job. But something told her not to do it so she applied in Fairfield and then quit because she didn't have a ride, eventually going to the dress factory in Wayne City.

*I went there to put my application in and I couldn't go in. So I went to Fairfield and went to work at a dress factory up there. . . There's something that wouldn't let me go in. I don't know why. I just couldn't go. So I went to Fairfield and worked for a couple of months or more I guess and some of the ladies quit and I didn't have any way to go and then I went over to the dress factory at Wayne City and I worked there 40 years until I retired.*

In summarizing her work history, Margaret said, *"That's about it...all I did all my life was work. I retired when I was 62. So that's been a while ago. 25 years. That's a lot of years isn't it?"*

#### Reflections About Herself and Life Today

Margaret reflected on her life with her husband. *"We worked hard. We did. I guess we didn't know any better. We was young. It didn't hurt us (laughter). We just got it done."* In contrast to her descriptions of her husband and her both working hard and working together to get things done, Margaret acknowledged that it wasn't that way for everyone.

*There was a lot of ladies that their husbands didn't work too. . . Every week when we got out of work there was always the men sitting down there in the car waiting for his wife to go home. I didn't have that problem.*

Margaret was quite aware of the many benefits that the factory provided such as friendships and money. Most of all, Margaret recognized the importance to the community to have people buying locally.

*I think the friendships and the money and all of that because most of them, most of us did our shopping here. We didn't go out of town to shop like we do anymore. It was an asset to the community.*

*I think taking all the factories out, the dress factory, the shirt factory and they had a basket factory or something down there in the old Elders building. But you know, that all contributed to Hamilton County, to this town and the areas around. And now we have nothing.*

After the factory closed part of the operations moved to Dexter, Missouri and eventually some of the work was sent overseas. Margaret sees this trend as having a negative impact on people's lives and the community.

*They started shipping shirts overseas. And that's what ruined everything. Sending everything outside to have it made. Then bring all of their stuff in here with us to buy with their labels in it. That irritates me. You know, I still say that's why our people don't have any work cause they send it all over there and give them work. Then there's so much meanness. Men don't have anything to do and get into trouble, dope, drink and it's just a ruination."*

Buying local was important to Margaret and her family. "We always did [buy local]. You went to the brokerage and got your shoes and clothes. You just think of all the stores around the square we had."

Margaret placed women and their role as key in keeping families and homes together.

*I think they [women] were the one that held the home together. (laughter) I really do. . . I'm not sure either [how they did it]. But, I think the one's that worked, worked, then went to home and did what they had to do and they wasn't out messing around. . . . For their family, right. Women held the home together. You just think about it. They stayed home, raised their kids. You never heard of so*

*much trouble back then as you do now. These young boys, with nothing to do and they're always in trouble. It's just sad, it really is*

Margaret experienced long days, worked hard but saw the practical necessity of working.

*It was long [the days]. I was young then, it didn't bother me (laughter). It sure bothers me now. . . . Well, sometimes I didn't like it so well (laughter). And, I'd think I'd quit, I'll quit, go home, and not come back. And I thought, I won't have any money if I do that. So I had to work.*

The factory was a place where Margaret met people and built relationships. There was a bond formed there that, for Margaret, is an important artifact from her working life.

*Yeah. I was at Mt. Vernon the other day and we were going to Aldi's and this lady come across there with a cart and said would you like this cart and [my daughter] said yes. And I said you look so familiar. I know your face but I don't know your name and I can't think of her first name. She worked at Elders years ago. I hadn't seen her in years. That makes you feel good when you see somebody that you'd worked with.*

## CHAPTER VIII

## SARAH'S STORY

*"I don't ever remember not doing volunteer work."*

Initially when I asked Sarah for an interview, she said no. Between the time of the first and second trip to McLeansboro, Sarah changed her mind and volunteered to an interview. She is a good talker and someone who is interested in a lot of different things. Sarah is compassionate, a learner, and an advocate for others, she is someone willing to take action.

When asked to describe herself, Sarah responded, *"Content. I'm reasonably content. No, I'm not really actually because I'm sitting here looking at books in this bookcase now I've read all those but there's gotta be more to anybody's life than just to sit and do nothing."* When asked what she would want others outside of McLeansboro to know about rural working women, Sarah noted, *"the majority of them are hardworking, honest people who worked to help their families."* This is Sarah's story.

When I say I...

This I-poem is an expression of her life.

*I was only 12.  
I got \$2.00 a day.  
I went to work.  
I left there and went to California.  
I went to work.  
I didn't like that much regimentation.  
I examined beer bottles.  
I had big hands and long arms.  
I was good at it.*



*I . . . left California.  
I was in Texas.  
I shipped ammunition.  
I wasn't laid off.  
I should have been laid off.  
I decided to leave.  
I came back up here.  
I worked.  
I was going to have a baby.  
I laughed and laughed and laughed.  
I'm gonna to have to quit anyway.  
I'm pregnant.  
I can't be here long.  
I went home.  
I stayed home.  
I stayed home.  
I guess.  
I went to work at the shirt factory.  
I went to church with [Mr. P.].  
I told him I needed to go to work.  
I said, I promise you I will stay.  
I was there 12 years.  
I went to work.  
I went to work.  
I promised I would stay.  
I stayed and continued. I didn't quit.  
I had to go to work.  
I went to my work.  
I was not intent to make \$2.35.  
I worked hard. I worked fast.  
I did very seldom have minimum wage.  
I figured out I could make more money.  
I got up I put my cigarette out.  
I will never smoke another cigarette.  
I never have.  
I never had any problems.  
I was doing my job.  
I enjoyed.  
I made a lot of friends.  
I won't say they was all friends.  
I enjoyed it.  
I enjoy what I'm doing now.  
I enjoyed that too.*

*I don't ever remember not doing volunteer work.*  
*I was asked to help.*  
*I did.*  
*I do the right thing.*  
*I'm very vocal.*  
*I like to read.*  
*I think the printed word is where it's at.*  
*I've done my part.*  
*I'm hard headed.*  
*I'm reasonably content.*  
*I can't' say.*  
*I wasn't there.*  
*I don't know.*  
*I went to work.*  
*I told [Mr. P.] I would stay.*  
*I did stay.*  
*I needed to be at home.*  
*I came home.*  
*I continued to work.*

### Biographical Details

Sarah was born in 1928 and at the time of our interview she was 79 years old. She was married for the second time in 1954 and was just shy of 50 years of marriage when her husband passed. Sarah has 4 children, 3 boys and a girl ranging in age from 46 to 59.

Sarah and her family moved around a lot when she was growing up. She began working when they lived in Mt. Carmel at the age of 12 and continued when they moved to McLeansboro when Sarah was 16. Sarah moved away from McLeansboro for a time and then returned. She lived and worked in California and Texas in her late teens and early twenties. She returned to McLeansboro in 1952 and continues living there today.

Sarah took a break from working when her second son was born in 1955. “I went home and I stayed home till [my daughter was] almost 3 years old [1964]. Her second son would have been almost 9 when Sarah went to work at the factory. She continued working there until 1975 when she quit to work for her husband’s business. She returned to work outside of her home in 1993 or 1995 and continues working today.

### Daily Life

Sarah’s day began early. *“Probably 5:00, 5:30 started getting kids up, fixin’ breakfast, get the kids ready to go to school and I had to go to work a little after 7:00.”* To get more done, Sarah would come home at noon on her lunch hour and then continued housework after she got home from work.

*We got off at noon and usually I’d run home at noon and wash a load of clothes or finish washin’ a load of clothes. If I left them soak in the washer [before work] I’d turn em on and they would finish washin’. If I left the washer running [in the morning before work] I’d hang them on the line because in another three and a half hours they’d all be dry. So and when I got home, get the clothes off the line, then I had 4 kids coming home. So you had to get supper started. And get supper started, get them fed, then there was ironing to do or sewing to do or whatever. ‘Cause [my second son], I made all of his shirts because he wore a 17 body and a 16, 16-1/2 collar, and his sleeves had to be 35, 36” long. So. It was difficult to find ‘em and if you did they were quite expensive. So, they had markers that’s what they cut shirts out of. They used to they didn’t call it a pattern they called it a marker and I convinced them to let me have a marker for a 17 body shirt. I made them ‘cause once you watch ‘em all made, you know how to make ‘em if you know how to sew.*

In the summer, her family put out a big garden. Her husband would prep the garden plot using a rotor-tiller or a hand held plow. Everyone would help plant, pick food, and can it. Sarah described how in the summer her work would double due to working in the garden.

*I'd can anywhere from 100 to 200 quarts of green beans and your Dad would grow those little tiny potatoes and he'd get those and I'd can those and put those in quart jars and tomatoes and freeze corn I didn't ever can corn. Because my Grandma always told me that corn was the hardest thing in the world to can and keep because it didn't want to keep, so I never did can corn, I always put it in the freezer. You just had to do it.*

She told a funny story about her oldest son being asked to help with canning while her husband and she took her daughter to the doctor. She could barely get the story out for laughing.

*When we lived, before we moved into this house [my daughter was] little and we were taking [her] to the doctor [laughter]. I had a big wash tub with 24 quarts of green beans in it out on an open fire. You had to keep the water level over the tops of your jars and keep the water boiling. Which wasn't too hard to do cause you usually just filled it high as you can get it and put the jars in it and be sure that the level was over a couple of inches. They cooked for about 3 hours. I told [my oldest son], we had to take [sis] to Eldorado to the doctor. I told [him], when they're done you take this lifter and put them on the picnic table and cover them up so that a breeze doe'dn' hit 'em. Cool breeze and break the jars. We took [my daughter] to the doctor and then when we came back and he had done just what I told him to do. He lifted 'em out and set 'em up on the picnic table. He covered 'em up alright but he'd gone in and got bath towels and wrapped up every one, each individual jar they were still almost boiling [laughter]. He was something else.*

Sarah's Mom and Dad lived in town. Most family birthdays and holidays were celebrated at their house. Celebrations would include a big meal followed by the kids playing cards or games. Sarah and her husband liked to travel and would take a family vacation almost every year. For fun, Sarah liked reading, sports, theater, and making things. She crochets, quilts, paints, and tries different craft projects.

Volunteer work was very important to Sarah. She described herself as being very vocal. Of all the participants, she was most active in community affairs and advocacy.

*I don't ever remember not doing volunteer work as a matter of fact. Before...a lot of times it was through the church but then when we found out that [my son] had a seizure disorder, I was asked to help with mental retardation and when the [Rehabilitation] center out here was first formed. . . . I did volunteer work and was on their board of directors.*

*And I was on the governor's planning committee for developmental disabilities and mental health. . . . I was going to school at the same time, I was going taking classes through Rend Lake and working. Never have figured out how [I did it] except that you just spread yourself thin and did it. . . . There was a committee and we met down at state office building and then we'd go down to Anna to the mental health center down there and they had a unit for developmental disabilities down there and I ended up, I was guardian for two girls and they didn't have any family. So somebody had to make a decision as to their health issues, it's not one that you're very comfortable with cause you hate to say go ahead and operate on this person for whatever and then they pass away and then you worry did I do the right thing. . . . When those parents are gone if they don't have other children who will step up then there's nobody to be an advocate for them.*

She resigned from the board at the Rehabilitation Center in the late 1970s, early 1980s because her son went to work there and it would have been a conflict of interest for her to continue on the board. In the mid-1970s, Sarah was instrumental in getting a Booster Club formed to support local athletics. Sarah explained:

*75 and 76. . . football season and somebody said something about it and starting a booster club and I was at the meeting. It was an after the ball game thing and somebody said well how would you go about it starting it. Well, I said, first of all you gotta get a committee to get a group of people together to be your board of directors. They said, that's you. So I got the guys together and I can't remember now. I know [Mrs. W.] was one of 'em. And I was a member of the booster club, I wasn't on their executive committee. And then I went on it and worked and worked and worked and [my daughter] graduated in '79 and [my Dad] got killed in '79 and I went off for a couple of years. And it was either '81 or '82 that I went back into the booster club and was on the booster club board until I resigned a few years ago. It was after [my husband] had had his stroke. Now that was in '93 so I think it was in 95 or 96 then I quit and they gave me that clock. . . for over 20 years service to the Booster Club.*

Sarah didn't want others to think her actions were self-serving or for her kids. Sarah acted on things because she believed they were the right things to do.

*And I had. I'd spent time and people would say but yeah you've got kids in school. And I'd say, no I don't have any kids in school. My daughter graduated in 1979. And they couldn't figure out why I still worked but at the same token I've seen senior parent night when they would introduce kids, they're a little better now. But at that time they were just starting it and you would introduce this young man as a football player and his parents were so and so and so and so but they weren't there.*

She was extremely proud of her efforts on behalf of girls' athletics within the school system. This was an extremely emotional story for me because I played athletics in high school in the 1970s, I was sometimes embarrassed at our ugly uniforms and second hand converse tennis shoes. We practiced basketball with worn out balls, hand-me-downs from the boys' program. Sarah described her and others efforts.

*79, March. . . People that are a lot more intelligent than I am helped me write the thing. . . . It was a, I don't know exactly what you'd call it. Inequality in Girls Athletics was I think what I called it. And, I talked to the coach who was the athletic director. And he said, oh, blah, blah, blah. Then they didn't pay women coaches as much. The girls didn't get anything. You guys had worn the same uniforms for softball, volleyball, and basketball [and track] for four years. So we wrote up this thing. And, I talked to the chairman of the board or the president of the school board and asked him if I could present it. I had copies prepared for each board member and one for the principal and one for the athletic director. And, I went and I presented each one of them with their paper and I said all I'm asking is that you read this and if you agree that there are inequalities in this, that the girls are not being treated fairly, that you do something about it. I did not say names, I didn't do anything. I just said, check to be sure. The Federal Law said you had to do the same things you were doing for girls that you were doing for boys. Boys were getting \$100 tennis shoes paid for out of the athletic fund. The next day, the principal called me to come to his office and meet with the athletic director and I said, and for what. He said well to discuss this and I said there's nothing to discuss. I've already turned it over to [the board] and if they read it and think there's something to be done I've done my part. They kept trying. . . .*

Again, Sarah was highly cognizant of how others perceived and interpreted her actions.

Regardless, Sarah acted and saw a direct connection between her actions and changes that

occurred in the girls' athletic program. I was touched by Sarah's notions of fairness and equality and how her sense of both drove her to action.

*And people would say well, you're just doing this for your daughter. No, I said, my daughter's going to graduate whether the girls ever get anything or not. That year after track started, that was done that spring, they got new sweats, they got new uniforms. They're still not equal, I would say they're still not equal. But, it's a lot more equal than it used to be. You didn't have the athletic director taking an old basketball and cutting off the cover where it had come lose where it wadn't good enough for the boys to play with and giving it to the girls to play with. That doesn't happen anymore. . . . [Shoes], they weren't fit to run in. [Boys, they had] Leather, leather tennis shoes. Yep. But they did get to where they got new uniforms, they got new equipment. The girls did well. They had somebody coaching basketball that knew a little bit about basketball. . . . They had men teachers who were capable of coaching and did coach some but they didn't want to coach the girls.*

Sarah's "outsider within" observations of how men became interested in girl's athletics were told with a laugh and a knowingness of how the world works. The rationale and savvy behind the strategy was revealed in the context of sensitivity to another woman and her daughter.

*When they finally got some tall girls that were pretty good athletes, they started basketball in grade school instead of waiting 'til high school then all the men wanted to be the girls' teachers. But it all started in 1979. I saw [the woman who did it and her daughter] the other night. [This woman] and I were the ones that did it. She had a daughter that was still in school. But she was with me but she really didn't want to be that much involved afraid it would hurt her daughter [cause her daughter wasn't graduating yet]. I said I'll do it because there's no way they can hurt my daughter she's already got enough credits to graduate.*



*That's exactly why that I was alone to do that because [my daughter] had enough credits. Whether that worked or didn't work or they was mad at me or what, [my daughter] still had [her] credits so they couldn't keep [her] from [graduating].*

### Paid Work

Sarah began working at a paying job when she was 12 years old. She collected freight bills for a furniture company in Mt. Carmel, Illinois.

*I would go in on Saturday morning and he would give me a clip board with a list of, with a bunch of bills, freight bills on it and he'd give me a brown paper sack. And I would walk all over [town] and collect those freight bills and put the money in that brown paper sack and mark the bills paid and then when I would get back to the furniture store we'd put them on a big round dining room table and count the money and compare it with the invoices and I never was off one penny.*

Sarah took pride in her work, her attention to detail, and her accuracy. She remembers she got \$2.00 a day, “*big time rich money.*”

When asked what she did after that, Sarah matter of factly replied, “*Lied about my age and went to work for J.C. Penney in their store.*” Come to find out, Sarah was only 15 when she went to work at J.C. Penny's.

*And Mom said she wouldn't sign the paper and let me work. And I went to Dad and said, Dad, I got this job but you have to sign the paper that says I'm 16. He said, are you? And I said yes. [laughter] And I went to work. But I wadn't 16 until about 2 months after that.*

At 16, her family and she moved to McLeansboro. Sarah got a job in the candy department at Ben Franklin followed by working at the Federated Store which sold dry

goods. But she explained, *"I didn't stay there very long. I stayed at Ben Franklin longer because I liked it, working in the candy department. I probably ate more than I sold."*

[laughter] After that Sarah went to work at Elder's while they were still down by the railroad track, but only for a short while. *"I didn't like that so I quit. I wadn't there but two or three days maybe a week. But they shifted me here and they shifted me there and they shifted me someplace else."* Sarah left the factory and went to the Alton glass works plant. After working at the glass works, Sarah left and went to California and began working at I. Magnin in their warehouse and stock room.

*But they didn't pay enough to live on. You had to wear black skirts, or navy skirts, navy or black shoes, hose at all times, and white blouses. Your skirts had to be 12 inches from the floor. Couldn't be 11, couldn't be 13. It had to be 12. I didn't like that much regimentation.*

In need of a job, Sarah got a job at another glassworks plant in east Oakland.

*So, I went over to east Oakland to the glassworks and said that I had just left the glassworks in east Alton, in Alton and I was interested in the job. Anda, he said, uh, were you in the union and I said yes, and he said can you pay your back union dues up and I said yes and he said go to work and I said when? And he said, right now. Get out there.*

At the glassworks, Sarah was a bottle examiner.

*That's how I got that scar right there on my hand [held up hand]. I examined beer bottles. And you'd pick up eight beer bottles and you start to roll the two outside ones and that would made all the inside ones roll too. And you'd examined for chips and cracks, and stones, and any defect that they had. . . . because I had big hands and long arms, I was good at it.*

She left California, returned to Mcleansboro and then left for Texarkana, Texas to work at the Red River Army Depot, a depot that packed and shipped ammunition during the Korean War.

