

Ann Jochems Interview With Rebecca Lurie.

A. This is an interview with Rebecca Lurie, February 28th, 1995, at the Labor Technical College.

Rebecca,--let's see,--can you tell me about your work history?

R. Okay. All of it, huh, or the non-traditional part of it?

A. Yeah. You know,--how ... how you evolved into the non-traditional part of it?

R. Okay. Actually, when I was in college, I worked weekends, taking care of retarded adults and disadvantaged youth?? houseparents for different programs (in) upstate New York. And I was kind of like involved with some sort of like alternative energy things, so I got involved in a house building project.

A. Hmm.

R. But I knew nothing about construction, but I got involved through the alternative energy aspect. And when I graduated college with a BA in sociology, I thought that I might get a job doing more of what I had been doing.

A. Yeah.

R. And the irony of it was I didn't have any clothes for an interview. ?? was I could do this, but I don't have the wardrobe for this. Where do I start? So there was this big hurdle. I didn't have clothes for interviews. And I'd go to the Salvation Army. I tried to buy something, 'cause I was like this little country dyke who just, like,--you know--I wore jeans. I was a hippie. I didn't have clothes for a straight job.

A. Yeah. I know what you mean.

R. Uh-huh. So I ... a friend,--an acquaintance,--got a contract for a job that some friends of mine were with this company. It was sort of a ... a hippie run ... what? ... what? ... It was a food ... It was kind of like a supplier to food coops in the northeast. It was a ware-- ... It was a warehouse for food coops in the northeast. They were a trucking ... a warehouse and trucking company,

A. Um.

R. owner run and operated,--collectively run. And they were renovating their warehouse, and they put in the contract,--they required in the contract that a woman or a minority be trained in the renovation.

A. Um.

R. So it was kind of an al-- ... a progressive company that was doing the job. So an acquaintance said, "Well, I know this per--" They referred me. So someone asked me if I wanted the job, and I said, "Yeah. I'll try that." I mean,--I was kind of like ... They knew me through the alternative energy stuff I did.

A. Hmm.

R. So I went to work, and I got my first hammer the first week, and I got ... You know,--I didn't ... I really didn't know much, and it was ... the warehouse ... It was a warehouse. It was like ... almost like working outside, 'cause it was all such a raw space and it was dead winter and ... and I was all comfortable and sort of wearing long underwear and dressing. But I knew ... And the guys I was working with taught me everything. I knew nothing.

A. Um.

R. And we worked together into the spring. And then, one of the guys took another small job and asked me to stay with him.

A. Hmm.

R. And then, with another guy, we kind of talked about starting a company, 'cause he didn't have much of a company. We were just doing a little independent.

A. Um.

R. And so, I got involved very early, contracting.

A. Um.

R. And I didn't know much about the business, but I knew more about business than they did. So together ...--you know. I was good on the client relations, and I was able to do estimates

A. Um-hum.

R. because I was able to talk on the phone,

A. Hmm.

R. get information. I was reading books about how you do things.

A. Hmm.

R. And we started this little company that lasted for about another six months, and I just kept learning as we went, and I would ... Sometimes, I would work with them, and sometimes I would

work on my own on very small projects. And I remember this one project where ?? nothing for the afternoon, and I had to...It was like a really cheap motel. It was like ... almost like formica on the walls;--very cheap. I don't know what they call it, but it was very cheap plastic laminated wall covering.

A. Uh-huh.

R. And I put the hole in the wrong place for the pipe, and that's the kind of thing you can't patch. Right?

A. Um-hum.

R. And the ... at the front of one of the books,--what's that book that Dale--what's her name?--Dale

A. ??

R. ??--right. Someone had got me that book during this time, and in Against the Grain there was: a good partner knows how to fix her mistakes,--an expression,--

A. Uh-huh.

R. so I was all by myself, and there was this mantra that I just started chanting: A good carpenter knows how to fix her mistakes. And that was, for me, an experience, because I figured out a way to fix my mistakes.

A. Um.

R. And a lot of,--you know--trial and error in ... in life. And as time went on, I would take on little side jobs for myself. I would build a bookcase for somebody. I never built bookcases before. And then ...

A. Um.

R. And then, I worked for this ... Then, I heard about this old man who was a contractor, who always needed a helper, and he always had women be his helpers.

