Interview with Cynthia Long

J. L. Okay. This is Jane Latour on September 26th, 2004, interviewing Cynthia Long about women in the trades.

Okay, Cynthia, tell me a little bit about yourself. Where were you born?

C.L. I was born in a car on the way to the hospital on September 2nd, 1955, at approximately three p.m.

J.L. And where did this take place?

C.L. This was in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

J.L. Okay. What ... what did you parents do for work? Were they union members?

C.L. No. My parents, I would say, are very anti-union and very rabid Republicans. When I was growing up my Dad was a mechanical engineer and that in and of itself was very unusual because back then not too many Chinese men had the opportunity to go to college let alone get a professional degree so he was kind of unique in that sense. And while I was growing up my Mom was a stay-at-home mom until I think when I was approximately in the sixth grade is when she went to work. She went to school to become ... to become a computer programmer. She was one of the first women ... Well, actually, she was one of the first people, not IBM employees, who took the course to become a computer programmer. And, of course, in that group of non-IBM people she was also the only woman. So in that sense she was unique and so she progressed very quickly. She was very good at what she did so she was a good programmer and then she progressed and she became a systems design analyst, and that the person that designs the overall system and all these programmers are then supposed to write their programs and then she's responsible for getting all those things, all those components, all those programs to work together. And she worked for very large companies like Chemical Bank, Irving Trust Company and some of the big banks in the ... in New York City. And that was pretty unique.

J.L. So you grew up in Canada or the United States?

C.L. Well, I would say ... the good thing is as a child I was growing up in Canada and things were ... felt very safe. And when I moved-when we moved here to the United States it was about approximately 1965 and we moved to Queens, New York, so--you know--so I kind of have, I would say, the way that I grew up in Canada had a lot to do with giving me that secure background that, when I encountered things that were completely out of my experience, I was able to cope with them because of my previous background in Canada.

J.L. Were your parents immigrants from China?

C.L. No. My father was second generation and my mother was an immigrant to Canada from China, and so when she came here to the United States, she--you know--we were ... we were all immigrants from Canada. But,--you know--culturally speaking, we were not that far from ... Being born and raised in Canada we're not that

extremely different like you would have been had you come from China.

J.L. What about your education? How much education do you have?

C.L. Well, I graduated from Sleepy Hollow High School up in Tarrytown with a Regents diploma in high school and I went on to the State University of New York at Buffalo on my Regents scholarship. And I went there for about, I would say, two years before I dropped out and so I have some college from ... from SUNY at Buffalo and then I went on to take courses through the ... the Cornell Trade Union ... Trade Union Women's studies program. I went to Empire State Labor College,--you know--and ....

J.L. Did you ever get a degree?

C.L. I ... When I finished my apprenticeship program I got the Associate's Degree from the Empire State Labor College.

J.L. And what were you studying at SUNY Buffalo? Did you have a major?

C.L. No. I really ... That's one of the reasons that I dropped out is I really couldn't declare a major because everything fascinated me. I couldn't choose so it was ... Ad it seemed to me to be a waste of money to stay there in school when I really wasn't on the path to getting a degree. I could have stayed there like a perpetual professional student but I knew that that was not a good... not a good move.

J.L. Did you work at any paid jobs before you went into Local 3?

C.L. Yes. I did a lot of work as a clerical worker. Most of these were, like, summer jobs and stuff like that, and so I worked for places like, as a clerical worker for Simplicity Patterns. I worked as a clerical worker at Marsh & McLennan, which is an in—a large insurance brokerage firm, and I also worked a place called An Evening Diner Theater where I took telephone reservations over the phone. So I already kind of knew about,--you know—low-paid work and I didn't find any of those jobs particularly satisfying. So ... so when I met Mary Garvin and she was talking about, you could become an apprentice and learn how to do a trade ...

J.L. Right. And she was the carpenter who started WEP or NEW.

C.L. Right. Right.

J.L. Now, how did you meet her?

C.L. I'm trying to remember. I think ... You know, if I'm not mistaken, I think it was one of those things that--you know--hanging out in a bar or something and she came in and she was leafleting and so I figured it was worth trying. It didn't ... it didn't sound that difficult.

J.L. Okay. So, now, will you talk about your motivation for going into the trades. Would you say that ... What was your primary motivation?

C.L. My primary motivation really had to do with ... I just wanted to .. I wanted to get a good paying job,-you know--that I could support myself. And,--you know--ultimately--you know--hopefully it would mean a career. So I was just eliminating the possibilities by eliminating those jobs that I knew I didn't want to have and then just trying to check--you know--explore other types of work and ... and becoming a construction electrician-you know--kind of fell into my radar at that time.

J.L. Now, did you consider yourself a feminist at this time? What year was it when you entered?

C.L. Well, the prior to ... prior to getting into Local 3 ... I mean, I'm, like, remembering some stuff as we're talking,--I know that because I was trying to find some kind of career I went through All Craft, which was the program that Joyce Hartwell had over on 8th Street in the East Village.

J.L. Right.

C.L. And that came ... that was, like, a CETA-funded program that grew out of her Lady Carpenter thing that she was doing. So I was exposed to the CETA - funded programs and--you know--what I ??

J.L. This was after you met Mary Garvin that you were ??
there?

C.L. No, no. I'm trying ... I'm trying to remember. This is kind of fuzzy. that's why I'm trying to, like, back up to try to remember what I was doing. I was unemployed and I know I was ... Somebody had told me about the All Craft Program so I went and got ... I got into that program. And in the process of going through that program I must have met people. And I think that ... I think that was probably at the same time that I was kind of having, like, when I was a college student at SUNY UB I did go through Women's Studies so I kind of had that exposure to feminism there academically. And then while I was at All Craft, I met some Asian women at an ?? organization called Asian Women United. And this was probably ... I think that they were just saying that they ... that as Asian women, that we had to come together and focus and be supportive of each other so again, the feminist ideals. And but most of the women, I think, from that organization were, like, young professional women 'cause most of their focus seemed to be, like, dressing for success and things like that which was kind of not--kind of the antithesis of what I was interested in. The ... Some of them were lawyers and--you know--in those white collar professions.

J.L. At All Craft were there males and females in this program you were in?

C.L. No. I think there was only maybe two males and they were instructors so that it was strictly an all women's program. And then after I finished--after I finished that program and I—you know--I figured that that was as far as that was going to take me, I got into another CETA-funded program at APEX Technical School in air conditioning and refrigeration because I figured, okay, I'm interested ... Of all the trades that they exposed me to, the one that I was most interested in was electrical but I couldn't ... there was no direct entry into electrical and there was that paucity. You know? When this air conditioning and refrigeration program came up I went into that 'cause I said, okay, this will take me further in that direction. You know? It's kind of an indirect path ... and I did ... I did that program and completed that.

J.L. And then did you ever go to WAP, to their ... Well, they weren't ?? then.

C.L. Well, well, this is ... well, when I met Mary Garvin, this was before WAP was

J.L. Doing training.

C.L. Well, WAP didn't really actually exist yet. It was at the beginning stages when she was getting the funding from the New York State Department of Labor so it was--how would you say it?—it wasn't yet bricks and mortar. It wasn't ... She didn't actually have an office and all this kind of stuff. It was, like, she was gearing up towards doing that.

J.L. Right.

C.L. And so, when I ... when she talked about the different trades and she said ... You know? And, of course, I asked what the requirements were and stuff like that. And basically it sounded like, as long as you had been--you know--just normally physically active,-you know-of average strength and ability that you could do it, so I figured I would give it a try.

J.L. So now, I know that when you applied for Local 3 you were the first group of women--right?--and you had to sleep outside to get the applications?

C.L. Right, because ... Mostly that was because they had not opened up the books; that is, they had not taken in any new apprentices in approximately three years. So because of that, we kind of anticipated that there would be a big--there would be a big group of people that would be wanting to get the applications. And I think somebody who lived out in Queens said--you know,-basically called Mary and said: Mary, they're starting the line,--you know,-so we packed up our sleeping bags, went there and got on line and slept-you know--overnight from Wednesday night,--Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday--five nights to pick up the applications on Monday morning.

J.L. And how many were there?

C.L. And the irony of this was that, had we just gone to the end of the line, we could have just picked up applications that day. But we didn't know it; we didn't want to take a chance on being shut out of the process so we camped on the streets of Flushing to do this.

J.L. How many women?

C.L. Oh, this is going to be tough, Jane. I ... The group that we went with was, I think, eight or ten women and we kind of--we ... they had us sign the book, show our ID so ... and the ... and what they told us ... that if they came back and looked for us, number 25 or whatever, if you weren't there you ... you would have, like, ten minutes to get back. If you didn't get back then they'd cross your name out from the book and you would have to go to the end of the line. So we had this system worked out amongst us,-you know--the eight or so of us that were there, that if ... don't leave unless you tell somebody there where you're going so that we would, like, be able to go ?? and get you if ... if ... if they called for you. So we were ... I ... I heard that many of the guys, at least the guys told me that they'd have their brothers stay on line while they went home to take a shower, so we weren't so lucky so we were a little ripe by Monday morning.

J.L. So now I ... I want to hear somewhat about your experiences in ... in the first class of women in the Apprentice Program. How was that?

C.L. It was really rough. I mean, it was very, very difficult and I was in psychotherapy for a good part of the time that I was in the apprenticeship, and the difficulty of that is that you're not making much money and what little money you're making,--you know--I was spending it on therapy because it--you know--it made me kind of--I would say I was pretty nutsy at the time. But, you know, on a theoretical level--you know--because of my experiences prior to that moment in time when I tried to get into Local 3,--you know--I kind of also knew that it was important, no matter how difficult it is or would be, that it was important for the women to talk to each other; that, not so much ... They didn't have ... We didn't have to like each other, we just had to be able to work together. So it's, like, I don't need you to like me,---you know--and I don't think you need me to like you, but let's at least be able to be able to work together on a professional level. So—you know,--I went into that--into this whole experience with that as the--you know-the underlying thing because I ... I know from ... I know ... I knew from my ... my women's studies classes at SUNY at Buffalo that this was kind of for ... for us at that point in time, was kind of a radical idea,--you know?--even though other women in the past had done it; historically in the past other women had been able to work together and do things, it was kind of I think, a difficult thing for ... for us as individuals to get to that point of--you know-putting aside ourselves individually to work together.

J.L. I'm ... I'm always curious about the first time you went ... the women go on the job on a big construction site because when I walk by construction sites I frankly cannot--you know—really imagine what it's like to go and say: I'm your new electrician;--I'm your new apprentice. So tell me about your first experiences? Are they fresh in your memory?