*I took the civil service examination, well I didn't take the civil service examination then, I went to work for the Post Exchange. I worked on the floor and they made me the secretary and I took care of the office but it didn't pay very much so I took a civil service exam and went to work at the arsenal as a warehouseman. I shipped ammunition.*

She described how she wore leather boots and to get the boots to fit her feet, she soaked them in water and wore them wet so they would fit better. Sarah associates her relationships with others as keeping her on the job after Eisenhower was elected.

*And Eisenhower was elected, whatever year Eisenhower was elected [1952], one day 1500 people were laid off. Well I wasn't laid off because my immediate supervisor was from St. Louis but because I was from Southern Illinois and knew St. Louis, we were good friends. His boss was from Chicago. And because he was from Chicago and it was in Illinois and I was from McLeansboro and it was in Illinois we were good friends and they kept me on when I should have been laid off. And then they told me the next cut will be yours. I decided to leave and come on home.*

Sarah returned to McLeansboro and went to work at SkyRay, a place that made television antennas, at 80 cents an hour for operating a 7-ton punch press. When asked how she got the job, Sarah said, “*asked for it.*” Sarah exhibited her care and consideration for others when describing her leaving SkyRay to have a baby.

*I worked there until [my husband] and I got married. And shortly, oh, we'd been married five or six months, and [Dad] kept telling me I didn't look very good.*

*He was kind of concerned about me and I just kept losing weight and losing weight. So, he insisted that I go to the doctor and I went to the doctor and he told me that I was going to have a baby and I laughed and laughed and laughed and I said no, navy doctors told me I'd never have any more children after [my first son]. So, they were going to lay off this woman, her names' [Mrs. S.] and she's deceased and so I went to. . . the office manager and I went to him and I said [Mr. M.] I'm gonna to have to quit anyway because I'm pregnant. Why don't you lay me off and let her stay 'cause she's a good worker and she'll be working when I'm not. And you know, I can't be here long and if you let her go now she'll find another job 'cause she is a good worker. So they laid me off.*

In 1964, Sarah went back to work at the factory. She described the circumstances surrounding her return to work.

*Well, because we had a big ice storm that July and we had insurance on the house but when the. . . It was jagged, long jagged pieces like a knife, ice that fell from the sky. [Mr. M's] wheat crop was ruined, it knocked out windows out of our house and tore the roof up. So [my husband] borried the money anda he and I put the roof on the house. But with four kids at home I didn't see how we was ever going to get it paid back unless I went to work so I went to work. We paid that back and, then because I promised I would stay I stayed and continued and helped get four kids through school and through college. One reason I didn't quit was because of the health insurance. I could keep health insurance on my husband and all four kids for \$17.00 a month through the Amalgamated Insurance Company. So that's what I did.*

She described how she got the job and emphasized that her promise is good.

*Went down and asked. I went to church with [Mr. P.] and I told him I needed to go to work and he said you're not going to go to work. If I hired you, you wouldn't stay. And I said, I promise you I will stay. He said, [Sarah], you've not worked in years and years and years. And I said, I promise you I will stay. So, he*

*said, I'm going to hire you but he said you won't be here six months to a year. And I was there 12 years.*

Sarah was quite decisive about what she did and didn't want to do.

*But, when I went to work at the shirt factory. I told 'em I didn't wanta to sew. [laughter]. . . I didn't want to sit at a machine. First of all I thought they were too low for me. I didn't think I would be comfortable sitting at a machine sewing.*

Sarah was hired on as a final examiner. She described her work day.

*We worked four and a half hours of a morning and three and a half in the afternoon. Got 45 minutes off for lunch and when I got to work I went to my work. First you clocked in and then you went to where you worked and I didn't have a chair. You didn't sit down. I was a final examiner and you didn't sit down but you had a table that was oh, maybe two and a half foot wide and maybe close to three foot deep and then you had a board with two clips on it and you clipped those shirts up under that clip and you examined them. You started with your collar, you examined your collar and you clipped it up under the thing. If the collar was okay you were fine. Then you did your, you had to turn the sleeves so before you did anything you pulled it out of the bin, you examined the collar. Then you ran your hand in the sleeves and turned the sleeves. And. That's how you examined shirts.*

While describing how she examined shirts, Sarah made the motions using both hands.

How many Sarah could do a say depended on the size and whether they were long sleeve or short sleeve. She spoke fondly of a lady who worked near her also doing final examination.

*I worked with a woman. . . We were both, well she was German and I had enough German in me that she wadn't ever going to beat me. And we were hard workers. We was two of the best paid people in the factory I can tell you that. When*

*everybody else...the minimum wage I think was \$2.35. So, because it was \$2.35 and I was not intent to make \$2.35 I worked hard and I worked fast.*

Sarah was proud of the speed and proficiency with which she did her work and saw her physical stature as an asset. She was quite knowledgeable about the process and how steps interrelated.

*You got minimum wage if that's all you made but if you worked a piece rate then you got what you made at piece rate. I did very seldom have minimum wage. Well, I weighed 112 pounds, I was 5'8-3/4" and I've got arms as long as from here to here. [motioned with her hands] Long arms. And I was fast, I still got long arms, I'm just not as thin and I'm still fast, I'm just not thin and fast anymore. [laughter] So then you worked, and you worked and you worked and you worked and you examined that whole shirt, every shirt. And some bundles was ten dozen, some were twelve. You would examine your shirts. You'd pin up the repairs and you had little cards and you would write the name of the girl on that card for cuffs or collars or sleeves or hems or whatever it was that the repair was on and then you took it back to her. And she had to repair that and put it back and then you had another woman that went by and picked all those up and reexamined them and put them back in the line.*

Sarah was focused on making money and took the initiative to figure out ways to maximize her earning potential. *"It was a fun time. [Mrs. K.] and I used to race to see who could do the most in a day." [laughter]*

*She and I didn't talk much. We just worked. We did talk a little but you didn't have time if you were doing your job you didn't have much time to do much of anything. We got breaks, two a day one on the morning and one in the afternoon. And at that time, I still smoked so I'd go smoke. Then I figured out that if I just run to the bathroom and then get back to my station, I could make more money.*

The bosses were pretty good to work with. Sarah explained, *“Oh, if you did your job they pretty much left you alone. You didn’t see’ em too much. [Mr. P.] would come by and stand and talk to me because we went to church together.”*

People working at the factory expressed care and consideration for co-workers and occasionally had dinners and celebrated Christmas together.

*If you had a sickness or classic example when [my grandmother] died, [Mom] and I went to Oklahoma and before I left they gave me a little box where they had passed this box around through the factory and they had taken a collection for me because my grandmother had passed away. We did that frequently. We did have dinners but not a lot of ‘em because there was so many people and in a factory that large you just couldn’t. We had one at Christmas, I know that. I’m not sure just when we had the others. We did occasionally have dinners for things and everybody brought food. Everybody ate. So, it’s just kinda like going to church to a church dinner.*

Sarah described a funny story that occurred after she became floor lady.

*I don’t know how long I’d been there. They decided to make me a floor lady. . . . And, put me on the floor, took away my job, and I had one lady that was a hemmer and I had to get on her frequently because she was very slow and I’d have to say, hey, you’re going to have to speed it up. One day she looked at me and she said, well I’ll just tell you one thing. Her machine is plugged in before mine and she’s using up all the electricity and I’m not getting enough that’s why I can’t work any faster. [laughter] I thought that was hilarious and I still think [it’s funny].*

Sarah too felt that some didn’t like her because of her role as floor lady. Sarah felt that some of the women were mad at her because she would send shirts back for repairs and because they thought she wasn’t giving them good sizes.

*And at me they were mad all the time. When I was examining they'd get mad cause I was taking them too many repairs. When I was on the floor they was mad cause I was always giving somebody all the good sizes. Now, my theory was if you had five sleeves and five 17 bundles or bundles of size 17 each one of 'em got one. If you had five sleeves and you had seven bundles of 17-1/2 or 17s then somebody got two. But that was the one that worked the fastest and it was the same thing if it was the sizes they liked which was a 15-1/2 16 good standard size, easy to do. It didn't make any difference, they would forget when they were doing the two bundles of 17 that when they were doing the 15-1/2 or 16s that they were doing more of those too cause they sewed faster. You get somebody that didn't sew fast and somebody else may be doing two bundles to their one. And at the time, they all got really upset about it. But when you see them now, today, upteen years later. They say, now we realize how fair you really were. But at the time we didn't see that.*

At some point, other women complained about the high number of repairs that Sarah identified so she had to set aside her work for further inspection.

*[Mr. Y.] was, he was quality control, and he came out one day and said to me, [Sarah] every thing you examine has to be kept on this cart. All your repairs and all the things that go back to parts have to be tied up separately and I will pick them up. I said why. He said, I can't tell you that. So this went on and it went on and it went on. And I finally, it took a lot of time so it cut your production when you had to tie up them separately. Now I'm tired of this and I want to know what's going on. He said you can stop. Why was it done? And he said, well, some of the girls went to the office and complained that you were taking out whole bundles and there wadn't anything wrong with 'em. I said okay. I said, how many? You've examined every one of 'em and how many times did you find that I had failed to take a, that I had pinned up a repair that was not a repair. He said, well actually none. He said, they were all repairs. Some of them could have*



*gone either way and you chose on the side of quality. That was my job. Yours was quality control but mine was to final examine and when I put that shirt through I said it was done, it was in good shape. And I wouldn't do that if it wadn't. And he said well that's what we found out. What you was taking out for repairs were repairs. It sure slowed me down for two weeks.*

It was interesting to hear Sarah talk about her work particularly her examination. She spoke about who and then how and then brought the story back to her doing her job correctly.

*And, we had a cuff setter that was the best cuff setter in the factory but if she got the first shirt and put a cuff on it and it was wrong she'd do the whole bundle wrong. Never, never, never, but if she got the first one on right. Sometimes she wouldn't have any repairs, sometimes one or two's all she ever had. But if she got 'em started wrong, they were all wrong. Part of that was in parts cause if they sewed that little top stitch on the cuff up just a little bit too high you couldn't get it folded, your shirt sleeve stuck in there and that folded back so it would leave a little snoot. Well when it left a snoot on the buttonhole side, it was a repair cause you wadn't supposed to have a snoot on there. It was a little extension about oh, anywhere about 1/16" to a 1/4" and I'd take 'em back and I never did know that she was the one but I figured it cause I'd taken her back a whole bundle one day. In fact, I didn't even examine the whole bundle. I started and there were so many that were bad, I just took them back. Or I didn't...he did. I figured she was the one but I don't know that. It don't make any difference. I was doing my job and doing it right and that's all that was worrying me.*

Examining a shirt became second nature to Sarah. She developed an efficient means of examining to maximize her productivity.

*You can just look at a shirt and see the stitches, watch for skipped stitches, watch for snoots on collars and cuffs and the advantage I had over the other examiners was that I could take a sleeve on the cuff of the sleeve and the hem of the shirt and eyeball the whole thing in one because my arms were long. So, that's one of the things that you had to do and that's one of the things that I, some of 'em would put their hand in the sleeve and pull it up and two or three hitches to get that sleeve. But my arms were long enough to get the sleeve with my fingers and turn the sleeves at the same time.*

Sarah reflected on something that upsets her about working at the factory.

*The thing that always upset me the most was that we had [Mrs. T.] was on sleeves, [Mrs. J.] was on sleeves, [Mrs. N.] was on sleeves, [Mrs. L.] was on sleeves and [Mrs. D.] was on sleeves. The only one still alive today was [Mrs. D.], the others all died. The first three that I mentioned all died reasonably soon after the factory closed with cancer. Lung cancer. And, I know, deep in my heart, I know they all had white lung disease which is where that lint goes down into your lungs and coats your lungs. But, nobody ever did anything about it. And then [Mrs. L.] died just a few years after that, Mrs. L. and I'm really not sure what she died of. [Mrs. J.] and [Mrs. T.] and [Mrs. N.] died, all died of lung cancer. . . . the sleeveers were the ones that I noticed the most because they used a surger and it had a cutter blade on it and I have been to [Mrs. J] machine and she'd have so much lint on her eyebrows that they'd stand out on her face ½" to ¾" with lint. You know if she got it on her eyebrows she got it in her lungs.*

Sarah reflected on disdain she experienced from other members of the community.

*Then you'd laugh cause you'd hear people say, oh, my husband wouldn't wear, they had a factory outlet store in the basement [of the factory] and you'd hear people say oh my husband wouldn't wear those shirts you make down at Elders. 'Cause my husband wouldn't wear anything but a Van Heusen, or an Arrow or a*

*good JC Penney shirt. We made all those. Arrow Shirts, Van Heusen, JC Penny shirts, Elder shirts, Tom Sawyer shirts, we made, that's the little boys. Their husbands won't wear anything that came from Elders. Except that they went out to the stores and bought 'em, a lot of times they did come from Elders.*

Generally, when talking about working at the factory, Sarah enjoyed what she did and friends she made there. She felt her role as examiner put her at odds with women at times.

*It was, I enjoyed what I did. I made a lot of friends at the factory. Of course, I won't say they was all friends. Some of them's probably enemies today. Most of them were not. Anda, it... you saw a lot of different things, a lot of different people.*

She especially remembers a young woman who dropped out of high school to work at the factory, their exchange, and her quitting to return to school.

*When I was on the floor the one I remember that is near and dear to my heart and I don't remember the girl's name but she quit school and she came in and was gonna sew, gonna sew cuffs and she sat there and she said I'm out of that jail, I don't have to go to school anymore and have those people tell me what to do. She's just on and on and on. All the time I'm showing her how to clean her machine, and how to thread her machine and get ready to sew. And then I told her you just changed one jail for another and I'm the head jailer. This is how you set a cuff and I showed her. And she tried it for three days, that I do remember. She came back and she said I've come for my scissors and I said okay, [she] said I'm quitting and I said okay. She said, you're right you're the jailer and she said I don't want to do this the rest of my life and I said so what are you going to do. She said I went back to the school and talked to them and they said if I were to come back to school and make up the work that I missed, I think it was a week*

*and a half. They will reinstate me and I can go ahead and probably graduate with my class and that's what she did.*

And another time, Sarah talked with a young woman getting ready to have a baby.

*So, we had this little girl she was a final examiner and I can't remember her name either except she had red hair and she lived out by Blairsville. . . . I know she said one day that baby was due the eighth of January. The reason I remember that 'cause that's Mom's birthday. It was Christmas Eve and we worked. I think we worked 'till noon. But I had told her I said some night when you're going to bed and you think whew boy do I have indigestion. You'll find out you're in labor and don't go to bed and think that that's just indigestion it'll go away by morning because it gets worse. She didn't come to work the next, no it wadn't Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve was when she didn't come to work. The 23<sup>rd</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> she didn't come to work. Everybody wondered why and then her sister finally called and said she had her baby. When she came back to work she came down to my station and she said I'll say one thing I really appreciate you because I went to bed that night and I thought boy I've got indigestion. And I thought about what you said and I called my sister and I said I think maybe I'm going to have this baby. She took me to the hospital and I did have that baby. She said, I would have gone to bed if you wouldn't have told me that 'cause I just thought I had indigestion. 'Cause I went to bed and I thought that's what [Sarah] told me not to do. But I don't know whatever happened to her. I've always wondered. A lot of people that worked there that I've wondered about and what happened in their lives. But you don't ever know.*

Sarah reflects on her friends from the factory.

*A lot of friends that you have still work over there. We're still friends, we don't see each other very much. [Mrs. G.] and I do cause we both work for the same company. If I'm wanderin' around over in housing, [Mrs. C.] will stick her head out the door and say get in here and talk to me. And I'll go in and sit and talk to*

*her a bit. A lot of 'em of course are gone. . . the younger ones that worked there [Mrs. B.], she was a collar setter. I still see her occasionally, just out, and we'll talk.*

In 1975, Sarah quit the shirt factory to answer the phone and keep books for her husband's business. Her departure from the factory before it actually closed was partly due to her re-assignment from a floor lady to a seamstress position.

*Before the factory quit they didn't need but one supervisor so I was the newest and I was the one who was eliminated and they put me on a job sewing. Didn't like to sew. Still don't wanta sit and, I like to sew, but I don't want to sit and sew to make money cause you just gotta sit there hunched over that machine and shove 'em though there. And I don't enjoy that. I enjoy sewing but not like that.*

So she decided to quit and work for her husband's backhoe business. He did contract work for the railroad, digging septic tanks for local residents, and any other job he could get. She continued doing this until her husband had a stroke in 1993. After that she went to work at the local pharmacy in either 1994 or 1995 and worked there for 8 years. Then a friend of hers told her about another job.

*I got an application and I filled it in and I said that I was employed at [the] Pharmacy and I would not be quitting. I was going to keep that job. Because I didn't go to work until 4:00 in the afternoon and I worked from 4:00 until whatever time I got through. So, that's what I did. And, I've been with [them] every since.*

At age 79, Sarah is still working. In past years, Sarah has helped with census activities in Hamilton County. She is looking forward to the next time they do the census because she so enjoys doing that.

### Reflections About Herself and Life Today

Sarah's story of her decision to quit smoking is illustrative of her decisiveness once she sets her mind towards an action.

*It was a Sunday and I got up and I put my cigarette out that I had and threw mine in the wastebasket and said to [my husband]. I will never smoke another cigarette again for as long as I live. And I never have. . . I must have been 39. I've been quit 41 years.*

Later on, I asked her what motivated her to do some of her volunteer work. She replied, "probably cause I'm hard headed." Sarah associated her achievements with the same thought process that she used to quit smoking.

*It's like when I quit smoking they said one day when we were up to [the Pharmacy] 'cause you really wanted to? Yeah, cause I really wanted to. Did you stay quit because you really wanted to stay quit or because you were hard headed to admit that you couldn't stay quit. I'd say it was a combination of both. Maybe a little bit of all of it I don't know.*

Sarah reflected on the differences between people and their wanting to work, needing to work.

*There's always those, always has been there's always gonna be those that are looking for an angle. But, most people work because they wanta work and if they don't wanta work they want to help their families. I can't even say they worked to give their family a better life. Cause some of them worked to give their family a life, not a better life, just a life. Some of the women that worked at the factory when I was there, their husband's were ill, bedfast, unable to work. They had to work. If they ate they had to work. Some of them worked just to get out of the house.*

## CHAPTER IX

## EMMA'S STORY

*"I was kinda mischevious. I like to have fun. [laughter]."*

I was excited to meet with Emma because she and I had worked together when I was a teenager. She is a woman who has a quick wit and I enjoy being around her. We sat around her kitchen table and caught up before jumping in. We enjoyed a cookie and cup of coffee together. When describing Emma, I'd say her eyes are the windows of her soul. They can be steely, they can express curiosity and interest and then bubble with laughter and joy. I would characterize her as fun-loving, independent, and vocal, one who stands up for others.

