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Abstract - Sue Buggs Guido

Interviewee: Sue Buggs Guido

Interviewers Andrew Devlin, Tori Duger, Jake Daly

Date: October 10, 2017

Location: 24 Owego Street, Cortland, NY Length: 39:36

Sue Buggs Guido has been living in Cortland her whole life. She attended Owego Elementary School and eventually graduated from Cortland High School in June of 1960. She has many experiences, stories and first-hand accounts of the history of the Wickwire factory that employed the brunt of the labor force of Cortland for decades on end. Sue's father, great Uncle, and her grandmother were all workers for the Wickwires. Her father, one of the youngest foreman to ever work for the Wickwires, worked in the dye room, overseeing the work over multiple laborers. Sue would have the chance to actually enter the factory and spend time with her dad at work after school on many occasions. Sue remembers the not so good conditions the workers had to work in every day. Sue's great uncle worked in the factory as well. George, Sue's great uncle, worked as a crane operator in the factory. All day he would pick up pieces of metal with a huge magnetic crane that would be put into extremely heated vaults to melt the metals down. Sue recalls stories of men that worked directly with the heated vaults and on occasions workers would fall into the vaults, leading to a gruesome death. Though these tragedies are horrendous, workers were used to seeing death and injury on the job. Her grandmother worked as a house maid in the Wickwire family house which is now today the 1890 house.

FIELD NOTES - Sue Buggs Guido

Interviewee: Sue Buggs Guido

Interviewers: Jake Daly, Andrew Devlin, Tori Duger

Date: October 10th, 2017

Location: 24 Owego Street, Cortland, NY (Tori's home)

Length: 37:37

The Interviewee: Mrs. Guido has lived her entire 75-year life in the City of Cortland, NY and that is where she plans to stay until she is 'in the ground.' Her great uncle George, grandmother, and father were all employed by the Wickwires for a number of years in the factory as well as their home, which is now the 1890 House Museum on Tompkins Street. Mrs. Guido worked as a babysitter and an assistant for many years. She married out of high school and had four boys, one of which was also interviewed for this same project. She still volunteers to work at the Cortland Hospital and enjoys playing cards with the girls in her free time. She looks back fondly on her memories of growing up in the City of Cortland and had a nice time reminiscing about her family and friends.

The Interviewers: Jake Daly is a SUNY Cortland undergraduate student studying history. Andrew Devlin is a SUNY Cortland undergraduate student studying history and education. Tori Duger is a SUNY Cortland undergraduate student studying history and education. The oral interview is for a project that all three students are working on for their HIS 280 Fall 2017 class for the 1890 House Museum.

Description of the Interview: The interview took place at Tori's home at 24 Owego Street in Cortland, NY on October 10, 2017. We sat in the living room on a couch and a loveseat while asking Mrs. Guido questions about the Wickwire factory and her life in Cortland. Jake sat next to Mrs. Guido adjacent to Tori and Andrew who sat on the loveseat. We spoke for almost 40 minutes with no interruptions.

Note on Recording: The interview was recorded on all three of our iPhones.



Transcript – Sue Buggs Guido

Interviewee: Sue Buggs Guido

Interviewers: Jake Daly, Andrew Devlin, and Tori Duger

Interview Date: October 10, 2017

Location: Cortland, New York

Length: 1 audio file, 00:37:35

Jake Daly: If you could just state your name for us.

Sue Buggs Guido: Sue Buggs Guido.

JD: We're interviewing Mrs. Guido for a History 280 project and we're going to shed some light on the workers of the Wickwire Factory. My name is Jake Daly.

Tori Duger: I'm Tori Duger

Andrew Devlin: And I'm Andrew Devlin

JD: We're just going to ask you a couple questions. Try to get some background information on the factory and what it was like growing up in Cortland.

SG: Ok.

JD: How long have you lived in Cortland?

SG: 75 years, and I'll be here when they put me in the ground.

JD: What can you tell us about growing up here?

SG: Well I, like I said, I've always grown up here. Down the street is an elementary school. It was Owego Street School, it's an apartment house now, but that's where I went to grade school, and I could walk to school. My father graduated from high school in 1936, and he started working at Wickwires on August 1st, 1936 and he lied about his age because you couldn't

work in the factory unless you were 18 years old. So, he said his birthday was August 1st so he could work but he was only lacking 17 days, his real birthday was August 17th. But he worked at Wickwires until it closed.

JD: Did anyone else in your family work there?

