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Interview With Ann Jochems

J. So we'll do a little test and then we'll listen to it to make sure it worked.

A. All right.

J. So why don't you identify yourself and tell me what Union you're with.

A. All right. I'm Ann Jochems and I'm in the Carpenters Union, Local 608, in New York City.

J. And how long have you been a member of the Union.

A. Well, almost five years.

J. And so why don't we listen now. Okay. so identify yourself one more time.

A. all right. I'm Ann Jochems and I'm in the Carpenters Union, Local 608, in New York City.

J. How long have you been a carpenter?

A. Over ten years.

J. So, and you've been in New York City for five years?

A. Yes.

J. Well, how did you decide that you wanted to become a carpenter? How did that happen?

A. A. Well, it sort of evolved out of really the overall vision of just wanting to change the world that manifested in this particular way of being drawn to non-traditional work after I graduated from college. And we were in a recession and I couldn't really find anything using my college degree. And so, the traditional men's jobs paid more and so I gravitated towards that kind of work, but since I didn't have any skills, ended up, like, managing a gas station and being a laborer and doing landscaping and then doing building repairs, and then getting more skills, and then wanting to be self sufficient, getting caught up in sort of the back to the land, each of us should enable ourselves to know how to do anything, especially as women and feminists. And then I helped friends build a house. Then I got interested in it that way. Then I got politicized from just hearing about Unions, just hearing about it in the community, really on the street, and the political nature of the pure Union movement appealed to me. So then I tried to get in a Union apprenticeship but ...

J. Where were you when these things happened?

(1)

A. That was in Kansas City in the late '70s.

J. So there were Unions in Kansas City?

A. Yes. But it's not really what I would call a Union town. And I wasn't successful in ... Even though I passed the first test and everything and got .. got interviewed ...

J. How did you hear about it?

A. I just tracked it down myself. You know? Like, it wasn't even advertised. I just decided that that's what I wanted to do and ...

SJ. so how .. how many people did you have to call and how many places did you have to go before you ended up at ??

A. Probably just --you know--the .. the employment center,-- the job service center and then asked them where it was

(Third female voice) Right.

A. and then went there. And then it was like a charade,--you know--because they didn't really take .. take me seriously ever. I didn't feel that they ever really took me seriously. I never ... I never felt like they honestly ever considered accepting me. and .. and they didn't. (chuckles)

J. So you've only been in ten years

A. Um-hum.

J. So that's 1980, while the big push was in the mid-'70s so they still weren't up to

A. Right.

J. the ... not in Kansas City in the

A. No. Well, they weren't up to snuff. and then I moved to New York in 1981 ...

J. Well, tell me first how you got into the apprentice program or you .. or did you?

A. No, I didn't.

J. You never did.

A. No, I didn't. and so I went to ... Oh, so while I was in Kansas I went to a CETA program in building .. in carpentry

J. Um-hum.

A. in Kansas City, - Kansas Vo-Tech I did carpentry and worked in building maintenance also.

J. So was that a serious program? You actually learned real skills?

A. Yeah. They did house building, although the teacher .. I mean, again, in theory it was a good idea. The teacher was horrible and didn't really--you know--impart the skills very well to the men or to the women. and ...

J. How many women were in your program?

A. Well, I was the only one. I was the only woman. and, I mean, he just did a bad job.

J. So did you end up helping each other learn or how did you ??

A. No. I feel like I just read the books and just,--you know--like, sort of I muscled it out,--you know,--just read the books myself and tried stuff. And I'll never forget, the first table saw lesson was really ridiculous 'cause it was .. Well, when I look back on it I just cringe that I still have my fingers and everything 'cause he sort of like, said: Okay. You try it. And he didn't tell you any of the safety rules or anything. You know? He just set you loose on the thing. and--you know--naturally--you know--the thing bound and it did a crazy kick back that, if you had been hit by it, could have killed you. But I did manage to survive it. and then,--you know--eventually just floundered through. You know? And yeah.

J. Where did you ... when you were doing this, where did you get the tools?

A. I ... I don't feel like I really did get the tools. I got it long distance,--you know--starting in 1981 I started getting it just from this magazine that came out of San Francisco: "tradeswomen ..." ... "Tradeswomen."

J. Um-hum.

A. and that's where I got all of my support really,--you know--'cause I didn't even know any other women that were doing it, although I looked all the time for it. And when I would go to women's festivals and stuff I would always go to the--you know--tradeswomen workshops. and I really sat it out but it was--you know--really slim pickings and not too much of it.

J. Um-hum. So what kinds of jobs Well, you .. you had the vocational program so how much of your time did that take in terms of classroom and on the job training?

A

. Well, it went all day, every day, for four months to that particular school. And then I worked like, twenty hours a week for this guy that owned all these old houses just sort of doing everything.

J. Um-hum.

A. But trying to learn on your own, which is what I've really always done without any really good guidance except for one year when I went to community college where I had a woman teacher and I feel like she .. she taught me really in a year, everything that--you know--all the right ways of doing it. but other than that I feel like it's just been from books and--you know--what I could, like, really--quote--"steal,"--unquote,--from them. But I was never able to form that kind of relationship with them where they felt like sharing anything with me.

J. Um-hum. What about the employer who hired you to work on the old houses? How did that happen?

A. He was just sort of like passed down from--you know--a friend in the community that ... It was sort of a sham too, though, 'cause really we didn't know what we were doing. It was another woman and myself. And this guy had inherited, like, eighty old Victorian houses from his mother and they were in total disrepair. and it's sort of like, he didn't want to put any money into them but he had to do something,--you know?--like he had to change locks when he kicked people out and patch the holes and not let the roof leak. really, some stuff he--you know--but it was like, from plumbing to electrical. And we ... we were just reading the book and trying to figure all this stuff out. And again, we were lucky we didn't kill ourselves and anybody else. But--you know--that was .. You know, still somehow or other, I still remained interested in it to--you know--and then wanting to specialize, always wanting to be really good at it,--still wanting to be really good at it. but,--you know--without really anything ... without really any--you know--like, day to day on the job support really.

J. So that CETA program has been wiped out. But how many of you from your class went on to work at what you were theoretically learning?

