

sible. Aunt Lila and her husband were the first in our family, and the last, to go on WPA. This was considered a terrible tragedy, because it was charity. You did not mention it to them.

That didn't mean you didn't accept another thing. There was no payday in any cigar factory that there wasn't a collection for anyone in trouble. If a father died, there was a collection for the funeral. When my father went to Havana for an operation, there was a collection. That was all right. You yourself didn't ask. Someone said: "Listen, so and so's in trouble." When Havana cigar makers would go on strike, it was a matter of honor: you sent money to them. It has to do with the Spanish-Cuban tradition.

Neighbors have always helped one another. The community has always been that way. There was a solidarity. There was just something very nice. . . .

People working in the cigar industry no longer have the intellectual horizons that my parents had, and my aunts and uncles. They were an extraordinarily cultivated people. It makes it very difficult for me today to read political analysts, even those of the New Left, who talk in a derogatory way of the "glorification" of the working class. The working class I knew was just great.

POSTSCRIPT: "My family thought very highly of Roosevelt, except my grandfather. As a young man, he had known José Martí, the Cuban liberator. He'd say, 'We learned to eat stones and survived on it.' He'd say, 'Hoover was just a mean old skinflint and Roosevelt is just another Mussolini.' But the New Deal did become the basis of a new union drive. And people did find jobs. . . ."

Evelyn Finn

She has worked as a seamstress. It was St. Louis in the early years of the Depression. . . .

YOU COULD UPSET the shop quite a bit. Even when there was no union. You'd get the girls on your side, one by one, until you had a majority. I remember this one straw boss. He wanted us to speed up. In the morning, the girls'd be tired. He'd go through the shop: "Is everybody happy today?" I'd say: "I'm not happy." He says, "What's the matter with you?" I'd tell him: "I come here to fight."

Another girl sided with me. He fired us. "Troublemakers." He had the nerve to say, "I'll write you a letter of recommendation." This poor little

thing, she was crying. I said, "I'd be ashamed to show anything you'd write on paper. I wouldn't want anybody to know I worked for a person like you." Lucky we got another job.

Sometime you'd have to fight for your moral support against your boss. I've even lost jobs against *that*. I was still pretty young. I weighed about 115 pounds, brown hair. I didn't notice my personality because I had such fight in me. I used to tell 'em off.

He just kept after me, this one. Nagged me and nagged me to go out with him. So all right, I said. Boy, he was so excited. We got in his car. He said, "Where we going? Your house?" "No," I said, "we're goin' to your house. For supper." You should've seen the look on his face. (Laughs.) I knew his wife, a sweet little woman. I used to sew and fix her clothes. I made him do just that. His wife was glad to see me. (Laughs.) He never asked me again. And he was an old gray-haired man with two grown sons.

One time I was on piecework. You get paid for the amount you do. But the boss wanted us to ring the time clock. If you're a pieceworker and you're very fast and very apt, which I was, you don't want him to know this, that or the other. I refused to ring the clock. Did they have a time with me! They didn't want to lose me. I was skilled.

"Why won't you *please* punch it?"

"You want me to work here?"

"Why, yes."

"Then don't bother me. If you stand when I come in in the morning, you punch it. Watch me all day long. And when I get home, you punch it again. O.K.?" (Laughs.)

They put up with it, even during the Depression. I had a gift in my fingers. And I wasn't scared. (Laughs.)

One day I took out the whole shop. There never was a shop yet I couldn't take out. This is when we had the union. I was the chairlady. They didn't get us what we wanted. I think they were playin' sweethearts with the boss. So we had a sit-in. I said to the girls: Just sit, don't do nothin'. We sat and joked about a lot of things and had a lotta fun. The boss was goin' crazy. The union officials came down. They went crazy, too. It was a hilarious day. They called us a bunch of Communists. The girls didn't know what it meant. I knew what it meant, but I wasn't. So, if that's the way they behave, I said, "Girls, it's a nice day. Let's all go for a walk." So we did, the whole shop. They got us what we wanted.

After all, I played a big part in organizin' our union in St. Louis. We used to go to the homes of people. It wears you out, but when you're young, you don't think about it. One day, this other girl and me, we're ringin' the bell, and somebody throwed buckets of water out on us. Everybody was not in favor of the union. They were just scared to death.

I don't remember ever bein' scared. Even if I didn't have a penny. And I was supporting a little girl. What can we lose? We haven't got that much

to lose. But some people are just afraid of every little thing. What was there to be afraid of?

