

IVA DIMITROVA: It is June 30, 2015, and I am conducting an interview for the project “Memory in Transition.” Hello.

INTERVIEWEE: Hello.

IVA DIMITROVA: To begin, can you introduce yourself with your full name and date of birth?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, my name is [name of interviewee]. I am born on [date of birth] in the village of [name of village].

IVA DIMITROVA: [name of village].

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: Can you describe what your childhood was like, what it was like in the village when you were growing up, those kinds of things?

INTERVIEWEE: I grew up in a typical village family. My childhood was very nice, just free. We played. It was very fun in the neighborhood, lots of kids. Overall I had a very happy childhood.

IVA DIMITROVA: And your parents, where did they work?

INTERVIEWEE: Well my parents, they were in the then-established agricultural co-op, and they were supervisors. They were people who worked with raising crops. And the entire day they would go to work. At night they returned home. My grandmother and I—she cooked, I just fetched her water. I had a very, very just beautiful childhood. I would go quickly to fetch water, and I would run off to play again. Yes, I helped out in the domestic chores too, I even helped in the garden. In all, I learned to work, even from when I was young.

IVA DIMITROVA: Until what grade were you in school in [name of village]?

INTERVIEWEE: Until eighth grade.

IVA DIMITROVA: And then?

INTERVIEWEE: Until eighth grade. After that I really wanted to study at the economics high school in Plovdiv, but it so happened that it was a big dream of mine, and work in general. But I missed the deadline or something, however it happened, and at the last minute they enrolled me here in the professional technical school in Sopot. I was the first cohort for the technical education. Moreover they prepare workers for the plant. And so I finished the three years, and then I began working at the plant.

IVA DIMITROVA: So you knew that you would work at the plant?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. They almost marched us into the plant.

IVA DIMITROVA: Marched you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: What does that mean?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, marching. It's like a march, everybody from our class—we were greeted by the manager, who was the director of Classified Information, Vasil Popov. And then he welcomes us as workers, new workers of the plant. Right at that time they had built the new Department 230, the plant was already growing. And so.

IVA DIMITROVA: What year did you graduate from the technical school?

INTERVIEWEE: I graduated in 1969. And so, I started working in Department 239.

IVA DIMITROVA: What did that department manufacture?

INTERVIEWEE: Special production—arms production. In reality, it's only the parts. It's not—parts are manufactured specifically for a given product. But I married in 1970, and in 1971 my first daughter was born. After that on January 10, 1972 I switched to public catering which is part of the cafeterias.

IVA DIMITROVA: 1972.

INTERVIEWEE: 1972, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: And how did that happen? Did they ask you or did you submit a request?

INTERVIEWEE: Well yes, I submitted a request. I found out that there is an open position, and they hired me as a cashier-invoice manager. Yes. And so. And I started working in the cafeterias and was there until the end—at the very end I was [working] here at the town center. But I've spent—actually the cashier-invoice manager was classified as an accounting position. I made calculations of the recipes. Accounting lists, more specifically.

IVA DIMITROVA: Calculations in what sense?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, every recipe is calculated.

IVA DIMITROVA: How much products to use?

INTERVIEWEE: How much products, yes. So, flour, salt, and so on. And everything is lined up and all of the desserts—and after that everything is summed up, everything is weighed. Like the overall quantity.

IVA DIMITROVA: These things for all of the cafeterias?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, for all of the cafeterias we calculated them separately. At that time there were four cafeterias.

IVA DIMITROVA: What were the numbers? How big were the quantities?

INTERVIEWEE: Large quantities were prepared. At that time the plant worked in full force and a lot of food was prepared. Around 700, 800 dishes were made—soups, desserts, a whole list of things were prepared. Many, many things. It was very difficult. There was a lot of work at that time. And yes—well,

and the businesses. We had a lot of stores then, a lot of business. We also had a greenhouse. Vegetables. During the explosion [note: the plant explosion of 1978] it was destroyed, but they built a new one after that.

IVA DIMITROVA: Which? The greenhouse?