C.L. Yeah. The first job usually is. It's like the first lover. You remember that very well. The first job was at NYU Hospital and the foreman is ... is a gentleman by the name of Don Lang who will come back into my life later on. But anyhow, he was the General Foreman of the job. And I went to their … I was, like, so naive, so not understanding anything, the structure, anything. Anyhow, I ... I found him and I was, like, trying to find out-trying to understand what ... what the structure was. So I thought he was the owner of the company and he laughed and he said: No. I'm not the owner of the company. I'm the General Foreman. And he was ... I think that he appreciated ... I think he understood, 'cause he's a really decent guy, the difficulty. So what he did is he had me work with basically a journeyman who wasn't going to be a ball buster.

J.L. Um-hum.

C.L. You know? And the guy said: Okay. You know? Have you ever spliced before, 'cause that's what he was doing. He was—you know ... They had ... The wires had already been pulled and now it was splicing out. So ...

J.L. And why do you splice?

C.L. It's to make a connection. It's like, you connect the wires so that they complete the circuit. So he ... he asked me: have you ever spliced before and I said yeah. So he says: Okay. Here. Splice these. Don't put the wire nuts on. Leave them open so I can take a look at them. And he said: Just splice out this room. So that's what I did. I just went around, I stripped the wires, I

spliced them together and left them open so that he could--you know--check on them before I put the wire nuts on them. And I must have done it okay 'cause he ... we just closed them up. But anyhow, this job was a big job. There were lots of guys on the job and so it wasn't so much the first day as it was, like, the following days that now ... now difficulties begin because they only had the men's locker room,-okay?-which they called the shanty,--the men's shanty. And there was no place for me. So ... And the other thing is that I figured that--you know--if they put me someplace else, then I won't be part of that culture and I won't be absorbing that culture. So I didn't want to be separated from the guys, but basically, Don, being a good guy, he ... what he did is he took a corner of the ... and kind of built me--had the carpenter build me a little shanty that was, like, the size of a telephone booth so there was some place for me to sit, change my shoes, change my clothes and leave my clothes there and that it would be locked so I could get to that ??

J.L. So the men didn't harass that space and environment.

C.L. Right. So they did ... they couldn't violate that space and it was a separate space for me. But-you know--I wanted to be in there with the guys so ... But I think it also took a week or something like ... or two weeks or something for them to build that little shanty for me so it didn't happen, like, right away. So when it ... when I didn't have a space, what I was doing is hang out in the men's shanty and then when somebody needed to change I would get up and leave and go outside. But it didn't seem ... it wasn't too practical 'cause a lot of guys would have to come in and change. And ... and, of course, I can't remember who it was who, like, tried to engage me in ... in, like, well,-you know--doesn't that bother you?--you know?--stuff like that, and I figured I can't let them intimidate me so I said: Well, look, as long as you keep your underwear on I have no problem 'cause, listen, I've got two brothers. So as long as you keep your underwear on we have no problems. You know?--because I just didn't want them to feel like they could intimidate me and, like, chase me out of the space. But anyhow, so later on I ... I learned that some of the men had complained to a foreman, complained to the shop steward and they ultimately ... they ultimately transferred me to another job mostly because the men couldn't deal with it. It was less of--you know--could I deal with it. It had more to do that the men couldn't deal with it and they didn't want me there.

J.L. Because you were female, not because you were taking up their sha--their place in the shanty in general.

C.L. No. I think it was just because I ... I'm a female and I think that they were just ... weren't able to cope with that at that time.

J.L. You ... What were some of the big jobs that you worked on in New York City? I mean, I realize you have a long career and you're still working, but early on? Did you ever work at the Convention Center?

C.L. No. I wasn't there. Some ... quite a number of the women did end up at the Convention Center. But I would say that, okay, as an apprentice it's kind of different because you're somewhat protected. But for ... as an apprentice I worked on NYU Hospital. I also worked on the Con Edison, WNEW TV/radio station. I worked on Con Edison at 14th Street, one of the ... I think it was a truck garage or something like that for the Con Edison trucks. I know I've done some jobs for, like, ... like, government jobs where the … where the customer was, like, either the New York ... New York State or New York City and a lot of those jobs ... I know Brooklyn Academy Of Music ...

J.L. I've read that women were sent to the less desirable jobs like sewage or water treatment plants, stuff like that?

J.L. Well, I think that that's true but I think that that came ... that came after me because I think that ... I don't know what the experience was of the other women exactly, but for me, most of my work was, like, in private industry when I was an apprentice. When I became a journey woman then I started to see being sent to certain types of job and not ... not being on those private industry jobs where you make a lot of money.

J.L. And that's because of the federal funding requirements that they hire women?

C.L. Yes. I would say that. And really, to this day, those requirements are the things that keep us as women working even when times are bad.

J.L. Now, let's switch over to the subject of organizing.

C.L. Okay.

J.L. And I'm interested in, first of all, what ... You ... you were ... You assumed a leadership role in organizing women in Local 3? Is that fair to say? You were the first Local ??

C.L. Well, I ... You know, this is the thing is that back in those days I was still ... still in this framework of, like, we're all leaders and we all are working on this together. And I'm not a leader over you or anything like that because I felt that it was important that other peoples' egos not be--you know--demeaned in any way. So it's like, I think for ... for people outside, they wanted to be able to pick somebody out as a leader and I think that, as a strategy, we discussed ... we discussed that as a group, the women electricians, and we said: Look if we're going to take a stand on something, we all have to take a stand. If we write a letter it's not just one signature on this letter, it better be all of us or none of us because if ... if we do it--if we go out and just put our own name, they're going to pick us off, one by one and get rid of us.

J.L. How did you decide ... I mean, how did Women Electricians come about?

C.L. I ... Well, I had the background in women's studies from SUNY at Buffalo. Beth Goldman also had a background in women's studies. And ... and I think Evan Ruderman had a ... an activist sort of background from her parents and stuff like that. Laura Kelber, she was, I would call a Red Diaper baby so she was-you know—again somebody who felt that we had to work together as a group and—you know--for the benefit of all of us. So I ... I think that there were so many of us of a similar sort of feminist--you know—sensibility that I think it was kind of easy. And we just--you know-- ... I think initially the way that it started, I would say, is that we had--as apprentices we had to go to union meetings. Okay? Union meetings was really the only time that we would see each other because we wouldn't see each other at school because some of us were on Monday and Wednesdays, some of us were on Tuesday and Thursdays. So the only time we saw each other really was at the union meeting. So what we would do is try to meet up at the union meeting, or look for each other at the union meetings, sit together and then after the union meeting go out and get something to eat because that's, like, for me a very important thing ... is always about,

mostly 'cause I'm hungry, I guess. But,--you know,-I think that when people get together and they eat--you know--and you share that time-you know--bonds are forged and strengthened and stuff like that. And so we started doing that. And then, from that I think we started to realize that we really had to ... to really work in a ... in a conscious, cohesive sort of way and that we needed to be in a different space to do that; that we couldn't just do it over dinner. We had to be in a space that we could focus on—you know--an agenda and decisions,--making decisions and things like that, writing ... writing letters.

J.L. Now, one of the big ...

C.L. That was a big part of what we did was writing letters and stuff like that.

J.L. A lot of the letters were directed towards your union leadership?

C.L. Yeah. I think that-- ... You know, at that time we were struggling to understand the structure and who it was that we should be addressing things to, 'cause the thing is, when something happens on the job,--you know--one of the thing--one of the steps is you address it to the people--the personnel on the job that have control over these things. And for some of the women, they couldn't quite grasp who that was. And when things ... So then it usually started with a specific incident that happened and then we would, like, respond to that by trying to--you know--write letters to the foreman or the GC, or whoever, on that particular job. And then we started to see that really, if you do it on that basis, you're constantly writing letters to everybody about everything; that it might make more sense to ... to address these letters to the leadership, whether it's the leadership in the union, the leadership of the contractors--Electrical Contractors Association, or whatever, or the Joint Industry Board 'cause those were the three entities that had jurisdiction over different aspects of our livelihood--of our life at that time. So a ... a lot of it was trying to learn for ourselves and sharing that information that we learned with each other so that I wouldn't know more than you know,-you know?;--so that then you could go out and cope with things; that you wouldn't always have to come to me and say: Well, what do you--what do I have to do? I mean, the whole point was to educate ourselves and educate each other and share that information so that everybody is empowered.

J.L. One of the big questions is the role of organizing as an independent group rather than trying to set yourselves up as an internal club, the ... the club mechanism for Local 3?

C.L. Well, are you asking why we did that?

J.L. Yeah.

C.L. Okay. I was ... was part of the dissenting group that didn't want to become a club of Local 3, mostly because I really felt that once we became a club they would just co-opt our energy and have us do all these other things that really were going to take away energy from what we needed to do because there was ... Look, there is like, ten thousand electricians in the A Division ... If they can't get enough guys out of the ten thousand to focus on leafleting or whatever, Oh well. But I know that of those ten thousand only the women, and only a handful of the women that are in the industry are going to care enough to organize and spend energy to try to change things. So I felt that it ... I felt that I ... I didn't have enough energy to spread around; that I needed to retain that independence from the union to ... in order to move our agenda ahead.

J.L. Um-hum. So how ... how did you get your group set up in terms of deciding what you were going to focus on? As you said, it was an issue by issue thing, but--you know--basically seeing yourselves as an entity, and also-you know--how did you support yourselves? Did you have a dues structure or a meeting structure? How did ... how did it function?

C.L. Well, I think that what we decided to do was to meet on a monthly basis because there were so many other meetings going on. I think ... If I remember correctly, I think the United [Tradeswomen] ... Maybe it's not true, but it sure felt like we were meeting every week.

J.L. They were. Right.

C.L. And it felt to me like we were meeting every week. But the ... the Women Electricians, we would meet, like, once a month 'cause we didn't want to make it too heavy. And basically, we needed the time in between in order to get things done. So usually ... Somebody would volunteer and usually it was, like, Laura Kelber would volunteer to write the letter. And Laura was great at writing letters. I ... I miss her. I miss her tremendously. You know, she would write the letter and then somehow, some way,-you know—we would get it typed up so that by the time the next meeting came, all we had to do was read the letter and sign it. You know? And she put a lot of thought into the letters so, I mean, I don't think that ... it was rare that I remember that we changed the wording or anything like that. And we also knew that if we changed the wording it was that much delay because then we'd have to go through the whole thing again.

J.L. Right.