When asked to describe herself, Emma responded, *"Oh mercy, you don't want me to answer that."* [laughter] She continued, *"I was bashful when I first started. I wasn't after I was there awhile, but I was when I started. Mischevious. [laughter] I think I was pretty outgoing, you know after I learned all the people down there."* [laughter] When asked what she would want others outside of McLeansboro to know about rural working women, Emma noted, *"the majority of them are hardworking honest people who worked to help their families."* This is Emma's story.

When I say I...

This I-poem is an expression of her life.

*I went to work at Elders.  
I'd get up. I'd walk a mile and a half.*

*I was crazy.  
I did it.  
I went to work.  
I wasn't married.  
I lived at home.  
I had to walk.  
I just had to go to work.  
I did.  
I'd walk it. I just went.  
I was 16. I went to work.  
I was real little.  
I was real little.  
I tell you what.  
I worked down there.  
I sure was [bashful].  
I had kind of got over being so shy.  
I never could do nothing unless I got caught  
I never could, I still cain't  
I look too guilty.  
I had lots of things happen to me.  
I can't see somebody else mistreated when I know they're not at fault.  
I went right behind him. I got mad.  
I didn't have nothing against her.  
I jumped on him.  
I just have to be honest.  
I never had no trouble.  
I didn't have any trouble.  
I never did take up for me.  
I don't care.  
I'm not going to change their mind.  
I simply can't stand.  
I still cain't.  
I got mad a time or two.  
I jumped her.  
I took off behind her.  
I took the whole [place] apart.  
I did.  
I aint' proud of it.  
I just wasn't in no mood [laughter].  
I might have been in the wrong. I don't know.  
I would've felt I was in the wrong.  
I hadn't a stood up for her.  
I guess.*



*I'm not near the spitfire I used to be.  
I stayed pretty busy.  
I helped Mom and Dad.  
I'd go home I'd do mine.  
I guess we just did it and didn't think about it.  
I just did what there was to do.  
I don't really want to quit work.  
I do it myself or.  
I'm glad I was raised that way.  
I'm glad my parents was strict.  
I might not have liked it at the time [laughter]  
I think that.  
I think that's made the person out of me  
I am today.  
I knew I had to work.  
I live a day at a time.  
I'd run home.  
I'd go back.  
I'd go check.  
I'd go back.  
I didn't have a break.  
I didn't have a lunch time.  
I felt like I had to go.  
I did.  
I thought I was pretty calm.  
I get to thinking I was kind of mischievous.  
I think.  
I think.  
I guess that's the reason I got to holdin' my own.  
I don't know.  
I was bashful when I first started.  
I wasn't after I was there awhile.  
I was pretty outgoing.  
I learned all the people.  
I don't know really.  
I was a little mischievous I guess.  
I look back.  
I don't know how we did it either.  
I really don't  
I didn't worry.  
I had to do.  
I just done it.  
I didn't clean house last weekend.*

*I won't clean it up this weekend.  
 I don't care [laughter].  
 I like to have fun.  
 I want it to be clean fun.  
 I like to have fun. [laughter].*

### Biographical Details

Emma was born in 1929 in Hamilton County. She had one sister and two older brothers and 2 brothers and two sisters who were younger than her. She was born in the middle of seven children. Emma started working at the factory in 1945 at the age of 16. When she first started Emma lived at home with her parents and had to walk to catch her ride. I asked her why she started working so young. Emma explained her Dad's work ethic, *"I just had to go to work. Anda, cause Dad thought when you got old enough to go to work, you needed to go to work and make your own way. So that's what I did."* Emma went down to the factory to see about a job there but was not old enough to work without a permit. *"I had to-a get a permit from the superintendent of schools to go to work."*

Emma got married in 1954. She continued working until 1957 before she had her daughter in January 1958. Her son was born in 1963. She stayed at home until about six months after her husband got sick. Then she returned to work at the factory and stayed there until 1978 when the factory closed. After the factory closed, Emma went to work at the nursing home in the kitchen. In the mid-1990s, Emma left the nursing home and went to work for an agency providing in-home services to needy people. She continues to work there today.

## Daily Life

Emma's daily life was filled with chores and caring for others. She got up around 5:00 AM every day. She described her responsibilities around the house when living with her parents.

*It was my job to wash the dishes regardless. It was my job to help Mom do the laundry. And I had to help carry in the wood and the coal. We had jobs that we had to do. And, we did them. Otherwise, we got in trouble.*

Her days were long. She'd do chores until around 10:00 or 11:00.

*I'd help Mom with the kitchen, I'd help her with supper, help with the dishes, well I done the dishes mostly. The kids were kind of little, my two sisters and I practically raised them. You know, it's just. Oh yeah, I stayed pretty busy.*

After she got married, she continued her household work of cleaning, cooking, and doing laundry. Her husband worked off-farm and raised hogs. They had two gardens and a sweet corn patch. When talking about gardening, Emma described how when her husband got sick she returned to work and he would help her with preparing vegetables out of the garden.

*We just did enough for our own [raised vegetables]. Oh, my brothers and sisters if they needed something, we did. We didn't trade it, we just gave it to them. Most of the time we just...But then after [my husband] got sick and I went back to work. When I went back to work, the six months, I went back to work at the factory. After he got sick, he'd pick the tomatoes and have them run through the juicer and have the beans broke and the corn cleaned and all. And then all I had to do was can it. But still that'd run you into late in the morning. And we didn't just do a little batch, it was...it had to be two or three batches.*

Summer brought on particularly long days because Emma was preparing and canning food from her parents and her garden till the wee hours in the morning. Emma got it all done by working till 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning.

*I'd have to go down and do Moms. I helped Mom and Dad. And then I'd go home and I'd do mine. And maybe it'd take until 3:00 to get the last can of beans or corn or something done.*

When she considered her long days and how she got it all done, Emma was accepting of that being the way that it was.

*We just knew we had it to do so we did it. You just didn't think about it. We didn't have all these modern inconveniences then [laughter], we just. . . . So I know, I guess we just did it and didn't think about it.*

Emma was a caretaker within her family and extended family.

*I just did what there was to do. Now on wash days, when I was still a kid I always had to help Mom wash and then after Mom got sick really bad I had to do their laundry. No, I didn't have anything certain to do. I just, and besides that, I had [my husband's] mom to take care of. She'd had a stroke.*

*I used to [volunteer] when I was, before Mom and Dad got sick. Kid's first started to school and all, I belonged to home extension out there and I was in PTA but outside of that. Now I'm in the VFW and the Ruritan Club. And that's about all I do besides go to church. Visit my sisters and that's about my social life.*

*That's just like when Mom moved in with me, you know, after Dad died. She lived with me for about eight years before she died. . . . On my break when she'd be sick, on my 15 minute break, I'd run home and check on her and then I'd go back and I'd go check on her at noon, and I'd go back. So see, I didn't have a break. I didn't have a lunch time. But, you know, I felt like I had to go check on her. I did.*

## Paid Work

Emma described herself as a hard worker.

*And I was crazy enough to try to do the work that three other girls did and I did it. . . . When I went to work I weighed 87 pounds and I worked on the box pleat machine and there's three collar girls that give me their work you know. And I'd have to take both feet to close the machines 'cause I wasn't even heavy enough to do that.*

Her youth and size were a surprise to one of the local bosses when he returned from service.

*[Mr. P.] he was in service. . . [Mr. P.] hired me, his brother. When he came back, course, there was a partition between my machine and the office. I was right there. He walked in and he looked over that thing and he said, well who let that kid in here [laughter] I was real little. I was real little.*

In talking about the older ladies who worked there, Emma declared, “*They took me under their wing. They teased me a lot.*” I asked her what they would tease her about.

*Boys. [laughter]. I had an aunt that worked there and she was, oh she was mischievous. [laughter] I tell you what. You may be bashful when you go there but you won't be bashful very long because they won't let you.*

By her own admission, Emma was quite shy. “*Oh Yes. Oh yes. You wouldn't believe it now, but I sure was. Bashful, my face'd get red at the least little thing.*” Her working at the factory changed her. “*You don't want to know what all they said to me. [laughter] I couldn't put it all down. They broke me in right.*” [laughter] We laughed and laughed at her being 16, green as a gourd, going into the factory with all these older women. Our

consensus was that they just teased it out of her. I said that women aren't exactly as pure as the driven snow. Emma laughingly replied, "*No. No. Shoot no!*" [laughter]

Emma received training to do her job but didn't think her job was one you needed to think about. "*Course, there wasn't much training needed. 'Cause all you had to do was step on one pedal to close 'em and step on another to close 'em.*" Her job was at the first of the production process. She explained:

*The units was on back where the pressing tables was you know. Some of 'em would press the fronts and some the sleeve. That's what they called the unit. In front, I did the box pleats. The other girls did the collars anda then some would do the cuffs.*

When Emma went back for the six months in 1978, she examined. "*After the shirts was completed your mom would bring us a bundle of shirts and then we'd have to check the collars and the cuffs and the tail to see that the hem was all in it.*"

One of her funniest memories of work was a day when her and some other ladies decided to play hooky.

*Didn't go to work. I mean we was at work that morning. We didn't have any work. So, we tried to get 'em to let us go home at noon and they wouldn't do it. So we took off anyway. Me and [some others] I don't know, they had a skating rink down here where Stewart's Oil is at, had a tent. We was just skating away [laughter] and we looked up and there sat the big bosses, they was watching us.*

*We just kept skating. We know'd we was fired. We knew we'd get fired. The next morning I was standing there. And boy, I knew he was behind me, I just kept working like the dickens. I was just going to ignore him. And he said, I didn't know you could skate. I said, there's lots of things about me you don't know. He never said a word, that's all he said.*

And another time, Emma and her friends were walking around the square when she did something that embarrassed herself.

*Then one of the big bosses was staying at the hotel up here on the corner where the Dairy Queen sat, Bonanza Hotel. [Mr. M.], he was one of the big bosses out of St. Louis. A bunch of us girls was walking around the square and of course, by that time, I had kind of got over being so shy. And, they dared me to whistle at him. Well, I did. And I didn't think with that bunch of girls he'd know who done it. The next morning he said, boy, you got a cute whistle. [laughter] I said oh. You think, that wasn't embarrassing. That was about the most embarrassing thing I did. But I never could do nothing unless I got caught. I never could. And, I still cain't. I guess it's 'cause I look too guilty.*

When she left the factory the first time to have her daughter, some of the girls gave her a surprise party although Emma indicated that parties were not the norm.

*I mean, of course we recognized each other but we didn't have a party or anything you know. We didn't have time then. But, when I got ready to quit, I was getting ready to have [my daughter]. [Mrs. C.] was the office girl and she told me, she says, [Emma], after work you drive down to the house I've got a little gift for you. I said okay, so, the girls that was riding with me, we went down there you know and I went in and there wasn't anybody around you know, and the next thing you know, they all came out of the kitchen. She had a shower fur me. That was one time I didn't know whether to sit down and laugh or to sit down and cry. I didn't think they'd ever keep anything from me but they did. I had lots of things happen to me, some good, some. . .*

Emma expressed a few times when she got mad but was quick to say it wasn't about her, she was standing up for someone else.

*It was never about me. It was about one of the other girls. And, I'm still that way. I don't care, I mean. If I want to take it that's fine. But I can't see somebody else mistreated when I know they're not at fault.*

*The girls, we wasn't working, we wasn't getting our unemployment. And the girls was going to go with me to do the talking. Now this was after me being there awhile. And they'd stand behind me. And that ol' unemployment guy came to the office there. We went up there and me and him was going at it tooth and toe nail and I looked around and the girls was all gone. It was just me and him. He left the office and went to the cutting room. And I went with him right behind him. He told [Mr. P.]. That's one time I got a tiger by the tail. That's one time I got mad. But at the girls, really, no.*

*I got mad at. . . [Mr. S.] because his daughter turned a bucket of water over in the floor. She was working summers. She was a nice person, don't get me wrong. I didn't have nothing against her. But she turned the water over. And [he] came up there just a flaunching and he didn't stop to ask who done it or anything. And he jumped onto [this lady]. He didn't no more jump on [her] than I jumped on him.*

Emma did not get fired. [Mr. P.] simply told her that it does you good to clear the air once in awhile. Emma liked her bosses especially [Mr. P.] because he would listen. “I mean if you had something to say, he'd listen to you. And, I think that's what it takes to be a good boss.” She went on to say:

*Really, I didn't have any trouble with him [Mr. S.], except that he talked to [this lady] like she was a dog. She hadn't done anything and she wasn't going to say anything for herself. So guess what ol' big mouth. . .*

When asked about the strike, Emma didn't quite recall all the details except that it happened.



*I don't remember really. It didn't last too long. I don't really know how it did come about. I don't even know who started it now. Yeah, let's see I don't know how many years I worked over at the new one before I quit. I don't even know when they started over there. I don't have any idea what year it was.*

*I don't think so. We might have. We might have got a nickel. I don't know. That's a big raise back then. I don't, I haven't thought about that. I've kind of forgot what all did take place then. I don't remember. I'm not sure that ain't what we was doing when I whistled at [Mr. M.] walking. [laughter]. Oh, I don't know.*

Emma reflected, *"I thought I was pretty calm until I get to thinking about things. I was kind of mischievous I think."*

After the factory closed, Emma went to work at the nursing home in the kitchen.

She told a story about getting mad there.

*Standing up for somebody else. We took the cart down, you know. I worked in the kitchen. The girls took the cart down and we went home at 2:00. Well, about 1:30 the cart hadn't been brought back so we went down, one of the girls went down and got it. And, wasn't long till here one of the nurses aides come, boy she was straddled out and she was a cussing and ranting and raving and telling the kitchen off. And [our boss] was in there. . . And, she was just goin'ta let her get by with it. Who brought that cart back down here with that tray still in it? I won't use the words she did. And, that tray still in it. And the cart had been down there for I guess for close to two hours, one and a half to two hours. And they'd forgot to feed this lady. So she was going to blame it on the kitchen. And, she wanted to know who brought the cart down there. And, nobody said anything. [The woman who] brought it said I did. And [the nurse] jumped on [the woman] and when she did I jumped her. I told [my boss], you better get that little red-headed out of this kitchen or I'm goin' to clean the kitchen up with her. [My boss*

*took off down the hall. And this girl took off behind her. And I took off behind her. I took the whole nursing home apart that day. The nurses, RNs, even the director of nurses. I did. I ain't proud of it but I did. But probably if I hadn't been so tired and worn out at that time. See, I'd been up about 4 days and nights with Mom and then she had died. And...I just wasn't in no mood. [laughter]*

*They all came to me the next day, the RNs and all of them and apologized for her doing that. I said, well this kitchen had to take the blame for a lot of things. But I said when she jumped onto [the woman], that was one thing that wasn't going to happen. And, it didn't. I mean. I might have been in the wrong, I don't know. But still, I would've felt I like was in the wrong if I hadn't a stood up for her. . . . But I'm not near the spitfire I used to be.*

Emma liked her co-workers and she instigated pulling a prank on someone.

*Oh me and her got into some dandy. One time this [Mr. M.]. . . . They used to come out there on Sunday mornings and have church or Sunday School or whatever. Every time he'd come, he'd come to the window and he'd want a hamburger. One Saturday night, [another lady] was going to go to Mt. Vernon. I said. . . go in one of them little novelty shops or whatever and see if you can't find a hamburger, artificial hamburger. Well she did, she found one. Next morning, she brought it to work. And we had it on a plate and we had him a milk shake, he always wanted a milk shake. A milkshake, an artificial one, you know. When he come to the window, just as innocent, we never cracked a smile. We handed that hamburger to him and that milkshake out to him. I didn't think he was going to be able to finish his church program. He just nearly got down. [His wife] said she still has that hamburger on a shelf.*

In the mid-1990s, Emma left the nursing home and went to work for an agency providing in-home services to needy people. She continues working there today.

### Reflections About Herself and Life Today

Emma sees herself as self-reliant and believes her brothers played an instrumental part in who she is along with where she was in her siblings birth order.

*When you're raised between four boys you kinda of learn to hold your own. Well, see I've got a sister I stay with now on mornings. I take care of her. She's 87, will be. And then, there was two boys. Then there was me. Then there was two more boys. Then there was two girls. So the girls was so little, they didn't get to catch any of the flack that I did. But them boys now, let me tell you they. You had a run for your money with them. So, I guess that's the reason I got to holdin' my own, I don't know. They would take me and find a little sapling, put me on it, and turn me loose and let it throw me. . . .*

When reflecting on how she went from a shy girl to one who would stand up for people, Emma noted:

*I don't know. I honestly don't know. But, I did and I still do it. I even did it at the nursing home. I never did take up for me. 'Cause I don't care. That's others problem if they don't like me 'cause I'm not going to change their mind. But, I simply can't stand to see someone mistreated like that. And, I still cain't. . . . You know, really today I'm not much to talk in a crowd. Now, one on one, I can talk to anybody. But, you know, in a crowd. I'm still not much to talk like that.*

Emma upon reflection cannot remember a time when she hasn't worked or cared for people. "No, I haven't. I really haven't. I'm serious. [known a time when I haven't worked]." In describing her sons realization that she will soon be 80, "He [my son] just don't stop to realize that I've got that many years on me. But I've never asked him to help me or anything. I've been like your mom, I do it myself or. . . "

All in all Emma credits her parents' upbringing as shaping and molding who she is and expresses concern for youth who aren't being raised similarly.

*You know, I'm glad I was raised that way. I look at some of these young kids today and they just expect everything handed to 'em. Some of these...well there's a kid across the street he's in prison right now for drugs and stuff. And he's been on them since he's 13. He's been in prison 2 or 3 times. . . . And you know, it's just like that. I'm glad my parents was strict on me.*

Working at the factory taught her a lot about life and how to be with people.

*Well, I think that [working at Elders], I think that's made the person out of me that I am today. Getting along with people and stuff like that. At least I knew I had to work for what I got. You know, I guess it made me stronger, maybe made me more aggravating. Would you say? [laughter]).*

Emma returns to her outspokenness and wistfully talks about how she isn't as outspoken now as she has been. All the while I suspect that given the opportunity, Emma would reveal her inner courage and strength to speak up in the face of an injustice.

*I'm really not too outspoken now. But I guess I've not had any reason to be, you know. Cause, land, I don't know. I don't know what it, Yeah, I do know what it'd take to make me mad is for somebody to talk about my kids, or grandkids, or great grandkids. Now, that'd make me mad. Outside of that I don't know. Probably if I saw somebody'd being mistreated I would.*

Her closing thoughts about her life.