INTERVIEWEE: The greenhouse, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: It was destroyed by the explosion?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, it was destroyed. It [the explosion] was right next to it, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: It was inside the plant?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: The greenhouse?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, yes. But because this [explosives] department—they already moved everything out to Iganovo, after that.

IVA DIMITROVA: Isn't it dangerous, to produce food like that?

INTERVIEWEE: No, no. It was a warehouse. It was a warehouse.

IVA DIMITROVA: Tell me about what you were saying how you made calculations, what tools you used. You say the calculators were an improvement?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, at the beginning we didn't have adding machines. There were those—they were black machines with sliders, with entering the number and you wound it up with handle and it multiplied. We mostly used multiplication. To multiply the lists. This quantity by its price is this much. You multiply and add. But with addition, you only add. Well, they had a handle, they were black. But when I started at the Worker Provision Department, we had the Nezabravka Lodge, we had mules, which transported the food up to the lodge.

IVA DIMITROVA: What does "mule" mean? [note: confusion about word in Bulgarian]

INTERVIEWEE: A mule. A mule is a cross between a horse and donkey. Yes. They are strong. And with them they brought the food up to the lodge. People would vacation there. Yes, after that they started using a tractor, with a trailer behind it specially made to haul the food. And finally, they built the lift. And so. Calculations, yes. Calculations were made from the recipe—the technologists compiled the recipes, whereas we only—it [the recipe] is made, for example, for one hundred portions. And based on these 100 portions, you calculate for 50, for 200, for however many. But plus or minus, whether through overspending or saving, you keep track so you don't go over with the amounts. They are written correctly more or less. And that is how I worked.

IVA DIMITROVA: Tell me about your coworkers. What did you all do? How did you get along?

INTERVIEWEE: We were one group, all young—more or less the same age. When you start with the people born in 1945, for example, to those born in 1955 or 1957. And we just understood each other a lot, a lot. We were like a family. And we did, like family dinners. It was very, very nice.

IVA DIMITROVA: So you all met up outside of the plant?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, outside the plant. We knew each other, in all, like a family knows each other. We knew each others' children, we celebrated the kids'—you know, who was accepted as a student, who did that and that—it was a great joy, being almost all one age like that, and our children were more or less within one, two, three years [age] difference. And it was very nice. Very, very nice. I still have these memories, with those people that we would get together. And we see each other now especially—and it's like they are relatives, I care for them more than just as relatives my coworkers, and those who have gone on from this earth, may they rest in peace, because there are some of those. We never fought. We would have squabbles over work things, arguments. But we weren't—we were always very close and we helped each other a lot. Yes, we were like friends. I regard my friend Sisi as a sister to me. We would tell each other everything—I could tell her everything, and she could share with me. And we always understood each other very well, and when she died—it was very hard for me. I had to take three sick days because I couldn't sleep, she was always there before my eyes. It's almost like I looked frightened. Yes. It was very hard for me, her death. Because all of a sudden she—she would always tell me 'you are a workaholic.' I would tell her, "well, you are the same." She—yes. Our generation is like that. We went to provide agricultural assistance, when that was still a requirement.

IVA DIMITROVA: From the plant?

INTERVIEWEE: There was Agricultural Assistance from the plant. It included a pork farm, a cow farm, plant breeding, greenhouse, and what else? There were four things. We would go plant onions. It snowed, we headed out to plant onions. To dig cabbage. We also dug tomatoes, we tied them. We worked very, very hard. But all of this was produced for the cafeterias. It was counted as a revenue going into the cafeterias. Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: So there is?

INTERVIEWEE: And parsley, carrots—everything. All of this was accounted for. And we had an account for everything that was produced: be it meat, be it vegetables, be it anything produced for financial assistance. It was considered as one branch, Agricultural Assistance.

IVA DIMITROVA: How often did you go there?