C.L. So we kind of ... so that ... So with the Women Electricians it was a monthly meeting and it wasn't ... there was no dues. It was open to any woman who was in Local 3. And basically, it was supported by those of us who just had the money or was ... were willing to commit the money. And we were doing mailings, monthly mailings, so any ... we had ... we started getting names, addresses and phone numbers and we supported Women Electricians by ourselves. We paid for the photocopying. We paid for the mailing and--you know--we got together to put the stuff together. So we just did it out of our pockets and ...

J.L. How did you find the other women? Did you get any assistance from ... You certainly didn't get any assistance from the union in terms of ...

C.L. I ... I ... You know ... Maybe I could be wrong, but back then I experienced my union as being extremely hostile to me and I didn't see any support coming from them. And it was the handful of us, I would say; it was, like, me ... Melinda, Beth, Laura, Evan, Brunilda and myself, so about six of us. And there were other people who would come in and out. There was Shannon Spence who also came in ... in and out over the years. And I think that we had our most cohesiveness, I think, when we were still apprentices 'cause we were all kind of in the same boat. After we finished our apprenticeships,-you know--some of the women became foremen. Some of the women ...-you know?-so people started to go in, like, different directions and we didn't ... the ... I guess, the need, the desire, to stay together kind of evaporated, although ... although I have to say that after we became journeywomen that some of the most important stuff did happen. I think one of them is aura Kelber took the ..the Joint Industry Board to court about pregnancy disability and pregnancy leave and light duty and those kinds of issues. And because of her, I would say, bravery in

doing those things that they did, in fact, have to change. So all the women that came in after, I think, benefited from her self-sacrifice. You know? And sadly she had two miscarriages, which was the motivating reason for mer--you know--taking them to court on issues of light duty when you're pregnant, and stuff like that.

J.L. And she ... she paid a price, aside even from the miscarriages, you would say?

C.L. Yeah. I would say that she paid a big price 'cause, aside from the miscarriages, I think that she dis-- ... she's no longer working in our industry and hasn't worked in our industry in quite a number of years. And I would say that that had to do directly with the fact that she took them to court. You know?-because they didn't make it easy for her when she would come back to work. So ... And ... and it's just ridiculous because here ... You know, this is the thing that pisses me off about it is, like, they would maintain this fiction,--okay?--they would maintain this fiction and say Local 3 is separate from the Joint Industry Board which is separate from the Employers' Association. So since employment is under the Joint Industry Board that's why she filed a suit against the Joint Industry Board. And then I would hear people from my union leadership who were clearly on the Joint Industry Board and--you know-leaders in ... in the union saying she's suing me. You know? And it's like, No! She's not suing you. She's suing the Joint Industry Board over an employment issue. You know? And it's, like, maybe 'cause these guys weren't bright enough to get it but it was, like, it was ---it always made me angry that they took it so personally when, if they could have just taken a step back, they would have realized that she--you know-there's a good reason that she ... that she has this law suit and it has to do with the fact that when you're pregnant, you can't be chopping for eight hours a day. You can't be chopping for twelve hours a day.

J.L. What's chopping?

C.L. Chopping is ... Usually you have a ... a chopping gun which has a lot of vibration to it, and it's a hard--it's a hard physical--you know--lousy job to do.

J.L. Hard for men even.

C.L. Well, I mean, some of the guys ... You know, look.

J.L. Like macho guys--right,--they like it.

C.L. You know, it's the kind of job that basically, you assign apprentices to do because it's, like,--because they get paid the least and you want this job done and it's ... there's incentive for them to get it done quickly so that they get it done quickly and it's done, then they can go do other things and learn the trade. But it seemed to me that they would be-when Laura told them that she was pregnant and she needed to be on light duty that they would-it seemed like they would automatically just hand her the chopping gun and say: Meet your new partner. Okay? You've got to chop this, this, this ... You know? So to me, it felt like they were trying to harass her out of the industry. And so when she filed the law suit, to me that was just like she was standing up for herself. You know? But there was no way that ... that the general public would understand that because that's who was on--that's who was on the jury. There's women who don't want to see other women doing that stuff because it challenges what they're doing. You know? There's

men who don't want to see women doing that work. And then the rest of it, they just don't comprehend why any woman would want to do this work. So she basically ended up with juries that were—you know--prejudiced against her and her case so ... But because of the law suit, there was, I think, a realization on the part of the legal minds who were actual lawyers at the Joint Industry Board that they had to change the policy. They had to change these things so that there would not be any future litigation. So ... so—you know--she ... But again, a tremendous price; a tremendous sacrifice and we lost a great trade union electrician--you know?--when Laura left the industry.

J.L. Tell me about your role in United Tradeswomen 'cause you were active right from the beginning with UT. Right?

C.L. Yeah. Before United Tradeswomen there was another organization ... I think a lot of this came about ... It was part of, I think, the ... the feminist--you know--not underground, but the feminist movement happening in New York City at the time,--you know,--at the same time that Asian Women United was forming and all this kind of stuff. And women who were doing these non-traditional things felt a need to connect with other women who were--you know--doing similar things. So there was another organization prior to United Tradeswomen, who the name escapes me for now, but who were ... Yeah, Women In The Trades. Right. And they were primarily ... They were women who were trying to be contractors so their ... their perspective was different. So United Tradeswomen, I think that most of us that were involved in that, we were in unions. We were not opposed to people who were non-union but since we were unionized, we were ... that was a lot of our focus. And a lot of it had to do with coming together, sharing--again, sharing information, sharing skills, and we were--you know,-we were politically ac—

Side Two

J.L. So about United Tradeswomen,

C.L. Yeah?

J.L. You were always meeting ... They were meeting on a weekly basis in the beginning. Then there were all the different committees.

C.L. Right.

J.L. And they had ... they kept changing the structure but it was very, very active--you know?--just a whole agenda.

C.L. Yeah.

J.L. When you ... What are ... What are your ... If you had to compare the two organizations, UT and Women Electricians, how would you ... how would you compare and contrast them?

C.L. Well, I think that in Women Electricians, it was a lot easier to ... to organize and to deal with even though, personality-wise and in terms of opinions and stuff like that ,we may not necessarily have agreed with, but it was a much easier format because we all belonged to the same union, so--you know-when we were talking and strategizing we were dealing with the same structure, we were dealing with the same individuals, and what have you. In United Tradeswomen, you're dealing with carpenters, electricians, plumbers,-you know,--all different trades, different employers, so it was much more difficult

to figure out a strategy that would have some kind of a ... an organized and get a positive result. So I would say that United Tradeswomen was more like a community activist type group, and I think that that was the other thing that we tried to do more of too, is to involve the other feminist women; let them know what ... what our situations were and stuff like that, and try to draw some support from them as well. So our organizing as United Tradeswomen went beyond those of us who were actually in the trades. We were trying to also educate other women out here as to what was going on to us and ask them for support.

J.L. Now, I ... you raise an interesting question because I'm wondering, as a woman out there on the front lines being a pioneer, how much support do you feel like you realized from those organizations in the so-called women's movement? How ... how present was that as ... How aware of that support were you?

C.L. I ... You know, I think that that was ... You know, for ... the key-you know--I think of that had to do with ... I was doing, I think, that kind of outreach to the other organizations 'cause I felt that need,--you know?--because it was very difficult—you know-- ... Even though there's other women electricians,--you know-who are in the same boat, we also felt very competitive with each other,--you know?--so there was some level of competitiveness that--you know--that somebody is thought of better than I am, or something like that, so that was hard to deal with. And I know that, as an electrician, I personally got more support from a woman carpenter than I got ... would get from some of the women electricians 'cause they would say, well,-you know,--kind of like, well, that doesn't happen to me,--you know?--kind of ... so a lot of energy was spent trying to, like, educate other--you know ... As far as the support from the other feminist organizations I think that if we ...--you know--and it had to be individuals or whatever, who would, like, take the time out of their schedule to go to those organ-- ... Like, in other words, if I went to the NOW, New York City meetings, I would get support from those women. But if I didn't go to those meetings, I wouldn't get any support 'cause—you know--it's not like it's at the top of their list or anything like that. So because I would go to all those different meetings, I personally would get support but it wasn't ... it wasn't support that would then spill over onto anybody else who was not there. So that was the difficulty. And ... and I think also, maybe, the ... it may have been I guess, the source of some jealousy. You know?

J.L. I want to go over a number of issues that have come up in interviews with other people and see what your take is on them in terms of internal organizing within United Tradeswomen and Women Electricians, just as issues that were difficult to deal with. And,--you know,--you tell me because ... But I'll just raise them one by one and then you react.

C.L. Okay.

J.L. First, let's start with race, race as an issue within those groups. How ... how did that play out?

C.L. I think that that was ... I think that was a very difficult issue for people to, like, really get a handle on and ... and I feel like that I often was, like, the scapegoat because I would raise the issues of race. You know? And I think for many people they would prefer to just think of me as a ... just kind of gloss over me and just think of me as a white person,--you know?-and I was not going to have that. So I would say that ... I would tell people that I would think that they--that the way that they spoke was racist,-you know?--and stuff

like that. So I ... I know because I said those things, that ... that I feel that I got scapegoated for a lot of different things. Like, they would ... Like, in other words, instead of focusing on the issue that I raised, they would rather break it down to personality. Well, Cynthia, if people are reacting to you its' because of your personality, not because of your race. You know? So I ... I felt like,--you know--

J.L. well, let me just ... reading United Tradeswomen papers,--and I've gone through all the papers that we have collected,--I realize that you all created many more papers than that, but the papers that are available to me in the archives,--and I see that in the newsletters and on the meeting agenda and ... that people really tried to deal with race as an issue that they ...--you know,---that people were concerned with racial issues and they would try to find ways to--you know--either write about it or have forums, discussions,--things like that. But what was the pulling apart point? I mean, how did it create a problem? What ... what was the ... You know? What was the feeling that ...

C.L. See, but ... Okay. This is the thing is that if you ... if you talk about racism as an intellectual exercise,--you know--it's one thing and it's kind of ... there is no bloodletting. Okay? But when there are people,--when there are actual individuals who are saying and confronting people saying: Okay, you raised the issue of racism so--you know--you're at least intellectually aware of it. But I'm here to tell you that the way that you say things is offensive to me as a person of color. And they wanted to sweep that stuff under the rug. So I was not going to let that be swept under the rug. So, I mean, I applaud them as an organization for trying to ... for raising the issue and trying to deal with it, but—you know--I guess-you know-it's ... it's a work in progress. It was a--you know,-it was a struggle and it felt very difficult. It was emotionally exhausting. It was a very difficult thing. And I don't know. I ... after a while, I just didn't want to be there anymore 'cause it was ... it was ... I wasn't getting ... I wasn't getting anywhere. I didn't seem to be ... They didn't seem to be understanding what I was saying. So after a while I just felt like, well, look,--you know?-I can ... I don't ... I don't want to participate any longer.

