

79 pp.

Interview with Elaine Ward

J. This is Jane Latour, interviewing Elaine Ward at the Wagner Labor Archives on Saturday, March 29th, 1997.

Okay, Elaine, I'd like you to tell me a bit about your family. And tell me where you were born and your family background?

E. I was born in New York Hospital on July 27th in 1954, and I spent my first couple of months in foster care. And I was adopted, I think when I was about three months old, by Sam and Leona Ward. They lived, for a little while, in New Jersey, but I grew up in Ridgefield, Connecticut until I was in high school. And then I went to Greenwich High School in Greenwich, Connecticut because they moved to Old Greenwich. And I went to college, after I finished high school in 1972,--from 1972 to 1976,--at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

J. Well, let me ask you, what did your father do for work?

E. Oh, okay. Right. You asked me about my family. My father is retired now, but he was an engineer in ... in physics. He worked in the Research and Development departments of large companies that usually had contracts with the government. And I don't know a whole lot about his work, but he--in the '60s when .. when the government cut back on military spending--a lot of engineers started being out of work, and he had to do some traveling to go to work. I remember he worked in Maryland during the week and then would come home to Connecticut on the weekends. And then there was another time when he worked in Massachusetts and would come home on the weekends. My mother was ... Leona Ward was originally trained to be a nurse, and she ... when my bro-- ... when they adopted me and my brother, my mother didn't work. And when we were both in school, she went back to work and she became an elementary school teacher. She had to go back and get

J. Certification?

E. Yeah, yeah. They both had ... Both my parents got college degrees, my father from Cornell and my mother did her nursing at Rutgers. And then in Connecticut, she did her re-certification and ... and became an el--a public elementary school teacher for about twenty years.

J. Um-hum. Now, I remember you telling me once that your brother wasn't interested in learning anything about plumbing or

... Didn't you tell me that once? And your Dad ... you worked with your Dad doing household repairs? Is that true? Am I mixing you up with someone else?

E. (laughs) I ... I wish it was true. My Dad ... No, my Dad was ... My Dad did do household repairs, but he was not particularly interested in teaching me anything about it. So you must have been thinking of somebody else.

J. Somebody else.

E. But I like the idea. (both laugh) My ... Actually, my brother ... my brother had some troubles as a teenager, and when he finally got done with high school, my parents said, you know, get a job or go to college. So he went to community college and ... for a year and a half and then dropped out and joined the Army. And it was peacetime so he didn't go to war. He went through basic training and that was a really good thing for him because the discipline of it and also the com-- ... the ... Let's see ... He got training in circuitry in the Army so he was able ... When he got out of the Army he lived with my parents for a few years and then ... and worked ... got a job right away for very good pay because of his training in the Army.

J. What ... How did you develop your interest in ... in learning about ... Okay, you went to college. What were you studying in college?

E. My major was studio art.

J. Um-hum.

E. When I was in ... between my junior and senior year in high school I went to a summer craft program in ... in ... called Haystack Hinkley in Hinkley, Maine, and I got really excited about working with clay when I was there. And the teacher was really excellent, and he taught at the University of Minnesota. So when I applied to schools, I only applied to a couple, and I said to myself, either I'm going to go the really heavy academic route or I'm going to do something with my hands so ... and do something with ceramics. So ... the other two schools I applied to I didn't get accepted, but the University of Minnesota fit my requirement because it was far away from home and it was a very large school at the time. There was fifty-five thousand students. And it was somewhere I'd never been before, so I went there. And the teacher that had been my teacher at Haystack, the summer school, took ...

kind of took me under his wing and really, you know, encouraged me much more than a lot of the other students. But by the time I was ... by the time I had taken all the art courses, which was two years into my college, I started to realize that I knew very little about the world and very little about what I wanted to do with my life. And by the time I got to the last two years, I was not into being in school at all. And ...

J. Now, what years were these?

E. 1972 to 1976.

J. Okay. So this is in the ... right in the Nixon post-War Vietnam era,

E. Yeah.

J. so that was a very ... Were you part of the feminist movement or anti-war movement or student movement?

E. Well, actually, ;when I was in high school, I had two friends,--one was a year older than I and one was two years older than I-- The woman who was two years older than I was my best friend,--we organized in high school around the Kent State tragedy. I think that was 1968, if I remember, '68 or '69.

J. '68 or '69. (* Kent State - May 4th, 1970)

E. Yeah. But anyway ... And we organized a sit-in at my ... at my high school. And I remember that I had a math teacher who was like somebody from the Marines or something. He was very, very discipline oriented, and I remember I got ... He, because we stayed out of class that day... I don't remember what the punishment was, but I remember that there was a punishment. And, for example, that year ... that year I was in high school was the last year of that building. It was a very old building and with a lot of stairs, and very crowded stairways when ... There were over a thousand students in my ... in my high school, and so I remember ... We had bells. We had three minute bells to switch classes. And my English class was on the bottom of the first floor and my ... his math class was way on the end of the third floor at the other end of the building. And if you didn't make it in three ... in the three minute bell, you got ... I think it was fifteen minutes you had to stay ... we had to stay after school for every minute we were late on the bell. But that was just an example. this guy was so authoritarian. But anyway, that ... we organized

around the Kent State situation. And I remember the first moratorium march in Washington. My parents wouldn't allow me to go. Most of my friends had gone. When I was in college, I was in the first class... they had no Women's Studies class at that time, but I was in the very first ... very first class that was the, like, test class to see if there was going to be women's studies classes in the ... in the ... in the University. And of course, after that there were and have been since. And ...

J. What ... Did they do history or literature or what, mostly?

E. It was more like an overview. There was a woman who was a scholar from, I believe, somewhere in Ohio or Illinois, and she was well known. And I don't remember her name, but she came ... she was hired to come up and teach the course. It was ... I would say it was a combination of history and literature and kind of an overview.

J. Yeah. So you decided that you didn't know much about the world, and where did that lead you?

E. Well, it was not a good time in my life. I ... One of the things that our department .. The head of the Art Department was a photography teacher and he was married to a woman who had family in a place in Mexico,--a little village in Mexico. And so, my ceramics teacher and this art tea-- ... this photography teacher organized a trip to Mexico during the summer for a ... for some art students who wanted to go down there and get some credit while being down there. And that was the impetus for me to ... Well, that was part of the impetus for me to realize I didn't know very much about the world, 'cause it was really ... You know? , I was out of the country and I was ... We had classes ... We stayed in this little village where this teacher's family was from--teachers' wife's family was from, and we had classes for three days and then we had four days to be out on our own. So it was really my first time kind of really on my own. And I kind of realized the world was a much bigger place. And I also had .. The ceramics teacher was pressing me, when I got back to Minnesota, to--you know--kind of make a decision about how committed I was to--you know--following a path in ceramics. And at the time, the students who did well were encouraged and did go to graduate school. And then, upon completing graduate school, they usually got teaching jobs at some well-known university or college, and then had a studio, and then did shows and ... So I was ... I was an undergraduate and I was young,--I was very young,--and I was ... You know? He was

mostly working with graduate students in this serious kind of way so he ... And I remember even once, I think, he said to me, "Shit or get off the pot,"--you know? Pardon the expression, but it's you know? I had to ... You know, I was ... I felt very pressured to make up my mind. And in feeling pressured, I didn't--you know,--that made it even harder for me, and I did not want to .. At that time, I did not want to commit myself probably to anything, but specifically, to following that particular path.

J. Um-hum.

E. So what happened ... What I did was--which is something I'm not particularly proud of,--but what I did was I didn't finish college. I mean, I remember I ... It's funny. I remember I used to laugh about the people who made it through four years and then, like, had--you know--half a dozen credits left and dropped out. I

...

J. Um-hum.

E. It was not my ... not my conscious intention to be ... to drop out. However, what I did was I got ... I was not taking care of myself very well and I got mono. I went to summer school and then I--you know,--to make up some credits. I kept taking art history courses and it was so ... The ... the work we had to do reminded me of high school. We had to write papers and it was really boring to me. It was not interesting to me at all. It was not something I wanted to do, so I kept getting incompletes. And I piled up enough incompletes so that I didn't have the requirements I needed to graduate. I was lacking thirteen credits. And I went to summer school and I ... I I couldn't face that I didn't want to do this any more. So anyway, I didn't finish school and I went home, and I ...--you know,--I told my parents ... I felt so ashamed that I didn't finish that I told my parents my degree was coming in the mail. Of course, it wasn't, but--you know--and after a while, they knew it. But anyway,

J. Um-hum.

E. I went ... the bottom line is that I worked a lot of odd jobs. I lived at my parents' house and worked a lot of odd jobs, and I ... I started looking for ... I started trying to--quote--"find myself." I mean, I didn't really think of it that way, at the time. But in hindsight ...

J. Um-hum.

5

E. And through the process of doing a lot of different things,--one of them being therapy and the other one ... I finally realized that I needed to--you know--get those thirteen credits taken care of, and I went to community college. And the funny thing was that, even after I went to community college in ... in Connecticut to get ... to take the courses,--which also, at the time, was difficult for me because school was something I didn't want to have any part of,--I ... even after I had the courses I needed, I still waited till I contacted the University and--you know ... It was a couple of years when they told me--you know--I had already ... I thought I didn't even have the credits finished that I needed and it turned out that I did. And then ...

J. So did you finally get your degree?

E. Yeah, I finally got my degree. In 1978.

J. In 1978.

E. They sent me the certificate saying that I had a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the University of Minnesota.

J. So what ... what jobs led you to ... to the realization that you wanted to go into the ... How did you end up in the apprenticeship program of the Plumbers?

E. Okay. Well, ... I ... I guess everything I did between ... in my twenties, which ... everything I did when I was in my twenties led me to the aware--finally led me to the awareness, when I reached my thirties, that I did not have any skill,--

J. Um-hum.

E. any specific skill or ... or I did not have ... It's not that I didn't have any specific skills, I didn't have what I needed to have a career. And I thought to myself, if I want to ... And everything I was doing was either something that I didn't enjoy and/or there was no money,

J. Um-hum.

E. and I was really surviving really minimally,--you know,--working--you know--minimum wage kind of jobs, and a lot of times, having to work more than one job at a time to ... just to survive. And most of the things that I really wanted to do,--which is why I would work three or four jobs,--didn't involve money, but they were

things that I needed money to do. And so I thought: Well, I have to find a way to have a lucrative livelihood. And I'm in my thirties. I need to get myself trained. And I always liked doing physical work so ... I worked for four years at this feminist vegetarian restaurant in Bridgeport, Connecticut, called Blood Root. And that was a wonderful experience, but I was always a part-time worker there and ... But that really ... that I thought maybe that I was going to end up--you know--staying, becoming a par--. That was a ... They were organized on the basis of being a collective, and I thought that--you know--I might end up being a partner. But it didn't happen that way. So I ... that's really what I ... That's what I was doing right before I realized--you know--to myself ... I was living in Connecticut, and the things ... the extra ... the additional activities that I wanted to have in my life and other skills I wanted to learn were ... were things they were doing in New York City. So I thought: Well, I think I want to move to New York City, and I need to ... I want to get a ... a job in ... in a trade union because that's where I'll get trained, and that's where I'll possibly have the opportunity of ?? livelihood.

J. So how did you get the idea ... I mean, it seems fairly ... a large jump from going to school and ... and majoring in art and being raised up in ... in Greenwich,--in Old Greenwich,--to the trades. So what ... what was happening? How did your awareness of what was going on in New York City ... How did you learn about that?

What did you hear that attracted you?

E. Well, I ... I ... It's not ... I skipped a lot. It's not really a large jump because, when I was a kid ... When I was a young teenager,--you know--it was always a big deal for me to go to New York, and I used to--you know ... I mean, I'd tell my parents that I was going to meet somebody at the train and--you know--I'd go in there by myself. I mean, I thought New York was the place,--you know? And I always used to say to myself,--you know,--well, I'd like to live there. And the other thing is that--you know,--my parents were both fairly ... because they were both educated,--I think the reason is because they were both educated, they ... they and they had interests in cultural kind of things,--they also took us to ... They took us to New York. they took us to plays. They took us on vacations to see dif--you know,--to go different places in the country.

J. So ... so what was happening in New York that you heard

about that ... that made you think of going into a trade union and an apprenticeship program?

E. Well, I don't think it was that I ... I'm trying to think now. I got ...

J. Did you see stories about women going into the trades or hear about NEW (Nontraditional Employment for Women) or ...

E. No, I ... not initially. I ... When I ... When I was working at Blood Root, the women at Blood Root owned a house that they rented out, in addition to the restaurant they owned. And this woman named Phyllis Chesler came up to the restaurant. And she was working on a book. She ... I became friendly ... I was renting part of the house. There was a small apartment in the house that I was living in, at the time. And she rented the rest of the house to work on her book and I became friendly with her. And I helped her ... She asked me to help her with some of the research on the book. And she was working on--Oh boy! It was ... It was a chapter on women and violence, and I ... it was really interesting to me. So anyway, we became friendly.

J. Um-hum.

E. And after she left Blood Root, she lived in Brooklyn so I used to ... I continued--you know--having contact with her and that was ... she was one of the reasons I used to go to New York. I was ... I had a little Volkswagon Bug and I used to drive into New York about four or five times a week. I had met a woman who,--a deaf woman at the time, that I became close with, and so ... And I ... and I also was going to martial arts classes at the Women's Karate School in Brooklyn.

J. Um-hum.

E. So really what happened was, at the Women's Karate School, I met a woman who was a carpenter, and she was the one who told me that the Plumbers Union was giving out applications. And she told me,--you know--to go stand in line--you know--overnight,--you know--and she said she would come and stand in line with me. And I thought that was really ...

J. What was her name? Do you remember?

E. Susan ... It'll come to me. I ... I forget her last name. But anyway, ...

J. So you did that?

E. Well, what happened was I ... I thought to myself: Well, if this woman who I ... who's basically just an acquaintance, is going to do this for me, I could is willing to do this for someone she hardly knows, I could do this for myself. I remember thinking that. And what ... what ...

J. And what did you think about the idea of being a plumber? I mean, did you investigate, what does this involve and ...

E. No. No.

J. But you didn't think,--you know--like immediately, I can't do this.

E. No. I just ...

J. A lot of people, I think, would think I can't do this.

E. No. I thought: I want to go for something that is going to get ... is going to get me a lucrative livelihood.

J. Um-hum.

E. And I ... I ... I just remember ... I did not do any research other than this woman telling me she'd come and stand in line with me, and I thought that was really great. And she ... Actually, I had started living in New York. I ... that summer,--the summer that I was going to stop working at Blood Root,--I had a newspaper delivery route. I worked for a pizza shop, and I did house sitting and house cleaning. And then ... because my work at Blood Root was part-time so I could fit in all these other part-time jobs.

J. Yeah.

E. But anyway, I ... I what I did was, I got together enough money to pay the first ... security and first month's rent on a ... on an apartment.

J. Where?

E. In Brooklyn, in Park Slope.

J. Um-hum.

E. Phillis Chesler lived in Park Slope and the Karate School was in Park Slope, and so ... My parents had moved to California for three years 'cause my father was still working, and part of the deal with this company was to go to California. So what I did was, I went ... I was house sitting ... Right before I went to California, I was house sitting for some women that were involved in the Women's Music Festival and ... up in Connecticut. And so I went up there ... I moved all my stuff to New York.

J. Um-hum.

E. I went up there. Then I went to California and came back from California and moved into this apartment. And it's pretty nutty when I think about it now, but I moved to New York with just the first months' rent paid. And I had no money and no job;--

J. So ...

E. no bank account ... Nothing. I ... I ... This woman said she would go stand in line with me, and that was like a really big deal to me. So it was October 1st, 1985, and she ended up not standing in line with me. She called me and told me that she was sick and ... But that's when I said to myself: Well, if she was willing to do this for me, I could do it for myself. So, actually, I was delivering pizzas, at the time, still, and I went to ... so I came down to New York at 6:30 in the morning to stand in line.

J. Um-hum.

E. I remember parking my car way over on the west side and walking to the line on 26th Street. And it was already three blocks long. I ...

J. And were there women there that you saw,--any women?

E. Well, the only woman I saw was this woman who was stand-- ... She was up from Florida visiting, and she was an older woman, and she was standing in line to make sure her grandson got an application. The line was three blocks long when I got there, and I stood in the line for nine hours. And ...

