

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in Labor Unions

Personal Experience

O.H. 1867

DONNA ROMEO-BOBECK

Interviewed

by

Holly Hanni

on

May 9, 1997

DONNA ROMEO-BOBECK

Mrs. Donna Romeo-Bobeck was born in Youngstown, Ohio on May 13, 1944. She was raised in the Brier Hill location of the city and her father worked in the steel mills. Donna attended Ursuline High School and graduated in 1962. She went to Youngstown State University for two years before she started at Delphi Packard Electric in 1964 at the age of 20, then returned in the early 1990's. She was divorced when her daughter was seven months old, in 1972. Her job has given Donna economic security while raising her daughter alone. She has always put her daughter first and, at times, has found it difficult to find enough time.

Donna became involved with Local 717 activities as a result of a friendship. The president of the local asked her to chair a Consumer Affairs committee. She took the position and began by raising funds to operate the committee. She was also involved with CLUW [Coalition of Labor Union Women] and held a seat on the executive board. Donna has tried to include the families of the union members in the events she has created. For instance, she coordinated a fashion show for two years in a row, and the children of the union members were the models. She said the biggest problem that women face in the union is the inter-politics with other women. She became burned out as a result of the petty inter-politics and has decided to not be active in the union activities anymore. She feels she has paid her dues and hopes that the young female members will take up the struggle. In 1995, Donna married for a second time.

H: This is an interview with Donna Romeo-Bobeck for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Women in Labor Unions, by Holly Hanni, on May 9, 1997, at 561 Joan Ave., at 7:00 p.m.

I see from your history sheet that you were born in Youngstown. Tell me what it was like growing up in Youngstown.

B: Well, it was wonderful. I really had a nice childhood. We lived in an area called Brier Hill and we were all Italian. The children played in the street and everybody was welcome at everybody else's house. Our fathers were steel workers. It was nice. I have very fond memories. As I got older, I was going to Youngstown University. I attended Ursuline High School, went to Youngstown University -- Youngstown College then, I think, or maybe it was Youngstown University -- on a dollar a day. YSU was not a state school in 1962. So when I got my job at Packard, I was rather happy. It was nice.

H: What did your parents do?

B: My father was a steel worker and my mother was "just a house keeper."

H: Just? That is a lot.

B: That is right, we know that now. [Laughter]

H: So with your father being a steel worker, were you aware of unions?

B: Yes. Well, I think our roots were in the labor movement. Everyone that lived in Brier Hill was associated with the mill in one way or another. Our grandparents came from Pennsylvania, and they were coal miners. So yes, I would say unions were in my roots.

H: How did you like school?

B: I liked school. I had a lot of fun. I really did like it, and I was always curious. I was not a very good student because I also wanted to "live," and being that I was Italian and from a very protective family, high school was a whole new thing for me. I never really adjusted, grade-wise, I think, until I went to college. I was always up and down, up and down. [I] did not know what kind of a student I would be because I just also wanted to have fun.

H: Okay, you went into YSU. What did you go into when you started college?

B: When I first started college, I was going to major in business, and I was really interested in advertising. I just wanted to do something in business or art. I took a lot of art classes, but I had no talent. [Laughter] It was like, what am I doing

here? I always loved merchandizing and sales and everything. Actually, that kind of did pay off for me later on through the years because I was always the salesman. I could sell anybody anything, and I think that basis kind of led to all my fundraising activities and political life.

H: It helped you?

B: Yes. I was going to Youngstown, and that is when I got my job at Packard, in 1964. So for the first six months, I was so thrilled to be able to make money. For the first six months that I worked for Packard, I worked afternoon turn there, and I was taking a full load down at Youngstown, and I did not do well at all. I started in August -- they laid us off for three weeks, and they bumped the seniority up to September -- so by Christmas time, one thing or the other had to go, and it was not going to be my job. I quit school then. I was probably a sophomore.

H: Was Packard your first job?

B: Packard was my first job. I worked a couple weeks for the Youngstown Board of Realtors. But that was my first serious job where I actually got a pay check.

H: I notice that you have a daughter.

B: I have a daughter. Her name is Lynaia Marie, and she is a 1993 graduate of Kent State. She is a lease-transfer agent for Columbiana Buick Olds Cadillac now. She handles leases for all the Pep vehicles, Product Evaluation Program.

H: What is a Pep vehicle?

B: GM lets the executives test drive the vehicles, and then when they come out of service, they let all the employees lease them or buy them.

H: When did you get married?

B: When did I get married? I got married in 1968 the first time. And I was divorced in 1971. [Laughter]

H: I noticed, from your history sheet, your daughter was seven months old when you were divorced.

B: Right. She was seven months old. Actually, I filed for a divorce when I was pregnant, and in the state of Ohio, you cannot get a divorce when you are pregnant. I had to wait until after she was born. When it was all over, she was about seven months old.