J.L. Okay. I still feel like the issue is kind of vague. But it's a feeling of being left out? It's a feeling of your frame of reference is dominant and mine is missing? Is that kind of ...

C.L. I ... Well, I think what it is, is that--you know--even ... even though, like, intellectually people were able to bring up the ... the issue, that I think that on a personal level they were unaware of how they were behaving in a racist sort of way.

J.L. Can you give me any example? You don't have to name names, but, I mean, you could ... if something comes to mind?

C.L. I ... I ... I just had--you know,_ I just had the ... You know, it's hard because it's, like twenty-over twenty years ago that I'm trying to remember this. But what I remember, or what's left over from those days, is that I felt that lots of times that people would say: Well, we this,-you know?-like there was some kind of consensus and agreement, and stuff like that, and I would say no. Where did you ... How did that happen? 'cause I wasn't there ... You know? I must not have been there 'cause I don't think I voted on that. You know? So I always kind of felt like, yeah, not included. You know? And after ... You ... I stayed for a while and I think it was, like, two or three years that I felt-I stayed to try to struggle. And then after three years I felt like, okay, I ... I

gave it my best shot and I give myself permission to leave now.

J.L. Now, I ... I've been trying to find some of these various women who were active with United Tradeswomen like ... I'm just going to give you some names: Martha Clanton. She was an activist. Right? She was a black woman and she was pretty active.

C.L. Yeah.

J.L. Did you know her?

C.L. Yeah. I think that she was more with the Carpenters--the Women Carpenters group.

J.L. And then Juanita Muhammad?

C.L. Right.

J.L. Valerie Jones.

C.L. Yeah.

J.L. Let me see. Well, Melinda Hernandez. Was Melinda Hernandez active with United Tradeswomen?

C.L. She was active on and off.

J.L. Um-hum. And I guess Vicki Garvin wasn't in the UT, she came and spoke to you. Did you ... Were you there the night she spoke? She was ... had been a--you know,--in the prior generation, the Rosie generation. She was a black woman who came and spoke. Do you remember that?

C.L. No. I ...

J.L. But what was your sense of the number of women of color who were active in United Tradeswomen?

C.L. Okay. See, how the thing is those ... the women that younamed,--you know--

J.L. Uh-huh.

C.L. I perceived them as coming in and coming out,--you know?

J.L. Okay.

C.L. So they were ... I mean, there was, like the core people that would, like, be there at every meting, no matter what, and then, beyond that, were these other women. So some of those women that you name are part of those that I consider ...

J.L. In and out.

C.L. Yeah. And--you know,--I think that people had--you know--used various strategies that when they ... when there was a certain issue that was going to come up, people would bring in--make sure that they would bring in people to bolster their side of the issue, or whatever. And just because I'm a woman of

color doesn't mean that all women of color have the same perspective on things. So sometimes the strategy used to be, well, okay, we're going to talk about this so I'm going to bring so and so who has ... who I know has this perspective. You know? And to me, that ... that felt very much like just dismissing the issues that I had raised as opposed to acknowledging them and ... and at least thinking about them for--you know-more than a couple of seconds.

J.L. Okay. And can you ...

C.L. And I had support--I did have some support in some of the things that I was saying because Barbara Trees and Hannah Gafney,--you know--we were ... I think that--you know,--the three of us were kind of like the scapegoats 'cause we ... 'cause we would bring up issues that the other women just did not want to deal with and they would just say: Oh, we just can't deal with this. You know? So ... so had I been completely alone I would have thought that I was crazy. But being that there were at least two other women who were validating what I was saying, saying: Yeah, we see what you're
saying ...

J.L. Uh-huh. So in terms of race, aside from, okay, having your particular perspective included and being part of ... I'm wondering how-what other kinds of issues were big in ... within United Tradeswomen in terms of that.

C.L. Well, I think that ... I think that there were others ...

J.L. What's the experience ... I mean, women having the ...

C.L. I think ... I think it's a given that it's very difficult to bring women from different backgrounds together,-you know?—and that people have to put aside the personal issues and stuff like that, to try to work together as a group. Some of the issues that I think that were difficult to deal with were issues that were about sexism really, because just because we're women, doesn't mean we're not sexist. Okay? There were also things that had to do with inclusion or exclusion of either the words lesbian,--you know—and stuff like that ...

J.L. I was going to ask you about homophobia and sexual preference and ...

C.L. Yeah. Yeah. So a lot of this stuff is, like,--you know--... and the other thing, too, to remember is that I think that as individuals all of us were trying to deal with these issues on a personal level and then we're trying to deal with them ... . so you don't have this all formulated or figured out in your own mind and then you're going to a group--you know--where you're trying to, like, justify your point of view, or whatever, so it became difficult. And I think that some ... Another thing that came up as an issue that ... that I think divided us, too, was that just because we're women doesn't mean we're feminists. Just because we're women doesn't mean that we're going to be sympathetic ... It's not the right word, but--you know--cognizant and sympathetic if other women's perspective. So I think part of it was,-you know—who we were back then or--you know--at that stage because, I would say, looking back on it now,--I'm almost fifty,--looking back on it now I think that back then we were in our twenties and thirties so we were struggling with our own identities and our own belief systems. So sometimes when you ... when you struggle or you argue with somebody else it helps clarify for you where you stand, what you believe, and stuff like that. And I think the other thing is, on some levels we weren't so forgiving of each other and of ourselves. You know? Like, we had a pic--we might have had a picture in our minds that we should be ?? for doing this; we should

be really feminists and we shouldn't let them--you know?--and that time ... time kind of like lets you learn the lesson that we have to pick and choose your fights. Like, in other words, back when I was an apprentice it was annoying that guys would-you know--would call me honey or sweetheart or something like that and I would fight with them about it. You know? I would argue with them about that. Now that I'm fifty years old it's, like, it's not ... that's not such a big deal. But I think that back then it was a big deal because if they can't include you in the language, then you're not included. So I still believe that today but I think now I'd pick and choose the battle. You know?

J.L. Right. One of the issues ... there's a couple more. One is class and education that--you know?--that a lot of the women who came in were educated and middle class and versus working class

C.L. Um-hum.

J.L. Was ... Did that ... was that significant also in terms of trying to ??

C.L. Yeah. I ... I think ... I think that all of those issues--you know, ... It's like ... You know, Like I said, we were ... I would pause,--you know,--not in a derogatory way but just in terms of human development, I think that we were kind of all half-baked. We hadn't clarified for ourselves who we were,--you know,-stuff like that. And the other thing too, is that as human beings we're always in flux.

J.L. Um-hum.

C.L. You know? We're a work in progress so we're always changing. And I think that we were very hard on ourselves and we were very hard on each other. And I think that, more than anything else, had to do with, I think, why United Tradeswomen didn't stay together.

J.L. Imploded.

C.L. Yeah.

J.L. Right.

C.L. It's ... it's difficult, plus ... plus you--you know,--we were sucking up all this time.

J.L. Tell me about ... Well, I'd like to ask you one more question about Local 3

C.L. Okay.

J.L. and the Women Electricians and just to focus on union democracy and the whole question of opening up that institution to questions of participation and ... How did that ... How was that in terms of the work that you did?

C.L. I'm sorry. I don't ...

J.L. Well, just in--you know--trying to get the union to be responsive to the women's issue and to ... to … issues that were important to the women and then this has a very-it's a very top down kind of institution, as I understand it. So would you say that union democracy is trying to make the organization

more participatory and play a role in it? Where did that fit into the agenda for Women Electricians?

C.L. I think that that was the ... the basic underpinning of Women Electricians, that we were trying to ... you know? Okay, our focus was because we were women, is whatever issues interested us as women. But the ripple effect would have been, and I think is, that ... that the people of color also benefit. Anybody who's currently not part of the hierarchy is going to benefit. And it's about making ... making our union accessible to us. This continues to be a paramilitary organization and they do not want to have any of this union democracy because they want to be able to be able to control things and to ... and to issue their edicts from on high and everybody fall into place. So we had a conflict in styles, obviously. And the other thing is that I think that Women Electricians, one of our failures was that we didn't really follow through as much as we should have,--as much as we could have because it was ... in terms of the process, it was kind of exhausting just to get that letter written and get everybody to sign it. Then once we sent it off, it's not like we then followed it up and said, Well, you still haven't done anything about X, Y and Z. You know? It was such a struggle just to get that letter and send it to them and let them know what we were thinking. So as their solution, the union's solution to the problem was that ... that they handpicked women that they felt that they could control and created the Amber Lights organization, within ...

J.L. Amber Lights?

C.L. … within Local 3, which was to basically take the heat off of them so that if ... if something happened that they could say what do you mean we discriminated? We have a women's organization. And ...

J.L. So that's like the Women's Committee for the Electricians---

C.L. Right. That was ...

J.L. female electricians?

C.L. Right. That was ... Right. That was the one. So that became the women's club and that was--you know ... you could have said it was a bad strategy on our part,-it's up to you,--but we didn't want to be a club of Local 3 where they could co-opt us and stuff like that. So we deliberately tried to maintain that independence. So the women's club of Local 3, The Amber Light Society, they'll always be--you know--drafted to do this, to do that,--you know,--and stuff like that. So ...

J.L. Have they done some things that have benefited the women?

C.L. I don't really know 'cause I really have not had any ... The fact that they actually get women to get together and meet I think is probably a big success.

J.L. Just let's switch to the ... I ... I want to quickly touch on your career path. As I understand it, you've been a foreman, to use that unfortunate term, but ... and you've kind of broken the glass ceiling for women in construction because that doesn't often happen. Right? Does it?

C.L. Yeah. I ... I would have to say no, that's not true.

J.L. Okay.

C.L. I've not been a foreman. But Melinda Hernandez has been a foreman for Forest Electric

J.L. Okay.

C.L. … so she has broken the glass ceiling. And there's ... there's other women who have become foremen over the years. And ... but no. That's something that I have never tired to do. I've never ... I've never tried to be a foreman.

J.L. Um-hum. Okay. And you ... but you-I understand that you have ... you've had positions of responsibility. Now, what ... what have you …

C.L. What I have done is that in ... in Local 3 I've been the lead mechanic on projects and stuff like that. But I really didn't want, and I still don't want ... I mean, I've been offered the position of being a foreman but I really ... I declined it because there were ... I made some certain assessments and I ... I felt that I really didn't want to do it. But what I have done was that-and this is where Don Lang comes back into the picture,---

J.L. Okay.