J. What kind of exchanges did you have with the males,--with the men on line?

E. I didn't really talk to anybody.

J. They didn't talk to you?

E. I didn't talk to anybody. I mean, I don't ... I don't remember. I just remember being really focused on thinking that this was pretty incredible that I was going to get that application. And I stood in the line until three o'clock in the afternoon. It took that long to get to the front of the line. And I got application three hundred and ... I believe it was three hundred and fifty-seven. They were only giving out five hundred. There were police barricades up. See, in the beginning, people were getting off the line. Guys were getting off the line, I guess, to go to the store. And I remember they were catcalling the women on ... who were ... the working women who were walking on the street, 'cause it was a working day. And the police were out there, I guess, to make sure that nothing got really--you know--violent. And there were police barricades up--you know--for the line. And eventually they, they ... at some point they decided,--the police decided that nobody could get out of the line because some of the guys were, like, fighting each other. But I remember, I made a very conscious effort in my mind. I ... You know. I didn't drink anything that morning or eat anything. I didn't eat anything all day because I didn't want to have to pee. (laughs) And I also remember I had my ... I was really interested in the women's tarot,--this women's tarot book I had at the time, and I just kind of used that as a focusing tool. And anyway, when I got the I had ... I had ... Somebody had told me to contact NEW when I was ... Some time passed between ... There was some time that passed between the time I found out about--you know--the October 1st line and October 1st, so I remember I had called NEW. And I was told to--you know--call them back after I had gotten the application. So ...

J. Um-hum. So what was the process? You got to the front of the line and they asked you questions?

E. No. I think I just ... Actually, I shouldn't say no. I don't remember if I was asked questions. I think ... I think I was asked for my, like, social security card and driver's license and birth certificate. Something like that. But I don't remember ... I don't remember anything very significant about that.

J. So you got it. Then what happened after that?

E. Oh well, I got the application. I called NEW and I star-- ... I went over to NEW a couple of times. Well, probably more than a couple of times. But there was a wonderful woman over there. I

believe her name was Terry Gordon. She was working there. She was the, I guess, employment specialist or whatever you would call her, and she ...--you know--they helped us ... There were some other women over there doing appli--trade applications too, and they helped us fill out the application. You know? I remember I had to get like a resume type thing together. And they helped me put the information down so it looked efficient and professional. And they helped me word it in a way that looked--you know--appropriate. And so I sent ... I sent the application in. And then I had ... Can you turn the tape off? Oh, okay. So anyway, NEW helped ... NEW helped me with all the different steps of getting prepared for the different parts of the application process. First, there was the ... sending in the application, and you only had to have a high school diploma or equivalency, you know?

J. Um-hum.

E. that was the bottom line. And then there was an interview. And there was an aptitude test, and there was a physical. And then there was ... And in between each of these things there was maybe six weeks or eight weeks time period.

J. Was there any section of the aptitude test that you had trouble with?

E. No. The kind of preparation I had was really good. They ... We had ... We had to turn over pegs and, with a pencil, we had to do a computer type ... Our computer scored tests was some math and some ... A lot of it was geared towards spacial relations. For example, they gave us pictures of five different shapes, and maybe two were different. And we had to say which ones were different or ... and different things like that. Anyway, the preparation that I received was very good so that when I went into the ... test, I was confident and--you know--not ... not nervous at all.

J. Um-hum.

E. So that was really ... that was really a plus. What was I going to say? Oh, when I went to the interview ... Each time I had to wait for a letter saying that I could go on to the next part of the procedure. And I went ... the interview I went to, I dressed very conservatively. I remember I had a pants suit on and no makeup, and I was only asked three questions. I was asked, did I know the starting wage, and I guessed it to be higher than it was. I thought it was eight dollars an hour. It was only six. It

was six-oh-five when I started, actually. And I was asked if I was afraid of heights and high places, and of course, I said no. Really, I didn't know if I was or not, but I was ... I wanted in so I had better say no. And the other thing I was asked was, was I married. And ...

Side Two

J. Okay.

E. So the third question I was asked was I married. And I was really surprised because when I told them no, I wasn't, they also seemed happy. And I was surprised at that, too, because in most ... most places ... most experiences in my life ... You know, our culture seems geared toward--you know--women who are the wife of somebody, or whatever. But any way ... And I didn't even know until later on that--you know,--asking me if I was married was not legal. They were not supposed to do it. But I,--you know,--at the time it didn't occur to me because I didn't care, you know? I wanted in so bad. Anyway ...

J. So they didn't give you any little lectures about this is a really rough field for ...

E. No, I didn't hear any ... I mean ... I mean, it was so short. I was just so surprised. I was nervous and I--you know--'cause I didn't know what I was going to be asked, you know? I kind of ... It was almost like the feeling like--you know--it was just a formality, like maybe they had already decided--you know,--that I was going to be in. But I didn't know for sure yet,--you know?

J. Um-hum.

E. I had to wait and get--you know--get the letter saying I could get in. And when I got the letter ... I got the letter saying that I could go to school, I received the letter a week later than the day I was supposed to have been in school. And so, I had to make up my first class.

J. Um-hum.

E. And at the time, I was working for a woman cabinet maker. She was not Union. She was somebody I had met at the karate school I was going to, and she lived a few blocks away from where I was living. And,--you know--I ... when ... I remember I went to

the apprentice school for about three and a half months before I was put to work on a plumbing job.

J. And they found the job for you, the Union?

E. Well, eventually. But the significant ... There were some significant conditions to this situation. One was that I had to take a day off from the cabinet making job to go up to the Bronx to go to the apprentice school because the apprentice school was during the day. And everybody who was ... I thought this was really unfa-- ... what was going on was really ... was really unfair from the get go. I mean, they didn't want me in the Union from the get go, in my opinion, because all the guys,--and all the rest of the people in my class were guys,--were all working. I was the only apprentice who was not working. And in general, apprentices are always working in the ... In '86, there wasn't the extreme unemployment that there has been since about 1990. But ...

J. So now that they found their jobs.

E. Well, I ... in hindsight I can say that a lot of them had connections either with their fathers or with--you know--friends of their family.

J. Um-hum.

E. Some of them had been working even before they started apprentice school. Some ... A lot of them were the sons of members already. they ... I went to ... You know, we ... when we went to apprentice school, we had to sign in and we had to put down who we were working for or if we weren't working. And I remember at one time, the teacher asking me if I was ... if I had another job,--if I was working somewhere. And I said yes, I was working for a cabinet maker. And he said, well, at least you're working with tools. And the other thing was that all these guys that were going to work for ... Plumbing contractors hired ... working ... hiring out of Local 2, were getting paid for the day and I ... and they were already on the clock to get their benefits, because you had to work six months. You had to have six months of work time in before you could ... before the contractors would start paying into your benefits. So the first thing was that I wasn't getting paid for the day I went to school.

J. Um-hum.

E. And I had to take time off without pay from the cabinet

making job. And my ... I started working in June, finally, and so my benefits didn't start until December while all these other guys' benefits started in July. I did get my raise in July. I mean, one of the ... Part of the deal was,--and this is part of what attracted me to the Union ... There were two things that attracted me into getting into the Plumbers Union. One was that we got, every six months we got a raise automatically. And at the end of four years, we ... if we went to school and did our best to do what was required of us, we would automatically be given this wonderful --wonderful hourly rate of pay which, at the time, was ... I don't know--was more than twenty dollars an hour. But ...

J. Now, tell me about the ...

E. Let me just tell you the other thing. the other thing was,--and I kind of ... after I got involved in the apprenticeship, X I put it out of my mind,--but I do remember thinking the Union is all around the country,--you know? The Locals are all around the country, and Union--card holding union members with their dues paid up, can travel.

J. Um-hum.

E. and that was ... that was a hot button for me, the idea of traveling to ... working and traveling.

J. Um-hum.

E. Traveling to work.

J. Um-hum.

E. ...but, ...of course, ...when I got involved in the apprenticeship,--you know--I didn't ...--you know,--that kind of was put in the back ... on the back burner.

J. Now tell me about the level of instruction? And how did you find both the instructors relating to you and your fellow students? How did you find the instruction in terms of learning your trade in the apprentice school?

E. Well, the instructors were very good, and the particular instructors that I had were knowledgeable and .. knowledgeable about the subject and knowledgeable about how to communicate it. I was the only female so I was, most of the time, I was not that comfortable with myself because I wasn't used to being in a

classroom with--you know--only men.

J. Um-hum.

E. And I remember a couple of the students were willing to help me out when we had shop. The way that the instruction was divided up was half the day was in classroom training--book learning,--and the other half was in the ... the shop. And by shop I mean they .. we had a ... part of the school, aside from the classrooms, was work areas where we could work on different projects. and they gave us different projects to do that were like mini ... mini little samples of the kinds of different material and tools we'd be working with when we were on the job. I mean, there is no ... no replacement for actually on the job,

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J. On the job.

E. because many of the ... I mean, I learned many things that I didn't ... that I never got to work on until quite a long time later. And quite a long time later, I didn't really understand how to do that particular thing until I had done it enough.

J. Um-hum.

E. And the way you really learn is by the repetition of doing. So ... And in the context ... I mean, the context of a little shop is very different from the context of an actual building project. And the other thing is that in ... in a school environment they teach you as if you were in ideal circumstances, and none of the jobs were ever ideal circumstances. And none of the people that I worked with ... I mean, it was all in degrees, you know? ... Some people were more ... Some of the guys that I worked with were more concerned about looks and more concerned about the technique than others. And some guys I worked with--you know--were either less skilled or less concerned about the skill of their work, even though the pipe would end up functioning after it was installed. So there was quite a ... I mean, I learned in the field there was quite a variation on what could happen after we all supposedly received the same training.

J. Yeah.

E. Yeah. So ...

J. So now, how ... how did you survive that isolation of

being the only female? And did you develop relationships,--cronies that you paled around with? Or ...

E. Well, no. I sur-- ... I guess I would say I survived by ... by stubborn persisting, persevering, strong willed state of mind that--you know? I had a bee line for the end of the road, which was the journeyman's card, which I said to myself: Well, nothing's going to--you know--get in my way. Or whatever gets in my way is not going to stop me from getting that journeyman's card. Because once I had a journeyman card, I had a ticket, in my mind,--you know--

J. Um-hum.

E. a ticket to having a certain value that was greater than, most likely, any other job I could receive,--you know--with the kind of training. So ... So,--you know,--that was ... that was the bottom line.

J. Um-hum.

E. But in terms of day to day stuff, I--you know,--I ... I thought if I did everything I was supposed to do and then some, I would ... that would put me in the right light in the eyes of the men. But,--you know,--a lot of things I thought were not ... I ended up learning, were not really the way things happened.

J. Um-hum.

E. but I did ...NEW had .. a support ... NEW had, I think they were monthly meetings, NEW had meetings where tradeswomen came together, so--you know,--I went to those meetings. And,--you know--there were other people in my life--you know--who were supportive towards me, even if they weren't ... you know,--even if they weren't involved with me in terms of the ap--being an apprentice, they were involved with me as a person,--you know. You know, I didn't tell my parents because--you know--my parents never would have been ... My paren-- ... I think my paren-- You know, I never heard this from my parents now this way, but I do believe that my parents were expecting me to go to college to meet a man to get married and be a housewife and have kids because, unfortunately, my father used to tease me when I was a kid. It was a little bit painful. He used to say,--you know,--you're going to grow up to be a bad lady, ha, ha. And my ... And then, later on in life--you know--I heard from my father: Well,--you know,--when ... when are we going to hear the pitter patter of little feet.

And--you know--I said,--you know,--you'd better speak to my brother (laughs) about that.

J. Did your ... Did your parents ever ... I mean, eventually you told them that you're a plumber,--a journeyman plumber-- and ...

E. Yeah. I don't remember exactly when I told them. My parents were in .. Actually ... Actually, my parents did send me money, I remember, the first year I was in New York. I shouldn't say they weren't supportive because it's true, people give their support in different ways,--you know. And sometimes they won't necessarily come out and say, well, we like what you're doing,--you know. We applaud you. But,--you know--they'll do things like send money or ... So I remember, I--you know,--I remember the struggle in New York City in the beginning because I was so broke. Sometimes when I started the apprenticeship, I didn't ... I remember, when I started the apprenticeship, I was partnered ... When I ... Actually, after I started the apprenticeship and I finally got put to work, I remember going to Pete Marzec, who at that time, was the head of the apprenticeship school. And he would say ... I * remember one time, he said to me, Well, the Union's not exactly open arms to women. He said, You have to be a pest. And nobody before had told me that,--you know? So I'd ... I called the Union hall every day for a week and I didn't get to speak to any of the Business Agents. I mean, it finally dawned on me after a couple of months and I wasn't ...--you know,--nobody was telling me anything about going to work, and I needed to go to work,--you know--that I'd better say something to somebody. So he,--you know,--he said, You have to be a pest. You have to call every day. So one day for a week I called every day, and usually I only got the secretary and I left my name. So then the following week, I was at apprentice school and I was given a message that I was, the following X Monday,--it was June 16th, 1986,--I was supposed to go ... go to meet another journeyman plumber ... journeyman plumber at a job site over on ... I think it was on First Avenue, on the east side in the '30s. It was 38th Street. It was the Carey building, anyway. That was my first job. But ... Oh, I just lost my train of thought. Darn. Anyway ...

J. Tell me about that job? How did he receive you and ??

E. Oh, yeah. What I was going to say ... that's what I was going to say is ... I was ... Sometimes I was so broke that I didn't even have money for coffee and I was too ashamed to ask the guy to loan me money, you know? And the guy I was working with, he

was like twenty-six years ... I was thirty-one. He was twenty-six years old and he had been a journeyman for a couple of years already. And he had been a foreman for a while. And he was ... he was ... I was ... I mean, there's ... there's good in every--. There's ... Sometimes, you can find good out of almost everything. The good ... He liked to brag about how much he knew. And the good thing of that was that I got to learn a lot of stuff from him because he did know a lot about the trade, and he did like to tell other people what he knew. So ... But anyway, my ... I was just going to say that I remember that, before I actually got into the apprenticeship, I had ... my parents had sent me money. So I would guess that, in that way, they were ... They were in California at the time,--they were supportive.

J. Um-hum.

E. they sent me a check for five hundred dollars. That was like a big deal. (laughs) But anyway, when I got ... when I started working--you know,--I just tried really hard to do everything I was told to do. And I remember thinking to myself, Well ... When a delivery came, I'd grab the ...--you know--I mean, within reason. But I,--you know--if there were two boxes and I knew I could carry both, I'd grab the one that was heavier,--you know--just because I had this idea that I would have to prove myself,--you know. I'd have to be there on time. I'd have to show up for everything. I'd have to--you know--get along with the guy that I was ... was teaching me. I was in ... in the Alterations Division of this company which was buildings that were being renovated, where the outside structure wasn't changing, just--you know--maybe a couple of floors on the inside of the building. And we were ... So in those situations, generally, there were ... there were teams of two. And usually it was the journeyman with an apprentice. And the journeyman was the foreman or the boss, so to speak.

J. Um-hum.

E. And so, I had to ... I knew right away I had to get along with the guy

J. Um-hum.

E. because I ... I needed to learn, and I needed the guy to teach me whatever he knew. So, fortunately, this guy knew a lot and I got along with him pretty well. I really ... I mean, part of it, I guess ... In the beginning, I didn't know anything and I

didn't know what to expect, so in a way that was a good thing. But,--you know,--down the road--in hindsight, I realize that--you know--I did a lot of things ... I mean, the way I ... the way I carried myself was ... was much so I could get through my apprenticeship,--so much so I could get along with whoever I was working with. And even if I didn't necessarily want to listen to them,--you know,--listen to all the stories they wanted to tell me and everything they wanted to talk about, that that was ... kind of came along with the territory. I mean, nobody said,--you know--nobody sat me down and said, Well, these are the rules. You know, when you get partnered up with somebody, you have to listen to them no matter what they say. And nobody said to me, you don't have to listen to them.

J. Yeah. Yeah.

E. so,--you know--me always ... You know, my brother was ... You know, as a kid, my brother was the one who was--you know,--the rebellious one. I was the one who ... You know,--my rebellion really was limited by the fact that I always wanted my parents' approval, so I always was ... If they said no, well, I'd kick and scream, but I didn't run away from home, you know? It was like that deal. So the same in the t--. I think that that was my behavior pattern already established, so that when I became an apprentice, I was--you know,--I wanted and needed their approval in my own mind, so I ... I thought, Well, I have to ... In order ... In order to earn their respect, I have to listen to ...--you know,--I have to try to participate in whatever conversation's present and--you know,--do the best I can to make myself likeable.

J. Um-hum.

How ... How long did you work with him, about?

