

## EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN (1950s-1980s)

### **Barbara**

*My first job at 15 was in Alfonzo Putz, a hairdressers, working 9-5. I hated it. I worked in home-care for 6 years, then a nursing home for another 6 years. First job was a hair-dresser, second in Spencer's Stores (grocery), then Standard Telephone Wiring; I was a barmaid, dishwasher, I worked on the fish stall in the market, then hair dressing again. In hair dressing, you interact with people, just like in the care home. I would have liked to have been a nurse.*

### **Karen**

*I did part-time work, starting in 6<sup>th</sup> form – shoe shop, hospital laundry, then did a degree in teaching. I also worked for Gwent Aluminium - women were canvassers, men were reps. My first proper job was in Duffryn High School, Newport. Then MSC, which offered jobs for teachers, e.g. environmental, youth work. Then I was pregnant and carried on with youth work. I worked in Usk Youth Custody, and taught part time in Pres Coed. I did a year at Nash College, teaching Communications. I also did supply teaching in primary schools. I did 2/3 of a Masters Degree, but it was too much with the kids and teaching, etc. I worked in the Royal Gwent Hospital, teaching on paediatrics as a hospital teacher and I also taught SENCO, at St Cadoc's. My wages were supplementary income. Working in primary schools, women never expected to become the Headteacher.*

### **Pam**

*My first job, I made cardboard boxes and I lasted 6 weeks. Then factory work. Then I went to the Channel Islands, at 16, to work as a waitress. There were parties in the German bunkers in Guernsey. It was a summer job. Then back home, back in the factory. Then Jersey, for a year. After I married, I worked in the Royal Gwent Hospital when the kids were small.*

### **Marilyn**

*My mother arranged my first job at 15 and I hated it. The job was to put lead in pencils and there were 6 girls on a table, putting different leads in. The men were all in management.*

*Girls were harassed. Looking back, it was intimidating, we were bullied. "Look at her tits" they'd say, or they would make rude gestures with vegetables. I continued working from home, but later, I had a babysitter. I was an Avon rep, worked in jewellery, a cashier in key markets. I went to a union meeting and because I was gobby, they asked me to represent the shop-workers in the shop Workers Union. I spoke up. Went to London. The hours of shop workers changed. They did long hours, 10 min break in the morning, 1 hour lunch, 10 min break in the afternoon. There was lots of sexual harassment. At 29, I reached my ambition to be a singer, at Caldicot and Cardiff Castle, and I was a classical singer for 17 years. Before then, amateur, in Operatic Society. For 5 days a week, in Caldicot, Lady Marilyn of the Court, singing folk songs, medieval songs and opera. I was there 17 years. I loved it.*

### **Sally**

*I did lots of temp work – hotel work, bar work, shop work. I worked when I needed money. In the early 70s, I was in my early 20s, I went for a tele-ad job. I'd ticked box for typing but I was very slow, so I failed the typing test. Doing office work, I thought I was the bees' knees. Why is that? It was an import/export business. There was lots of cash-in-hand work then, so there was no "stamp" paid. My wages were a supplementary income, until I became a social worker, then I was financially independent with a mortgage, bringing up the kids. I paid my mortgage off early. As a career, being a social worker wasn't fair on men, due to pre-conceptions – it was viewed as women's work. However, management in social work was male-dominated, with teams of women, led by men. I question how some men were managers when they didn't know the answers. Women had tough interviews – I had questions I couldn't answer. Why did they do this? So that they could tick boxes and fill criteria for management jobs, that's why. There were questions on childcare, etc, at the time, which were not asked to men. It was prejudice. Maybe that's why women didn't get the management jobs. There was a gradual drift towards equality. It was the time of Jack the Ripper, I was terrified. None of us ever worked alone at night, regardless of gender. Women grew up protecting themselves.*

### **Shirley**

*I was a librarian for the local authority for 40 years. I was one of the first to be married. Always felt they didn't like married women. It was mostly men in management in local*

*council. When Newport changed to the County, and included the Valleys, they seemed more progressive, with more women in management. In the library, we would wear overalls, with brown buttons up the front and for the first hour and a half, we would dust books. The second hour, the overall was cotton, wine coloured, buttons up the front, tie belt, top pocket for pencils. No heels. Public authority, had to be "suitably dressed". Jacket, trousers, skirts, blouse, cardigan. I was in John Frost Square library in 1960s. I never stopped working and was the main wage earner when my husband did Social Science degree, then he left. I kept the house, paid the mortgage on my own, worked in a chip shop as well as library. Lots of women went to clean shops or offices early in town. Mum never worked. Dad worked on the docks, he was a boiler-maker on ships.*

