

# First Interview

I finished my studies and then I started working as weaver at the factory, from 76 to 80. I was working on carriage machines of different types. Then I changed to a more modern type of carriage machine, in another section of the factory.

The machine measured 1m76. The machine, metal thing that rolls. I was controlling the quality. My favorite activity. I Added color to the textile. Most of workers were women, some men were helping us out on some technical issues.

## [when ask if she performed domestic work also]

No, not at all.

## [When ask if she uses the skills she holds from that time]

Maybe sometimes but I don't use my skills nowadays. Now I'm working at the market place because of my health. I don't own the shop, I'm employed. I can't really describe it because it was a very hectic time for me. I was working on 3 shifts system for 15 years.

## [when ask if she would have preferred domestic work or work outside of the home]

Of course I wanted to work. I really enjoyed my work as a quality control manager.

Of course it would be nice to keep in touch. It was very interesting. I don't keep in touch with the former workers. In 1989 I got my last child.

## [when ask about the change of work]

I wasn't thinking about it at the moment, it happened naturally. I consider my self as a creative person working at the factory and later on at the printing factory and now I'm trying to stay creative in my current workplace.

# Second Interview

The factory was working 24 hours a day and people were working four shifts during the last years. Otherwise there were three shifts. We decided to work flexible shift, so I was working sometimes 1 shift and sometimes 3 shifts, like in Europe. These were the last years of survival for Krenholm. The morning started with the alarm, obviously. We were never late. The Krenholm people were really diligent, and real worker, so to say. Afterward breakfast, coming through the entrance, changing in the locker rooms, and then you'd go either to the transport section, to your vehicle or carrier, everyone did it its own way. Once you were there the official would always be there, as well as the cleaners and it was an entire complex. The cafeteria was working always, so you would never have to take any lunch with you. There would always be somewhere to eat, something to eat, and someone to eat with. Everybody was one family.

When I started working, I was a boy, really a boy. I started to do the non-sense work, like making the bobbins, and getting on everyone's nerves. I was bobbins the thread, from one bob to another, tying knots, by the way well, salary was not so bad. An engineer also made 200 at that time. And it was very interesting, and you were always looked after, like by a mother. What was good at Krenholm it is that it was like a family. And leaving for army at 19 they actually ask me to come back. They brought me a suitcase and something else, and I did return. But that was already another world, the 90s' and we were already separated from the Soviet Union.

Second shift was that you had to not be late at 4 o'clock, actually 3 because we would always come a bit earlier. Then the night shift was the hardest one, when you had to close your eyes before the night shift for two hours and you'd hear the alarm tic in your head. So, there was almost no point of getting up. So, you'd get up at 10:30 and go to work. I lived quite close. So, I could walk. Others cycled or took the bus. Again, there were entire crowds of people heading there and after a night shift you had to try to sleep, but it was difficult because the night was broken and you had to work, and moreover and everyone was on their feet and the job was physically demanding.

So let's just say it wasn't easy work. But considering that, the sections were clean, light and comfortable. In summer we would always have holidays and always for 28 days. Because that was required by law. The night shift was the hardest, with the break for dinner only being 20 minutes. These would fly quickly and after that you would have to go back to your stable like I used to say, but obviously meaning back to your machine. Or back to driving some bobbins, unloading some carriages, or doing any job that was your specialty.

At first, I would tie little knots, there was a little machine tying the knots and you had to tie the threads in a way such that the thread would get caught in the bobbins. So, I was making the entire thread. So it would go in the special threading machine.

That was my first job ever. My starting point. But it was not my specialty at all. Then I went to the army. So I returned to the factory after the army. The whole generation was working in the factory. The people were nice, friendly, and good workers. This time, I just carried the bobbins around. I took them off from one place and carried them to another place. My third task was to manage the transportation of the goods. I just transported and weight them. I manage the logistic of transporting the product to the people working on the jacquard machines. I can't tell you about the people who were working as technical engineers, because I have no

knowledge. The engineer, they were teaching young people who came from the schools, how to repair the machines, and work on them. They spread their knowledge. Usually, men were working on those machine, as mechanical engineer and women were weavers. Because they can handle the monotonous hard work better than men.

I had some female task, for instance I worked as a quality controller. We cut the knots off, or took away mistakes in the fabric, making nice finish. I don't even know the proper words to name that task we were doing...

Men, they didn't want to do this kind of job, as a quality controller because it was really hard and repetitive. It's a hard routine, mainly women did it.