SG: I had a Great Uncle George that worked there on the crane. He operated a crane with a magnet and they picked up metal off the floor and, naturally, it stuck to the magnet and put it into big huge vats that were heated and it melted it and they made wire out of the melted metal.

JD: Do you remember whether or not they enjoyed working there, they ever complained...?

SG: My father never complained. The workers for the Wickwires went on strike when I was a little girl. On Squire Street, there was a gentleman that owned a coal factory there, and my father worked there during the strike and also hunted muskrats. And skinned them and sold the pellets.

JD: So, he had a side job?

SG: Yeah until they settled the strike, and I was too young to remember why they went on strike. Obviously, it was for money and whatever.

JD: Was it common to have a side job back then, was it necessary?

SG: My mother worked, she always worked. She worked in the probation department all her life, and then she worked for a judge in city hall. But my mom and dad always worked, and when my sister and I were very small, we went to what they called the day nursery, down on Court Street. And I did go to kindergarten at Randall School and I could walk there from the nursery and when I got older I went to Owego Street School and my sister did too.

JD: Did your dad earn a livable working at the Wickwires? Was it tough growing up, financially?

SG: It wasn't easy, like I said my mom worked. And back when I was about seven, my mother and father bought a camp on Song Lake and it was my mother's uncle. So, in the summer, we lived at the lake, and mom made arrangements so she didn't have to work in the summer and she was able to stay with my sister and I. When I was 14 and my sister was 12, we had a brother so when we got older we took care of my brother. But when I was a kid I would meet my father when he got out of work at 3:30 and I would walk down Squire Street and then I would go to South Avenue. It was called Railroad Street when I was younger. I had a kitten and I would put it in my carriage and walk down and meet my dad and walk home together because we only had one car and my mom drove that to work at the courthouse.

JD: Do you recall anything from the 1970's in Cortland with the major recession that happened, were there a lot of people out of work?

SG: In the 1970's I had children at the time, I didn't pay much attention. I babysat children at home. My husband was a school teacher at Homer, he was a history teacher. I always babysat to have extra money, we didn't have extra money I mean because you know school teachers don't get rich and they still don't. We had four boys and it seems like all four of them got along. They all went to college. Two of them just with \$2,500 loans and the other two with \$6,000 dollar loans. One went to Clarkson, the other to Scranton, and the other two went to Cortland. My husband didn't want them to be 20 or 30,000 dollars in debt so we pinched pennies.

AD: So, with your father and uncle, at any family events or anytime they were together, would you ever overhear them talking good or bad about their jobs in general?

SG: My father was a foreman, and he was the youngest foreman in Wickwires and my sister told me this, that people weren't too happy because the south end of town, where the factory was, there were a lot of Italians who lived down there wondering why this young man whose parents were from England, was a foreman and why they had not chosen a man who had been in the plant for a long, long time. But my sister and I, his tool and dye room was right on the corner on the railroad tracks and when we did go to Randall School, we walked home to Frank Street and we would go up in the tool and dye room and see dad and the people he worked with and there were two or three ladies and two or three men who worked up there that he was in charge of. Now my Uncle George never married, but he worked in the forging room where they poured and he would tell me they would have accidents because they would have a big walk thing where you could look into the vats, and there were men who would fall accidentally into these vats and obviously, they didn't come out.

AD: And was that common?

SG: It wasn't uncommon, it was just something that happened and you knew or I didn't hear just only when my Great Uncle George would talk about it.

AD: And how was the experience of you and your friends actually going into the factory itself?

SG: It was just my sister and I that were able to go in but we went in and up these old, old stairways and it was all like grease and oiled, you know it was a factory. Old wooden steps, you would have to be careful and we would go up in the dye room. My dad would take, my sister's name is Chopper, he would take Chop and I down to the cafeteria and we would get you know chocolate milk or an ice cream sundae or something like that and my grandmother, my father's mother, worked at the Crescent Factory just up the street, and at times my sister and I would go

in the Crescent and see grandma and she always gave us money to put in the vending machine to get a candy bar. You know it was not bad life, my father didn't make a lot of money. He refereed basketball, he refereed football, so that's how he made extra money and when the Wickwires had gone on strike, he worked part time at the coal factory and hunted muskrats and sold the skins.

AD: And how about your great grandmother living in the house being a maid?

