

Interview with Angela Olszewski

J.L. This is Jane Latour on Saturday, December 18th, 2004 with Angela Olszewski, and that's O-l-s-z-e-w-s-k-i.

So, Angela, Tell me a bit about when you were born, where you were born and raised.

A.O. Okay. I was born in St. John's Hospital in Queens on March 27th, 1970. I was a breech birth and I came out feet first. My parents are from Green Point, Brooklyn, I'm from Green Point, Brooklyn, my grandparents are from Green Point, Brooklyn.

J.L. A nice Polish neighborhood.

A.O. Polish neighborhood. Mom's Italian. The folks in the family who came to Ellis Island basically got off at Ellis Island, went to Green Point and stayed there for a hundred years. Both my parents, to sum it up, are workers. They have been working since childhood. My mother dropped out of school. She convinced her mother to sign her out of school. I believe they told the school she was going to Italy, and she went to work as a teenager at a machine embroidery sweatshop, basically, in Brooklyn and her and her sister have done that all their life. My mother still has her embroidery machine. My cousins and I used to go to the factory ... It was just a little shop. There were about ...

J.L. What neighborhood is it in?

A.O. In Green Point.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. Yeah. It's gone now. The business ... My mother actually took that business over when the owner retired, but my cousins and I all have memories of--you know--before there was "take your daughters to work day" I was going to work with my parents. My Dad works ...

J.L. Was that sweatshop unionized or non-unionized?

A.O. No, non-union-non-union and in fact, we figured out recently that all that hard work my mother's put in, she does not have enough credits for Social Security so we have to figure something out for her. Yeah, it's horrendous really, but--you know--back then you thought you were doing the right thing just work hard, make your money ... My Dad worked, as a kid, his ... one of his proud stories is that when he was fifteen he bought a car. And it sat in a lot and he would go and start the car up and move it around in the lot. But he had worked so hard as a kid working in laundromats and delis and things that he'd bought this car. He then got a job with my Grandfather at Taylor's Iron Foundry in Green Point. My grandfather was a shop steward in Taylor's Iron Foundry and the stories my father told, it was such hard work that ...

J.L. What union?

A.O. I don't know that. I've gone on line to look that up and I can't find much information on it. I believe Taylor's Iron Foundry went to India and if you look at the gratings and the sewer covers in New York City sometimes you'll see it'll say Taylor on it. And this is the kind of heavy, hard work my Grandfather did. He .. in fact, had two hip replacements and we attribute it to, like, repetitive stress injury from the job.

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. My grandfather was also a bar tender on the weekends and when he was a kid he used to deliver ice with his father in a horse and wagon,--

J.L. Oh my God.

A.O. Yeah, yeah,--so this is all what was going on in Green Point. But that's where it ... it really begins because I know my Dad must have been a kid at the dinner table with my Grandfather listening to my Grandfather tell the shop steward stories. And what happened with me is after my Dad, after working at the iron foundry, he also got a job at Continental Can Company, steel company, when it was in, I believe it was in Long Island City. but they closed up shop in the '70's and went south to Jersey and then even further south, I believe south of the border.

J.L. I worked for them for one month.

A.O. Did you?

J.L. I did, in New Jersey.

A.O. Here in the New York ... In New Jersey?

J.L. New Jersey ... New Jersey.

A.O. Really!

J.L. So that's another story.

A.O. Do you know Arthur Sieczkowski? [Her father's friend who did go to NJ with Continental Can Co.]

J.L. No, one month.

A.O. Okay. Yeah. Oh wow! That was short. So after that my Dad had a couple of different stints in building maintenance. My Dad was always a very handy guy. He still is. But the big break in terms of a job for my family came when my Dad got called up for the New York City Department of Sanitation. He had taken the test in his twenties and there was a freeze on hiring for so very long he got called in his thirties. But at that point my family--you know--was relieved because this is a job where you think ...

J.L. a good paying job.

A.O. right, a good paying job, five weeks vacation, unlimited

sick and--you know--steady, overtime when it snows, all good things. So at that point when my Dad got that job my parents finally had a second child. (laughs) So ...

J.L. boy or girl?

A.O. A girl, my sister Jacqueline.

J.L. So your father became a member of the Teamsters then.

A.O. Yes. He says though, they are considered affiliated with the Teamsters, that they're not actually Teamsters.

J.L. 'Cause they have ?? a union local.

A.O. Right.

J.L. And so did you work with your Dad? You said he was handy. Did you work with him around the house?

A.O. Yes. Yes. My parents were always working so much, so much, they took a big chance in the '70's, before real estate went crazy, and they purchased two properties in Brooklyn, two six family apartment buildings. And my father knew he could fix them, not at that time 'cause I was too young but over the years as I got older, I began to help him with renovations and--you know--carrying lumber and sheet rock and ... and all sort of things. And I still do to this day because we're still fixing up some of the apartments as older tenants who've been there for very long have gone out and ... and so on.

J.L. And now he has a skilled tradesperson along with him.

A.O. Oh yes. I recently renovated two bathrooms in the buildings and I could see it blew them both away. You know? I could see that because before that I'd really be helped my Dad with things like demolition,-you know?-rough work.

J.L. Right.

A.O. and I came in and I did these two bathrooms: I tiled them up, grounded them ... and my dad's handy, but if you don't do something like tiling every day you're going to go slow at it, so he was just floored about how quickly I did it and turned it around.

J.L. And how beautiful it was.

A.O. They were beaming. Yeah, they were beaming with pride. I could tell.

J.L. So tell me about your education?

A.O. I went to Catholic grade school in Green Point and Catholic high school in Queens, St. Stanislaus [Kostka School] in Green Point and St. John's Prep in Queens and I went to SUNY, Binghamton, for a semester, my first semester of college, but I really didn't like being away.

J.L. That's far.

A.O. It's far and--you know,--when you're so used to New York City how--you know--

J.L. Real country.

A.O. Real, real quiet, just too quiet for me. I came back and I transferred and finished up at Queens College. I have a B.A. in Communications: Film and Video Production.

J.L. Oh, good. So how would you describe yourself politically?

A.O. Politically ... feels; it's troubling.

J.L. Well, just sort of put yourself in some kind of general

..

A.O. Liberal... It's ... It's ...

J.L. Like, I always say I'm a Socialist, even though it doesn't mean anything 'cause I don't do anything with anybody else. But,--you know--that's my ...

A.O. right.

J.L. If I had to put a label on myself ....

A.O. Right. And I'm .. I'm registered as an Independent, which--you know--I just ... there's good and bad in all of it,--you know?--so ...

J.L. I'm registered as a Democrat and that's problematic,

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. Just so I could vote in the primaries in New York.

J.o. Right. And I considered switching to Democratic just because

J.L. Because of that. Yeah.

A.O. That's what the political machine is offering us. You know? Yeah.

J.L. Okay. So it's not a real important question, I guess. So what jobs did you have prior to going to .... into a pre-apprenticeship program?

A.O. Prior to pre-Apprenticeship I had so many jobs. You know? When you're living in New York City you are a butcher, a baker, a candlestick maker to pay the rent and keep up with the cost of living in this city. I was a dental assistant when I was a teenager. Don't ask me how, but I was shooting X-rays and things like that and I had no technic--you know-technician skills. That was a short lived job. But I sold cigars at a place called Mom's

Cigars on Fifth Avenue and 20th. They're not there any more, but they were there for over forty years. They had a big write up in "Cigar Aficionado."

J.L. Smoke ....

A.O. Uh-huh, when cigars were this big thing. I worked at a place called CompetiTrak, which is a marketing research company. Basically ... It's glamour sounding, but I basically sat at the computer with a stack of newspapers from all over the country: Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, and I leafed through all of the pages of the paper looking for advertisements. And when I'd come across them I'd measure them and I'd have to go in the computer and say, Okay, I found the AT&T and; it was four by six; it had two colors;--you know--and it was whatever this--you know--get a hundred minutes for your son;--whatever the--what am I looking for?--the gimmick was. And it was an electronic sweatshop is what I called it. You know? It was eight dollars an hour, no benefits. A lot of people were going to college that were there. You know? It was just that kind of job. I worked at Brinks Armored Car Company. I worked there during their night shift. I worked in the money room. I counted millions and millions of dollars in cash, night after night. And around ...

J.L. There really is such a thing.

A.O. There actually is such a thing.

J.L. I always thought they were Brinks trucks that drove around. See, I never took it to the next step.

A.O. Right. They bring it to Fort Knox and we'd count the money. And it was hilarious because it was the kind of place ... Remember the ... the TV show "Get Smart," the opening of the show he walks through all the doors ...

J.L. Um-hum. Right.

A.O. That's how Brinks is on the inside. You have to look at ... You have to look at a camera and then they ... they buzz you through to the next job--to the next spot; to the next spot. But what's very interesting about that job is it used to be a union job.

J.L. Right. And Brinks drivers were Teamsters.

A.O. Right. And Brinks busted up the union. It happened well before I got there and I realized--you know,-while I was there that just something was strange. And like, all the management was white and all the workers were really mostly people of color. I mean, there was a ... there was a white guy on the day shift and I was the white girl on the night shift. And right there the picture felt weird. I brought it up to management: how come there's not a nighttime differential. You know? At this time of year when we would get the Toys Are Us accounts we'd be counting money till, like, four in the morning. And what Brinks started doing,-well, maybe they'd been doing it,-is every three months we'd have a meeting and at the meeting they'd explain to us how it would

not be good if we had a union here. And they said: If anybody ever asks you to sign cards, or this and that, you're going to--you know,-you're going to spoil what we have here and bla, bla, bla.

J.L. Was it well paid?

A.O. It was only, like, eight an change, nine when I left and I .. I don't consider that really well paid.

J.L. So you left. And so let's segue over to the trades.

A.O. All right.

J.L. How did you hear about NEW: Nontraditional Employment For Women?

A.O. In .. Well, I heard about NEW while I was at Brinks. It was in '95 and I heard it from friends of friends. And I went over to NEW, getting some information, and they said: Well, you have to be on Public Assistance or collecting unemployment to go through the program. And at the time I was not so I just said: Okay. I'll file that in the back of my head and if I find myself in that situation I'll come running through the door. Just before I got into NEW I was working at New York City Parks and Recreation [Department]in their permit office. I was a Seasonal Clerical Associate, I mean, and I sold tennis permits.

J.L. And were you in the union, DC 37?

A.O. I was in DC 37. However, I worked in the very high profile location called The Arsenal which is where the former Parks Commissioner, Henry Stern, worked and there was no union literature around and ...

J.L. Were you in Local 983? Do you remember?

A.O. I believe it was called 15 [Local 1549] something, not .. I mean,

J.L. Okay. there's so many ....

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. There's so many .. 1505, 1507 ...

A.O. I would have to look at my pay stub. It's on there.

J.L. That's all right. It's ....

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. I ... something strange happened there where I confronted them about some union issues. Henry Stern had this quirky thing where he gave out Park's names if he liked you, and it was ...

J.L. Oh, right.

A.O. It was an indication that you would get ... you would be

able to stay on. You see, it was explained to me and the other women that they hired, well,--you know--this could be an opportunity for you to get a full time position in the Parks Department, but it all depends. It all depends on the budget. This is not .. Basically they tried to play the two of us against each other to keep ...

J.L. And did Henry give you a name?

A.O. No.

J.L. No?