We always celebrated all together our birthdays. We only had 20 minutes for it but it was enough for congratulations. Men always respected women. There were a lot of women working there, it was a working factory. I always felt sorry for them as a man. It was a huge women factory. There was a Klondike of women. Women had manly tasks to do, they were carrying a lot of things. They were using earplugs, they were covered in dust and some of them lost their voice. The dust from the production was flying around and was unhealthy for workers. My mum sometimes lost her voice because of the dust from the factory. The women should get a memorial for their job. The work they are doing now is nothing compared to the one they had at the factory. But they were very happy and they always felt supported by the collective. People always shared everything, which is now a rare thing to find.

Yes of course, they had a lot to do after work. Most of the women were married so they had to do the household work, they were no exception. I want to say it one more time, women deserve a memorial for this kind of life. One thing that I didn't like about those women, but well they all have it, is the jealousy... but that's women. It was very hard to work with them. But it was fine with me. They were very afraid to lose their job because they were not capable to learn new things at 50 or 60. Not everyone can learn a new language, especially people from the factory.

## [when asked about the transition]

It was a terrible experience, there were no jobs at all. People were afraid to lose everything, there was a lot of stealing. Usually people who were fired were the people who couldn't find the right language with the employers. Usually people did find some new place to work after they were fired. A lot of people went abroad to work as nanny, especially older women. I lot of people went to Russia. My parent went to Russia. And I know a lot of people who were happy to leave Estonia for Russia. Some of them totally disappeared.

I stopped working there in the late 90s' and I got a job in the other factory. But in 2008, we had the economic crisis and I was fired from the New place. I worked as an electrician there. But at the Krenholm factory you had the opportunity to learn Estonian language back then, but for a little money. Then I became an electrician, because I wanted to change something in my life. I like to learn new things. The women of the factory were very nice we went to sauna sometimes together - a lots of Saunas were build, especially for the workers. It was an interesting experience I enjoyed it, working there. Friendships, laughs, it was a happy time for us.

Although my mother left the country long time ago, the people who worked there are still her closest friends. We always call each other, whit ex-co-worker, we meet on a regular basis. It's a really close connexion between us. I have to say a lot about the factory, it's a whole life...

The people who left the factory are working now as taxi driver, me for example, I work as a construction worker. I do a lot of things, just to survive. But the experience when you start you work, and leave the work with the same people, it's very rare. There is no such things, nowadays. We spent a lot of time back then after work visiting cafés, drinking beer on the way back home. There were good times, bad times, we were like a family. We celebrated weddings, birthday all together. Or if somebody died, we went all together to the funeral.

Nowadays, we still meet, but not so often. But we call each other. We help each other out. If I need something, I can call somebody and I know I will get help strait away. There is a store "a thousand little things" in Narva, a lot of ex-Krenholm factory workers now work there.

Narva is a big village, but it's a sad village now. I was really proud of leaving here, but now, I not feeling that well. I didn't leave Narva, but I am surviving here. Other people usually leave the town. But I will stay here.

## Third Interview

### [when ask to describe a normal working day of her son who worked at the factory]

He always wanted to go to work. He was helping out carrying stuff around. He was 20 years old. He always enjoyed working there, there was a 2 shifts system. He's unemployed now. He was working there only for 2 years because of his health. He was crying when he lost the opportunity to work there, he was really devastated to stop working there. There is nowhere to work here in Narva, there are only malls no industries or factories for him to continue working here.

## Fourth Interview

The factory was like a big world in our city, it was a huge industrial complex that was providing work for half of the city. There were a lot of people working there, mostly women. And when it was time to go to work it seemed like the city concentrated at the factory. Around 8am if we would go for the morning shift then it would mean big streams of people that went through the entrance. And it seemed to be the majority of Narva's population. So the factory was an important employer for all of our people. My

mum finished the tech university specialised in chemistry analysis. And straight after the university she went to work, first in the workshop and then she would transition to the laboratory. There she worked for 41 years. Her love for chemistry was given to her by her teachers and all the processes that she was involved in at the laboratory was working with ascetic chemicals, quite dangerous processes. She was really interested in it so it wasn't a routine for her. Despite her 41 years there she would have continued if the factory hadn't closed. But since she was already approaching retirement age, she could retire straight away.

The team was interesting with a lot of creative programming and events happening, a lot of social interactions. And for me, after high school, I was trying for the one university we had for those times - it was 89, didn't get in and I had to start working and I could quite easily get a job at Krenholm and since my mum was working in the laboratory, she got me a job in the laboratory in another factory. As a 17 years old, my working day, only 7 hours. I had few months until I started working the 8h day. It was Monday to Friday and we had the weekends off because in the laboratory we didn't have evenings and night shifts. And my work was revolving around the testing of equipment of the machines. I had two types of machines, a hackle and a drawing frame machine. Sometimes we would stop the machines to fix them and the workers were really unhappy because they had to make a schedule and if the machines were standing still they could worry but it was part of the job of the lab technician: providing quality production and quality goods.