A. That part I don't know. You know?

J. So then what happened after you finished that program you were working at where, the building maintenance? And then what was your next job?

A. Then I moved to New York.

J. What made you decide to come to New York?

A. Well, it was really just a .. a relationship that I had up -state and

J. Uh-huh. and so you came to the big city,--your first big
.....

a. Yeah. Well, no. Yeah, I never dreamed I would come to the big city, actually. I .. I ended up upstate and tried--you know--got jobs but, like, they were all, like, non-Union and very .. very little they lasted, like, two or three months, each one, about three of them. and it was just like,--you know--scraping together. then I'd get laid off. Scraping .. You know? I'd just walk down to construction sites and say,--you know--

J. So were they, like, office construction or housing construction ??

A. One of them was, like, building a metal truck stop, and one of them was residential. And the other one was restoring old houses again. Yeah.

J. So you just had to put yourself out there.

A. Yeah.

J. And that was hard?

A. Yeah. That got ... Yeah. ?? really exhausting and always .. always being the only woman. And then ended up in another program. I think CETA was gone, but I think this .. I think this was CETA, though, again--again. I got this other CETA thing where I went full time every day for nine months to this carpentry program in Onondaga BOCES which ... that was a really ... that was a pretty good teacher.

J. Um-hum. That's near Syracuse. Isn't it?

A. Yeah. Yeah. and ...

J. What was good about it?

A. Well, I ... Well, I love school (laughs) school. School was great because there's not the pressure to produce and you can sort ... there's sort of the freedom to find your way through it. You know? In a way I think it's more advantageous than the apprenticeship program because .. except that it's not real life job situations, I guess. but it gives you more creative license to, like, explore more interesting ways of doing things without a boss--you know--without your job being on line. You know?

J. So this was .. it was also to become a carpenter?

A. Right.

J. ?? all the different aspects, like finishing work and ...

A. Right. right. And then wood working ...

J. ??

A. Yeah. Yeah. And then I fell in love with wood working and decided that maybe that's what I'd like to do so, yeah, I went to a community college for a year. I just--you know--I read about this woman in a magazine and decided, yeah, I'd like to learn from her. You know? Maybe that would be different. And I went there and it was the best thing I ever did for myself.

J. And that's when you eventually became ...

A. Yeah. But that was only one year and I only ended up with

J. Um-hum. Were you the only woman?

A. No. There was a couple of others and she really .. Lily was great for us. You know? And ... and she ...

J. What kinds of support aside ... I mean, the .. the teaching and the really ??

A. Yeah. She just knew how to ... Yeah. she just knew how to do it. She connected with you. She believed that you could learn and therefore, you believed that you could learn. and you ... you trusted her that she wasn't going to let you cut your hand off, which I never did trust any of the men to ... You know? I just figured that--you know--they might get a thrill out of that if that happened or something. You know? But I guess this is really a trust issue. and she was ... and she was so highly skilled herself that she was a perfect role model for seeing that you could do it. And the only regret out of the whole thing is that it was only one year instead of about six years, which I feel is .. is really what you....

J. a real apprenticeship.

* A. Right. Right, but you teach how to strip rubber.

J. So you ... you were up there and you were .. then you finished that program after one year.

A. Right.

J. And then what did you go on to?

A. Then I got an apprenticeship with the National Trust For Historic Preservation, which you already needed building skills to do, but this is sort of like supposed to be a more specialized thing. And it was a real sham, unfortunately, also. It was supposed to be a three year program and it was at one of the historic properties, Lyndhurst, in Tarrytown,--you .. doing all of the trades again. You know?

J. Um-hum.

A. But wood working was my favorite. But they didn't let me do very much of that and they mostly made me do masonry. And .. and it paid so horribly and the area was so expensive to live in that, as soon as I had an opportunity to go as a restoration craftsman at Central Park, I did that which was a really great job.

J. Um-hum. Our Central Park in the City?

A. Yeah. Yeah. It was .. It was a great job but it paid crummy again.

J. How did you hear about the opportunity?

A. It was on the bulletin board at the apprenticeship school. But--you know--it was working in the grounds and it was terribly creative. It was all ... a bunch of artists and stuff that really .. really worked there and did it, and--you know--rebuild all the summer houses in the park and ... Rustic architecture is what it was, and it was fascinating with no ... Again, the thing that appealed to me about it was that there wasn't any big push for production. You know?

J. And you felt like you were building something that mattered.

A. Yeah.

J. Um-hum.

A. Yeah. Yeah. It was really great. But it was non-Union and--you know--sometimes you would be working, like, side by side with Union people so that was, like, sort of annoying because, I mean, the truth of the matter was that we really worked harder and got paid less.

J. and a lot of you cared more.

A. Well, we cared more. But also we didn't have job se--as much job security. You know?

J. ??

A. But, yeah. Yeah.

J. Were there any women on the site?

A. Not when I started,

J. Um-hum.

A. but I personally recruited several. There was a women's bookstore at the time, and so every time I heard they were hiring I just went and put the ad up myself and did get two women--two

other women hired. And that was great.

J. ??

A. Yeah. Yeah, I always do that. I still ... I'm still doing that every time I ... I hear there's hiring. but ... but it hasn't worked out, 'cause now on this job, I've been there five years and I'm still the only woman. but ...

J. So you ...you finished .. that job came to an end or ??

A. Yeah. Well, I heard about this j.. the City civil service thing.

J. Now, when did you get into the Union?

A. Well, I'm still not in .. I'm still not in the Union now. Now I heard that the City civil service things--and this was, like .. this is the only way I got in the Union Oh, and then I tried again when I was back in Syracuse to get in and again got put on a waiting list and couldn't get in;--tried ?? apprenticeship in the early '80s and couldn't get in. and then I--you know--I didn't everything I said. Then, when I came here, I took--you know--several City civil service tests advertised and took it and rated high and got interviewed and got the job. then, if you passed a one year probation, they have to let you in the U--in the Union because they--you know--some agreement ... I think it's the only municipality in the whole country that's that way.