E. I worked with that guy for nine months and we got taken from job to job. The shop would send a truck and we ... we would have ... We had a gang box, a big ... a large tool box that was usually on wheels, that we would bring to the truck. And we got sent to a lot of little jobs ... I say little, I mean just a couple of floors, where ... And the time that we stayed on any particular job varied, but we usually would install all the piping that would go in before the walls went up. And then, when we were done installing that piping, we leave and go to another job and do the same thing. We were up in the Empire ... We were in ... We were in the Empire State Building one time that I remember,--you know ... One of the things I appreciated about the guy that I

what I did. I used every possible avenue of complaint filing that I could use, meaning ... We had a ... I filed grievances in my union under the ... The only ... There was ... Really, sexual harassment was not addressed in the Collective Bargaining Agreement of Local 2, but there was a ... there was one little, very brief sentence about not non--about not discriminating, so I used that. And I also filed with the Human Rights Commission, and I filed with the federal ...

J. State? Oh, federal.

E. the federal government. Yeah. The ... the one ... Well, I had ... I filed ... I ended up filing quite a few complaints. But there only ... There were basically two that were significant. And the one ... the one I want to mention is ... Well, I guess I'll mention both of them. But one of them was ... I was ... I was specifically shaping up at jobs that were federal ... that I knew were federally funded, and one was the VA Hospital job. And I went to the ... I went ... I did ... I did write to the superin-- ... I did contact the superintendent and I contacted the Business Agent and I went to the job site a couple of times, and I had all that in writing. I ... I filed a complaint asking the government to look into the fact that possibly that contractor was not--you know--up ... up to speed on the amount of women that were employed. So what happened was, I got a ... Did I get a letter? I think I got a letter from the contractor saying that I could come down and fill out an application to go to work. Now, so I did that. I went to the contractor's office and filled out an application. Now, I don't really under-- ... I mean, I didn't think about it at the time because I was ... I wanted to go to work so badly. But most ... most of my co-- ... most men I know do not have to fill out applications in order to go to work. So it did kind of seem odd to me, and in hindsight I know what was going on. They, because I had filed a complaint and they were being investigated, they had to show that they were taking applications from women, so they needed a writ-- They needed a written record. So I went down there. I filled out an application. And the person I spoke to gave me--who I believe was the EE-- was an EEO officer for that contractor,-- gave me the impression that I was going to be work ... going to work. She even said to me, "Well, where do you want to work?" I mean, I didn't even know where all the jobs were, much less that I had ... might have a choice.

J. Um-hum.

E. But anyway, I was given the impression that I was going to

go to work. So then, I remember, I went to ... As a matter of fact, I went to an AUD meeting that was ... I believe it was in Michigan. This was in April of ... March or April of 19--I think it was 1990--1991. It might have been 1991. Anyway, I came back from that ... I came back from that meeting, and there was a letter in my mailbox from the contractor, and the letter said ... the letter said that this ... that ... that they were not ... they were not going to hire me because ... until ... because they realized that I was the one who filed the complaint and the com-- the comp--until the complaint was resolved,--you know,--they wouldn't consider me for employment. So I thought to myself, Well, gee, they just put it in writing. Bingo!--you know? Here we go! We're on a roll! I took this down to the fellow at the government office and I ... I did indeed have a case,--you know? Here was ... Here was the contractor admitting in bold face that my supposed ... my supposed right to complain,--to ask for an investigation,--to ask just for the--you know--company ... the company's business dealings to be checked out,--

J. Um-hum.

E. just my right to ask was the reason that I was not going to be hired. And anyway, so the upshot of that was that I did indeed have a case. And since this contractor did primarily federally funded contracts: sewage treatment plants and VA hospitals and jobs like that, that that was their main ... their main source, and that the clock was going to start ticking because they had hired four men after they had taken my application and told me that they were going to ... were going to hire me. So from that what ... What then happened was, in September ... Yeah, it was 1991, because in September of 1991, I got a call and I was told that I could go to work. They wanted to stop the clock on the back pay they were going to have to give me from the date that they should have hired me. So I went to work and I worked for six weeks, and then I was laid off. And then the ... the case that I had ... the case that I had initiated was, as it turned out, was to take some time, and it wasn't till 1994 ... I was traveling. I had been in New York ... I had been in New York all of 1992 until the fall when I started going out of town. And I had been back in New York from 1993 till--let's see,--what was it?--March of 19--May of 1993 to March of 1994 I was also in New York, and then I decid-- I went out of town again to work in 1994. And when I was in Kansas and I was visiting a Union hall to look for work in Kansas, I got a ... my parents called the Union hall that I ... My parents who live in upstate New York, ... I had told them I was going to Kansas, and I had ... I must have told them the union halls that I

042

was going to visit. I don't re--. You know I was staying at a motel, and I had rented a car and I was driving to these different Union halls to see if I could go to work. and my parents had called one of the Union halls that I was visiting to find out about work, and my parents had left a message saying I should call home. And when I called home, I found ... there was a message for me that I was supposed to contact the lawyer about this case.

J. Um-hum.

E. and my choice, at the time, was ... Actually, the ... the case was ... They were ... They wanted to get the ... They finally wanted to get the case resolved, and it turned out that they had gone to a ... they had tracked down my ex-neighbor. I mean, they had tracked down a neighbor in the ... in the building that I used to live in to get a hold of my parents, to get a hold of me. And apparently, they had gone through some--you know--some ... some inconvenience to get a hold of me. But meanwhile, I had been in New York for quite a while and nothing was done on the case. But what ... the bottom ... The upshot of that was I didn't go to work in Kansas. I went to work in St. Louis. So from St. Lou--from going to work in St. Louis, I had to decide over the phone with this lawyer, would I accept the settlement for the \$24000, which was the four months of back pay, or did I want to come back to New York and--you know ... if the case would go to trail, I would have to come ...

J. ??

E. Yeah. And then I was told, well, if I litigated the ... even if I won the case, the ... the contractor could appeal it, and then they they might ..win the appeal, or it would be a long time before I'd see any money.

J. So you took the settlement.

E. Yeah. I made ... I made ... It was a no win situation. I .. I got ... I ended up, after taxes, getting \$11,000, and it all paid .. All it did was pay debts. And--you know--the company ... And I had to sign a thing saying ... I believe I signed a ... I have to go back and look at the papers again. But I, if I remember correctly, I saved ... signed a thing saying that the company was released of any wrong doing. So they went about their business.

J. So what company was that?

E. Oh, that was F&B,--F&B Mechanical. The other situation was the .. the ... I'd filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission against the contractor that I'd worked for as an apprentice. I mean, there was just ... I mean, there was just so much harassment. And I had testified in the ... in the New York ... the Commission hearings ... The Commission on Human Rights had hearings. Out of those hearings ... *

J. Well, you testified. Right?

E. Oh yeah, I testified.

J. What did you testify to?

E. I testified about the harassment in ... that I had experienced during my apprenticeship. And I had worked for one contractor. and I had filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission,--you know--alleging that the contractor had laid me off because I was female and not because of ... and not because of lack of work,

J. Um-hum.

E. because there were many cases where they'd kept guys that had worked for them their entire apprenticeship and went on to keep them, even though things were getting slow. And I had tons and tons of examples of harassment. And that case went to trial in ... Oh, actually, we had a settle-- ... Well, actually, that case went to a hearing in ... I filed that case in 1990, and in--let's see,--1991 there was a ... the end of 19--the end ... 1991 there was a ... a hearing. And ...

J. This is the Human Rights Commission?

E. Yeah. and I ... I agreed to a settlement of \$18000 and ... in damages, and I got thirty days' work. They had to put me back to .. They had to put me back to work for a minimum of thirty days. So thir--thirty days to the T, I got laid off. *

J. Um-hum. Did they harass you when you were there? They left you alone.

E. No. they were told not to. They were told not to harass me. They were ... And then, when I got laid off after thirty days, I was ... I filed another complaint saying that I had been laid off because they were ... I'd be fired ... I'd been laid off unfairly

(14)

because I was--you know--they were still discriminating in that they just did their thirty days and that was it. And that ... that ... that part of the complaint has not yet been resolved. But anyway, in 1992 wasn't working for ten months, and I ... Oh, just as an up note on that, I also ... I ... I instigated some other complaints. And what the Union would do is they ... There were a couple of other women in the Local,

J. Um-hum.

E. and those women got to go to work on the jobs that they--you know--that I had been ... that I had been filing complaints on. Also, I did get one ... In ... When I ... In 1990 I did get one job because I ... I did ... I did get one job because I shaped it and shaped it and shaped it. And finally, I called up the Business Agent and he said ... Well, actually, I was in his office. I kept bugging the Business Agent. And I was in his office and he did ... this was not a federal ... I mean, this shows you how warped the whole situation was. This was not a federally funded job. But I sat across from the Business Agent and I ... he called up the contractor and said, You got to put a woman down there. Okay? So I got sent down.

J. Um-hum.

E. And I think that was in the beginning before I really got involved in all the political activity. And I think the guy did that maybe just to get me off his case. I really don't know. but I worked on ... I got ... I was on that job for four months. That was 52 Duane ... 52 Duane Street. It was a ... 52 Duane Street? It was a fifty ... over fifty story condominium. ★

J. Yeah. A friend of mine lives there now.

E. Oh, yeah.

J. I'll have to tell her that you worked on that building.

E. Yeah.

J. Yeah.

E. Well, anyway, that job I ... I went to the shop steward and I told the shop steward that there had to be a shanty. And--you know,--I went ... I ... Some of the details I've forgotten, but I was on a ... I ... I went on a serious ... I was on a X

245

serious thing there to make sure that that shanty was put in. And I finally got the shanty. And there was a lot of harassment on the way to getting the shanty, but I got the shanty. And ...

J. Now, was the shanty for you,--for a female, or was it for Plumbers? What was ...

E. Well, I was the only female on the job. (both laugh)

J. So what ... Who was the shanty for?

E. Well, the ... the ... See, all the men had a change .. to change clothing ...

J. Yeah.

E. Well, the men in each trade had their own shanty to .. to change their clothes,--you know.

J. Um-hum.

E. this was a new construction job. And our Collective Bargaining Agreement--you know--there's supposed to be a ... I forget the exact wording. At the time, I knew it very well: satisfactory facilities--you know--for the men.

J. Um-hum. Um-hum.

E. And, of course, it didn't say men and women. But anyway, I ... I went to the steward, and I was persistent with the steward. And I told the steward that ... I mean, I got ... I told the steward that ... that ... that they needed to do this; that I wasn't going to take no for an answer. And I ...

J. How long did it take?

E. Well, I was only on the job for four months, so I think it took like the first month I was there.

J. Um-hum.

E. Okay? And anyway, so that was, like, a significant accomplishment because I don't think in our ... I think in our Local's history, that was the first time.

J. Probably the only time.

146

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E. No. Actually, it was not the only time.

J. No?

E. When I as I said, I was the ... In 19--let's see,--in 1992, I went out of town. And I went out of town as a result of meeting an iron worker in my neighborhood. I'd been out shaping with a ... I used to go out shaping with other women, women who, maybe, didn't want to go by themselves. I went by myself a lot.

J. Um-hum.

E. But I went ... I told women, like, at the NEW meetings, I used to go there and I used to say,--you know,--anybody who wants to go shaping, who doesn't want to go by themselves, I'll go with you. And even ... I'll go with you even if we're going to a job where only you have the possibility of getting on. I mean, that was no problem with me.

J. Um-hum.

E. I'd help anybody who wanted to do whatever. And so, there was a couple of women that I shaped with periodically,--you know,--two carpenter women that I shaped with, individually. And anyway, one of the women, I remember, ... She had a car and we went out ... We ... I used to only ... We used to only shape ... I used to always mostly only shape early in the morning. but on this particular occasion, we had a car and we went to some place out in Brooklyn, places I wouldn't have gone to for me. But--you know,--carpenters can work ... Local ... Lo-- ... The other Plumbing Local works in Brooklyn. My Local doesn't.

J. Yeah.

E. But her ... she could work in this other ... She was trying to get on in a couple of the jobs, so we went. And when I came back, she dropped me off. It was, like, three o'clock in the afternoon. And I was in ... I was just by my neighborhood, and this guy came up and started talking to me. And he ... I was dressed in my work clothes. I always, when I went to a job site,--no matter what time of day it was,--I always had a hard hat,--you know,--blue shirt, blue jeans, construction boots,--all that. So he saw me in the neighborhood and he came up and started talking to me. And he ... he thought I was an iron worker. Because it turned out he was an iron worker and he'd come back from being out on the West Coast, working somewhere. And so, anyway, he was the

one who told me about the first job that I went out of town on.

J. Um-hum.

E. He told me about a job in Erie, Pennsylvania, at a paper mill. And he said there was a shut down, meaning ... meaning that the plant was just closing down and hiring ... The ... the Union contractors were hiring travelers, people with Union cards in other trades from out of town, and that, if I called the Business Agent up there, maybe I could get on. ★

J. Um-hum.

E. and so, that's what I did. I called the Business agent in Erie, Pennsylvania, and he said: You're from where? You want to do what? (laughs) And he said: Well, it's only four tens, meaning four days for ten hours. And I had been out of work for so long I was really desperate to go to work. And I said I really need to go to work. He said ... And I had already checked out the Am Track. I didn't have a car, but I'd checked out the Am Track and I knew I could get there by 5:30 the next morning.

J. Um-hum.

E. And so he said, Well, when ... Well, call me back so I ... in a couple of hours. So called him back and he said: When can you be there. And I said 5:30 the next morning. So he said: All right. You can come. And I was, like, Oh, this is great,--you know. I got myself a job.

J. Um-hum.

E. So I got ... I went to Penn Station. I took my sleeping bag,--you know,--my work boots and all that, and I ... the next morning I was in Erie, Pennsylvania at 5:30. And I went ... I found the local coffeehouse that was open twenty ... coffee ... diner that was open twenty-four hours, 'cause that's where the early birds go to have their coffee before they go to work. And I had my flannel shirt on. It was October. And a guy came in and sat down next to me and I started talking to him and he was going the same place I was so I got a ride. And then I got there. And the first fifteen minutes that I was there, I found out ... I found more out about what was going on around the country in the construction business than I had the whole time I'd been in Local 2. And so I soon discovered that there was, like, this little network of ... I don't know if I'd call it underground, but it

wasn't underground. It was just,--you know,--when you go to a job and there's travelers or boomers, as they're called, trades workers,--and this even cuts across trade lines, but in this case it was plumbers and pipe fitters,--mostly pipe fitters. We're in the same International, the Plumbers and the pipe Fitters. They ... When there are people from all over the country who've been traveling around, they're ... the information that they ... that they ... you can't get in a book, the information they know about what's going on in other places in the country where they've been: who's hiring ... all this kind of stuff. Plus, our ... the International gives all the Union officials what's called a roll call book, which has the ... all the listings by state and also by Local number, of the names of the Business Agents, the address of the union hall and the phone numbers, and also when the union meeting is. So anyway, they don't give this to the members. They kept this in their office and most people don't know about it. But I was able to get a very old copy of a roll call book, which is very ratty right now 'cause I've held onto it for such a long time. But I learned then that I could ... I could get jobs on my own. I still had to be dispatched out of the Union hall, but I could make direct contact with the Business Agents around the country. And I also learned that ... With this roll call book, I had their names. This book comes out twice a year, by the way, but ... and it's only given to Union officials. But it has the names of the Business Managers. So I could call up on the phone and say ...

J. And it's all the Unions?

E. This is for the Plumbers and Pipe Fitters only.

J. ??

E. The iron work-- ... Now, the Iron workers have something which I believe that we should have, and we don't have. Their .. Their ... their International magazine, which goes to all the members and comes out every month, once a year has a directory issue and they ... And all the members are entitled to this information. And we're ... I mean, all the members of the United Association of Plumbers and Pipe Fitters are entitled to this information also, but the International does not make this information readily available to its members. the Iron workers Local sends every member who gets the magazine ... the monthly magazine, the yearly directory issue, which not only lists the names of the business Managers and their ... their office and home phone numbers, but it also lists all of the wages,--the wages and the benefits of all the Locals around the country. They also have

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199

an 800 number--a hotline number,--which anybody call call from anywhere around the country ... And not all the Locals participate in it. A Local may be ... have work but may not put itself on the hotline. But you can call up on a touch tone phone and, like, it'll tell you by state, which Locals have work. So any boomer,--any Iron worker boomer,--can call up and fin--you know. If they want to go to work somewhere,--you know,--there'll be a message on there saying: In Alabama, we need three connectors or five rod men or six welders for a job that's supposed to last for two months. Drug test required. Call Business Agent so-and-so, and here's the number, before coming. Now, our International has nothing like that and it's really a shame. But anyway, I went to this four/ten job in Erie, Pennsylvania. It turned out to be one eight hour day and four twelve hour days, 'cause everything always changes in the construction business. And then I went back ... We got laid off on a Saturday. I hooked up with ... the two people I went to work with ... I was really surprised. the foreman singled me out first and he said, when he started handing out the jobs, and said: I hope you don't mind. I have this really easy job. I hope you don't mind that I'm giving it to you. and I need two other people. It's a three person job. and I thought to myself, Oh shoot. And I wanted ... I was going to do whatever the guy told me to do because I was there to go to work, so I said, Sure. that's no problem. Whatever you want me to do. And he ... he said, I need two other guys for this job. who wants to do it? And I'm--you know,--sitting there for a moment, thinking, Oh boy! Nobody's going to volunteer to work with me. And two guys right away raised their hands. And,--you know,--it turned out ... The guy said,--you know ... the guy showed us where we were going to go to work and he said, I don't have the tools and materials for you yet but ... and I don't care what you do. But when I come back here I want you right where you are. So ... And then I be-- ... As it turned out, I became friendly with these two guys, and then I was able to go get a room and ride back and forth to work with them every day. Even though I didn't have a car myself, I could travel with them. they helped me out. and we went back to the Union hall the following Monday to see the Business Agent again. It was ... I remember it really well. We waited all day for the business Agent to come back. We went from like eight o'clock to three o'clock in the morning. Three o'clock in the afternoon, the Business Agent finally came back and he said, Well, who here is a plumber? I have a plumbing job starting down the street and it's supposed to last six months. So I--you know,--I was able to get an apartment over there, and I stayed in Erie for about three and a half months. And,--you know--that was the beginning of--you know--my experience finding out about--you know--being able to work out of town. And

as I said,--you know--I started ... I started practicing the calling Business Agents around the country and saying--you know,--saying--you know,--May I speak to Mr. So-and-so. by having their names, I got ... I was usually able to get them on the phone. And then I'd say: Hi. My name is Elaine Ward and I'm a UA traveler.