- H: What was it like raising your daughter on your own?
- B: Well, it was tough. It was nice, but the total responsibility of it it was tough. I really have been thankful and grateful because I do have my job at Packard. But I was hell-bent that I could raise a well-adjusted, intelligent, young woman, and sure enough, it turned out that way, because I am real proud of her. [Laughter]
- H: That is good.
- B: She is going to be 26 in August. I think I did a pretty good job. I am very proud of her.
- H: How did you cope as a working mom, then?
- B: Well, it was tough. And I went through a lot of ups and downs. My girlfriend and I laugh -- we got our divorces together, we had our children together. Still, to this day, we do not know how we did it. We shared the same baby-sitter. There were so many days that we would be coming home on 422 in our broken-down cars, counting pennies, just trying to see what we were going to do to make ends meet. Even though we had good jobs, it was such a tough time, and just trying to get everything done that we needed to get done -- paying for our child care and just doing everything that we needed to do -- it was tough, but it was nice. And it got easier.
- H: What kind of problems? Do any certain problems come to mind?
- B: Well, the time. The time that you had to be away from your children, and the physical strain that it took, because of the jobs that we were doing. You know, we had to be there to make a living, we had to work the over-time. The guilt.
- H: Was it mandatory over-time?
- B: No, it was not mandatory, but if you wanted to improve your living standard, you literally had to do it. I do remember, early on, that there were a couple of Sundays that were mandatory. Later on, through the agreements, our Bargaining Committee negotiated it so that none of our over-time was mandatory. But just the guilt, I think, of having to be away from her, that was the worst. I know when she was just born -- that was another part of the emotional struggle, too -- because when she was a baby, I would only work enough days so that I could afford to stay home with her. I made sure that I did not miss any of her school activities when she started going to pre-school. I always used my vacation days just solely for that purpose. I was never one to miss work, though. I always went to work; I was raised with a strong work ethic. That kind of paid off for me. A lot of people were absentee's! [Laughter]

H: Who watched her when she was a baby?

B: I had the same baby-sitter from the time she was six months old, a lady by the name of Sandra Ambrose. She was from Brier Hill, too, and she watched my daughter from the beginning all the way until she was in high school. Even in high school Lynaia would go down there. She still calls them her aunt Sandra, and her uncle Donnie. She has another extended family there, too.

And she would go between there and my father's house. My father was alive at that time, and he always wanted to spend time with her, but he was partially disabled, so I would let her stay there a couple days, and I would pick her up and she would stink of cigar smoke. [Laughter] And I would have to clean up his house, and then take her home and clean up my house. It was something. He let her do her own thing. He spoiled his granddaughter. But when she was at Sandra's, Sandra did everything. I mean, I paid her, but she would have taken very good care of her any way. She would have her all nice and clean when I would come home to pick her up. It was quite emotional, though. The thing about it was, we were young and used to try to have our fun at work, because of the fact that there were so many of the girls in the same situation, as far as that went. And we did have our fun at work.

H: What did you do?

B: Gamble. [Laughter] We played cards at work, we drank in bars near work and at work, we did everything that there was to do, everything that you do when you are young, that you could possibly do, we did. We got away with a lot, we really did. But it refers to what I was telling you earlier about the fact that we all grew up there together, too. Lucky for me, I always knew where to draw the line. But a lot of people did not. You know, a lot of people bit the dust in those years because of things that went on there. It was different - sex, drugs and rock and roll.

H: Was it men and women together?

B: Always. There was a lot of female commeradery because, in the early days, there were more women than men. But as we were growing older and as we were expanding, it was always men and women. We had fantastic friendships there, because we spent so many years together, so much of our time together. So, yes, it was both.

H: What made you become active at your local?

B: Well, I had always been interested and always curious, and the simple truth is I just wanted to know what was going on. I was just nosy. [Laughter] What are we doing here, and how can we make this better, or how can we make that better? People were always asking questions, and so in order to know, I would have to

go to union meetings. I did not get active and up close and personal, though, until much later. But I always knew what was happening, because I always read the union news and the minutes of the meeting. I could always talk about it with the girls at lunch or on break, because I was reading. They would not read what was in the paper or what happened at the union meeting. So consequently, I would start answering their questions.

And then, over the years, it was like, my god, these people are coming to me to ask me this stuff. Then I got into the position where my own opinions were being inflicted into it, naturally. You know, how are you going to prevent that? Then I would be in a confrontation with the committeeman because, maybe I had a different view. [Laughter] And I was so politically naive. I did not know what you were supposed to say or what you were not supposed to say. I was just out there saying it and doing it. And if it was the truth, I really said it or did it.

H: What was the response from the union?

B: Well, I did not always get a real good response from the people that were in elected positions. But I always got fantastic response from my co-workers. It took me a long time to understand what was going on, though. It really did. I was so stupid.

H: Well, you were outside looking in.

B: Yes, I was outside looking in. I just could never understand. I know, so many times I would stand here and, during every campaign, think, How could he be over here supporting this guy when the last time he was over there on that side? You know, I just did not understand the game. It took me years, but now I got it. [Laughter]

H: From what I have seen in other interviews, it is the politics within the union.

B: Oh, the politics were atrocious. It is like Charlotte says all the time -- she told me when I interviewed her -- she says, "It is like a soap opera, if you know the players. It makes for an interesting Sunday." Who is doing what to whom? Who is going to win this one? [Laughter] But I had no idea of how bad it was, and really how bad it was with the women, until I got up close and personal.

H: How?