J. Is there a one out of three rule or something?

A. There is a one out of three rule but ?? somehow or other, I .. I just feel like it's .. In a way, even though I don't have a lot of job satisfaction, anyhow, I feel like it was one of the luckiest breaks of my life that they inadvertently hired me,--you know,--because it's highly competitive,--well, now especially,--and--you know--there's probably a thousand people that want the job even though it's far from perfect.

J. Um-hum.

A. And--you know--that's--you know--got me in the Union at the journey level status,--you know,--having amassed all my education and eking out my job experience on my own because it's a hefty experience requirement.

J. So you are the only women carpenter for the whole of New ... New York City?

A. Yeah.

J. That is amazing.

A. Yeah.

J. What a distinction! ?

A. Yeah! Yeah.

J. Yeah. Wow. So what was the response of the ...your coworkers when you started at that job?

A. Again, it was horrendous. It was really bad because, well, for one thing, it was really hard just figuring out New York City. You know? But the corruption, I mean, I can't .. I can't estimate the corruption aspect of it a lot ... enough. You know? And how

J. even with the City?

A. Yeah. Yeah. I'd almost say especially. You know? But ... 'cause I ... I didn't work outside Union in New York ever, so I only worked City Union. and, I mean, just the scam that they sort of have going is--you know--really, really horrible. I felt like they... they just did everything to try and get rid of me. They did try and get rid of me and I had to ... I did have to file a grievance to keep my job because they--you know--they just said: bad attitude... They called it everything. You know?--from incompetence, bad attitude, insubordination ... Everything they could think of they just, like,

J. And how did you fight that ? You documented things?

A. Yeah.

J. Or what's some of the ways that you

A. Yeah. I documented things. And .. and basically, I was a test case. In a way I caught them unaware.

J. A test case that's still going on ???

A. Yeah, a test case that's still going on... Right... But in a way the advantage that I had, although it didn't seem like an advantage to me but I guess it really was in a way, was that--you know--they didn't know what to do. They didn't really know how ... They did a very poor job of getting rid of me. They should have been able to, if there's enough ... they should have been able to get rid of someone that they didn't want. But I just--you know--- sort of just strong armed ... strong armed them right back. You know? And they didn't have any ?? the whole thing, 'cause then, once you've passed that year of probation, they've sort of like got you forever. You know? You've got tenure. so now it's like ... it's a weird situation because there you are. and .. and--you know--they all just think that--you know--they inherited you, and--you know--it's just an overall not that good of a situation,--you know--except for very ... with very few exceptions I feel like most

of them just wish I wasn't there. You know?

J. So what kind of jobs do you work on?

A. Well, I was, when I was a field mechanic, until October, I went from school building to school building doing maintenance and repairs on the schools. But what it was is--you know--I really .. I really ... Like, I was the only one that didn't have a partner. they would always give me, like, the least skilled and the heaviest schleping,--you know,--lie, again, very little wood work, which is what I like. I asked them to put me in the shop and they wouldn't do that. Anything they sensed that I wanted, they did the exact opposite. And they generally went out of their way to make my life miserable,--you know?--like they transferred me from a ... like, for a very far point away from my home and .. 'cause they usually try and accommodate you if they like you,--you know,--let you work close to your home and everything. And just ... just exclusion,--you know,--like not being told about parties. You know? and just hearing about everything after it happened, and never, never really being included, and always getting the bad jobs and everything. And then the supervisor's test came up and I did really well on that. And I should have sued them three years ago when they started .. two years ago when they started calling from the list for the job, just ... just on affirmative action,--just because I was the only woman on the list in the whole City--citywide,--and in my agency. But I decided to be patient because--you know--I'd had sort of .. I was still reeling from the repercussions of the list grievance, because it really takes a toll on you to fight back too. So now they made me,--to try and sort of appease me,--they made me this acting supervisor. But again, I mean, it's incredible because, basically, I have no responsibility.

J. and you're in an office ...

A. Yeah. I'm in an office and it's, like, ??

J. and what are you supervising?

A. Nothing. If my boss stuck out his foot he could kick me. It's like ... It's such a convoluted situation. Now, they again transferred me ... Well, I asked to be transferred to Queens but I meant as a field mechanic. The ?? sort of threw in this incentive that if I would do this I could have an extra half hour a day overtime. So I did it, thinking that everything's a learning experience and trying to see it as sort of a positive thing. And they said it would last only two or three months and then the line would open and I would get the title. but that--you know,--now it's been, like, since October and I still haven't. And now I've given them in my own mind, another October deadline. If, by October, they don't appoint me to a supervisor's position, I am going to file a grievance for it again. So then the fight will start again because once you ... once you file a grievance and they know you did that and then you have to work with them every day, then it's like,--you know ... Well, at least ... at least it's more out there. But I

sure have a hard time getting along with them. You know? I mean, some of them it's okay. None of them are--you know--very ... It's just not a normal .. I don't know how to describe it and how .. how it's such an abnormal situation of how you can just, like, bang your head against the wall, day in and day out, trying to figure out what it is?--what is it? What is it that doesn't connect. And then you can meet some trades woman somewhere and in five minutes she knows exactly what you mean. But these guys--you know--you can explain it for--you know--months and they just say, Oh, you've got a chip on your shoulder, or--you know--you take things the wrong way, or they just--you know--do all this stuff. But

J. Some of the reasons why it's you.

A. It's your fault. Right.

J. It's not the system that .. obviously that's at fault when you look at a system where ?? one woman ??

A. Right. Right.

J. So that .. that's going to be a tough experience, day in and day out.

A. Yeah. Yeah. It really wears me down. And .. and everybody that I care about in my personal life has told me that, why don't I try some other field of work. You know? and: don't be a martyr. You only live once and all that. But it's a cause.

J. You .. you feel a pride in your craft and you want to use it.

A. Right. Exactly. Exactly.

J. And you have job security and a good job, well paying, ?? and why should you walk away when they're the ones who are at fault?

A. Right. Right. Well, yeah. And I always say, we don't need one less. We need five thousand more women. But...

J. I understand that there's a few men that have called NEW (Nontraditional Employment for Women) and talked about using them as a source for hiring for the new hiring that they're going to be doing ... for building trades people for the Board of Ed.

A. Oh yeah.

J. It's part of his ... He (new head of Bd. Of Ed.) started saying right when he came here that he needed a lot more people. He had fewer in New York City (than) he had in Miami and it's a much bigger system.