J. Um-hum.

E. I've just finished up on my job ... my last job, and I'm looking for my next job,--you know. I heard maybe you have some work. Or if I already knew about a job that they had, I would ask about a specific job. If they said they didn't have anything, I'd ... or if they told me they had a certain number of people on the bench, which means a certain number of people laid off, I would ... I would say: Oh, you must ... Are you sending your guys out anywhere, meaning--you know--where have you been sen-- ... where are you sending them. Or has anybody been calling your Local. And what I found out,--what I learned was that I was not ... It was better if I didn't say I was from New York, and it was better if I didn't say that I was a Plumber because most of the out of town work for travelers in our organization is for pipe fitters. In other words, it's industrial work. Plumbing work is generally work that's connected ... Pipe installations that are connected with systems that are for human consumption or human use,--well, human use. I mean, the pipe fitters work is generally work that's piping systems that are for industrial purposes. *

J. Um-hum.

E. so most of the ... most of the plants around the country: the car plants, the steel mills, the paper mills, the computer chip plants, the power houses,--most of those jobs are all jobs where when they have shut downs or they're doing new construction, they hired pipe fitters, not plumbers. but in most cases around the country, the Locals are combined Locals, so the plumbers and pipe fitters are part of the same Local. And in many cases, if they need extra hands, the Business Agents will put people to work even if they have plumber on their card. I mean, sometimes they told me, Well, I should ... that I should get my card changed to say pipe fitter, but it's never stopped me from getting a job. *

J. Um-hum.

E. In some cases, they have separate lists for plumbers and pipe fitters and they don't let the ...--you know,--they don't,--you know--co-mingle the ... the ... the--you know--let one person

(5)

in ... who has a plumber on his card work in a pipe fitting trade. But anyway, I started to learn--you know--how to go about the business of getting ... not only how to but go ... I started to go about the business of getting myself employed around the country. and what was really terrific is that, for the first time, I did not need my officials in Local 2. and not only did I not need them, but I had also found out that, in most cases, they were useless. the ones from the ...--and I'm not speaking about the ones in office now,--but the ones who were in office before, just before I went out of ... the first time I went out of town in 1992, before I met that iron worker in my neighborhood,

J. Um-hum.

E. I had been in ... I remember being in the union hall, Local 2 office, almost on my knees, begging, begging them to send me somewhere out of town. And I remember the Financial Secretary/Treasurer at the time, saying, Well, do you know that the only place there's work is in Salt Lake City? And do you know how much the wage is? and I said, I don't care how much the wage is,--you know,--send me there. I'll go there. and they still would not pick up the phone and make the call. I think the truth of the matter is that ... that, not only could they ... not only would they not do it, they didn't want to help me. I mean, I've heard stories about how our Local used to send out guys that they didn't want around here,

J. Um-hum.

E. or sending out guys they didn't want to put to work here to get rid of them. And then they'd send out guys who would give the Local a bad name. and plus, because of what was going on there, they did not encourage our ... our people to travel: one, because we couldn't reciprocate,--or maybe they didn't want to reciprocate. but they also did not work on ... Not only did they not work on establishing rapport with other Locals and other Union officials around the country, but my own opinion is that they were really snobby. And because the wages are so much higher here and their ... and the political corruption that was going on at the time, and the greed and the selfishness and the self centeredness, there's no way that ... I mean, they don't even have friend ... they didn't even have a friendly rapport with the guys in Jersey, never mind the guys out in the mid-West, in Ohio or ... I mean, even now, our--you know--our ... in my opinion and my observation, the Local officials in my Local who are ... I believe, we have some people of integrity in the office now, they have a long road

59
 8-10-09
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to hoe to get the image of our Local and the rapport needed with other Union officials in other Locals to a better place.' And also, we don't have work enough even for our own members now, never mind ... Most of the Locals prefer to do business with the immediate Locals; the ones that can reciprocate. and New York has not been able to take in any travelers,--you know--since the very early '80s.

J. Would you say the unemployment rate is around fifty percent in your Local? Or ...

E. Well, if there's six or seven ... If there's six or seven hundred on the out of work list and the ... the Local has three thousand active members. I guess that's how you'd figure the percentage. Six hundred is what, a fifth of three thousand? So that's--you know ... What is that, twenty percent? Is that right?

J. Right.

E. Yeah. Am I doing the figures ... I mean, that's just ... but,--you know ... and people who are ... people who are working don't ... now don't ... There is a list now,

J. Um-hum.

E. and the list started in October of 1994 by lottery. And I've only go-- 1994, that's on--October. We're only a few ... Well, that's two and a half years ago. I've worked once for eleven ... eleven weeks since that list was started. I was on the road for seven months when that list was made. Seven months, I was already on the road when the list was made. I remember. I was at an oil refinery in Lima, Ohio, and I called up in to find out what my number was. And I'd gotten number 373. So it was not until April, 1996, that the number came up for me to go to work. and I worked eleven weeks ... So even though there's six or seven hundred on the work list,

J. Um-hum.

E. some of those people have gone to work. Some of those people ... if you work more ... longer than two weeks, you go to the bottom of the list. I went to the bottom of the list. I was number 602 in June. So because I've learned so much about how to get myself to work, on that Friday I got laid off, the following Monday I had a job to go to in Ohio, and I went to work. So once I learned how to use the system and how to ... how to make myself

friendly with it, I could lose a job ... I could be laid off a job on a Friday and--you know--who cares how many miles away,--I could be working the following Monday, if I wanted to. I was willing to go ...

Tape Three

j. Okay. tape Three, Elaine Ward, after lunch on Saturday, March 29th. So Elaine, now that we're full as fat pigs and we can't move, let's try to think about some of the ways that your crusading has paid off, either for you or for other women in your Local, and the ways that you've connected with other people in the City, in terms of trying to improve conditions on the job, both for yourself and other women or other workers in Local 2.

E. Ask me the beginning part of the question again? Sorry.

J. Well, how ... how ... In what ways do you think there's been a pay off, an improvement,--and some ... some successes,--some kinds of things that have resulted from your crusading?

E. Okay. Well, I think the first thing is awareness. I think ... I think my ... the consciousness of my Local in general is a whole lot better towards women, even though there's still, like, hardly any of us in the Local.

J. Um-hum. Do you feel that ...

E. I think ... I think har-- ... I think the notion of harassment is taken a lot more seriously than it used to be. And,--you know,--regardless of the reasons,--whether they're scared for their pocketbooks or their jobs, or who's the boss, or ... I don't really think that matters so much as the fact that there's more--you know ... There's just ... it's just taken seriously,--you know,--because enough ... enough things have happened where people have made it an issue. And I don't ... I don't think it's ... I mean, I think,--you know,--I certainly helped that way. And I think, in general, all the other women that have--in other walks of life that have come forward to make it an issue. And I think .. And of course, I think, sometimes it's been taken ... Sometimes the intent has been twisted,--you know. In some cases, the media has perverted it.

J. Um-hum.

E. and in some cases, poli--you know,--women who may be

accusing politicians, for example, and the media making a big deal out of that, that's kind of perversion, but ... Anyway, it's become more of an accepted circumstance that women are going to be in jobs where they have to be considered as ... as people worthy of respect and worthy of decent treatment. I know ... I was telling you at lunch that in 1990, I worked on a job in lower Manhattan and persisted to get a shanty,--a changing room.

J. At 52 Duane Street.

E. Yeah. And then,--you know,--in 1993, when I was finally able to get on the courthouse job, there were already five or six women working for Lipsky & Rosenthal, which was the contractor that I'd worked for on Duane Street, and they had a shanty on that job.

J. Um-hum.

E. and then, the company that I was hired by ... to work for, Breslow, they made a shanty also when I ca--. I mean, I didn't get .. I was told when I got on the job that the shanty was going to be built, and then they ... I was told to use Lipsky's shanty until the one that was built was built. And--you know--after ... I was on that job a total of ten minutes. I don't remember how long before they built the shanty, but certainly, I would say, within a month or two of the time I was there they finally got the shanty in. And another ... There were one or two other women that came there after me, so they got to use that too. So,--you know,--that ... I suppose ... I mean, you can definitely say that's a ... that's a pro--a sign of progress,--you know. And I was telling you before, there was a .. a .. there was a clause in the Collective Bargaining Agreement about sexual harassment so that--you know--when I was ... when I filed a grievance in my Local about sexual harassment, the only ... there was just one little line in the Collective Bargaining Agreement about not discrim--the contractors not being allowed to discriminate. And now, there is a little ... there is something in the Collective Bargaining Agreement,--and I wish I had brought one with me, but I didn't,--but there's a ... a paragraph that's more wordy and ... and directs ... and I believe it addresses the is--the term ... It uses the term sexual harassment and addresses the issue more specifically.

J. Now, how did that get in there? I mean, it had to be amended. Somebody had to submit it, or how did it happen?

E. Well, I don't know exactly how ...

J. Um-hum.

E. how the inst-- ... I mean, I was not ... I've not been involved in any of the contract negotiations, but I know that I raised the issue enough in my Local so that ... I know that ... I was also told that the Union officials and maybe the foremen ... I think Lola, as a matter of fact ... She's not alive any more, but she used to run NEW.

J. Yeah. Lola Snyder.

E. Yeah. She was called to do a workshop for those guys at

J. For the staff at ?? Local 2.

E. Oh, you know about ... You know about ...

J. No. But I'm just saying that's who she was doing it for.

E. Oh, yeah. Right. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

J. How did that happen?

E. I don't know. (laughs)

J. Jeez. ?? Lola.

E. But ... But I believe that's something that may have come, if not a direct result, certainly as an indirect result of some of the--

J. Um-hum.

E. you know,--some of the ... the issues ... The--quote-- "trouble" that I was causing by raising that issue through filing those complaints or grievances.

J. Um-hum.

E. No. At that time, I don't remember ever being given any kind of arena for being able to have any of those issues addressed. So, of course,--you know--one--quote--grins and bears whatever situation one is in until the issue becomes so intolerable that ... that ... You know,--I created an arena for the issue to have to be addressed, or forced it to be addressed, by taking it the legal--you know--the legal route, exercising my right to file

a grievance and file complaints, both with the Human Rights and ...

J. How often would you say that grievances are filed in Local 2. Is that a common practice, that people file grievances? Are the forms readily accessible?

E. Oh, yeah. no. Well, I ... under the new regime things may be different and I haven't been around that much to really know. But ...

J. but under Pete Salzarulo?

E. Yeah. Well, I told you before. I guess I told you this at lunch. I went down to file a gr--. I called up first and he told me I had to pick up a form. So I got the form and I filled it out and brought it down to the Union office. And the Secretary/Treasurer, Michael Ciletti, came up to the counter and said in his usual gruff way, Where'd you get this? (laughs) So ... Who gave you this? So I knew that ... that was another way that I ... I mean, that was another way that I had reinforced what was in my mind, that--you know--the Union officials did not want anybody rocking the boat, filing ... not only rock ... not only ... not even rocking the boat. It was the point that the Union officials did not even want anybody exercising their rights under the Collective Bargaining Agreement. I mean, that was what was really pathetic about what was going on. I mean, but that was related more to ... I mean, that was related to the ...

J. inherent corruption of Local 2.

E. Right. Right. the greed and the ...

J. Now, what about the ... the other ways in which the members are being short changed; not only about--you know--how jobs are assigned and who gets to work, but the whole thing with benefits. You were mentioning

E. Oh, yeah.

J. ?? jobs where benefits weren't being paid?

E. Yeah. Well, in 1990, I, by--you know--pressuring an EEO officer for Turner Construction, I got the guy to put me on the job up at Columbia University,--it was the science and engineering building,--for a contractor called High Tech Mechanical. and at the time I went on the job, the ... When I .. When I was hired on

50

the job, the ... at the time, the benefits were not paid. And we had .. It was October, and let's see,--the elections were coming up, and the ... the ... One of the ... I remember, one of the Business Agents came to the job and--you know--gave everybody this lip service that the job was going to be shut down if the benefits weren't paid. And let's see,--they got ... Right before Thanksgiving, they got their checks. We used to get vacation checks twice a year, and one time was right around Thanksgiving. I hadn't worked before that so I ... for this contractor, so I didn't have any ...--you know. I wasn't involved in that lack of benefits being paid. But I remember that when the guys got their checks, they still had to get an extra check. And then ... I got hired in Oct--the end of ... October 22nd, I got hired. And when I got laid off on February 22nd of 1991, still none of the benefits had been paid for the time that ... I think it was up to September of the other cut off date. So the benefits from October through the time I got laid off, they were not ... they had not been paid. And I remember asking some guys on the job,--you know--talking to some guys on the job and saying: Hey, lets--you know,--let's do this as ... collectively instead of ... And I remember one guy said, Oh ... one young guy, he said: Oh, I only care about what's in my envelope. And another guy said to me: If I'm ... I mean, this show you what the ... how terrified their th--how terrified they were. The ... The guy didn't say to me: I'm afraid if I speak up I will be laid off or fired, and then I'll be out of work. and if I'm out of work for such and such an amount of time, I won't be able to pay my house payments. He didn't ... He didn't explain all that to me. He just said ... His first, immediate response was, when I asked him to go in with me on this, was: If I'm out of work six months, I'll lose my house. In other words, he was so brain washed with the thinking that, if he said anything, he was going to be laid off, he didn't even say that part to me. that was already a given. I mean, it blew me away because--you know--these are grown men, and--you know--their ... their perception of reality had been so ... They had been so indoctrinated,--you know--by whoever they'd been around and whatever

J. Um-hum.

E. propaganda they had been ... being exposed to by whoever--you know--was in front of them that they were not even willing to call the Hall;--not even willing to call the Hall, which didn't even mean anything was going to get done. It just means you--you know--raised your hand and said: Excuse me! Excuse me! I think something isn't okay here. (laughs) So,--you know--it was a pretty pathetic situation. So I just said to my-- ... And I called the

58

hall a bunch of times and was given a run around or ... or wasn't ... my call wasn't returned, or whatever happened. And I went to ... I remember going to the ... The foreman on the job, at that time, was the ... the cousin of the President of the Local, and he said to me: Honey, you have two choices. You can go to work every day or you can go down to the hall and tell them you don't want to work,--when I had said to him about the benefits being paid and ... or not being paid. And so, I ... I knew that I wasn't going to get my answer through (laughs) through talking to the foreman who told me,--you know--I'd better ...--you know,--if I wanted to keep working, I'd better shut up,--you know--which was part of the indoctrination that had all these other guys scared, I guess. *

J. Um-hum.

E. I guess. I don't know. Anyway, I called the .. When I got laid off ... there's a clause in our Collective Bargaining Agreement that says the delinquent employer has to pay on a terminated employee. So I said to myself: That's cool! I'm going to be laid off anyway. As soon as that happens,--you know--I'm going to force the issue through the ... through my right to exercise the fact that I'm supposed to have a right in the Collective Bargaining Agreement to tell them they've got to pay me. So ... And I had to go ... The ... the accountant for the contractor gave me lip service and was not willing to acknowledge, even when I had the Collective Bargaining Agreement in my hand in front of of ... and he was in front of me. So the woman at the Industry Board, through a series of phone calls, I finally had to tell her ... I finally had to--quote--threaten that I was going to file a grievance and take it as far as I needed to take it to get satisfaction. I mean, just in my ... Well, it's like an annuity fund but they call it Supplementary Emergency Fund.

