

Interview with JoAnn Jalving

Interviewed by Anna Holt

1999

AH: This is Tuesday, August 3, an interview between Anna Holt and JoAnn Jalving. First I'd like to ask you just a little bit of your personal history; where you were born, when you came to Holland...

JJ: I was born and raised in Holland. [I] married a born-and-raised Holland man, [laughter] just been married twenty-five years. [I] graduated in June, married in July. [I] went to work for -sorry- Johnson Control Prince Corporation [laughter] for a year and a half. [I] decided to be a mom so raised children for eight years, stayed home, was a home day care center. [I] had that. After my baby went to kindergarten I said it was time to find a job. So this is where I landed my job.

AH: So that's been....twenty-one years then?

JJ: I've been here sixteen. Sixteen years that I've been employed here.

AH: When you started what did you start as? What were you doing?

JJ: Let's see. I started on October 3, ...1983? They typically then at that point in time put everybody in hand assembly. So in hand assembly for three weeks, [I] sat on my backside and hand assembled. After three weeks they said there's a machine catcher opening and if I was interested in trying it. At that point in time I was nervous because the girl that started at the same time I did, didn't work out so they let her go. I thought that was my last straw and it wasn't going to happen. I was going to be out

the door. Nope. It worked. I was the catcher on the blankers for probably two years. Then there was an opening for back-up, set-up person, mechanic. So I did that for awhile. Then there was a full-time opening. So for about eleven years I did machine set-up in the blanker department.

AH: What department?

JJ: Blankers, which is a machine. I was a set-up mechanic for eleven years. [I] hit on the third shift for three years. [I] decided that was something I wanted to try. During that time they gave me the opportunity to come back here into material handling and be a facilitator. So I would facilitate to lines, maybe ten people at a time.

AH: So that's what you're in now?

JJ: After facilitating the opportunity to be a coordinator and work with Kathy Cox coordinating this department. What we do is a lot of scheduling and making sure lines are set up for their products and that they're made on time and shipped out the door on time. That's pretty much what I do now, a lot of whatever they ask me to do is what I do.

AH: And how long have you been doing this?

JJ: I've been coordinator for probably, I want to say a year and a half, close to two years.

AH: Can you tell me a little bit about what you know about the background of the company?

JJ: I took out my employee handbook and tried to find out! [laughter] Actually, I was

never at the Sixteenth Street plant. I came here in '83, they moved here in '74. This was a fairly new plant when I came here. I watched a lot of additions come onto this plant. This whole area here, material handling, was not even here. Beyond that point, the shipping area wasn't here either. We were like, I would say half this size. Where our computer systems are now is where the machine shop use to be. That whole area has been moved. I've seen a lot of additions and a lot of growth in the company.

AH: Do you think it's going to continue? Are you going to have to put more additions on?

JJ: Oh yes. [laughter] It seems every time that they put on an addition, before we've even moved in we've outgrown it. It's really grown. We always could use more area.

AH: What are you're biggest products?

JJ: I always figured the chip board side of the company was our biggest products. It seems that our material handling tote area has really expanded and become a top... I don't want to say top sellers. I think the whole company between the chip board and the material handling are pretty much equal. We have done a lot of production in the last year in this area.

AH: Is that the returnable packaging?

JJ: Yes.

AH: And when did that start to come about? Was that before you were here?

JJ: No, it was after I was here. This area at one point in time was maybe a bathroom size area, very small. They had a welder. They assembled a little bit. It was very

small area. I don't know how to explain what size it was. This is probably about fifty percent bigger if not, seventy percent bigger than what they had before.

AH: But they were into it by the time you had come here? They had already started the returnable packaging?

JJ: No. It was just a new little thing. It wasn't even an area that you talked about going into. If one area was slow they move you into. Say one area that was busy, this wasn't even one that you would go and work in. When I first started here, no.

AH: So you've seen it grow all the way into this...now as one of your biggest...

JJ: Yes.

AH: Who would you say are you're biggest competitors? It seems like this is kind of an area that you don't really ever hear about...