*I live a day at a time. . . . You do what you have to do. You don't think anything about it. You just do it. You know, it's been a hard life, but it's been a good life. I mean, I don't know of anything I'd've changed really. Maybe a few things back then [laughter], but you know what I'm saying.*

## CHAPTER X

### ISABEL'S STORY

*"I'm pretty easy going. I have a lot of common sense."*

I have known Isabel for a long time, her kids and I are around the same age. Isabel has energy and a smile that I so enjoy. She lives on a beautiful property south of McLeansboro. She has remodeled her house and showed me her new kitchen and family room. What I most enjoyed was watching the birds off her back deck. On the day of our second interview, we had snow and ice and out her back door, it looked like a picture postcard. We stood for awhile watching the birds at her many bird feeders. It was a lovely day, cold and sunny. I would characterize Isabel as someone who knows the value of money, a learner, easygoing, yet will show fierce determination and tenacity when motivated.

When asked to describe herself, Isabel responded, *"Easygoing. Easygoing. I'm pretty easy going. I'm not a, you know, I usually take the good with the bad."* [laughter] When asked what she would want others outside of McLeansboro to know about rural working women, Isabel noted, *"They's all good, honest, hard working women. . . They not only worked, they knew how to take care of it once they got it. That's what I want you say."* This is Isabel's story.

When I say I...

This I-poem is an expression of her life.

*I was born.*

*I was barely 18.  
I've got an opportunity.  
I went up there. I worked up there.  
I came home. I worked.  
I don't know how many years.  
I didn't work steady.  
I'd be off a while.  
I was always lucky enough [to go back].  
I loved to work.  
I just can't remember.  
I was there. I can remember that.  
I enjoyed it.  
I didn't have any problems.  
I didn't.  
I didn't.  
I was tired too.  
I was give out.  
I was tired.  
I never did have a lot of time. I really didn't.  
I miss them days. I really do.  
I really had more fun, I think.  
I enjoyed the people.  
I miss that part.  
I worked there.  
I had more kids.  
I said, I'm never mowing again.  
I've not been on a lawn mower since.  
I've done outside work enough.  
I never did go for a lot of organizations.  
I'm just not that type of person.  
I like to be with my family and friends.  
I didn't have time.  
I was really trying to keep up with things.  
I intended for him  
I intended for him.  
I sure did.  
I had to be downright mean.  
I sure did.  
I sure did.  
I took him down there.  
I just felt like he could do better.  
I wanted him to have a chance.  
I was proud of that.*

*I'm just old fashioned.*  
*I was a tomboy.*  
*I've come a long way.*  
*I was growing up.*  
*I always wanted an education.*  
*I never was that smart.*  
*I just really wanted to go to school.*  
*I did get my high school.*  
*I went on.*  
*I got married and had kids.*  
*I love to read.*  
*I'll lose myself in a book.*  
*I'd get me a book. I didn't care.*  
*I loved to read.*  
*I was young.*  
*I didn't have money.*  
*I worked.*  
*I had to pay all the bills.*  
*I thought.*  
*I started saving for my retirement.*  
*I started putting all the money away.*  
*I'd done things a lot different. I just didn't know what to do.*  
*I was in high school, I went to work.*  
*I was 12.*  
*I worked like a boy.*  
*I tell you what.*  
*I've had a lot of ups and downs.*  
*I always used to laugh.*  
*I'm pretty easy going.*  
*I usually take the good with the bad.*  
*I think I was real easy going.*  
*I have a lot of common sense.*  
*I saved enough.*  
*I still had enough money.*  
*I saved money.*

### Biographical Details

In 1937, Isabel was born in McLeansboro. At the time of this interview, Isabel was 70 years old. At age 18 she started work at Elders and then left after four months to

get a job in Springfield with the State. In 1958 she returned to McLeansboro. Later that year, Isabel got married. Her husband and she are just shy of being married 50 years. In total she worked eight or nine years at Elders quitting in between when she had her three children. When the factory closed in 1978, Isabel continued working at other jobs in town including the Rehabilitation Center and the telephone company where she worked for over 20 years.

### Daily Life

Isabel shared about her youth and how her upbringing influenced her.

*I tell you what when I was raised before I was married. We lived just like Mom and Dad, just like the Amish does today, when I was raised. When I was a kid, we didn't even have a car, we had wagons, and buggies, and things and that sounds almost unbelievable but you know, at my age even back then I used to saddle my horse. I used to ride a horse to school and turn him loose and he'd go home. You know what, I didn't even ride with a saddle 'cause Dad didn't have a good saddle. We'd hitch up the horses and his parents, Dad's parents or Mom's parents on Sunday in a wagon. Can you imagine that? Our whole, our whole life was just around family. Chickens, and cows, and horses, we had milk and eggs and everything, and goats, we even had goats. I mean that's the way we lived, it was just with the family. Women had their work and men had their work. I was a tomboy.*

Isabel understood that what she wanted was in contrast to the prevailing social attitudes with regard to girls getting an education.

*When I was growing up, girls didn't get an education. My dad didn't want me to go to high school. I always wanted an education. I never was that smart but I*



*just really wanted to go to school and so I did get my high school and then I went on, when I went up to work at Springfield at Brown's Business college for my job and learned some things...I learned some shorthand and things like that. It was a good experience. And I enjoyed that. And then when I got married and had kids, you're right back focusing on your family.*

Her mom was hard working and resourceful. Both her parents emphasized paying your bills.

*Mom. . . was resourceful so every year she'd get 500 or 600 chickens, she was on the egg route, we butchered chickens. We had income from the eggs, we had income from milk. She'd get out and we'd go milk cows. I was milking cows when I was in high school. We was on the milk run for that. She sold vegetables and things right out of the garden. Mom made even though she didn't go out on a public job she made the equivalent of a public job. . . . she made her money. . . . You know, my Dad always paid his bills first and mom too. If they didn't eat they paid their bills. Of course we always had enough to eat 'cause Mom had a big garden and all that. Dad raised cattle and hogs. We always butchered and had our own meat and everything.*

From her early years, Isabel learned the value of saving money and prioritizing expenditures.

*We never had an allowance at home. Gosh a nickel would be like \$50.00 today and when I made money, even when I was working, I made \$5.00 a day on Saturday. Back then, we didn't have luxury items like bologna and soda pop. [laughter] But you know I made \$5.00 and I saved enough. I put my own self through high school. I don't think Mom and Dad ever gave me a penny when we was going to high school. . . . And I still had enough money to buy mom's Christmas, I'd always buy Mom something and dad something. I saved money.*

Isabel's day started early and ended late. Isabel described her daily routine. *"Get the kids all ready, get them to the babysitter. Go to work, worked all day, come home, cooked supper, tend to the kids, get their baths, get their clothes laid out. Same old mess again."* She'd go to bed around 10:00 or 11:00.

*When the kids was home. I had to jump up and fix breakfast. . . . Usually got up around a quarter to five then I'd fix their breakfast and get the kids half way lined out. I'd usually put their clothes out of a night and usually they'd have their baths of a night until they got older and got dilitary. They'd get ready real quick and fix breakfast. And that'd consist a lot of times of cereal and piece of toast. I'd take them to the babysitter. [My husband's] mom kept them for years until they went to school. And then we had to make different arrangements. We lived in town. We had to cart [my son] around cause he's handicapped and take him to the babysitter. But [the other two boys], we took them to school.*

When her mother-in-law wasn't available to keep the kids, Isabel found someone else. It might be her Mom but her Mom lived 20 miles out in the country. Isabel explained how she found a sitter. *"Back then, you didn't have day care or anything like that. Just word of mouth. . . . just word of mouth. . . . if I didn't know them I wouldn't let them keep them."*

Ironing was a central task back then. We laughed at how quickly things changed with the rise in popularity of cotton and wash and wear fabrics.

*Back when the kids was really young, ironing was what kept me late a lot. 'Cause I'd iron their shirts and things, and jeans and then when this wash and wear came out you know, I quit doing a lot of that. [laughter]. I said hey, if you don't want to wear it that's fine you can iron your own clothes after they got older.*

They had a garden every year. Her husband and she worked together to get it out and to can food.

*I canned every year. There again, [my husband] was pretty good to help me, he'd get vegetables in and we'd go to the basement and can. Like, when I lived in town and he'd stay and help me get everything done before we went to bed or we tried to.*

Isabel's husband did all the outside work. At first she said she didn't work outside that much but as she described her activities, she did quite a lot outside.

*I used to mow the lawn with a push mower. And I had scissors, I clipped that stuff around, with the scissors around the house so it'd look real neat. . . . we got a riding lawn mower. And, I said, I'm never mowing again. I've not been on a lawn mower since. I've done outside work enough. I've got three boys. . . I'm not going to do it. As far as the housework. They weren't too [work] brickle on the housework. They'd help me a little bit. They didn't like no part of that. That's why it wasn't always like, as clean as it should be. In the things got pretty deep.*

When asked how she got it all done, Isabel laughed and then described her strategy for doing the best she could do.

*I didn't. I didn't. I'm not going to lie to you. I tell you sometimes the house looked like a tornado struck it. If somebody'd come to the door, I'd lock it and pretend I wasn't home. [laughter]. There's no way to get it all done. Now some of them did. I tell you what, I always got my washing and ironing, and food up and that's one reason I didn't go to church. Sunday was my day for really cleaning house, washing my clothes, ironing their clothes, getting everything ready for next week. A lot of times, you know, I had [my son], I had to give him therapy of a night too. That was another job too. . . . What you had to do would keep you up until 10:00 or 11:00 every night. I was tired too, I was give out all*

*the time. I was tired all the time. So, you just have to get up, put on your face, act happy, and go right onto work.*

I did a little bit of sewing, patching round the house and making my own clothes and stuff like that.

Outside of being together with family, Isabel described herself as “*not that type of person*” with regard to organizational participation. She laughed as she indicated she is not a “*socially minded person*” and explained that she likes to be with her family and friends. Whereas her special needs son was involved though, Isabel was quite active in an organization and was instrumental in advocacy and fighting for his right to an education. She diligently kept on school officials to ensure her son got an education. In thinking about it, she said, “*I sure did. I sure did*” have to keep on them.

*We did attend that regular [an organization for cerebral palsy]. . . . They was trying to get a chapter started so they could get some help here in Southern Illinois for cerebral palsy kids. I was on that for quite a while. I still belong to it. . . . With [my son], I was really trying to keep up with things on him. . . . I intended for him to go to school. And I intended for him to have all the therapy he could get. . . . That was a fight. And I had to be downright mean too to get him in school.*

*They had a state law passed that these school systems had to teach cerebral palsy or mentally retarded kids or whatever they were. Down here, the principal, he didn't intend for [my son] to go to school down here. And I said, they got a mandate in Illinois that you will educate the kids, so you will educate him here or you'll send him somewhere else. I can take him so he can come home at night. He went ahead and paid for me to take him to Harrisburg for quite a while. You know. That's one of the times I didn't work at Elders cause I had to take [my son] to school. I took him down there for about, I would say two years. And then, he*

*[the principal] decided that, you know, cause, they told him that they were going to have to pay me to transport him or pay somebody. So they paid me so much. I don't know how much it was. It didn't amount to a lot of money. Then they decided that they'd teach him at home. I got a desk. They furnished a desk and everything. So when they taught him at home, I went back to work. He went to school at East Side. He started at school at East Side. He graduated from East Side. He went on to McLeansboro. And, he graduated from McLeansboro High School.*

Isabel correlated the school's lack of commitment to educate her son with historical societal views on educating women. *"They didn't want to educate him. It was almost like the men used to be about girls. You know, they didn't think he needed one, he never'd amount to anything anyway, why spend that money educating somebody like that."* Isabel was quite forthright when I asked her how she found the courage to keep fighting for her son.

*I just felt like he could do better and later on in life. He needed all the training he could get. He needed everything available because he could use it later on in life. If he didn't get it now, when was he going to get it. That was my main thing. I wanted him to have a chance.*

For fun, Isabel loved to read. She wished she could have gone to college.

*I'll lose myself in a book. That's something I'd used to do on Sunday evening when they'd all be watching TV, I'd get me a book. I'd get a book and totally leave this world. I didn't care. That was always my thing. I loved to read.*

## Paid Work

Isabel went to work at age 12 in a local store. She stocked shelves and waited on people. *“I was a big hefty girl and I’d go down and bring up boxes and all. I worked like a boy.”* Later, Isabel exerted some effort in getting hired on at the factory.

*I went every Monday morning asking him for a job. And finally he said to me, I’m tired of looking at you. You come back a certain day and I’m going to put you to work. And if you don’t work like you say you want to work, you’re out of here.*  
[laughter]

After being at the factory four months, Isabel got an opportunity to go to work for the State in Springfield. She was concerned about giving up a job for the opportunity so she went to her boss and talked with him.

*And [Mr. P.] was so nice, I walked in, I told him I said, I’ve got an opportunity to go to work for the state. I don’t know that I can even do that. But I said I’d love to do that. But I don’t want to do lose that job up there and lose this job. I talked to him a little it about it. He asked me a few questions. I tell you what, you go up and there and try. If you don’t like it you come back and your job will be waiting for you. Well I said, okay. So when I went up there. I worked up there about three years then.*

Isabel explained her work history in light of having a special needs child.

*I didn’t work steady. I mean I’d be off a while. Because you know how [my son] was and everything. I’d had to go to St. Louis. They never did call it a leave of absence you just quit. But I was always lucky enough to get a job when got done, cause [Mr. P.] always want me back.*

Isabel was a hemmer and as she said, *“That’s the only job I ever did there was hem.”* Isabel was taught how to use the machines on the job. She was proud that she

figured out how to do her job without having to stop her machine, a skill that enabled her to earn more money.

*They taught me how to use the machines. So I learned to hem shirts and we had, when I started there they hemmed just the left front and the right front and that's what I did. I was called a front hemmer. You had to hem it and put gussets in them. That to me was the hardest thing. But, I learned to do that and never stop my machine, just keep a going. Me and this other lady, who taught me how to do that, you could make more money if you didn't stop.*

This factory produced the entire shirt. “And then you had different sections, you had banders, collars, cuff people and some of them put the placket into the sleeves. They did everything there.” Isabel was paid minimum wage plus a piece rate based on her production. It got to where her job became second nature. “Didn't think about it. Just sit there and think about anything in the world. Dream it was all over and you didn't have to work at Elders.” [laughter] She described the process further noting how today's quality is different.

*What it is is nothing but a square piece of material that laid up in your fold, , I mean say this is the machine and then they had kind of like a gutter come down here, there was piece about like that. You pinched it in the middle and then you would into that hem and just sealed it over. And what it was used to be had a piece of material right in here so it didn't rip out. Now they don't have that more. That's just another short cut they took. That's why the shirts are not as good.*

Isabel described the factory as a “good place to work. I enjoyed it.” And yet, she acknowledged how physically demanding it was.

*My legs are paying for it now. You know, you sit there and them machines had pedals. You figure how many times you raised your feet. The brakes on the*

*bottom and you started at the front of it and your feet go up and down. . . . It was work, hard work.*

Isabel was insightful about the nuances of her floor lady and how the other ladies and she would adjust depending on what kind of mood she was in.

*It was a wonder she hadn't killed us. 'Cause I mean we used to put her through her paces as well. She made us live hard too sometimes and we made her live hard too. We'd get even with her. . . . I always used to laugh. We'd go in and we'd say what kind of mood is [she] in today. [laughter] We'd all kind of figure it out. We'd watch her for awhile. We're going to have to sew good and slow today. 'Cause she'd examine and she'd bring everything back to you that you gave to her. . . . If she was in one of her days, you had better just settle down and do your job right. If she kind of flighty why you could make a little money that day. [laughter]*

Isabel's enthusiasm for working at the factory and the social interaction that being there created really showed through.

*I loved to work at Elders. It was just like you see on these shows. These women would congregate in there. You had some honery ones and you had some real straight laced ones. They'd say about anything and do about anything. We'd tell jokes, you know. It was just like a big old family. We had units.*

*I always enjoyed just being there. . . . I can remember days with her that she'd get to talking and laughing and they couldn't do a thing with us. Your mother, she was a unit girl there too, and she couldn't do a thing with any of us cause we'd get on a streak. I mean, it was just, we'd just have a blast. But no one day that I can remember was any different.*

Occasionally, when someone had a birthday they would have a cake or get a card or acknowledge their birthday. "Everybody'd say happy birthday. Kind of put them on a



*pedestal for that one day. That was about it. I don't remember too many big birthday parties."* Isabel really got to know the women who worked right around her.

*You knew all their kids. Especially right around us. You knew the people, you knew their kids, you knew what their husband did. You knew their likes and dislikes. When they went out at lunch to eat they'd tell you where they went. It ain't like that today. Everybody acts like it's a big secret today. I mean, used to be, everybody told everything.*

*I miss them days. I really do. I said I really had more fun at Elders and as far as enjoying it. I think I enjoyed the people and working there more than any job I ever had just because it was so relaxed. No put on there at all. If you was down in the dumps when you walked in, you was down in the dumps and nobody didn't bother you. You could be down in the dumps. And, if you was happy, there's people that was happy around you. They didn't interfere in your lives. But they understood what was going on with you. They really did. I miss that part. They was all good people there.*

The work conditions in the summer were pretty hard because it was so hot.

*I hated that place in the summer time with a passion. All they had was big windows and shirts stacked up all around you, you couldn't get any air. You'd be just wringing wet with sweat. And of course, I always held shirts on my lap cause you had to. I'd pick them up to the machine. I was hot as a bear all summer long. I'd think, Oh Lord if I can just get out of here.*

Isabel reflected on the wages, making good money and the relationship of what you made to your own work ethic.

*You know, we made fairly decent wages there. It was a place that really tested you I mean, if you wanted to work and you was willing to work hard. You could make some pretty good money. But if you wanted to sit all day and gab and run up and down the aisles. But you was guaranteed so much. I think minimum*

wage. *But there was a lot of people who made a lot more than minimum wage. It depended on how hard you wanted to work. And the piece work was pretty decent, the prices were. That got to be a problem in the later years. Once you got up to where you could make a decent wage, they'd hook up those time machines and want to cut the wages, the piece work wages. You didn't make as much money and work twice as hard.*

Hearing that the factory was closing was hard on Isabel.

*I guess the day that really stands out more was the day they told us they was closing the factory and said they'd be laying off people. And that's when they started laying off. Everybody thought, it was like cause I mean, we didn't know what we was going to do. That supported McLeansboro. It supported I don't know how many families. . . . I guess when the factory shut down I was working there then and I thought my life was over because the factory was gone.*

### Reflections About Herself and Life Today

Isabel reflected on the hard work and the necessity of working to have money to do anything other than work.

*They [the days] was long. They was hard, hard. It was hard work. Them women, me, and all of them they worked hard. You didn't get to or you didn't have money to go anywhere or do anything. It really, really your life was at home or at work. It's about all you had to do.*

Her days back then were filled with activities with little time for herself.

