I hereby give the tapes and transcriptions made of interviews recorded on March 1, 1989 to the Oral History Library of the Fashion Institute of Technology, for such uses and purposes as the Director of the Oral History Library shall determine.

MEMOIRIST

Nathaniel S. Love
Signed

INTERVIEWER

June 6, 1989
Date

July 11, 1989
Date
Dear Ms. Felsher:

This letter will confirm my understanding and agreement with the Fashion Institute of Technology with respect to my participation in a series of interviews conducted by the College's Oral History Research Program.

1. The interviews will be taped and a transcript made of the tapes. The tapes and transcript (collectively called the "Work") will be maintained by the College and made available by the College in accordance with College rules and general policies for research and other scholarly purposes.

2. I hereby grant, assign and transfer to the College all right, title and interest in the Work, including the literary rights and the copyright, except that I shall retain the right to copy, use and publish the Work in part or in full until the earlier of my death or __________ 19__.

3. This letter contains our entire and complete understanding.

Very truly yours,

[Signature]

Date June 9, 1989

ACCEPTED AND AGREED:
THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK
BY [Signature]
LEAH KNAPP

b. April 15, 1903
Paterson, NJ

Quill winder, weaver

Brilliant Silk Mfr. Co., jacquard weaver
Louis Messer Silk Co.
Shain & Jacobs Silk Co., quill winder
B. Edmund DAvid Co., weaver mens ties
Miesch Mfg. Co., ribbon weaver
Interview with Leah Knapp for the Fashion Institute of Technology, March 1, 1989.

INTERVIEWER: -- at Westmont Home, March 1, 1989. Miss Knapp, you were a weaver.

KNAPP: Yes, I was.

IN: Could you tell me when you started? What year?

LK: I was 14 years old. I don't know the year. That's too long ago.

IN: 14 years old?

LK: Yes.

IN: Did everyone start weaving at that age?

LK: Yes, they did. They got working papers. They went to work in the mill or whatever work there was to be done. They started at 14 when they got their working papers. You had to have working papers.

IN: Were you the only person in your family working in the mill?

LK: Yes. Well, I was the only one.

IN: You were the only one.

LK: Only child, yes.

IN: And your parents didn't work in the mills?

LK: Oh, yes. My father was a jacquard loom fixer and he took me in and taught me how to weave.

IN: Ah, he taught you how to weave. You were weaving, then, before you even got there, before you went to the mill. Were you weaving at home?

LK: Oh, no. We didn't do no home work. This was all in
the mill. He taught me in the mill.

IN: Did your father learn to fix looms here?
LK: Oh, gee, I couldn't tell you that. No, I don't know.

IN: When did they come to this country?
LK: Oh, they were here. They were born here.

IN: They were born here so he learned here. Was his father in the mills, the weaving mills?
LK: No, I don't think so. I don't know really.

IN: And you don't know if anyone on your mother's side --

LK: They were all silk workers. My mother was a picker. She used to pick the silk, take the knots off it after you wove it. She wove, too. She could do anything in the mill. Then my cousin, she was a quill winder, and my grandmother worked in the mill, too.

IN: So it's really a family affair.
LK: Yes, mostly.

IN: Tell me, now, what was the first job that you did in the mill when you went in at 14.

LK: Well, I went in as a quill winder first. Some woman friend of ours took me in as a quill winder, but then I went and my father took me in and taught me how to weave.

IN: What mill was it you worked in?
LK: Right down here by the museum, across the street.
It was the Brilliant Silk Company.

IN: So you went in as a quill winder?

LK: No, not there. That was another mill. I don't remember that.

IN: You mean the first mill that you went in.

LK: Yes, the first mill.

IN: Oh, okay. So let's talk about the first mill.

LK: Well, the first one I don't know much about. I wasn't there too long. I only got eight dollars a week.

IN: How long were you in the first mill?

LK: Oh, I was only there a couple of weeks or so.