J. Um-hum.

E. that ... that was one aspect of our benefits. And that alone, for the four months I was working there, was almost two thousand dollars that they owed me. So ... And I was out of work. and I knew I was going to be out of wo-- I didn't know how long, but I knew I needed that money, so ... Never mind that they were supposed to be paying anyway. So, through a series of--you know--calls to the woman who ran the Fund office,--the Local 2 Fund ... Benefit Fund Office and her cooperation to call the contractor and--you know--pass the word on that I meant business, I got my benefits paid. But the other guys still didn't have their benefits paid. And so many ... so many contractors ... You know,--this is *

part of ... This is kind of ... I mean, it overlaps, but this is kind of another topic of the corruption of those ...

J. um-hum.

E. of those officers. So many ben-- ... So many ... One of the first jo-- ... One of the first things that people who came into office after these guys left, one of their first big issues was to collect a whole lot ... try to get ... to collect a whole lot of money. I mean, never mind a whole lot of money was already lost. But a lot of benefits were blown to the wind because the ... the Union officials were not taking ... were not taking care of business the way they were supposed to. Yeah. *

J. but they were probably getting something for looking the other way when the benefits weren't paid. So ... Just along those lines, how do you see the corruption issue in Local 2 in terms of its impact on your average rank and file plumber?

E. Oh, it's a terrible thing. I mean, everybo-- ... Nobody ... Nobody Everybody got hurt by it. Everybody! Everybody! And especially the union, and especially the issue of the ... the ... the ... The integrity of ... of ... The integrity of the Union and the integrity of the existence of the union was ... was ... is, in my opinion, permanently damaged by what happened. But every--everybody--everybody,--you know,--everybody gets to lose. You know,--everybody gets to be out of work for ... A lot of people ... So many people got to be out of work for a long time. So much money was wasted. And what's even worse is, in my opinion, is that the City gets to have such a bad ... the Union gets to have a bad ... such a bad reputation in the eyes of the City.

J. Um-hum.

E. And the City officials get to ... Again,--once again, in conjunction with the help of the media, continue to give people the impression that a Union is a no good thing,--you know,--because when they bust peop--when the ...when the government gets to bust the unions and they get ... the media projects it as stopping organized crime or--you know--getting rid of organized crime, it's automatically associated with the union. And then the people who know nothing about the history of Unions and--you know-- ... all they hear is--you know--what a rotten thing the Union is. And they have no idea that people ... that the existence of the Union is originally what helped everybody have a better working condition in this country. And the fact that people originally, when they were

10

worked with was that he had really good reflexes. And I was carrying some pipe, and we were walking into this large freight elevator in the Empire State building and the ... this particular elevator,--which was unusual in my experience,--didn't have anybody operating it and didn't have ... And if somebody called for it from another floor the door would automatically come down. So I was walking across the doorway of the elevator and the door came down. And fortunately ... Well, I had a piece of pipe on my shoulder, and fortunately the ... Well, I had a length of pipe. Fortunately, the ... my partner was right there, and he jumped and pushed the ... the stop button. So just ... the door just barely grazed my shoulder. I was so fortunate,--you know,--I didn't get ... get hurt.

J. Yeah. Yeah.

E. But,--you know,--I really was fortunate in my whole apprenticeship, I mean, partly because I worked with people who were fairly, for the most part ... I mean, there were some exceptions, but for the most part I worked with people who were fairly safety conscious. And ... But one thing I did learn, because I did have some experiences with people who weren't safety conscious or who were ... some men who were--you know ... That was one of the ways their hostility came out was to--you know,--in my presence, to act like they didn't care about safety or my safety, so I did learn that--you know--safety is really an important thing, and that--you know--everybody has to look out for themselves,--you know. It's kind of like driving an automobile. You put your life in all the hands of the people around you, so that--you know--as much as I have to look out for myself, I have to look out for the people around me because they may not be looking out for me.

J. ... looking out for themselves or anybody else.

E. Yeah, right. Right. But then I had another partner that I had for almost two years and I worked very hard for that ... that guy, too. And,--you know--I thought ... I also ... I thought all of this was going to get me brownie points,--you know. And I also went to Mechanics Institute, which I thought was going to get me brownie points. I mean, I--you know,--I learned things so I ...

J. But you want ... you wanted to do it to learn. Right?

E. Yeah. I wanted to do it to learn, but I also thought that ... that the byproduct would be that the Union officials and my co-workers, for the most part, would recognize that I was somebody

who's serious about being in this business and that I deserved to be treated and acknowledged in that way. And ...

J. Mechanics Institute is in Brooklyn?

E. No, it's in Manhattan on 44th Street.

J. Uh-huh.

E. It's a school that's been around for a very long time. You know, one of the wonderful things about it is you go on your own time, in the evenings. but ...

J. That's the one right in midtown,

E. Yeah. Well, it's free.

J. and it's ... Is that where they have that wonderful library, Mechanics Institute? What experiences ??

E. Yeah, they do have a ... Yeah. they do have a library.

J. Um-hum.

E. It's on 44th Street

J. Fifth and Sixth.

E. between Fifth and Sixth.

J. Okay. That's the one.

E. And they have ... It's free, except you pay for your books. It's a free school. I mean, it's really amazing. It's ... And the learning is very good. I went three years at night, in addition to my apprenticeship and got a ?? Design certificate. And I learned a lot about ... There's no shop in the school. You know,--you don't have any shop work so you don't have any hands on, but I learned very well about the plumbing code, about design ...--you know,--blueprint reading and design situations. Plus, my ... the apprentice school,--the apprenticeship school gave some courses which I attended at night and those also were ...

J. They were more specialized?

E. There was a blueprint reading course, and I think there

were a couple of other courses. But the one I went to was blueprint reading. That ... I guess to some extent it was encouraged, but it seems to me that it was not encouraged enough for the students,--the apprentices to take additional schooling. But I found it really helpful.

J. Um-hum. Now, tell me about when you first ... Did ... Did you attend union meetings as an apprentice?

E. Yes. They were not They were not required, but I went.

J. Um-hum. But you did. And what was that like? What was your experience with the union?

E. Well, I always got the feeling that I was walking into a bar (laughs) for two reasons. One,

J. Where did they hold their meetings?

E. They used to hold the meetings down on 14th Street in ... in the hall over there where the ... (Carpenters' Hall)

J. Yeah. I can't think of the name either.

E. where ... The Carpenters have their Union meetings there.

J. Um-hum. Yeah, and the Sheet Metal Workers.

E. I forgot the name of the place, but it's right across from Union Square.

J. Yeah. Um-hum.

E. And the reason I say I always thought I was walking ... I mean, I know I wasn't walking into a bar, but I ... I mean, I say that a little jokingly because, first of all, I always got stared at because there's so ... I mean, there's three thousand ... At this time, there are three ... I'm told by union officials, there are three thousand active members. Of course, there were never more than ... usually never ... probably never more than a thousand people at the meetings, and maybe only five hundred, or something like that, at a meeting. But there's only--you know--maybe only a handful or less than a handful, or less than you can count on one hand, women in the Local. And I don't often ... Occasionally, I see one or two other women at the Union meeting but not ... oftentimes not, so--you know ... I was an

unfamiliar face and I was female, so--you know--I was stared at for that reason. And the other reason I said it was like walking into a bar because a lot of the guys drank before, after and during the meeting, and a lot of them were It's so amazing now,--I mean,--you know--since I

J. Marc Ballroom.

E. Yeah, right. Marc Ballroom. And a lot of them would stand in the back. And I don't know ... Maybe even the ones standing in the back being noisy were not the drunk ones, but it was like social time for a lot of guys, so they wouldn't ... Nothing ... My memory is that nothing about any respect or quiet or consideration for anyone else was ever enforced in the meetings. And the meetings were pretty chaotic. And since I've been traveling around the country and had the opportunity to sit in a couple other union meetings in locals around the country,--not all of the locals I've been to but a couple--where you could hear a pin drop. I mean, it just ... It just ... I remember thinking, at the time, it used to boggle my mind. The meetings would never get to new business. I mean, it used to amaze me that even as much would get done--you know ... I mean, I would walk around the City and think about all the plumbers--you know ... It's not as much now, but--you know,--the last thirty-five years or forty years of this City's history, the Union,--the Plumbers Union--you know--built all these buildings, not--you know ... The iron workers and the carpenters and the electricians and the sheet metal workers too, but I mean, the ... the huge amounts of plumbing, piping, that are in all these buildings that were put ... mostly installed when they were new,--if not now but when they were new,--by these union plumbers. And some of these guys had been around for a long time. And I'd go to the meetings and the chaos of the meetings, I would just be appalled that--you know--just ... It just would be an enigma to me (laughs) almost that the meetings were so chaotic and

...

J. Did you ever learn anything useful at the meetings?

E. Well, everything I learned was useful in one way or the other. I ... I got to see that I was part .. a part of something that was--you know--dominated by a particular mentality that ... that showed its ugliest side at the Union meetings,--in a ... in a group way showed its ugliest side at the union meetings because they were really out of control and they were really There was so much going on that I was not really aware of, which had to do with the political history,--the internal political history--of the organization, and all the personalities and the people ... the

men who had affinities with other men and loyalties to particular people who had agreements and disagreements with their fellow workers in such a way that ... You know,--this is how it showed itself,--you know,--the ... the cen-- ... The fellows that were in the position of supposedly being the sentries to, like, control the meetings did not do anything to keep the .. the people who were being a nuisance from doing whatever they did. And the Union leaders did not ... The ones who were supposed to be leaders did not seem to be in control of anything that was going on. And whenever they acted like they did, they did not ... they did not make anybody go by any rules. I mean, there's things in the ... in our Constitution where our members can be fined for un--certain unruly behavior, and none of that was ever ... or thrown out of the meeting or ... I mean, none of that was ever enforced. So it just,--you know--it just really boggled my mind,--you know? And--you know,--the way I got to interact with members that I didn't see on jobs,--which was most of them, 'cause I only worked with a small few-- I worked for one ... I worked for one contractor my whole apprenticeship, so my exposure to other workers was very limited by the ones working for that same company.

J. Um-hum.

E. So I got to be--you know,--introduced to other Union members at the meeting. And,--you know--I don't remember ... I mean, I just ... I just remember that ... You know, I guess if somebody showed me a video of this union meeting beforehand and said to me,--you know--before I ever knew anything that I was going to get into this trade,--and said--you know,--doesn't this look like something you'd want to join (laughs) or be a part of, I don't think so,--you know? So,--you know. And there was just so much pettiness--you know? There was just so much petty-- I mean, it's such a shame.

J. Now, I just want to ask you a chicken shit question. Did you ... Did you ever feel scared going there, or intimidated or ... How did you feel going to the meetings? What was it like?

E. Well ...

J. Or you were just amazed?

E. Well,--you know--I ... I always am aware when I'm ... when I'm ... when some--you know,--when somebody's pushing a button that says intimidation on it, or when I'm--you know--felling unconfident about myself, or when I had a bad day, or when--you know--a certain

number of people had been unfriendly to me, or somebody who's important in my life is not nice to me,--you know,--it's easy to feel--you know---you know--feel fear or--you know--I guess intimidation is when somebody--you know--has ... I was just thinking I ought to look up the definition 'cause I really don't know the definition of intimidation. But in my mind--you know,--I say, Well, intimidation is when someone--you know--wants to control ... one person wants to control another person by ... in a negative way, by making them feel bad about themselves, or whatever. And I just--you know ... If I had those feelings,--you know,--I never let them stop me,--you know.

J. Um-hum.

E. I mean, I'm sure--you know--I'm sure ... You know,--like I said, I don't walk ... I'm not somebody who drinks,--you know? I don't ... It was ... You know,--only on one or two occasions did I ever even go to a bar with any co-workers, and then I had to be kind of prodded. But alcohol has never been something that's been of interest to me. And so, going into a bar ... So when I said, like, walking into a bar, walking into a bar, if I had to ... If I had to write down some images of what intimidating kind of experiences were, walking into a bar has always been that kind of an experience for me, because I always saw alcohol as something negative. So ... And I always ... I've always viewed it ... I mean, it's ... I mean, of course, women--you know--get involved with alcohol. But--you know,--in terms of walking into a bar, it's always men looking at women,--you know? And I always found that--you know ... kind of checking them out,--you know. Or ... I guess what I should say is, like, my experience on the job or my ... One thing I learned about construction ... being in construction ... And I remember,--you know--like, when construction workers are eating their lunch on the sidewalk and women are walking by, and--you know--they're dressed nicely or they're dressed ...

Tape Two

J. Tape two, Elaine Ward, Saturday, March 29th. So continue.

E. Okay. So if ... I'm just making an analogy here to women, and before I was in the construction business, being female, walking by construction workers, and the feeling of ... or not just the feeling, but knowing that the men were, like, check--checking out the women that walked by physically and--you know,--quote, unquote,--undressing them.

26

J. Um-hum.

E. And what ... I was using that as an analogy because I was ... what I want to compare that to was, after I went on the construction jobs and when I became an apprentice ... I remember, I used to dress ... Like, I used to wear really baggy clothes and--you know--kind of grungy--not really ... My clothes weren't dirty but grungy,--you know--work clothes; kind of grungy clothes, because I was trying to ... I was consciously trying to play down anything about my femaleness. X

J. Um-hum.

E. And even ... And I found out ... I found out that even if I did that, I still would get undressed,--you know--visually by the men, the way they looked at me.

J. Um-hum.

E. So I'm relating to walking into a ... when I was relating to the experience of walking into a union meeting, or walking into a bar, or walking down the street, what I found out, or what I learned,--one of the things I learned was that became ... Instead of ... What was fearful and intimidating became something familiar. And because ... And when it became familiar, I learned that I could ignore it, you see. And I guess if something just happens to you once, depending on the severity of the impact, it's not necessarily something that can be ignored, or it leaves an impression. But when I'm going to work every day, just doing my job, and I come into contact with so many men,--so many men all the time, day after day ... And ... And the other part of it was going from job to job,--I began to have ... certain things became like yard sticks.

J. Um-hum.

E. And certain things were ... And certain things repeated themselves again and again and again. And as things re-- As my experience, in terms of being a woman and prob--usually the only woman on a job site of twenty to thirty to forty to fifty to a hundred men or more, or whatever, since I traveled many more, there was nothing new. I mean, there were the -- They happened in a different way, but ... and ... and sometimes the verbal stuff was different, and sometimes--you know,--sometimes--you know,--I ... sometimes I was, maybe, not in the mood, or whatever, to deal with whatever was going on, but in general, there were things that

(27)

happened repeatedly enough so that I saw them as patterns and ... and was able to start learning not to take those things personally.

J. Um-hum.

E. And then I didn't have to put my personal self into it, and then I didn't have to get ... go to that place where I had to feel fearful or intimidated.

J. Okay. So when did you en-- ... When did you get to know some of the other women in the Union? How did that happen? I assume that you did, over time, get to know some of the women.

E. No.

J. No?

E. I had ...

J. It took a long time?

E. Well, I had contact with a few other women in the Union. But have I gotten to know them? No. I would say no. I ... Actually, I--you know--I became ... At the end of my apprenticeship, I became active with women that were trying to make changes, and ...

J. Changes in the Plumbers or changes in construction?

E. Changes in construction, because I became involved with women in other trades who also experienced similar things that I experienced, and ...

J. How did you ... Who did you become active with, or how did you do that?

E. Well, because I went through a lot of experiences that were unpleasant and seemed to be definitely related to the hostility towards women being in ... in a trade, and nothing to do with our ability to do the work. ★

J. So you were involved with ... Well, I know that I met you through Association for Union Democracy, the Women's Project.

E. Yeah.

J. But did you work with NEW or ... You weren't ... You weren't part of United Tradeswomen, were you?

E. No. I never was part of United Tradeswomen.

J. New York Tradeswomen?

E. No.

J. No.

E. I mean, I went to some of their events

J. Uh-huh.

E. and I went to some of their meetings, but I was not ... I was not ... That was not my ... I mean, I wasn't active in organizing around that.

J. Uh-huh. That's where I first met you, at a reunion conference for United Tradeswomen,

E. Oh, yeah, yeah!

J. in a church basement.

E. Yeah, yeah.

J. You had just gotten your card.

E. Yeah. It was such a big deal. I guess--you know--you know--the bottom line is how do we survive. I guess, as time...
~~You know, as time went on in my apprenticeship, I wanted to keep~~ *
educating myself,--you know--not just educating myself in--you know--by learning the apprenticeship, but also educating myself as far as--you know--what was supposed to be hap--what my experience was supposed to be, and what my experience ...