SG: My great grandmother lived on Pearl Street by the college, it backs up to the college now. My Great Uncle George lived with her. My grandmother's husband died when I was 4 years old. So, my grandmother had four kids to raise and dad was the second of four children, three boys and one girl in the family. Then eventually my husband died and moved down the farm on Pearl Street and Mr. Genmen lived on the corner of Tompkins and Pearl Street and there was a farmer there, Mr. Genmen and he owned all the land back to 281 before it got bought by the college. My sister and I would stay over Friday night with my grandmother and Saturday morning we always would go over for Mr. Genmen because he always gave grandma a dozen eggs because he had hens and he also had other things. He gave my sister and I a penny each and we thought we were in glory. And speaking of pennies, up where the elementary school was, there was a grocery store across the street and there was a gentleman named Mr. Bunny who owned it. And we would always have a penny and he sold penny candy. And we would go over there after school and get a piece of gum and a piece of candy for a penny.

AD: You can't do that anymore.

SG: No, not at all.

AD: Who's your relative that worked in the Wickwire family house?

SG: After my father grew up and got married, it was just my Uncle George, Great Uncle George, and my father's sister. It was like a two-family house, Grandma lived downstairs, and

my Aunt Mel and her husband and two kids lived upstairs, and Uncle George had a bedroom upstairs that he shared with my cousin, but he always had meals with my grandmother. My Uncle George was my grandmother's brother-in-law.

AD: And when we were walking around in the Wickwires house, in the 1890 house, you said that you actually had a family member that worked inside the house?

SG: That was my grandmother who lived on Pearl Street. When she came over from England at age 16, she didn't have any place to live. So, she moved in there and she was a maid to Mrs. Wickwire.

AD: And for how long?

SG: I don't know how long because I don't know how old she was when she married her husband.

AD: Do you remember how she felt about her job?

SG: No, my grandmother was always a very hard worker. She worked for the Wickwire family and then she was married. She lived on the farm, but when her husband died she lived down on Pearl Street in the family house that they owned, and she worked for the Higgins family. Dr. Paul Higgins and Dr. Edward Higgins; one was an ears, nose, and throat person and Dr. Paul was a regular surgeon, and my grandmother worked up there every day, cooked, and did ironing and washing for them, and whatever clothes their boys outgrew, they gave to my grandmother because Grandma had three boys, and they would get the clothes the Higgins boys outgrew. When my dad was in high school, and the high school was where the county office building is, down on Central Avenue, so he ran home every day, he only had one pair of shoes for the whole school year, and he'd wear the bottoms out, so then he'd take cardboard and put it in the bottom of his shoes, to last the rest of the school year.

JD: You mentioned that there were Italians in the neighborhood. What other kinds of backgrounds were there?

SG: Well, the south of Main Street, all the Italians lived down there, but then you come up way on the other end, on Owego Street were Russians, and there was a place up there years ago my mom and dad would go to and take my sister and myself and it was called The Russian Club, and they would go there and they had a big bar and a dance floor and Chop and I would play polka music and dance all over the place. And then they would have special dinners where they would have Russian food that mom and dad partook in. So, it was fun. To me, it was a normal life.

TD: How was the Russian food?

SG: It wasn't bad. I didn't mind it at all. They had what we call today cabbage rolls and they had a halupki which was dough with meat wrapped in it and boiled in water or fried.

TD: How was the food in Cortland? What was night life like on Main Street?

SG: Well when I was in high school we would have home football games and when we did we would have a marching band, and if we won the football game, we would come out by Randall Field. We always played there. And if we won the game, we would come to Main Street and the students and the band would come down Main Street and then cut down Central Avenue and we'd have a dance. We always called them mixers. If we didn't win, we would go down Greenbush Street to get to the high school. In my senior year in high school, in January, my business teacher told me there was a doctor that needed a secretary because his secretary was leaving, Well, the doctor that needed a secretary happened to be somebody I knew. He was my Sunday school teacher at the Episcopal Church. So, I went for an interview and Dr. Eckel told me that if I wasn't going to be getting married in a year that I had the job. Well I didn't get

married in a year, so I worked there, and there used to be a place down on Groton Avenue by the Elks Club by Dom's Grill and I had a friend who worked in the drug store. They fixed my schedule so I could go in at noon until I graduated in June of 1960 and then I worked full time. After work, my friend and I would go to Dom's Grill to have a beer or two and that's where I met my husband.

TD: Do you remember what it was like when the factory closed and how people felt about it?