These women who were working at the factory, their job was obviously very hard. I was watching them while testing the materials they were producing for the laboratory, this was spinning, and machine maintenance. And of course these women were really the heavy lifters. My work was of course cleaner and a lot easier but even so, the work became monotonous to me. So after a year of working I realised it was time to go back to study and get another specialisation. In the 90s I enrolled into college and left the factory. So Krenholm only occupied a year on my life path. But what I still remember from it is that these

were interesting times because we were young and we had the youth camps, and we were coming together for conventions, evenings, meetings. Trips and travel were provided and social interaction across the country. Everybody who wanted would go there. So in general everything was always friendly, fun and interesting.

In principle I'm a positive and social person and every work environment is interesting to me. Obviously working for a year at Krenholm, there were so many women, I wasn't interacting with all of them of course but a certain amount of people. They were also involved in my life after I left. Because after getting my diploma in medical studies, certain reforms happened and I transitioned into a trading profession. So together with those Krenholm women who I started to work with back then, we ended up in the same collective again. In this formation, we have worked for over 10 years in the store, so you can say that this first step in the factory gave me a ticket to my future life. And also because Narva is not a very big city we somehow keep meeting each other. So this social context have paved the ground for further pursuits.

These were the times when, this was already the 2000s, when new investors and new firms were emerging and I was always running away from routine in my life and I wanted to change continuously from the least interesting to the more interesting ones. And when I found the ladies again, one which was in the process of establishing a shop gave me the idea and I thought, why not? In this way I decided to radically change everything which I don't regret. Because the 10 years to come were also really interesting and complete years. But the structure changed because from medicine I went into trade which had a completely different environment. I always wanted to change something create something new. The most important skill is the social skill and at the factory everybody is hard-working, who can take a lot of responsibility and discipline: coming to work on time, discipline in the hard work, and not being lazy. And so when in 89 Perestroika happened, we needed to get our head into different levels, from the Soviet mentality we transitioned in a more capitalist way of living. And these skills of working hard and being responsible

came in handy in any system. And this is the thing that brought us together. It was a sentiment of mutual support (getting out of trouble), solidarity, help and responsibility before each other.

The lives of a lot people were shaped up by the solidarity. In general, it was heavy workload and the house work load was also heavier than it is now because of the lack of facilities.

It was a hard job to handle the household and work at the same time. There were no washing machines and any other equipment that could help saving time. For example my mum, after returning from work, had a lot of cleaning and washing to do and all that with her hands. So now we're very spoilt with the whole equipment that we have. Plus she was responsible for cooking food for the whole family. The only good thing was that she still had two days off, Saturday and Sunday. But people still had a job. Nowadays, it's very hard to find one. If you have one, you have plans and strategies for the future. Its god that we have a lot of opportunities higher education or to learn new things but what's next?

I'm very happy with my situation right now because I have things combined, medicine and sales. After all, I'm happy with the place where I am now. I'm working as a pharmacist. I always liked to communicate with people, I get energy from it.

We had a very big family with great grandmother and great grandfather, so the older women cooked for the whole family. So it was easier for us to live all together. But we always had stuff to do so we were busy all the time. We still had a house in Russia, we spent there every summer and cooked vegetables from there.

All the women's work did my mother, and my father did the manly work. My father is a fisherman, it's his favourite hobby. We were always a big happy family.

## Fifth Interview

In the times Krenholm was still active, they tried to bring us together. Krenholm consisted of 7 factories if I'm not mistaken, I don't remember I was only working at one. So the factory was collecting us through advertisements in the newspaper, whoever was working in this and this factory, come for a reunion evening. I unfortunately couldn't come because that was the moment I was travelling, because I would've loved to come.

No because it was very difficult to work there, but the collective was good and the people were different. I don't even how, everybody was just the same.

Now, they are not inviting us anymore. It was about 10 years ago when the last factory was still running. When they still had a branch, they would organise these evenings. I was working on the threading machines, you can't imagine what it's like. In three shifts, it's a very difficult work. And here you see, the work is completely different.

How on earth could we have known? We didn't know anything before, we just knew how to put on a uniform and go to work, but in the end, we were left without work completely. No girls, everybody did it in his own way, some could endure the trading, some could not, some are still working on the market. And it worked out because we had to feed our children, right? When you are left alone with a child and you need to feed him, you'll go work wherever.

I'm the owner here and I am my own shopkeeper and my own boss as a sole trader. Because you see what's happening, nobody is buying anything anymore. That's why I'm waiting for pension to come soon. It's time retire for us soon so we can't wait.

Because you have earn the money, you at least had a father and as we were both the mother and father figure and everything combined. But that was the time when many of them either died or became an alcoholic or moved away to work and then

disappeared there. How many people disappeared in this way? These were difficulties, that's why you wouldn't even want to remember them.