IN: Why did you leave?

LK: I wanted to better myself.

IN: Oh, okay. So then you went to the Brilliant.

LK: To learn how to weave, yes.

IN: Okay. So you went as a quill winder for that first mill for a few weeks, and then you went over to the Brilliant. And what did you do there?

LK: Well, he taught me how to weave.

IN: Were you actually weaving?

LK: Oh, yes, sure.

IN: I mean did they put you right to work weaving?

LK: Oh, yes. He put me on the loom right away and taught me while I was learning. He used to go and pick the looms then he'd come back. He put me on the loom and then he'd come and see how I was doing.
He'd show me what to do and then he'd go away and then come back.

IN: What kind of loom was it?

LK: It was a jacquard loom with a lot of straw. It had a design.

IN: What did you have to do exactly as you were weaving?

LK: Well, you had to push the loom over and throw the quills back and forth. The shuttle goes back and forth. You do that with a hand loom, too. Then you had to match the pattern when it broke.

IN: You had to repair the warp ends as they broke?

LK: Oh, yes, you had to tie them up. You had to go around in the back and tie them up to the harness.

IN: So you stood in front of this loom. How wide was it?

LK: It was quite wide. I didn't measure it. I don't know.

IN: Was it like --

LK: No, not like that. Yes.

IN: So it's about a 45 or a 60 inch loom.

LK: It was pretty big.

IN: And you watched one loom?

LK: Yes, at that time.

IN: How long were you an apprentice? Did you consider yourself an apprentice?

LK: Oh, yes, because I was learning.

IN: How long did you stay as a learner?
LK: Well, about a year or so.
IN: Did your pay change during that time, or were you --
LK: What's that?
IN: Did they pay you less because you were a learner?
LK: You worked piece work so you got paid by the pieces that you took off. You know, how many pieces. You had to take the pieces off, roll them by hand.
IN: How big was the piece that you took off?
LK: Oh, long. Long.
IN: Yards.
LK: Yes. You had to take them down to the office, the pieces. They were heavy to carry.
IN: How many could you do in a day, the first year when you were learning?
LK: Oh, I don't know.
IN: And later as you became proficient at it could you take more off?
LK: I don't know. I really didn't count. I counted when I was there, but I forget now. And they used to have a yard measure, like a cord and it had a bow on it and when it would come up to that bow that was a yard. So you used to pin that on the chart you had there and that told you how many yards you made during the day. But I forget how many now.
IN: And what were they paying you an hour, do you remember that?
LK: Oh, no, I don't remember that, but it wasn't much.
IN: But it was better than the eight?
LK: Oh, I made about -- Let's see. I used to make
about sixty dollars every two weeks. We got paid
every two weeks. About sixty dollars approximately.
IN: There were a lot of other people doing what you were
doing.
LK: Oh, yes. It was kind of a large mill.
IN: Do you remember how many people worked at the mill?
LK: Oh, no.
IN: Or doing what you were doing?
LK: I was only a kid then, you know.
IN: How long did you stay there?
LK: Oh, about a year or so. I don't know just how long.
IN: How many days a week did you work?
LK: We worked six days.
IN: Six days?
LK: Half a day on Saturday. Ten hours a day.
IN: That's a lot of work.
LK: Yes, it was a lot of work. We didn't mind it then
at that time.
IN: And who were your coworkers? Were you working with
other girls?
LK: Yes, there was different people working there.
IN: Were there any men doing the work you were doing?
LK: Oh, yes. There were men. It's men and women both.
IN: In some of the reading I saw that women in some
mills only did the weaving and sometimes only the
men did the weaving.