A.O. o. I ... first I had one picked out but I caused ... I basically got upset because we were selling these tennis permits. And while we were in this room selling these permits they renovated the room and cut out a new window in the wall and they said: All right. Listen: when it's not too busy can you sell T-shirts at that window? And I said: Well, that's another job description, so will you pay me two salaries? Or--you know--should I call the union and ask them what I should do about this? And they were, like, Oh, please don't call the union. So I really didn't get involved with that T-shirt window. The other girl ... You know, basically I ... I spoke up and the o--the other two people in the room backed off and then complied, 'cause they wanted those jobs. And it wasn't worth it to me.

J.L. So NEW.

A.O. But just let me ... let me tell you this;

J.L. Okay. Yes. Okay.

A.O. It's--you know ... Really Henry needs to be exposed. This old-timer, Ephron, came to the window,--he's a maintenance guy,--and one of the things they let you do with these T-shirts, these parks Department T-shirts, is have your name put on them. So Henry came to me and he said: Listen. Can you--you know--get them to get me a baseball hat with my name. And I gave it to the manager and he said: No. Ephron can't have that because Henry only wants people who are Parks names to have their names put on these Parks Department clothing. And I said: that is ridiculous. This guy, Ephron, had, like, nineteen years of service with the Parks Department and they wouldn't let him get a hat with his name on it. I just ... I was furious. And basically, after that they probably said: We don't need you any more. And ....

J.L. Your season was up.

A.O. Yeah, my season was up, and it truly was. And I said: Wow! You're laying me off? Great! And I ran right to NEW, and that's ... I just ran right to NEW.

J.L. So you started at NEW. And tell me what was your motivation for wanting to learn a skilled trade?

A.O. Well, I just maybe mythologized in my head, but I just

figured skilled construction trades? I bet those unions are good. I bet those unions get paid well and I bet--you know--that there's solidarity there. That's ... that was my ideals about it. And I definitely wanted to go into a skilled finishing trade where my work would show, 'cause I really was going after it with a lot of measure of pride. I wanted to really get involved in something and ... and be proud of it, and work hard and be, like, yeah, a union. This is the way to go.

J.L. Okay. So you went to NEW. And how long does that program last?

A.O. At the time that I enrolled it was a twelve week, full time program.

J.L. Wow!

A.O. Now it's abbreviated to six weeks.

J.L. And you .. how did it happen that you ... You get to choose from trades, if I understand, from those unions that are looking for apprentices?

A.O. Yes.

J.L. So how did you .. What were your ... What was the selection process and how did you end up with the Tile Setters?

A.O. Well, I came through the door at NEW saying I wanted to be a bricklayer.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. And I knew I had an affection for cement. You know? I wanted to work with cement. And I sat down with the director at the time, Melinda DiMaio, and she explained to me that the Bricklayers were ... In construction in New York City they don't really do what I was after. Again, I was looking at it very romantically. I wanted to do arches and ... and I was thinking, like, what I could do with landscaping and, like what you see in old--beautiful old brick buildings. But really brick work nowadays in new construction is facade and it's very plain. You know? There's a lot of iron lintels and there's no arches over windows and things. And so she kind of discouraged me about it, and it was good that she did because as time went by and I learned more about that union, I'm glad I didn't go in that direction. It would have broke my heart. So as I was at NEW for the twelve weeks, did the training, and basically they made me aware of the opportunities that were available, first and foremost. And I remember bridge painter was a big one, elevator repair, tile/ marble terrazzo and electrician. And I thought about ... And carpenter. That was almost always open there. So I went to the library and I took out a bunch of books on the tile, a bunch of books, stacked ... stacked books, like, all the thickness of a telephone book. And I started leafing through the pages and I just fell in love with it. I fell in love with it because it's such a finishing trade. And I was looking at ... I remember this one thing that stuck in my head, these tiles that we inside a canal that was around ,like, a palace. And this rich family had this tile canal that they would--you know--go through with their gondolas or



whatever, and it was from the fourteenth century. And I thought, wow!--you know? That's what I want. I want to put something up and I want it to last--you know?--longer than me.

J.L. Now, we all basically know what tile is. That's the trade that you do? And marble we know. But terrazzo? Could you explain what terrazzo is?

A.O. Sure.

J.L. You've made me aware of that. Every time I see it now, the word, I think of you.

A.O. Oh.

J.L. what's ... what is it?

A.O. Terrazzo is a type of flooring. It can also be cast into stairs, shower pans, and other things. But basically what it is, is it's broken up bits of marble,--okay,-and you use these zinc,-metal strips. And when you see terrazzo it's usually in a large public building like a museum, a public space; some of the old post offices ... big, big places. Okay? So they take the metal strips and they make a framework on the floor and they put a cementitious base in that ... in the area of the ... the outlined by the strips and then they pour these marble chips. And they pour a lot of them and they pack it in, pack it in, pack it in. I mean, you really put a lot in and they flat trowel over the top of the stones and what that does it is ... it makes the stones most flat surface come to the top. Okay? And then they have to let that set, and the next day they grind it flat to the strip and then they polish, polish, polish, and you have a beautiful marble chip floor. And you can do it in different colors. They have new products where they use these epoxy-epoxies inside the cement that create, like, really rich colors. I was at a Disney store in New Jersey and they had a terrazzo Mickey Mouse base on the floor, just ... It was so perfect and,--you know--all the colors; the black ears, the white face, red around, circles in gold. You can do some really ... It's a very labor intensive process, very expensive, but it's .. if installed properly, guaranteed to last a hundred years. So ...

J.L. I'll be on the lookout.

A.O. Okay.

J.L. So tell me now about NEW. I have a question here. How much did you know about the industry and the history of the unions and you basically have already answered that. You had a romantic view. You really didn't know about the history of the building trades of New York City. But ...

A.O. Right. What my understanding of unions was basically through my Father and other extended members of my family. I had a lot of uncles who were in the Department of Sanitation. I have cousins who are in Police and Firefighter union, and basically my family all in a chorus would say take the test. Get in the Union. Take the test! Take the test! And you do that. And it was a really interesting bit with me and my Dad. When he got into

the Sanitation probably ... 'cause he just retired. Twenty years of picking up garbage is just unbelievable to me. About the last ten years of that twenty years my Dad did quite a bit of his own rabble rousing because the Department of Sanitation ... things have changed. When my Dad started at that job that was a three-man truck picking up garbage. And during his time there it was reduced to two men,--you know?--one driving, one lifting.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. And part of that comes out of the fact that the workers would run the route and they'd all finish before noon or what have you and people would go home. And the City of New York and the people out of Washington said; Hey,--you know?-what are we going to pay for this. You know? But my Dad would try to talk to the men and say,--you know--you're going to throw your back out. You're going to mess up your elbows.

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. And what happens to a lot of men who retire from Sanitation is they stop moving and they die. They retire and in two years, from the relaxing, they have heart attacks and die. So one of the things my Dad started doing with his partner was to work a seven hour day. And he was getting a lot of flack from higher ups about that, and I began to help him with his grievance letters because my--neither of my parents finished high school. So my Dad would give me a synopsis or some notes and I would compose his grievance letters and that--from sixteen on I was doing that for him. And that really started to educate me about the process of grievance and fairness and justice and ....

J.L. And the union as a tool for representing aggrieved workers. Okay. So then we come into the building trades. So we'll get back to unions, but I just wondered about that question. So tell me about the ... what were the chief benefits of the program at NEW?

A.O. For me I felt that the benefits were NEW's political connections and NEW's networking connections. So I had a bit of trouble getting into Local Seven at first. They said: come the first Tuesday of every month between the months of--I think it was March and December. And I showed up on the first Tuesday in November, it was Election Day, and they were, like, why are you here? What are you talking about? What application?

J.L. Where are they located?

A.O. The office for the application and training is in Long Island City. I can't think of the address right off the top of my head.

J.L. Yeah. That's all right.

A.O. Yeah. And I went back to NEW and reported what had happened and basically the director at the time, Martha Baker, and

the Job Developer, Susan Wilson, went to work to iron out the details of my return in December where there was an application. There were other people making applications. And I took a little math test and filled out a paper, and, yes, the gentleman, Phil Aversano, who made the application, said: so why do you want to do this? You know?-like it was peculiar for me but not the other people in the room.

J.L. Right. And the other people in the room were all male?

A.O. Yes.

J.L. Uh-huh.

A.O. Yeah, absolutely.

J.L. Uh-huh. And so your answer?

A.O. My answer is that it's a beautiful trade. It's absolutely  
....

J. L. And he must have liked that answer.

A.O. Oh yeah.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. Yeah. He was an excellent ally. Unfortunately he ran against the current Treasurer of my Local and he lost and he lost his position as the instructor at the school and I haven't seen him in politics or on any jobs sites since then.

J.L. And he was a good instructor?

A.O. He was a very good instructor.

J.L. So the .. so that was a benefit of NEW and then it sort of acclimated you to get ready to go into an apprenticeship?

A.O. Yes. NEW was very strict about attendance, punctuality. I remember women being told: I'm sorry but you've been late too many times. You know? You have to leave the program. And people cried and were--you know--

J.L. Trying to get people ready for the discipline in the work place.

A.O. Yes. Yes. And it ... you cannot under-stress how important it is to be on time. And that means really early in the trades. That means really early. Be on the job by ^:30. Be there! Have a coffee, chill out and-you know--don't be the one rushing in at the last minute.

J.L. Tell me about any difficulties or obstacles that you had during the time at NEW?

A.O. Funny enough, I had a hairline fracture in my thumb

playing basketball in ... in the phys ed class. But I didn't realize it at the time, I kept playing ball and--you know, so that was a little funny and fuzzy to have that kind of injury.

J.L. Yeah. And then you're going in to use your hands in the trade.

A.O. Yeah. Yeah. So that was a little ...

J.L. Has that ironed out now?

A.O. Oh yeah.

J.L. Yeah?

A.O. No trouble with it at all.

J.L. Okay. So tell me about the graduation ceremony from NEW. There was a graduation ceremony?

A.O. There was a graduation ceremony. I have kept my program from that day. It was great. I mean, there were, like, two people who dropped out of our class but the rest of us really hung in there.

J.L. Uh-huh. Got close?

A.O. We got close during the twelve weeks, and people really ... you know, if you saw somebody sinking you picked them up. You know? We were ... we were tight like that. I wrote and read a poem at the ceremony and ...

J.L. I would love a copy.

A.O. Sure ... sure. It was really tied to the context of the experience that we all had but what was really amazing to me was when I looked out at the audience, they were applauding like crazy. And so many people had tears in their eyes, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it and it was really ...

J.L. And did your folks come?

A.O. No. At the time I wasn't really speaking to them.

J.L. Oh.

A.O. They ...

Side two

J. L. So we were just speaking about ... this is Side Two and we were just talking about you and your parents and--you know-you had that kind of a rupture ...

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. over your sexual preference. And ...

A.O. That's right. And we lost ... we lost some years, actually, over that and in the ... in the past couple of years we're .. we're gaining our ground back.

J.L. So that's ... We want to touch on this subject again, but that's--you know,-it takes courage in this society that has so much hate, to-you know--to be who you are. And the other way is to be not who you are and that's--you know--that's no way to live. So ...

A.O. Yeah. Boy, does that take energy, too, too much energy.