### **Val**

*I taught at comprehensive school for 11 years part-time. Comprehensives are too big. There were two separate staff rooms for men and women. I had a break when I had children and returned approximately 6 years later. There were more facilities for PE, a bigger range in comprehensives, compared to the limited facilities for PE in junior school, where there was no access for field for girls - we could use it on occasions. Staff were not allowed to wear trousers. I can remember at age 10, in church, a lady had to leave teaching when she got married, and another friend had to leave work when she married.*

### **Jane**

*My first job was in the offices of a hand-tool factory, typing, etc. The wages lady was behind a partition and later, I started doing wages. There were four women and Major Howrick and Captain Gill – the owners both ex-army. The Captain felt important that I could do shorthand, and he would call me into the office. There was also Ken, the buyer. The factory was attached to the office, I had to go in there to collect papers, etc. I got wolf-whistled. I was aged 17. I wore skirts, dresses, flat shoes. I stayed for 1 year, then went to a solicitors for a couple of years. I married a police officer, we moved away, and I worked part-time. I was aged 20. My wages were supplementary. At 20 and 22, I had kids, and returned to work when they were in school. My first job back was in a factory, as I could have the school holidays off – it was all based around school times. It was mostly women. The supervisors were women too. We needed extra money to buy a house.*

**Elaine**

*In 1961, at 15, I worked in Marks and Spencer, which is all I ever wanted. The uniform was blue nylon, a belt, a M & S badge. There were no men on the shop floor as the men were in management, but there was a woman floor manageress. When you were on the phones, the men would ping your bra strap, or stand so that when you spun around on your chair, you'd land between their legs. You had to give and take. If men wolf whistled at me, I felt grown up, gorgeous. If I could have done anything, I would have liked to have been a nurse. When the kids were young, I worked as a home-help – there was no real training, and we were going into stroke victims' homes. I liked it. My last job was in Wildings, and I also worked in the card shop in town. I never worked full time and I paid Married Women's stamp, so there was no pension.*

**Babs**

*At 15, I went to work in Meek's shoe shop in town– my mother wouldn't allow me to work in a factory. No men worked in the women's shoe section, and vice versa. Men were in management, but there were no women in management.*

**Elaine B**

*I had a Saturday job in Woolworths. In my fourth year in school, we sat exams for secretarial college or engineering, pre-nursing and domestic science. I became a student nurse/midwifery in the 1980s. There were male nurses, but they progressed much quicker. I returned to work when Jayne was 16 months, back to nursing, part-time, 16 hours. I worked evenings, and shared childcare with my husband and family. My income was supplementary. I joked that I returned to work to get a tumble dryer, for 'pin money'. Regarding rights in the workplace after maternity – there was no maternity leave, you left and then went back. I went to a different hospital, so I had to reapply. There were questions on how I would manage child-care, whether there were plans to have any more children, etc. I was in the Royal College of Nursing Union, which was an association, not a union. You had to join as a student. They never did anything for women. I was a shop steward, but I couldn't stand the middle-class lip service, it was "don't rock the boat". We were encouraged to be more 'professional', e.g. you'd have the 'Midwife Chronicles'.*

## **Melanie**

*I worked in the market on Saturdays, on the meat stall, it was pre-decimal. At 16, I got an interview without telling my mother. I worked in the Midland Bank for 2 years. I went to London, nursing, aged 20 (I thought I was "old"), then Bristol, and left to be Occupational Health at Steelworks. It was split shifts as a nurse. Nursing was a secure career. I never stopped working. I took maternity leave, for 3 and 7 months.*

## **Ruth**

*I took a convoluted path into politics, it wasn't planned, no career ambition. I was a physiotherapist, involved in trade unions, and thought I fancied a job in the Assembly, so I went to Monmouth and got selected for parliamentary seat. It was a great time, and I learned a lot. I didn't win, but thought I'd go back. When Paul Flynn retired, I got selected. My motivation was that you can't do anything unless you speak out, and the higher up you are, the more impact you can make, you can have a voice on the big issues. There's a lot of injustice out there.*

## **Pippa**

*My first jobs were pin money jobs. First as a fore-court attendant, then door-to-door, selling central heating, double glazing, etc. Cafes, pubs. My maternity leave was short, I worked from home, a designer at the time and had good arrangements. I was the only wage earner, as my husband was unemployed. I always earned well, in the creative industries. Nearly always earned more than my husband.*