A. Hmm.

R. That was what I found out once I took the job, and I worked for him. I mean,--this is upstate New York in the late '70s, early '80s, or 1980-1981, where \$5.00 an hour was the going rate for someone who was learning their trade;

A. Um-hum.

R. off the books, \$5.00 an hour. And I managed on that, 'cause I just was living sort of simply,

A. Um.

R. and with friends,--you know. Rent was cheap, and I either rode my bike or hitchhiked, or got rides with friends. Eventually I was able to buy a little car. I mean,--

A. Um.

R. I didn't need much so I was able to manage on very little. And I worked with this old man for another six months or so, and he ... or more, on and off. He was a real tradesman from the old school,

A. Um.

R. but he was losing it physically and ... and psych-- ... and psychologically also,

A. Um-hum.

R. and he really needed someone who just sort of fed his ego,--which is why I think he had women work for him, because he could tell us what to do and we would do exactly what he said, and we didn't ask too many ... We asked a lot of questions to feed his ego, but we didn't question him. You know,--

A. Yeah.

R. we didn't question his abilities. He would take us for three hour lunches 'cause he was having a tough day.

A. Um.

R. Or he would have us clean out a garage one day. He ... He was working for a very dear friend of his who was renovating her house,

A. Um.

R. and it was kind of like she was doing him a favor.

A. Um.

R. So here we were. Everybody was babysitting each other, but in the interim, I learned a lot of good little tricks of the trade.

A. Um-hum.

R. And during that time, I called the Union in the area,

A. Um.

R. and asked them about their apprenticeship and how you get in, and they said they'd call me when the chance came up. And during that time, they called me, and I went;--left him;--went on a Union job,--

A. Um.

R. started the Un-- ... the apprenticeship program. And then, when ... when there wasn't work with the Union, I went back with him,

A. Um.

R. and when there was work, I left him again. And I did that for about a year. And then, I moved back to New York City, because I was from New York and I was getting bored in the country. I'd spent eight years there,

A. Um.

R. and I felt like it was time to get back to the City for ... for bigger reasons, not ... not work related, but politically, I was more motivated to do other things, and I was ... 'cause this is a political activist thing. I was doing a lot of leftist work in the country.

A. Um-hum.

R. I was doing anti-Klan work and solidarity work for South Africa and El Salvador. And after a while, you work with the same twenty people, and it was ... The community was very small, and I was getting very restless.

A. Um-hum.

R. And you do your projects, but it ... there was only so much room for growth, it felt like.

A. Um-hum.

R. And I was relating to New York City a lot on the political things, so I moved down here. And when I moved down here, somebody told me about Non-Traditional Employment For Women,

A. Um.

R. and I contacted them to help me transfer my book. I needed to figure out how to get into the Union down here, and they helped me shape. And it was ... the way you had to do it then in the Carpenters was you had to find a job and then the Local would take you in.

A. Oh.

R. So I shaped with people from NEW for probably about a month before I got in, and I got a job in Washington Heights

A. Hmm.

R. and I got into Local 17,--which, at the time, I didn't realize that that was not necessarily a good thing. Local 17 was not,--I don't want to be quoted on this ??anything other than it's not a really ... it wasn't one of the best Unions to be in;--

A. Um.

R. not one of the best Locals;--not a lot of work.

A. Um.

R. Not a lot of work in the Local.

A. Right.

R. So, as time went on, I worked through the Local and I also was doing political work. And the most significant political work I was doing, at the time, was I started getting involved in construction brigades to Nicaragua,

A. Um.

R. and I worked until I organized a brigade. And about a year later, I left my job to go to Nicaragua for two months. And what I did was, I told my boss that I had to go take care of my sick sister so he laid me off, so I was able to collect unemployment

A. Um.

R. while I went to Nicaragua. It was actually for just a little over a month.

A. Um.

R. We built a school. And when I came back, the Union didn't send me out to work right away so I did odd jobs, and I worked for a little, small contractor, who was non-Union, who was just

willing to take me on.

A. Um-hum.

R. ?? a gay man, a couple of other friends of friends who put me to work.

A. Um-hum.

R. And I met working. I also took on some jobs of my own that ... things I felt challenged but able to do,--and I kept doing that. I kept working one way or another. And then,--let's see,--eventually I got hooked up with a contactor who I worked for for about three years,--non-Union, but he ... he helped me pay my Union dues during the time, and he sent me on a lot of the Union sites that he had to fanagle onto, and he hooked me up with some Union contactors so he could still be a sort of GC (General Contractor), but I was working for a sub, and a lot of things. It ended up ... I ended up in some fine ... some awkward although fine situations;--

A. Um-hum.

R. awkward now because I work for the Union. I would ... Some of the things, I would not want to go on record about necessarily with my name,--the Union, non-Union thing.

A. Well, we issue the transcript before ...

R. Okay.

A. and we would always have to have your permission to ...

R. Okay. I don't ... I mean,--who ... who's it for?

A. It's for the Tamamint/Wagner Labor Archives at NYU.

R. Yeah. I mean,--it's fine. I think .. I mean,--it's just ... Politically, it's awkward to be in the position I'm in, because the fact is that I was ... I got some really good breaks non-Union,

A. Um.

R. training-wise. I had people who, because they were sort of a progressive ... through a progressive world,

A. Um-hum.

R. they let me work with all my tools. They let me learn. They let me,--you know,--and I got ... and I got really good training given ... I got really good experience. I got really good hands-on opportunities

A. Um-hum.

R. that in the Union, I might have had a harder time getting. Well, the fact is that the Union wasn't sending me out on jobs,--

A. Um-hum.

R. the Local,--and I didn't really know how else to get a job. But they put my name on the list, and I never got called. So, in the meantime, I kept on figuring out other ways to work.