J.L. So,--you know,--but we'll revisit this. But your parents weren't at the graduation. So now we'll move on to the apprenticeship. So between ... after NEW then you went to the apprenticeship. And you started the apprenticeship when?

A.O. I finished .. I graduated NEW in December of '99 and I was not given a firm confirmation that I would be training with the Tile Union or that they would be beginning a class any time soon. They kept telling me we don't know. We don't know. We don't know. Well, as it ended up, I waited until February. February 14th they started a class. And it was another full-time twelve week training. So I had done the twelve weeks at NEW ...

J.L. But the apprenticeship was only twelve weeks?

A.O. No, no, no. It's ... The Bricklayers Union runs what they call pre-job training

J.L. Okay.

A.O. and it's a twelve week pre-job ... All the trades: Brick Layers, Marble, Terrazzo, Tile, we all do a twelve week pre-job

J.L. Um-hum okay.

A.O. ... where we go full-time for training. and I ... I explain to my students, 'cause I do teach at NEW now, that must be patient with this process. It takes a while. And it takes a while for me, it takes a while for the men, for these things to kind of happen. So twelve weeks at NEW, six weeks of waiting, twelve more weeks of training in Tile, it was--you know--six-and-a-half months before I went to work from this process.

J.L. And then how was it when you .. for that twelve--for that six weeks of--the twelve weeks of training?

A.O. Well, during the six weeks I worked a bit at NEW helping out, and I winterized, put plastic on the windows, I changed the garbage, I did some work like that around there. And that really helped to stay involved with NEW and to speak to new members--new students that were being enrolled and ...and things like that. That really--you know-sort of kept my morale up. Susan Wilson is--you know,--my dear, dear friend and she--you know--she would always give me a pat on the back. You know?

J.L. She has a wonderful, warm, affirming nature.

A.O. Yes. Yes. And so I got enrolled in this twelve week Tile pre-job and there were five other guys and me. And ...

J.L. Okay. What was the response?

A.O. It was fine. It was really fine with the guys, Phil Aversano, who was the instructor. He was just like a jolly good guy as a teacher. I don't know what ...at what level his politics were in the union at that point. You know? I was just getting started.

J.L. But it wasn't an issue. It was him as a teacher.

A.O. Wasn't an issue. And because the class was so small,-you know--we had his attention and we ..I basically could ask him anything I wanted. And he was always right there. He wasn't managing a class of thirty. IN a ... in a couple of weeks one of those guys dropped out so then it was just four other guys and me. Right? Yeah. That was Damian Lynch, Ralph Martinez, Craig Cavallo and this guy Robbie Rashid. And me, Ralph and Robbie trained to be Tile Mechanics and Craig and Damian were training to be tile finishers, which are basically helpers. They help the mechanics and they also prep the work that we do. And things went real smooth. The only thing that was a little troubling is the school simultaneously ran training in brick, marble. They weren't running the terrazzo at the school yet. The Stone apprentices worked at night. But the Bricklayers that were training .... I joked to friends that it was like being in the Rikers Island after-school program. You know? I'm not going to go further in ... in kind of joking about that because I believe people should be able to pick themselves up and change their lives and go forward. But the Bricklayer kids were more rough around the edges. And I did have one incident at the school where I had asked one of the fellows to give me some mud, which is cement, and he said: give me a kiss first. And I was like,--you know--don't talk to me like that. You know? What's your freaking problem, bla, bla. And then he got all offensive back, like Oh,--you know-why are you so up tight, bla, bla, bla,

J.L. Right. Right. Yeah.

A.O. And then there was this whole, like, relation where they all figure out I was a dyke,--you know?--

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. And confirm that with me, like, 'So do you have a boy friend,' -you know?-that kind of thing.

J.L. Uh-huh.

A.O. I was the only woman at that facility except for the secretary.

J.L. Wow! And how was the secretary to you?

A.O. The secretary was pleasant, very pleasant. 'Hi, Angie, how

you doing?' Yeah. She was more aligned with the Bricklayers and I don't know really that we'll explore it here but there's basically some tension between Local Seven, tile/marble/terrazzo and Local One, which is Stone/brick and PCC. So she worked for Local One and she was kind of having her own labor issues about taking on the paper work for Local Seven Apprentices. So ...

J.L. Yeah. So were you up front with them about your sexuality?

A.O. Oh yeah.

J.L. And then did they use that against you, or was it ... did it become ... I mean, how did they handle that?

A.O. I felt like it was just a curiosity and--you know--being that they were younger guys,--you know--they watch television. There's--you know--kind of a ... you got the real world MTV stuff and--you know--they just probably looked at me like,--you know---just another character,--you know-- in this business.

J.L. Uh-huh. Yeah. Uh-huh.

A.O. I remember one guy telling me that, after a while, I was going to get a beer belly like all the men in construction, and he said to me, and it's going to look really funny on you. (both laugh)

J.L. And there you are drinking your beer. Well, but no beer belly. (laughs) So tell me about the challenges and obstacles of being an apprentice. Well, you had the first you had the pre-apprentice. So then you go into the Apprentice Program.

A.O. Yes.

J.L. How was that? Was that a different story or the instructor ...

A.O. Well, to keep the link between NEW and my apprenticeship,

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. Susan Wilson, Martha Baker, Charley Hill and Art Cavazzi and G. M. Crocetti .. Charley Hill's the President of Local Seven and Art Cavazzi owns G.M. Crocetti, they worked out kind of a deal,--okay?--because NEW was aware that that Jim Crocetti was going to get a big project that involved Federal money so ..

J.L. Uh-huh. And he's the contractor.

A.O. Yeah, and so basically I was going to be indentured to G.M. Crocetti.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. And get to work on that project. Now, while I was at the school and I was training, at the end of training I kept telling Phil Aversano: Listen,--you know? I now you're telling us not to get upset if we don't get work right way. But I got this deal with Crocetti,--you know--so maybe you should look into it because they

basically said .... The agreement went something like this. Charley said to Art Cavazzi: Listen. If you take her, I'll try her and Art Cavazzi said: Charley: Listen. If you train her, I'll take her. so (laughs)-you know, here it was .I'm training and I want to get to work. And I remember Phil saying to me,--and this is where, like ,the sexism begins, only it's very subtle,--Crocetti, Crocetti, that's a tough shop, Angela. I don't know. That's a tough shop. Right? and it's true. The work that Crocetti does is stone marble with thin set, which is cement basically, that we use.

J.L. So it's heavy.

A.O. It's heavy work, yeah.

J.L. And you have to be able to carry things and ...

A.O. Yeah. yeah. And -you know--spreading glue and setting little four-and-a-quarter tile is different from working with inset and stone and even cutting stone and all that. But I was up for it. This is what I wanted to do. And I knew I wanted to get my hands on that material because to touch marble and to actually set every piece of marble. It's a wonderful experience. It really is, and it totally ... it vibrates with me that I know this is what I should be doing, not hanging sheet rock, not wiring a fixture. This is what ... this is the trade I want. Yeah. So at first I went out with another company doing little tile work and then Phil showed up at the job. I wasn't there a few days  
....

J.L. The inspector ...

A.O. Yeah. He said: Angela, you're going to a job with Crocetti tomorrow and I said: See? I told you. And he was---you know,-he was surprised. And off I went with Crocetti. And my first job was the Bridge Tower apartments on First Avenue right by 59th Street Bridge. Yeah and .. That's where the Roosevelt Tram is. Right?

J.L. Right. Yeah.

A.O. Yeah. That was the job. And we did white Carrara marble. Oh, that was so beautiful!

J.L. and where was it going?

A.O. It was going in, like, the guest power room/bathroom where it's just a toilet and a sink. And we had to install a chair rail with a miter cut and saddles and the kitchens were granite, black granite, and the master bathrooms were this that we call Botticino marble, which is a beige marble. It's used all over the city. I'm going to get sick of it after a while. But white Carrara is so beautiful!

J.L. And did you work with a journeyman? did you have a partner?

A.O. Well, I did. I ... I showed up on the job and I met the foreman,-his name was Dominic Zampini,--and his helper was Anthony



Caforelli. And funny enough, on that job when I showed up, President Charley Hill's son, Billy Hill, was also on the job working. And one of the things you can do in my union is, if you're a helper, if you're one of the finishers, at some point in your career you can say you know what? I want to try and be a Tile Mechanic. It's called switching your book. So you figure if you've been around the business long enough, you want to give it a try. We make more money. We make, I think, we're almost nine dollars an hour more than the helpers now. So Billy was doing this. So Billy was kind of like skill-wise, like equal to me in getting his hands at this marble installation. And we did that for a while. Shortly after I got on that job,--I got on that job May--the middle of May,--in June,--at the end of June--I went to Masonry Camp. I was invite to go to Masonry Camp by my International Union, so I took a break from that job.

J.L. And how long did that last?

A.O. Masonry Camp was one week. It's held out on Swan's Island in Maine. It's basically a public relations type of event where they bring together what they consider outstanding apprentices from all over the country and they're all--you know--all the trades: brick, stone, marble, terrazzo, tile--all different ...

J. L. Were you the only one from your Local?

A.O. I was the only one from my Local and there were two other women apprentices. One was a Bricklayer from Detroit and the other was a Stone Mason from Philadelphia. And then what they do is they bring to get--us together with these architect students who are in their fifth year so they're usually working at firms and stuff. And they put us in these groups, a mix of apprentices and architects, and we have to do what's called a design/build project. So we spend some days designing something; we spend some days building a fragment of some ...

J.L. It sounds like fun.

A.O. It was really incredible. And what they want to facilitate is that we understand each other, the architects and the masons.

J.L. You know how to talk to each other.

A.O. Yeah. And what was really amazing to me is the architects had such a repertoire of design so you don't say to them, Okay, we'll put a door here. They're like, Well, what kind of door, and they go on and on and on about it. And for us as masons, we're so interested in the quality of how that thing is installed. You know? So, I mean, our noses are right up on our work. You know? We're worrying about plum lines. We're worrying ... like, I'm worrying about tile joints. Are they lined up? Are they this? Are they that? Whereas the architect is really pulled back really far away from the work, but they have all these ... these ideas. So we kind of had to come to the middle, and it was a great ... there was a lot of tension, but hen--you know--it really worked itself out. So I returned back to that first job ...

J.L. Right. And where was Billy when you got back?

A.O. Billy was gone!

J.L. Oh.

A.O. The foreman said ... Well, he was talking and he just was saying Billy couldn't handle it yet. And that's what happens a lot in the business. They say that tile is not about production; that you should go to work and give a fair day's work, but there are numbers. So, for instance, in the bathroom of your apartment to put tile on the walls, they would say to me: You need to produce three of those a day in order to remain on this job. And if, in a few days, I couldn't hit that number they'd be, like, Sorry.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. You know? We'll try somebody else. Or do five floors a day. And that's how it goes. And I guess Billy wasn't cutting it. And that doesn't mean that he couldn't get there 'cause he's obviously still learning, but that's what that foreman said. And what ... that was interesting, I showed up there were a lot more men there.

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. One of them was this fellow whose nickname is Jimmy the Jet, and it turned out he was the shop steward. And another fellow, his name was Scott-I don't know his last name,-and Scott and I had some problems on that job. Well, I was ... I got to know Jimmy The Jet as the shop steward and I ... I didn't quite understand it. Jimmy, at the time, had a serious drinking problem and a serious problem with drugs and whatever else,

J.L. And he's the steward.