SG: I don't really know because at the time I was raising children. My father got a job with Cortland County as the weights and sealer man, so he would travel all over the county, and he would go to every gas station, and if they said you're getting a gallon of gas, he would pour it in a special thing to make sure that the pump was giving you a gallon of gas. So, he did that for probably ten-twelve years after the Wickwires closed. And then, speaking of food, my father had a garden, we had two gardens. We had a garden on Frank Street and then he had a big garden when I was seven that he grew at Song Lake. We lived at Song Lake in the summer. So, mom and dad, in the fall, were always canning, canning tomatoes and beans.

AD: I know you said you really don't, not that you don't remember, but you don't have a sense of anyone in the population leaving in the 1970's when it closed?

SG: I just know Brockway's. Brockway Motors was another big business here, they made trucks.

AD: The one on Main Street, right?

SG: No, it was down on Central Avenue in that area, but when Brockway's closed, a lot of people moved out of town with them down in Pennsylvania because they moved to a big factory down in Pennsylvania. And I honestly don't know, my Great Uncle George, he retired

before Wickwires closed. He retired in 1965 and then a year later he died. He had cancer but, I was too involved in my own life. I got married in 1963 and I was babysitting, I babysat for eleven years and then I worked in doctors' offices and then I worked seventeen years in the guidance office in the high school.

TD: Did you know anyone from The Wickwire Factory?

SG: Yes. Charlie Wickwire, and I think his father's name was Charles, so this was Charles Junior, had a daughter named Lucy, and Lucy graduated from high school with me and Lucy had two brothers. One is Jeff and I can't think what the other one was, but the one brother still lives around here.

TD: Do you remember what they were like?

TD: Did she live in the 1890 House?

SG: No, she lived on West Court, almost up to the college. If you go up from Brix on Court Street, it would be on the left.

TD: Do you remember when you first went to the 1890 House?

SG: Oh, gosh, it was just a few years ago. I didn't go until they opened it up for visitors and so forth. I've been there, to the 1890 House, for gatherings because they've had socials, like the hospital recently honored somebody and they had a big tent in the backyard, and then the Alumni House too, right next store, they have a lot of parties there. You can rent it out for weddings and people have gotten married in the 1890 House.

TD: If you had to pick something to put into a time capsule, what would it be?

SG: And whatever but, probably different things I did in high school of going on picnics, and a group of us that were always together, we went sliding up in Virgil and we built a fire and everything and back then you wore boots, rubber boots, and I wasn't paying attention, and I had

my feet out like this, burned a hole in the toe of my boot. My good rubber boots. But I had a lot of fun as a kid and a teenager, and sometimes I don't think you people have the fun. I worry horribly about you guys, and I have eight grandchildren, of what the world is going to be like with everything that's happening. It scares the bejeebies out of me. I just think you guys have so much ahead of you, and I just worry about you. You know that things will work out for you in, I mean we had, when I graduated it was the Vietnam War and we had three or four fellas in my class that went into the Vietnam War. That was one thing that, you know, bothered everybody back then. But the fellas in my class did come home. Now some other fellas that went after, some of them didn't make it home. And I had a cousin, my age, that was over in Vietnam, and he was missing for years and years. And they finally, not too long ago, his mother lived on the corner of Broadway and Townley, it's a big yellow house there, and that's where he grew up, his name was Doug Glover and he was Green Beret. And he went missing, for oh so many years. And they finally found human remains or whatever and brought it back and he's been buried back here.

TD: Good!

SG: But, that I mean was bad for us when different things like that happened. But you people have so much political stuff out there and it just-

AD: My grandparents say the same thing.

SG: Do they?

AD: Oh, yeah.

TD: And they lived through wars.

AD: Mhm, yeah, they always say we don't know how to have like fun anymore.

SG: I mean, well I have two uncles. Two of my, my Uncle Ken Buggs and my Uncle George Buggs. They were my father's brothers. They were both in World War Two and they were over in England, when England was being bombed. And my Uncle George was out in the field, and then my Uncle Ken got there, he slept in my Uncle George's bed because he was, they were moving battalions here and there and everywhere and he didn't get to see his brother, but luckily, they both came back. My father was not drafted, or they were going to draft him, but he was the only boy left in my grandmother's family, and she was a widow. And he was not, he was married. So, he didn't have to go, because she already had two boys.

AD: Wow.

SG: Over there.

JD: That's crazy.

SG: Mhm. So.

JD: Alright.