LK: No different, men and women mixed.
IN: Were they all the same age as you?
LK: Oh, I don't know how old they were.
IN: But were they young kids or were they adults?
LK: Well, some of them were and some of there older.
   There were older ones and younger ones.
IN: You say you worked six days a week, Saturday half
day. How many hours did you work? When did you go
in in the morning?
LK: Ten hours a day. We went at 7:00 until 5:00.
IN: Did you have any lunch hour?
LK: Oh, yes, they had lunch hour, but later on they
didn't. You worked right through. That was in
later years. I wasn't a weaver then. I was a quill
winder.
IN: Now, you stayed at this job one year you said. Then
you moved on. What was your second job?
LK: Oh, I had different jobs. I went different places.
   I didn't always work in the silk. You know, I
worked in Meyer Brothers one time for a while and
then I went back after.
IN: Meyer Brothers is a what?
LK: A department store in Wayne. That was many years
ago.
IN: We're interested in the succession of jobs that
you've had at the weaving. What was your next
weaving job that you had after this one where you learned to weave?

LK: Oh, I worked in a lot of mills in Paterson. I forget them. Messer and there was a lot of Jewish places, small places that I worked in after.

IN: Were you doing the same --

LK: And then I did plain. I worked on plain looms. I didn't always work on jacquards. I learned on jacquards but then I went to work on plain looms. I used to work in a Turkish towel place right across from Washington Casket Company. That was years ago. That's when the social security came out.

IN: That was in the '30s.

LK: Yes,'36 or something like that. Well, I was working then weaving Turkish towels.

IN: To go back to the earlier days when you said --

LK: No, no, no. I didn't go back to jacquards.

IN: Okay, you never went back to jacquards but you did other silk weaving?

LK: Plain looms.

IN: Did you ever join the union?

LK: Oh, yes.

IN: At which job did you join the union, and which union? Do you remember?

LK: That's when I was working on the Turkish towels, I think.

IN: Do you remember which union?
LK: The International, I think. CIA or something like that.

IN: Did you participate in the strike?

LK: No, I wasn't working then. The big strike you mean?

IN: Yes.

LK: My father was in that, but I was only a kid then.

IN: I just didn't know who -- I'm asking you who actually --

LK: But my father was out of work quite a while when they had that big strike.

IN: That was in the teens. 1913's approximately.

LK: I was only a kid about 7 years old.

IN: A question about your coworkers. Did you have good friends that worked with you in the mill your first job at Brilliant?

LK: No, I didn't stay there too long. Only the year. But, no, I didn't bother with anybody.

IN: Were there social times when you were weaving? Could you sit down and talk to your friends ever? Were there breaks?

LK: No, not that I know of. We'd say hello and different things.

IN: But they weren't people who lived next door to you so that you really didn't have a lot of --

LK: No, I didn't have a lot in common with any of them, and we were all busy working, anyhow. You didn't have no time for talking.
IN: Not like today.
LK: No, you didn't. They didn't want you to talk.
IN: Did they tell you that you couldn't talk?
LK: Yes. You'd get laid off if you did a lot of talking.
IN: Did they have people who walked around watching you?
LK: Well, I guess they did. They knew whether you were talking or not.
IN: Your second job, how did you get that job? Did you get it through your father or did you find it?
LK: No, I went. I went myself and asked if they needed anybody. They used to have signs outside, "Quill winder wanted. Weaver wanted," but they don't have that today. They had signs out.
IN: That's right.
LK: And in the paper. You got it through the paper.
IN: And when you went from the jacquard to the plain weaving, were they paying the same type of wages or were you earning more as a jacquard weaver?
LK: I made more with the jacquard because there is more work. You have to pull those cards and turn the loom over and get the pattern and match it up.
IN: Were you working with the cards, too? Did you help set the loom up?
LK: Oh, no. My father did that. He was a loom fixer. He used to make the patterns.
IN: He used to make the patterns?
LK: Yes.

IN: Did any women do that? That was nothing you were ever interested in doing?

LK: No, no women did that. They couldn't do no loom fixing. Not at that time. I think they do now. I think they do now.

IN: Sure. When you left your first job, did your father leave at the same time?