C.L. … is that at the time I had a back injury and I didn't think that I would ever work in the industry again so I went to Hunter College to kind of like try to find myself a new career. While I was there a young woman in the class came up to me and said: are you the Cynthia Long and I'm like,--like, at that point I'm, like, a wise,--you know--I'm, like,--you know-I've got a wise attitude so I wanted to say: Yeah. What's it to you? What are you doing, writing a book?--you know?-some kind of snide remark like that. But I didn't. ?? here's this young girl,--you know, she's like, twenty-two or something;--twenty-one or something, so I said: My name is Cynthia Long but I don't know about the Cynthia Long. And she says: Oh! My dad is Don Lang. I said ... and I instantly remembered him. And it's like, Oh yeah. He was a great guy. How's he doing? what's--you know-going on ... so she told me he had a mid-life crisis and that one of the things that he did when he went back to school was he wrote about my first day on the job.

J.L. Oh my God!

C.L. So I said: I'd love to see that. You know? So she ... I said: Well, next time you talk to him please--you know--tell him I said hello and stuff like that. So she got ... she got me a copy of his little paper, 'cause I thought it would be exciting to see what his perspective of my first day was and ...

J.L. I'd love to see a copy.

C.L. If I find it. And so he ... he ... at that time he was working as an electrical superintendent for Olympia & York. So he said: If you're not doing anything I have a position open as my assistant. So I went and I interviewed and he hired me and I went and worked for Olympia & York for about two-and-a-half years while I had that back injury. So ... so the good thing obviously is that I got a job out of it. But the other thing was that I had this additional perspective from being ... working for their General Contractor as a superintendent. So what I would do is that, since I had ... since I was there and it wasn't like they were going to fire me,--you know,-then when I would see pornography in the gangbox I would talk to the foreman and say: you've got to

take that down. I said: I don't want any of the women customers walking through and seeing that. Oh, we'll keep it shut. I said: You can guarantee me that you're going to keep that shut. I think that this is offensive to women. You need to take it down. You know? So,--you know--I tried to make change that way, to use my position to make change in that way. So maybe--you know--maybe it had some effect. But I know that other women who are project managers and whatever, that they have that power. They can do that. And it's just a matter of do we do that. Are we willing to ... 'cause it feels scary to talk to this guy and say you got to take this down. But ... but I think that that's what changes the culture. That's what changes the offensive pornography.

J.L. I know that you've been mentoring women and you've also had female apprentices, a least one. Right?

C.L. Yeah.

J.L. So talk about that a little.

C.L. I ... this' ... that's been a lot of fun. You know? And I think that--you know--I ...

J.L. Did you request to have a female?

C.L. No. I think that so-- Usu-- ... Nowadays there are so many,--you know,--there are more women coming into the industry that it's not as unusual. And so for me it's a lot of fun because I don't have to, like, really think about stuff too much and I just talk to them and I tell them things and I try to instruct them and then,--you know ... but this is the same thing that I do with male apprentices as well. I tried to share with them as much information as I can and it's up to them what they do with the information. So ... But it's been a lot of fun when I've had the women apprentices. And it's also fun, too, that--you know-when they become journeywomen they remember me. It's like, whether they're males or females it's always a lot of fun.

J.L. Women In Construction, what is that? Is that...

C.L. Okay. Union Women IN Construction?

J.L. Um-hum.

C.L. Okay. That ... that is ... that is really the ... the last version of, or the continued version of Women Electricians except that it's, instead of the focus being just the women electricians, it's to include all the other trades. And what ... what it ... Basically, the way that it's structured is that it's a community based organization and any of the women who are in the trades can belong. There's no ... There's no fee. There's no membership or anything like that. All they have to do is say they want to participate. And what it is, is I try to maintain a ... a core group of women of different trades, different ethnic backgrounds and things like that, so when something happens I can just pick up the phone, call these women, and then they can contact--you know--other women in their trades or ... or any other women to share the information. For example, the other day I got a telephone call from a gentleman from the demolition people that are going to be deconstructing the Deutsche Bank building and he's looking for a woman contractor and stuff like that. So I picked up the phone and I just started calling people and letting them know so that they could ...

J.L. Okay. That raises two questions. One is about how many women are, would you say, are ... know about this organization and participate in it?

C.L. We ... We don't have separate meetings or anything like that. This is all on a ...

J.L. It's a network. So about ...

C.L. Yes. It's ... it's pretty ... Yes. It's a network. I would say about twenty ... twenty women participate in it. Those are the ... my twenty core people and they come in and out because sometimes things happen and they're not ... they're not that ... they don't have time. And ... but mostly what I try to do is I try to utilize the Tradeswomen Coffeehouse at NEW as a meeting point and what we do is, like, we go out afterwards and have drinks and dinner and stuff like that.

J.L. And that's once every week, every Friday night or ...

C.L. No. That's ... that's once a month. The Trades-the Tradeswomen Coffeehouse is the third Friday of every month and that's kind of where I reconnect with people. And if I don't see them there I pick up the phone and say what's going on? What's happening? And ... so that they're not out of the loop for very long.

J.L. Okay. Now, the other question that I want to ask you about, because the Deutsch Bank raises this, health and safety.

C.L. Right.

J.L. And I'm just interested in ... Being that construction is such a very dangerous job, right at the top, so do you perceive a genuine difference in the way that women are more willing to raise safety and health questions on the job or what do you have to say about the issue?

C.L. Well, I guess it's been my experience that it's the women who raise most of these issues. And I have would have to say that, mostly it comes because of our roles as mothers and daughters,--you know--that we are concerned about health and safety issues.

J.L. What about union ....

C.L. I think some of the guys do, and--you know--those are the guys that I personally make allies with because they seem to have--you know--a little bit more going on other than,--you know--grabbing up all the overtime as much as they can because they're ... You know ... So, yeah. I'm starting to ... to ... to do more of that working in coalition with ... with the men in the industry.

C.L. But, yeah.

J.L. But that's going to be really a job where a lot of attention has to be paid to that issue.

C.L. Well, right. So one of the things that--you know-- ... we were first told about this through Nontraditional Employment For Women. They had ... they had the people from CDI, who are the demolition people, come in and basically tell us. A lot of the women were really excited and wanted to get involved and I

asked them what ... what about the toxic mold situation? What's being done to abate it? What's--you know--what's happening with that? Well, they're ... basically the answer was ... They were working on it was basically their answer. So one of the reasons that I raised that was just so that people would hear. Don't forget, this is the building with the toxic mold. And so, what all the women that I called about--you know--possibly working on that project is to remind them again that there's that toxic mold and there was asbestos and--you know--so these are the issues that you--you know--you need to be concerned about. But I don't see my role as being the gate keeper. I don't ... I don't want to be that, 'cause I want to ... I want to empower people. If there are women who want to start their own companies and they decide this is the project I'm going to ... You know? Or I have a ... a pre-existing contractor's license and I'm going to go for it,-you know--I'm going to do what I can to support them. So what I said to them over the phone was that if you're missing a piece to be able to do this project, don't just take yourself out of the running by saying I don't have that piece. Let us know so that we can try to find somebody else who has that piece and maybe this will be a coalition of different companies in order to do this. You know? So part of ... part of my job, I ... Or what I see as important, is to continue to stay ... stay on the union about taking more women in, making—you know--the union more accessible, and once the women get in is to make it possible for them to continue to stay in throughout their life and not just get rid of them after they've-you know—outlived their usefulness as a ... as a number or something, which is what they kind of want to do.

J.L. Okay. I want to switch to another subject now which is a thesis that was written by Francine Moccio about your union. She calls it Local 500 but basically it's Local 3.

C.L. Okay.

J.L. And she writes this whole voluminous piece of work with a lot of depth. But I just pulled out some really kind of—you know--really pointed comments she makes about the women and then I want you to respond to them.

C.L. Okay.

J.L. And she talks about the ... that the ... your group, which she refers to as a club, but she--you know,--makes a distinc-- distinction that it's independent, that it's not one of the club- clubs of Local 3, but she calls it the Women's Club,--she sees it as "an attempt to forge bonds of female solidarity inside a structure of male fraternity" and "organizing for acceptance, democracy and recognition." So, I mean, that's ... that's pretty clear cut. That's,--you know,--that's nothing really to be contested there. I mean,--you know,--but that's just her characterization so I thought I should start with how she characterizes it. Do you want to say anything about that?

C.L. Yeah. I think ... I think that clearly she pulled this from different people, different ?? from different people because I don't think ... because I don't think that what we were going for was acceptance and recognition. What we were going for was-you know--how could I say-duty of fair representation.

J.L. Um-hum.

C.L. If ... if you have a rule about men having a changing shanty,--you know--then the extension of that is that if you have women, you should have a

changing shanty for women. So it's not about recognition or acceptance or ... or ... or whatever she called it, but it's about fair is fair. You know? If you ...

J.L. Okay. Now, one thing that ... I mean, I have a lot of comments here that I want you to ...

C.L. Yeah.

J.L. But the basic distinction that she's making is that if, if you had organized internally within the union process and gone through the union channels rather than--

C.L. Being independent.

J.L. And she calls it,--you know--"different but equal strategy" of saying these are our issues as women, rather—you know--going internally through the--you know,--now I go to my steward; now I go to my union rep; now I--you know? So ...

C.L. It was not ... We never ... either or?

C.L. We never tried to bypass that strat--that process because that's what we were telling ... Part of what we were doing was discovering what that process is for ourselves and sharing that process with other women. Whether they chose to follow that process or not is a whole other story and it comes down to that individual woman. But having ... You know, I think I was clear about why we ... I wanted to be separate, but I think that the point of it is that it was about getting the women to use the union structure so that if something went ... happened that they wanted some response to, that they were supposed to go to the shop steward. And after the shop steward didn't do anything, that they were supposed to go to the foreman of the job. And that if they wanted support from us in the ... in the process, or what should my next step be, that they would be able to find out from us without--you know--without somebody threatening them or ... or them feeling that my job is on the line.

J.L. so I think it's ... it comes down to ... it sort of ipso facto, the fact that you organized and you have a group and it's not--you know--doesn't have the blessing from the union, an official union group, so there, ipso facto, that's challenging, that's threatening within the institution--the fraternity of Local 3 because they're so used to controlling everything, so that ipso facto, you're making yourself outside this makes it more difficult
rather than ...