A. Right.

J. And then we were talking in meetings about writing him a letter and saying--you know--what about women?

A. Um-hum.

J. And so then, right at that point, he did I learned that he called NEW women. So do you have any hopes that something will come of this or ??

A. Oh yeah. I do have hope that it will, but I feel like it .. it all takes so long of a time--you know--because there's so many different layers. I mean, like, the chancellor, who--you know--is an educated man in a very high position ... it's great that he noticed and that he said that. But I feel like it will be many, many years before it filters down to the ... to the tangible level because, like, I know that they're hiring right now and I know that there are ... Well, there's no women on the current list so I know that it's already .. it's going to be all men.

J. Is that because women haven't been taking the test?

A. Yeah, because they've had to have five years experience before they can take the test, and--you know--it's hard to get that. so that's the excuse that they use. but the thing is that if they really wanted to hire women they could have set up an apprenticeship program or an the--you know--on the job training thing. They could .. they definitely can do it if they want. And if they wanted women and minorities they could have them tomorrow. But instead, they just--you know--give lip service to it. But nothing really has changed as far as the systems' helping that to happen.

J. So, now, you're in the Union,

A. Yeah.

J. And what does that mean?

A. Well, it's a very strange situation and .. and really to find out what that meant, because then I was so excited to be a Union member--you know--because politically I really believe in the .. the Union,--the pure concept of the Union,--which I think doesn't exist but is another goal to strive for. so--you know,--I'd go to .. I'd go to meetings and stuff, but it was horrible because it was a huge smoke filled auditorium with hundreds of people

J. Now, this is for your Local Union,

A. Yeah, Local 608. right?

J. And you don't have separate Board Of Ed meetings for the Board Of Ed?

A. Right. Right. And I didn't know anyone and it was all

men. I mean, there are a lot of women in that Union but you never see them.

J. ?? schedule.

A. Yeah. Yeah. And these guys that look like--you know,-- they're all clean and in suits, and they stand up in the front and they just

J. Acting like the ?? leadership?

A. and they just--you know--talk to themselves really, without any input from the audience except for .. it seems like there might be a few planted in the audience that they let have a voice. But then, if anybody's dissident ..

J. Do they have mics set .. I mean ..

A. No. And if you ...

J. No mics. You have to shout out and ...

A. Yeah. And if you disagree with them it's almost like a--you know--a monarchy or something, because they--you know--they don't allow any dissension and they just almost, like, bounce you out of there if you don't say what they like. And I couldn't imagine saying anything anyway at the meetings because--you know--it's so overwhelming without any support. You know? If I had a group of people--you know--that I was hooked up with then I'd be ??

J. Have you tried any ways of linking up with other women who are in the Union?

A. I have.

J. ?? or anything. But how do you do that?

A. Right. But I guess I .. I guess I haven't dogged it persistently enough because

J. What ... Which ways have you tried?

A. Well, the thing that I did was is I--you know--I seek out tradeswomen's support all the time. So--you know--any time I hear anything about that I do .. Like, I joined CLUW and I joined AUD. and I joined New York Tradeswomen, and I joined ... there's another tradeswomen group whose ...

J. United Tradeswomen?

A. Yeah, United Tradeswomen. So I joined I joined all of them and they all .. and we all talk about together doing this thing with the Union. But the Union is like .. It's an .. It's very hard to do it. as a matter of fact, just today when I knew .. 'cause I

new I was going to have this interview, I did write a letter to one of the guys in the Union saying .. suggesting some of these ideas about why don't we have a Women's Committee? And how about a bulletin board? and let's put women's issues in the newsletter regularly because I was ecstatic about this issue of Carpenter Magazine having a whole page on tradeswomen. So--you know,-- hopefully something will come of it. but it's just a long struggle.

J. So who .. who does that letter go to?

A. Well, I sent it to this guy Ray O'Kane. And the only reason I sent it to him is because .. I don't even know what his position is. He's some .. I think he's sort of a low level assistant. But ..

J. In the district council?

A. Right. Right. But he does the newspaper and so I wanted--you know--I wanted something in in the newspaper. I wanted the thing in the newspaper about my graduation from the Cornell program 'cause I heard about that. And so the only way to find out about the Union .. that's why I went to school for The Women's Trade Union Women's Studies program for a year, to learn about it.

J. When did you decide to go through that?

??

A. I heard about that from the .. the women in NEW.. in the Tradeswomen's Support Group, like Cynthia Long (Local 3, Electrician) and Barbara Trees (Carpenter, Local 157) and ...

J. So what was your experience at Cornell?

A. It was wonderful. It was--you know--just the greatest thing, just just .. For me, it was just being around women. You know? I specifically chose the women's program for that reason because I believe women learn better with each other and from women teachers. And,--you know,--all the teachers were just brilliant. and--you know--it was just a very positive learning environment. Like, ..every--you know--everybody was really nice and really warm, and you always felt good, and it was like an aberration from the outside world here, just going there, because it--you know--made you feel normal again. Because all day long you .. you just feel like--you know--you .. it's got to be you because it's everywhere and there's never any break in the wall. You never get any support saying it's not.

J. Yeah, victimization.

A. Yeah. And then when you go there and you hear everybody saying--you know--What? Are you kidding me? You know? You know, those guys were all jerks and all that, then--you know--you feel validated.

J. ??

A. Yeah.

J. So you .. you were in the certificate program?

A. Yes. Yeah.

J. So what courses did you take?

A. Writing skills and an overall view of the labor movement and labor history, labor law, collective bargaining, and one other one that just alluded me. I can't remember that last one.

J. So when did you finish up with that?

A. In June of 199~~9~~0, just .. just this past June. Yeah.

J. so ...

A. But what I was trying ... So I was trying to figure out how being in the Union works with being a City employee. And that's the part that, even though I studied in school for a year, I couldn't really figure out. Because it's almost like, when you call the Educational Director of the Union for information, which I've done and I've met with him personally, trying to get my foot in the Union door,

J. Is that Charles Fanning?

A. Yeah, he just sort of says ... He just tries to appease you. He just sort of says: Look! You have a good job. Just don't--you know--don't worry about it. And even the guys on the job, they're so ... For the ... for the vast ... The vast majority of them are very apolitical about the Union and they just say--you know---why do we even have to pay in dues? You know? We've got our good job

J. What about issues of ... Like, usually on the work site issues come up that they somehow they want somebody to deal with ??