B: The women are their own worst enemies. You know, when I did get involved, once I became a member of the Women's Committee, a good friend of mine got elected to the presidency.

H: Was that male or female?

B: He is a male. He did get elected to the presidency. We were in trouble then; we did not have a lot of money. And he asked me to come up with some ideas to do a fundraiser for the local. So he put me on the Women's Committee and, stupid me, I said, "Oh, yeah, I have some really good ideas. We could really do some things here." [Laughter] At that time, we had a female vice president.

H: What was her name?

B: Barbara Gleason. She had aspirations to be president some day.

H: She got hired by the management, did she not?

B: Yes, now, I believe she is hired by management. But at that time she was vice president. I had no idea what was going on there. She was really against me and anything I tried to do. So I did the fund raisers for the local and they were quite successful. But it just was horrendous, what I had to go through. As a matter of fact, I wrote a paper about it for a labor studies class at YSU, and I was going to ask you whether or not you wanted the two papers that I wrote, because you might be able to use some of the material in them.

H: Yes, sure. We would appreciate it. So you feel there is a lot of competition within the union, amongst the women?

B: I do not know that it is healthy competition. The women that have been up close and personal for years, for 25 and 30 years, they definitely know how to play the game. And they are going to do it, but they are mainly going to do it for themselves, not to serve the membership. I was naive; I really did not want anything from the local. I wanted to try to give something back to the local. So consequently, doing the fashion shows and doing the fundraisers, for me, it was very positive. It was my idea to do something with our families. During the 1980's it was like unions were starting to fall by the way-side. We could not do picnics anymore. The children were all starting to grow older. We were getting older. What can we do to involve our children? I always knew in my heart it would be a success. Who do we spend more money on than our kids, right? Grandparents, parents, everybody would come. My daughter had modeled locally, in Youngstown, so I knew I could do this kind of event. So I just kind of brought it here. I told Louie, I said, "You know, Lou, this is going to be a fantastic fundraiser for the local. We could do this."

H: He was the president?

B: He was the president. Lou Palone was his name. Little did I know that the women were going to be all up in arms because, naturally, they thought, 'Well geez, she must want to be president. What is she going to do?' They just could not understand that it was just going to be a simple little thing like, let's just make

some money and have some fun and give these kids an opportunity to do something they never did before. They just could not believe that it was just that simple. I wanted nothing. So it was just horrendous. I mean, it was horrible. That has probably been the most disappointing thing for me, because of how the women operate. They are their own worst enemies. I have said it for years, that a woman can ask me a question and I can stand there and give her a view, give her my opinion, and tell her the truth about what really happened.

Say if it is on a motion at the union meeting or over an issue. I can tell her the truth, and as long as some elected official did not walk up behind me, she would believe me. But as soon as somebody did and she asked him, he would stand there and lie to her. And she would still believe him over me anytime. [Laughter] It was that kind of thing. It was very, very frustrating. And I was the type of person, I just have to tell people. I could never just kind of soft-soap an issue. I do not think that I was a bitch, but I think I probably have the reputation because I never took the stuff from the women. I did not know how to do that. I was just hell-bent on just doing things. I did not understand the way the game got played. I thought it was all about hard work and we were just supposed to serve. I did not know we were supposed to be serving ourselves.

H: Do you feel that is still a problem with the union?

B: Oh, absolutely.

H: More so?

B: More so. And it always will be. The women lost control of it, though. Well, maybe now they might just be coming into where they could get elected, but I think it is going to be a lot of the younger women, maybe, out of need. Because the cycle has gone around again now. We had all the good times. The young women that are working there now that are low wage, they have to start all over again. But they are smarter than we were.

H: You were the first.

B: We were the first, we fought the battles, but they are smarter now and they have more tools at hand. I mean, they can go on-line and instantly communicate with people all over the country. We did not know those kinds of things when we were coming up. Organizing and trying to stay in touch with what was going on with other women and other locals and learning from them, that was a big struggle for us. And in order to get the money to do that, we would have to go to the president to ask. We were always kept away from conferences and kept away from anything that could have educated us. They would not support us. No. And then we had women that, as long as they were being handed something like an expense-paid trip, they would go against other women. You mentioned one of the women's names, you have already interviewed her -- and I

will not tell you who that was. [Laughter]

H: I can guess.

B: She happened to be the president of the coalition at one time, and I was on the executive board.

H: Of CLUW [Coalition of Labor Union women], you mean?

B: Of CLUW, right. Now, there were 11 women that wanted to attend the convention, and we had a little caucus and all decided that we were going to go to the membership meeting, we were going to set a motion aside where the executive board had denied us money to attend this one conference, this coalition convention. And we set it all up, exactly who was going to say what, how we were going to get it done, how we were going to argue this to the floor, and how the money was going to be divided.

H: Solidarity.

B: Exactly. We would go to the meeting, everybody did their part, we set the motion aside, the president gives us the money. The only thing is, weeks later he writes the check to the coalition, to the president of the coalition, and makes the check out to CLUW. She deposits it in the coalition's account and disperses the money, not the way we all agreed to, but the way she saw fit.

H: To who she wanted to.