C.L. Maybe. But the thing, too, is that I think that as individual union members that you ought to be able to challenge the system if--you know-whatever my need is, whether it's just unique to me or it's unique to me because I'm a woman, that if it's an issue that's not only affecting me, that I should be able to raise it and that at the union, since they are the union, since I'm paying you my dues, then it is your duty to fairly represent me. If you don't know what my position is or what's going on, it's my job to educate you. Okay? But if I make that effort to educate you and you just pooh-pooh it and say, Oh, this is not important, then you have failed--you have failed in representing me and here I am, I'm paying you my union dues. So that's how I see it. So regardless of whether ... You know, even though there's this other organization that does have the union's blessing and this, that and the other thing, if you talk to any of the women who were actively participating in that organization they will agree

that their energy has been siphoned off for other purposes and they're not focusing on their issues of women.

J.L. One of the ... she includes a quote from a ... a white male brother electrician, and he said that, "Your generation of tradeswomen," that it brought in a lot of women who came in because of a crusade rather than a genuine interest in the industry." Now, I have a wonderful quote from you. You were in a film that was made by NEW and you're talking about--you're describing the process that you're doing as "beautiful," which I … it struck me and I ... I remembered that. But, I mean, how do you feel about that charge, that you're in there for a crusade but that you really don't care about the industry. You spent your life in that industry.

C.L. Well, I think that clearly he's wrong. You know? I can't speak about what other peoples' reasons for coming into the industry were. You know? Mine was about getting a good paying career and something that--you know--- I want to be able to do … something that I could feel it was a contribution to the society and I can sleep well at night because I'm not doing something bad. I'm not doing something that's ... that's heinous. You know? So, to me, I see our industry as ... as being--you know--we create beautiful things. You know?--we ... Just in ... in terms of looking at the conduit work that's done, it's ... it's like a sculptural thing. And ... and the fact that it's functional. These things that we do make somebody's life better. You know? So I ... I wholeheartedly disagree with him. I can't ... I don't know how to stress it in the ... in the--you know--stress that I think he's really wrong. I don't think ... I don't think that any of the people who came in who had an axe to burn, or whatever. First of all, I don't see that that was true. I think that each of us came into this industry basically to have a good paying career. We wanted to do something that ... that fit with us. You know? And for whatever reasons, we didn't fit in those other types of jobs. So for us, being in construction fit. You know? Different reasons for different people. When any one of the women left, I think that they left because the industry--they found the industry too hostile,--you know--and they couldn't ... it was ... it was costing them too much as an individual so they left. Or ... or health reasons: exposure to something and they're sick and they could no longer work in the industry. And,--you know--I'd have to say that environmentally it can be a very harsh environment to be in. But I can't ... I truthfully cannot think of any one of the women that I know who came into this industry with an axe to grind. I think all of us came in because we didn't fit in other jobs and we were just young women searching for something that would fit us or suit us and that when we felt that--you know--our own purposes were not being served; we were not feeling satisfied; we were feeling that it was a hostile environment or whatever, that's when people left.

J.L. I ... I wanted to ask you about a strategy that she talks about in terms of making common cause with the women who are, like, in the other divisions, not in the-you know-the electrical …

Tape Two

J.L. Okay. So Cynthia, we ...

Tape two: Cynthia Long, September 26th. And Cynthia, I was asking you about making common cause in Local 3 with the women in other divisions, the more low-paid women. Is there ... Is there any future in that or is that ... What's your thoughts on that?

C.L. Well, when I was involved, I did ... I did meet with the women from the M Division and talk to them and stuff like that. I think, though ... I think it's important to maintain connections with those people, those women from the other Divisions. But I think that one of the things to keep in mind is that those other Divisions operate under different rules than we do in construction. The work environment that they're in is different than what we're in. So because of that, not because they're lower paid, that there's no need to--you know--interact with them. I think that the more women that we can involve in the process that want to participate, that's great. But I think that what really would happen is that even though we ... you would--I would make that effort to connect with the women from the other Divisions, those other Divisions have their own sets of issues that that they want to deal with which are different from the issues that we ... they don't have to worry about changing facilities they ... because they're not moving from place to place. They're in a factory or something like that, they're in ... so they already have a mechanism to deal with those kinds of issues. So ... so I think that it's valuable to continue to make those ... those connections and contacts, but I think that, as far as ... as actually making changes in the Construction Division, you really have to focus on—you know--the ... the conditions and all those kinds of things. So ... so I think that there should be , basically parallel organizations.

J.L. Um-hum. One of the things that Francine Moccio wrote is that the bulk of the work of women electricians was taken up with issues like pornography and sexual harassment. Is that ... Do you think that's the case or ...

C.L. I think that was true back then, yes, because those were the most heinous things that we felt we had to speak up about, because there was nobody who was going to ... there was nobody who's going to come to our defense about it. So if we didn't bring it up, if we didn't raise the issue, if we didn't frame that issue and ... and suggest to them how it ought to be dealt with, it wasn't coming from out leadership.

J.L. Now, one of the things that I ... I want to do now is ...

C.L. Well, one of the things that's valuable about that fact is that, because we raised those issues back then, very rarely do those issues come up now.

J.L. Okay. Well, that's a beautiful segue, because what I want to talk about now is an assessment of ... We want to look and see what kind of progress and what kind of barriers are still in place; where we're at today. So first of all, I want to ask you about the numbers. How do you explain the fact that the numbers are still so small of women in construction?

C.L. I think, like I said before, a lot of it is when ... when women come into the industry initially,--you know--they're open and they're willing to put up with some hardship and the--you know--stuff like that and just deal with it. But after ten years of being in the industry and things haven't significantly changed in their perception and they have other options, they do leave,--you know?--so it's a very personal decision that people make and I can't fault them for doing that. One of the things that I would say, though, is that, because we had those fights early on about pornography on the job and sexual harassment and stuff like that, that things have, in fact, changed. I think that we all ... that women coming into the industry, they already have an idea of what is inappropriate behavior, and if it occurs, they can ... they can grieve it. They can bring it up to the Shop Steward and--you know--

J.L. And the shop stewards are more responsive to those issues? I mean, they're not just, like, dismissive or ... of course, I realize that there's a whole range of different types of stewards and ...

C.L. Right, because, finally, the edicts have come down from up on top that now they do know that this is unacceptable behavior and things like that. So I think that they have been more receptive, or they have been more responsive. And really what it comes down to is ... is the thing that has always motivated them in the past, which is if you don't do it--if you don't do X, Y and Z you open yourself up for law suits. And I think that the lawyers made, or the Joint Industry Board made that very clear to them and said: Look, you have to come out with a policy--you know,--and you actually have to follow this policy. It can't just be a paper tiger.

J.L. Okay. Because the ... when you went in, they did nothing to prepare anybody for the entrance of women?

C.L. I would say that that's true.

J.L. And when did they start--you know--doing some kind of preparation training, sensitizing, education, any of that? When did that start taking place?

C.L. Truthfully, I think that those things started happening after the law suits were brought.

J.L. Okay.

C.L. And ... and once ... once the first law suit was bought they kind of realized they'd better change. So suddenly policies were written and published.

J.L. Now, what ... what are some of the law suits? I mean, can you speak a little bit about some of the law suits besides Laura ... Laura Kelber's?

C.L. Actually, I'm not really familiar with any ... any other law suits. I think that ...

J.L. But in ... within construction, you're saying that it was kind of generic awareness that they finally got it; that ... It doesn't necessarily mean it was Local 3 but that it was ... because there were a lot of law suits.

C.L. Well, Yes, there were, but I thought we were speaking specifically about Local 3.

J.L. Right. Well, I was, but I ... I thought maybe that you were referring to generic ...

C.L. Well, I mean, I think that ... I think that for us, as Women Electricians, one of the things that I was doing and I later found out that---you know--how ineffective it was,-but anyhow, I was going to school at Cornell and I was specifically focusing on sex discrimination, sex--sex discrimination and sexual harassment. And so, what I would do is I would read about those cases and I would ... and there were people who were friendly to me who would, like, make me copies of these law suits so that I could read them. Basically, they were summaries. These were all summaries. So once I got those, I would find one of my contacts who would give me free photocopy. I'd make,--you know--ten copies of these things and give them out to the women who were working with me,--Women

Electricians,-so that they too could ... could know what I know. And one of the things ... one of the cases that I think that was critical is the [Jacksonville] Shipyard--Jackson--the Shipyard case. You know? And ... and also,--you know--there were so many different things that we were ...

J.L. That was about pornography? Right?

C.L. Right.

J.L. Okay.

C.L. And there were so many different things that ... that we were ... You know, we weren't solely focused on certain things. You know? It's hard to explain, but we were, like, just like sponges. We were soaking in anything that was coming in that was pertaining to--you know--women in the trades and the trade unions and stuff like that, so that case was, like, particularly interesting to us because it was in a non-traditional environment which we could identify with. Because prior to that there was also the ... the case of the women bank workers in the mid-west,--I think it was Minnesota, if I'm not mistaken.

J.L. Right. They made a movie about it.

C.L. Right. So all these different things were--which were part of--you know--what was happening publicly. And, of course, the ... the??

J.L. Oh, right, Anita Hill.

C.L. Anita Hill and Clarence Thomas,--you know-that whole thing was ... a giant teach in …

J.L. Right. Right.

C.L. For the whole nation about sexual harassment and ... and the inappropriateness of it.

J.L. Right. He of the EEOC.

C.L. Right, and the Supreme Court. You know?

J.L. Yeah.

C.L. So it was, like, all of these different things. But anyhow, so all of this stuff was happening in ... So,-you know---you'd have to be, like, a hermit to not have been exposed to any of this. But in the meantime, I was also making photocopies and giving copies of these cases to different women so that they could read about them. I later on found out that a lot of these women would get freaked out over [these] papers,--you know?--and to me it's, like,---you know,--to me that was, like, a way of just, like: Hey, I can't explain the whole thing to you 'cause there was nuances to it, so you can read it yourself and ... and then I found out later on, about ten years later, that ... that some of the women were just so freaked out about these things that they just couldn't ... which surprised me.

J.L. So ... so the ... if you had to assess the progress of Local 3 and IBEW in terms of women coming into the industry, how would you rate them? What do you see that's different--that's changed??

C.L. I think that it ... I think that it has changed because the ... the people ... the guys that I came into the industry with, they're now the guys who are the foremen on the jobs so they're somewhat used to the fact of women being in the industry. So for them it's not like this, Oh my God, what is this? type of thing. They ... they just say: Okay. Okay. You go do this,-you know---then they just treat us like every other worker, which is great. You know? So finally,--you know--twenty-five years, twenty-seven years later ... this last job that I worked on was a foreman that came ...

J.L. What company?