*I've never did have a lot of time for myself. I really didn't. There wasn't no soaking in tubs or anything. I'd take a shower or a spit bath and go on. It wasn't that bad. It sounds terrible. But, everybody lived their life one day at a time. So*

*it's, you'll have hard days and harder than others and they're really pleasant and it makes life worthwhile.*

Women worked to provide for family and extended family.

*You see those women, they brought home enough to support them families and probably half of their you know, some of their other kids too if they was married. Cause people didn't have a lot back then.*

Some women worked because the men either didn't work or didn't make enough.

*I can see it in my mind. I see the women coming out...I always got a kick out of it. Because, when they'd all leave the factory, I mean, the minute that bell or whatever it was rung, it was just like a bunch of ducks trying to get out of the door at the same time. That's the way we was and here's all these men lined up out here. And they'd say, boy these men are go getters coming to get their women after work. [laughter]*

Women working benefited the community due to their commitment to buy local.

*You know, I've always thought that it was such a shame that these factories leaving and going overseas cause they want just a few make a millions of dollars. A company should be run for the people. Naturally ones of those who runs it should make more because they have the brains behind it. I think they should share with the employees and keep families a going. It's just like General Motors, up there, some of them leaders got millions of dollars for just their bonuses. And you just think how far that would have went if that'd trickle down among the workers...kept everybody in a job. They're hogs who want everything and what they've done is cut out every worker. People've lost their lives and everything. Gone overseas and ruined lives. . . . You know when you got off work you didn't run to Walmart or Carmi or Eldorado or Harrisburg. You went to your grocery store right here in town, the dime store or eating places. We didn't eat out a lot. I don't know if the Dairy Queen was there or not. We had the*

*Hilltop restaurant up there. Once in a great while, John would take us up there and eat supper, on Saturday night out. It seemed like that little shack shop down by the high school was open and we'd go down there once in a while. I mean when you got your check you cashed it and put it right back into the town, McLeansboro. I just never could understand why they wanted to take it out of town or take it out of the county and then bring it back for us to buy with money we don't have.*

Isabel pondered her generation's commitment to family, respect for self, and hard work with that of women today.

*The life, if you work and work hard and anything...to me, maybe I'm just old fashioned...there's too much stuff in the world now...people aren't busy enough. The world's going to pot. . . . Women have no respect for themselves. Used to be they respected their family and their self and they didn't stand in front of a mirror primping. They lived for their family, they didn't live for themselves like they do today. . . . We had...I've come a long way since then. The women now days, like if I had kid. Like you're young. Now it's more education and you know...let's get a better house and all that kind of stuff today. No families much. They don't have kids like they used to. . . . [Women] can bend in the wind. Very few people around here when I was growing up my age and your mom's age you didn't break them. You might bend them a little bit but you didn't break them 'cause they got right up and they'd work.*

## CHAPTER XI

## JOAN'S STORY

*"I'm learning a lot of things." [laughter]*

I went to school with two of Joan's three children, we were in band and many activities together. As kids we tried to stay out of trouble. However, one night, her youngest drove in late, so he shut the lights off so his parents wouldn't see him coming in late. Wouldn't you know, the peacocks they raised started screaming right under his parent's bedroom window. I still laugh at him telling that story about those darn peacocks. I thought of this and looked forward to seeing Joan again. As I drove in, I was greeted in the driveway by one of Joan's dogs. He was a loving animal, one who did not seem to have a killer instinct. Or perhaps, he sensed I too am an animal lover. Joan and I sat at a table on her enclosed front porch. Her dog never left Joan's side intermittently napping and keeping an eye out.

Joan is an inquisitive, curious person, one who likes to learn. I find her quick witted and interesting with a turn of the phrase. She has a knack for growing flowers and her yard in the spring is so lovely. When asked to describe herself, Joan elected to "*turn the tables right back*" and asked me how I would describe her. I told her that I experienced her as curious and humorous, someone with a quick wit. She said "*a lot of people think I'm weird.*" We laughed at that. I went on to tell her I see her as a learner because she's always taking on projects, going to school. She agreed that "*I've always got my nose into something. Good or bad.*" When asked what she would want others outside of McLeansboro to know about rural working women, Joan stated:

*We were a hard working group, that we did participate in the money game and as well as everything else, we were equal. . . . Even though we make less money most of the time we're still equal cause we do more work [laughter].*

*I realize it more and more that women who've never worked are still equal. They do a lot of the background work that you never see.*

Here is Joan's story.

When I say I...

This I-poem is an expression of her life.

*I worked at Elders. I done box pleats.  
 I got good at it.  
 I'd never worked in a factory before.  
 I couldn't see that.  
 I honestly, I wasn't smart enough then.  
 I was also fair.  
 I couldn't see why I had to change.  
 I was faster.  
 I mean.  
 I just took it and went on.  
 I watch a lot of things I didn't want to watch.  
 I was very timid.  
 I didn't notice.  
 I say.  
 I was timid.  
 I didn't pay attention.  
 I was busy learning my job and perfecting it.  
 I wasn't too familiar.  
 I wanted to go out.  
 I went to work there.  
 I was really dumb.  
 I've never worked in another country.  
 I am kind of curious.  
 I don't want to visit. I want to be there for several days.  
 I worked hard!  
 I'd think, I'm not going to work hard today.  
 I'm bored.*

*I'm beginning to push.*  
*I'm putting everything I've got into it.*  
*I'm built.*  
*I can't help it.*  
*I was tied down all day.*  
*I was tired.*  
*I enjoy a shower where I don't have to do anything.*  
*I'd get up. I worked.*  
*I still get up early.*  
*I don't have to hurry.*  
*I didn't volunteer for anything.*  
*I did belong to a quilting club. I did enjoy that.*  
*I didn't have time to go.*  
*I enjoyed those people.*  
*I get older I can see*  
*I'd had more experience. I went to Elders.*  
*I wouldn't have taken.*  
*I did.*  
*I wouldn't have been hurt.*  
*I overheard.*  
*I wouldn't have been scared.*  
*I worked before.*  
*I had gone off to school.*  
*I'd have been a lot smarter.*  
*I'd known by then.*  
*I didn't have to take a lot.*  
*I did.*  
*I took things too seriously.*  
*I got hurt a lot.*  
*I backed off.*  
*I don't really like people [laughter].*  
*I like 'em but I don't really like people*  
*I don't really like people.*  
*I appreciated that job.*  
*I was making good money.*  
*I ain't ready to quit.*  
*I've changed that much.*  
*I'm weird I think.*  
*I've always got my nose into something. Good or bad.*  
*I did though.*  
*I'm learning a lot of things. [laughter]*  
*I'm learning a whole new ball game.*  
*I said, I want to do that.*

*I read it, I kind of understand it.  
I go to do it.  
I realize more and more.*

### Biographical Details

Joan was born in 1938. She was 70 at the time of our interview. Joan married in 1956 and has been married for over 50 years. She has three children. Joan was born in Indiana and moved to McLeansboro when she was 29. Her husband sheared sheep and they came to Hamilton County to farm. Joan began working at the factory in 1970.

### *Domestic Work*

Joan described her daily routine.

*We had to be at work at 7:00, we probably got up at 5:00. Made sure the kids had clean clothes, fixed breakfast. Got out the door before they got up and needed the bathroom. You'd go to work and you'd put in time. You were really tired because it was constant all day. Hurry up. Hurry up. So then you'd come home and here they sit at the table waiting on you to fix supper. And I didn't want to fix supper. I wasn't one that liked to cook real well. [laughter] So we'd get supper over with. They'd all go watch television and I wanted to too. But there was still dishes to clean up and leftovers to put away. Different things, different housekeeping chores you had to do daily. And sometimes, there was homework, they mostly done their own homework because they were smarter than I was.*

Joan's day was filled with inside and outside work. Her work included feeding animals, mowing the lawn, and gardening or whatever needed to be done around the farm.



*Some times [I'd do outdoor chores]. A lot of times, yes. For awhile. Some times you'd have to feed the cattle or feed the sheep. But in the wintertime when it got dark early, they'd usually have that done then. It was mostly in the spring or the fall when they were busy with harvesting or planting then I had to do a lot of the outdoor work. And in the summer, I'd have to mow the lawn.*

*I'd work on the garden. But I never could grow a very big garden. . . . I could grow good flowers. . . . Not edible plants. . . . I don't know. I just didn't have that knack. Some people have it and some people don't. . . . Well, maybe I just took better care of the flowers. But I didn't have too many back then because even then flowers was expensive and there wasn't that much money.*

Her husband was a farmer and stayed on the farm. Meanwhile, Joan worked all day, was tired, and had little time for herself.

*[My husband] pretty well stayed on the farm and done his work. He enjoyed that type of stuff. But through those years, there was overtime at different times at Elders. I was tied down all day. And of course, the kids clothes, and the food, and different help that they needed that came after hours when I was tired. There never seemed to be any time for me. Never any time to enjoy a bath. Now, I enjoy a shower. You know. Just a chore you had to hurry up and get through. Now it's kind of a luxury. It seemed like the kids had outside things to do and it was just always busy, busy, busy. Never any real time where you could sit down and say hey, I don't have to do anything. Sometimes you'd sit down anyway but you had plenty to do.*

During holidays and breaks from the factory, Joan and her family would travel to visit family or time off was spent attending school functions for her kids. Time and energy were at a premium.

*We usually went home. . . for holidays. . . . That was always such a busy time even though we were out of, the factory took a break there. But still the hurrying up*

*and getting the shopping done, getting your food ready to go, to wherever you're going. . . . It was hectic. And then, kids had programs and plays and concerts that you had to attend.*

Volunteering was tough to do due to little time by the time Joan worked all day and worked at home, there was little time or energy left for volunteering.

*I never had time to volunteer. It was always too busy until after the kids left home. It was still hectic after that 'cause you had different functions for them to attend with them and all. By the time the last one left, there was grandkids already. No I didn't volunteer for anything during those years.*

*I [volunteered] when [my oldest] was in grade school, he was in a couple of plays. I did make some costumes for that. But it wasn't really. It was just a hurry up, add this to everything else. It wasn't actually a volunteer thing. I think I was kind of out one time because I didn't volunteer for anything other than what he needed.*

The quilting club was a place where Joan could learn from others and spend time with women she really enjoyed. She was particularly touched by the fact that rather than point out work that was perhaps not as good as some others, women just took care of it.

*I did belong to a quilting club through part of those years, not while I was working. They met like once, I can't even remember, once a week or once a month. I did enjoy that. But it wasn't really volunteer. And if I didn't have time to go, I didn't have to. It wasn't anything that I was expected to be there. Whoever showed up done the work. And I think I enjoyed those people more than any of the people I've ever worked with.*

*Because at that time, they were older people probably in the situation I'm in now. They'd done their share of work outside, they knew what it was like. There wasn't the jealousy and all between them. They had one or two women who didn't do*

*very good work. Well there was some when they left, went home, take that work and redo it if it was really, really bad. Some of them their eyesight wasn't that great. They never really griped and growled about it. They just did it. It was just a fact and you did it.*

### *Paid Work*

In light of necessity and hard times, Joan decided to go to work.

*Well, it was pretty slim on the farm and of course, we'd bought his equipment out when we came over here, and three kids in school and pretty, pretty slim pickings. So I went to work to work at Elders because there was Elders and Decatur Garment here in town. And of course, Elders I think paid more. So I went in there and applied in October and then they hired me in December.*

Joan knew how to sew prior to going to the factory but realized that factory sewing was totally different from home sewing.

*Sewing in the factories is a lot different than home sewing. . . . In home sewing you either patch, repair, or cut out your own patterns. You go through the whole thing, cut out and assemble the whole thing. When you work, you do one or two operations and you better get good at it. . . . I was timid. I didn't pay attention to a lot of them. I was busy learning my job and perfecting it.*

At the factory, Joan was paid piece rate. *"For years, it was always piece rate. Hurry up and do this. Hurry up and do this properly. . . . I done box pleats on men's shirts. And I got good at it."*

In contrast to the other women interviewed, Joan did not describe working at the factory as fun, in fact quite the opposite. This was the first factory job Joan had and her first exposure to working with women in this sort of situation. It was quite an eye

opener. By her own admission, Joan was timid, not sure how to act and as she worked to grow extremely competent in her job, she experienced jealousy from other women. She thought some of their complaints were unfair.

*No it was not fun. It was a different situation. I'd never worked in a factory before. I had an older woman who was extremely jealous. And, I remember one time we were doing cadaver shirts. And they were all big. . . . Shirts that you make for dead people. And, they're a cheap type looking shirt and I think they have to have more room and they split them up the back then. Anyway, they were all big sizes. And, she kept hollerin' to the supervisor or not the supervisor but the lady that supplied you with work. And then at noon, we were still eating at our places of operation at that time. And I heard her and the lady behind me, "All I get is sixteens and seventeens, and eighteens". It clicked in mind because that's all I had been getting also because that was all there was out there to get. She was complaining to this woman that I was taking all the small sizes. This is what I put up with. I didn't look at what I was going after. I just, when I needed more work. I just went and picked up. I honestly did not pick it out. I wasn't smart enough then. But, I was also fair. She really, she griped all through the years about that. That I was getting all the small sizes. And I actually wasn't because when you compare'd them, I was doing as many big sizes as she was. But I, in factory work, you run into an awful lot of jealousy and some people can't hide their jealousy. . . .In her case, she didn't want to do all the big sizes. If we had a lot of colors where you had to change the colors in the thread. I had 4, was it 4 or 8 spools that you had to change. I can't remember, it's been too long ago. You had to change a bunch of spools. If one of them you didn't get it tied on right and it broke on you, it didn't go through all the mechanisms, then you lost quite a bit of time rethreading your machine. And that cut down on your piece rate. And if we had a lot of different colors, she'd make sure she got the bigger color or the most color and then she'd gripe, well, one boss came out and told me one*

*time...he says, you're the fastest one here, you ought to change colors more often. I couldn't see that. I couldn't see why I had to change more colors just because I was faster. I mean I didn't just grab all the big colors but I didn't see why I had to do all the little bitty color changes. You know fair, is fair. When they've been on the same color for 4 hours and I've already changed colors 6 time, what's fair about that. Of course, I was stupid and too timid to speak up back then. I just took it and went on. But it didn't leave me with a good feeling like I want to go to work today. . . .*

Joan experienced supervisors as fair but realized the importance of connections and relationships with her description of floor ladies and the hierarchical pecking order within her unit.

*The supervisors for the most part were pretty fair and pretty easy to get along with. I avoided them because I was very timid back then. And the floor ladies if you got a new floor lady you were alright, if you got an older floor lady that was attached to some of the other workers before you came into that department. You was just the last man on the totem pole.*

A process thinker, Joan was quite knowledgeable about different people's jobs and the overall manufacturing process for shirts.

*The floor ladies made sure that the work moved. Like, I was on the beginning end of the garment so they made sure if we were running low on supplies, they'd make sure that the cutting room was aware of this to get the supplies over there to us. If we were running low on interfacing tape, they would make sure that that was brought up. Sometimes, they'd have a little time and they would put the work on your table, especially if you had an order that you were running behind in, an order that had to get out the door. Things such as this. And they made sure that it moved back to the next department. I think right after me they examined the shirt front to make sure everything was done. Well, at the same time that we were*

*doing it. Someone else was hemming the other side of the shirt front. So then they'd go to the examining area where they were kind of glanced at and looked at, and then they were matched up and they would trim these neck lines so they matched for the collar people. Because when you hem a shirt and you put the box pleat on, it's two different operations, so that the neckline didn't always exactly match. So they would kind of trim so that was all even for the collar setters.*

In particular, Joan articulated her competency for her job.

*It becomes like a second nature. If someone asked you something, you'd have to think about what you're telling them. Because, once you do this task and get in the groove and you get it down pat so you know what you're doing. It's just a mindless thing. I mean, sometimes it would present a little problem if you changed materials and they were real difficult material to work with. Then you'd have to kind of have to relearn the process, learn how to handle the material. But, otherwise if you were to tell somebody about your job, you'd have to really think about what to do. I could show them much easier than I could tell them because you just become like a record that you played over and over and over. And you don't think about it. . . . If you were doing like cotton or polyesters, you know, it's not exactly a stiff material but it's a firm woven material and then you went to knits that would slip and slide, you have to be sure that you held that specially like when I done cuffs. You'd have to hold that so you made sure that when that clamp came down on it that it was all smoothed back, it wasn't folded back and it was a softer material. It would kind of shift and make little wrinkles as it went around a curve. . . . Sometimes you'd have to kind of play with it a little bit to figure out what you have to do, how to put it in there, and not get all this stuff. . . . I think when I was on the shirt fronts. I think I got up to...oh I can't remember for sure. But when you're doing like 50 or 60 dozen a day or more I think I did get higher than that but it's just been a long time. When you do it that many times, it's just second nature...you don't think about it. The only thing*

*would be is if you had a shirt to where you had like a plaid where you'd have to match the plaids and the box pleats.*

Celebrations and remembrances of people's special days occurred at the factory. Joan was particularly irritated by the fact that women would bring in food for their contribution to Jerry's kids and the male bosses would deliver the money on television.

*Sometimes [we'd celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, or babies]. Mainly, the thing that went around if someone was sick, they'd pass a box around and you'd put money in. Or if in the event of a death, they'd do this also. That was the main thing. Then for awhile we had like a maybe a dinner a month where people would bring in food and you would maybe one group of people would bring in food and you'd buy a dinner for them. Cause we were donating this money to like Jerry's kids. What always irritated me on that. The women would do the cooking, the women would do the buying and the bosses would take this money and be on television, making this donation to Jerry's kids.*

Joan left the factory in 1978 a little before they closed and went to work at the dress factory. Joan left the dress factory in 1980 because, *"it was going down. And I had gotten where I could recognize the signs back then."* After working in Wayne City, Joan went to Enfield to the bra factory where she stayed around 5 years. Then, due to life changes Joan made a change. *"By that time [my husband] had a job, we had insurance other than what I was carrying and so I went the temp route. . . . which I'd never do it again."* She worked another place for five months, was out of work for three months, and then went to another factory where she worked for more than seven years before they closed. I joked that Joan was hard on companies because everywhere she worked ended up closing down. Joan laughed, *"No, I really run them off. [laughter] Actually, I've*

*only quit one job. It was them that left me.*” Today, Joan is taking college classes working toward several computer certifications.

### Reflections About Herself and Life Today

Joan was quite reflective about herself particular her interactions with others. Working at her various jobs, particularly at the factory was integral to her development of who she is today. From being largely with her husband and kids on the farm to working in a place with many other people, provided an opportunity for Joan to grow, to learn how to be with others, to learn work expectations and other social norms.

