

**Name:** Bailee Glass

**UAW Local 2209 Member:** James Glass

**Relationship:** Daughter

**School:** Grace College

Sacrifice is the hymn of the women during the Flint Sit Down Strike of 1936. Fighting for human dignity, fairness, and respect, the humility and hard work of the Women's Emergency Brigade was instrumental in the success of the strike and the establishment of the United Auto Workers. The women who participated take pride in their efforts, recognizing the endurance and bravery that came about from the strike. Reflecting back on their role, they mention their provision of food to the strikers. Those that were employed in nearby factories discuss a nerve racking, uneasy, and scary environment. Many wives worked because either their husbands or fathers could not. Before the strike, no benefits, health or welfare, unemployment or social security existed. These benefits, which seem almost customary now, have come about because of the founding of the UAW. While working in a factory is tough in multiple facets, the women viewed it as a privilege to find employment there, even with limited safety features. There is dangerous work, and then there is women work. Breaks for restrooms were so heavily regulated and job were dependent on personal production rates. Foreman desired pretty, attractive girls to work out front. If you did not match the desired criteria, you worked very tough jobs. An environment was created of sexual favors in exchange for employment. While the work was degrading and humiliating, it was necessary to provide for themselves and their families.

Women who were not working saw first-hand the physical sufferings of their husbands from the rough and painful job requirement. Upon arriving at home from a day at work, husbands came back exhausted. Their hours to rest, relax, and enjoy company, was instead spent minimally recovering from the day's labor. They lost the ability to be decent companions to their wife or children because of the conditions faced inside the plant. A significant portion of the suffering in the workplace transferred into the home and much of the built-up energy was released on the wives. The husbands suffered at work, and the wives at home. Furthermore, much of the money earned was spent on alcohol, frustrating wives who were consequently

consoled by the churches. General Motors in Flint was backed up by big names and the consumer suffered. Consequently, the women of the Emergency Brigade truly were the “pioneers of the labor movement.”

The Flint Strike was a key change in story plot of labor. The women were fighting not necessarily for more money, but to be treated like human beings. Organizing with a union was a fight for life. Due to their nature, unions had to participate in secret, and often met underground. Previously, those who signed a card aligning with the union were fired. Nonetheless, those women came together and worked to persuade more to participate and join the union. Many individuals felt odd going against the business that provided their livelihood, understandably. Additionally, the women in the home was tied down and very needed in the home. Taking the time for a strike was not rational. Factory management saw breaking the wives as a way to get to the husbands and tear them apart. Even so, they stood united. As the strike began, women were asked to leave for their own safety while the men remained. Upon investigation and deliberation, the women went up and talked to their husbands and decided to form the women’s auxiliary. They gathered to discuss pensions, working conditions, and seniority rights. Appropriately, these women were concerned about their husband’s roles in the strike and understood they had as much significance in the strike as the men. After some time, mothers and wives not connected to the factory began supporting the women already on strike. They collaborated to cook large meals and organized children in support of their fathers, as well as establishing nurseries. The individual gifts and talents of the women of the soon-to-be Emergency Brigade came together for one purpose.

During the night of one specific riot where weapons were deployed, women broke through the police line and stood with their husbands, sons, brothers, etc. They shared the message of the organization. An atmosphere of women’s courage developed, and the women

organized a brigade to be there for the men, not only in Flint, but wherever needed. The strike continued for weeks, and the men weren't moving if General Motors was not budging. On one occasion, the bravery of the women rescued the men on strike. As they held the gate shut from the police, men and women gathered singing "Solidarity." In 1937, February 11, the UAW was born as General Motors settled. The women's role gave the men another perspective on who the woman could be. They gained respect as being more than housewives. Beautifully and bravely, they were ready to sacrifice their life for the victory of the UAW. The women were thanked for their work, and with time the women gained respect, inclusion, appreciation, and support.

Today, the UAW supports General Motor's employees by providing care above satisfactory level, meeting and superseding the mandated OSHA standards of safety. It is through the actions and the assembly of United Auto Workers that these safety measures are enforced. One example is the negotiation of ergonomics as to prevent and decrease the likelihood of pain caused by repetitive bending and heavy lifting. Specifically, vehicles in assembly are set at a certain height on the line as to benefit employees. Furthermore, health care through the UAW is above traditional health care plans, serving both the workers and their families. In matters of health and safety, the UAW is concerned, but they also place a value on relationships providing for paid vacations and holidays. It is through the actions of collective bargaining and negotiation that these benefits are provided.

Seniority is another benefit of working with the UAW. Negotiations permit that a long-term employee has seniority, or rather priority, over a newer employee when it comes to job preferences. It is the large number of members which allows for so many crucial and important benefits to be available when compared with similar field jobs in the United States. Much of the Flint Strike is responsible for these. No longer are workers forced to stay silent for fear of losing their jobs but are provided a voice. Matters of equal pay have diminished as job performance is

looked at instead of demographics like race and gender. Looking forward, the UAW also provides a pension to its members, which supplements a 401k plan and the social security the government provides, equating a more comfortable retirement. Workers are more likely to be committed to their employer due to the benefits available.

The Flint Strike is one of many examples of people coming together. Historically speaking, the UAW has supported minority and oppressed groups like people of color, coming alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. fighting for integration and fairness. More recently, the UAW has helped support community foundations and national organizations like Make-A-Wish, raising upwards of \$50,000 last year alone. United Way programs are supported along with other companies and credit unions. The annual Labor Day parade honors these workers and members and in return the employees volunteer and serve their communities in need via various acts like cooking. As a result of the UAW, General Motors is able to give back.

Overall, the strike in Flint, Michigan shaped the history of workers, families, communities, and our country. A focus on unity has always been profoundly evident in the United Auto Workers aiming to serve and help not only it's member's, but the world around it. I am inspired by the passion and drive of the women before me who stood up for what they valued and did not back down in the face of adversity. Their sacrifice and commitment were essential to the success of the sit-down strike and formation of the UAW. May I be a woman of similar courage. And may I also preserve the hard-fought wins of the organization, fighting for continued fairness and regularly giving back to my community with my time and resources. As someone who desires to serve others with her vocation, I strive to live a life of similar impact as those before me, especially the women of the Emergency Brigade. I strive to not be mediocre, but exemplar in my citizenship, vocation, and womanhood.