INTERVIEWEE: We had a pig farm with boards, with mothers, pig mothers, little piglets, those who were still milking. In addition, others for fattening up. In addition we had a cow farm—we had calves for fattening up, those who were still milking. We had a mountain shepherd who would lead out the cows to pasture on the mountain. They also had calves, and there were also milk cows—55 at Paytalka, the Paytalka area. But after that they sold it off. Everything was made—mechanized, feeders, these transparent strips for feeding. We had a freezer, to store the milk. We also gave the milk to the milk plant

in Karlovo. All of this was—yes. We had everything, including meat for the cafeterias—fresh meat was slaughtered. At the beginning, before the [democratic] transition, we had a 45% decrease in price of food. And including the five percent that came from discounts, that made it about 50% price reduction. And the cafeterias fed a lot of people. But after that, when the transition did come, all of this went away, and now what price you purchase it for is what you sell it for. They began to include the DDS, to implement it.

IVA DIMITROVA: What is DDS?

INTERVIEWEE: 20% on items.

IVA DIMITROVA: A tax?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, and when the DDS was factored in, it became more expensive. But it is still in place now. It is everything, not only here. And so.

IVA DIMITROVA: Let's talk a little about the democratic transition and after that we will talk about your participation in the dancing—not in dancing but in?

INTERVIEWEE: Performing arts.

IVA DIMITROVA: In the singing ensemble?

INTERVIEWEE: Performing arts group.

IVA DIMITROVA: But for example, what did you see—what kind of changes did you see, as you said, during the transition?

INTERVIEWEE: Ah, we had a recreation division. The fourth one was a recreation division. Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: So, what changes did you see—for example, from your perspective, how quickly did these [financial] accounts begin to change and the money coming into these enterprises?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, when computers were introduced, it started to, everything was accounted for centrally. The accounting was done on the computers, right. They made a diagram. And so the accounting books became less used, just like writing by hand.

IVA DIMITROVA: But from the point of view of the difference between the enterprises, such as the cow farm, and those kinds of things?

INTERVIEWEE: Well there were developed—until recently I still had the purchase list off which we worked. From the central office they would make the lists, and we would work with them. And when they started using those for the accounts, everything was calculated: the incomes, the expenses, the leftover sums. The accounts for materials, for the packaging, everything was now accounted for. And everything was done on the computer, and it made it much easier because the figures were already calculated for you. It calculated them itself.

IVA DIMITROVA: Did you see a difference in the figures in the years follow 1990? For example, a decrease?

INTERVIEWEE: After 1990—

IVA DIMITROVA: Was it apparent in the numbers? In the sums?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, it was apparent that the work was becoming easier. That is why they started to lay off people because when there isn't that much volume of work, and the work was becoming easier. But when they started selling off—and they first sold off the Youth Center, it was also part of our plant. The Youth Center. The cinema. Then the pasture. Then the cow farm. And finally the pig farm, the greenhouse—everything was gone by then. Only one cafeteria remained, the cafeteria system, and only one cafeteria was still open. No, at the beginning there were—there was a banitsa stand [note: a savory pastry]—they made banitsa, it was in Cafeteria #4. So there was Cafeteria #1, Cafeteria #2 and they closed that one and there was only one cafeteria left. And by that point, there was almost no work. Yes. And they started to move people around and to redirect them. That is why I went over to the pavilion at the center—at the pavilion. Yes, that is where I worked last. I was...

IVA DIMITROVA: The pavilion in?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, It was like a buffet. I sold coffee.

IVA DIMITROVA: Was it still part of the plant?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, yes, yes still part of us, part of the WPD. Wafers, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: The WPD, I don't know—

INTERVIEWEE: Also prepared food from the cafeterias, they brought food for lunch. And I sold meatballs, steaks for lunch. Those people working at the centre could buy them for lunch. And that was the last thing.

IVA DIMITROVA: I don't think that you mentioned what WPD stands for.

INTERVIEWEE: Worker Provision Department. Public catering. That was at first—later they renamed it PCTR—Public Catering, Trade, and Recreation Department. That's how it was. The recreation division. But later—yes, that was it. But the old name was WPD. (laughs) Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: During these years when the layoffs began, were you—did you feel frightened about losing your job?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, no. I have never felt—I have always thought that I am lucky in life. At the very end, I work at the buffet, and then I retired because for thirty-something years I had worked just there. Thirty-seven, thirty-eight. Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: Like you mentioned before, can you tell me about how people would come by to see you? (laughs)