A.O. ... and he was the steward and I really didn't understand it. And after a while of paying attention to the foreman I realized the foreman had some trouble too. He was recovering from a heroine addiction and so every Tuesday we would get paid and every Wednesday Jimmy would be out pretty much, or he'd show up in the same clothes as Tuesday. And every Wednesday afternoon the foreman would leave early because he had to get medicated. And I thought, Wow! This is a strange union. You know? I'm just trying to get my training here.

J.L. Right. And then you had this problem you mentioned, with a co-worker,

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. and were you ... were you looking for some help from your shop steward?

A.O. Well, yeah. I was really ... It was tough. Okay. It's my first job. I just went to work in May.

J.L. And what year is this?

A.O. this is the year 2000.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. May, 2000. On this first job. At around the ... the end of August the shop steward, Jimmy, he gets laid off , finally. the union had been, like, trying to keep him going but the company was, like, Look. The guy cannot be out every Wednesday. You know? It's just not appropriate. So they appointed somebody else. And the trouble I was having with this guy, Scott, was Scott would come into the locker area and he would just start changing his clothes right in front of me,

J.L. Uh-huh.

A.O. But not right in front of me only, like, just in front of everyone. In fact, he would get up on a stage, because we would have material stacked up in the room, pallets of marble,-he would get on top of the skid and he would undo his pants and change his ... to his work pants. And got other guys ... Since the locker is actually an apartment of the building, other guys would go into these other little rooms and do there thing. You know? And basically the main room we would sit and have our coffee. So one guy said:-you know,-Hey, Scott, Angela's in here. And he's, like, So. You know? She doesn't like it, she can leave. I was here first, he says, meaning he thinks that because I was away at Masonry Camp I wasn't on that job ??-whatever. Now, my strategy was this, and it's a strategy I offer--you know-to anyone, but we all have our own rep--

J.L. Right.

A.O. You know--repertoire of response on these things. I just got in. I'm so focused on doing my work I don't want to make an issue of Scott because Scott is--you know-by me pointing any fingers at him is going to make more dirt on my face than--you know--satisfaction of dealing with him.

J.L. Right.

A.O. So when Scott would do this thing I would either step out of the locker or I'd turn my back, and--you know--that's the way that went. A little later into the year, around August, we had some overtime. I had a second coffee break with Scott and some of the other guys. And I ordered a soda, people ordered juices and drinks. Scott orders a beer for second coffee break. And we were working in an area where there were a lot of people so we went off into the smaller room and I sat down on a skid, an empty skid, and Scott came over and he sat right next to me and he learned on me,-he learned his disgusting sweaty body on me. And I don't even know what he began to say out of his mouth, but I just turned to him and I was like: Get the fuck off me. Get the ..You know? Just get the fuck off me. And,--you know-I ... I pulled my own body away from him. There was a guy sitting directly across from me and he said: Scott, Scott, Scott, she don't like you, man. She don't like you. She don't like you. And Scott shifted his ass away. So ... And that's how I dealt with that.

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. But here ... there's a pattern building here,--okay,--with me and Scott and his inappropriateness. We're having lunch on the street one day and a vendor came along and he had this little cardboard box and he had batteries and cologne and belts and he was selling stuff. And he came up to the bunch of us sitting on the sidewalk and he was, like,--you know--selling his wares. And Scott jumps up and looks in the box, and the guy had the bottles of gin seng. So the guy says to Scott,--you know,--get the gin seng! Get the gin seng! And he motions like this with his fists as if to say,--you know--it'll arouse you.

J.L. Oh yeah.

A.O. So Scott goes; Oh yeah? Oh yeah? And he motions back. And then he reaches down and he starts unzipping his pants and he reaches in to take his penis out. I turned my head away. The other guys I'm sitting with .. Like, I catch sight of one guy looking over in Scott's direction and he's, like, appalled. You know? Scott's .. He's just being so embarrassing to all of us, but the men are going to be, like, Oh,--you know---

J.L. They're not going to say anything.

A.O. Right. Right. so I'm like, God damn. You know? Why is this guy .... It's disrespectful, basically. Like, I'm not a prude and I'm not, like,--you know--going to be a ... a puritan about these things. As I tell women, this is not the choir of angels that you're joining.

J.L. Uh-huh. It's a rough culture.

A.O. Yeah. Yeah. But I just felt like, okay, Scott is really daring me to say: Please don't take your penis out.

J.L. Yeah. Right.

A.O. I'm not going to play into his hands.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. So in less than one week's time we're on the street again. The whole building is on the street now, the whole construction site is on this one side by the Food Emporium 'cause they had a lunch buffet. It was great. We'd all be there eating our thing. And at this point in the story another woman has come to work on that job. She's a helper. Her name is Chantel Bauer and ....

J.L. And that's your union.

A.O. She's in my union. Yeah. so this is amazing. And I remember before his happened, but after the first time Scott took his penis out, she had come to me one afternoon and she was like, I just saw Scott's boxer shorts. I'm, like: I know. I know. He does this thing where he changes his clothes in front of you. So we're all on the street and there's a pretty woman walking across the other street. I felt so bad for her because she made a

wrong turn. You know? On a hot summer day she turned on the corner and all the construction workers were sitting on the ground eating their food. So they all start catcalling, and Scott's ... Scott's like, the .. the master of ceremonies. He's screaming ... screaming to her: Are those real! Are those real! Are those real! And she's trying to--you know--be dignified and just walk. But finally she turns around and she grabs both her breasts and she shakes them at Scott and she goes: they're real! They're real! Is that real? She says to him. He says: You want to know if it's real?

J.L. Oh God.

A.O. And he starts unzipping his pants to take his penis out again. I was so fed up. I just was so fed up so I got up, I walked away, I went to a pay phone,--I didn't have a cell phone at he time,--I called my Apprentice Coordinator, Phil Aversano, I said: Listen. We've got a situation here. I said ... 'cause I felt so disappointed.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. Like, there's other men in my Local. There's other men on this job. Somebody ...

J.L. Nobody's going to say anything.

A.O. Somebody just say: Scott, listen. Don't do that in front of her.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. You know? Nobody. Nobody steps up. So I called Phil I said: Look, Phil. I just want somebody to talk to him. I said: I don't want to do it because that's what he wants me to do. He wants me to come to him and say please don't. And psychologically I'm not playing that game with him. So ... And it's funny, on the phone he's like: He took it all the way out? I'm like: Phil, does it matter?

J.L. Yeah. But ...

A.O. Right.

J.L. Right.

A.O. So I return to work and I'm with Chantel and one of the other mechanics,--this guy, his nickname is "Cock-eyed Gene"--he comes to me and he says: You know, that wasn't right what he did out there and he's like, You should call the union. I said: I've done it. He's like: all right. And he says: You and her, you should ... Together you should ...I said: No, no, no, no. I said: if ... if it was me and a hundred other women it wouldn't be the same as you just say something.

J.L. Right.

A.O. Just you, Gene, would mean everything. And he's like: You're right. You're right. You're right.

J.L. I get it. I got it. Right.

A.O. So Phil shows up on my job with the Business Agent for the Tile Mechanics. That is a guy named Eddie Solari BA & Secretary/Treasurer for the Local]. Eddie Solari is kind of ... was kind of like Mike Tyson. He was a big guy with a very soft voice, and he would always say: Hey, kid. How you doing? How you doing? Is everything all right? Okay. Good, good, good. Eddie Solari showed up on this job and he had a voice like I never heard. He's like, "Where is Scott! Like really gruff. And Gene took him on the side and Gene explained. He was motioning like this, like ... [Twirling the hand motion at the side of the head that signals you are thinking someone is acting crazy.]

J.L. Uh-huh. ??

A.O. Yeah. So Eddie found Scott. I wasn't with him 'cause Scott was on another floor working, and I was told he said to Scott: Scott, take your tools. You're off the job. At that point Scott came running up the stairs, Eddie jumped between us and Scott was screaming and he was crying, tears in his eyes: You should have been a man. You should have said something to me. I decide, bla, bla. The union, bla, bla, bla. He was really upset. And,--you know--he got it off his chest but he was ... he was getting kicked off that job. And I appreciated that the union had to take this severe thing so that I wouldn't turn around and say--you know--\

J.L. Yeah. Um-hum.

A.O. ... do the right thing when they bothered me. It's a shame that it had to come to that stage, but that just seems to ... the way it always goes.

\ J.L. Yeah. Well, so have you seen Scott since then?

A.O. I saw Scott about a year later at a union meeting. He walked right up to me. He said: I'm very sorry. I was an ass. You know? I had to go to a hearing at the union. I had to pay a fine. I'm really sorry.

J.L. Wow! Progress!

A.O. Yes.

J.L. In many ways.

A.O. Not only that. A heard a story through the grapevine about Mr. Scott. Scott went to another job with another woman tile setter,--her name is Rita,--and a guy--a foreman on that job was giving Rita trouble and Scott stuck up for her. This was after his incident with me. So,--you know--maybe Scott learned a big lesson. I mean, maybe he's an ally now so it could be great.

J.L. Uh-huh. Terrific.

A.O. Great.

J.L. Okay. So now, you go through this whole apprenticeship program and how long did that last?

A.O. That lasted three years, almost to the day.

J.L. Wow.

A.O. Yeah. But it was an interesting three years. In fact, I just got, on November 20th--twenty something I just got in the mail my certificate that says this is to certify that Brother Angela Olszewski ...

J.L. Brother?

A.O. Yes,--has completed--you know--all the training and required hours to be a Journeyman Tile Setter and it's ... to receive it now it's a year and a half later. The date on the document is May 12th, 2003.

J.L. You didn't have a ceremony when you graduated?

A.O. No.

J.L. No ceremony?

A.O. No.

J. L. They just say you're finished and a year-and-a-half later they sent you ...

A.O. I've seen them announce it at meetings, like,--you know--because some people finish up at different times 'cause it's based on forty-five hundred hours of work and some of us do better than others maybe, maybe depending on our race and gender,--you know--we do it quicker or slower and ... You know? So I've seen that happen with other people, but ??

J.L. And how many classroom hours?

A.O. Classroom hours, it's a hundred and forty-four hours of related training per year of your apprenticeship.

J.L. And how were your instructors in the Apprentice Program? Would you still have Phil as an instructor?

A.O. No. No. In the election of 2001 Phil ... Phil lost to the Treasurer and so then he lost his job. And this new guy, John Cosentini, stepped up to be the instructor and he had to get it together. And I was really patient in the beginning. I cooperated with him. Phil ... Phil did some things that weren't right where when he exited he didn't leave behind the paperwork.

#### Tape Two

J.L. So this is tape two, interviewing Angela Olszewski and it's December 18th and we're talking about her apprenticeship.

So Angela, tell me about the new instructor who took over in the Apprentice Program.

A.O. Yeah. It's a guy named John Cosentini and he comes out of the marble industry. He was the marble instructor at the time

that I trained to be a tile setter during that twelve week pre-job. Seemed like a nice enough guy then, but he fell flat for me as an Apprentice Coordinator. When I went to my next big job with Crocetti at the Ritz/Carlton in Battery Park City the things were great. There was a lot of opportunities for training there and I was very, very diligent about keeping track of my skills and keeping track of the skills I needed to acquire and really looking around ... When I was a job site I'd be, like, okay, I've never done that kind of installation. You know? I want to get some time trying that. And the Ritz/Carlton had so many opportunities for me as an Apprentice and not ... the foreman, basically, after a while, he ... he complimented me quite a bit; told me I had hands of gold; I was really good at tile ... at marble setting. But what he did is he kind of pigeonholed me into this one particular project. And that's not uncommon. When you work on a big job you're going to be the floor person, somebody else is going to be the hop up person, somebody else is going to be the shower pin person. But as an apprentice I need to try everything. I can't really do that.