SG: Anything else you want to know? I just...some of this stuff is just coming out of my mouth.

AD: Oh, yeah no, it's great yeah.

TD: It's nice to just hear you, yeah. It leads to really cool places. Like I never would have known that you had family in the war.

SG: Mhm! Yeah, I've got a picture, pictures at home of my two uncles in their uniforms standing with my grandmother. And my one Uncle Ken that was over there too, he just died a year ago and he was 94.

AD: Wow.

SG: Yup.

AD: So, do you have anything else to say? Anything about growing up or any family members or anything?

SG: When I was growing up and we lived on Frank Street there were a lot of kids, and at night we would get together and play hide and seek, we played hopscotch, tag, and on Duane Street there was this Greek lady, and her name was Bessie. And we called her Bessie the Greek. And she always walked down the middle of the street talking to herself. Well we'd always hide behind a tree, and holler at her. Well she swore like a trooper! She came out with words that, you know, I had never heard before. But we always, you know we shouldn't have done it. We were bad kids but we picked on this one poor old lady, all the kids in the neighborhood. But we always got together and then when we lived at the lake, every night when my sister and I got closer, like twelve-thirteen years old, there were other kids our age on the lake and they would all gather at our place and dad would build a fire and we had this old popcorn popper. It was a square thing and you pulled it back and held it over the fire and you shook it like that and every night we had popcorn and everybody was in our yard having popcorn, and we you know, at times we had friends that had bands and they would come up and play on our front yard, you know, and we would dance and it was amazing. We had hayrides at the lake every year at the end. And one of the farmers down the road, we paid him and he had a hayride and everybody paired up with somebody and we didn't pair up with them during the time we were in the summer. But we had, on this dumb hayride, we lost glasses, we lost watches, things like that. But I had a good life, I mean, with the way I grew up. I grew up on a lake. When we first moved to the lake we had an outhouse. We always called it the three-holer because there were three holes. And we didn't have any water in our camp. We had a pump, so if you wanted water you had to go out and pump it, and, to do dishes, we filled up a bucket from the pump and heated the water

on the stove and then washed dishes that way. And my sister and I, when we were real young, slept in a tent. My grandfather had bought us a tent, so Chop and I slept in the tent. We had two dogs and a cat, and the two dogs slept at the foot of my bed and the cat slept up on my shoulder. And my sister slept in a cot. I had a daybed and it had sides on it, so the cat couldn't get underneath it. But Chop had a cot that was all empty underneath and the cat would hunt for fish and he would bring them in during the night and we would wake up in the morning and there would be a fish head or two under Chop's bed. And she didn't like that, I was put in charge of getting rid of the fish. And we always caught frogs, we always went fishing, we were young when we fished, and we belonged to Girl Scouts, and we had Bunsen Burners, and we would clean our own fish, scale them, sunfish, and we would cook them on our Bunsen Burners. Yup.

TD: Sounds like fun!

SG: It was, it was not it- kids don't have the opportunity to do this today.

AD: Oh, yeah.

SG: You know, I was very fortunate. My mother and father scrimped to have this camp at the lake because not everyone, you know, I didn't have many friends that had camps at lakes. And my sister and I would invite a girlfriend up for a week and we would take turns, so they had the opportunity, and well, when I was fourteen my brother was born. And he was in hoops so we had to take care of him because my mother, you know, continually worked but then when I graduated high school, I just kept on working for the doctor for six years until I got married and got pregnant and then I babysat for eleven years and worked in different doctor's offices and worked at the guidance office at the high school. And at the high school, I worked for the social workers and the school psychologist, and I had these two young girls that were in the seventh grade and they would come and visit me every day at noon. And they were poorer than church

mice. They didn't, you know, they were always being sent home for lice. But at Christmas time, they put their money together, and they bought me a poinsettia. And I thought I was, I was just heartbroken. Not heartbroken. I was so excited, but knowing that these two little girls, or seventh graders, they were poor and they bought me this for Christmas because every day during their lunch, they came to my desk and talked to me. And it just made me feel like a million dollars. So.

TD: Thank you for sharing so many intimate stories with us today.

SG: Well if you edit, you can take out what you want and do what you want with it, but I hope it gets you an A+ on this project.

AD: Oh, yeah.

TD: Definitely, thank you so much.

SG: You're welcome. It was fun. I was nervous coming here because I wasn't sure what but uh-

TD: You had plenty of quality dialogue.

SG: Enjoy your college life and so forth.