

When I was fourteen my mother told me if I wanted to smoke I would have to buy my own cigarettes, so I got a job at Woolworth's Drugstore.

It was during the Christmas season and I worked behind the counter, ringing up purchases for customers. I was scared the manager would find out how old I was, and when he did, I was sure he would fire me. Instead, he moved me over to the soda fountain, where all the teenagers came to drink bottles of Coke and hang out on the red swivel stools with their friends.

Later I took a job working the soda fountain at Stix, Baer and Fuller in downtown St. Louis. I didn't like it there as much as the counter at Woolworth's because we had to wear hair nets, but I got



*Girls working the Woolworth's counter*

to work with lots of other girls my age. One day we learned that management was going to fire a big group of us.

"We'll post the names of those we're letting go by the end of the afternoon," our boss said.

I gathered all the girls together. "Look, we can't let them do this," I said.

"How are they going to decide which of us to fire?" asked my friend Mary Anne.

"It's not fair," someone said.

"No," I said, "it's not. And we're not going to let it happen."

"What do you mean?"

"Here's what we do. We all walk out together."

"Yeah!" someone said. "Like a real strike!" Everyone looked excited.

"Let's go, ladies!" I shouted. Just then the manager came from the back room.

"He's got the list!" Mary Anne whispered as he walked toward us.

He held up the piece of paper for us to see. Everyone groaned, including Mary Anne. My name was the only one missing.

The girls went to gather their coats.

"Wait!" I said. "What about me?"

The manager looked at me with a grin on his face. "Looks like you're closing up by yourself tonight."

That was my last experience leading a strike.



*The Stix, Baer & Fuller building at 6th and Washington Avenue, downtown St. Louis*