LK: Oh, no. My father continued on there.

IN: At that first place. And was your mother working then in the mills, did you say?

LK: Yes, she worked in the mills, too.

IN: And did she work where you worked in the same one?

LK: No, she worked in different places.

IN: The only time you really worked with your family was when you were with your father.

LK: Yes, that's the only time. Oh, my mother, I worked with her in the Turkish towel. She worked there. She was weaving and I was weaving. That's when they had the total eclipse, the first eclipse they had. Where the sun goes by the moon.

IN: That's right.

LK: We were looking at it through glasses out the window. I remember that, yes.

IN: That's interesting.

LK: They said it wouldn't happen in another hundred years, but it did. It happened again.
IN: Partial.

LK: But I saw the total.

IN: Yes, that's right. I think that in the next century there's going to be another total.

LK: They said that in a hundred years you'd never see it again.

IN: Did everyone stop weaving to go look at it? They allowed you to do that?

LK: Yes, sure they did. They looked out the window.

IN: My sense of reading is that a lot of these places were almost sweat shops. I mean you really didn't have a lot of choice. You had to work all day long.

LK: Oh, yes, it was all work.

IN: Did you have to stand up? Could you sit at any time or were you always leaning?

LK: Oh, no. You could sit down when the looms were going.

IN: You could?

LK: Yes, when your looms were going, but you had to keep watching the back of the warp to see that there wasn't any ends because that would give you a smash. They didn't have smash fixers. The loom fixer used to put it in sometime, and the twister.

IN: When you say "smash" what do you mean exactly?

LK: Smash is when a whole lot of ends come out, a bunch of ends, and then you can't get them back in the harness.
KNAPP

IN: On the back of the loom you're talking. They're coming out of the winder.

LK: You have to put them through the harness, the heddles.

IN: And you did that?

LK: Well, if it was a small smash. Not the bigger ones we didn't because they had to pull the loom up. Then they put them in. The twister would come and put them in. They pulled the loom up so the ends would be long enough to go --

IN: Question. Did the twister tie or did they use a glue?

LK: No, they twisted it.

IN: They twisted it with their hands.

LK: They sat in the loom and they'd twist it like that.

IN: Right, but did they use a glue on their hands to help it hold together?

LK: Maybe they did. I don't know. I didn't really notice, but I seen them sitting there twisting. Oh, yes, I did see them put something on their hands.

IN: Because just the twisting of the yarn doesn't hold it together.

LK: They did something with their fingers, yes. It must have been a little glue that they used.

IN: And you didn't have to do that at all?

LK: No, no, no. That was their job, the twister. They made good money and the warpers made good money.
IN: How many looms did you watch in your first job?

LK: One.

IN: And your second job?

LK: Oh, two. They run two plain looms, but then they started in giving you three and then four.

IN: Did you ever run that many?

LK: No. I quit then. It was too much. I said, "This is not for me." So I went quill winding, but that wasn't so easy either because you had to run around, keep the ends going and the silk was very bad. They didn't have good silk, either. They bought a lot of junk and then they used to put some kind of -- I don't know what they put on it to make it run.

IN: To make it run?

LK: They had it soaked. Yes, they used to soak it and they got plenty of money for the dresses and everything when they sold it, but it wasn't worth anything. It was all rotten silk. [laughs] And you'd pay maybe eighty dollars for a dress. So it wasn't worth it. That's how I know because I was working in the mill. The Jewish people, they used to buy up a lot of junk that they had.

IN: You never knew who bought the silk yardage when you finished? That was never part of anything that you did.

LK: I didn't. That's their business. I didn't ask what they did with it. They used to pile it up, I know,
and sometimes they got caught. They went bankrupt because they were hoarding it up to get a better price out of the stock market.

IN: And they were bankrupt. Did that happen to any of the mills that you were working with?

LK: Oh, yes, a lot of them. They went bankrupt.

IN: And then what would happen?