*Yeah, you can always learn something from somebody. . . . You can always learn if you open your eyes. I see that more and more as I get older. And I can see where if I'd had more experience before when I went to Elders. Things would have been a lot better. . . . I wouldn't have taken a lot of their gossip as seriously as I did. I wouldn't have been hurt, as hurt by a lot of the remarks that I overheard. I wouldn't have been scared to death of the bosses.*

*Had I worked before or if I had gone off to school... Things would have been a lot different. I'd have been a lot smarter. I'd known by then I didn't have to take a lot of what I did. . . . I took things too seriously. And, I got hurt a lot. So I backed off. I don't really like people (laughter). I like em but I don't really like people.*

Working outside the home, provided money for living, buying food, having insurance. Joan reflected, “[Working at Elders was] *My first really good paying, at that time, paying job. We were able to go to the grocery store and buy food.*” Today, Joan



enjoys the luxury of a shower with no need to hurry and a day filled with choices of whether to do anything or not.

*I still get up early on most of the time. And you stand in the shower and you think this feels good...and I don't have to hurry. So, it's really...to do things anymore is kind of a luxury. If you want to do them, that is. And it's just me and [my husband], so, if I want to do it all right. And if I don't he don't say anything either. When it gets knee high I clean it up (laughter)*

Joan is currently enrolled at Rend Lake College and is taking computer classes preparing herself for a new career. Wastefulness and inefficiency's in manufacturing processes are two things that Joan would like to study further. One of her dreams would be to go to another country to watch their production methods.

*I've never worked in another county. It would be interesting to be there on a daily basis for awhile to see what goes on in another county. . . . I don't want to visit. I want to be there for several days. Everyone's on their good behavior with a visit.*

Joan has worked hard her whole life. She reflected:

*I was born right after the depression and it was really, really hard through then and all. And there was no jobs and when you got a job you hung onto a job for dear life. [Today] changing jobs seems to make you a more wanted person to the next person. . . . It seems to be more valuable to have a few jobs rather than just one. . . . I'm watching people now they miss days of work so much. If you got a job to go to it.*

At age 70, looking forward and reflecting back, Joan remarked, *"In fact its better now than it's ever been. But I ain't ready to quit."*

## CHAPTER XII

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze stories about the dailiness of rural working women's lives from my hometown, McLeansboro, Illinois. A qualitative narrative inquiry was used to gather stories from each woman about her life during the time she worked at a garment factory. Data collected included interviews with each of the seven participants. This study facilitated an opportunity for rural working women to voice their lived experiences. The following research questions guided the study and are discussed in this section.

What were the women's daily experiences during the time they worked in the factory?

What patterns of meaning are suggested in the stories told by these women about their daily lives during this time period?

After an analysis and several readings of the transcripts, five themes emerged that addressed the research questions. Within the dailiness of rural women's lives, women find meaning through (a) an ethic of responsibility and work, (b) a continuum of daily experiences, (c) competence, (d) connection, and (e) resistance. This chapter discusses these themes in relation to the literature review and provides recommendations for future research.

## Discussion of Themes

### *Ethic of Responsibility and Work*

A dual ethic of responsibility and work was the cornerstone of women's daily lives and identity. Women consistently said they wanted to be described to others outside of McLeansboro as "*hardworking, honest people who worked to help their families.*" The finding that work is central among rural women is consistent with that of Adams (1994), Neth (1995), and Walker (2000). In contrast to the middle class ideal of a housewife put forth in the cult of domesticity and the doctrine of separate spheres, women worked at the factory (Adams, 1994, p. 186; Baxandall et al., 1995, pp. 40, 41; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005, pp. 31, 228; Kemp, 1994, pp. 5, 11, 12). Within the ethic of responsibility and work, women's primary role of being responsible and caring for their families was under girded with a self sufficient work ethic where people, men and women, worked to provide for themselves. They negotiated their need to work with their sense of responsibility for having children and childcare. Women viewed their femininity in part through what it meant to be good, honest hardworking women where the goal was to have a "good life".

Integral to family and community, women's responsibility enveloped household management, economic provision, and care of children, husband, and extended family. In this section I focus primarily on economic provision. Need and ought were the primary motivations given by participants for working outside the home. Needing to work was most closely associated with women's family responsibilities, whereas, ought

was a perception based on the prevailing work ethic. Scarcity and tough economic times drove most of them to work. As Agnes said, “*You never used to have much money. . . . We had to work if we had anything.*” Work provided the means for women to meet their family’s tangible needs in tough times. Sarah reflected:

*I can’t even say [women] worked to give their family a better life. ‘Cause some of them worked to give their family a life, not a better life, just a life. . . . their husband’s were ill, bedfast, unable to work. They had to work. If they ate, they had to work.*

Women’s salary from factory work paid bills; bought food, clothing, and houses; provided insurance and medical care; put children through school; allowed them to save money, provided a small pension, and contributed to the local economy. For women in need, working became a primary way of meeting their responsibility to support their family economically. In contrast to Neth’s (1995) descriptions of women’s movement to off-farm jobs as diminishing women’s influence and power (pp. 11, 242), working at the factory when combined with home management and care-taking, allowed women to retain a central place in the family’s economic and overall well-being.

In contrast to the Protestant work ethic, a more generalized work ethic was embraced. Rural Americans are often associated with a Puritan or Protestant work ethic (Kellogg study, 2001, p. 5). The Protestant work ethic described by Weber (2001), provided a “methodical organization” (p. 71) of life oriented toward acquiring goods and earning a living (p. 100) and was directly linked to God’s favor and salvation. The ethic of responsibility and work, as suggested by the women’s stories in this study, was not linked to salvation. Rather, as Ciulla (2000) noted, separated from salvation, a three part

work ethic appears that includes fairness and social obligation, excellence, and personal character or goodness (pp. 54, 55). Intertwined with a strong sense of responsibility was a firm belief that a person ought to work and had a social obligation to work. Muirhead (2004) described it as an *ethic of responsibility and diligence* where “we avoid becoming a burden to others by taking basic responsibility for ourselves” (p. 96).

These women began working at paid work as young as age 11 or 12, took time off for children, returned to work and continued to work in their 60s, 70s, and 80s. In their dailiness, working is what a person does, a worker is what a person is. For example, Sarah said, “*There’s got’ta be more to anybody’s life than just to sit and do nothing*” and Margery too said “*You just can’t sit.*” Emma, when asked why she started working at 16, replied “*’Cause Dad thought when you got old enough to go to work, you needed to go to work and make your own way. So that’s what I did.*”

Whereas previously self sufficiency was bounded within the confines of a family farm (Adams, 1994, p. 49; Neth, 1994, p. 3), now concepts of self-sufficiency are revised and adapted to embrace off-farm paid work. These women’s views of work; however, were contrary to Josselson’s (1996) statement that women are unlike men in the sense that men see themselves as having to work to have an identity (p. 195). Within this rural context, male or female, work is something you do, a person works to provide for their family.

Within their life course, women took time off from work to have their children. The length of the time off varied depending on the woman, but, after a time, each of them

returned to work. Choosing to work with small children was not a decision free from conflict as explored by Margery:

*At the time, I wished I'd be home with 'em. It's hard on women to work. But I don't know that kids are any better off when their mothers don't work. . . . To leave their kids every day, you know. 'Specially when they're little. Seems like there's always that. . . tug. . . . I think women that work are just as well off. I mean, I don't feel like the family hurt, you know, in the long run, maybe some of 'em didn't manage right or something, but it might have happened anyway. But, I think my kids turned out just as well as ones that their mother didn't work. And, oh, probably, I could have done more with them if I'd been home. You wonder how it would have went if I hadn't worked at all. I don't worry about that though. . . . You wonder what you would have done different you know. But you don't know.*

Margery's wonder and retrospection at her choice to work when her children were little illustrates the difficulty of choice in a time when women needed to work. Taking time off to raise children was acceptable due to a woman's responsibility for her family and returning to work in her own time was also acceptable due to the duality within the ethic of responsibility and work.

When women referred to themselves as “a good, honest, hardworking woman” they referred to a femininity tied to an ethic of responsibility and work with certain attributes: (a) a self integrally tied to “other,” mainly husband and children; (b) a person who worked and kept busy; and (c) a strong orientation toward the present. A woman evaluated herself and others based on how hard they worked and how well their families were taken care of. Women were expected to hold the family together through a selfless, external focus on what was good for their family. Margaret observed:

*I think [women] were the ones that held the home together. I really do. . . . I think the one's that worked, worked, then went home and did what they had to do and they wasn't out messing around. . . . Women held the home together. They stayed home, raised their kids. You never heard of so much trouble back then as you do now.*

Women who weren't busy and were focused on themselves rather than family were judged as not holding their family together. Isabel reflected:

*Maybe I'm just old fashioned. There's too much stuff in the world now. People aren't busy enough. . . . The world's going to pot. [Women] lived for their family, they didn't live for themselves like they do today. Our whole life was just around family.*

Working and busyness were virtues associated with good character, whereas, idleness was viewed as being lazy. Agnes who quit work at age 80 said, “*Everybody ought to be made to work. . . . I don't do anything anymore, I've gotten so lazy.*” These women spent little time on introspection or dreaming about the future. They were strongly oriented to the here-and-now, the present moment, responding to life events as they arose. This is consistent with Jensen's (2004) distinction of a difference between working and middle class people, where working class have a “here-and-now sensibility” (p. 174). Women's lives were long days lived in a context of responsibility and work ethic negotiating their life as it happened.

The ultimate outcome for a life lived in service to an ethic of responsibility and work was “*a good life.*” Emma reflected, “*When you look back, we had a good life. We had everything we needed.*” Because it provided a space and context for these women to live their lives and care for their families, McLeansboro was often cited as a “*good place*

*to live.*” Instead of focusing on material acquisition and getting ahead, women focused on providing a life for their families. Ironically, upward mobility often touted as part of the American dream (Zweig, 2000, pp. 41, 42) was not part of their vocabulary given the challenges these women faced in providing a life for their families. In a time when the middle class ideal promoted notions of woman as homemaker staying at home tending to house and family, women were out working. Women couldn’t think of anyone who didn’t work. Margery said, “*The women I can think of that didn’t work would be like older people who had already lived their lives.*” Joan reflected on the idea of women not working, she said, “*I realize it more and more that women who’ve never worked are still equal. They do a lot of the background work that you never see.*”

Clearly cognizant of differing classes, women were highly accepting of differing choices due to differences between theirs and others situations. Sarah explained, “*Most people work because they want’a work and if they don’t want’a work they want to help their families. . . . Some of them worked just to get out of the house.*” No one mentioned these differences using the term *class*, but they were certainly aware that class differences existed. The fact was that some women needed to work more than others. It was a given that women were free to choose what was best for their family given their family’s situation. Yet, Agnes said, “*I never did get away from work.*” Consistent with Zweig’s (2000) views, hard work did not ensure economic security or upward mobility.

McLeansboro offered limited employment and economic opportunities and access to social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capitals. There was a feeling though that



everyone was in the same situation. Agnes explained, “*There’s nothing in McLeansboro, we just take what’s what.*”

### *A Continuum of Daily Experiences*

Women’s identification of themselves as hard workers was situated within a continuum of daily experiences. So strong was their identification with work in their daily life, the most common *I* statement among all participants included a reference to work. Long 17 to 18 hour days experienced as a continuum of doing and activity were the norm. Women identified themselves as hard workers making no distinction between paid and unpaid work or types of work. This is consistent with Gannage’s (1986) finding that there was no distinction between paid and unpaid work among garment workers. Dissection of a woman’s day using phrases such as double day (Gannage, 1986, p. 18) or triple shift (Wright, 1995, p. 216) reduces women’s experience and blurs our capacity to see the improvisational way women navigate the mosaic of their dailiness. Many would get up at 5:00 and go to bed at 10:00 or 11:00 with even longer days in the summer when there was garden work to do. Theirs was a long day of doing, busy-ness, and action.

Their day consisted of inside and outside work at home and working at the factory with little time for themselves. In general, except for the descriptions of factory work, women’s roles, responsibilities, and descriptions of work were typical for women described by Adams (1994), Neth (1995), and Walker (2000; 2004). What this suggests is that within the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society, women adopted a hybrid way of life, one that added paid work to the mix and one that most suited their

ethic of responsibility and work. Oakley (1975) found that on the one hand women were free to do as they wanted and on the other they were never free from responsibility (p. 44). Housewives may have had a certain degree of freedom, but women who worked because they needed to had limited freedom. There was always something to do. According to Joan, *“It was just always busy, busy, busy. Never any real time where you could sit down and say, hey, I don’t have to do anything. Sometimes you’d sit down anyway but you had plenty to do.”*

Women had responsibility for household management and child care with little sharing of those responsibilities with her husband. Women did not complain about their responsibilities or see themselves in a subordinate role. When asked what jobs men did that women didn’t, women clearly associated outside work with work that their husbands did supporting in part the doctrine of separate spheres. Yet, in actuality, women and their children worked alongside men to accomplish whatever needed to be done. Margaret, in particular, said *“I never was much of an outside person”* and then launched into a series of stories about outside work that she did. The amount of shared decision making and leisure time varied depending on the marriage. But as Oakley found, “Marriages characterized by jointness in leisure activities and decision making are not necessarily those where husbands help a lot with housework and child-care” (p. 145). Also consistent with Oakley’s findings, none of the women questioned women’s primary responsibility for household management and child care and while women used the word “help” to describe their husband’s help in getting something done, responsibility for the task remained with the woman (p. 159).

When describing daily work, women did not use the general, nondescript term *housework*, rather they listed different tasks done around the house. Oakley (1975) explained this in terms of housework not being a “single activity” or a heterogeneous experience but rather a series of unique tasks (p. 48). Women were primarily responsible for child care and other inside chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, ironing, doing dishes, sewing clothes and making repairs, and for some, handling finances. Ironing, clearly, was the most disliked task and when the topic was brought up, we shared a laugh and a groan. When asked about changes they most appreciated, women mentioned the advent of wash and wear because it reduced the need to iron. Everything used to be ironed. Isabel said that ironing kept her up late, *“I’d iron their shirts and things, and jeans and then when this wash and wear came out you know, I quit doing a lot of that.”* [laughter] As Margery said:

*It was easier. Yeah. But you know, we used to iron things that we didn’t really need to. [laughter] I used to iron sheets, pillow cases. . . . I’d hate to try and iron a sheet now. . . . You just get in the bed and you wrinkle them. [laughter]*

While they noted outside work as their husband’s responsibility, women and children helped in a variety of ways, doing whatever needed to be done. They carried in wood, fed animals, milked cows, cleaned barns, plowed, put up fence, and mowed the lawn. All of them helped put out and work the garden and had responsibility for canning. Everyone, including children, helped with the garden. Often, women said their husband or children would have vegetables picked so they could process and can them once they got home from work. Women also bought groceries and did the shopping for the family.

Each had standards and routines for getting things done. Some things were done daily and others were done on certain days.

Women's day at the garment factory ran from 7:30 to 4:30 with a 30 minute lunch break and two fifteen minute breaks. Sometimes women would eat lunch at the factory with their co-workers, other times, they'd run home to do a load of laundry or to take care of a parent or spouse. Women were responsible for finding a baby-sitter and usually relied on a family member or someone they knew. All of the women could sew before getting to the factory but had to be trained in their specific job. Joan explained:

*I have been sewing since I was in grade school. But, sewing in the factories is a lot different than home sewing. Because in home sewing you either patch, repair, or cut out your own patterns. You go through the whole thing. . . . When you work, you do one or two operations and you better get good at it.*

Women were trained and could perform different functions within the manufacture of a shirt including making box pleats, sewing the yoke down, sewing buttons and button holes, sewing cuffs, hemming, final examination and pressing. There was a group who produced parts of the shirt such as the collars, cuffs, sleeves, and other parts. Parts were brought over to the units, there were four lines of women with each person responsible for certain aspects of the shirt production. According to Margaret, the units put the box pleats on and hemmed the other front. The shirt then went to the pocket setters and examiners, the button and button holers, and the yokers. Then the shirt was sent to the front tail hemmers, joiners, sleeve setters, where they sewed down the sides, collar and cuff setters, then on to the front and tail hemmers, and then to the laundry where it was ironed.

The factory employed white men and women in various roles. All of the people who worked at the factory were white largely due to the fact that McLeansboro was a predominantly white town. Roles within the factory were segregated by gender. This wasn't a point of contention, rather, just the way it was. Women were assigned jobs in production, sewing and laundry roles. Men worked in the cutting room, in packing and shipping, and as mechanics taking care of equipment. Floor ladies or supervisors over the units were women. Two of the women interviewed were promoted to floor ladies over a unit. All of the bosses responsible for management and operations were male. Early on, women were paid a rate based on how much the line produced, after the union came in the late 1940s, women were paid a piece rate based on how many you actually worked on, then later on, each person was guaranteed minimum wage plus a piece rate.

Women were quick to say their day was "not all work." Each had things they liked to do such as reading, traveling, sewing, crocheting, embroidery, quilting, and other crafts. They spent time with their family and friends cooking, playing cards, and just being together.

### *Competence*

When women said, "*I am a hard worker*" or "*I worked hard,*" they expressed and validated their sense of competence at how they performed and fulfilled their responsibility and work. Josselson's 1996 study was the only study linking competence to a woman's identity. According to Josselson (1996), "a woman's sense of competence resides in her sense of effectiveness in the world" and is derived from "an awareness that

they have done what they set out to do” (pp. 180, 181). Women saw a direct connection between their competence, meaningfulness, and the results of their efforts when they said “*we had a good life.*” The phrase *working hard*, as descriptive of competence, was not tied to an amount of money earned, status, or acquisition of material goods, rather, competence referred to fulfillment of their responsibility, level of effort, the ability or speed and quality with which they performed their work, and expertise.

Woman’s ethic of responsibility and their sense of meeting that responsibility was a driving force behind everything women did. Women did what they were supposed to do with a focus toward family. Women found “identity in their work relative to the impact they had in the lives of others” (Josselson, 1996, p. 183), in this case their family. The ethic of responsibility and work was a shared norm that had the effect of creating a space within which women’s choice to work was acceptable. Consequently, women accepting responsibility and working outside the home was their right and an acceptable thing to do. Women took their responsibility quite seriously and took ownership of accomplishing tasks before them whether at home or at work.