A. Right. They don't .. they don't come up. I mean, just ... just recently was the only issue that ever came up. No issue ever came up because it's so corrupt and it's taken care of in such a back handed way that there is not only no organization, but everybody's just basically foundering on their own, and you figure out ways to--you know--make your life easy. And the way you do that is by doing favors for people and .. You know? It's a real club that way.

J. ?? a lot of individuals who are trying to look out for their own thing,

A. Exactly.

J. and trying to do what they have to do to ?? and

A. ?? if ever.

J. ? collect their pay

A. Right. right.

J. falls by the wayside. And your work is in very isolated kinds of situations or ...

A. Yeah, always .. I am, although ,, then occasionally you do get this group effort. Like if there's a big project that needs to be done they do pull everybody together and you kind of get a sense of how the ?? is doing.

J. Um-hum.

A. But--you know,--nobody really .. cause I've talked to them about the Union organizing and nobody really feels any need for it and .. Except for very recently there was this instances with one of the supervisors where something happened to him and he felt like he was going to be dragged onto the carpet and he got Charley Fanning down there. And this is like the first time in the history of the Board of Education to .. He got .. He got Charles Fanning down there to, like, plead his case on the rug against .. He wasn't going to go on the carpet by himself. You know? And basically Charley just lambasted management and blamed management for everything. And of course, naturally, there was--you know .. Nobody ever talks about the corruption that goes on in the rank and file also, which has gone on from .. from the beginning of time and been a huge cover up itself. You know?

J. J. ?? like feather bedding kind of--you know--just taking things and and time and ..

A. Yeah, exactly, I mean, in a big way that you can hardly probably not even imagine. I've never seen anything like it.

Side Two

J. So the Union, it doesn't really act in the typical way on your job. And now ... the only kind of way that you see the Union as a force is if somebody goes to the Union meetings and that's when you see the Union? They don't ... You have shop stewards?

A. Well, yeah. That's .. that's another of one .. corrupt sort of thing,--you know--because then ... I heard there are shop stewards and they never do anything. Like, they never have any meetings .. and when I was having trouble, the shop steward was, like, so horrendous I couldn't even talk to him at all in the beginning. And ... you know? so then Now I've transferred to

a different .. to a different boro and everything and that boro didn't have any shop stewards at all. And that's when I decided, -I was going to Cornell, --I decided, well, being a shop steward might be good .. a good way to get involved, to learn more, --you know, -- maybe make some connections and stuff. So I went to see Charley Fanning and that's when I asked him how you'd be one and he just appointed me. I said: Well, that doesn't feel very good because nobody I work with knows. So I thought that, well, I could just tell them. And I told them and they said, Well, we don't need any. and then this issue happened and then--with the supervisor, and then they all of a sudden came up with these shop stewards that represented everybody. But here I was that I never voted. You know? They had elections everywhere but I never heard of the elections. And I know one black man that .. that said that he wanted to run and they pretty much said: Well, no, you can't 'cause--you know--we're all so racist and everything ...

A. You mean they actually admitted ...

A. Yeah. Yeah! They shouldn't have said that to him. You know? So he called me and he was a little upset about that , that they didn't even let him run. they didn't even let him put his name on the ballot. So

J. Have you made any common cause with him?

A. Oh yeah. Yeah. there .. there's two black men that ... that I like pretty well. But--you know--basically we've been through very ... almost identical experience to me.

J. Did they say that problems with hiring minorities in a problem in the Board of Ed is a problem also? What's the ratio of

A. Well, there's ... there's more minority men than there are women, but I'd say it's .. I'd say it's ninety-five percent while men, --you know, --and four point five percent minority men, and point five or less, women. You know? So I think it's a little easier for the minority men. But .. but all of the women that I know that ... Like, I know an electrician's helper and ... Well, no. I do know one minority woman who's an electrician's helper. There's three other women. They're all white. There's .. You know, there's that one minority woman, but--you know--they have even, of course, the double burden.

J. So what's your status as shop steward now?

A. Oh yeah. (chuckles) So then there was a meeting So then, all of a sudden, for the first time in the history of the Board of Ed they decided to have a shop steward's meeting because this ... It's been changing. The system is being computerized and the guys .. I mean, this is incredible, how they used the Union to sort of like push forward the corruption, because since the ... the system has been computerized and they're being more accountable,-

they're starting to be held more accountable,--I mean, there's an uproar about it 'cause nobody wants to be held accountable because they never have been. And so now they're talking about workers' rights. And see, this is a real conflict with me because I believe in workers' rights, but in order to be a worker you have to work. You know? (laughing) So it's sort of hard. Yeah. Yeah. So these guys that don't work are now, like, asserting their right to not work and it's just .. I mean, it's just in--in--bizarre. And so they .. So they had the shop steward's meeting and I went because--you know--I'm a self appointed shop steward .. Well, Charley Fanning appointed me but the guys ... the guys .. particular this one guy just--that I had bad ?? before,--I mean, he just, like, didn't allow me at the meeting. I mean, he asked me to leave and everything. In order to not make a scene, Charles Fanning said: Well, just let her stay as a guest this time. And so then I was so unassertive I said .. I was furious ?? like Charley Fanning sent me down the river 'cause he should have said: I appointed her a shop steward. She stays.

J. Yeah. I appointed her a member.

A. Right. And she's going to be vocal. But instead just, like, after I was designated a guest I felt like I couldn't say anything 'cause now I'm the guest. And nobody ... I didn't have any backing anyway, so--you know--why say anything 'cause who was I representing? And then the guy that was supposedly representing Queens is just .. I mean, it's just incredible who they picked to--you know--be the shop steward because they can't really articulate anything for you. So then, as sort of a real appeasement, Charley Fanning made me the back up to this shop steward in Queens. but it's--you know--it's a sham because--you know--the guy doesn't want me. He's not going to tell me anything. And so then ... then, that's when he told me about the meeting. Then there were a few more shop steward meetings about them being held accountable, how made they are about it. And then he held a general membership meeting and he told me when it was. And so I showed up right on time and everything, when I wrote it down, that's when they all laughed and said: Oh, we only have one meeting in--you know--twenty-five years and you missed it. You know? 'Cause when I made the guy tell me what went on, and it's just ... they're just not serious about it,--you know--except when that they feel like they're not going to be able to get away with it any more, that's what they're serious about. But they're not serious about ... You know, they're not serious people or something. You know?