J. Um-hum.

E. and the things that were .. the things that weren't right about my experience and if I could do something to change those things. And also, I wanted to be a good union person,--you know,-- *
and I wanted ... I really wanted to be involved in what the Union was about. So,--you know,--educating myself about the Union, and also educating myself about being female in a ... in a trade that-

-or in a profession that was--you know--really not ... not yet open to women that much. So ...

J. Did you ever hear of or participate in any of the courses that Cornell had for women trade unionists, or trade unionists in general?

E. Yes, I did. But you know something? I don't remember. I mean, I have I remember I wanted to go to that summer program, but I never ... I know I ... I remember, I wrote to the President of my Local asking to ... if I could be sponsored to go, and I was told no. So ... And at the time, I--you know,--money was an issue. Money was always an issue. So I didn't go. And--you know,--at the time, I didn't have credit cards either. I didn't have much of a bank account in the beginning. I didn't have any bank account in the beginning, and I didn't ... so, of course, I didn't have any credit cards, so I really couldn't do things that I didn't have the money for;

J. Right.

E. that I didn't have actual cash in hand. But I also wanted ... You mentioned about isolation. I also wanted to not be isolated,

J. Um-hum.

E. So I al--I usually went out of my way, as much as I could, to participate in anything that involved women in the trades.

J. Um-hum.

E. And--you know,--I did go to conferences and workshops, and--you know,--I was interested in organizing. I was interested in women trying to help each other. And I was interested in getting to know the women in my Union. And I remember ... I remember, when I went to the ... I always went to the Labor Day Parade, too. We weren't ... We weren't ... As apprentices, we weren't required to go to union meetings, which I think is a mistake,--we should be required,--but I used to go. And I used to go because I wanted to know what the union meetings were about and what ... what went on in the union as a whole. And I also wanted to know because, when I was a journeyman, I was going to have a vote, so I needed to be informed about kind of things were going on that would be voted about.

J. Um-hum.

E. And I also wanted to get over whatever fear or intimidation might be lingering from past experiences that were not trade related, to walking into this big group of men which I said was like a bar,--walking into a bar and having them all stare ... I wanted to get over that. So I knew if I did it enough times, I would get over it, just like going to work every day, you get ...--you know,--I would ... I would ... I might not like it any better, but I wouldn't ... I would be able to ignore it after a while, if they were staring at me or taking my clothes off in their mind, or whatever they were doing.

J. Um-hum.

E. Anyway, so I did ... I remember I went to one of the Labor Day Parades, and I went up to ... I went up to another tradeswoman, who was Maureen. (Maureen Brown) And she'd been around longer than I had, and I said, Well, I want to ... you know--I wanted to get together with her sometime and talk about sexual harassment. And I remember that she said to me that--you know--she was--you know--having a good time and--you know--she wasn't interested,--you know.

J. Um-hum.

E. and I was really disappointed. But I--you know,--the year before, I remember, I had tried to make friends with her, and I had gotten ... I have one ... They gave out T-shirts at the Parades, different T-shirts every year. And one year, the t-shirt was ... had a ... was a white t-shirt with a picture of a wrench on it and a ... a valve. And it was a really nice t-shirt. And I remember, I had gotten more ... I had gotten two of them, and I had given her a t-shirt, and--you know--that was like a way of, like, trying to reach out to make friends. But,--you know--it didn't happen that way.

J. ??

E. No. And I ... as I became active in ... in wanting to change things, and I became aware of sexual harassment and--you know--I got my ... I finally got my journeyman's card and I testified at the hearings. And ...

J. Now, let me ask you,--just to step back,--when you get the journeyman's card, is there a ceremony or something, or they just

send it to you in the mail?

E. No, we had a ... When I graduated, there were sixty in my graduating class and we had a dinner. They had a ...

J. Sixteen?

E. Sixty.

J. Sixty.

E. Yeah. We had a dinner. they gave a ... The union put on a dinner for us up at the ... this place in the Bronx. I forgot the name of it, but this place in the Bronx that does big parties and--you know--weddings and stuff.

J. Not Jimmy's Bronx Cafe?

E. No. I don't remember. It was some kind ...

J. Okay.

E. But anyway, they had a big dinner and we were allowed to invite one person. You know,--most of the guys brought their girl friends or wives. And I asked,--Oh boy, why are names ?? today,-- Melinda Hernandez (Local 3 IBEW) to come with me.

J. She's a carpenter?

E. No. She's an electrician.

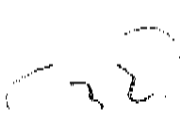
J. Okay.

E. She's an electrician.

J. Uh-huh.

E. And she gave me a ... I remember, she gave me a tool box as a little gift. Yeah. And she came,--you know,--and I bought new clothes to go,--you know,--a nice pair of pants and a fancy blouse and,--you know--and these nice boots. And we had the dinner, and then--you know--we were ... they gave us our ... they called out our names and we came up, and gave ... gave us our certificate.

J. Certificates.



E. Yeah. And there were forty-five people that actually showed up. And, of course, I was the only ... I think there were three women that were taken into the apprenticeship program when I ... when I got my application in 8--. Well, I got my application in '85,--when I started the apprenticeship in the spring of '86. But in March of 19--March 1st of 1990 was when our dinner was,--I was the only female graduating. And I never saw ... I had only heard that there were these other women accepted, and I--you know--did not get to see them or get to find out ... I don't remember if I got to find out who they were. And I remember, like, I think it was at a couple of Parades, I ... I--either a couple of Parades or a couple of different union meetings, I had the opportunity to meet one or two other women who were in that Local,

J. Um-hum.

E. but never in a manner of--you know--having any close contact. I might have just sidetracked from the question you asked me.

J. No. That's ... I was just looking to see what I wanted to talk to you about, when making the transition from being a journey--an apprentice to being a journeyman. So what was that like?

E. Well, ... the good ... the good ...

J. How did you get your ... Okay.

E. the great part of it was that I was making twenty-six ninety-one an hour.

J. That's good.

E. You know, I went from eleven-eighty to twenty-six ninety-one an hour. And I remember the guy ... one of the ... the guy who was the ... He wasn't even a foreman, but he was ... he was kind of a guy who I knew was on my side, and I used to talk to him,--you know. He ... He kidded around 'cause we used to go to the bank★ on Thursdays to cash our checks, and he said,--the first time I got to cash a full journeyman's check, he said .. and we were working on Sixth Avenue,--so he said, like, you're ... He said to me something like: Your smile is all the way from here to Broadway. You know, I just was ... I had a permanent beam on my face. I just was ...--you know. You know,--I really thought I had it made,--you know? that's where I was at. I was ... But on ... on

the other hand, I knew I didn't have it made because the ... the --
 ... I thought, when I was an apprentice, that--you know--after a
 certain period of time--you know--they would all get used to me
 being around, and--you know--I would have ...--you know? they
 would have seen that I wanted to work, and--you know--I did this
 extra education and showed up every day, and was on time and--you
 know--worked hard and did whatever they told me to do, and bla,
 bla, bla,--all that stuff,--and that, eventually, the ... the
 harassment and/or hostility would decrease. But my ... my
 perception of my experience is that it increased. And as I got
 closer to ... to qualifying for the big ... the big bucks, my
 interpretation was that, because I was succeeding,--you know--I was
 ...--you know,--then I was due for a bigger--you know--that I was
 due for more hostility

J. Um-hum.

E. because I was succeeding. And everything along the lines
 of the--quote--intimidation that ... that I experienced, I believe,
 was an attempt to really test my ability to persevere. But their
 intention ... I believe that a lot of the intention of the guys who
 dished it out was to try to discourage the women--you know--

J. Um-hum.

E. and set it up so that they could keep it a boy's club. I
 don't ... It's not like I think they had a group or they got
 together and met and said, let's figure out--you know--how we can
 keep these women out?

J. Not like the LAPD, that's ?? such a group.

E. No. I don't think it ... I don't ... I really don't
 think it was that organized or ... and I don't think it was that
 personal,--you know--against Elaine Ward. I just think that I,
 especially after I got my journeyman's card, I ... I ... I decided
 that I really was not going to keep my mouth shut any more. And--
 you know,--even on the way,--you know--as I got close to my
 journeyman's card,--you know--I became more and more aware as I
 informed and educated myself more and more, that there were a lot
 of things that were going on that were not to be tolerated.

J. Um-hum. Now, let me ask you, when you became a
 journeyman, you had to get your own job, or did you continue to
 work for that contractor? Or how did ...

E. Well, I worked for that contractor for two months. And two months after I got the journeyman's card, I was laid off. And then ... We had in our Collective Bargaining Agreement that a journeyman could solicit their own work, so ... which meant that, supposedly, we could get hired straight from the contractor. And years ago, they used to do what they called shape up. and ... and years ago, before ... way before my time, but years ago, foremen, I understand that foremen had the had the authority to hire. Now foremen in my Local, in most cases,--all cases I've experienced,--do not do the hiring.

J. Um-hum.

E. Because I would go to jobs and the Business Agents were no longer Union ... the Business Agents that were in office when I was an apprentice and when I became a journeyman, you know,--in the early years of being a journeyman, are no longer in office,--but they were very unkind to me, and they were very not helpful. And they were very, to put it quite bluntly, very hostile. So I ... And the more persistent I was, the more they made it clear that they were not going to do too much to help me and that--you know--it didn't matter what the laws were. It didn't matter if jobs were supposed to have women on them. It didn't matter--you know--if I went to Mechanics Institute five times over, even though, I remember once, standing in the hallway, and one of the Business Agents was telling this young fellows that they should go to Mechanics Institute. And here I was. I had a certificate from there, and the guy wouldn't give me the time of day,--you know? But ... So I went to job^s ... So to keep myself informed about what jobs were going on--because the Business Agents certainly wouldn't tell me, I would ... and also to see if I could get myself hired, and to start setting myself up to find out what was really going on,--I used to go around to jobs with my work clothes. Because years ago, if the foremen were doing the hiring, the men ... the men could go to the job dressed for work, and if some--they needed somebody that day, supposedly they could get hired. Well, I never got hired from doing that, but I did get to find out a lot about what was going on around the City and who ... what contractors were doing work, and where the jobs were, and who the superintendents were, and how long the job ... I used to ... Actually, I learned--I believe I learned this process of shape up over at NEW because they used to teach women how to do this, and they used to take women in groups to do this.

J. So where would you go to do that?

(25)

E. Well, I just went on my own. I mean, I ... I guess I've already expressed that I was not easily ... that no matter how much somebody intimidated me, that did not stop me. And I would put my work clothes on and go wherever I saw a job site,--a large construction job site and in Manhattan. And I would go there ... Work usually started at eight o'clock, so I would go there between seven and eight. And I also used to have a little ... I always had a hard hat and work ... and work boots on, because if I had a hard hat and work boots, then they could not tell me I could not be on the job site. If you ... If you go on a job site and you don't have a hard hat, ... Even though the .. the people working on the ... on the site may not be wearing their hard hats, if you're an outsider and you go on the job site and you're not wearing a hard hat or work boots, they have a legal right, for safety reasons, to ... to escort you off the site. So I would always wear my hard hat and my work boots, and I would find out ... I'd go on the job and I'd ask somebody where the plumbers--you know--where the plumbers' shanty was, or the ... the place where they hung out in the morning, or where the foreman could be found. and I would go down, and I would go up to the foreman and--you know--I'd introduce myself, I'd show my union card and I'd say that I was looking for work. And--you know,--if I didn't know who the contractor was, I'd ask who the contractor was and who did the hiring. And I only ever once heard a foreman say that he could do the hiring. And I shaped ... I shaped so many jobs. but I also kept notes, because--you know--I'd go to a job and--you know--if it was just in the beginning stages then maybe they hadn't even hired the crew yet and ... but there was a trailer on the job, I'd say: Well, who's the contractor, and how long is the job supposed to last, and how many stories is going to be up. And if I got to talk to a foreman, I'd say well ... and it wasn't ... the crew wasn't maxed out yet, I'd say, well,--you know--how many are you expecting to hire and--you know--max in the crew, and--you know--how long do you expect to have them, just ball park. So I knew if it was April and the guy said, Well, in three months we're going to be hiring--you know--a total of twenty-five more people, I knew--April, May, June, July,--in July, or ... or at the end of June, I ought to be going back to the job site to find out where that's ... what's going on. *

J. Um-hum.

E. Or, in most cases ... Well, what happened, and what's bad about the system that they had, or the way the system was practiced, was that the foremen would say that ... The foremen would tell me I'd have to go to the superintendent or the boss,--the contractor, as far as getting hired. And then, when ... what

I would do is either call them or, in most cases, I wrote letters. Some cases, I would go to the shop and ... and ask about that particular job that I had just visited, and they would tell me that I'd have to go to the Union hall. So then I'd go to the Union hall and I'd go to the Business Agent, and I also would write a letter, -in most cases I would write a letter because the Business Agents were really hard to get ... get a hold of. A lot of time they weren't in the office or they didn't keep any regular hours, but ... so I would usually write a letter and I would certify, return receipt it so that I couldn't be told that they didn't receive the letter.

J. Um-hum.

But I would write a letter saying I'd ... I'd visited such and such a job site. I'd put down the date. I'd give the name of the foreman I spoke to, the name of the contractor, and that I was interested in ... that I was available and ready for work and that I wanted to go to work, and--you know--if I could ... please consider me for the job, and--you know--I can be contacted as such and such a number. I also sent out tons and tons and tons of letters with ... I made a resume,--you know,--because I have a college education, because I went to Mechanics Institute, because I did the furrier apprenticeship, and return receipted them all with the fact that I was available for work. But in ... Anyway, what I ... the point I was trying to make was that the contractors ... in a situation where a journeyman can solicit their own work,

J. Um-hum.

E. the contractors are not responsible to the Union hall. And the ... and the Union hall is ... The officers in the Union hall are not responsible directly to the members ... I mean, it doesn't have to be practiced this way, but this was the way the practice ... this was what happened in practice. The people who were ... were going to be ignored were told by the Union hall to go to the contractors, and that's what the Business Agents would do. They would tell me, if I got to them,--you know--got to speak to them, they'd say, Well, you have to go to the contractor. *

J. Right.

E. and then the contractor, of course, had told me to go to the Business Agent. So they could play this cat ... this--you know--cat and mouse game where I would be sent back and forth. And in the ... in the meantime, I would never be hired. And I began to *

see this pattern emerging. And as I ... I also went to EEO officers. I targeted jobs that were federally funded jobs because, at the time--you know--supposedly, these jobs were supposed to be ... These ... A lot of ... There were a lot of jobs in New York City. There were a jot of jobs in New York City in the early '90s that were federally funded jobs, and I learned ... You know, I went to talk to EEO. I went to the general contra-- ... I started going to general contractors before the jobs were even in the ground. Some of them were already in the ground. and I'd go to the EEO officer and get my name put on the list. I was the very first one ... Even before the ground broke for that courthouse job, *

J. Um-hum.

E. I had my name on ... I was the very first tradeswoman, period ... I was the very first tradeswoman ... I was the very first tradesperson, never mind woman, to have my name on the list, --on the EEO officer's list--for that job down at the courthouse, before that job even broke ground. and I ... *

J. and how did that work? Did you eventually ...

E. Well, I was one of the last ... Eventually I got to work there. but in 19-1992, I didn't work at all. I worked ... I graduated March 1st, 1990, and I ... I worked ... I worked two months,--let's see--two months ... I worked a total ... In 1990, I worked a total, including the time I was still an apprentice, I worked a total of eight months. In 1991, I worked a total of five months. And in 1992 I worked in New York City, not at all. And so I was ten months unemployed in 1992 and--you know--had borrowed an awful lot of money. At that time, I also ... by then, I also had credit cards,--you know? I thought I had arrived,--you know--if I--you know--had a bank account, and my own apartment, and credit cards,--you know. that was one of my goals when I started out,--you know--my apprenticeship. I was going to get my journeyman's card, and I was going to--you know--elevate my financial security to--you know--have ... be able to have credit and a credit card. *

J. Um-hum.

E. Anyway, I was ten months unemployed and I had borrowed an awful lot of money just for paying ... survival, (laughs) just to pay my rent. I remember, when I graduated from my apprenticeship, I moved from out in South Ozone Park to Long Island City because it was closer to Manhattan and I was making more money. Now I'll give >

an analogy, and I increased my rent by almost \$250 a month,--you know,--the amount I had to pay.

J. Um-hum. Right.

E. So what a lot of guys in my class did, they lived at home during their apprenticeship and--you know-- Or even if they didn't live at home, whatever,--you know--maybe they had somebody who helped them out. They graduated from their apprenticeship. They went to this--you know--high paying rate of pay, and--you know--maybe they were al--maybe they were already married or just about to get married, or--you know--they started making a family--you know,--having kids, and they bought a house.