C.L. This was a company called **Stanco** from--you know,-they were located in Staten Island and it was, from my perspective, a great job because I made a lot of money on it. But what was really good was that when ... within the first two weeks of this job there were two women on the job site, not just one of us; two of us,--you know,-and we pretty much stayed on the job until the end, which is--you know? 'Cause we were talking about--we were saying how unusual this is, 'cause normally, the first lay off, we're the ones going.

J.L. Even after all these years?

C.L. Yeah. So that's why we were saying that that was a very unusual job. And it had to do with the foreman, the general foreman, on the job and because he ... he went to school at the same time that I went to school and so that I think that because of that he ... he was ... he was a lot more fair to us. Because we had many opportunities to work overtime and it was--usually overtime is, like, given only to the--you know--the hand-picked boys.

J.L. Right.

C.L. Right. And so for ... for the first time, we were part of that in group. You know?

J.L. Yeah. Tell me about barriers that remain. What are the obstacles?

C.L. I think ... I think the barriers, I ... I would say, are similar to what women lawyers face and what women doctors have faced, which is that the numbers are relatively--are still relatively low,--you know?--and so there's not going to be ... It seems to me that as long as the numbers remain low that you're not going to have the women moving up into the positions of ... I mean, it's still going to be a very rare thing that a woman is a foreman unless it's for a contractor. Sometimes the women con—women-owned businesses will make it a point to have a women foreman on the job. So I think that, when the numbers change, I think--you know—that will also change. And I think that we're at that point, twenty-seven years or so, where now there are more and more women who are just, like, they're going to be picked for their ability to be ... to be forepersons, foremen, forewomen. It won't be such a rare thing anymore. But I think that that's still ... I think that that's still a barrier. I think that it's still a barrier in terms of the recruitment. They're still not making the effort to recruit more women, in spite of the fact that I think the numbers are going to be ... that there's going to be ... You know, we're still, I think, fifty-one percent of the population, so--you know--if they don't make the effort to recruit more women they're going to be falling behind. And that would also be true of people of color because the, if you will, the complexion of our society has changed; that I think it's almost one third Hispanic now, if I'm not mistaken. So if they don't take those ...

J.L. ?? white people in the minority in Union City now.

C.L. Right. And so, if they don't take that into consideration and recruit from these-you know--populations, they're going to be left behind.

J.L. I just thought of a question that I want to ask you that I don't have on our little list, which is what would you say to a young woman who is considering coming into the trades, like the night we were at Pace University and they had the big recruitment for jobs at Ground Zero and all these young women were there? What would you say if you were telling them about your having spent your career in this field? What's ... what's good about it? Why is it a good career option? Or would you still recommend it?

C.L. I ... I still would recommend it because I still think that--you know-being a construction worker is-can be a very fulfilling type of work. And I think that the women who will do well are women who are somewhat independent, who are ... who are willing to work hard. And if they do those things, they can make good money. They can make ... They can ... they can support their families. Because the other thing is, there's quite a number of single women who are single heads of household. And so I think that's it's a good living wage. You're in a unionized work environment, and you ... and the best thing of all is that in ... in this trade you get to be creative, whether you're working as a carpenter or an electrician or a ... or a sheet metal worker, or whatever, you're creating things. You're working with different materials. You're ... you're--you know?--so that if you have that desire to be creative and deal with physical things, being a construction worker is ... is ... is a wonderful thing. I mean, I am so glad that I was born when I was born so that it was possible for me to ... to do this. 'Cause I think if I had to have been pigeonholed, because at that time in the ... in the early 1970's, I don't think that I could have been a nurse, teacher,-you know---

J.L. A secretary.

C.L. A secretary or a clerical worker because I ... I basically did try those things, except for--you know--the nursing and ... and stuff like that, but it's ... And a teacher you need credentials. But I don't think I could have ... The fit into any of those pigeonholes would have been really difficult and very ugly. So for me this was good fit because I was able to--you know--be the person that I am, be who I want to be, and make a good living.

J.L. Now, tell me the years you started your apprentice and you finished?

C.L. I started my apprenticeship in August, 1978, and I completed my apprenticeship in I believe it was May, 1982.

J.L. Okay. Now, I know that you've been active with so many different organizations and you've done so much work ... I know that you, when ... With the Cornell Trade Union Studies Program for Women you--didn't you endow a scholarship?

C.L. Yes, I did. I did. I taught ...

J.L. And then you stopped that for a while and you taught in it?

C.L. Well, I was able to teach at the summer school, which was

great. I also went on to ... They had a special program training minority women in labor education so I was able to ... to participate in that. That was a great thing. All these different things ... You know, I ... I thirsted for the knowledge. I wanted to do these things. And ... and I think that it's been extremely beneficial to me. You know?

J.L. Now, you've been active with Operation Punch List, with the NEW Coffeehouse with ... Have you been active with TNT, Tradeswomen Now And Tomorrow?

C.L. Well, for a very brief time I was but I think that ... truthfully, I think that I realized that my best efforts would be on a local level and there's still so much-there's still so much yet to be done. And I think a lot of it, too, is that I was very fortunate when I came in back in 1978 that here were ... here was a ... a ... a group of women who were ready to make change. I think that right now it's much harder because there isn't that consciousness of the need for women to come together, to work together to make change. And I think that back in 1978 it was just- -you know--I don't know--

J.L. God's ??

C.L. Yeah. God just set everything up just ... just right to make this all happen. I miss those times.

J.L. Do you ... do you see some way forward, some strategic routes forward that might yield ... You know, I know that you're working with Legal Momentum

C.L. Um-hum.

J.L. And--you know--I consider them as part of the official, like, women's movement, so their dedication to this cause is sort of like, I see it as connected to their beginnings, NOW Legal Defense and NOW itself which was--you know--committed to getting women into these jobs. So, I mean, what ... what do you see as having ... bearing fruit now?

C.L. I think that ... I think that this working with Legal Momentum has been--it's the-you know,--like you said, the fruit because back in the days of 1978 when we were struggling with all these things there were a lot of people who just didn't understand, who didn't comprehend. And I think that now that Legal Momentum committed themselves to work in Operation Punch List and host those meetings, has made a very, very [big] difference. Because I think the next step needs to be, that some ... some entity that has the wherewithal and the ... and the institutional support starts to look at-you know-- ... What they need to do is they need to compile all this information. So what they need to do is look at ... all these individual women, they have to look at their work histories,--you know--and they have to do it consistently for everybody and look at the patterns and practices that are emerging and then-and then to either start to promulgate--you know--rules or ... or ... recommend practices that would avoid the ... the discrimination that women still face in our industry. I think that even ... On the one hand, I've seen that things have improved drastically over when I started in 1978; you don't feel so alone, so isolated because now there are ... We did try to ... For example, the Tradeswomen Coffeehouse. We did try to institutionalize that by finally getting Nontraditional Employment for Women to host the Coffeehouse. So these things are things that we were wanting in 1978, that we were trying to achieve in 1978, but it took until the 1990's for us actually to be able to achieve it because of the fact that ... And I think again, it goes back to the feminists. I think that when Nontraditional

Employment For Women was guided by Martha Baker, who's a feminist that I knew from--you know--the women's movement and stuff like that,--that ... that is when the Coffeehouse was being ... started being hosted by Nontraditional Employment For Women. Prior to that it was a struggle. They would not—you know--The people who were in leadership there did not want the tradeswomen to be meting there. So that has come a long way so the ... and the fact that we keep it going and we have staff support from NEW to do this makes a big difference. The fact that Legal Momentum, among other organizations is, like, supporting us and Operation Punch List … This makes a big difference. And Jane, I have to credit you for pulling that together because I think that without that--without your help that would never have ever happened and I thank God that you were there to ... to pull it together 'cause that--I think those things amongst other things, will ... Will—you know--push us forward and help us to achieve ... achieve--you know--equality.

J.L. Critical mass.

C.L. Critical mass and equality. I mean, that's really what it's about is, like ... I want it to be so that if you're a woman electrician, that it's not a big deal. It's, like--you know—what ... it's not a big deal. You know? That's what I'[m trying] ...

J.L. You know, the United Tradeswomen had this mission statement and it said: fighting for the guaranteed right for any--for a woman to work in any job of her choice. And it's still a radical demand.

C.L. Right.

J.L. You know? So it's ... so we have a ways to go.

C.L. Yes, we do. Sadly we do. But I ... I think that—you know-- ... I think there's a lot of stuff that individuals can do
to move it--move it forward and so that's ... that's how I see myself fitting into this is that I'm just trying to do little bits and pieces that I think is going to move us closer and closer to the time that--you know--women can pick and choose the jobs that they want to do. I think that we ... you touched on it briefly when
you talked about the endowment. That was one of the reason why I did a scholarship. And my ... my theory on that was that ...

J.L. And you specified that it was for a tradeswoman,--right?--as I recall.

C.L. Yes, right ?? I did. Part ... part of it was that I wanted to encourage tradeswomen to go to Cornell Women's Studies program 'cause I thought it was such a valuable ... You know, again, it's like, it's like knowing history. If you don't know where you've been, you don't know where you're going. So I wanted other women to have the same experience that I had of learning about tradeswomen's studies,--you know?--learning assertiveness training, all these different things, all these different components that help women--you know--you know--empower women. And so, even though I could have just--you know--done several full scholarships, what I--my theory was that people need to be vested in it. So if you make it a half scholarship and they have to come up with the other half, then they're vested in it enough to try to do well; to make ... 'Cause if it's a full scholarship and they just, like, drop out--you know—

J.L. Right.

C.L. That took away from somebody who might have really—you know--wanted to do it. And so I made it two half scholarships and I think that one of the ... One of the people that I'm most proud of that went through it was Eileen Sullivan. She was one of the--one of the ones who ...

J. L. That's great.

C.L. … who went through that on that scholarship so it was like, okay, I did good.

J.L. You did real good.

C.L. Yeah.

J.L. Okay. Well, and I think that--you know--we could talk for a long time about strategies but we'll just conclude it here and agree that there's lots to be done but we've made a lot of progress. So I thank you very much.

C.L. There's one ... Can I add one thing though?

J.L. Yes.

C.L. I think one of the key things was the ... all that organizing that we did behind those Human Rights Commission hearings back in the 1990's,

J.L. You know, I'm glad you brought that up ...

C.L. Because if it wasn't--if it wasn't for those hearings--you know--we wouldn't have those conclusions to fuel Operation Punch List.

J.L. Okay. Now, I--you know,--I skipped over this question based on Francine Moccio's thesis, but I wanted to--since you raised the hearings I want to go back to this point. One of the points raised in that, is that by making things public, going public with the internal things about-you know--abuses or violence or-you know--harassment of women and bringing it outside the union and making it public, that that sort of acts to send out the message that women aren't welcome here, thereby diminishing the numbers of women who are coming in and, as she puts it, subliminally accomplishing the goal of them en, which is that they don't want the women to be there. So what's your response to that?