Within this responsibility resides an absence of choice. McLeansboro offered very few opportunities. Agnes said, “*You didn’t pick your jobs. You took what you could get.*” Women needing to work were left with few options and little choice but to go to work at the factory. Women may have been free to choose how to accomplish something but had little choice whether to do something. Every woman interviewed expressed “*You had so many things to do, you knew you had to do it, you just did it.*” In women’s view, a hardworking woman does what she has to with a strong orientation

towards doing, the accomplishment of tasks. Consequently, women were busy responding to circumstances, responding to tasks as they presented themselves with little time for reflection or introspection. Oriented to the here and now and present evolving circumstances, you just do what you have to. Joan expressed her lack of freedom when she said, *"I was tied down all day."* The endless routine of work was noted by Isabel, *"no one day that I can remember was any different."* Margery accepted it as *"just the way it was."* When striving to balance work and family, "each woman finds a way to balance these aspects of her life, juggling, improvising, and engineering creative solutions as the needs arise" (Josselson, 1996, p. 200).

Level of effort reflects women's capacity to accomplish and was a function of initiative, busy-ness, long days, and the number of tasks to do. Expended level of effort influenced outcomes (Nicholls, 1990, p. 23). Women repeatedly described themselves as hard workers or as working hard. Women had to work hard explained Emma, *"They couldn't goof off. . . . or procrastinate."* Expressions such as *"we had a whole lot of hard work"* by Agnes, or *"We did quite a lot of work. . . . we've done a lot of things"* by Margaret referred to the number of activities done in a day. Consequently, there was little time for themselves and little time to do other things. Joan reflected, *"There never seemed to be any time for me. Never any time to enjoy a bath. . . . It was just always, busy, busy, busy. . . . they was long [days]."* Isabel echoed those sentiments, *"I never did have a lot of time for myself. . . . There wasn't no soaking in tubs or anything. I'd take a shower or a spit bath and go on. You'd put in long days."* As Josselson (1996) said,

“‘being tired’ of doing something does not usually relieve the necessity of doing it” (p. 189).

With ability, working hard referred to the speed and quality with which women did their work. These women knew they were good at what they did. Each developed strategies to increase production or to facilitate getting more things done such as developing standards, routines, and particular ways of doing things; multi-tasking; not taking long breaks; playing games with themselves; racing against other women; and mastering a task. Specifically with factory work, women understood the process of producing a shirt, who did what and in what sequence, and understood their impact on overall production and on women down the line. Women understood their production influenced how much they got paid and potentially impacted what others were able to make. Women would get paid piece rate so the more they did the more money they made to take care of their family. Margaret explained:

*We had this line and whatever went out of the line that's what you got paid. If the two ladies up there didn't produce much, you didn't get paid much. . . . We wasn't paid by the piece, it was whatever went out of the end of the line. After we got the union, you had your little ticket that you cut off and it had the dozen on it and that's how much you made.*

Speed and accuracy were important aspects of factory work. “*Hurry up and do this. Hurry up and do this properly*” said Joan. An aspect of speed was the girl down the line had to have your production to do her job. Margery noted, “*If she had to wait on me. . . wasn't good for me. So we would do a bundle. There'd be so many dozen in a bundle. And you'd hurry and do that bundle so she could take it.*” A consequence of working a



fast and hectic pace was tiredness. Joan said, “*You were really tired because it was constantly all day, hurry up, hurry up.*” Margery got to where she’d take a walk after work because “*I was just exhausted from hurrying up so much.*”

Expertise was exhibited through daily analysis, decision making, and action, “sometimes several times in a day with each situation presenting somewhat different dilemmas” (Josselson, 1996, p. 201). I asked each of them how they got everything done there was to do in a day. Most of them replied something like, “*I don’t know, you just did it.*” Probing questions were met with more of the same type of explanation. Women described their daily work as a habit, something you do every day, like a second nature and something you didn’t think about. How this type of expertise is interpreted depends on who you ask. For example, Oakley (1975) noted the stereotypical view that housework is “degrading and unpleasant” (p. 41). Women in Oakley’s study compared housework with “repetitive industrial work” (p. 51) where women rarely “report thinking about the task in hand” (p. 84). Interpreting a woman’s *not thinking* as mindless further denigrates what she knows and her dailiness by disassociating her actions from the knowledge and skills she demonstrates. Schon (1983) identified three properties of knowing: (a) actions we do spontaneously that we don’t have to think about, (b) lack of awareness of how we know how to do certain things, and (c) an inability to describe our knowing (p. 54). Women said they didn’t think, struggled to explain how they got it all done, and really didn’t know how they learned to do it all. As Schon explained:

Often we cannot say what it is that we know. . . . our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. . . . our knowing is in our action. (p. 49)

Essentially Schon recognized that a person's experiences represent their "repertoire" that is drawn upon in decision making and action (p. 138). When situations are fairly routine, a person draws upon their experience, compares what is before them with prior experience, and takes action based on similarities between the current situation and what they have experienced before. When a situation changes, a person undergoes a comparative and analytical decision making process to figure out how to proceed. Women didn't have to think because they were proficient with the routine that was presented to them. Joan's description of her factory work illustrates this:

*It becomes like a second nature. If someone asked you something, you'd have to think about what you're telling them. Because once you do this task and get in the groove and you get it down pat so you know what you're doing, it's just a mindless thing. I mean, sometimes it would present a little problem if you changed materials and they were real difficult materials to work with. Then you'd have to kind of relearn the process, learn how to handle the material. But, otherwise if you were to tell somebody about your job, you'd have to really think about what to do.*

Similarly, Klein (1998) highlighted the role of intuition in recognizing patterns in his recognition-primed decision making model (p. 31). Intuition, said Klein, "grows out of experience" (p. 33). Mental simulation and decision making occurs in response to non-routine situations or when we encounter a pattern we haven't seen before. Expertise, then, is associated with our tacit ability to match patterns and mental simulation (p. 149).

My point being that within the dailiness of a working woman, the number and types of tasks presented suggests a level of complexity that is ignored by focusing on their descriptions of “not thinking” or “mindlessness.” Rather, mindlessness is more a symptom of routine or a lack of non-routine situations. Part of women’s competence is expertise where they literally do not have to think because they have mastered the situations presented and are drawing on their repertoire.

### *Connection*

Connections were central to a woman’s identity and meaning and developed into an intricate web of relationships constituting social networks with social capital. Women experienced connections between family, friends, community, and the economic space within the community.

Women’s sense of self was most realized through connections and relationships with others. Women used “I”, “she”, “he” or “we” when describing herself and others and things they did together but switched to “you” or “you’d” when describing process or things she did. Women’s identity was “expressed by joining others and taking a place within that community that is bound to others but uniquely one’s own. . . . identity is, in essence, a form of belonging” (Josselson, 1996, pp. 209, 210). Women’s mention of significant other in their lives included husband, children, and friends.

Women’s lives were tightly interwoven with their husband and their life was experienced in relation to him. When describing life events, women often began with “I” and then switched to “he” or “we.” For example, Agnes described her work at home, “I

*was home at that time when we had them. . . He worked. . . . We had the cows. . . . I would do that.*” Women’s sense of self was distinct but intertwined with an attachment and bond felt for her husband. Husbands were, using Josselson’s (1996) words, “anchors to their sense of themselves” (p. 216). “*You just want the best for your kids*” said Margery. Children were important to women too although women did not overtly talk about the meaning of having children in their lives. However, their narratives described efforts at care and encouragement. Sewing their clothes was a practical way women cared for children including buying extra nice fabric and custom making clothes. Women stayed up late making costumes and things for school events. Women desired for their children to get an education. Women emphasized the collective nature of family through expressions of “*We all worked together.*”

Friendships were comprised of shared knowledge and experiences; acceptance and understanding; and having fun together. Many women stated that the best part or highlight of working at the factory was the friends made there, long lasting friendships. Friendship was distinguished by Coates (1996) as an:

Intimacy that comes from knowing someone really well, ‘knowing’ here being defined as being in touch with key events in each other’s lives. . . . once a particular quality of link is established between two women, then ‘the time in between doesn’t matter’. (p. 22)

Isabel described this knowing:

*You knew their kids. You knew the people. You knew what their husband did. You knew their likes and dislikes. When they went out at lunch to eat they’d tell you where they went. . . . Everybody told everything.*

The factory provided a physical space for women to interweave their lives with those of similar backgrounds and shared experiences through talking, having fun, and sharing information. “Relationships with co-workers are central to how ‘work’ is threaded into a woman’s identity” (Josselson, 1996, p. 197). Women were engaged in a reciprocal relationship with friends, a relationship that helped them see their place in the world and understand who they were (Apter & Josselson, 1998, p. 27). Within women’s friendships:

We can only be sure we are what we are when someone else knows with us what and who we are. . . . we become self-aware through our awareness of how our thoughts and feelings are the same and different, from those around us. (Apter & Josselson, p. 81)

Through direct observation and conversation, women engaged in a dialogical process of learning about themselves, others, and how the world works. Emma who started at the factory at 16 noted, “*They took me under their wing. . . . they broke me in right.* [laughter] Acceptance and understanding was another aspect of women’s friendships. Because you knew people and people knew you and your circumstance, you were allowed to be yourself. Isabel recalled:

*I enjoyed the people and working there more than any job I ever had just because it was so relaxed. No put on there at all. If you was down in the dumps when you walked in, you was down in the dumps and nobody didn’t bother you. You could be down in the dumps. And, if you was happy, there’s people that was happy around you. They didn’t interfere in your lives. But, they understood what was going on with you.*

Having fun together was another aspect of friendship. Isabel remembered days working with her friend *“that she’d get to talking and laughing and they couldn’t do a thing with us. . . . we’d have a blast.”* Women told jokes, socialized, and talked, all part of having fun.

Women’s social networks were densely interwoven connections between husbands and children; extended family of grandparents, parents, siblings; and friends and co-workers. If strong ties link people who travel in the same social circles, then, women’s connections may be characterized as strong based on the amount of time spent together, the intensity and nature of the friendships, and the degree of similarity among women (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361; Wellman, 1990, p. 198; Wellman & Wortley, 1990, p. 560). Women’s interactions were frequent at work and socially due to the size of the town. Connections exhibited what Varella, Javidan, and Waldman (2005) called psychological proximity due to shared identification, a common objective provided by the ethic of responsibility and work, and women’s inclination to help and offer support for one another (p. 118). Trust was more readily given to those from McLeansboro and within the group. For example, one of the bosses at the factory was a local man who was born and raised in McLeansboro, the other male bosses were from corporate offices in Missouri. Consistently, the local boss was described as better because *“He knew us and we knew him”* (Margery) and *“everybody felt close to [him] cause he was hometown and [the other boss] was from out of town”* (Margaret).

Community was experienced as a reciprocally constructed, cohesive, concept that included relationships, social norms, celebrations, social institutions, and contribution to the local formal economy. Family and friends got together on weekends to socialize, play cards, eat, and have fun. Families got together to celebrate birthdays and holidays. Besides a source of companionship and emotional support, friends were a source of job information and would put in a good word for you. At work, a box was passed to take a collection if someone was sick or there had been a death in the family. Dinners and celebrations were held for baby showers, retirement, or at Christmas and money was collected for Jerry's Kids. Mutual aid comprised of the exchange of goods and services was not prevalent. Joan explained, "*We didn't have to do that.*"

Organizational involvement was restricted due to women's busyness and lack of time or because they didn't enjoy those types of activities. This is consistent with the findings of Gidengil and O'Neill (2006, p. 5), Putnam (2000, p. 94), and Wellman (1985, p. 175) where employment and demands on time limited community involvement. Women generally went to church on Sunday and school activities for their children. Some participated in Home Extension, PTA, or a quilting group, but most were too busy to have an active role or could not attend because meetings were held during work times. Others just didn't enjoy those types of activities, preferring time with family and friends over organized activities.

Women expressed connection to the greater community through their work at the factory and their contribution to the formal economy. Women were committed to purchasing goods and services locally. When women got their check, they cashed it, and

put it right back into McLeansboro. Margaret noted, “*we didn’t go out of town to shop like we do anymore. It was an asset to the community.*” When the factory closed, Isabel thought her life was over, “*we didn’t know what we was going to do. That supported McLeansboro.*” The ultimate betrayal was the factory leaving and shipping the jobs overseas. Margaret angrily said,

*[The garment factories] all contributed to Hamilton County, to this town and the areas around. And, they started shipping shirts overseas. . . . They bring all their stuff in here with us to buy. . . . that’s why our people don’t have any work ‘cause they send it all over there and give them work.*

Isabel described her frustration, “*I just never could understand why they wanted to take [the factory] out of town or take it out of the country and then bring [goods] back for us to buy with money we don’t have.*”

### *Resistance*

Women’s meaning was expressed through forms of resistance including (a) their own agency with the capacity to create knowledge and make meaning from their daily lives and experiences, (b) laughter, (c) creativity, and (d) overt advocacy and action. Rather than strictly organized resistance, women were engaged in creating “the conditions for life” (Aptheker, 1989, p. 169; Sachs, 1996, p. 26), focused on creating “a good life” during tough times where need exceeded want. Women were active participants in dailiness filled with responsibility, work, and connections. High identification with a hard worker role shaped women’s orientation to and sense of



responsibility for that role. Women's view of themselves as a worker was located within a context of feminine and masculine roles.

Women's agency with the capacity to create knowledge and make meaning was expressed as a chosen positive outlook which provided a source of contentment.

Contentment was described by Frederickson (2003) as "the urge to take time to savor current life circumstances, and integrate these circumstances into new views of self and the world" (p. 166). Rather than an emotive response to conditions, women demonstrated an active, chosen perspective characterized by statements about looking on the bright side, taking one day at a time, no complaining, and being thankful. I was frequently reminded of the scripture, "Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am" (Philippians 4:11, New Revised Standard). Paul's contentment carried with it a sense of self sufficiency derived not from external situations but from an internal sense of well-being in Christ (Weedman, 1998, p. 68). Contentment, for these women, likewise derived from an inner strength and sense of resolve, a confidence in their capacity to take life as it came. Agnes said, *"Yeah, but we all have found ourselves up against a rock and hard place and figure out how to go around or over it."* According to Isabel, *"everybody lived their life one day at a time."*

Circumstances were viewed positively, with thankfulness, and a conscious choice to look on the bright side. Margery offered, *"I guess women. . . took life as it came, made the best of it, the good and the bad and there was always more good than bad really."* At first, I thought this might be an example of "the tyranny of the nice and kind" described by Brown and Gilligan (1996, p. 45). Within their narratives though, there was a

distinction between niceness and the kind of deliberate outlook that I witnessed. For example, women were being nice when they talked about another person such as “*I’m not faulting her, she couldn’t help it.*” But contentment had to do with how they chose to view the totality of their life. For example, Agnes said, “*We had a good life and I can’t complain. . . . what’s the use to be grouchy. You just as well be happy.*” Or Margery who said:

*I like to look on the bright side of things. I never thought poor me, I have to get up and go to work every day. I never did feel like that. I’m just glad I was able to get up every morning and go.*

It wasn’t that women did not experience frustration, aggravation, or a desire to complain, but they intentionally chose to accept circumstances and move on. Women weren’t immune to external conditions and viewpoints, they were the sort of women they were due to inner decisions to be a certain way. Women, according to Isabel, were resilient, “*they can bend in the wind. . . you didn’t break them. You might bend them a little bit you didn’t break them ‘cause they got right up and they’d work.*” An ethic of responsibility and work enabled women to transcend their present circumstances and declare, “*I’ve lived a good life.*” Happiness, explained Frankl (1984), is “the unintended side-effect of one’s personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself” (p. 17). Women took life as it came and chose to look on the bright side taking the good with the bad. Josselson (1996) offered an explanation:

[Women] have demonstrated an artfulness in blending and bending, putting themselves together with their partners, improvising solutions, figuring out what

is essential to them, and doing the best they can with the rest. Identity also involves living with what you feel you cannot change (p. 215).

Naysayers might say that women sugar coated their circumstance or viewed the world through rosy colored glasses remaining insistent that women need to recognize their oppression. Quite frankly, I find this view insulting and denigrating to women's lived experiences and how they understand them. As Sachs noted, "rather than seeing women as helpless victims of an all-powerful, patriarchal ideology, we must account for women's potential for creativity and agency within a context of limited options" (p. 25).

Women's laughter and sense of humor further showed that women defined life and interpreted events on their own terms. Laughter was a strategy for connecting with others, having fun, and staying positive. As I listened over and over to the audio recordings, I found myself intrigued at how often women laughed and when. Frankl (1984) noted, "the attempt to develop a sense of humor and to see things in a humorous light is some kind of a trick learned while mastering the art of living" (p. 64). Not all laughter was the same. Women laughed (a) around topics that were seen as incongruous with their identity, (b) at themselves, (c) at jokes and pranks they did, (d) when telling funny stories about life happening to them or in conversation as a sign of enjoyment, and (e) in recognition of the way the world works. Women laughed when revealing things about themselves or at things that seemed incongruous with stereotypes about women. For example, Emma laughed while describing her change from working at the factory:

*You wouldn't believe it now, but I sure was. Bashful, my face'd get red at the least little thing. . . . You don't know what all they said to me [laughter]. I*

*couldn't put it all down. They broke me in right. [laughter] Shoot no, [women aren't pure as the driven snow]. [laughter]*

Women laughed at themselves and others. Joan after telling about how every place she worked at closed laughed “*I really run them off.*” When she heard she was going to have a baby, Sarah said she “*laughed and laughed and laughed.*” Women told jokes and pulled pranks on others. Isabel reflected, “*You had some honery ones and you had some real straight laced ones. They'd say about anything and do about anything. We'd tell jokes.*” [laughter] Women laughed while telling stories about their lives and in the course of conversation. During the retelling of a story, women would laugh and laugh as though they were reliving the event in their minds. Laughter during a conversation might mean (a) they weren't sure how to answer a question or thought the question odd, (b) a signal they were engaged and listening, or (c) simply a response to an enjoyable aspect of the conversation. Finally, women laughed when describing the way the world is and how it works demonstrating outsider-within type knowledge about class and men. For example, Sarah was particularly annoyed at women who refused to buy shirts manufactured at Elder's:

*You'd laugh cause you'd hear people say, oh, my husband wouldn't wear those shirts you make down at Elders. Cause my husband wouldn't wear anything but a Van Heusen, or an Arrow, or a good JC Penney shirt. We made all those. . . . Their husbands won't wear anything that came from Elders. Except that they went out to the stores and bought 'em, a lot of times they did come from Elders.*

Or their awareness of men who didn't work, as Margaret said, “*There was a lot of ladies that their husbands didn't work. Every week when we got out of work there was always*

*the men sitting down there in the car waiting for his wife to go home.” [laughter]* Isabel laughed, *“Here’s all these men lined up out here. And they’d say, boy these men are go-getters coming to get their women after work.” [laughter]* It irritated Joan that *“The women would do the cooking, [laughter] the women would do the buying [laughter], and the [male] bosses would take this money and be on television, making this donation to Jerry’s Kids.”* Sarah when talking about girls’ athletics in the local school system noted

*They had men teachers who were capable of coaching and did coach some but they didn’t want to coach the girls. When they finally got some tall girls that were pretty good athletes. . . then all the men wanted to be the girls’ teachers.*

*[laughter]*

Creativity, in a life with few choices and opportunities, was a resistive outlet for expression, creation, contribution, and power. The role and importance in women’s lives of physical artifacts such as (quilts, lace, needlework, knitting, crocheting, pottery, painting, books, flowers, candles, photographs, or recipes) was noted as illustrative of women’s culture (Apteker, 1989, p. 137). By virtue of their existence, these created objects are what Huyck (2007) called *tangible history*, artifacts providing evidence of women’s lives (p. 54). Beyond their physicality, these objects are examples of women’s material culture. *Material culture* was defined by the Archaeological Institute of America (n.d.) as “physical objects and structures from the past.” It was suggested by Ulrich (2003) that objects were outlets for creativity and expression, symbolically representing power due to the labor that went into them. By conceptually associating culture with physical objects, rather than merely a creative outlet, a craft to be

discounted, these objects have meaning and are an integral part of women's social situation (White, 2003).