A. Yeah.

R. So that went on and on for a while and I ... it just spearheaded to other job opportunities. I organized other brigades. I was able to leave the job, go to Nicaragua, come back, get ... get another job through the same network,--the informal network I had created.

A. Um-hum.

R. And the whole time, I kept going to the apprenticeship program and I completed my school in the appren-- I completed schooling. I didn't have the ... the hours that you need to complete an apprenticeship, but I had the ... officially, I didn't have the Union hours, but I had been working steadily in my brigade.

A. But then, does that ... But then, do they still let you be a journeyperson or ??

R. Yeah, they do.

A. Yeah.

R. You don't get your official grad certificate from the International, but they do. And now I'd have the hours, 'cause I eventually went back to the Union.

A. Um-hum.

R. One of the jobs I took after a while,--which is not considered non-Union,--I took a job with ... I went and applied for a job with the New York Public Library,

A. Um-hum.

R. 'cause I had worked for a contractor that got a job in one of the libraries, and I met the guys who worked there for the library, and I ... and I ended up applying. And it was a very interesting job for me, because it really ... it was the first, like, a more official job I went into as a journeyperson, not as an apprentice.

A. um.

R. Not ... I mean,--they all were official jobs. I got paychecks. A lot ... Most of them were on the books.

A. Um-hum.

R. It was just that it was a Union ... It wasn't a Carpenters Union job. It was a City ... DC 37 job.

A. Um-hum.

R. But I applied as a ...-you know--a ... as a full mechanic, and I got the job as a full mechanic.

A. Um-hum.

R. And I realized I was a full mechanic.

A. Um-hum.

R. It was a nothing less. And I realized ... I mean,--actually, during that time, when I worked for some of these other smaller contractors, I was running the work.

A. Um-hum.

R. I didn't really doubt my ability. I had grown to be ... In some cases, I was even a foreperson for some of the smaller companies. But it was just about going out into the bigger world and saying that I am a mechanic,

A. Um-hum.

R. and I went, and I did it, and I got this job. It was a very interesting job 'cause it was in the ... the main branch of the New York Public Library, and I love New York,

A. Um-hum.

R. and this was in the basement of one of these fantastic buildings. And fixing things was fun and ...

A. Um.

R. But the pay was really low.

A. Um.

R. I was getting paid like first or second year apprenticeship wages. So I got frustrated with that, and eventually I ... someone knew somebody,--a friend of mine knew somebody in my Local and made a call for me, and ... and I got ... and the Local sent me out on a job.

A. Um.

R. So I did end up getting back into the Union after the ... pushing it and pushing it,--

A. Um.

R. going out as a mechanic. And then I went out as a mechanic for years,--for another like--what?--that was like '86, '87,--you know,--until about two years ago when I stopped working in the field to have the baby.

A. Um. Like what kinds of jobs? All different kinds of jobs or were they ...

R. The first ... Actually, the first job I got was with a wood working company,

A. Hmm!

R. and it was a series of calls and pushing and pushing to get this job in this company. But I got it, and then ... So I worked with the wood working company for a while.

A. Um.

R. And then, the next job I got was a general contractor, and that was .. so I did ceilings and I did dry wall,

A. Um.

R. and I did the finish work. Once it was ... If they did too much concrete ?? that kind of a shipment.

A. Um. Was there ever any other women on your jobs?

R. Not ... Rarely. No.

A. Yeah.

R. No, not much. Sometimes an electrician.

A. Hmm.

R. Well, during my apprenticeship, I worked at North River, which is one of the big water pollution treatment plants, and there were a lot of women on that job,--

A. Um.

R. carpenters and all trades,--and there was a lot of federal dollars on that job, so that's probably had to do with that.

A. Um. And then, you came to teach at the Carpenters School.

R. Well, yeah. I ... During ... During my time in the field, I knew, at a certain point, I had an interest in teaching and I contacted the school. And I had to pursue it a little bit, but I ended up getting a position teaching here

A. Um.

R. in the evening, one night a week, starting in '88. And I really liked it. I really ... I had really wanted it, I think, 'cause I knew I wanted teaching. I was very nervous, like: Am I good enough to teach? I'm not that good.