J. Yeah.

E. Well, I moved into a bigger apartment. I mean, I was still paying rent. I couldn't ...--you know? I didn't have anything to buy a house with. but,--you know,--then, in '87,--you know ... By 1990,--by the time we graduated,--you know--thinking Oh now, now we're making this big money;--we're going to have this--you know--wonderful in--yearly income,--you know--you know--the unemployment started--you know--started being very serious,--you know. In '87, when the stock market crashed, that really--you know--started this ripple effect. And it wasn't ... It didn't ... It didn't really start becoming pronounced to the early ... until the early '90s. by '92, it started to become--I mean, this is in hindsight; I know this now,--by '92, it started to be common for people to be out of work for a long time.

J. Um-hum.

E. and it's common for guys to have been out of work for a year or two, three years,--whatever. But also in the early '90s, there was this other situation going on of ... of the laws stating that the jobs that were federally funded that were supposed to have women on them, were not ... were not being enforced. These laws were not being enforced. and the ... the Union was not enforcing it, and the contractors were not enforcing it. And the EEO officers ... It was my experience that the EEO office ... officers, in general, were ... were positions that were fairly lucrative positions that were paid ... that were set up to pay minority people,--employ some minorities;--they were usually black men or black women, or Hispanic men or Hispanic women--to sit .. to sit in an office with a general contractor and make it look like equal opportunity was happening because they'd take applications

and names of ... of ... of women who wanted to get on the jobs. but the women were not on the jobs. And I got to know most of the EEO officers at that time, and they knew who I was. And,--you know,--unfortunately, I was extremely persistent, and--you know--I raised a lot of ... I made a lot of waves because I was very unhappy about the lack of enforcement and all the money spent on giving lip service to the practice of equal opportunity and the ... the ... the kind of back stabbing that was going on to the notion of equal opportunity. You ... You put somebody in a position, who's a minority person. You pay them to be somewhere every day, to ... to help ... be part of that process that's supposed to enforce the law. But meanwhile, you go on all these job sites and there's no women on them,--you know? *

J. Um-hum.

E. So it's like using a minority to .. to ... to make sure the process doesn't happen. And then the minority ... the person who's in the position of being the EEO officer, is--you know--is a middle person between the ... the contractors and the general contractor. and that person has to, in order to keep their job, I'm sure, to whatever is told by them to do to keep the status quo.

J. Um-hum.

E. So it's such a ... I mean, it was such a ... It was such a horrendous situation to me, and it was just ... it was just really abhorrent to me. And,--you know--I never--you know,--I ... I was ... In 1992, I was out of work for ten months, and I'd basically already, by then, knew that my Union hall was not going to do anything to help me go to work. And so I had really--you know--between 1990 and 1992, I got to find out that--you know--I really had not too much to lose, because I had my journeyman card now. They couldn't take that away from me.

J. Um-hum.

E. but they weren't putting me to work. So I could go around to jobs and find out where women weren't being hired, and write ... put all of that in writing. And ... and ... *

Side Two

J. Okay. Side two, tape two, take one.

E. And I could file ... file a a complaint. And so that's *

organized Unions in the late 1800s and early 1900s, actually died ... You know, a lot of people died so that everybody could have better--you know--better working ... better working lives. You know, all that is lost. I mean, it's not that it's lost, but a ... a little more of that becomes less important when the media is reporting about the corruption of the unions. And it's a terrible ... It's a vicious cycle because--you know--the union ... those particu--many of ... most of those officials were in the ... were in office for a very long time. And becau-- .. And because they were in ... And when times were good in the early '80s,--you know--and everybody's making money, even the people who--you know--even the people are working who don't ... aren't connected to anybody in the union,--you know--Union ... There are union members who ... who maybe are not in the popular Party or are not relatives of the Union officials or are not part of the sort of central power structure of the organization, even tho-- ... even ... It's so ... Thing are so ... were so busy that even those people were working. So, on the one hand,--you know--everybody's making money,--you know,--and nobo-- ... and it's a lot easier for people to kind of look the other way, when they see things happening that go against the Collective Bargaining Agreement because everybody's working. I mean, that's the ...--you know,--that's kind of the bottom line. But then,--you know--as things progress and you have, like, what happened in our history in '87, when the stock market fell out or the stock market crashed and--you know--the bottom started falling out and ... and jobs starting becoming less and less available and people started becoming laid off ... And these Union officials had been in office for so long and people think ... the members have been ... a lot of them have been indoctrinated with the idea that these guys are their friends and they're going to take care of them. And meanwhile,--you know--there's so much greed and dishonesty that's been--you know--kind of perpetuating--you know--the activity. And all of a sudden,--you know--lots of people aren't working. I mean, it seems as if it's all of a sudden. But little by little, as ... as the Collective Bargaining Agreement has not been enforced,--you know--the conditions start to slide, and--you know--contractors are allowed to do things that are against the Bargaining Agreement and people turn ... people go along with the idea of turning their head the other way. And then, all of a sudden, a lot of people are out of work and they're looking around, and they're saying, Well,--you know--what's going on here?

J. Um-hum.

E. and now they're upset. And even the people who--quote--have hooks are not working. And they're And at this point,

they're becoming too scared to open their mouths. And in the meantime, the contractors have been allowed to not follow the Collective Bargaining Agreement. So you have a situation where--you know--kind of the whole purpose of the union has sort of fallen apart. And people are too ... at this point, people are scared. And even if they will open their mouth, they won't get any satisfaction because there's been an agreement between the officials and the contractors that we don't have to play by the rules any more. we'll make up our own rules and do whatever we want. And,--you know--I just think that this has been a horrible, horrible, horrible thing. It's not something that you can ... I mean, if things are to get ... When things ... You know,--if things are to get better, it's going to take a long time because I don't really think that all of this happened all of a sudden,--you know? It's just that people become aware of it,--you know--in a moment of their need (laughs) and start crying about it in a moment of their need. But by then, it's too late because so much has been lost. And there's so much unemployment now, and there's such a long road to hoe, I don't ... Well, I'm ... I'm sounding really negative, but I don't ... I don't ... I ... I foresee it as a really long haul,--you know,--to ...

J. Are you planning to attend the Union meeting this week,

E. Yeah.

J. when they're going to talk about possible merger of your Local and ?? Everybody's going to come into one pot, I guess;--everybody into Local ?? information.

E. and Local 1 has no ... Local 1 has no hiring system in their Collective Bargaining Agreement. Local 1 has the same deal. You can solicit your own work, which means the contractors can say,--you know--go to the Union hall, and the union hall can say, Go to the contractors, and (laughs)

J. give everybody a real run around.

E. Yeah.

J. So you'll have to report for us on the reaction of the membership to the news that you're going to be one big, happy family.

E. Well, yeah, maybe. Yeah.

62

J. Yeah. So I'm wondering, in ... in your ... from all that you've seen and experienced, if you have some observations about recommendations or things that you'd like to pass on to other women coming behind you,--words of advice?

E. (pause) Well, I guess the most important thing is to believe in yourself and--you know--find the people who will be friendly to you and help you learn, and help you get where you want to go, and hang around those people and ... or be with those people, or seek those people out. And to be informed,--you know;--to be educated and informed. that's really important. And to know what your rights are. And ... I don't know. What ... what ... What else did you have in mind?

J. Well, as you've traveled around the country, have you ... You know,--we always hear about these tradeswomen's groups in different parts of the country. Have you connected with any of them over time? I mean, you've .. you've attended different conferences and things.

E. Yeah.

J. So what kind of experience has that been,

E. Well, ...

J. both as a ... Early on you attended those. But ...

E. Yeah, I used to do a lot of that because it was really supportive in the sense that it gave me a larger picture of--you know--kind of a world outside of myself where the ... But the world outside of myself was made of other women who had experienced similar things.

J. Um-hum.

E. and also were in their own little scenario of kind of being isolated. So in kind of a backwards way, it helped me know that I wasn't alone,

J. uh-huh.

E. which kind of gave me some images to uphold in my mind,--even if it was in my mind's eye,--when I was going on my day to day business to ... to know, I guess, that it was ... that I could get through it or--you know--

J. um-hum.

E. that it wasn't ...--you know--that ... that I could ... that I could meet the challenge of it. But I wouldn't ... I guess,--you know--it would be better if I could say,--you know,--yeah, life is wonderful--you know. All these support groups are terrific. And,--you know--they're good for what they are, which is support,--you know. But really, ... as far as--you know--making things okay on the job,--you know--or making contractors and unions be more receptive to women, I don't think that that's anything that ... I think that's only going to come from women being willing to go on the job and stay on the job, and do their job, and speak up for their rights and--you know--put up with the--you know--backlash and--you know--stick with it, and--you know--prove--you know--prove, time and time again, that they can do the job and they're capable and that they're decent human beings and that they have a right to earn their livelihood. I think that's ... And,--you know,--there's not any ... I mean, we live in a society that wants everything instant,--you know,--the--you know,--from the fast food to the button you push for the TV or the movie or the telephone or ...

J. Um-hum.

E. But--you know--that's not the way the human being changes. Or that's not the way human beings become receptive. And I don't foresee,--I don't really foresee the--you know--the kind of chauvinistic thing--you know--going through a mass, overnight change.

J. Um-hum.

E. I don't see that happening,--you know.

J. When you travel outside the City, how would you compare your experiences here to your experiences elsewhere, in terms of being received as a woman, a union member: given respect ...

E. I would say overall it's better, but it's not great. Union ... My experience in general with the Union officials was much better. I--you know,--I had ... You know,--I've had some experiences where I walk ... You know,--one time I was ... I went into a Union hall in Kansas, and the guy sent me ... Even though he saw Plumber on my Union card, and he sent me ... I was in, I believe it was Topeka, Kansas, and I was in the union Hall. and it was summertime and I had shorts on and a t-shirt. and I hadn't

64

been working for a week ...--you know--for a couple of weeks, or whatever. And,--you know,--shorts, t-shirt, sandals and--you know--I had my nails painted. So I go in there and--you know--the guy ... and I pull out my Plumbers Union card. And the guy looks me over and--you know,--tells me to go see somebody else by ... He gave me a guy's name by name. And I was new in the traveling business;--the business of traveling. And I went back out in my car and looked in my roll call book, and I saw that the guy he'd sent me to was a pipe fitter, not a plumber. but he knew I had plumber on my card. So I went to the ... He sent me to this pipe fitter. So I went to the pipe fitter in Kansas City, and the pipe fitters and plumbers were in the same building but they had separate offices. and the pipe fitter said to me: Well,--you know--the plumbers down the hall. Why don't you go see him? And I said, Well, I ... I'm going to. But the guy from the plumbers and Pipe Fitter's hall in Topeka,--which was one Local and not separate--said,--you know,--come over and see him. and then,--you know,--he really kind of wasn't that interested. But then I started telling him how I'd already been in a paper mill and an oil refinery and ...

J. Um-hum.

E. and then his eyes opened a little and--you know,--he said: Well, we have a job ... a job in a car plant coming up in a couple of weeks. And go see the Plumber down the hall. So I went to see the plumber down the hall, and the plumber told me that that guy from Topeka had been calling all over the place for plumbers. So I knew that the guy sent me to the pipe fitter because the guy was thinking if he sent me to the pipe fitter, the pipe fitter would turn me down and I wouldn't find out that he needed plumbers, because he really didn't want me.

J. So did you go back?

E. No. I didn't bother with him. I think I sent him a postcard from wherever I went to work next, which was in St. Louis. but then I was in ... in I believe it was Lawrence, Kansas, and I ... the guy ... I spent almost the whole day with a guy. And he took me to lunch with another carpenter guy,--you know. In his office, he was putting me on the phone with ~~all~~ these other Business Agents from other states and--you know--making it look like he was trying to help me. And ...But,--you know--there was ...you know,--everything was, No, not now or down the road, or whatever, and another--you know--five hundred miles, or whatever. And a guy came in the Union Hall, who was a member of that Local in Lawrence, and

165

he had just come back from St. Louis. And this other Union member said, off the cuff: Well, why don't you call the BA in St. Louis? But the Business Agent in Lawrence never picked up the phone to call the guy in St. Louis. when I got back to the motel, I called the guy in St. Louis and he said, yeah,--you know. Come on over. So my ... my job ... So I went to ... I started ... I went to work in St. Louis. But I had another experience where I went out to Oregon, and I went to the plumbers and Pipe Fitters Hall out there. and they have a ... they have a dispatcher, who's not even a Business Agent, who takes care of giving out the jobs. My ... My experience was usually that with the Business Agent who ... or Business Manager that dispatched the members to the jobs ... In this case this Union ... Oregon has one Union ... one Plumbers and Pipe Fitter's Local for the whole state. Yeah. And this dispatcher .. And this time, I walked in, I didn't have my nails painted. I had my car hearts on. I had my ... usually I go into the Union hall looking like I'm ready for work with my ...

J. What are car hearts?

E. The Carhart is a ... actually a brand name of a company that makes a lot of work clothes. And they make a jacket that a lot of guys wear. And anyway, it's a well known company among construction workers, and there's variations on it. But ... so Carhart has also become a generic term for work ... work clothes,

J. Yeah.

E. just like

Side Two

J. ... purposes of ...

E. Oh, that was just a joke. Yeah. Yeah. Is this working?

J. Yeah. So if you go on the job with that shirt and you wear it on the job?

E. Oh, it doesn't matter what I wear on the job, I mean, to me, not any more. I mean ... I was just going to say when ... I'll just finish the ... what I was saying before about ... I went out to Oregon and ... In New York City the journeymen do not have to have a New York State Journeyman's license. you just have to finish your apprenticeship. But in a lot of states, in the plumbing industry, it's ... the state gets ... the way the state can control who gets to be a plumber there and ... is by requiring

60

the apprentices to have a state license,--a journeyman's license.

J. Um-hum.


E. And so, anyway, I went to Oregon. I was in this Union hall and, as I said, I was dressed to look like I was going for work. And the guy hands me the papers and I think, Oh great! I'm going to go to work. And then he asked me for my travel card. And then he tells me, well, it's going to be two to three weeks. Well, I needed a pay check right then and there. I didn't have two to three weeks to wait. So I said, Give me back my travel card because I need to go to work right away. And,--you know,--then he also threw the papers ... He wanted to know if I had a plumbing license. And I didn't so .. And then I asked him about ... he gave ... So then he gave me the papers to take the .. the test. and then I asked him about pipe fitting work' cause I'd been on quite a few industrial jobs already. this was ... The first time I went to Oregon was February of '95. And then he read me the ... he sort of read me the riot act about why plumbers ... about the rea- According to him, the reason plumbers were losing their ... losing their work was because they were doing pipe fitting jobs. And,--you know,--he went on and on and gave me this big lecture. So I really got it that this guy wasn't too happy about me being in the hall wanting to go to work.

J. Um-hum.

E. So .. so,--you know--I wasn't going to go to work there. And I remember, I went back and I got a copy of the recent ... out there they use ... they go by the uniform ... the uniform plumbing code. There's some different codes. New York City has its own code. Anyway, I went back to buy the latest copy of the code book. and then I asked the guy if I could use the phone and he didn't want to let me use the phone. and,--I mean,--it just was (laughs) It was like--you know ... It was ... It was a ... It was really a challenge for them. They don't like ... They really gave me the impression that they did not want anybody ... any outsiders there.

J. Um-hum.

E. And being that my card was from New York and I was on the other side of the country, I was definitely an outsider. As a matter of fact, they have A, B, C, D, and E list out there, and this is for travelers also. A list is people who are from their Local, from 290;--that's the number of the Local. B list is, I believe, what they call ... They have something they call a



District Council, which may be a couple of Locals in the northwest. As I said, Oregon has only one Local so it might have been Washington,--you know--and a couple of the surrounding states. And then the C list was for ... was a broader category,--geographical category in ... in the western area. And then I believe the D list included everybody up to the, like, the west side of the Mississippi.

J. Um-hum.

E. And then, the E list was guess what?--all us on the east side of the Mississippi so ... As a matter of fact, in '90, a year later,-- Well, in between then and a year later, I went ... I worked ... For example, I worked in Texas. And when I was in Texas, I was sent out as a pipe fitter, but I also took the ... the Journeyman license test for plumbers there and passed it and--you know--have since got it renewed. You have to take continuing education, and you can do it through the mail. and you have to pay them a hundred bucks. and then you have to get your license renewed. And ... And I also took the ... When I worked in Idaho, I worked in a computer chip plant there also, but I took the test there for a journeyman's license. and then I was able, through reciprocity ... In other words, if you have an Idaho license ... Because you have an Idaho license, you can get an Oregon license by paying a bunch of money and not taking ... not having t to take the test. So in ... a year later, '96, I went back to the Union hall in Oregon. And now I have an Oregon State license so I can do plumbing in Oregon,--I can go out on that plumber's list. and they're busy there. but you have to go to the hall between three and five in the afternoon, and you have to sit there and wait until they ... he goes through all these lists to get your name on the list.