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, when I worked at the buffet here at the centre, since this buffet had been closed down and they decided to reopen it, because they had moved it. They relocated many accountants to the Computational Center building. And I was lucky to go there to work. We cleaned up everything, and when they see that I am enthusiastic, that I want everything to look nice—and they came too. We washed the lampshades, we washed everything—the windows, the floor, everything shined, we stocked up. And it was all just very pleasant for me, and I kept it clean—I hung up curtains. And it was very pleasant, because I kept it clean. And so. In addition to that, I was very bright. At the beginning I was scared of handling money, because I wasn't very used to it. But after that I became used to it. And there were many, many—I was very happy when people came to visit. And they always said, can't we just come in to see you and say 'Good morning' and go on up, even if we don't buy anything, we go on up just to see you. And I always had a smile on my face. I love working with people. And they all have a lot of respect for me now. All of them respect me a lot. When I go to the store here, when they come by from the centre—they never just pass me by, never. They always tell me, "you are always so dressed-up, always so put-together, and always so smiley." I say, "I wish for you to be this way at my age." (laughs)

IVA DIMITROVA: Well...—

INTERVIEWEE: That is life.

IVA DIMITROVA: I was going to ask—

INTERVIEWEE: To be happy.

IVA DIMITROVA: About the reception area, is that what you called it?

INTERVIEWEE: Which one?

IVA DIMITROVA: That room that you showed me here [pointing to a photo], what is it called?

INTERVIEWEE: Ah, that is the guest room.

IVA DIMITROVA: The guest room.

INTERVIEWEE: The guest room in the cafeteria. Yes. In Cafeteria #1. The main cafeteria.

IVA DIMITROVA: What kind of people would eat there?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, at the beginning all the directors ate there, all of the guests—the directors had the right to eat there. At the very beginning when I started working there, before they renovated it, before they did the new renovations, everybody ate there. Even everybody from the National Economic Alliance (NEO) would eat there, and there were two waitresses who waited on everybody and took orders, like at a restaurant. After that when they did the renovation it ended—it began to be only for guests, delegations, they hosted them in that guest room. My daughter worked there as a waitress, my younger daughter, this one [points at photo]. She is photographed there, this is her with her apron—she is the one with the white apron. Stefan had photographed her, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: Can you tell me about your participation in the singing ensemble?

INTERVIEWEE: My performing arts experience is very long. I started singing from when I was small. When I was still in the village. At the beginning I started singing “Ruma Moma”, and I was too shy to go out front when I was in the choir, I would sing from my spot. Because I was shy. And only afterwards did I begin to go out front on my own, I even sang at gatherings, in the open, in the festivals in the villages there around Karlovo. But when I came to study at Sopot, I also participated in festivals—every year we had festivals in the technical high school. And I was won awards, I wanted to show them to you, but I couldn’t find them. I don’t remember where I have put them. And after that when I started working at the plant, I began to sing. Right away I joined the choir. And we would go—we performed in the departments. I have always sung, like before, on my own. And they always called me the folk singer [name of interviewee]. I was called [maiden name] because it was my father’s name. Uncle Kolyo was a very, very good director and he respected us. After that I sang under direction of Donka Koleva, and after that I went with Andonova in the a cappella group. Because in group singing, with just voices, without accompaniment. And that was with Andonova until the end until—and that was the end, they fired her and she disbanded the choir. I sang with her until the end.

IVA DIMITROVA: What year did they disband the choir?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, was it after 1995? They stopped it either 1995 or 1996. And then in 1997 or 1998 they sold the vacation post in Nesebar. I used to go there to work. I went as an accountant, and stayed for about two weeks at a time. But I’ve participated a lot in the performing arts especially. We even went to Slovakia. I’ve gone three times to Slovakia.

IVA DIMITROVA: Where did you sing there?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, in the Kisutsko Novo [sp?] area around Vashka Bistritsa. Around there mostly. We always went there. We were accustomed to it.

IVA DIMITROVA: And in front of whom did you sing? In front of what kind of people?