We have a circle of friends, acquaintances, we're all from the factories until now, there are still some segments that are producing, where winding still works. But in general, our factory was the first to close, so we were the first ones left without a job. Most of us went into the security sector or training to become a seamstress and then ended up working at Maxima. Go to the larger Maxima and there almost all the girls were from the factory. Either they're cashiers or cleaners... a lot of girls.

No I really don't want to talk about it because I tried all sorts of jobs, you think I just came and started trading bags straight away? No, I was dealing in footwear and clothing and cosmetics, everything. No, no... that was hard.

In general, it was a women's collective in the factory. We had one male floor worker for 10-15 people. Only them, the rest were women.

Naturally, because these machines it was extremely difficult, I wouldn't wish this on anyone. I don't know if they were doing this on purpose or not, because this threading machine was top of the line of know how. But they were so heavy to maintain and to work with. If you look at photographs you can see these B-D machines, they're very tall with these bobbins spinning on top and they were probably 10m long. And if somewhere a thread would break, I'm saying 100 bobbins on one side, and if a thread breaks at one of them, a red signal light would turn on. And this red light was really challenging the nerves. And we had 5 or 6 of these machines so you would run between these red lights and you'd go shh. You just have to see it.

It's recent that men have started to help around the house but before it was mostly women. I couldn't imagine because I was really young then, I remember thinking how did women do this? Once I had children and a husband and that you needed to help them with the homework and come to work the night shift.

Naturally everything was easy after the factory after the immense workload that was there. Once we came here obviously it became much easier. The ones who organised everything for themselves stayed trading and the ones who didn't had missed the boat.

This was our youth, you understand? Because when working at the factory we were around 20 years old and I was working until 35 years old, it was our youth.

The thing is that we had Krenholm conventions and every weekend we had some kind of event. So, we didn't have weekends at the time because we were young and wanted to go here and there. Than the weekend will pass and it would be back to work again.

You can't even imagine what it was like. In Narva there was a summer camp for the youth and it was provided by Krenholm. So, all the youth was gathering there, there were sports events, competitions between every factories. The thing is that we thought Krenholm would always exist, we thought it was something that was and always would be. Because there would always be work there since they were always recruiting people. But then it turned out they closed it, it was such a monster. When our section closed, the factory was still working for about 10 years so we could have gone to work on some other sections, but it turned out we had another destiny.

Here, no, we don't come together, we don't even have a room for relaxation. It's every man for itself here. There, every factory had their relaxation room, there was one on every floor. Every floor was another section and the floor were large. We'd come to relax and meet there and discuss our local problems. Then there was a little red corner, where there were Party meetings. For all the problems there was the labour union that you could consult. Everybody was equal also economically.

## Sixth interview

### [when asked what her job at the factory was]

Operations manager. I did only 1 shift from 7:20am to 4:20pm. At the beginning, I was working at one of the storage sections, and then in another storage section, managing the subsidiary companies to cope with the demand.

### [when ask how the transition period was for her]

Work is work. I started here 12 years ago. I had some connections.

## Seventh Interview

After school, we started working at the laboratory section of the factory with a friend of mine as quality controllers. I think most of the young people were working there at that time. It was the starting point of my career. I was 17 years old, it was very interesting, a lot of young people were working there. There were a lot of excursions, competitions, we were performing at the Girasimov community centre, we went to St-Petersburg, Tallinn, Riga... Back then, we had a very interesting life. Then I got married with a man from the factory and worked as an accountant at the factory. Then a lot of people got fired so I needed to find a job. I found a job at the Joala restaurant, it was really interesting.

### [when ask what skills she developed at the factory]

Responsibility... doing your job properly came from the Soviet Union. To be honest, responsible and do your job correctly. But the most important skill was responsibility.

Now, it's called 'how to survive until retirement'. The factory was closed, the restaurant was closed so I needed a job to survive, my husband lost his job too. And the first thing you had to do in the 90s was surviving: we went to Poland to get the goods and then we were too old to get a job, nobody wanted to hire us because of our age. Although I graduated from St Petersburg state university, I got stuck here (pointing the market).

As an entrepreneur, I have the freedom to decide and be my own boss, and it's better for my health. From 1993, I started this terrible business, but I like it. It was very meaningful because I was my own boss. We're getting the goods from Poland, Lithuania and Russia. I'm at this age so I should prepare for retirement, but it was so interesting working at the Krenholm factory. Back then I went to some sanatorium for treatment for cheap...

We don't have a problem with borders, we don't see the borders. [pointing at her shop] It's boring, not interesting, there is almost no customer and no profit, but that's life. The market place was built in 2000-2001, it's pretty young. It's boring and not interesting at the moment here.