LK: One time I worked eleven years nights, but I wasn't weaving there. I was quill winding. He went bankrupt.

IN: For 11 years you did quill winding?

LK: Night work.

IN: Night?

LK: Yes, night.

IN: How many days a week nights?

LK: Well, that was only 8 hours a day then. That was only 5 days.

IN: Why did you work at night?

LK: Because I wanted to work at night.

IN: So you could have the day?

LK: Yes. I could have worked in the day. I could have got a day job, but I didn't want to work days. I wanted to work nights.

IN: What were the hours in the nighttime?

LK: Well, the same. 8 hours. You'd go in 3:30 and you'd come out at 11:00. So then you had time to sleep and then get up and do your work and whatever
you had to do. I liked the nights. 11 years I worked nights.

IN: Do you remember which mill that was that you did the quill winding in?

LK: Oh, there's so many. That was Shain & Jacobs.

IN: When you think back to working at weaving, did you enjoy the weaving?

LK: Yes. I liked the quill winding, too. Very interesting. I liked to work. I didn't mind it.

IN: But you enjoyed what you were doing?

LK: Yes, sure I did.

IN: Did everyone?

LK: No, everyone didn't, but I did. Yes, I used to like to work. It didn't bother me any.

IN: Now, you moved out of the silk into the toweling you said. That was the last job that you worked at?

LK: Oh, I don't know whether it was the last or not. No, I wove again, I think, in Edmund & David. That was a big mill on East 18th Street. I worked on tie goods there.

IN: Oh, so that it was narrow, much narrower.

LK: There were three beams.

IN: Three beams, okay. Tell me about it.

LK: The others were only one beam. That was easier. The tie goods was a little harder.

IN: Was it actually only this wide? No.

LK: Oh, no. It was regular material and they made ties
out of it, but it was tie material. Silk ties the men wore.

IN: Were they using the jacquard looms on this, too?
LK: No, those were plain.
IN: Plain.
LK: Just three beams.
IN: You really watched the loom again. You were doing the weaving. You weren't doing any of the putting of the yardage on, or the warp on.
LK: Oh, no.
IN: You didn't do any of that?
LK: No, they have a warper for that big wheel.
IN: So this was after you had done the toweling?
LK: Oh, I don't know. I couldn't tell you.
IN: In general. Just in general. Just sort of a sense of how your work went.
LK: I couldn't tell you when I got the jobs. I just got them as they came. When I was out of work I went to get a job.
IN: What other type of silk weaving did you do?
LK: Well, the toweling and the jacquards and the plain. All kinds. Georgette and crepè de chine.
IN: You never did ribbon. Did you ever do any ribbon?
LK: Yes, I worked down there, Miesch's.
IN: Okay, you did work with ribbon.
LK: Yes, but I didn't do no weaving in the ribbon. I didn't like the ribbon.
IN: Tell me what you did as a pinner.

LK: We just pinned the ribbon. You know, they come in like a little wheel. You pin them on. I didn't really care for that too much. This other lady that you're going to talk to, she worked in ribbon and she worked in the mill, too.

IN: Tell me, how long did you pin? Did you do pinning very long?

LK: Oh, I didn't stay there. I didn't like it. I got out of there.

IN: And went back to weaving?

LK: Well, I don't know what I did. I did a lot of different things. I used to work in a button factory. I went to Rochester and I worked on a machine. And then I worked at Continental Can. I did a lot of different jobs.

IN: Did you ever do commission weaving? Did you do private weaving?

LK: Oh, no.

IN: Did they ever call you into a factory to do --

LK: No, I never did.

IN: One of the ladies that I'll be talking to did do that.

LK: Commission?

IN: Commission in the sense -- Maybe it was Sadie Zonderman.

LK: She did commission work?
IN: Well, someone did. I was told by Arline Bergemann that someone did what I call commission weaving, which is that they may call you in to do samples.

LK: Oh, we did samples, yes.