INTERVIEWEE: A really large audience, especially at Vlashka Bistritsa. When we went in 1982, the very first year—after that in 1986 and 1988. In 1982 we went together with the dancing group. We choreographed together with them. And I won’t ever forget that we sang “Dear traveler, young traveler.” We were three women who sang. And to me it was—and it left such a strong memory that—we go out in front of the audience—a dark room and the three of us sing and it’s as if you are singing within an abyss. You can’t imagine the feeling I experienced of being a Bulgarian. It’s just. They don’t sing that song anymore, but it is very—“Dear traveler, young traveler went out to see the stranger world” or however it goes. A very good song, and those voices would pour out. It was something divine. Our trio sang folk songs. The trio, folk songs. To start, three voices would sing and after that the choir would join in. Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: And what other good memories do you have?

INTERVIEWEE: Of what? The performing arts?

IVA DIMITROVA: Of traveling, of singing.

INTERVIEWEE: Of traveling? Well, I have always been—how should I say it—loved. People have always preferred me in choosing me to sing with them. And I have always had this kind of higher feeling about my identity, that nonetheless they valued me and my voice. They would always tell me that I had a velvet voice when I sang. And I sing at home now. When I am home alone I sing and I make various variations and I listen to myself and I tell myself, “no here you didn’t do it well, now repeat, another time.”

IVA DIMITROVA: Like your own director?

INTERVIEWEE: I find peace in the songs. For example, when I am very sad about something or something is tormenting me, the music plays and I sing and in that moment I forget about everything because I am already thinking about the following song. It floats up into my consciousness that the next song is this one, the next one is that one. And I don’t think about anything else at all. I find my peace through songs. Especially Macedonian songs, they are my favorite. Pirin songs. But not Chalga, not Chalga [note: Chalga is a Bulgarian pop-folk genre]. I don’t even want to say a word about chalga. Yes. But otherwise, classical singing, operettes and those kinds of things—my voice isn’t that developed, however. In the Karlovo choir I sang these kinds of songs, church songs too. Yes. “Our Father,” you know, I sang those kinds of songs. [begins to sing] “Our Father” ...

IVA DIMITROVA: Can I ask you to sing something when we finish at the end because I have to set it for a lower volume.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: When you would go from department to department, on what occasion did you go to the plant to perform?

INTERVIEWEE: We went to festivals, we went to festivals.

IVA DIMITROVA: In the departments of the plant itself?

INTERVIEWEE: In the plant, yes. They invited us, for example, in Karlovo. I went to the ceremony room. We’ve sung at the stadium. We sang on many of these kinds of occasions, on holidays. On the day of Kirill and Methodius [note: holidays celebrating the patron saints of the alphabet and literacy in Bulgaria]—we sang on all of these kinds of holidays. We sang on the day of the Hanging of Levski. I have a photo from the Hanging of Levski. [looks for photo] Yes, on that holiday, in front of the monument of Vasil Levski.

IVA DIMITROVA: The opening of— know that during the 1980s some things were opened. For example, buildings at the plant were opened.

INTERVIEWEE: At the plant. They unveiled—they unveiled the monument of Georgi Dimitrov, later they took it down, they removed it. They monument of Lenin, they removed it too.

IVA DIMITROVA: Where? In Sopot?

INTERVIEWEE: In Sopot, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: Was there?

INTERVIEWEE: There was, yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: Where were these [monuments]?

INTERVIEWEE: The monument of Georgi Dimitrov was in front of the sports complex. Now the only part that remains is the bottom, the pedestal. Here in front of the plant, in front of the cultural center, in front of the turnstile at the plant's entrance, there is a little garden there—there was a bust of Lenin there. Well, actually it was just the head, not the bust. I think it was only that. Whereas the monument of Georgi Dimitrov was from the waist up. And they removed them, so they could put others ones.

IVA DIMITROVA: What have they put there now?

INTERVIEWEE: Nothing—they remain like that.

IVA DIMITROVA: And so you mentioned, where did you have singing rehearsals?