J.L. Right. Uh-huh. And that's been a big problem for the women to be sort of denied these other opportunities to learn.

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. Yeah. And it's partly a sexism driven and it's partly business driven because he wants to run a job efficiently and he wants to make his bonuses and ... and things like that. So I was trying to--you know--do my best at playing politics and figuring out, okay, when's a good time for me to ask him? And I ... I asked the foreman a couple of times please, please, please,--you know--put me on another assignment so I can learn. And he would say to me things like, Oh, I promise. I promise. I just really need you to finish up to this floor doing this particular project. and it was ... He had me on this thing called back splashes for quite a while and it was actually an excellent opportunity. I'm not going to disregard what I was learning from it and not appreciate it. I had to cut every piece of marble I installed, which is a good skill to develop. I also had to do intricate out corner and in corner miters with the marble chair rail. And where my worked appeared ... A back splash is right behind the sink, the bathroom sink, so if you think about it, you're in a hotel. How often do you look at every bit of the tile. You don't. You look at certain areas and one of those areas is going to be when you're washing your hands. So I said: Okay. well, this is great. You know?

J.L. Uh-huh. Yeah.

A.O. This is a really important part of this project. And I held onto that as long as I could and then I said you know what? I need to get on the walls because my apprenticeship is going to be over one of these years and if I don't have these skills they're going to be, like, kid, we don't have any more back splashes for you.

J. L. Right. Yeah.

A.O. So I asked him once. I asked him twice. The International Union in the end of June/early July, 2001, invited me to the Smithsonian Folklife



Festival and my International Union was part of the exhibit called Masters Of the Building Trades;-Masters Of the Building Arts. Yeah. And so I was there in this ...at the exhibit and I was installing tile, and people would walk through the exhibit and they would ask you questions, and-you know--we all had our ... our things to say.

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. It was a wonderful experience. I spoke on a speaking stage about being a woman in the trades and ...

J.L. Were there some other women?

A.O. There were. There was a woman from Seattle, Washington. Shucks, I can't think of her name just ... just in this moment. ??

J.L. What was her trade?

A.O. She was a tile setter as well. Colleen Muldoon, who is the Director of Education at IMI [International Masonry Institute], is .. she was a bricklayer for eight years,-she was there doing brick installation. That was it for the women. Yeah.

J.L. So ... Uh-huh. Yeah.

A.O. But they had--you know,--men of color .... We really,-- you know,--we looked very politically correct on this stage in--you know--the nation's capital and that's when I realized, like, there's a lot of facade. There's a lot of facades how .....

J.L. And it's not just on the buildings.

A.O. Yeah. Yeah, and it's not just on the buildings. So I did that and I was very proud to do that and I was paid handsomely to do that, and returned back to the Ritz/Carlton. But I returned back to the Ritz/Carlton with an agenda, that I was moving on from the back splashes. And while I was at the Folk Life Festival for almost two weeks, I spoke to the President of my Local and he asked me: How's it going? And I said: things are going good except,--you know--I want to move on to the walls. He says: All right. Well, when you get back, if things don't change let me know. So I start working with John Cosentini and I said: Listen, John, Can you please come and talk to this woman.

J.L. Intervene.

A.O. You know? So he shows up, and I was doing the floors on the day he showed up, and John says to me: You know, Angela, I don't want to burn your bridges. And I scratch my head and I say: What is this burning my bridges? I am an apprentice, he's a foreman, you're a man, we talk, we say .... this is good for business. This is good for the union. This is good for me. This is good for you as the coordinator. I need to get my skills. We need to make--you know,--make a plan here. There's so much that I could be doing.

J.L. Right.

A.O. ... and it was as if just to speak to this foreman and say:  
Can this apprentice-- No matter what ... If I had purple polka dots: Let the  
purple polka dotted apprentice .....

J.L. He's the union.

A.O. Yeah. He's in my union. The coordinator's in my union and  
I'm in the union. You know? This is an apprenticeship.

J.L. You're asking for help from your union and you expect it.

A.O. Yeah. Yeah. And he said: You know ... You know, I don't  
want to burn your bridges. And right there I lost complete faith in John  
Cosentini. I was, like, You know what? I've been doing this better on my own  
and I will continue to do it better on my own. So I let him walk away that day  
and I went home, and I looked at all my paperwork and I wrote down all the ..  
the different tasks that I'd been doing. And I have this paperwork. I  
have every fax, every letter I've ever written, and in a very, very nice way I  
said to the union to the company, to the foreman, to the coordinator, to the  
Business Agent, to the International and to the IMI, which is the affiliation of  
the International, I said: Gentlemen and Brothers,-you know? Here's how it's  
going. I've ... I've been on this job. This is a marvelous job. There's so many  
opportunities for me. I'm doing this back splash thing. I'm learning so much  
from it, I said. But let me give you a break down of the spectrum of my  
experience so far and the skills I think I need to--you know--spend some time  
with. And I wrote and I put it in plain English. I said: I spent forty-three  
days on back splashes, thirty-eight days on punches, fourteen days on the floors  
and eight days ?? It was, like, dramatic. You know? Like the back splashes and  
the punch list together was--you know--six months of nothing. So I--you know--  
complimented the foreman, I said,--you know--he's obviously one of the best  
foremen the company has. This is a very big, expensive job. I'm glad to be  
here, not trying to burn any bridges. Well, what I---my strategy was I would  
always, the night before I'd fax it to everybody at once so in the  
morning they're all on the same page, my page. And when it hit the fan, Charley  
Hill, the President of my local, Jim Crocetti, the shop ... when I walked in the  
foreman said: You're upset. The shop called me. I'm like: I'm not upset. Lady,  
there's nothing to be upset about. I told you I need to move on. You know? I  
know you're trying to keep track of this as a business, but I'm trying  
to keep track of it as an experience. And not that day but the next day, I went  
on the walls. And unfortunately, that was the end of August and September 11th  
wa September 11th and ...

J.L. And that was the end of the Ritz/Carlton for a while.

A.o. For a little while, yeah. But I remember I just got on  
walls and I remember the guy came to take coffee order and he came  
back a few minutes .. in a few minutes and I knew it was too soon  
for him to be back. And he said: Angela, you've got to see this!  
You've got to see this! And I remember coming around and a bunch of  
us were in a room just looking--from south of the towers, just  
looking at what was going on. And the second jet flew over our  
building. I mean, it was like ... I thought the thing was going to  
crash into the back of my head from the sound. We couldn't even see  
it 'cause we were looking at the Towers. But I remember us all,  
like, it was so primordial what happened; like, the way our bodies  
were, like, ?? because that jet was so low and the ... that guy  
really gunned it when he went down the street. So that was a

tremendous experience. And we returned to work October 1st after that and I stayed on walls. But then I had some really big problems. The guys had put up porn and there was beer cans and porn all over the locker when I returned because some--a small group of men went back to work a week before the rest of us. And I thought it was really inappropriate because--I mean, the porn was on the wall and Ground Zero was out the window. It was just like that. So I walked up to the porn and I took it down and I said,--you know,-- Who the fuck put this up? I said,--you know--you should put this on your mother's grave. And,--you know--guys were snickering. As it turned out. I didn't know because it's so shady;--one of the guys in the room was a shop steward. Never, never announced it to me. Never told me in, like, all the months that I'd been there.

J.L. Well kept secret.

A.O. Yeah, well kept secret. And I ... this is my first day back after 9-11. So I take this down, I'm very upset. I call the outside guy. I'd just been appointed to the Women's Task Force....

J.L. Outside guy for the union?

A.O. For Crocetti.

J.L. Oh, for Crocetti. Yeah. Okay. Okay.

A.O. Crocetti. He's like, the guy that assigns you some work. I had just been appointed to the Women's International Task Force and--you know--came back and, boom, there's this. And I put it in my pocket and what I started to do ... when men would show up for work that morning I would open it in front of their face, in my hand, and I'd say: do you know who put this up? I'd like to talk to them. And the guys were, like ... they were just running for the hills. Finally I opened it up and I showed it to the foreman. I said: do you know who put this up? I want to talk to them. He said: Oh, no one did that to bother you. No one did that to bother you. I only had men here last week. They needed to have a good time. I said: good time? Yeah, good time? What about my good time. You know? And there was a lot of shadiness ...

J.L. Shadiness?

A.O. Shadiness.

J.L. The second time you've said that. What do you mean?

A.O. I mean that ... so there was this week before where men were there working, and then this October 1st where me and some other fellows showed up for work because we were told that's when we could return.

J.L. Right. But why were the other guys there before ...

A.O. Why were the other guys there, we wondered. And,--you know--we're talking about going back to work and earning. And I ... that afternoon I called President Hill and I explained to him what happened. He apologized to me immediately on the phone. He said: I'm very sorry that that happened. And I said: thank you. You know? I realize ...

J.L. And he's President of the International?

A.O. No, of the Local.

J.L. No, of the Local. Okay.

A.O. Right, of the Local.

J.L. Oh, that's right; Billy Hill's Dad.

A.O. Yeah. And he said to me: Try to find out who was there the week before. And I said: Can't you find out? And he and I started talking on the phone a bit over the days that followed, and he said the shop wouldn't tell him who was there. And I'm ... I'm saying to myself there's got to be away to know. You call the Benefit Office: Were there benefits paid for that week or pay roll?-something. What about your shop stewards, you know--sitting there laughing. It was a very deep, dark episode after 9-11 because I stayed on that job until December and I was having all this hostility because what it boiled down to,-and it's so, so strange,--every man on that job received a letter from the union, saying that they had to show up ... that they might be brought up on charges, every one of them. And not every one of them did it. Some of those guys didn't come back till October 1st so they weren't part of the deal. But the way the union handled it,--the way the Local handled it--they ... they said: Okay. We're bringing everybody in. Why? Because the guys that were there the week before couldn't be man enough to say,--you know--who it was? But no. They want to say it's my fault; that I'm making the fuss.

J.L. Right.

A.O. ... and I'm not going to back down. I'm not going to play, like,--you know--call the police. I'm being abused. No, no,-you know,--I've changed my mind. You know? So we went through this. And at the end of November I had to go to the facility where they have the training 'cause that was big enough for us to do this in, and all the guys that I worked with on that job site had to go. And they took my testimony first, and I was told, when my testimony was over, leave! Don't come back. Just go straight home, as if I should be afraid for myself.

J. L. (inaudible)

A.O. And I was told that I would not be allowed to know what the determination was. I don't understand that;

J.L. Yeah. Right.

A.O. that I was ..I was not to be allowed ... and John Cosentini, who was my apprentice coordinator, and at the time he's the person assigned to be the contact for sexual harassment,--well, don't you know when I sit down for that hearing, he's one of the judges. And I said: this is conflict here, right here. You have too many hats that this guy's wearing. And he had this, like, bogus stack of yellow Manila folders: bogus. They had scribbled on them, his stack of them, and he said: See this, Angela? All these men are going to get a letter in their file,--you know--from this. And he wanted me to show him the porn 'cause I had with me. I'm, like, ?? And he looked at it and it was just ridiculous. It was ridiculous that I wasn't allowed to know what the outcome was. And I--you know--basically had to keep going to work, staying on walls ... now, here's .. I'm trying to get a

new skill.