A. Um.

R. It hasn't ... It's not that long that I've been out of the program. But I really enjoyed teaching. And then, when I got pregnant, I decided that I didn't want to work. I wasn't quite sure how I was going to handle being pregnant in the field. I was very nervous about it. I'm kind of large, anyway, so I thought, with being pregnant, I'd get even bigger, and how am I going to move around, and how agile can I ... can I be? And on the ladder and all of this. So after I got three months pregnant and every-- ... and knew that everything was ... the pregnancy was going fine,

A. Um.

R. I started putting the word out that I was looking for some other opportunity.

A. Um.

R. And I was told about that Non-Traditional (NEW) be looking for a part-time instructor, and I thought that would be good,--part time ... I was looking ... I wasn't really looking for something part-time,

A. Um-hum.

R. but the idea of part-time instructor meant that I might be able to do this, not just through the pregnancy, but after I had the baby and stuff. And that's basically what happened. I went to them

A. Um.

R. when I was like four months pregnant, and worked ... although it was part-time, which was less than I would have liked to work immediately, it worked out very well for the first year. I was ?? 'cause I kept on working part-time, and that was really nice, and ??. And I taught. And as time went on in that program, there became more and more administrative duties that needed to happen, besides the teaching,--in addition to the teaching,--

A. Um-hum.

R. and I got more involved with program developemnt at NEW.

A. Um.

R. And I stayed there for two years. And then the Carpenters asked me to come on full-time

A. Um.

R. as a counsellor. When I did that, I gave up my teaching position at the Carpenters School, 'cause it just felt like I'd be spread too thin to

A. Um-hum.

R. be full-time as a counsellor and have to put in another night a week and have my family,

A. Um.

R. so I gave up my teaching position and I'm here full-time, sort of like managing students and giving them advice, and going out doing public speaking about what it's like to be a carpenter,

A. Um.

R. and gettting involved with some program development.

A. Where do you do the public speaking?

R. Public schools.

A. Yeah?

R. Um-hum.

A. Oh, that's great.

R. The schools ask us, on career days, to come and speak and we go to mostly middle schools, junior high schools and high schools.

A. Um. Your ... And your partner's a carpenter, too.

R. Yes.

A. That's great. A house full of carpenters.

R. Right.

A. So how's it been being a tradeswoman mom?

R. Well, Tylor's favorite room in ... in the house is the shop and

A. It's great you have a shop.

R. Huh?

A. It's great you have a shop.

R. We have a little basement. We have a basement, and I get a little nervous that the dust might not be good for him or something. But he loves ... I mean,--how's it been? I mean,--our schedule, when I was teaching, and Elly's schedule,--'cause she's working in the field,--is you come home early enough that you can, like,--you know ... I mean,--if you worked a real straight kind of straight office job, you get home like, at dinner time. At least one of us gets home before dinner time. You have time to cook and pick him up and ... I think the most significant thing about being a carpenter mom,--at this point, being a lesbian mom,--is that ... because Elly,--who I parent with and who's my partner, and who is also a Carpenter in the Union and also teaches at the school,--we weren't out, or we didn't think we were out when we were together without a kid.

A. Um.

R. And I definitely know I wasn't out at my job in the field because I was referred to as an old maid, and I laughed along with the joke and ... But we're ... at the school, we now are out to anyone who ... who--you know--can sort of like see. ... see the obvious and can figure out how to state the obvious. I mean,--I'm not going to push it down anybody's throat. That's not the intent. But we're out because we share a son,

A. Right.

R. and it's like, this is our family, and ... and it's acknowledged--you know--more in the context of family, not in the context of sexuality. We ... We are who we are.

A. Right.

R. And ... And that's been really interesting, because

A. Um-hum.

R. I think it's kind of easier to come out in the context of this is my family

A. Um-hum.

R. than the context of this is who I sleep with.

A. Um-hum.

R. And,--I mean,--people understand that it's a little less threatening when it's based on this child that they all meet and see, and--you know--"How's your kid?"--and you can show pictures, and you can all talk about parenting issues,

A. Um-hum.

R. and everyone talks about Disney World, and--you know--what did he say? and what's a good video and these issues,--you know. And And then, like, an expression like "Tylor came into bed with us this morning?"

A. Um.

R. and I'm just talking about my life.

A. Right.

R. I'm referring to Elly and I sharing a bed. It's like it's their pro-- ... I've .. I've ... I've ... I've heard,--you know,--I've heard me say this, and I've thought about it, and I've said, Well, that's just the truth.

A. Yeah.

R. And it's not so awkward, I think. But it comes out with people who ... at work who I'm talking with.

A. Um-hum.

R. So,--you know--those are some of the things. And I think mostly, people deal with it or don't. And I don't ... They don't say it to my face, if they have a hard time dealing with it.

A. Um. So have you found child care to be adequate, since you have a partner and ... or

R. Child care's tough. ?? I've just spent time today.

A. Yeah.

R. I mean,--we've had good child care. We had a home . We had ... When Tylor was first born, I had somebody who came with me to work,

A. Um.

R. and I nursed him, and she watched him while I ... for the hours that I would be in the classroom. And for a few months, he came to work with me.

A. Um.

R. And for ... And then, for a few months ... And then, for the next while, he eventually adjusted to doing home care with a woman on our block who took a few kids in.