B: Exactly. Her and her friends got more and everybody else got the shaft. [Laughter] This is what goes on. That is the kind of thing it is. Because she just happened to be at the hall and this is the way he wanted to do it because, why should he pay taxes on writing out 11 checks, even though they have always done it, historically, for the men.

H: It was giving her some authority.

B: Absolutely. Too much. It was very unethical for both of them. And I saw that happen time and time and time again.

H: Do you think that men intentionally do that?

B: Absolutely. The men love to pit the women against each other. They certainly do. That is their whole game plan.

H: And the women allow it? Certain women.

B: Certain women that lack integrity. That is one of the major reasons why I am no longer involved. I just cannot deal with it anymore. It is just too much.

H: Too stressful?

B: Well, I have matured. And now that I know the game, it also is a matter of integrity. [Laughter] I truly believe in trying to educate women. But at what point are you going to use your education? I raised a child, and I think I did rather well, and I did not have to beat my head against a wall in order to make her understand what she needed to do for herself, for her own self respect, and for the other women that she was going to associate with, and how she was going to conduct herself as a woman out there in the workforce. So, consequently now at 53 years old, why do I have to deal with imbeciles? I can talk to my daughter.

My daughter has got it. She absolutely has got it, and I love it. If I get any satisfaction out of my involvement now, it is watching her and her friends and how they operate. She had to go through this. She got out of Kent State and the only job she could get with her degree was tending bar. There is a service industry out there, in order to make the kind of money she wanted, and needed, to live on her own. She did that for a while. Even with all our political connections, she still could not get a job in her field, because she wanted to work in the court systems. She was a criminal justice major.

H: That is what I have a degree in.

B: I called everybody, everybody that I worked for, tried to help her. She had political friends trying to help her. Nothing. She is better off doing what she is doing. And she picked it herself, she got her own job. I got such kick out of it because, she was telling me when they hired her, they had told her she was going to make a certain percentage and she was going to have a certain amount of money by the end of the year. So Christmas came and went, and she did not think she made the money they agreed she was supposed to make her first year. So she came home one night and she told me, "Well, I just went in there and I told them, 'You know, it is not worth firing up the [GMC] Jimmy to drive out here.'" [Laughter] So she ended up getting her raise. And I just loved it, the way she did it. And I thought, she got it. She knows she has to assert herself. She knows what to do, and she is not going to shaft anybody and she is not going to use a man to do it. She is going to just do what needs to be done. And I like that. So it was worth something.

H: Getting back to the conflicts within the union, when you said she is not going to use a man to do it, do you think that is the attitude or mentality of a lot of women within the plant?

B: Oh, absolutely. And even if it is not, you get accused of it anyway because there are so many of them that did it that way. For so many years they used a "casting

couch," so to speak. The men do not even realize that there are women that come from other ways of thinking, you know, that have a certain amount of integrity, that are not going to do it that way. They will not be subservient

H: Collectively, do women deal with women who use the "casting couch"? Do they confront women if they know someone is doing dirty deeds to get what she wants?

B: Well, I do not. I know instantly when it is happening, now. I just do not bother with it because you cannot. You would be confronting something always. I am much more direct, I think. If I wanted something or if I thought something needed to be done. I have no problem with calling the president, making an appointment to see him, or calling the chairman or telling the committeeman or telling the sub-chairman, where I am coming from, without even thinking about the fact that, "Gee, maybe I should have slept with him first."

H: What about the president giving the checks?

B: Roger Van Gilder -- I went in and told him that was a really politically stupid thing to do. I let her know that I knew that she was up to her manipulation, but my focus was telling him that it was a dumb thing to do, that it was never done before and there was no way that he could have justified what he did. It was morally and ethically wrong. He dearly paid for it, too, because he touched 11 women, and he did end up losing his election when he ran again. [Laughter] It just is not the right thing to do, and if the woman was not smart enough to know that, it was his responsibility as president to know. She has literally ruined herself, politically, in the local now anyway, with men and with women. So those kind of actions all come to pass.

H: I know who you are talking about and everything, because she held a position at one time within the union.

B: Recording Secretary, right.

H: She did not even want to discuss the union. She talked about CLUW and sisterhood. Big emphasis on that.

B: No, she has no idea what sisterhood is all about. It is easy to talk about.

H: What has been the hardest part of being a working woman?

B: The hardest part of being a working woman? I would probably say the emotional toll that it took on me later, going into menopause. Once I realized the emotional toll of that time, because of the fact that I was raising my daughter by myself, I also always thought that I needed to be making money. So I watched the men,

because I knew I could not get ahead in the union. I could have gone into management, but I chose not to do that because in management, I would have had to have been more subservient to management policy than out on the floor. Out on the floor I can make money and just work the hours that I want to work. I did have an opportunity to work in management, but I bypassed that. So once I was working out on the floor, I always thought, I have to be where the men are. Whatever the men are doing, those are going to be the easiest jobs and that is where the money is going to be. So I did that. I worked ten years on the labor gang and then I worked ten years on the tow motor.

H: What is the labor gang?