J.L. Right. Right.

A.O. I'm trying to learn this new skill and I have this--you know-tension, and at the same time, out the window, is Ground Zero.

J.L. And you were working with different men or working paired up with one person? Or you basically worked by yourself?

A.O. Basically I worked by myself. I need to be set up by another person and he usually will set up two people, so he'll, -like, if I'm doing marble, he'll load up the room I'm working in with marble; there'll be a bucket of thin set; maybe by coffee break he'll give me another bucket of thin set,--you know--depending on how the installation's going.

J.L. So you .... you ended that job in December,

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. ... and you never found out what the resolution of the ... And even what ... what's happening with the Women's Committee? The Task Force?

A.O. In the ... Well, in January of 2002 I approached the Local. I said: Listen. You know? I got put on this Task Force. I would like to write a letter to all the women in the Local and announce it and say, Hey,-you know? Here's my contact information. Contact me. You know? Maybe we could talk. And I wrote this letter and I went down to the Local because the only way you can get members' information--you know--

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. ... is through the Local and you can't really have it personally. So ...

J.L. Did they ever tell you how many women were in the Local?

A.O. We came up with a list of about twenty names. And when I first showed up it was just me and President Hill and he was looking through these--you know-the old fashioned computer paper with the holes and the green and white bars.

J.L. Oh yeah. Uh-huh.

A.O. And he's, like, I don't know how to use the computer. Let's see if we can find these women. And he was going to leaf through, like, fifteen hundred names. And ... and he was trying to do this, and I was, like, You know? And somebody else came in who knew how to work the computer and they punched out the women's names. And ... and in fact, some of the guys came out because they were mis--you know-tabulated as women and they fixed that. And God help us.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. And so I had this list. So then I had my letter and I said: Okay, here. You can read this and let me know if it has your blessing. I'm not,--you know--I'm not going to have any closed fists here. Like, here you go. Let me know what you think. So he took it away and he came back and he's looking at it. And at the bottom I put a little tear off .. I was enclosing a self addressed, stamped envelope ....

J.L. Right, so you could hear from them.

A.O. Yeah. Just filling....

J.L. Right. Makes sense.

A.O. ... and he came back and he was , like, Oh, he said, listen. This can't be anything political. I said: It's not going to be political. I said, Maybe we'll get together and have dinner. We'll invite you. You know? Like, this is just a letter of introduction really. And he was so worried about the politics. Well, sadly, I got a response from, like, three women, two that I already knew and one woman was flat out, like, I don't--you know--just don't worry about me. Forget about me. And I'll tell you that it's mostly white women.

J.L. Uh-huh.

A.O. And my experience of white women in the trades, 'cause I don't see them a lot at the coffeehouse and even at OPL, is there's .. there's a feeling of, like, you carve your niche and you protect yourself. You know? And it's sad, but really, like, I think we're the ones that really need to help--you know--face some of the racism that's aligned with the sexism. So it didn't take off, this Women's Committee. And I knew, too, that in my Local, whether it was me or the Women's Committee, or anybody doing anything outside of that loop, that if you align yourself with others like me, you're not going to work. And do you want to take those hits. You know? And that's the truth. You will be ... there won't be work for you.

J.L. And why ... why align ... I mean, why so soon in your history in that union, just because to do anything is to ...

A.O. Well ...

J.L. I mean, why ... the union has asked you to do this. Your International has asked ...

A.O. Well, the International didn't say, okay, we want you on the Task Force. Here's a handbook on what to do.

J.L. No. Right.

A.O. I took it upon myself ....

J.L. You took some initiative.

A.O. Absolutely.

J.L. I mean, what is the Task Force supposed to do?

A.O. The mission is to give policy suggestions for the better recruitment and retention of women in the BAC trades.

J.L. And one of the keys to retention is that women can have access to each other and know that they are there and have a way to talk to each other and help each other survive it. That's one of the basic ...

A.O. Exactly.

J.L. ... ideas of retention.

A.O. Exactly.

J.L. So ...

A.O. ... reduce the feeling of isolation,--you know?--foster support  
.....

J.L. being the only one. Yeah.

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. So ... But that's too threatening for the ...

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. So what ... has this ... I hate to use this unfortunate expression but I will; I just can't help it:--has this petered out, this Task Force or ...

A.O. Well, I would say I'm kind of disappointed and I think,--you know--some of it, I realize, has to do with the politics of ... The International really can't intervene in the Local's politics. That's just the way it's set up. You know? Like, the State and Federal government. You know? And Charley said to me that day, he said: You're,--you know--You were not elected. This is an appointment. You know? So he was making it clear to me ... and I respect,--I respect ... If you've honestly been elected to anything, you've been elected. You know? But,--you know--a snowball chance in hell that --you know--we're going to get women elected and ... and doing anything any time soon. So the International did this. And it makes the International look good, which I realize ...

J.L. To have it.

A.O. Yeah, to say here it is,--you know,--and that's where I was saying things seem like a facade. So we have a Task Force and you can say you're doing something about getting women into the trades, but I just say to them all: fooey. You know? I've had enough of meetings. I've had enough of more women's organizations. You just need to hit the trenches, you need to go out in the field and you need to say to the G. M. Crocetti's and the Paul Morris's and the other tile companies and brick companies and whoever, women are here ... give them a fair apprenticeship. You know? Give them a fair year's worth of work

hours and--you know--it'll happen. And you know--put some guards up against this sex--hostile work place experiences and sexual harassment and it'll be fine. But nobody wants to do that work. It's so wonderful to be academic: Oh, I'll write this--you know--thing about ... But it's got to be in the trenches. There's got to be point guards. You know?

J.L. Yeah. This is one thing that ..... It never comes down to the work place.

A.O. Right.

J.L. Angela, let's switch to talking about your status as a journey person. What happened in terms of getting work after you became journey level, and how much did your salary go up?--I mean, your hourly rate? What is your hourly rate?

A.O. Right now my hourly rate is \$39.87 and that's just my paycheck.

J.L. And then you have your benefits, paying into your ....

A.O. I have it in my pocket. Do you want me to get it?

J.L. I hope it's not a lethal weapon that .... Okay. So we're switching to the paycheck.

A.O. Yes. So currently we just got a raise and I'm up to--I'm sorry--\$39.85 an hour.

J.L. Uh-huh.

A.O. And my annuity is up to seven dollars an hour, which is ... it's great for tile. There's a pension as well and,--you know--my benefits,--my medical benefits, I've nev--I cannot complain one bit. I've never paid anything out of pocket, really, and --you know-- ...

J.L. And so are you working for one contractor now?

A.O. Well, I spent my first two years with Jim Crocetti, which--you remember Phil said--

J.L. Yes.

A.O. You know--it's a rough job.

J.L. Don't burn your bridges and .. Oh, well, that was

A.O. Well, Cosentini said not to burn my bridges.

J.L. Right. Okay.

A.O. But--you know--the bottom line is I hung with that job my first two years and I did a good job. I know I did. You know? It's not ... It's not a question. And I know when I was given the opportunity to do production work, where I described to you



J.L. Um-hum. Right.

A.O. ... four a day or three a day or whatever,

J.L. You did it.

A.O. I could get up to that speed. Now what would happen is the foreman .. No sooner do I touch,--you know--that number, he's, like, Okay, I need you to do this now. So it was, like, Oh,--you know,--I wanted to hang and do it for a little while to really be confident. But it's all right. It all comes to you over time. It really builds up. And then I spent the next two years ... I had a little lay over. I had that little incident in the Ritz/Carlton. I got laid off in December. I was out of work till just about April.

J.L. Wow.

A.O. Yeah. Yeah. But at that point .. the thing is, whenever I have time down is when I jump into my organizing

J.L. Oh, okay.

A.O. So I got hooked up with TNT...

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. ... in that lay over in 2002.

J.L. and you're on the--what ...what do you call it,--the ... the Board.

A.O. I'm not on the board. I did get elected to the Board of Directors and I gave it my best shot, but still being an apprentice and --you know--

J.L. trying to get to those meetings ...

A.O. not feeling the support from my Local ... My International has always really tried to throw money at me in terms of funding, a trip here and there, but they weren't on board to fund me full time for that position. And I really couldn't do it. I think the next meeting was somewhere remote that I couldn't really get to. I couldn't take the time off of my apprenticeship, and so on, so I resigned from the board, but-- you know--felt good about--you know--stepping up and giving it a try and learning from that experience. And my ... my International did support me to go to other event with TNT. And in fact, in April that year,--was it April?--yes because that's how I went back to work,--I went to the Building And Construction Trades Council meeting in D.C. and I met Senator Clinton and introduced her and her staff to TNT and our mission and gave them some paperwork. And I shook their hand and I have a nice photo. and she really--you know--picked up the ball and has been running with the tradeswomen issue. She put a resolution out for tradeswomen,--I'll pass that along to you, Jane,--and she invited us back the following year and sponsored us for a luncheon. But that was an incredible experience to go and see all the Presidents of all the Internationals in the building trades, painters, elevators, electricians ...

J.L. And what has come of that because it was talking about

retention and getting women in and keeping women in. What's come of that? Has there been follow through?

A.O. Okay. With the Women's Task Force?

J.L. Not with your union. I'm talking about with TNT meeting with the heads of all these unions, because I remember that meeting that you went to in ...

A.O. that invitation alone was ... was a big ice breaker because till then ...

J.L. Right. I mean, it only took twenty-five years. But ...

A.O. Right.

J.L. Okay. So you were ... I remember hearing about that. You were all there, you told them the issues, you had materials.

A.O. Yes. It was very positive. It was a positive first step. And,--you know--we had a table set up. It was the first time the BCTD,--you know--invited a national tradeswomen organization to an event like that.

J.L. Historic. Big.

A.O. Yeah. And ....

J.L. So I want to know about the follow up.

A.O. Well, basically--you know--there are information tables ...

J.L. ?? about going again this year.

A.O. Oh, I'm sure they are.

J.L. Yeah. They are.

A.O. Yes.

J.L. I looked on the TNT ...

A.O. I'm sure they are because it went well for everyone.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. We handed out materials ... so a guy from a Local in Wisconsin would come to us and we'd say, Oh, there's a tradeswomen organization in--you know--this city in that state. Hook up with them.

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. You know? Just like there's NEW and there's Chicago Women In Trades. There's others.

J.L. Yeah. Right.

A.O. And we basically were trying to network ...

J.L. Right.

A.O. ...the Locals with the women's organizations. And, -you know-  
-we all felt good about it. It was positive. Lauren Sugerman gave  
a presentation, along with some other tradeswomen, ab--

Side Two

J.L. So side B of Tape Two. So continue. So we're talking  
about TNT.

A.O. Yeah., TNT and the Building Trades Conference in 2002 in  
D.C. And, -you know--Lauren gave a presentation and it just went really well. And  
for me what was interesting is the members of the officers of my Local were  
there, because officers of all Locals ... Like, it's just a big-you know--powwow

J.L. Right.

A.O. for the International trade unions, and-you know--what  
was just incredible, I mean, shocking to me how many-you know--  
overweight, balding older white men were there. I mean, I thought  
.. You know, we were talking about pruning recently, I thought ...