A. Um.

R. We did that full-time for a year and a half. And then, at a year and a half, we put him in part-time to a day care program, and that seems very good. He really likes it, and part-time staying with the home care person. I mean,--we've been pretty good with ... I think we've sort of ... our child care ... It's just always a struggle because you're not with the kid as much as you'd like.

A. Right.

R. I think that ... I understand people who want to be a full-time mom. I'm ... I--you know--and give them a lot of credit, too, 'cause I also see how hard it can be.

A. Um-hum.

R. He's full-time with other kids, and I think that that's really good,

A. Um-hum.

R. and with other caretakers. And I'm really jealous that he's not with me, but he doesn't seem to suffer at all. I think the benefits from the exposure he gets,

A. Um.

R. and the schedule that we maintain,--the money that we have to pay for it, and all that,--but we manage it.

A. Um. Um.

R. And we ... we both,--you know--are doing okay with working full-time with our incomes, so we can swing it, and that's the ...

A. Um.

R. that's the trade off.

A. Um-hum. So ... So what would you tell him about going into the trades?

R. If he wants to! I just hope he,--you know ... I think that he'll un-- ... he'll know what a carpenter does very early on.

A. Um-hum.

R. He ... We visit Elly on the ... If Elly has overtime on the weekend, we'll go over and visit her on the job.

A. Um.

R. He'll come here and we'll play in ... in one of the shops ... Shop classrooms here.

A. um.

R. He visits our jobs. I think that's nice,

A. Um-hum.

R. and to get an idea. And if he wants to go into a trade, it's not bad money, and that's okay, and he can. I mean,--I'm kind of like ... I just want him to have an idea of what different people do, so he can decide what he wants to do.

A. Yeah. Great. Let's see what I want to a-- ... So, the tradeswomen movement ... Were you ever a part of, like, United Tradeswomen or that ??

R. I went to meetings.

A. Yeah.

R. I went to UT meetings. They were towards the end of their existence when I came back to New York.

A. Um-hum.

R. I'm not really clear how it, like, died off. But I went to a few meetings and then, there weren't any more meetings to go to. And then, a couple of years ago, they had a ten year anniversary and I went to that, and it was fun. I wish there was something like it now, but things are really kind of divided in New York. And I was ...--you know,--being that I was on staff at NEW and I've been a tradeswoman, I mean,--I ... I sort of know about all these other things that are going on. But New York City doesn't have a real grassroots Trades Union ... tradeswomen's movement,--you know. As a matter of fact, I was interviewed a few months ago, and someone asked me about the tradeswomen's movement, and I had to say, What tradeswomen's movement?

A. Um-hum.

R. Although I do get newsletters and I am aware that ... and I've gone to some conferences and that ... there is a network out there. When I worked at NEW, I was aware ... Part of the network is based on non-profit agencies that do what NEW does,--you know,--

A. Um.

R. doing the training programs for women coming into the trades.

A. Um-hum.

R. But part of it is women who are in the trades talking and supporting each other.

A. Um-hum.

R. And New York, our ... our network of women talking and supporting each other, doesn't relate to the training component that ...

A. Um.

R. And in some places it's all one organization, and some places, it's divided.

A. Um.

R. New York's divided. And part of the division with the grassroots of support end of it,--the tradeswomen talking,--it's like, you get a lot of issues of leadership,

A. Um.

R. and ?? people haven't--you know--given up leadership. Other people haven't taken it on,

A. um-hum.

R. and the personalities split,--you know--UT,

A. Um-hum.

R. and they continue to actually split the ... the general population of tradeswomen who don't come together.

A. A few years ago, there was the ... the Regional Council of Tradeswomen.

R. Uh-huh.

A. And now there seems to be sort of a push for a National Tradeswomen Network.

R. Uh-huh.

A. And--you know,--I wonder, do you have any ideas on how that would shape up or ... or ...

R. I think it's hard. I mean,--I've gone to Regional Council meetings, and I think that ... I ... I went to Regional Council meetings a year ago or two years ago. They were really bad.

A. Um-hum.

R. They were really boring. They were really in(to) club stuff. Like, if you didn't know what they were talking about, you wouldn't know what they were talking about,

A. Um.

R. because nobody brought in anybody new. And it was a lot of government bureau--women,--you know,--female government bureaucrats who care about these issues, and a couple of ... and then a few tradeswomen themselves, and a couple other people who ... But it just didn't feel like authentic networking. It felt

A. Um.

R. I felt very alienated. And ... And I'm not easily alienated, because I usually, like, walk in and have something to say about anything. So I ... I just think that that was telling. I just think that if I ... if I feel alienated,--someone who sort of like can well adjust to any clique or to any group,--imagine how anyone who's shy or isn't real active might feel. So I was not impressed. And I went to a few meetings, and then, it sort of ... they stopped meeting. Recently I heard they want to start meeting again, and I said I'd ... I would get involved if they went ... if they do it,

A. Um-hum.

R. but it's a lot ... I mean,--I think it's a lot of personalities going on that keep it, not really--you know--

A. Yeah.

R. welcoming. That's my opinion.

A. Yeah.

R. Did you ... Have you gone to any of those meetings?

A. A couple of years ago I did.

R. Uh-huh.

A. Yeah. But then, it sort of fell apart,

R. Uh-huh.

A. and I was in school and I couldn't attend. And then, when I ... now that I'm back in the game again, they're not happening. But I do sort of ...