JJ: ...I don't know if I'm allowed to say that! [laughter] Ford has become a very big one. We're QS9000 because of our automotive. Ford hits on our Q1.

AH: Tell me about the Q1.

JJ: Oh man, I feel like I'm an internal audit. [laughter] Q1 is a certification, I might be a little off-base on this. [It] is something that we have to achieve to supply to our automotive makers. So we have to have this certification that we follow certain guidelines in order to supply to them. What we've had a lot right now is car plastics, which is Ford. Summit is a real big one that we've been doing... We get little ones.

AH: Do you find that you have mostly return customers or do you have a lot of new...

JJ: Oh yes, a lot of return customers. That means we please them right. [laughter]

AH: Can you tell me a little bit about the ESOP program?

JJ: Oh, you're talking to a woman who's \_\_\_\_\_... ESOP is something that was given to the employees. We own stock in the company. We tell ourselves out here, in each one of their cells when they're building a tote, that's their little company. When you're building that tote, think of that as your company that you're sending products out to. How do you want to save? With ESOP they have given us a part of the company. That's the way I feel. They're saying, "OK, this is your company too. Make it work." Through that you earn...your stock through years. I would think the more profit we earn, the more our ESOP would be. My biggest joke is that when I retire, my ESOP will buy me my last brand new truck and fifth wheel. My husband laughed. And when it came, I have my truck. But I've been here sixteen years. I think a lot of the new people don't see that yet, but they will when they start long-term. You're only one hundred percent invested after seven years of employment. Before that you have to work up to it. You get a little bit. Once you're a hundred percent invested and long-term, it's a nice little sum. I'm impressed with it. I like it. I like owning stock in the company.

AH: I bet that makes it... a lot more pride in what you're doing. Makes you work a lot harder because obviously you want to see the company succeed if you've got a hand in there too. How does that work out? Since this company is privately held...I'm not too bright in that area. [laughter]

JJ: [gestures that she doesn't know]

AH: OK, that's fine. I know we touched on this a little earlier... the growth that you've seen. When you started here it was so small and the additions... Can you go in a

little more on the growth that you've experienced?

JJ: ...Expansion, building-wise, machinery. A lot of new machines came to us, which are cost-saving - expensive, but they're cost saving in the long run.

AH: Were a lot of those new innovations, that machinery, or was it just kind of new coming this way?

JJ: New coming this way. Employee-wise, has doubled. We use to be... a handful. Now with all the new product line out here. You'd say it doubled. You had the chipboard side and then the material handling side.

AH: Do you have any idea the number?

JJ: No. I know we have full-time, approximately twenty-three people, on this side, for just our material handling only.

AH: How would you describe the relationship between the management and the employees?

JJ: I think good. I really think good. What I've seen from this department and the people we work with - I think very well. On a personal note, Jud Sr. has watched my kids grow. They know my kids. Where - I hate to say the name - Prince Corporation, when I was there we were a number. When they came out, they had a bonus plan and Christmas time you received a bonus. He would take someone with him to be able to say, "OK, who's this person?" And then wish you a Merry Christmas and then hand it by your personal name, but he did not know it. That's not true here. Here, they know the people, they know their families, not one-to-one, but as far as knowing who these people are. They joke now when they see me, they

know that my daughter's in the service (?) in Spain and my other daughter's in college.. they ask, "How are they doing?" The people, they know each other. It's kind of, I think, family. I really think family here.

AH: So now that Jud Bradford Sr. has kind of stepped back a little bit, who's taking over his place now?

JJ: Tom.

AH: Has that been an easy transition?

JJ: I think so.

AH: Just kind of normal?

JJ: Yes. Just one Bradford coming after another Bradford. He feels the same way with employees. They take a lot of care into who they have here.

AH: I remember talking to Jud Sr. and he was talking about the Q1 award banquet how everyone was there and the Ford people were just amazed that this company... Everyone says that their company is like a family, but this one really does seem to be.

JJ: Yes. This one is. Maybe because we're a smaller company that it's that way. I don't know. Here people, they care. It seems like they care.