J. Well, I know that you've been trying to organize women in the Board of Ed who are in the trades.

A. Um-hum.

J. And what .. How did you start doing that and what's bene the result of that?

A. Well, that was really very exciting at first because as soon as

they made me this acting supervisor and put me in this office environment where, I mean, I was under their watchful eye, it's true, but basically I felt like-you know--I can do anything I want here because that's what everyone else does,--

J. Um-hum.

A. I decided to--you know--use the telephone and for my own purposes which ... My agenda is always to increase the numbers of women in the trades. And so I just started doing outreach to as high up in the Board Of Ed as I could go. I wanted to go all the way to the top, up to Amy Linden, who's the Director of the Division of School Facilities. I mean, she's like, not the Director but, anyway, the highest .. the highest manager there is. And I didn't get that high because then this other woman sort of like interceded. But I said that we needed a liaison for trades women,--you know--because I knew of all these trades women and they had particular needs. And how come every single one of them experienced all these same problems,--which I talked to them and they had,--you know,--these five that I could talk to, except for the two that every time they saw me they ran way. But .. but everybody else just said--you know--you know--again, like, within five minutes it was just shared common experience of all the oppression and everybody trying to get rid of them and nobody including them and treating them as equals. So what I was trying to do was create the position for myself, this liaison position, just to give my job responsibilities more meaning. and it would be more interesting work for me if part of my job was to talk to women and improve their lot and set things up for them, which--you know--I would have had ... Since I don't have any responsibilities, it would have been something good to do. But they saw the danger in that and they appointed somebody else to do that, which now .. she's somebody who's really, like, too busy to do it,--you know--and she hasn't really got the trades women issue at heart. I mean, she's a nice woman but she's not very political.

A. so what ... what kind of process did you use to pull it together, aside from talking to individuals and how .. what kind of accountability system to they have for dealing with her?

A. Well, not very good. You know? some .. It all seems like, almost like luck in that this first meeting happened with--you know--one of the plant managers and myself who are really the only women. Like, they .. they wanted to keep it small because .. I tell you, it's almost like management wants to find out your angle on them; figure out how to keep you quiet so that you can't really get organized.

J. Cut you off at the pass.

A. Right. Right. So that's what happened. And--you know--it was really three members from management and us two. You know? We met a couple of times and--you know--made this agenda and set out all these elaborate goals that we had and everything. And,--you

know,--meanwhile my .. my wheels were spinning on--you know-how can this thing grow? How can we include more people and everything. and their wheels were spinning on we have to cut this thing off and--

J. Right. Right.

A. You know,--not .. not upset these women too much. But ...

J. So you did have one meeting ...

A. Yeah, two meetings. We were at two meetings and then that was it. And then they said they were going to--you know--do this survey. They were going to survey all the women and all the minorities--minority men--employed in the Division of School Facilities about their experience with harassment ...

J. Now, have you seen the survey yet?

A. I saw the survey but they didn't distribute it. they only gave this rough draft to the five of us at the meeting and they never really did it.

J. to get feedback.

A. Right. No. Well, it was the one they were going to use.

J. Oh.

A. And they said that in the next paycheck they were going to give everybody a copy of the EEO policy, give the survey No. They were going to do ... No. They were going to do private surveys so she was going to set up appointments,--this liaison that was created was going to set up appointments with everyone and do this survey. And it just never really .. You know.

J. But people would feel more threatened ?? if they had to be called in and ...

A. Well, that too. I mean, once Yeah, because that was set up already.

J. What happened to the idea of putting it in the paycheck. That seems like a good idea.

A. They just didn't do it.

J. So now what's the process to hold them ... I mean, they say they're going to do this thing so in what kind of ways are you holding them accountable?

A. Well, like,--you know--it's hard for me to be assertive too. It's hard for me to say ... because I'm ... I'm trying to figure out ... I have such a history of not getting along with

people that I'm trying to figure out more effective ways of communicating other than saying I'll sue or--you know--I'll complain or--you know .. Positive, assertive behavior is not my forte, although I'm trying to sort of like learn it. And so, to me, it's hard to say to somebody why didn't you do that? You know .. It sounds like ... You know? It feels too assertive or--you know--I'm going to have to think of some nicer way to say it and basically I just haven't said it yet. You know? And so I'm just trying to figure out other ways than ...

J. When are you going to do it?

A. Yeah. Well, I figured out another way to do it. So .. so what I did was not use the group that we had to say ... what I did is I asked her if I could get loan time off from the job, if I could--you know--do all the ... any speaking engagements I could find 'cause I could just go to those instead. Like, instead of meeting with them or working in house, it's sort of like, well, maybe go out then. And so they did say yeah. They said I could do that. And ...

J. So you've done some speaking at the schools ??

A. Yeah. I have .. I haven't really. I .. You know, it was really sort of an effort that didn't work out. I set up two times. but one time I just went and visited. I mainly visited with the teachers and didn't talk to the kids too much at all. And the other time the teacher canceled it. But ...

J. The first time was for a couple of teachers? And .. and what .. did they have useful questions or did they really seem that they wanted to know ??

A. Oh yeah. Yeah! the teacher was great. It was a program at Central Park East school and it was a carpentry program for elementary students, which was fascinating to me that--you know--you could get them at that young age. And it's a wonderful program. And--you know--that's all. She's doing it and it's great. But there should be more like that. You know?

J. Yeah. And then the other program was canceled?

A. Yeah, and the other one was canceled. And that's another thing. Like, the schools are just such a mess,--you know?--because it was canceled because she said that .. some of the teachers are weird too. You know? But this particular teacher who was ... happened to be the Sex Equity Coordinator ... it was that school in the Bronx, and she just said that--you know,--she said the kids just all ran out of class and there wouldn't be anybody to listen,--something like that. You know? ?? That's too bad because she tried.