J.L. Well, this is the building and construction trades.

A.O. I said to myself, they've been cloning people for years. All these  
people look alike! I can't believe it. I mean ... You know, I'm sorry how ever  
that ... that has just come out, but I mean, there was no real diversity.

J.L. That's the history of the building trades.

A.O. It was really shocking. And I've had some women come over to  
me and say: I know. I know, just--you know--just relax; just relax  
'cause it was so shocking.

J.L. But did people ask questions when Lauren spoke?

A.O. Yes. Yes. People wanted to know, basically, how to make  
this--all of this work better, -positive people--you know--that  
would ... One: that would come ... come to these .....

J.L. Not like, Ah, girls don't want to be in the trades.

A.O. Right.

J.L. We tried that.

A.O. Yeah. Well, those guys were probably at the bar instead  
of at the-you know--presentation. But I did see the officers of my  
Local

J.L. Okay.

A.O. and--you know--my International and the Task Force,

particularly Colleen Muldoon, was aware that I'd been out of work since the Ritz/Carlton. And my Business Agent was there... Yeah. It was a long time. And my Business Agent was there and he said,--you know--Make sure you call me when you get back. And I'm like, All right. You know? And I called him. He's, like, all right. You're back and, like, .... You ... You know I'm out of work.

J.L. Right. All of a sudden. Right.

A.O. And I .. I had been going to related training as an apprentice every week. And many of us were out of work and we .. we were just, like, were out of work. Like, there was no, like, you didn't know or ... or any business like that. So, yeah. Go to Washington, high profile, go back to New York, go back to work. And that's when I hooked up with Paul Morris. Now, Paul Morris is the other big shop. Paul Morris is the other shop that hustles; that's--you know--it's tough to hang with them. And I hung with them. And I hung with them for two years until recently. I really was with this company and--you know--was told things like you'll always have a home where. And they made me a foreman on a project.

J.L. So what happened? You ... All of a sudden you don't have a home here?

A.O. Well, I was at the Brooklyn Federal Courthouse and I was really shocked. That job was eighty--over eighty-five percent done by the time I was placed there and I thought, my God, why wasn't I here sooner? You know? I'm a woman. This is a Federal project. You know? And it was a stone job, with inset job, but whatever. I did my best and I did what I had to do. But,--you know--as the time goes by, as the pages of the calendar turned in,--you know--I started to see--I started to see more and more about what's going on here. And I was having a talk with some of the fellows and we're really upset because we have a really shaky excuse for an annuity statement so we're all worried, like, where's our money? What's it doing? How come we don't have a real financial statement? You know? Like, if your bank gave you the piece of paper that I get that says--you know--what my annuity is, you'd be, like, this isn't a real bank. There's a lot.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. And,--you know--there was somebody there who was also a kind of a rabble rouser, an African-American guy, and I said,--you know--I'm staring to think that this is a boss's union. You know? I said,--you know--Paul Morris jobs, there's never any shop stewards on the Paul Morris job. You know? And Paul Morris is the kind of company that always bends the rules a little; get a little ore out of you;--you know?--make a helper ... A helper's only supposed to help two mechanics; make him help three; make him help five. You know? Cut the corners.

J.L. You're lucky you're working.

A.O. It's ... Yeah. Be lucky you're working or you'll do it like that and you'll work a full year. You know what I mean?

J.L. Yeah. Okay. And people accept it.

A.O. Right. And people accept it and they bring down the

quality of life for everyone.

J.L. And some people shape, like, they do it anyway. They feel frustrated but they're still going along with that program.

A.O. Right.

J.L. And so here you come and you're saying this isn't a good program.

A.O. Yeah. Right. And one of the things that happened to me after I topped out .. and I topped out with Paul Morris and, I mean, I got my journey ... I got my journeyman book. I had been an apprentice with this guy Joe Bracco. Joe Bracco's been a tile setter for forty-one years, God bless him, - forty-one years on his knees doing this work. That's incredible. But Joe Bracco was really a grouchy guy.

J.L. Uh-huh.

A.O. People were, like, Oh my God, he's so nasty! He's this. He's so that. I became the apple of his eye, okay? Because I looked ... I looked him in the eye one of these times when he was being grouchy to me and I said: You remind me of my mother. And he laughed. He said: Your mother must be a nice person. I said: she is. She really is. And,--you know,--I called him out on his bravado. But anyway, he still was all nasty to everybody else and people, I guess, were getting upset that he liked me. But he ran a job really well. Like, I didn't have any problems with what I call soft discrimination. What I mean by that is I'm a full paid journeyman. They want me to do three bathrooms a day I want that helper to set me up,

J.L. Right.

A.O. Like, I'm going to do my three bathrooms. And what they would do is, Oh, they'd say, it's a woman. She's probably only going to do two. So then when I need the things I need to keep going, to keep flowing ...

J.L. They're not there.

A.O. Yeah, not there. And that started to happen.

J.O. Oh, okay.

A.O. And really, when Joe retired and I was kind of with these other foremen I saw a lot of that. And one of the things that happened in this contract is before this contract the helpers and the mechanics, tile setters, the ... we make very close money,-- very similar,--and now, like I said, we're almost nine dollars away--pulled away from them because we deserve a chain. We do a higher skill than they do. We're responsible for ...

J.L. You have to know more. You have to ...

A.O. Yeah. We're responsible for how the job comes out. We're responsible to tell the helper what to do.

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. They don't tell us what to do. We tell them. We tell them get us more ... Do this. Get a bucket of water,--whatever,--so we're starting to break away. Now, you got to understand there's guys that have been helpers for fifteen, twenty years, and suddenly

J.L. Um-hum. And they're unhappy.

A.O. I'm a woman and I'm making almost ten dollars more an hour than they are. They don't like it.

J.L. So they're going to sabotage you.

A.O. Sabotage, just be jealous, call the shop: Oh,--you know--this, that. I had a guy tell me that a foreman called the shop and said the reason something didn't get done was because I didn't do something. And it wasn't true. And the guy came to me, telling me, telling me ?? and watch out for that foreman 'cause he just .. I heard him, and he said this to the shop and it ain't right. It ain't right. I'm, like, okay. Thank you.

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. You know? And from about that moment on I really just started to not worry, like, Oh my God, I gotta do this! I gotta do that and I started to just watch people and watch how this one doesn't really do it all either. And there's this one ... this one foreman, he screwed up so many times. He screwed up a layout. If he screws up a layout and I'm a mechanic and me and these other mechanics have to start a floor but we have to stop now and rearrange the layout, you think he's going to call the boss and say I screwed up. He's going to say, no, the mechanics, they were too slow,--you know?--whether it's me or anybody.

J.L. Right.

A.O. So I started to reali--Oh, look at ... look at all these back stabbers,--you know?

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. The guys that'll help three guys and four guys instead of what the union says is two. And I started ...

J.L. And there's a union presence

A.O. Right.

J.L. and nobody's enforcing it.

A.O. Right.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. And also I wanted you to talk a little bit about what did it mean when you were made a foreman?

A.O. Well, it was a very small job. It kind of happened in two places. That guy Joe Bracco retired and he retired when this one job was really at completion. There were a few apartments left to do. The crew was scaled down to me and two and three other people at a time and basically, since I had been on the job so long that I understood it,--

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. I understood what had to be done,--and it was really just wrapping it up. This other job where I actually have check stubs that say foreman's pay,--and it's only fifty dollars extra a week,-- was a very small job. It was me and a helper and then two days into the job they sent another mechanic who I said: Okay, tile this bathroom and he did it, and that was the limit of it. I didn't really run a crew. There was no shop steward there. Obviously we were all on our--you know--our own reconnaissance to speak up or say anything. But it was such a little job and it was over and five or six days.

J.L. Okay. So then ... so then you were quickly laid off after you started speaking about the absence of the union presence or ...

A.O. Not quickly. I was on that job ... I would have to look at my records. I'm going to say I was on that job in August. I was at this other job in September, shifted, and laid off from that job on September 17th and I was told lack of work. And I called Paul Morris every week for three weeks after that: no work, no work, no work.

J.L. Yeah. They don't want you back.

A.O. Called the union and said put me on the list and no work, no work, no work. At the very end of November I called my benefit office, I said: listen. Do I have enough hours for medical for next year? And they said no. I said woe! And I called Paul Morris and I said,--you know,--Listen, I'm .. I'm kind of hanging out here by a thread. I said: You don't have any Federal projects? You know? I .. I had never ever, like, challenged them on that, but they were like: Angela,--you know--you're not the only one ... 'cause basically the benefit office was telling me I was going to do COBRA next year. I'm like ... There's going to be a lot of press about this. You know? I'm going to do COBRA. I'm in a union. And,--you know--the guy at Paul Morris was like, there's no work. And I wrote a letter to my Business Agent and I said: I just want to remind you that on October 8th I called you to be put on the out of work list. I said, I'm still out of work and I called the benefit office and they said I don't have my hours for medical. You know? Could you please help me out with these matters. And I mailed that letter to him and to the President of the Local, to the President of the International, to the head of the Women's Task Force, to the Benefit Office, to Vinnie [Vincent P.] DeLazzero, the owner of Paul Morris, and I blind cc'ed it to Clinton's office, to TNT and to Legal Momentum.

J.L. And what happened?

A.O. And very interesting synchronicity. I mailed the letter

on Wednesday. Thursday morning Legal Momentum called me, Françoise [Jaconsohn]. She said: Angela, I wonder if you can help us? We're looking at the Brooklyn courthouse and we're having trouble with two contractors, this company Aztec and Paul Morris and they're not in compliance. And they have all these hours logged in, in October and they're telling us they can't find any women. There's no women.

J.L. Oh, interesting.

A.O. And I said: wow! I said. That's really incredible because I just mailed out this letter. You're going to see it in the mail in a couple of days. I just called Paul Morris on Monday. They told me there's no work, la de da. And sure enough, I mailed my letter Wednesday, my business agent had it by Thursday and he called me. And,--you know--I told Legal Momentum, I said--you know--he ... he called me. I'm going to call him back and--you know--see what's up. So I talked to him on the phone and he says: listen! You have your benefit. I was out on disability this past year, nine weeks. He said: You get credit. You get thirty-five hours credit for all your weeks and we added up nine times thirty-five ...

J.L. You hurt your hand on a job?

A.O. Yes. I hurt my hand on a job trying to speed up and do my work so that I could stay with Paul Morris. That's another story. And so I had the coverage. So I said: so how's it going with the out of work list? He said: Well,--you know--you must know it's been real slow. He says: I don't have it in front of me but I think you're number ten or eleven on the list. I'm, like, All right. Well,--you know--you let me know. He's like: Yeah. Do me a favor. Call me ... call me every week. I'm, like: all right. So I called Legal Momentum. I tell them,--you know--he didn't offer me a job, but--you know--I have these benefits. We're all, like, relieved. I go and ... I go to the deli on the corner 'cause I was going to stay home and prepare a legal intake with Legal Momentum, and I get a call at the grocery store there and it's my business agent and he says: You know, you're really lucky. The last nine people I called didn't want to go to work. Do you want to go to work? I said: Of course! I'm not going to say no. Of course, I need the work so he gives me information, boom, I have a job. I go to this job. It's with a new company called Wilkstone and it's ... it's a place called Bliss Spa, very high end, very fancy spa, and I work Friday two hours overtime, I work Saturday, I work Sunday, and like, right there I made a weeks pay so I .. I'm thrilled. and on Saturday and Sunday I did what's called float and cover. It's a very ... it's a tough thing to do in my trade. And we have parameters. Okay? I was setting, Jane, the biggest heaviest tile that tile setters in the union are allowed to set. Okay? It was a two foot by two foot stone. It was three quarters of an inch thick. It was huge and I had to set it on a floor with cement

J.L. Um-hum.