INTERVIEWEE: We sang in the cultural center, this yellow building here which is next to the plant. It was very large. At the bottom there was a cafeteria, which was part of the plant. Cafeteria #2. It was a large cafeteria. At first, it was small, but later on they expanded it. At the top, there was the hall—that's where the dance group would rehearse. Above that there were stairs. The singing group had a room—they had a room especially for the singing group. The choir had a room, the mixed choir. After that, we also sang there, when Uncle Kolev—after that, under Andonova she—the plant had a radio installation. It had a radio installation, and it announced messages and work-related news. And there was a room—the supply room for the plant was on the outside. So that people wouldn't enter inside the plant, the room was on the outside [of the plant]. The supply room, and so on. It was very, very lively. But now everything is declining. There used to be a kiosk there. We had a kiosk there too.

IVA DIMITROVA: Across from that.

INTERVIEWEE: Inside the cafeteria there was a kiosk.

IVA DIMITROVA: Outside across from the building there is like this cement—

INTERVIEWEE: There was a lottery stand there. There was a lottery stand. Later on they made it into a store, but then they got rid of it. And around that area there was also this other pavilion, a privately-owned one, on the other corner of the plant. Everything, everything has gone away.

IVA DIMITROVA: And you were saying that when you rehearsed—when you rehearsed, the people going home from the plant would hear you.

INTERVIEWEE: It was very, very wonderful.

IVA DIMITROVA: Can you talk more about that?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, in the morning, however awake you may be, you head to work. At lunch when you leave to go either to the exterior cafeteria—that's what we called it—the exterior cafeteria where the Cultural Center is. From above, the drums are beating, and it puts you in a good mood. A good mood. It just puts you in a good mood. And in the evening when we would leave at five o'clock, the dance group would be dancing, playing. That music. You head how they stomp with their feet. It was just—you return home, however tired, with the songs, with the rhythm of the dances with you as you return home. It was something divine. And when we would go—we were performers, but he had one hour, two times per week where we would leave before the end of the workday. So we could rehearse. That was our privilege, yes. And we would return home at the same time as the workers. So about one hour, well two hours, in fact, a week they allowed us to leave early from work to rehearse. Whereas when we would go to perform, you would take off from your free time. But still, you would never not go to a performance or wherever—you just had it in you. Everything is looking to make money [nowadays]. But we—we didn't even—we were performers. Performers. It sustained us. He who had it within him, it came from inside. Not everyone can sing. Just like not everyone can dance. It is a natural talent, yes, a God-given voice.

IVA DIMITROVA: What do you think about the involvement of VMZ in the performing arts? About that connection between them?

INTERVIEWEE: We were proud, for example, when we would perform well, and we would represent the plant. And we never thought that—and the dancing group won a lot of awards. We also had a lot of awards. And we just, we performed with pride. The dance group, just like the singing group were very famous. The singing group still performs. They had very good songs. And I really liked how they sang. And that's why somehow—we were proud to represent the plant. We sang with pride, it was just natural to us. I am really hurt by what's happened with the plant. I'm really hurt. Even though I am retired now, when something happens to the plant, it hits me hard. Because nevertheless, I passed my life always going through the portal and looking at the clock. Yes. I am very saddened by what's happening to the plant. But they won't close it down. I believe that it will continue to exist.

IVA DIMITROVA: Really?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: What do you see as its future? Can you describe it in more detail?

INTERVIEWEE: Only this plant remains state-owned. It is still state-owned, not privatized. Whatever it may, maybe they start another type of production, I still believe that they will not close it down. That is what I think, but I don't know. That is my hope. Yes, let there be something in this region. Because it's hard for the young people, they don't have anywhere to work.

IVA DIMITROVA: But do you think that young people are attracted to the jobs at the plant? Especially jobs in manufacturing?

INTERVIEWEE: Young people are not attracted because when you mention to them it pays 300 lev, they think it's too little. Whereas when I started working, I received a monthly salary of 63 lev. Nor did I even ask what they would pay when I first started working. No, it wasn't anything like that: to ask, to negotiate. There weren't the sort of people like there are now. We were part of a different generation. We were hardworking, we didn't think about those kinds of things. And we worked shifts: first shift, second shift. Goodness, you are a young person and you are so sleepy that you can't even see, but still, you won't grumble. We never made a big deal of it, like the young people do now. I think that they have to learn to work.