IN: Which is different than yardage. So you did do it. Could you tell me a little bit about it?

LK: Oh, no, I couldn't tell you much about that.

IN: Why?

LK: Because I was mostly on the plain looms and quill winding.

IN: You were working at the mill and they'd call you in to do samples, is that how it worked?

LK: I couldn't tell you about the samples because I don't remember about them, but I think I did some sample work, yes. By commission work, that's when they do work for other people. Is that what you mean? For other mills?

IN: Yes. Small amounts of yardage.

LK: Yes. Well, I worked in mills where they used to take work from other ones, but I don't know their names or anything. But they did commission work if that's what you mean. They get a percentage on it.

IN: I see.

LK: It used to be a family affair, like, and they maybe had ten looms or so, you know, and they were in business. They used to call them cockroach places.

IN: I was going to ask you what is a cockroach. Why was
it called a cockroach place?

LK: Because it's small. They did it on their own.

IN: Were they in separate shops or were they part of a big?

LK: No. They had it in their own house sometimes and then they had a little mill behind. Oh, I worked on Goffle Road. Do you know where Goffle Road -- I don't know the name. I forget now. I quill wined there. That was a pretty big place. You wouldn't call that a cockroach place. They were small. There weren't too many looms. Maybe the boss would work and his wife would work. It was a family affair and if he had too much work then he'd hire a couple of weavers.

IN: What kind of looms did they have in the cockroach shops? Did they have Jacquards.

LK: Oh, they had the regular looms. No, not Jacquard. The plain looms. Knowles.

IN: What?

LK: Knowles is the name of the loom.

IN: Knowles? Do you know how to spell it? N-O-L-L?

LK: K.

IN: Is the name of the loom?

LK: Yes, Knowles, I think. There's another word to it, but that's one of the words.

IN: Those are the looms that were in these cockroach shops?
LK: Well, they had them all over. They had the same looms. They didn't have different looms. They had the same looms as they had in the bigger shops. They'd buy a couple looms and start as a family affair. The wife and husband, they'd all work there, and as they progressed they got another loom.

IN: Going back to your tie weaving, the yardage for the ties, was it important to keep track of the different colors? Did you have to keep track of the colors as they were going through?

LK: Oh, yes, with the quills. You had to watch.

IN: How did you know? Did they give you a pattern to follow? How did you do that?

LK: Gee, I don't remember that now. You had them on the board and the quill winder used to put them on the first or second pins, and then they'd put them up further and then that's how you went.

IN: So you just used the quills. As you finished them you would go onto the next.

LK: Well, they had them arranged on the quill board, the quill winders. Oh, box looms. They had to put so many different colors. Maybe two black in the one box. The one box moves first, you know, goes back and forth and stops. Then another one goes back and forth and that's a different color.

IN: When you say a box, is this like a shuttle?

LK: Yes, a shuttle.
IN: Okay. So you first use one.

LK: They call them box. They stop. I'd run two or three shuttles.

IN: Do you remember how you chose the colors to go in? In other words, if you used the box with the dark colors --

LK: Well, they'd give me a chart that told me what I had to use. Black on the one box and --

IN: Was it written out or was it a visual chart? Did they show you?

LK: No, I think they wrote it out.

IN: They wrote it out. So you really had to read the chart first, know it.

LK: Oh, yes. Oh, you had to know it otherwise you'd be putting in all different colors.

IN: Right. Have very funny looking ties.

LK: That was so long ago I forget, really.

IN: But you're remembering wonderful things. Was that hard for some people to do? Did everyone read? You read, but did other people read? Did other girls that were in one of these shops?

LK: Oh, yes. Well, I went to school. I went to Number 5 down here.

IN: So you went to school before.

LK: Yes, I went through Number 5 school here. Then I quit.

IN: And then you went to work.
LK: I didn't want to go to high school.

IN: Did the rest of your coworkers read, also? Did everyone read?