A.O. ... where we float it and we tap it in, and then you set the next one next to it, and so on and so forth. And I tell you, if I looked at all my work sheets I'd never done that before, never, never.

J.L. Um-hum.



A.O. So here I'm thinking wow! This company is so nice. They're paying me time and a half and double time to do this work. It's so great.

J.L. What happened?

A.O. It was fine. The foreman .. Oh, the foreman with kid gloves, he's like: Your work is so good. Oh my God, you've done that already, bla, bla, bla? It's just really been ...

J.L. So they're treating you good.

A.O. Very pleasant. So I walked on that job, there were two African-American guys, there were three Latin guys. It was like, this is such a breath of fresh air, this company.

J.L. Yeah, so different.

A.O. Yeah. Yeah, really ...

J.L. Okay. That's a good place to segue to ... I want to quickly run through your ideas on--you know--what do you think are the most important things in terms of success for women in--you know .. all the .. all the organized you're doing, the .. Legal Momentum, TNT ... What are the key things; the most important things?

A.O. For .. for, like, conditions or ...

J.L. Well, to ...

A.O. I would say for the women to be very determined,

J.L. Okay.

A.O. Very, very determined to do this. And I think ... I think that NEW does a good job and I think it can do a better job in explaining the big picture to women. Because we can't just say these are great jobs. You're going to get great money and great benefits. We need to say there's organized crime that tries to steal your pension and your annuity. There's--you know--shakiness on who gets to work and who doesn't and you need to be--you know--in real life you need to make plans for that. Even if,--you know--you decide to make a federal case about it, you know what? If you're not getting your paycheck you need to be ready to handle that. You know? So we need to not paint such a rosy picture.

J.L. Super ?? Um-hum. Right.

A.O. You know? I think that's just--you know--a good conscience will do that.

J.L. Um-hum. yeah.

A.O. I think that the unions and the contractors ... See, I would like to educate the men, particularly the men who are so proud; they say my father did this; his father did this; his

father before him did this. And I think there's really nothing wrong with being proud of that,--you know,--and to feel like--you know--you're ... you have an integral part of this. But you need to realize that on some level that that's a type of affirmative action;--you know?--that you are just entitled to come into this business.

J.L. Ownership,

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. Because ... Yeah.

A.O. Yeah. And,--you know--and to realize, like,--you know--because men will want to say, Oh,--you know--why should we give the women special treatment? I'm, like, Oh, because you must realize that you are receiving special treatment. You are not being put through what I am. You are being treated differently and better,--you know,--with access to skills and so forth. I had a young fellow who I ... I watched him go from being a helper, to training to be a mechanic, and now he's a foreman on jobs. And I ... I'm watching how, because he's one of the insiders,--you know--he's getting opportunities to do--you know--things like trying to be a foreman. No one trained me. The union didn't offer me training. The company ... the company didn't say: Okay. You know what? We'll warm you up and let you work for the foreman and the make you a foreman. You know? There's none of that. It was just, like, go ahead ... you know,--just throw you in and ... whereas this kid, I saw him working with someone who's very respected as a foreman. And I had had a confrontation with him. He was on my job when I was a foreman and I said to him,--you know ... I was kind of disappointed, I said, the one day you left at one thirty and you didn't even finish the shower stall. And he says: Oh, well,--you know--what were you going to do the next day if I didn't leave you that work? I'm, like, what is .. I aid: You and I work for Paul Morris. We work seven hours a day. Joe tells me,--Joe's the outside ??,--Joe tells me,--you know--seven hours. You know? I thought you finished that shower. You didn't even finish it. He turned around and he says to me: You got some set of balls talking to me like that. I should smash your fucking head, he says. And he said it in front of this other guy. And I turned to the other guy, I said: Look at this? He's going to smash my fucking head. You know? And he realized ... Like, he just got furious 'cause he's just so entitled to be there and he's so, like,--you know--you know--this is his place, not mine. You know? And he walked away and he cooled off and he came back and he was nervous 'cause he realized he ...

J.L. He screwed up.

A.O. he screwed up bad. And he says: You know, listen, listen, listen. I got nothing against you, he said. Anyone ever talks to me about you I said she's a hard worker. She's a hard worker. You know? He said: this is just between me and you. I said: Well, let me ask you something. I said: Did you have to wait in line to get into this union? He's, like: what do you mean? What do you mean? I'm like: Seriously, did you have to fill out a piece of paper and take a test and wait? And,--you know--the answer is obviously no.

J.L. Right.

A.O. You know? His father's in the union and when it was time,

his father worked in Paul Morris or wherever and they said okay, you're in. I said: Well,--you know--some of us, like me--you know--we had .. we really had to keep proving it to people and .. and all that. And,--you know--he kind of like tried to--you know--back away from all this,--you know,--like he respected me, and this and that, but it just really disgusted me because I realize--you know-- I'm not ever going to have the access that he has to this trade to ...

J.L. ... that you love.

A.O. Right. Right.

J.L. Tell me about your ideas about women going into the trades, into ... into construction. I mean, do you think it's a good fit? I mean, do you .. what do you think?

A.O. Oh yeah. I think we're just dealing with a particular population of individuals in the unions and in contracting who just have some old fashioned ideas and some control issues where they just want to keep this little thing to themselves because ...

J.L. It's a good thing.

A.O. It's very lucrative for them. You know? My ... The officers in my local make six digits. They get new cars like .. but ... and.. and it's fine. You know? I was told by John Cosentini that President Hill is a .. is a respected president of a local. You know? All over the country he's respected, and I'm , like, but what about right here? How about these annuity statements. You know? Like,

J.L. Yeah.

A.O. How about the respect right here. So,--you know--for the women, I think, we really just got to get them know, like .. Like, I really love all that I've learned and I really love the confidence that it has given me in all of the world and in all of life. Like,--you know--to go in and hang with these guys ... a lot of them have criminal records and--you know--it's a rough bunch to .. to navigate, to get my skills to perform. It's a performance thing. You know? I mean, you have to ... You've got to have your nerve. You've got to have your .. You got to--you know--g-- I work on my knees on top of that for most of my seven hours is all on my knees. and,--you know--I do my work and I love my work. But I think if .. if somebody--if somehow we could really just make sure women have access to these .. to the skills they need, real access, not like, Oh yeah, we'll let you try this once. No, no, no, no, no, no. It's a forty-five hundred hour apprenticeship. Let's make a plan. It's that simple. It's so easy. And you all make your six digit figures or your fifty-two checks a year. You have the time to make a map. I mean, I could do it and you, Jane, and me. And you see all the women who are active. We don't have extra salaries to do this. We're all doing it on our own time and--you know--for our own passion. And I just ... I see some of these guys just sitting on it.

J.L. Well, I know you devote a lot of your time to activism, organizing on behalf of women in the trades. And I'm wondering what are your goals? What are your dreams? When you think of your first year career. Do you have some dreams?

A.O. Okay. I do. I am applying to law school.

J.L. Oh.

A.O. Yes, and I want to do labor law and I'm going to keep my book. See, a lot of people think, Oh, you're ..No. I'm not moving on.

J.L. I didn't think that for one second.

A.O. I knew you wouldn't. I knew you wouldn't 'cause--you know--we have a connection. And it's unfortunate but I think I'm going to give a goal. In my third year of law school will coincide with the next election in my Local and I want to throw my name in the hat.

J.L. Wow.

A.O. I want to run on a platform that ...

J.L. And you're going to ?? campaign

A.O. The union deserves a lawyer for President,--you know?--like, somebody who's going to give them back and its' not just bravado. And,--you know--

J.L. That takes a lot of guts. Angela, do you think your union is mobbed up?

A.O. Yes. Yes, I do.

J.L. What .. I'm not going to start worrying about you yet.

A.O. Good.

J.L. Tell me ... so you're applying to law school and you .. your goal is to start next year?

A.O. Fall of 2005.

J.L. Okay, and to go part time?

A.O. I'm going to go full time.

J.L. Full time?

A.O. Yeah. Well, here's the thing. I wish and hope that there is a way that I could work one or two Saturdays a month,--you know?--as a union tile setter,--you know,--when Lower Manhattan gets going and we have plenty of work,--you know--why wouldn't the union, if they needed union labor, let me work. You know?

J.L. Right.

A.O. Unfortunately, I wouldn't be able to work during the week when I'm .. I'm in school

J.L. Right.

A.O. But I would need some source of income. I also plan to continue to teach at NEW.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. I teach the Job Readiness class at the night session. And I love teaching that class. I love getting the women excited...

J.L. How long have you done that?

A.O. and ready,

J.L. Uh-huh.

A.O. and I give them--you know,--I shoot straight from the hip. I tell them, like, a consumer report. You know? You recommend best buy. I say: listen, I know tile sounds great. You think wow! You know? You hear violins playing in the background. You think, Oh, you're going to make all these beautiful things. But let me tell you, there's ... you're on your knees. There's piss all over the place because we tile around the toilet ring on the floor and the guys piss in it and there's urine everywhere. I said: there's got to be corruption going on, and so on. I said: so I'm not saying if somebody in this room really want's to do this, because that was me, then,--you know--that's what you do. But,--you know--at NEW we want to explain all your options and you should pick something that fits best for you. ??

J.L. So this would be ... What year would you be running for office?

A.O. Okay. We just really went through an election cycle, so 2007.

J.L. Okay.

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. Good. That's the year this book comes out so you'll be mighty busy.

A.O. Yeah.

J.L. Okay. So ... and in terms of affirmative action and the whole question of--you know--the difficult period we're in now in terms of lack of commitment to the whole idea of affirmative action .. but,--you know--you're out there on the front lines. And what do you see in terms of the relationships that you're able to develop with the people you're working with? What's your sense of how far we've come and how far we have to go?

A.O. It's just ... It's like I said, there's a lot of academic talk. Like, the Union,--the International Union looks good on paper: look, we have a Task Force; look, we took these women and we sent them to Vegas; we send them to Washington. You know? It seems like something's done. I like the Women's Task

Force to having hamsters in a cage. Right? You give them food and water and you put the wheel in there. They run. They look so busy. Look! They're running! They're running. Let them out of the cage. Oh, but you don't want that,--right?--because then they're busy doing their own thing and you don't have control any more.

J.L. Um-hum. Um-hum.

A.O. So the Task Force is kind of like this caged animal that looks busy. And it's not happening in the trenches. You know? I just .. I've watched women come and go in my Local and it's because they're by themselves. They don't have access to skills, training and support. Okay? I've watched the Apprentice Coordinator, John Cosentini,--you know--ridicule a woman rather than--you know--getting behind her, saying: wow. You know what? Let me think about this. She's the only Hispanic woman in this Local. Gee, maybe she feels isolated. Maybe that's why she's a little bit edgy. You know? No. He just reads it as you're ungrateful. You know? Why do you have such a bad attitude?

8-10

J.L. Right. Exactly. □