AH: Can you tell me a little bit about Bradford in Mexico?

JJ: No. [laughter] It's hot there. Actually no, I really don't have anything...

AH: OK. Well, it's got to be good news, such expansion, that you need to follow your customers where they are.

JJ: Mm-hmm.

AH: What's your opinion about the business climate here in Holland?

JJ: Business climate?

AH: This seems like the hot place to be now. Business here is just growing.

JJ: Oh here. We're the hot place? [laughter] Everybody wants to work at Bradford?

We're always looking for very good employees. If we're going to keep growing we're going to need that. It's kind of neat to say that it's the hot place to be. Which is a big plus, means we must be out there on the market, knowing we're a good company to work for, with benefits.

AH: Much is said about the work ethic in Holland. Do you think that's had a lot to do with the success of Bradford here?

JJ: Work ethic?

AH: The Dutch work ethic...

JJ: Oh. I don't know. Does that reflect on companies?

AH: It seems to. It seems like a lot of people I've talked to have said that it's the people here that are so hardworking that makes their businesses successful.

JJ: [pause] Dutch are tightwads? [laughter] ...I don't know.

AH: It just seems like the people here aren't afraid to work hard maybe.

JJ: No. We have a good crew down by us. They're all very hardworking people.

Always dedicated at the last minute if there's overtime to get a hot job out. They're there to do that. I would think that's because it's a fair company to work for. If you get someone else they say, "This is just a job. I'm here just to punch clock and earn forty hours of pay." Out here it just seems like we have a lot of dedication. People

that they know, OK if we want to make this truck, we might have to give four extra hours. They're willing. If it's hot, sure they'll [grumbles] but they still do it. At one time we had a job to get out. We had a crew go from scratch of receiving an order at two in the afternoon and everybody pulled their weight until eleven o'clock at night to get this order out. It's not something they have to do. It's always, OK, a volunteer thing. Is anybody willing to do this? Everybody pulled together from one machine to the next, all the way. Once that night was done I was proud to be with the people that I was with. It made me cry. [laughter] It was amazing how everybody just pulled together. I think the company makes their name. It has to be. If say, one of our employees goes out and says to a friend...to me they have to be telling other people that it's a good place to work. I would think. As far as getting people in, thinking it's a hot place to work.

AH: What do you see for the future?

JJ: Well, eighteen years retirement! I still think a lot of growth. I could see this whole west end, another addition, hopefully. I see growth.

AH: Do you think you're going to come up with any new product lines?

JJ: I would think so. Different products as in other than our expendable? I would think so.

AH: And the...ESD? Electro-static...It seemed like Mr. Bradford was telling me about a newer...

JJ: The anti-static material things? We really don't see it, more on the paperboard side I think. They hold like computer chips or something so they don't shock? We have

one company that we do deal with that we do out here. It's mostly putting it together and gluing a little foam piece in. We don't see a lot of that job here, so I don't know if that would be a growth maybe, in time. We do actually have an order coming up next month for them, but it's been awhile since we've seen that particular customer.

AH: So who would you say are your biggest competitors?

JJ: I don't know as far as competitors. You mean a different company that would...

AH: In your type of...

JJ: I really don't know to say there are no competitors. It's all Bradford. We have no competitors. We are it. [laughter] I don't know of any in the area or to be able to say that I know of any competitors. I'm sure sales do. They know who they have to fight with to keep our customers. I'm sure there has to be someone out there that's saying, "I can do this cheaper." Technically they might be able to do it cheaper, but we're going to do it better.

AH: It seems like you've snagged quite a considerable part of the market share.

JJ: I think we are in our peak season, if I'm not wrong. Last year this time, we've already exceeded that in sales this year. It seems like every year, it's more. And too, returning customers. They want more of what they have.

AH: Do you think you're going to build new plants?

JJ: I don't know about new plants. I think we'll probably build on. Then maybe new plants in different areas of the country. [laughter] Maybe my last ten years I could go to somewhere nice and warm.

AH: Well, great. Thanks so much for your time.