LK: Oh, gee, I couldn't tell you that. No, I guess they didn't. A lot of them couldn't read.

IN: Did you help them read their charts?

LK: No, I don't remember that I did. They wove over there, see. They got jobs here when they came from the other side. A lot of Italian people came.

IN: Were they weavers?

LK: Yes.

IN: Or were they working in dyeing and things like that?

LK: Well, they worked in the dye shop, too. Then they used to weave.

IN: They could do two jobs in the factory?

LK: Oh, they could do a lot of things those people from the other side.

IN: Who else were the people that you were weaving with? There were Italians.

LK: Oh, there were all nationalities.

IN: Did you have English people?

LK: Oh, yes, a lot of English, too. Belgium. One I worked with, when I worked nights he was weaving. He was a Belgium.

IN: What did they do for lighting in the evening?

LK: Oh, they had very poor lighting. They had these little green lights with a green shade. They didn't
have it up on the ceiling. They had it over the loom. You could hardly see it. You had to have good eyes, yes.

IN: Did they pay you more to work in the evening?

LK: Yes, ten cents, I think, more an hour. And on the graveyard shift that was the third shift. I worked on the second shift. They got another ten cents an hour. Well, they were only getting twenty-five cents an hour.

IN: For the weavers.

LK: The food wasn't dear, everything was cheap except clothes.

IN: So you had little light. How did you not make mistakes?

LK: Well, the eyesight was good then. I was only young. But I couldn't see nothing now if I had to do it now.

IN: Those people who worked on that shift, were they younger people? They had good eyesight.

LK: Not all. They were used to it, I guess. They had these little green shades and some of them had a warper's cap on, like a peak out here. Green. The warper's wore that and the weavers, too.

IN: Did they have a light in it?

LK: No. No, it didn't have no light.

IN: Why did you wear the --

LK: Well, the shade your eyes from the lights because
they were low, right. They used to wear them to shade their eyes from the lights.

IN: When did the places that you work become electrified? Did they bring in electric light, or was this an electric light?

LK: Oh, yes, it was electric, but when I was a kid they had gas.

IN: Did you work at night as a kid?

LK: Oh, no. Daytime.

IN: Did you have to be a certain age to work at nighttime?

LK: I don't know. I wasn't young then when I worked nights. I was older.

IN: In your twenties or something like that?

LK: No, I was older than that. I was in my thirties. I worked a long time.

IN: Tell me, how many years did you work in the mills, in the weaving?

LK: Oh, I couldn't tell you that how many years because I had all different jobs. But I worked all the time and then I worked in a laundry at the end because I couldn't get a job in the mill anymore because there was no mills to get the job. So I went in the laundry. I was 52. It was too early to stay home, to retire. So I went in the laundry by my house and I only got eighty-five cents then and he was paying under the wage. It was supposed to be a dollar, but
because I didn't have to pay carfare he gave us eighty-five cents. He figured that would make up the difference that he didn't have to pay the carfare.

IN: This had no connection to the mills?
LK: No.

IN: So in the time you were in the mills you were a quiller, a weaver and a pinner. Those are the jobs that you did.

LK: Yes.

IN: I'm going to stop here for a moment. [tape turned off]

LK: The falls, there's a bridge there and I used to walk over that bridge from where I lived down here.

IN: Is that the bridge I came across?
LK: No, that's a different bridge. That's the fall's bridge. They used to have shows there years ago. They used to walk across the falls on a tightrope. I used to cross that bridge and walk down to work. 7:00 we started. I was only 14.

IN: Were the factories heated? Were they warm?
LK: Oh, yes, there was heat.

IN: What about the noise level.
LK: Oh, well, you get used to that. It's awful noisy. Some people couldn't take it, you know, and some of them go deaf.

IN: Did anyone put things on their ears?
LK: Not that I noticed. I never did and I didn't see anybody else. Oh, yes, the looms clicking and clicking, banging.