R. I would ...

A. harbor this dream of the national ... of a ... of a New York Tradeswomen Network, kiind of like what we were talking about, but it's so hard to happen here. But it happens other places ,like in Oregon and Boston and ...

R. Right.

A. And I don't know why it's so difficult to happen here. Like, the closest thing is the ... the ... for me at all, is the Women Carpenters Committee, but that's like, not the other trades.

R. What about New York Tradeswomen? Have you ever called them or ??

A. It's not I haven't heard ... It's not happening for a couple of years.

R. I don't think that's just on paper. They were just on paper.

A. Yeah. Yeah. I mean,--they used to meet right yearly, and now, for a couple of years now, they haven't. I think that the leadership in that group is now sort of focused on the Women Carpenters Committee and trying to make that a legitimate thing,--you know.

R. It's all problematic.

A. Um-hum.

R. I do. I think that ... I'm not sure why. I can't put my finger on it, and it being more of chatting stuff than interview stuff, I think, unless this is some part of the interview you really want.

A. Well,--I mean,--no. Just,--you know,--no, I was just chatting.

R. Yeah. I think there's some personalities who are

A. Yeah.

R. not real good at bringing in other people and making it something that can work, that's open.

A. Yeah.

R. I mean,--it feels really,--you know--each ... I mean,--New York Tradeswomen has felt closed, and ...

A. Yeah, I know what you mean. How about Beizing? Have you got any thought on Beizing or ...

R. No. Are you going?

A. Uh,--I would like to, but--you know,--I don't know. I have to see how the finances go and everything,--you know? I mean,--I would like to go as part of the tradeswomen thing. But again, I feel like, I wonder ... I wonder if it's going to really be a representative sample or

R. Um-hum.

A. it's just going to be people that know each other and everything.

R. Hmm. Is there some networking happening in Beizing?

A. Yeah. They want to send a ...a--you know--tradeswomen group, and they want to have a tradeswomen workshop.

R. Oh, great!

A. And--you know--they ... they mentioned Boston Tradeswomen Network was organizing someone, and they wanted to send twelve women from around the country. And,--you know--just how they're going to pick those twelve, and who those twelve will be, and all like that, is what

remains to be seen.

R. Well, how about ...

A. Yeah. So tomorrow's the start of Women's History Month. And is there anything that you know about ... about tradeswomen going on for that?

R. I know nothing for that.

A. And I just know of one ... one firefighter thing at the Brooklyn Historical Society,--some women fire fighters. And again, I guess New York's a hard nut to crack. But I gue-- ... I wish that,--you know,--I feel like that ... that we should be getting a lot of exposure. Every year, during ... during Women's History Month, I always feel like we should be getting a lot of exposure as tradeswomen,--

R. Uh-huh.

A. you know,--to, I guess, be speaking in the schools and all like that. But ...

R. Well, yeah.

A. hard.

R. It is hard. I mean,--I've heard people speak, again and again, about wanting to speak in the schools. But it wasn't until I started working at NEW that I realized ... On the one hand, it's like, if you're not employed full-time where you can get a job where you can go out and speak in the schools, you're not available.

A. Right.

R. We've got a lot of outreach to do. And to ... for the schools to know about you, to contact you to come and speak,

A. Um-hum.

R. and then, you've got to be readily available. I mean,--at NEW we were able to do that. And here at the Carpenters School, we don't even ask, and we get phone ... We get calls all the time for career day speakers.

A. Hmm.

R. And I've said to my supervisor, "I think you should send the women. I think you should send the women,"

A. Um-hum.

R. 'cause I think that's who needs to go to these things.

A. Um-hum.

R. Anyone can tell ... Any one of us could tell them what a carpenter does.

A. Um-hum.

R. But it's the women who can influence the women. And I think ... And I hope that sort of from a sort of more being in an official location that I can have that same impact that we otherwise intend,--you know;--that as a women's organization, we say we want to get into the schools. There's a ... They don't call women's organizations. They call labor, or they call

A. Right ...

R. the trades.

A. the Carpenters School. Right.

R. Yeah. So it's kind of an interesting place to be, 'cause you see that from this official capacity, you can have the same impact,

A. Yeah.

R. hopefully.

A. Yeah.

R. I mean,--I do go out there a lot, especially this time of year, spring. They have all these career days as part of the curriculum.