C.L. I'm sorry. Say that one more time. I'm sorry.

J.L. Okay. Just by making these ... that making public—you know—publicizing …

C.L. Right.

J.L. All the environment in the ... of discrimination ...

C.L. I get it. Okay. I think that--you know-- ... I see the ... the things that happened to the women in ... in our unions as not dissimilar to what happens to women in domestic violence cases. Okay? So as long as men feel entitled to be able to be violent to women with no repercussions,--you know--you know--we're still an unequal society. And as long as we're an unequal society we're still going to have--you know--bizarre things happen. And just look at

the last two weeks all the ... three highly publicized domestic violence situations and that continues to go on. So what happens within the context of the union is that not quite as violent, not quite--because the emotions are not quite as high because those were--you know--they were domestic partners so here in the work place it's a lot less...But, see, it doesn't take much to scratch the surface. I think that it's important that when there's ugly stuff like that happening you have to put the light of society onto that. Otherwise it's going to continue to be the dirty, dark secret that it's been for years and years and years. So I think that we do have to expose it to light because if you know that this is a possibility of something that may occur to you, forewarned is forearmed. If you're forewarned that this might be a possibility, that at least gives you some time to think about what could I do differently,-you know--so that the outcome is different. And so part of it is ... is--you know--by sharing that information, sharing that with other people, it's, like,--you know--the knowledge of how to use your tools. It's, like, these things, if you don't share it, you can't hold this stuff to yourself because--you know--then you keep other people from ... from ... from reaching their potentials. So you share that information so that somebody else can think of a different way to deal with that issue.

J.L. You know, just the way you spoke about this issue leads me to another question which I skipped over. But when I interviewed the group of women for the chapter on the United Tradeswomen—and this was a big subject that kept recurring which was corruption in the building trades industry and the whole question of mob control and corruption and the endemic, the pervasive nature of corruption. And that's another area where people argue that--you know—you shouldn't talk about the corruption within unions because it gives us a bad name and provides fodder for enemies, bla, bla, bla, on and on. I mean, what ... what ... As ... having spent your life in the construction industry, or a good deal of it, how do you respond to the question about corruption in the industry?

C.L. I think that the whole ... that that issue of corruption is the same thing. You have to shine the light of daylight on it,-you know--because if ... if you ... if it's swept under the rug and not talked about and not dealt with, then people are going to be ... things are still going to be going awry and people who think they know what's going on are going to be saying, well, why did that happen because they were completely clueless to that ... that whole corruption. And I think that it's true that some of the--you know--it does give us a bad name. But listen, if you don't--if you don't deal with it up--you know--face forward,--you know--you're not going to be able to make a change. You need to be able to ... to confront it and name it and ... and then things can be done differently.

J.L. One of the things that strikes me with the female versus male population in construction is that a lot of the men are related. They come from families who--you know--their father, grandfathers ... And maybe that's less true now, but certainly when I was teaching in the Apprentice Program that was pretty much the case, back in the '70's.

C.L. Um-hum.

J.L. And it occurs to me that, because of the storytelling at home and hearing things, that males would be more familiar with the fact that there is a lot of corruption and there is a lot of mob influence in the building trades, whereas, women, like your generation, came in very conscious of civil rights and

discrimination issues and--you know-consciousness about fighting for equal rights; less aware of the corruption in the industry, more of a surprise to have to learn on the job. Would you say that that's kind of a fair estimation or …

C.L. Yeah. I would say ... I would say that. You know? I think that even--you know-even though I would have to acknowledge that there is corruption, it doesn't play such a big role for me because I'm not ... I remember the stories that some of the women carpenters would tell me about people being shot at, at their union meetings or ... or people being beat up 'cause they were distributing some leaflet or newsletter, or whatever. So from that--you know--I know that that kind of corruption exists. But it also is ... it goes much higher than that and I think that--you know--when they ... when they evaluate a project and they say that the cost overruns were—you know--in labor or something like that, and you know that there's no way that the labor cost overruns are anywhere close to what the pay offs were;--you know?--that that's really what caused the project to be so over budget was-you know-the corruption aspect of it, not--you know,--not that--you know--ten electricians worked ten hours overtime. You know? So ... so it's like, that' what being in the industry as long as I've been in has given me that perspective. But,--you know? So ... so I'm kind of aware of the corruption, but more tangentially, not ... not as blatantly as I would say, that you would see it or experience it as the laborers talk about it or the Carpenters talk about it.

J.L. Yeah. And that's a blessing.

C.L. It was a blessing to me, yes. (both laugh)

J.L. Okay. Thanks, Cynthia.

So we see that we neglected to ask one important question based on Francine Moccio's dissertation, which is the ... Basically, in her thesis she writes that the women's club or Women Electricians, as we know they are, failed to organize across lines of class and education and race and sexual preference. I think that's what she said. Right?

C.L. Right.

J.L. And also she carries it into the present which ... what is happening now. But why don't we talk about Women Electricians first, and what ... what do you have to say to that?

C. L. Okay. I would have to say that I disagree with that. I mean, I'm ... I might have to say that I agree that there was a failure, but I would have to say that it wasn't for lack of trying on our part because I think that those of us who ... who did come together as Women Electricians, it was our goal,-it was always our goal to be open to anybody who wanted to participate and that really the only ... You know, I guess the way we saw it is that our meetings were open to everybody and anybody could come in and say whatever they wanted to say. And if somebody said I need help, we would try to help them. So I ... I think that we ... we deliberately planned a structure that was designed to be as open as possible and that there were no issues that would be considered taboo or whatever. But I think that there were--you know,-there were so—we would invite any women, all women to come and participate and I think that a lot of women, for whatever reasons,--and we would hear through the grapevine that a lot of the reasons that they ... the women did not come was because the men had talked them out of coming and saying: don't associate yourselves with that bunch of lesbians. So it was, like, immaterial whether any of us really were lesbians or

not. It was enough to scare the women to not participate. And there were women who--you know-- ... People make their own decisions. They make their own choices and that's the way that I ... The way that I see it is that there were women who chose not to participate and chose not to be active and involved because it's also a time-consuming process. You know? You're taking time out of your life to go do these things. But one of the things that I was proud that we were able to do is that we ... we did have the first Women Electricians Conference out at Bayberry Land; that we were ...

J.L. Do you know what year that was?

C.L. It was in the '80's, I would think, about '82, '83, '84, somewhere around there. But so it was ... When we first ... when we first approached the ... the Chairman of the Joint Industry Board--you know,--his perception was that we wanted to get together to trade recipes so we said, oh, okay, yeah, we'll take that. (laughs) You know? And so we organized it and we had a bus. They paid for a bus to come pick us up outside of the Port Authority Bus Terminal, and, like, the whole way out there we were playing, like, music and dancing and partying out there. And so I think that it was a very successful conference for us. But it takes--you know-it takes a lot of organizing. It takes a lot of effort and energy from ... from ... You know? If people don't volunteer to do that work it doesn't happen. So ... so I think it was very successful. And we also included women who were travelers from out of town. So that's where Joi Beard ... Many of these women were working at the Convention Center so we invited all--we opened it up to any women electrician. So you could be an apprentice, you could be from out of town, whatever. Everybody was invited. So I think part of our legacy from that is that Donna Hammond, who was from Portland, Oregon, went back to Portland, Oregon, and she became very active and moved up in the hierarchy in Portland, Oregon. You know? Joi Beard is ... she had met somebody and married so she wasn't going to go back to Louisville, Kentucky, where she was originally from so she transitioned and instead of being a construction electrician she became an electrical inspector for the City of New York. And then she ... she and I both attended classes to get our contractors' license. So I truthfully was not that interested in becoming a contractor but I was there for the ... for the knowledge. I wanted the knowledge. And ... and Joi was very ... was successful and she ...

J.L. Where did you take that? Mechanic's Institute?

C.L. No. This was ... this was a separate thing. Oh, I can't remember. Joi ... Joi would probably remember. I have my books from back then. But anyhow, so she was successful and she became an electrical contractor. And at the time that she became an electrical contractor I believe she's the only woman who worked as an electrician to become an electrical contractor and the first black women. So I mean, she's got a lot of firsts. And she was probably the first woman electrical inspector, too, if I know ... if I'm not mistaken. So she ... I highly recommend that you talk to her because she started off ... because she knew that she couldn't do this business as a Local 3 contractor because it takes a lot of money to do that. And she did become a Local 3 contractor so she's currently a Local 3 contractor, which is, I think, a really big deal.

J.L. I know Veronica Rose has her own business. Wasn't ... she was an electrician also. Right?

C.L. Yes, but ... Yeah.

J.L. I don't know-you know--what the difference is distinguishing ...

C.L. Okay. Veronica ... the thing about Veronica was Veronica ... All I remember about Veronica was that when ... when there was high unemployment in Local 3, Veronica, even though she was a traveler, was working as basic work force and those of us who were, like, Local 3 is our home jurisdiction, many of us did thirty-nine weeks unemployment and had to get that special extension by Bush number one. And ... and the other thing that distinguishes Veronica Rose is that she's married to a very powerful Local 3 Shop Steward.

J.L. Okay. Yeah. I seem to recall that too. I wanted to ask you a couple of other questions about ... You know, it seems to me that Local 3 never had a strong tradition of rank and file organizing whereas some of the other Locals like the Carpenters and--you know--some of the other Locals, the Laborers, had more of a tradition of independent organizing sort of for the rights of the rank and file members. But it seems to me that one of the things that happened with a lot of the women was that because the pressures were so intense and there was so much ... so much energy had to go into survival, that that became sort of the--you know,--the choice was either sort of go along to get along to survive and that became the primary focus for a lot of the women in the trades, versus trying to shake things up and organize for change. Does that strike you as correct or ...

C.L. Yeah. Well, I think that it--I think it goes down to the individual women. I think that--you know? I remember Barbara Trees being very active in--you know-in the anti-corruption stuff …

J.L. Right.

C.L. And I remember her talking about how ... how scary it was and how dangerous it was and stuff like that. And I ... I think I would agree that a lot of the women,--you know--if they wanted to stay working kind of didn't get all involved in ... in ... in that sort of stuff and I think that--you know--the women of color still have to deal with the racism in the industry and so consequently, a lot of the women of color have not been working--haven't stayed employed and are laid off, it seems to me, more often than ... than the white women are. So I think that they do have to--you know—try to deal with corruption and stuff like that kind of on the back burner if they want to continue to work and make their livelihood as carpenters.

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