First they have to get their education, they have to be interested, they have to have knowledge. You can't just take somebody off the street and put them in front of a programming machine and ask them to work, you just can't. Especially working with microns? First of all, they haven't studied it. And that is why it is very bad that Zaimov [note: the technical high school in Sopot] stopped offering those [technical] courses. But they have now realized their mistake and they have started up courses on milling, on lathes, and so on—they started new, what were they? Food industry, light-industry and what else, computers and that stuff. But they can't, there has to be the other courses too, especially for the plant. The vocational school and Zaimov prepared workers for the plant. In Iganovo, there were munitions and they learned about that the munitions profession. And they knew all of the different ingredients with which they were working. If they learned it, they knew it. And it was easy for them. And that is why it is necessary. There has to be these kinds [of trained workers].

IVA DIMITROVA: Do you think that the defense industry has a future? For the nation to be—

INTERVIEWEE: Defense has to be nationalized, in my opinion. Because nevertheless, it is military-related. Nonetheless the nation has to be in control of it, according to me, but I don't know. I don't know exactly, but in my opinion the nation should be in charge of it. There can be distributors, but for the production itself I mean, the production should be controlled. That is what I think. I don't know. There are specialists [who can say differently], but according to me, that is how it is. I also worked in public catering—now they have also established courses for chefs, but it is different when you have graduated from a technical high school. The food industry is different. It's different to have completed some courses because you get both practical and theoretical knowledge—it's a different experience. But with courses every housewife can become one [note: it's unclear the comparison she is trying to make]. It's different, like when I watch a lot of Master Chef that's on TV. I just really love watch shows like that. I would wait for it with anticipation, and I could immediately make a judgment, even though I'm on the sideline, I would say to myself, I like that because it has to have both a good appearance and a good taste. Your eye just likes it, just from a glance. Everything is because of mastery. Yes.

IVA DIMITROVA: What do you think young people understand about the history of the plant, about the role it played in the development of the region? Do they have some awareness of this?

INTERVIEWEE: Well, at one time our generation had this awareness.

IVA DIMITROVA: Really? From where [did it come]?

INTERVIEWEE: The people born from 1960 to 1960-something had this awareness.

IVA DIMITROVA: How did they develop this awareness? Where did it come from?

INTERVIEWEE: The awareness came from within. Maybe it was from the parents, that a person has to work. That you have to work, you have to work in order to receive something. Because you can't get it served on a platter.

IVA DIMITROVA: But in regards to the plant, you only knew—

INTERVIEWEE: We considered the plant—I considered it like family. Because when you haven't worked anywhere else, you've only worked there, you grow fond of the plant. You become fond of it. And that's why, when you see how it's being ruined, it pains you. It pains you. I just felt pained. When you go by one of the departments and you know how it used to work, and now you see it in ruins. You feel pity, you feel pity. [The plant] is like a house. It's like it was really nice and all of a sudden the flood water comes through and everything falls. Everything becomes in ruin. And you look around and everywhere there are fallen things, unearthed yards, as people say. And that's how it is at the plant. And it pains you. Because you have grown up there. I wasn't even eighteen years old when I began working. How could I not feel this way? You grow fond of it. I didn't work anywhere else. Only at the plant. And that's why.

IVA DIMITROVA: When you were growing up in [name of home village] and before you graduated, did you have any idea of what the plant was like?

INTERVIEWEE: No, my dream was always to work at a desk. And God granted to me the opportunity to work at a desk many years. When I was young, I would go over to the neighbor's, and she worked in the co-op. And I would go see her, she worked at a desk. And it was a big dream of mine—to live in an apartment and to work at a desk, because I grew up in a village. And it was a big dream of mine. (laughter) Ivche, that's how it is. Life, life—maybe it's because I'm a devout believer. I love people, there is no one I hate, I can't hate. And whoever has done something bad to me, or who has slighted me, I can't hate them. And maybe that is why doors have always opened for me. Whatever I have wanted, I have achieved. Wherever I have set out for something, I have never turned back. It's just whatever I have dreamed out has always come to pass. And I've helped out my children as well.