A. They used to ... They used to do it. I used to have career blanche (??) with my supervisor. But that supervisor's not there any more. Now I have one that's not open to that at all.

R. ??

A. Too bad.

R. Yeah.

A. But,--you know,--back to the Contract On America. Let's see. So ...

Side Two

R. ... survival, and just how I'm going to tell them. I can tell other apprentices how to survive. And, I think,--you know,--for me, one of my strategies was just keep on working. Not ... You know,--when the Union didn't have work for me, I kept on working.

A. Um.

R. I mean,--I remember the time a friend said she wanted ?? and I went to the library, and I read about fasteners. And I ... And I went to the hardware store and I asked them more questions than they could tolerate. And ... And whatever I charged her, I must have made like \$3.00 a day. I mean,--it just took me so long. I ended up with a two-loft bed. ?? And I remember it was like ... I don't want to say it was over my head. It was right at my level, but it was ... it was a challenge.

A. Um-hum.

R. And so, partly, it's like, I ... I always ... One of my strategies for survival was just to keep on working,--to keep on taking on challenges. Just to keep on doing something, even if no one's going to give it to you. No one gave ... You know,--the Union never called me for work, and I kept on figuring out ways to work, even though it might have been subsistence level money coming in and it was ... At least, like, by continuously working, you're continuously learning.

A. Um-hum.

R. And ... And I never ... I kept on finding out ways to learn. And I remember being very, very demoralized when I got laid off that they never had me do anything beside move materials, and I was very disappointed that they laid me off 'cause I was the best damn materials handler around, and how could they lay me off? And it turned out to be a really good opportunity, because they weren't ... I wasn't learning anything there.

A. Um.

R. I ... You know? And ... And so, the other thing was that I learned was that,--you know,--when the door closes, you can have better opportunities ??

A. Um.

R. So one of the strategies for survival is to just keep on working. Another one is: my sense of humor really, really hasn't changed. And I remember during my apprenticeship, being appalled at the level of sexism. When a woman's husband followed her ... came ... A woman carpen-- ... carpenter apprentice, her husband came on the job and beat her up in the morning, before work started. And by the time I arrived, and everybody else, it was ... the rumor ... It had already occurred. He had come and followed her and beat her up. And I was appalled, and I was having a conversation with everybody, and everybody was like, "You don't get involved with that? That's his

wife, and you don't touch that with a pencil." Oh ??--you know ... And it was all about non-involvement and condoning it because you don't know what the business was. He could be right in doing it. And I was appalled for days. I ...

A. Um.

R. I think I would have,--even though it's still an appalling thing,--I want to say,--nothing about my sense of humor in this instance,--but more in terms of how I tolerated the crew.

A. Um.

R. It wasn't that .. I don't think I should ever change my ... my ability to not tolerate that incident, but how I handled everybody's response. I took everybody so seriously, and I ended up so angry at everybody,

A. Um.

R. because everyone,--all the guys I worked with,--no matter whether it was somebody I thought I liked or not,--everybody sort of had the same response to this. Sort of like ... Since then, the Mike Tyson thing came up.

A. Um.

R. It's like, if I hate ... if I stayed dogmatic in my responses, I ... you can't survive.

A. Right.

R. You'd ... You'd have to walk out. And I have walked out, in different instances, and I've changed jobs, or I went non-Union, or I--you know--went to Nicaragua or whatever. I mean,--I have had instances ... And I have walked into the bathroom and cried.

A. Um.

R. And I have,--you know--had horrible days when I came home. But my own sense of tolerance of these people and their opinions has had to adjust. Again, not to say that I now tolerate these opinions, but I've figured out ways to manoeuvre within them;--

A. Um-hum.

R. different ways to have conversations, or to avoid conversations ??,--or to change to things about humor, or to turn things around.

A. Um. ... see,--I have some ... What ... What predictors of success would you tell women coming in to ... that they would ...

R. ??

A. I guess,--yeah, the qualities ... Would that be the same as strategies for survival?

R. Their own predictors? What would be a predictor for themselves?

A. Yeah.

R. It might be similar to the strategies for survival, but it's an interesting different question. I mean,--predictors of success often are how long you can keep a job, although you don't want to get too involved in that because in fact ... in fact, these would work ourselves out of a job, every day we go to work. And the fact is that there's tremendous bias against women, no matter how good you are, so I don't want to make that too much of the ... of the--you know--barometer,

A. Um-hum.

R. because that would be a set-up. But how well you ... how comfort-- ... how comfortable you feel handling your own tools. When your tools start to feel like your own. I think ... I think, pride in your tool box and ownership of your tools is ...

A. Um-hum.

R. is something that you can really, like, gauge, when ... when that starts to happen and ... and they feel like yours. And,--I mean,--I have a certain ... I still ... and I go down, and I still have my tool box, although the tools kind of are spread out around the house now. But ... But I have my tool box, and I see my certain things that I just have a certain warm feeling for.