J. To the E list.

E. right, right, right. And then he'll come out and say, Nothing today. Come back tomorrow. And you go there between three and five p.m. and that definitely means you're not going out that day, anyway. I mean, most halls you can go there at six o'clock in the morning, seven o'clock in the morning, and go to work that day, if there's work for you. But anyway, so when I went up to the counter, the guy didn't ... didn't even ask me if I had a plumbing license;--didn't even care about it,--you know? And two ... for two weeks,--you know ... There's supposed to be plenty of work there. But for two weeks, I went to the hall and there wasn't any work . Finally, I said to the guy: Well, can I call you instead of

having to be in the hall every day? And I happened to be traveling with my partner.

J. Um-hum.

E. and he knew there was this job in a paper mill out on the west coast and so we went out there and stayed in a motel there, because sometimes ... sometimes it's smart to go and stay in a place that's near a job, because then, the Business Agent might say: Oh, where are you staying. And you tell them. And then they say, Well, I'll send you to that job.

J. Yeah.

E. But most of the times, it's like ... Well, it's always like they're the boss. And most of the times, it's--you know--you can't ... it doesn't always happen that you can say, Well, I'd like to go to that job, and--you know ... And they were building a federal courthouse in downtown Portland . and of course,--you know--the guy would not send me there. I think ... I think John Finex went there. Somebody from Local 2 I talked to got to work there for quite a long time. but anyway, I went out ... we went out and took a motel near that job in Toledo, on the west coast of Oregon, and that was when the ... the they were having those floods out there. the Columbia River was flooding. and it rains all the time there anyway. but this was four days of solid, solid rain. anyway, I called up the guy Monday, Nothing. Call him back tuesday. Tuesday he says,--you know,--Oh, you're staying out there? Why don't you do me a favor and go to that job. So then, of course, I get to the job and--you know I got there in the afternoon and the guy at the job said, Oh, we thought you were coming yesterday,--you know? So there was obviously--you know--a game going on there, too, about--you know--me going to work. And--you know--it was not surprising. But anyway, the bottom ... What I was telling you about the floods was that--you know,--everything's different everywhere you go. And out there, you buy your own raincoat, and in the rain, you work. and in the four days of pouring rain, they worked and it was ... not ... not ... not my first choice.

J. ??

E. No, not at all.

J. Have you encountered any other women traveling in your travels?

E. Yeah, once or twice, but very rarely.

J. Um-hum. what trades?

E. My trade,

J. Yeah.

E. pipe fitting.

J. uh-huh.

E. they were either pipe fitters or welders.

J. Um-hum. and have you learned a lot ... You've learned a lot from being on the road, aside from .

E. Yeah, absolutely.

J. 'cause you were basically learning a new trade.

E. Yeah, because I went to a lot of pipe fitting jobs. And, -you know--a lot of times I'd go on the job and ... In New York City, all I did was plumbing.

J. Um-hum.

E. and in pipe fitting, there's different materials. Some of them are the same, but there's a lot of different materials and some different ... and different things ... different ways of putting pipe together that are not ... not used in plumbing.

J. Um-hum.

E. and so, I had to go a lot ... I had to be willing, a lot, to not only go .. not only go to a Union hall and stand in front of Union officials that I'd never met before or never seen before, but also I had to be willing to go onto job sites with ...

J. ??

E. Yeah, being the only female, in most cases, . and a lot of these jobs were much bigger than any job sites I'd ever been on in New York City, not in terms of the ... the height of the building or the size of the building ~~persey~~ .. A lot of times these jobs were big because they were spread out, but the amount of

construction workers on a job was a lot bigger.

J. Um-hum.

E. And--you know,--and I had to be willing to go among a lot of ... a lot of guys that I'd never met before, and guys from all over the country, and guys with a lot more experience than I had. and also, I had to be willing to deal with the fact that, in a lot of cases,--you know--it might be my first exposure. Like, the first time I was in an oil refinery area, or the first time I was in a steel mill, or the first time I was in paper mill. and then after--you know--after the first time, it's not my first time any more.

J. Yeah.

E. so then again, just like--you know--when I was saying before about ... a certain familiarity comes with walking among men and getting used to them--you know--kind of looking me up and down,

J. Um-hum.

E. or just staring, I ... I just got in the habit of giving everybody the benefit of the doubt. I mean, they ---they ... giving them the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise, in terms of--you know--if I could interact with them or if I should bother to interact with them. but,--you know--if some guy's staring at me, I ... I'd look at him back and say, Hi; how are you doing?--or whatever,--you know?

J. Yeah.

E. but then,--you know--if they're going to act--you know--really hostile to me, then--you know--I'll do my best to ignore them. And if they're somebody I have to work with, then I deal with it the best I can. And--you know--if I ... if I'm traveling and the ...--you know--I can't mediate matters individually, then I go to the foreman or the steward, if there is a steward.

J. Um-hum.

E. that was another difference. A lot of places in the country I went, there was no shop steward. and a lot of places I went ... I mean, first, at first, like, I got used to being ... given my referral and being sent to the shop steward or the foreman. But what happened a lot of times, depending ... If I was

in a place where Union conditions were pretty bad, then a lot of times the ... the referral would send me straight to the superintendent,--you know. But if I couldn't mediate the situation or get satisfaction through the foremen, or the ... of if there was no shop steward, through the superintendent, and ... and I couldn't find any way to work it out myself, then I could leave the job,--you know? And that,--you know,--that ... that also was another ... That's a plus about traveling, because as a travel-- ... First of all, as ... I think one of the reasons I was tre--that I experienced good treatment as ... because, as a traveler, I'm going to a place that's busy. And when I'm in a place that's busy,--you know,--people aren't ... aren't as threatened by somebody else, because they have ... they have their job,--you know. So I'm not taking something from somebody else, because I'm there because they have ... there's a need for more than they have. X

J. Right.

E. and the other part of that is that I'm also a transient. I'm not a member of their Local. I'm not in .. on a daily con--in any kind of ... I'm not seen as a threat because they know I'm not going to be there for very long,--you know? So ... And ... and the flip side of that is, if I don't like being there, I can leave. And since I am a traveler, I don't ... I'm ... I'm not involved with politics. I don't have to get involved in the politics,--you know? I don't have to ... I don't have the same concerns that the people have who are there every day, who ...--you know,--the personalities and the who's in power, and who gets along with who, X

J. Um-hum. Yeah.

E. and who's related to who. You know, none of that has to be any of my concern. So from that point of view, I got treated better. It was also my experience that people in the mid-west, 'cause I worked quite a ... I worked in Ohio. I worked in Illinois. I worked in Missouri. I worked in Texas. I worked in Minnesota and Colorado and Iowa. I work-- ... I worked in Pennsylvania. I worked in Georgia and Virginia and Idaho. But the mid-west in particular, what I want to say is, in places where the history of the state ... It has a lot to do with people originally being farmers. The ... the people themselves are much more connected to everybody working, to, like, women working. Like,--you know--on farms, men and women work,--you know,--and there's something about that mentality that is kind of much more inbred. So that when a woman comes on the job, it isn't like, Oh yeah? What's she doing? It's like, Oh, there's a woman who's working in X

this trade. I mean, I'm not saying that that's what they're saying in their mind. And I did encounter--you know--some forms of--you know--some .. I mean,--you know--some forms of chauvinism in different ways, but not so much as in New York City. In New York City it's because ... And the other thing is that the wages ... the wages aren't as high,--you know--in other places, and they work much harder for what ... for what money they get. But the wages aren't as high. And I think in New York City, some of the chauvinism has specifically to do with the fact that there still is this really, really conservative, old fashioned notion that women are supposed to be home. and there's this really ... Or that the men are ... are only seen as being good men if they are the provider,--you know? And that's where the buck sto--begins and ends. And, of course, it's a power thing, too. But--you know,--in New York City my experience on the job was that the wages are so high that--you know--that's a threat--you know? It's like,--you know--women aren't supposed to be making that kind of money,--you know. So ... I don't remember if ... I might have gotten distracted from your original question.

J. No, we're going to ... So ... so you ... you feel, at this stage, after being in the trade for as long as you've been, you have a feeling of confidence in your own skills, both interpersonal and survival, and in terms of knowing what you're doing.

E. Um-hum.

J. If you don't know how to do it, you'll learn.

E. Absolutely. And there's a lot I don't know, but that doesn't matter. I mean,--you know,--there's always a way to find out what you need to know.

J. Um-hum.

E. and I--you know,--I learned ... I learned that a lot on the road. I mean, well, I learned that ... Actually, I learned that through my apprenticeship. In my apprenticeship, I learned that if there's a will, there's a way.

J. Um-hum.

E. And I learned that partially by--you know--my determination to ... to achieve my goal, which was to get my journeyman's card, which I did. And I also learned that by ...

You know,--I was ... I ... You know,--aside from the ... I mean,--you know,--in my mind, I have to separate ... I have to look at the chauvinism and .. and the ... the learning of the skill as two different things ... The experience of the ... the hostility and the men being chauvinistic as one part. And then, the other part is that some of them, even though they might have continued to view me as a sex object or primarily thought of me as somebody who shouldn't be there, some of them did teach me some things about using the tools. So there was that aspect of it. but really, my ... my ability to perceive myself as somebody who's able and skilled, and able and skilled enough to learn more, didn't happen until I was on the road. And I think that, when I went on the road, I was really able to be seen as my own person,--you know,--and I was being able to see ... being when you're ... When you're a traveler, it's not ... I mean, there's so many guys who've traveled, and so many Union officials around the country who've ... when they weren't, before they were Union officials, they had to travel. There's some Locals that ... They call them suitcase Locals. They're only ... There is no work in their area, and the Local exists primarily to ... to send the guys around the country. And those Union officials have a lot of knowledge about what's going on in other parts of the country And a lot of rapport with other Business agents. And there's a lot of ... There's a lot of Locals where it's common that,--you know,--maybe six months a year ... six months of the year there might be some work, and then the rest of the year there's no work.

J. Um-hum.

E. So it's a given that these guys are going to be going somewhere else,--you know.

J. Um-hum.

E. and it's a given to them--themselves that they're going to be on the road. Or it's a given that they're going to do what they need to do to take care of their families. and part of that means traveling. So when I went to these other places as a traveler, there's a certain ... No matter ... Whether you're male or female, there's ... there's a understanding that there's a desire to make ... earn ones' living when one is traveling.

J. Um-hum. Um-hum.

E. and it's not easy. And everybody has to help each other.

J. Um-hum.

E. and that's what I did not get here, when I was in New York,

J. Um-hum.

E. that ... One of the deal ... One of the ... One of the most important parts of the union is to ... for people to help each other. And that is really a shame because--you know,--that's ... that is the biggest .. That's really the--you know. All the greed and the corruption and everything else aside, that's the biggest downfall of the Union, that's it's not ... that what's being passed along is not that we are here to help each other. And ...

J. Um-hum.

E. but anyway, when I traveled, I got to ... Even though I had to--to some extent, I had to prove myself, when ... a lot of these really big jobs that I've been on,--you know--you're just another number. And sometimes, it doesn't ... Sometimes, the contractor's getting paid for having a certain amount of bodies there. And the

J. Um-hum.

E. and I'm sure you have to do something. But the pace is so different and the ... the things don't--you know--things get done according to a certain order and a certain procedure on the job. And the guy will come and tell you ... I mean, the first day I learned that the foreman came and said--I've said this already,--the foreman came and said, I don't have the ... the material for you right now and I don't know when it's going to be here. But I just want you here when I come back here,

J. Um-hum. Right.

E. so I don't have to run around looking for you. And that was the first thing--you know one of the first really important things that I learned that--you know--I'm on this job. I'm going to get paid for being here for a certain amount of time. the time is temporary. and my job is to show up and be there. and when the guy tells me to do something, that's when I do something. Otherwise, I'm just there,--you know--

J. Um-hum.

(75)

E. and I've got to look out for myself not to get hurt, and--you know--look out for the people around me. but a lot of the big jobs I was on was like that. and it wasn't so much a matter of--you know--how much I ... It's not about individual egos. It's not about--you know ... I mean, certainly, their--you know--the jobs are comprised of a lot of people who know how to do things. and there were a lot of people with more skill than I was. But there were also a lot of people who were willing to share what they knew.

J. Um-hum.

E. and one of the things that I ... I learned was that--you know--you've got to really know how to go with the flow and put your time in. It's kind of like, you go to these jobs and you put your time in.

J. Um-hum.

E. and if you can handle being there for ten hours a day, six or seven days a week, or twelve hours a day, six or seven days a week for--you know--three weeks or a month, or however long it is, or however long you can stand it, then--you know--with the time and a half after the straight time, you .. you come out with some money. *

J. Um-hum.

E. but you've got to spend sixty or seventy hours a week,--you know--in pla--and oftentimes, in places that have terrible environments and ... and--you know--you may be worr-- ...you may actually be going something with the tools and material half of the time, even though you're going to get paid for the whole time being there. *

J. Um-hum.

E. and--you know,--that's kind of the way it goes. And there'll be--you know ... As I said, a lot of people who were willing to ... you know,--I learned that if I had an attitude showing that I was willing to learn, that the majority of people were going to help me. And there were only a few people who--you know--I would need to walk away from, and in a couple of case, where I would quit a job--you know--because ...

J. um-hum.

E. because of what happened.

J. So, well, any other comments or ... Happy with your life choice? Too difficult?

E. What do you mean? (laughs) What do you mean?

J. Woman as plumber.

E. Oh God!

J. Do you have any ... any ideas about, like, okay. you were on this job for X amount of time, and something that you'd like to do that you haven't done yet, in terms of changing your lifestyle or your ...--you know,--what ... what you're actually doing? And do you have any ... any dreams about something that you'd like to do, sort of your next stage of life? or you haven't thought about that?

E. Yeah. I have thought about it.

J. but not ... You don't want to share it. (laughs)

E. Well ... I'd like to travel and not have to ... not have to look for a job. (laughs)

J. Yeah.

E. I--you know,--I .. Right now it's--you know,--it's good to have information to be able to share with people that helps people. And,--you know,--it's good if ... It's good if my experience can ... Well, it's good if my experience can--you know--help other people. But all I ... all I think about mostly is ... I don't ... I'm not sure if I would have been able to do all this if I had known about it ahead of time. (laughs)

J. Yeah. Yeah.

E. So,--you know--I just ... You know, it's ... I thought .. I just thought about things so different when I started. I mean, I really thought ... I guess I really didn't--you know--I really didn't have any idea about ... You know,--it's a really good ... It's a really good living if there's work,--you know?

J. Um-hum.

E. If there's not work, then it's much better to have something else to do.

J. Yeah. I .. I ~~meat~~ met a plumber when I was in Washington State, who was working as a plumber at my sister's house. He came to fix the plumbing. But he was an operating engineer who was out of work

E. Yeah.

J. 'cause his ... he felt his Business Agent--you know--sort of wasn't sending him out on work because he was pissed off at him. So he was working as a plumber.

E. Yeah. Yeah. And what did he say about being a plumber?

J. trying to ... He sort of taught himself how to do the plumbing. and he's doing residential jobs ...

E. Yeah. Yeah. I met ... You know, back in the ... I guess it was in the late '80s, I met this ... I became friendly with this woman in Vermont who's a plumber. I don't know if she's ... I haven't had contact with her for a really long time. But she ... she was in the union. And she was teaching... She used to teach in the apprentice school up there. And ... she taught herself .. She initially taught herself ... She'd bought a house, and everything was busted up, or whatever ...

J. So she had to do it.

E. Yeah. Yeah. And then,--you know,-through a series of whatever circumstances, whatever she had to do, she--you know--got herself in the Union.

J. um-hum.

E. and--you know,--she became ... My view, at the time, I thought--you know--she was ... she appeared to be quite successful.

J. Um-hum.

E. I mean,--you know--she had her own life struggles--you know,--so I don't think everything was a pile of roses for her either. But ...

J. Well, I just want to ask you, what's ... what's going on

for you? Why the tears? What's .. What's ... What are you thinking, in terms of when you're looking at this retrospective of your struggles?

E. Oh, well, I guess 'cause I--you know--I think, well, I'm going to sound really negative--you know--if I say,--you know--if I say, well, I wouldn't recommend it for anybody,--you know,--for any women,--you know? You know,--I just think, if you can find something else to do where you don't have to (tearfully) ... where you don't have to go through so much struggle,--you know--go for it,--you know?

J. Yeah. Yeah. Well, I want to thank you for participating in this and sharing your experience.

E. I should have brought some Klean-ex.

J. I should have too.

E. Yeah.

79