B: It is the maintenance crew. We were construction laborers. We operated jack hammers and we cleaned offices and we worked outside and cut the grass. Just whatever needed to be done, that is what the labor gang does. The jobs were easier. We could get done early. That is why we had time to gamble and drink and do a lot of things that we were not supposed to be doing. But the money was there. It was better money because you worked more overtime and it just was, all in all, much better because I was not standing there on a conveyor or pounding away at a press or taping my hands up on a jig over and over and over again.

H: Redundant.

B: Very monotonous. As a matter of fact, I thought about going into skilled trades for a long time, but I did not want to take the time away from my daughter, because I was raising her. And I went on the tow motor because I saw, ah, I can make money here. This is real nice.

H: What does a tow motor do?

B: The tow motor drivers -- and at that time they were all men -- they hauled the freight all over the plant, all over the complex. Load the trailers.

H: So you drive fork lifts and stuff?

B: The fork lifts, right, for ten years. And the big drexel shipping forklifts. At that time, they used to have railroad box cars that would come into the plant, and they would have big drexel fork lifts up on the shipping floor, because they would have to load the boxes into the railroad car. Anyway, we were among the first, and that was a real treat there, too, because it was just atrocious. The men did not want women driving the heavy equipment. You know, they would grease the steering wheels and put water on the top of the trailers so when we rode in, they would fall on us. [Laughter] Just all that crazy, dumb stuff.

H: Retaliation.

B: Right. I would have to go in the morning to pick up my aisle sweeper, when I was on the labor gang, down to plant 11. Everybody was supposed to share the equipment, but I was the first woman to drive the aisle sweeper on day turn. One of the first -- I should not say I was the first. I would have to walk down to plant 11 in front of all those men, to go pick it up, right? And I was terrified every morning because I would go down there and they would be screaming filthy names. "You whore!" [Laughter] Everything rotten that they could scream at the women they would scream at us. So I would just grit my teeth to control my anger, not answer or say anything. And pray that it was going to start and pray that I was going to be able to get out without a humiliating scene of some type. Sometimes it did start, sometimes it did not. I was very insecure, but I just was not going to let anybody know that I could not do this thing. You know, I was terrified, too, a lot, because I did not know if I was going to run it off the dock. I got very skilled at it after a while. In the beginning it was real scary.

H: Did you ever chase after them with it?

B: Later, yes.[Laughter] They used to try to run me off the dock, you know, and they did come damn close to it a couple of times. Yes, much later, once I got secure. Yes, I think it was the day that they actually called me that, you know, the cunt word, I just really had a fit. I just fired that sweeper up and I drove up to plant 12 and I parked in front of the foreman's office and I went in there and I just said, "Listen, I have had enough of this. There is no reason for this behavior, because I will have your job if I have to deal with this kind of thing again." I said, "There is no reason in the world." They started delivering the sweeper to me, my supervisor had them deliver it to me. Those were the kind of things that went on. Some of the women put up with real humiliation and danger.

H: Like what?

B: Going on the molds, for example. I mean dangerous things.

H: Somebody mentioned to me that they put rodents there.

B: Oh yes. I mean, just all kinds of things they did. You just never knew what the hell they were going to do next. And some of the things could have hurt somebody, you know, especially on the molds and everything, because those were dangerous.

H: Those are the plastics, right?

B: Those were the machines that molded the plastic parts, right. People would lose fingers and hands in that machinery and, you know, you cannot jam those up.

H: The men were jamming the machines?

- B: Oh, they were doing all kinds of horrendous things. You never knew what they were going to do.
- H: How did the women cope?
- B: Well, a lot of them swore and carried on. You know, they joined in the struggle any way they could. They would march to the front office. They fought. They did fight, but they never left the jobs. They stayed on the jobs. [Laughter]
- H: What did the union do when all this was going on? Was there support for the women?
- B: Very little. But then once the committeemen understood that if they wanted to keep the positions that they had they were going to have to start taking care of the issues, then they did start taking care of them. There was just no choice because they were not going to get elected again and they wanted their jobs. So who better to reason with the men in leadership positions than the men on the floor, right? So they finally got it and then it just overwhelmed them. The women, once we learned it, then other women just started coming on, too. So then it just completely turned around so that the women had all the good jobs and the men were on the conveyors and the presses. It just completely reversed itself.
- H: Tell me about your involvement with the Consumer Affairs Committee.
- B: The Consumer Affairs Committee [Laughter]. Louie appointed me to the Consumer Affairs Committee because the Women's Committee did the fund raiser, the fashion show, and then we did the car raffle. So the membership had wanted a Consumer Affairs Committee at that time. There was a petition taken up. Actually, the woman that started it all, along with some people at Lordstown, her name was Connie Thomason. She was the first chair. It was so stressful for her, she stepped down. Then he asked me to take it. What we did there was mediate whatever was going on out in the community with the car dealers. Or if somebody had a problem in the community with any business, they would call me and tell me their side, I would contact the business and see if we could try to get them to fix it in some way. If it was a bad floor, if it was a problem with the car. So, basically, I was a liaison between the membership and the businesses out in the community.
- H: How long did you do that for?
- B: Well, I did it for Louie's term, and then Roger Vangilder asked me to do it for his, too. Probably six years, the better part of six years.
- H: Do they still have it?