When my daughter worked, I already told you how she worked in the factory and how a machine almost fell on her and killed her. And I told her, [name of daughter] you shouldn't work there. And what do you think happened? What luck. The manager himself—I was really fond of Dimitrov. I ran into him right on the corner there beside where I worked, there where the cafeteria is—you've been there. And I say to him, and he says—I knew there weren't waitresses: one was on maternity leave, the other was pregnant, and there weren't any. And I say, "Well Dimitrov, so and so, what do you say about hiring my daughter [name of daughter]?" At that time she had divorced. I said, "Hire her," I said, "because she works shifts and she had an incident and I became very worried." And he said, he said to me, "She can come starting tomorrow." Yes. And she goes there the following day, and I was worried. I said to myself how will she adjust, and so on? Because she had to start working right away. But there you have it, luck. That's what it is. Whereas for me, when I was about to start at the Worker Provision Department (WPD), there was

Tinko Boshkov, may he rest in peace. He was the director of the Cultural Center. A very well-mannered man, very smart man, respectful. And he really liked how I sang, and he would always tell me, “[name of the interviewee] you have a very beautiful voice, you have a God-given voice.” And so I’m heading out from the plant, because they don’t want to sign my transfer letter for the WPD, you know to go work at the WPD. Dimitrov there at Plant #2. And I got out and he runs into me. He immediately runs into me and says, “[name of interviewee] what’s wrong?” And I explain it to him. And he says, “Really? Just wait, we’ll see why Dimitrov doesn’t want to sign off.” And at that moment, Dimitrov comes up through the front gate. And he says, “Gosho, why don’t you want to sign this girl’s letter?” And he was like, “Ah.” And just like that. He signed my letter right there at the front gate so I could transfer to the WPD. Isn’t that luck?

IVA DIMITROVA: It’s luck, yes.

INTERVIEWEE: That is what luck is. There aren’t coincidences.

IVA DIMITROVA: So you all knew each other?

INTERVIEWEE: There aren’t coincidences. Well, like I was telling you, I knew a lot of people. I would always take home first place at the singing festivals. I only got second place one time because I was sick. I had gotten a cold and I didn’t even want to participate, but I said to myself, “I’ll show up and whatever happens, happens.” And I took home second place then. I sang “The Turk Transported Slaves,” a slow song. In life, above all a person has to be good so that their dreams can come true. Only with goodness and humanity. Some people think that if they do something or another, but no. They won’t achieve anything like that. Only goodness. Humanity is what makes a person. It’s like they say, humanity is what makes up human, we have to have it. I always tell my children, love each other, respect each other. For the little ones [her grandchildren], even though they are young, I repeatedly tell them, “you are brother and sister, you shouldn’t fight. Don’t fight, love each other,” and so on. I am always repeating this to them so that it gets into their head. My two children, despite the number of obstacles they’ve faced so far, my daughters have never fought. Never. They help each other a lot, and that makes me very happy. When the older daughter came home [from abroad], she always buys something for the grandchildren. Summer clothes for right now, when she comes she will buy them clothes for winter. She buys them three of this, and three of that. You know how in London they always come in sets of three. Tank-tops, sweats, she had bought them rain boots for the winter, even shoes, she buys them everything. I just tell her, “[name of daughter] you have to love each other, you have to respect each other.” You are two sisters as well. [referencing interviewer and her sister] Love each other. There is nothing more important than that. To love each other and to respect each other. Yes. That is a big help. One sister will help with this, the other will help with something else. Many times [name of daughter] would say, “she [my sister] got so and so.” No, don’t let me hear you say that. Whatever I gave to you, I gave to your sister. I never treat them differently.

IVA DIMITROVA: Do you want to add something more before we conclude the interview?

INTERVIEWEE: I just want us to be happy and healthy. Health is the most important thing. Let us be healthy. So we can take care of the kids. So I can rejoice in my grandchildren, and so they can grow up and finish their education. That is the greatest wealth.

IVA DIMITROVA: Thank you for describing your experiences.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, I wish the same for you. For you and your sister. For the two of you to love each other and respect each other and to always get along. And yes, for good to always win out, and the bad to pass you by. Amen.

IVA DIMITROVA: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]