J. ?? Now, you have a possibility of teaching in another program.

A. Oh yeah! So then I .. I figured a career change or trying to give my life more meaning that way, so I do have my license to teach carpentry. But I don't want to just teach boys. So then .. I know that there's laws on the books about sex equity in vocational education so I sort of tried to track that down,--you know,--find the sex equity coordinators. And I must have made over .. easily over a hundred phone calls trying to find someone who could know about this. But it was amazing 'cause everybody just .. Every time I said girls in vocational education, everybody knew exactly about reverse discrimination but nobody knew at all what discrimination is. They were very astute on that issue. And basically, the way it is, is that, for the most part,--you know--the girls are still taking Home Ec and the boys are still taking Shop, almost ninety--nine percent of the cases. But then I found out about this Access For Women program that would-in conjunction with New York City Technical College and the Board Of Ed, that .. that runs a it's really training for the GED, I think, and--you know--it is for

J. Job skills.

E. Yeah, job skills to get them in nontraditional jobs. And so I'm going to hopefully assist in that class, 'cause my job .. that's the good thing about forming that Committee even though I haven't followed up on that, now that .. now that I've sort of created this liaison, she said that I could be loaned out to do that, and she saw the connection; how that would be valuable from an educational standpoint, for them and the Board of Education to--you know--for me to participate in that program. So that'll be good.

J. So that starts in the fall?

A. Yeah. That's for twelve weeks,--one morning a week for twelve weeks in the fall so I'm excited about that.

J. What about NEW? I know they have ... they have classes for women and ...

A. NEW is a hard nut to crack. I .. I haven't even been successful getting my name on their mailing list. I've tried for years... Now, I don't know what it is about my approach here, but I--you know--I met with the Director ... Very first ... very first, I made an appointment with the director and met and said,--you know--talked about my own personal isolation and how I ... Basically I just, like,--you know--muscled it out on my own. And now how wonderful it is to find this organization and everything. And how could I offer my services, so we'd have this relationship, to achieve the goal which is increasing number of women in the trades. and--you know,--I thought it went pretty well, but I never heard from them again. So then I called again and .. and to get my name on the mailing list. And they took my name and everything but I never heard anything. Well,--you know--I called several times and then I would hear one .. I would get one thing but it wasn't an on-going .. You know? I couldn't ever really plug in. You know? And now I know that .. that they, every other Tuesday, they do have

support groups and I've been thinking of doing that, although that's not really my need to do with them because I've already got New York Tradeswomen to do that and I sort of wanted to do something else. But I'm not sure what.

J. So at this point in your career how are you feeling? Are you feeling like you're still committed to trying to push on through and find ways that you can make a difference?

A. Right. Well, what happened is, is that I almost was a complete burn out two weeks ago and then I just had a two week vacation. And it's amazing because I went and visited .. while I was in San Francisco, I went and visited Tradeswomen, which was an incredible experience because, for some reason or other, just sitting in that little office and talking with women, it was just very energizing. And when I came back I got a million positive things that happened from just--you know--being asked to do this interview to being asked to participate in the Access For Women program, to getting a job interview for a temporary teacher's position out in Western Suffolk, to getting my picture in the national Carpenter magazine, to all this stuff just sort of like snowballed. So once again, I feel like--you know--not .. not really giving up. But the thing about ... Well,--you know--it's all tied up with self esteem too, this career thing, about--you know--what .. what would I be most suited at and how could I be most ... how could I be the most effective at my job type of thing. So, yeah.

J. I would like it if you described your experience in San Francisco going to visit Tradeswomen, and describe the office and ... and what it's like out there, and how you think the environment for women in San Francisco might be different in terms of .. I .. I understand that they have a lot more women in the trades.

A. They do.

J. And what kinds of things are happening for them?

A. Yeah, they do. they do! But--you know,--that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to really get a sense of it because I really had them on a pedestal.

J. Um-hum.

A. and I still have them on a pedestal but it's a different kind of pedestal than what I thought it was because I thought they would have .. I thought they were just like Tradeswomen City,--you know?--that they had hundreds of trades women and they're so organized and they have groups every night and everything. And I was really shocked to find out that they're actually, of course, naturally, struggling also. You know? They have a very, very small space which--you know--is a really great space. And they still have more than any place else in the country has. And they,--you know,--they have a computer and they're doing real grant

writing and everything. But there was actually a point this year where they were afraid they were going to have to close just from lack of--you know--basic support from their members.

J. What's it like when you walk in there?

A. Well, it's very crowded and, but to me it felt like just sort of like a little haven, of course, because it's such an important issue to me that I've followed for so many years and stuff. But there was three women there,--you know,--I think two paid and one volunteer, and--you know--they were just very incredibly nice women that well, right away again, within five minutes, understood all of my experiences immediately and were very warm and supportive. And--you know,--I just got a lot from just the short visit there. You know? They couldn't have possibly been nicer and more supportive.

J. So you said .. you mentioned that the women out there are struggling too. What are .. what are they ... You know, describe some of their issues that they're struggling with?

A. Well, the .. I don't think it's as hard as here, but the thing of, like, municipal jobs which are really good jobs. There's not many of them out there either because they have the heavy experience requirement also to get in so which .. that means that their retention is probably low or .. but again, out there I think that there's more of an entrepreneurial spirit. I think more women have their own businesses and are non-union. My feeling is that they're .. they're probably not in the Union as much either.

J. But they're hiring women?

A. Yeah. Yeah. There's lots of women com-- .. women owned companies,--you know--with all women working it seems to be. You know?

J. And so what are ... what are some of the other things that they're talking about?

A. Well, the whole thing ... The whole thing right now is,--well, this isn't just out there,--but there's ... the whole tradeswomen movement is now organized because of--

J. the Network.

A. right,--the Network is .. is organizing now for this conference that might take place in 1991. So I'm trying to decide what kind of role I want to take, like if I want to become--you know--try and get on the Board or if I just want to do some committee work or ... You know?