IN: Did anyone get injured? Did you ever get injured?

LK: No. I guess they did, but I never got injured. It was noisy, but you didn't mind it. You got used to that. Oh, it was awful noisy. Now I couldn't take it now I don't think. All that noise.

IN: I've been in a spinning mill. They're very noisy.

LK: You have? A spinning mill? Oh, they had a flax spinning mill here.

IN: They did?

LK: In Paterson.

IN: Did you ever work there?

LK: No. I went for a job there but they wasn't hiring. Yes, flax.

IN: Did you know how to spin?

LK: No. They were hiring learners, taking learners.

IN: Did they pay the same type wages?

LK: Oh, yes, but they didn't pay nothing in those days because everything was cheap. The rent was cheap. Look at the rents now, five, six, seven-hundred. My God, how can they do it?

IN: It's very hard. [tape turned off]

LK: The ends were all down. The bobbins. You know what bobbins are? Well, then they'd all be empty and I had to fill them all up again after filling up the
battery. Then I had to fill up the quill winding machines.

IN: For the 40 looms?
LK: Yes, and I had to quill wind for 40 looms.

IN: And when were you doing this? Was this before --
It was after the jacquard weaving. It was after the

LK: Oh, this is when I was older.
IN: You were older doing this.
LK: Oh, I worked all my life.
IN: That was considered a skilled job.
LK: Oh, yes, it was. That was skilled work. My father
wanted to put me in Drake's Business School, but I
didn't want to go. I didn't want no business. The
business I liked for myself, but I don't want to do
it for other people. You were more your own boss
when you was a weaver. You did what you want as
long as you did the work right. Nobody stood over
you or anything.

IN: But you had to be there for a certain amount of
time.

LK: Oh, yes, sure. Well, I didn't mind that. But as
far as going in to learn to be a book keeper or
anything like that, I didn't want to do that.
Although I can do it for myself. That's good enough
for me.

IN: And so you did these 41 looms. Did the union like
that you watched that many looms?

LK: Oh, yes, sure.

IN: They didn't say you had to get much higher wages? What was the union doing?

LK: They were within the union. They was within the union. I got the union price, which was -- God, that wasn't much either.

IN: What was that, do you remember?

LK: Oh, let's see. I only got about twenty-eight dollars a week, I think, at that time when I worked at nights. About twenty-eight dollars a week. They paid by the week then. Before they used to pay every two weeks in the beginning, but then later on they paid every week. Eight hours a day.

IN: Eight hours a day six days a week, or did --

LK: No, five.

IN: Do you remember when that started?

LK: No, I don't remember that.

IN: It must have been in the '30s, do you think?

LK: I think it was before.

IN: And there were no children working any of these looms that were younger than the 14?

LK: No, they had to be age 16 then later on. You had to be 16 before you could get working papers.

IN: So when you started you could start at 14.

LK: But other people had to be 16 to work. I had a friend of mine, she had to be 16 to get her working
papers.

IN: Because she started later?

LK: 16.

IN: How could you start at 14, then? Was that the rule when you started?

LK: That was the law, but you had to get working papers. But now it's 16.

IN: Yes, now.

LK: Even now I think 16. But you still have to have working papers.

IN: And where did you get your working papers?

LK: Oh, gee, I don't know. I guess from the city of Paterson probably. My father must have got them. I don't remember going down getting working papers.

IN: During your years did you basically live at home or did you have your own place? Your whole family was working, your father and your mother. Your mother was periodically working, weaving. Did you live at home during those years?

LK: Yes.

IN: Were young women allowed to live alone?

LK: Well, later on I did.

IN: But in the beginning you really had to.

LK: Well, that's about all I could tell you, I guess.

IN: You've told me a lot. We will stop at this point.

LK: I don't know whether Sadie will have too much. She worked in that ribbon mill. She worked down on Ryle
Avenue, I think, but she'll tell you about it.

End of Interview
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