B: I do not think so. I turned over a budget when I stepped down. I had a \$2,000 treasury and turned it over to them, asking them that if they were going to disband the committee to just turn the money over to the Women's Committee so that they could do a conference or do something. But the president refused me at that time, so I really do not know what happened. I never knew, after me, of another one. I knew that a man had taken the position, but I never knew of one actually functioning in the way that I had when I was there. Actually, a lot of people today think that my daughter got her job as a result of the fact that I had that job. But that is so not true. [Laughter] But people just assume that because I was out there with the car dealers and the dealerships, that she got her current job through me. She did it all on her own and I had no idea that she was even going to end up in the car business. I thought she was going to be an attorney.

H: Why did you work on the Political Action Committee?

B: Why? Because I loved it. That is one thing that, really, I just loved -- national and local politics. I loved working on the Dukakis campaign.

H: I worked on it, too.

B: Did you? I loved everything about it. I worked on June Lucas' campaign. It just is very interesting to me. I would have loved to have been a part of President Clinton's campaign and his re-election. All of that. But by that time, I had just [decided] that is enough.

H: When did you become involved on the Political Action Committee?

B: Sometime in the 1980's. There you go again, you could only get appointed, so it had to be Louie's administration or sometime thereafter because once Louie appointed me and once I did the work that I did for the local, then it was like Roger Van Gilder had to do something with me because I had a voting block of friends now. Then Roger had two terms. Then Nick Border got elected. I really just do not do anything with the president now because he is probably the most sexist president that we have ever had. He just has no use for women, and if he does, it is a real big secret. Half the membership does not even know who or where he is now. He is never on the shop floor. He was always a very good benefit rep, I will not take that away from him. People that work in benefits now claim that he is still excellent as the president of his benefit staff. But I do not see the man as understanding that he has a membership of 8,000 people, that a lot of them are women. I do not see him as doing anything or as having a vision.

H: Are women still participating as much in the committees as when you were there?

B: Well, they are still there, but I do not know how active. They are not functioning.

They lost a lot of good workers. We were the worker bees of the local. No, they are just not there anymore, and I do not know what is going to happen as a result of that. It is almost as if there is a kind of complacency now. They are into this thing -- they keep feeding the membership the fact that the local does not have any money now. They do not have money. Well, they do not have money because they are spending the money, that is why they do not have money. The men are just kind of spending it on themselves and there are not women today that are always trying to generate it.

I always generated my own budget. The local did not have to pay me. Actually, I was probably the first self-sufficient chairwoman there. I generated the budget to have my committee operate, and then I operated from the budget that I generated. The local did not have to do anything for me. And then on the one or two occasions that I did ask to attend a conference, there was always an excuse not to go along with my request. I knew that I could be successful out there because I had done it in my own home, so I knew I could do it there. I was never a part of the in-crowd, where the expense or lost time money was coming easy to me. Lost time is money the local pays for union activities.

H: You said earlier that when women wanted to go to conferences, it was hard for them.

B: Oh, the men would always just say no to travel or expense money. And the women that were a part of the executive board, those that could have had some authority, did not think it was important, so they did not support it, unless it was for them. They would go down one recommendation after another, and sure they would be going off to workman's comp conferences and they would be going to conventions and they would be going to safety or benefit conferences, or district meetings. Three women would petition for a conference in Michigan and, no, they did not have the money. No, there were too many women that wanted to go. It was absurd, just absurd. The women would have to lose a days pay, in addition to travel expenses, if they chose to go to a conference.

H: Has there ever been a woman president?

B: No. Barbara Gleason ran. She ran and she lost and she just gave it all up. She ran and she lost because when she was there for all the years that she was there, she did not do anything to encourage other women, their participation. If anything, she tried to keep people out. They always tried to keep women out. The men, if they thought that there was a smart woman or somebody that was bright, they felt threatened, and the women just thought, well I am not going to do anything or educate her or tell her everything because then, my god, they are not going to give me the committee appointment or job that I want.

H: Right, competition.

B: Yes. There was so much of that. And it is a shame, but it is all the way from the international all the way down. We have only had one woman from our local recognized. Two women -- I take that back. Out of thousands, Pat Tutocki went to work for the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations]. She was from our local and she got appointed to the IUE International Union 30 years ago. And she may or may not still be with the AFL-CIO. And Diana McBride was a black woman and I think she came back to work now for Packard Electric in Warren. I do not even think she is working for the international. She got laid off from the IUE. And nobody after those two. This is crazy, that is just crazy. Nobody in all those years.

H: Do you think it is a lack of leadership or do you think it is a lack of solidarity amongst the women?

B: I think the women that are even at the international level just pay lip service to other women because, even when I went to the Coalition of Labor Union Women conventions as a delegate, there were open issues. There were women from our contingent that went to the Chairwoman of the International Women's Committee and told her what was going on at our local with women, and how women were being treated by the leadership. She did not use her position with the President of the International, Bill Bywater, to stop it, to help it. So it is, everybody ignored the issue from the top of the IUE International to the local level.

H: How is the representative from CLUW for the northeastern district elected. Who votes on that? Is it just the women from the northeast district?