Finally, women resisted through overt expressions of anger, advocacy and action. When it came to others, women exhibited a fierce, deep concern, and willingness to take action, particularly those viewed as more vulnerable. Emma described several incidences where she stood up for others, saying, *"I don't care, I mean. If I want to take it that's fine. But I can't see somebody else mistreated when I know they're not at fault."* Isabel took on the school principle to demand an education for her special needs child. After learning what the law said, Isabel took action:

*I was really trying to keep up with things on him. . . I intended for him to go to school. That was a fight. . . . Down here, the principal he didn't intend for [my son] to go to school. . . I said, they got a mandate in Illinois that you will educate the kids, so you will educate him here or you'll send him somewhere else.*

Her son got an education. Women utilized and leveraged more formal means of advocacy resistance to better theirs and others lives. Early on at their work at the factory in the late 1940s, women organized a strike to get the union. This was a highlight for those who worked at the factory at the time, all recalled walking around the square, preventing a loaded truck from departing, and getting the union, a pay increase, and insurance.

Regarding the strike, Joan noted that *"everybody had to stick together."* Sarah, in particular, was quite involved in community affairs and advocacy serving as a guardian for residents in a mental health residence, serving on a governor's council for developmentally disabled, helping to establish a booster's club for athletics, and fighting

for equality for women in girls athletics. While she said that she had always volunteered, her activism began in response to a child who had a disorder and children who participated in athletics. Her actions were an extension of her care for her children initially and a sense of advocacy for and fairness to others propelled her to further action. Women's knowledge that their actions were contrary to prevailing expectations for women's behavior was revealed in how they described themselves. Emma described herself as "*ol' big mouth*," Isabel declared she had to "*be downright mean*," and Sarah said she was "*vocal*" and "*hardheaded*." Regardless, women placed their responsibility for others ahead of social norms.

### Recommendations for Further Research

This study gathered and documented stories about the lived experience of rural working women adding to our knowledge about the dailiness of their lives, how they made sense of their experiences, and their contribution to the rural experience. Given the findings of this research, following are eight recommendations for future research.

1. What are the characteristics of identity in older women? A review of the literature found mostly studies exploring female identity among adolescent, teenage, college age, or midlife women.
2. What are the perceptions of an ethic of responsibility and work among rural elderly, middle age, and younger women? This study interviewed women in their 70s and 80s who shared an experience of working at the factory. In light of societal and

generational changes, exploring perceptions among women in other age groups would be an interesting study.

3. What are the characteristics of ordinary women's competence and decision making? It was difficult to find literature on competence. Decision making literature often focuses on 'experts' as defined by a professional degree or title or decision making within organizations. With the exception of Josselson's study (1996), I found no studies specifically addressing gender and competence or gender and decision making.

4. What are the characteristics of contentment and how does it impact overall well-being in women's lives? This recommendation expands on work done by Barbara Frederickson and others on the role and effect of positive emotions in people's lives.

5. When do women laugh and why? I was struck by the amount of laughter in our interviews. There was some acknowledgment of laughter in studies by Deborah Tannen and Jennifer Coates' on gender and conversation. Women's sense of humor has been explored in relation to the types of stories they tell. However, what are the differing meanings of laughter when it occurs in women's conversation?

6. What is the role of spirituality, religion, and/or church in rural women's lives? While women specifically mentioned going to church, nothing was really said about the role or experience of spirituality or religion in their lives.

7. What was the garment industry in Southern Illinois and what was its contribution to the region, to Hamilton County, and to Mcleansboro? The literature review identified many studies about the garment industry within Rochester, Chicago, Cleveland, and New York. With the exception of this study, no research has been done



on the garment industry in Southern Illinois or its impact on the region. There are two facets to this recommendation. First, the fact of the garment industry needs to be captured and documented and secondly, stories need to be gathered from people who worked there considering they are now in their 70s and 80s. What did working at the factories mean for women and men who worked there?

8. What does a social network analysis show with regard to bonding and bridging ties in Hamilton County? This study suggested that while Hamilton County was high in bonding connections, bridging connections providing access to information, jobs and resources was lacking. What does the social network look like today and if low in bridging, what are influencing factors?

### Conclusions

This study looked at rural working women's to explore the dailiness of their lives and patterns of meaning. Using standpoint theory, this study sought to explore women's lives through the lens of embodied knowledge, gender, and social situation. As related to white rural working women, the findings of this study support our understanding of rural working women's dailiness and the meaning they make from their daily lives.

My first research question asked: What were the women's daily experiences during the period which they worked in the factory? In the stories of the seven women whom I interviewed for this study, the report of findings and the discussion of the findings clearly indicate that rather than a double day, women experienced their day as a continuum from sunup until sundown with no differentiation of paid or unpaid work.

Roles were segregated by gender both at the factory and within the home. Women were largely responsible for household management and child care, men were responsible for outside work. With that said, women worked outside to help with whatever needed doing and took responsibility for the gardening. Endless days of work were relieved by having fun which varied from women doing hobbies they enjoyed such as quilting, crocheting, reading, or spending time with family and friends. In short, rural working women's lives were most similar to descriptions of rural women pre-World War II with the addition of paid work.

My second research question asked: What patterns of meaning are suggested in the stories told by these women about their daily lives during this time period? Four themes arose (a) ethic of responsibility and work, (b) competence, (c) connections, and (d) resistance. Central to a woman's identity was her ethic of responsibility and work. Women were responsible for care of family and work itself was viewed as something people to. Part of this view was that a woman's sense of self was integrally tied to "other", mainly husband and children; keeping busy, and a strong orientation toward the present. Competence was an outcome of a woman's sense of her effectiveness in the world and referred to fulfillment of their responsibility, level of effort, ability, and expertise. Connections were descriptive of a social network that included family, extended family, and friends. Women's identity was found in relationships and connections with those of similar backgrounds and with shared experiences. Friendships were a powerful source of learning about what it meant to be a woman, how the world works, and emotional support. Finally through resistance, women established their own

agency with the capacity to create knowledge and make meaning from their daily lives and experiences; they used laughter as a form of resistance, and performed overt instances of advocacy and action.

### My Reflections

So what? I asked. As I stepped back from this study and considered the implications, several things came to mind regarding research studies exploring lived experiences.

1. Multiple variables such as race, class, gender, and place come together to form a shared history where cultural practices and differing constructions of reality reside. To focus on a single variable is to sacrifice true understanding. I came to a new understanding of myself and what it means to be a rural, white female from a working class family who now lives in an urban area and who has been privileged with education and opportunity.

2. Exploring social networks and social capital rises in importance particularly with regard to place and bridging capital which largely determines access to information, jobs, and resources. Understanding a place historically in relation to a region or a state is critical also in understanding power dynamics, influence, and allocation of resources. For example, an understanding of McLeansboro located in Southern Illinois, must consider rurality and its relationship with the northern half of the state.

3. Striving to reveal biases within existing policies and procedures and their historical formation provides important clues as to direct and indirect actions. For

example, the intentional policy decisions relative to Cooperative Extension based on perceptions of rural culture as backwards and unsophisticated and the notion of a white middle class ideal as optimal for all.

4. We must strive to mitigate our human and/or cultural tendency towards binary thinking such as black/white, male/female, urban/rural, productive/unproductive, sophisticated/backwards. This language is often used hierarchically and oppositionally to denote a person or group as inferior or inadequate tending to reinforce difference. The hope is that through intentional awareness we can create spaces for identifying and illuminating our similarities and differences, a safe space grounded in mutual respect.

5. An emphasis should be placed on getting people to talk and tell stories about their experiences. Narrative inquiry was a powerful tool and experience because participants did most of the talking. When your goal is to see the world through another person's eyes, inter-personal dynamics change. To be heard is to feel respected. I benefited because I was able to participate in the sharing of women's wisdom gained from their unique experiences.

6. Reconsider our societal conceptual framework seemingly driven by economic and consumer indices, a framework that fails to consider human and cultural capital. Outsiders might look at McLeansboro and its residents and proclaim "*ain't nothing happening there.*" What McLeansboro lacks in the glitz and glamour of an urban area it makes up for in connections, in relationships, and in an immeasurable quality of life. Mono-cultural expectations of progress assume a homogeneity that simply isn't true and employs evaluative criteria that fails to recognize unique culture, unique ethics of

responsibility and work, and the sense of community that is derived only through human relationships and connections. We must ask whether progress requires the abandonment of unique cultural expressions and local ways of living. When do humans as agents of their own knowledge construction and way of life get to define *progress* in their own terms without judgment and undue influence from others outside the region? Cultural domination denies our humanity and diminishes us all.

Most of all, I learned and experienced a deeper appreciation for the concept of *women as weavers of the social fabric*. With all that has been written here in my feeble attempt to analyze, make sense of, and describe what I experienced, there still remains this great mystery, a dialogical exchange that occurred within human interaction, within conversation and being together. I was and am deeply moved at my experience within the space we co-created. Within those moments of connection, there is this powerful, transformative mystery. To these women who so humbly opened their homes and hearts to me, I am eternally grateful. I close with a Gadamer (2004) quote that is one of my favorites about a collective way of being in the world:

Reaching an understanding is not....an external matter of adjusting our tools; nor is it even right to adapt ourselves to one another but rather, in a successful conversation we both come under the influence of the truth....and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FOR INTERVIEW

## **CONSENT FORM**

### **AN ETHIC OF RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK: THE DAILINESS OF RURAL WORKING WOMEN'S LIVES**

The Principle Investigator is Alicia D. Crumpton, 602-451-8320, Doctoral student, and Ph.D. Candidate in the Doctoral Program in Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University. Dr. Karen Norum, Associate Professor of Leadership is the Committee Chair for this dissertation and is the Responsible Project Investigator.

#### **Purpose and Benefits**

The purpose of this study is to gather and analyze stories about the dailiness of rural working women's lives from my hometown, McLeansboro, Illinois. This study will facilitate an opportunity for rural working women to voice their lived experiences. Individuals interested in women's studies or rurality will be interested in this study.

#### **Procedures**

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the dailiness of rural working women's lives. The research will be based on interviews. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Washington State law provides that private conversations may not be recorded, intercepted, or divulged without permission of the individuals involved. As many as 2 interviews with each participant will be conducted over a period of 2 months. Interviews will be informal and should last about 3 hours each. Each participant will be asked to recall the time in their life when they worked at Elder's Manufacturing in McLeansboro, Illinois.

#### **Risk, Stress or Discomfort**

While every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of participants, there is minimal risk that participants could be identified. There are no known foreseeable risks involved with participation in this study.

#### **Other Information**

All information will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants. Participants are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Participants will not receive any inducements. Participants can request a summary of the results and will have access to the completed dissertations at the Gonzaga University library.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

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**Participant's Statement**

The study described above has been explained to me and I voluntarily consent to participate in this research. I have had an opportunity to ask questions. I give permission to record and divulge conversations in which I participate during this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

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## APPENDIX B

## COVER LETTER FOR INFORMED CONSENT

<date>

<To Address>

Dear <name>,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research on rural working women. I cannot believe that I'm back in school, yet again! My husband says this is the last time (big grin). I will be coming to McLeansboro on Sunday, January 20 and will give you a call to set up a time to talk.

I'm really looking forward to our time together. The seed for this study was planted a year or so ago when I asked Mom to tell me about when she worked at the factory. I was struck by how hard every woman worked. Yet, when I think about it, we rarely hear stories of rural women and their contributions to families and community. So, my study will gather stories from women such as you, who worked at Elders in McLeansboro. The questions I ask will merely ask you to recall the time in your life when you worked at the factory. No right or wrong answers just your recall of your experiences.

One piece of business....the university requires that each person read and sign the attached "informed consent", basically a form that ensures you know the how's, what's, and why's of what I'm doing. The big thing is that you know that your participation is voluntary and that you may quit at any time. I've attached a copy of that form so you have a chance to review it prior to our getting together. We'll go over it together when we talk.

Should you have any questions before I return to McLeansboro, please feel free to contact me at 602-451-8320 or leave a message for me at Mom's (643-3588).

This will be fun. I look forward to our conversation and time together! Have a great day!

I look forward to our conversation and time together! Have a great day!

Sincerely,

Alicia D. Crumpton  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Leadership Studies  
Gonzaga University



APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## **Interview 1**

### **A. Introduction**

Review the consent form.

Ask participant if she has any questions before we begin interview.

Turn on digital recorder.

### **B. Comfort Questions**

#### **Background**

When were you born?

Where did you grow up? If somewhere other than McLeansboro, ask

- When did you move to McLeansboro?
- Why did you move to McLeansboro?

Where did you go to school?

Were you married when you worked at Elders?

Do you have any children? If yes,

- What age were your children when you worked at Elder's?

When did you begin work at Elders?

How long did you work there?

### **C. Core Interview**

#### **Dailiness**

Reflect back to that time when your worked at Elder's, describe your daily life from the time you got up till the time you went to bed.

What stands out for you during that time?

Describe how your life was the same or different from your husband's or from men you worked with?

What did friends and family mean to you?

#### **Leadership**

Describe an experience during that time where you worked to get something done at work.

Describe an experience during that time where you worked to get something done in the family.

Describe an experience during that time where you worked to get something done in the community.

Describe an event that illustrates the importance of your work within the community or in building community.

#### **D. Transition**

Is there something (e.g., quilt, lace, needlework, knitting, crocheting, pottery, painting, book, flower, candle, photograph, recipe or food) that reminds you of that time in your life? What do you remember when you look at this?

#### **E. Closing**

What questions do you have for me as we end our time together?

<Highlights of Interview for me>

Next steps: I will prepare a typed version of this interview based on the digital recording and send to you by <Date>. I want you to review it to ensure I captured your stories correctly. <Schedule next interview time together>

Thank you for telling me your stories. I appreciate your openness and willingness to share your experiences with me. I have learned a lot from you!

#### **Interview 2**

The purpose of this interview is to provide the participant with an opportunity to provide additions, clarifications, and/or edits to their transcripts and for me to ask clarifying questions.

Remind the person that the consent form is still in effect.

Ask person if she has any questions before we begin.

Turn on digital recorder.

Individual questions were formulated based on review of transcripts.

What word or phrase would you use to describe yourself?

Pretend I'm going to be on Oprah, what would you want the world to know about rural working women?

## APPENDIX D

## COVER LETTER FOR TRANSCRIPT

<date>

<To Address>

Dear <name>,

Thank you again for sharing your stories during our recent time together. It was so great to get together and chat! I will be coming back to McLeansboro next Monday (February 11) and will be spending the week there. I'd like to get together again to follow up on a few things. So, I'll give you a call when I get into McLeansboro to see what time might work for you.

I have enclosed a typewritten copy of our conversation. I literally sat down with the recording and typed, hopefully word for word, what each of us said. Just so you know, I will be the only one who sees this. I use it mostly to jog my memory for what each of us said. If you have a look and realize that I got something wrong, let me know when we get together.

I tell you, as I think and reflect on your stories I grow even more proud of my roots. You women worked so hard and were extremely focused on work, family and friends. Really, what else is there when you think about it? Thanks again for sharing with me!

Should you have any questions before I come home, feel free to give me a call at 602-451-8320 or if you want to call Mom at 618-643-3588, she'll relay any messages.

Can't wait to see you again. Have a great day!

Sincerely,

Alicia D. Crumpton  
Ph.D. Candidate  
Leadership Studies  
Gonzaga University

APPENDIX E  
CONTACT SUMMARY SHEET



APPENDIX F

GONZAGA UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL LETTER





December 20, 2007

Karen Norum, PhD  
Department of Doctoral Leadership Studies  
AD Box 25  
Gonzaga University

Dear Karen,

I am writing on behalf of the Gonzaga Institutional Review Board to notify you that the research proposal submitted by your graduate student, Alicia Crumpton, has been reviewed.

Alicia's research proposal, "The Dailiness of Rural Working Women: A Study in Quiet Leadership" met the requirements for the Expedited Review status of the IRB. It was approved.

We wish success as well as an optimal learning experience for Alicia. We thank you for your support in Alicia's research efforts.

Sincerely,

Deborah Booth, Ph.D.  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

C: Alicia Crumpton

*Office of the Academic Vice President*

502 E. Boone Ave.  
Spokane, WA 99258-0099  
509.323.6504  
[www.gonzaga.edu](http://www.gonzaga.edu)

There are two copies of the abstract. One is in the dissertation, page is numbered, and there is to signature space. The other abstract includes the title of the dissertation, the name of the student and has places for the signatures of the committee chair and the dean of the School of Professional Studies.

# AN ETHIC OF RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK: THE DAILINESS OF RURAL WORKING WOMEN'S LIVES

Alicia Diane Crumpton

The purpose of this study was to gather and analyze stories about the dailiness of rural working women's lives from my hometown, McLeansboro, Illinois. *Dailiness* is a term Bettina Aptheker used when referring to "the patterns women create and the meanings women invent each day and over time as a result of their labors and in the context of subordinated status to men" (1989, p. 39; 1993, p. 86). With dailiness, daily work and women's meanings associated with their work are upheld as valid and illustrative of knowledge and meaning within their social context.

A qualitative narrative inquiry approach was used to gather and explore stories from each woman about her life during the time she worked at a garment factory. Data collected included in-depth interviews with each of the seven participants. This study facilitated an opportunity for rural working women to voice their understanding of their lived experiences.

The findings in this study present five themes about the patterns of meaning evident in the dailiness of women's lives. These themes are: (a) an ethic of responsibility and work, (b) a continuum of daily experiences, (c) competence, (d) connection, and (e) resistance. Recommendations are provided for further research.

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Chris Francovich, Ed.D.  
Committee Chair

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Mary McFarland, Ph.D., R.N.  
Dean, School of Professional Studies