There were no colored girls in our shop. The one next door to us had four or five. They did very menial work. But they didn't work with white girls. Not in St. Louis. Now, three of us work together, these two colored girls and I. The rest of the shop can be dormant, but we've always got something going on in that corner. Not a dull moment. You wouldn't think we're doin' a thing, but we produce more than the rest of 'em. Even when we get mad about something, we laugh about it. When the boss nags us, we just laugh him to death.

I never made my work a drudgery. I always made it a hobby. I enjoy my work today like if I was sitting down reading a book.

Hank Oettinger

A linotype operator. Much of his spare time is devoted to writing "Letters to the Editor." "I like to throw barbs into my political opponents. I hang around bars in the Loop. I like arguments and I get into dillies. Even Birchers look toward my coming into the place. When I don't show up, they get worried: 'Where the hell ya been?'"

"I go to work late in the afternoon, get through at midnight. See my friends at the taverns. Agitate. Get my sleep. I wake up, and it's nice and warm and it's light. I go down and maybe have a couple of arguments before I go to work."

I CAME from a very small town in northern Wisconsin. It had been ravaged by the lumber barons. It was cut-over land, a term you hear very often up there. It was a one industry town: tourist business. During the winter, there was nothing.

A lot of people who suffered from the Depression—it was new to them. It wasn't new to me. I was number ten in a family of eleven. My father, who had one leg, worked in a lumber mill for a while. Lost it, held a political job for a while, Registrar of Deeds. Lost it. Ninety-two percent of the people in the county were on welfare in the early years of the Depression.

We could have gone on relief, but my father refused. Foolish pride. He would not accept medical care, even. I had, oh God, a beautiful set of teeth. To have one filled was \$2 at the time, I think. Oh, my gosh, my teeth just went. Eventually, I got to work and saved most of them. But the fact that he wouldn't even accept medical relief—stubborn Dutchman!

He was a great admirer of Bob La Follette. He liked the idea of Bob's fighting the railroads and being against our entering the First World War. I came from German stock, that was a factor. People up here loved old Bob. They had been so downtrodden and knew they had been misused by the lumber companies. In 1924, my mother said to my father, "You know La Follette isn't going to win the Presidency. Why don't you vote for somebody who can win it?" He said, "I vote for what I believe in."

I remember seeing a hunger march to City Hall. It was a very cold, bitter day. My boss was looking out of the window with me. I didn't know what the hell it was. He says, "They ought to lock the bastards up." I thought to myself: Lock them up for what? All of a sudden, the printing business like everything else went kerplow. I was laid off in '31. I was out of work for over two years. I'd get up at six o'clock every morning and make the rounds. I'd go around looking for work until about eight thirty. The library would open at nine. I'd spend maybe five hours in the library.

The feeling among people was beautiful. Supposing some guy was a hunter. He'd go out and get a hold of some ducks or some game, they'd have their friends over and share it.

I can remember the first week of the CWA* checks. It was on a Friday. That night everybody had gotten his check. The first check a lot of them had in three years. Everybody was out celebrating. It was like a festival in some old European city. Prohibition had been repealed, of course. You'd walk from tavern to tavern and see people buying ponies of beer and sharing it. They had the whole family out. It was a warm night as I remember. Everybody was so happy, you'd think they got a big dividend from Xerox.

I never saw such a change of attitude. Instead of walking around feeling dreary and looking sorrowful, everybody was joyous. Like a feast day. They were toasting each other. They had money in their pockets for the first time. If Roosevelt had run for President the next day, he'd have gone in by a hundred percent.

I had it drilled in me: there are no such things as classes in America. I awoke one day. I was, by this time, working for a newspaper in Waukesha. They had a picture of this farm woman, standing in the window of her home and the dust had completely covered everything, and there was a dead cow. And here, at the bottom of the same page, they had a picture of Bernard Baruch. He had made some big deal in the stock market and was on somebody's yacht. I looked at one picture and then the other. No classes in America.

I was making sixty-seven cents an hour as a linotype operator.⁴ At about \$27 a week, I was a big shot. I was rolling. And gradually got involved in the union movement. The printers played a big role in the early days of the CIO. This may seem unusual, a high class craft union went along with John L. Lewis against the old aristocracy of labor.

* Civil Works Administration. It presaged the WPA.