J. National Tradeswomen Network has a coordinator now and ...

A. Yeah.

J. but that position, I understand, that ... that amount of money from the Department of Labor Women's Bureau is running out, and so they've got things in motion but it's a question of whether or not they're going to be able to continue. So .. But that's a real exciting thing, to pull women from across the country together. And ...

A. Um-hum. It's the most exciting thing to me. But that's why it's You know ...

J. Is that conference to come out of that ... It's like a successor conference to Chicago?

A. Yeah. That's what it is. It'll be the third international ...

J. Uh-huh. And where is it supposed to be?

A. I think it's going to be in New England somewhere.

J. Boston?

A. Yeah, maybe Boston. I'm not sure about that. But somewhere in New England, I heard just a rumor. But that's .. You know, to ... It would be great to get--like in the Carpenter magazine that we just got all our pictures in, it said that some of the women's Unions sent them. I remember I asked before I went and they said, No. We don't do anything like that. You know? But to get to the point where all of the Unions willingly sent .. supported their women. I mean, and that definitely would be a good goal to have. And that's ...

J. How many women attended .. I know you attended a conference in New England for trades women.

A. Yeah. That one .. I think that one was about a hundred and sixty women.

J. A hundred and fifty women?

A. Yeah. I think that one was. And then Chicago was around eight hundred, I think. So, see, even the numbers worldwide are small, but hopefully we'll ...

J. So the New England conference was good. How .. How .. what was your experience there?

A. Well,-you know--it was just wonderful. I mean, I always .. I never have more fun than with (laughing) a whole bunch of women like myself that have--you know--just like Molly's (Molly Martin) book: Stories Of Success and Struggle. You know,--just all the workshops and learning from women and hearing other women's experiences, it's ... it's just totally empowering and always sustains you for a while after you go back.

A. ?? I know that, interviewing women who've been in the trades in New York City going back ten years, a lot of the women have expressed that relationship they had with United Tradeswomen, when they were just starting out and how important it was to them and the role that it played. And what .. what do you see for New York City Women in the trades to bring people together and people to get active in New York Tradeswomen or United Tradeswomen? Because, from my perspective as an advocate for women, I see that women are isolated. They're having experiences that you're talking about, and there's a real need for them to get together. So it's not .. You know, there's the trades women and then there's also the women who are learning trades in companies,

A. Right. Right.

J. Con Edison and all these places that are so isolated and spread apart.

A. I know. It's really hard. You know? And I don't .. I don't have any answer to that. You know? It's a ... It's a personal frustration of mine that .. that we're not more together in New York City. But then, when I'm going to San Francisco, even though they are a little bit more together, to see that they're still struggling too made me seem like .. made it seem like maybe there was some hope here that--you know--we could ... we could get more together. I don't .. I don't have any answers in that--you know--we just keep meeting and ... and--you know--inviting everybody we can possibly think of to join us and hopefully having events. Like maybe sponsoring a conference here ourselves and stuff. But grassroots organizing is very, very difficult and ... 'cause I know I live on Long Island so I have to commute here to organize, so I've even,--you know--like tr--done a little bit of outreach trying to, like, figure out how to draw trades women together on Long Island where there's ??

A. Boy, there's a lot open in Long Island. I know it's difficult to ??

A. Yeah. Yeah. this is all of them. You know?--except for a few. A few might say: Well, I don't know. It never happened to me. You know? But I think they just haven't looked far enough.

J. So what are your words of advice for other women? What would you say that you've learned from your experience that would be helpful to ...

A. Well, it's really hard because, I have to say it, it has taken a tremendous personal toll on me trying to do this, I mean, so that every day I question whether it's worth it or not except that I just, somewhere in my heart, feel like if there was more of us it'd be easier. And I just hope I'm not sacrificing myself personally to something that doesn't make any difference. But I just hope that it does. And I weight that a lot. You know? As soon as I feel like, in good conscience, I couldn't tell another

woman to go into the trades because the day to day experiences are so horrendous. But I believe so much that if there was more of us, like .. like in World War II when it was all women in the work place, it would be a completely different scene. It would be a positive experience. But I don't know if we can ever turn it around that much. You know?--If the pain we experience in our daily lives is worth that, or if we should just, like ... like, do it for a while when we're young and then do something else or something and just let the .. let people do it in the beginning or something.

J. I know that you are aware of the fact that The New York City Commission on Human Rights and the Office Of Labor Services have been holding hearings about discrimination in the building trades in New York City,

A. Um-hum.

J. discrimination in City hiring, discrimination in the Unions and by contractors and looking at the performance of the agencies that are supposed to be enforcing the laws that are on the books. What are your hopes for those hearings?

A. Hmm. Well, I hope it does do some good. But the ... the whole thing with agencies is it just takes a really long time,--you know?--I mean, like maybe not even in your lifetime type of situation. You know? Ultimately I believe that it does do some good, but in the immediate sense it .. it is sort of a wash because it doesn't really filter down to the people that need it the very most, the people that need the good paying jobs and the work. It reaches them last and they almost become, like ... and it doesn't happen for them quick enough, although it's still positive that it happens because it will make it happen a little bit easier. You know? But it's just all so painfully slow that it just makes you want to scream. You know?

J. So before we conclude, do you have any other words of advice or

A. I wish I could be more positive about it. I really do. But it's sort of not my style. I don't know. Just ... I don't know. I mean, for the women that are still doing it, I just hope that they can--you know--get .. be .. have it be good for themselves and not be consumed by it.

J. Well, I look at you and I see a woman who is a carpenter, which I think is such a wonderful trade, I mean, not knowing how to do it, but the idea of it.

A. Um. Um. Um-hum.

J. . and you're a member of the Carpenters Union, ?? one of the biggest most powerful Unions in the City. And you're working for the City, -the Board of Ed,--

A. Um-hum.

J. and you managed to get these skills, managed to get in the Union, you managed to get a civil service job, and then keep enough energy to keep fighting. So I think that you can't say it's a totally dismal story. You have to say that it's a positive story that has a lot of truth and quality. You know?

A. That's a nice way of putting it. And I agree.

J. Yeah.

J. And I want to thank you for your interview.

A. Thank you, Jane, to ask me what I think.

A. Yeah.

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