A. Um.

R. And I think that when you start acquiring that, you become a tradeswoman, and not an ... an apprentice.

A. Um-hum. Um-hum, yeah. That's good. Can you think of any other critical issues for tradeswomen activists?

R. Well, I think Unionism is ... is an im-- ... are important issues.

A. Um-hum.

R. Labor issues are important issues, in terms of sort of looking at ... especially with the Contract On America and everything else that goes on, in terms of what kind of rights might we have as workers. I think those are important issues.

A. Um-hum.

R. I think training issues. How ... How do people get trained, and how do people come in. Affirmative action issues, although affirmative action might, as a term, might faze out. As a concept, I think we need to figure out ways that the concept of ... of equity and ... and opportunities for training and opportunities for entry into the trade needed to be maintained for women.

A. Um-hum.

R. Maintained is a poor choice of words, 'cause they haven't even existed all that much:

A. Um.

R. maintained, strengthened and developed;--that we,--you know,--need to be, I think, on ... involved in those issues,--in the issues of equity in training ... And there are, of course, issues of sexism and racism, and how that effects all of those things.

A. Yeah. Oh yeah! I wanted to ask you about your sexual harrassment course.

R. Uh-huh.

A. You ... They asked you to teach that?

R. Yeah. Well, the ... the evolvement of that,--how that ... how that came to be,--is that there was somebody as a ... worked as a consultant here at the Carpenters School who--Mary Ellen Boyd. She was ... She has a long history. She was ... She was the Executive Director of NEW many years ago. And about five ... Well, about four years ago, she worked on a grant here with the Carpenters. I think they called it a--what did they call it?--instructor development ...

A. Hmm.

R. It was a special projects grant, and it involved a few things. It involved some special training for the instructors, and it involved some money to give sexual harrassment training to the apprentices and to the instructors,

A. Um-hum.

R. and to develop some instructors who could give that training. And they did that grant with NEW. What the grant was: they would give so much money to NEW to pay them to train here at the school, to ... from NEW,--the staff from NEW,--to ... to do a training at the school and to train some of their instructors, and for the Carpenters to develop a ... a pamphlet on sexual harrassment. So Mary Ellen Boyd worked very hard on it with somebody else from NEW. I was on the staff at New, at the time, but I wasn't involved ...

A. Um-hum.

R. At the beginning, I wasn't involved in this project at all, sort of to ... to my dismay, but that ... I wasn't involved, and I wasn't pulled in, and I wasn't informed, and I was unrelated to it except sort of to see it as it developed.

A. Um-hum.

R. As things went on, Mary Ellen left as her consultant position, but the grant was in full swing. And the person from NEW who was giving the training became very ill,

A. Um.

R. and subsequently passed away (Lola Snyder). And I was on staff at New, and I was on part-time staff here at the school, and I was asked to fill in and teach that course as a staff member from NEW.

A. Um.

R. And I did that. And partly, in the interim, I think, my doing that and doing a few other things representing NEW with the Carpenters are the things that got me to be asked to come on full-time at the school.

A. Um-hum.

R. So when I was asked to come on full-time at the school, it was, and you can continue doing this training. And I didn't want to take this training away from NEW, so I looked into the history of it and found out that the grant was actually for a year. The year had expired. They actually hadn't trained anybody on staff at the Carpenters School, like they had originally agreed. But here I am. I'm on staff at the Carpenters School, and I was trained. So ...

A. Right.

R. So I now give it. Yeah.

A. That's great. I love the pamphlet.

R. Oh good. I give it. And I've tried to train a few people on staff here. And that's really hard, because I want men to be able to give the class, but I have yet to have found ... I haven't yet--you know--developed that well. So you'll see, if you sit in on any of the classes, ??

A. Yeah. I'd love to, sometime.

R. Um-hum. I can give you a schedule. I'm bringing some men in. But what happens is you

give ... you give up control when ... It's not ... It's not the same workshop when other people are co-teaching it.

A. Yeah.

R. And I ... So it's a little tough;--a little tricky.

A. Um-hum. It's great though. It's great that they're doing that.

R. Well, hopefully, they'll train fore-- ... shop stewards and foremen and supers next.

A. Um. Right on.

R. They/slash/we.

A. They did that ... They did that at my job. But now we need a refresher course;-- a little ...

R. Who gave the training?

A. Oh, it was in-house. It was films and ... Or maybe they did hire ...

R. The Board Of Ed?

A. Yeah. Maybe they did hire consultants. You know,--I can't remember. It was so ... I was so sensitive about it all because I felt like nobody was taking it seriously. I mean,--the people giving it were, but I mean the ... my co-workers. Well, that's ... that's about ... Have you got anything else that you can think of that you'd like to add?

R. No. You can just tell me more about the study.

A. The ... The ... What we're doing with it? Well, it's ...