B: It is all fixed. Everything is. They already know where they are going and who they are going to allow to move up. That is why I said, once you got up close and personal and you saw the game, and then you saw how it got, how it escalated, it is like, man, I really wasted my time here. I know that I could be out there on the floor, and I could help more women one on one, just talking to them. I do not need to dedicate myself, take time away from my family, to go serve the local, when it is more of a struggle for me to do it that way. I could educate women just by talking to them every day. For example, my Nutrition Action Newsletter, I used to mimeograph my copy. They would not even give me a column in the local's paper because this was getting my picture in the paper. I would have to go mimeograph my information and go pass it out to the membership because it was like, oh my god, do not let her picture be in there, in the union news. She might want to run for something. She is going to get a little too well known here. I do not have to deal with that.

I really have a problem with this Charlotte Ingalls and I laugh about this all the time, because with every president, you know, supposedly, they want you to write a letter if you want to be reappointed to the committee's. I said, "Sure, I raised all this money. I am going to write him a letter. If he does not think I

deserve to be on it, I am not asking nobody for nothing." [Laughter] You know, I used to do that before. I am not doing that stuff anymore. It should be an automatic thing, just because of the fact that we were good workers. We did it, we were subservient, we did everything we needed to do for the local and more. And we are going to write a letter to ask them if we could bend down and kiss your ring? No, I do not think so. I am done with all that. [Laughter]

H: Would you say that was more the men's doing?

B: Well, that is their ego, yes. They get in there and they think, well, we will see. They try to say that we need to do that to show them that we are going to support them, or we are going to be on their side. Well, come on. We all know about politics. They would whore their mother and switch up in a second, right? Now all of a sudden, the women have to write a letter in order to let them know that we are going to be loyal to their administration. I mean, it is a given. That is what solidarity is. You are going to be a part of the local, the committee -- you forget about all the politics and what happened during the campaign, and you just start all over and, let's take care of business now. Management is the enemy. It is not us.

H: That inner politics is what is weakening the union.

B: Sure. Oh, absolutely. It has killed them. It has absolutely killed them.

H: But you said Roger -- what is his name -- Vandeer?

B: Vangilder.

H: He kept you on, right?

B: He reappointed me one term, and then the next term he had to take me off.
[Laughter]

H: Why?

B: Political pressure. He got a lot of flack about it at that time. Of course, he did not remove me until he was re-elected. That was the term when Marti became the recording secretary and he was well aware of the differences between the two of us, the issue of CLUW and all of that had happened. And it was not only from her. I should not say that it was just because of her, but the man that is president now, Nick Border was Roger's vice president at that time. He also, I think, was the man -- this is my opinion, based on the letters that we received -- that had a lot of control over that whole issue with the money business with the coalition. And the reason I say that is because Nick, the current president, was the head of the Veteran's Committee, and in the letter that they sent to us, telling

us how much money we were getting for this CLUW convention. It was referred to as an allotment. [Laughter] I said, "Oh, we are getting an allotment, like we are military wives." I said, "Oh, there is something fishy here." So I kind of think he was very instrumental, being that he was vice president at that time. He had to be removed from office by Roger because he shafted Roger real good. Roger appointed him to everything, then Nick ran against Roger.

H: I noticed that somebody ran -- was it her husband or ex-husband -- and she [Marti] was talking about working on campaigns. Do you think that there is a lot of that going on? You know what I mean? Women date men and when the man gets in , or if he gets in, that is how the women achieve.

B: Yes, when we were younger. We cannot do that anymore. We are too damn old. There are some that are still trying it, but it is not working. [Laughter] The guys are older, the women are older, you know, it does not work. The older men, now, are looking to the younger women.

H: Are the younger women taking part?

B: No, they have their own agendas. They really do. It was different because, like I said, we all grew up together, but it is real different now. Plus, the young women that are working there now -- the young mothers and just the young women in general -- they are so much smarter.

H: Do they take an active role in the union?

B: I do not see it, but I do not see it because I am not involved, so I really do not know for sure if they are. It does not look to me, from the floor, from my position on the factory floor, like they are. I do not think that a lot of them know how, and the reason I say that is because just recently, before I went off on this leave -- because I have been off a couple weeks -- they put a new conveyor in up in plant 15, in my plant. Some of the work is coming back from Mexico now and the word is all battery cable is going to be assembled on the conveyor again. They are taking this work back from Mexico. So they started up the conveyor line, and I went around and I was looking at some of the young girls' hands, because the battery cable is very, very heavy, and even though there is an ergonomic program. I do not know if it can help the young women in plant 15.

H: What are ergonomics?

B: Well, they try to make it more comfortable for the workers. They have Ergonomic Committee's where they try to make sure that the boards are at the right height and the production materials are not too heavy, so that they do not strain themselves, so that they do not get carpal tunnel. So, we have these Ergonomic Committees. And I was real curious. I wanted to go over and see

how the girls were doing with the heavy battery cable, trying to get it hooked up onto the conveyor. I looked at their hands, and their hands were atrocious. They were so sore. They reminded me of me, of 1964 when I was pulling the wire around the pins, stretching it. I asked a couple of them, I said, "Are you complaining? You know, you have to go to medical. You have to just keep going to medical with this, because management is never going to understand that this is real difficult to do and to just keep doing it continuously, unless you girls make an issue of it." But they do not know how to do that, and they are scared to do that, naturally.

So it is like I have seen it go full circle. There are so many things that we took care of, so many things that just should be automatic by now, and it is a whole new age out there and they have all new terms and it is all technological now, but it is all the same stuff. You know, they are starting all over again. And it has been so many years in the interim from the time we were hired until Packard hired new workers, that we cannot even relate. My daughter cannot relate to what I do. She came out there and she looked around, and it was like, "Oh." [Laughter] So those young girls are out there, too. They cannot relate to what we do. They only know they need a job.

H: Do you think that the union helps educate them of their rights, or shows them the ropes?

B: No. I am real concerned about that. I am real concerned about that right now, especially where the women are concerned because there were not enough of us in between. I do not see the Women's Committee out there functioning. The new people that are a part of the Women's Committee now, they are kind of lost themselves. I think they are trying to understand it all. They do not know how to take it back out to the membership. They do not know how to educate those girls, and plus everybody is scared, because they do not know what they could do. We used to be able to come up with joint efforts. The men used to have their tea parties when they wanted to prove a point to management. They would go in groups and take care of them. But we kind of built up ways, new things that we could do that were unspoken.

H: Like what?

B: Like breaking down the conveyors. We knew how to do those kind of things, so you cannot go in there and tell those young kids now. I mean, now it is sabotage.

H: You could be fired.

B: Exactly. They are going to be fired, you are going to be fired. You just cannot do that kind of thing. We grew up with it, so we knew. Plus, there were people in management that were doing it when we were coming up, you know.

H: What do you mean?

B: Like when the conveyor is down.

H: Management?

B: Yes. I mean, there were, actually, people that were doing it then, too. The bosses and stuff. It was like, "Oh, how did that roll of tape get stuck in that chain?" You know, we knew we did not do it, so who the hell did it? You know, somebody wanted some down time someplace. It was not us. There was a lot of stuff that went on there, too. Like I said, we all grew up together. I mean, there was a lot of stuff that went on in management, too. People were out of the plant when they were not supposed to be out of the plant. A lot of thievery, yes.

H: Come on. Tell me. [Laughter]

B: We have known stories about general foremen that would have their service boys working at their house when they were supposed to be on the clock and at their jobs. Just those kind of things. There were a lot of them that were no good, too. The foremen - the old-time foremen -- are few and far between today. And they are firing left and right now in salary, for everything. It is a whole new day now. You could not get away with any of that stuff. People do not leave the plant anymore. We used to be able to do that kind of thing. We would still be on the clock and be across the street still having lunch. They have got the monitored security doors. It was a different day then. It was possible to slip past the guards and out the door.

H: Going back to the sabotage, what were some of the reasons?

B: Oh, who knew? I mean, the foremen used to doctor their books and stuff, though, too. I do not know because I never understood a lot of that. We would have red tags and repairs. We would be working on inspection and the red tags were horrendous, thousands of them. We were not supposed to ship any of that stuff, right? So the inspectors would red tag them, the bosses would come by and just say, "Oh, ship it. Just take the red tags off." And things would just go out the door. Then, over the years, people got fired for doctoring their books and, you know, they would just make those numbers say what they were supposed to say. So there was a lot of stuff going on in management, too, and I think it spoke to what happened to General Motors. Their stock went in the dumper.[Laughter]

H: It was from the bottom line.

B: Exactly. But it is a different company, though, now. They are paying a lot of attention to their bottom line. Money is a big issue with them. They are still

making money, huge profits. The one thing that is good about Packard Electric is they always were a money-maker for General Motors. If Delphi spins off, I think it is going to be a fantastic entity. And it is going to be good for the valley, too. The whole work picture is going to change. I think it is going to be a smaller work-force, but a better work-force. A more educated work-force. There is going to be technological improvements.

I think that is kind of why they are in stalemate now, too, with being able to negotiate something for the young people. First off, the people that are elected to office now -- in my opinion -- are not, I should not say not educated. They are not intelligent enough to go up against company labor relations attorneys. Now, the younger ones, they are head and shoulders above the leadership of the local when it comes to education and technological knowledge.

Today, concessions can be clouded over so easy, the bargaining committee does not understand what a concession is anymore. One of the members of the last Bargaining Committee came down on the floor and tried to sell the last contract, it was so concessionary -- three years ago. And he was trying to explain away his actions and how he came up with what he did. And he said in plant 10 they were on three days on, three days off, rotating shifts. And the language was that when it came to bereavement, we were supposed to have had three days off for bereavement -- for the loss of a parent or whatever -- and he just could not understand that he needed to address that and clarify the issue when they were working 12-hour shifts, somewhat better than what they did, because they ended up conceding to the hours, and the people suffered because they got two days. They did not get three days off. You know, they lost time, paid time off. And they could not understand it. And it is like, well how do you make them understand it.

H: Did the union educate them?

B: Well, they spend a whole lot of money, supposedly, going to conferences and everything. What are they learning? And when are you going to use this education? So it is like, you know, you do not want women there. They do not understand their fiduciary responsibilities. They are spending our membership money and then they are going to try to come and tell us we cannot get elected. We know how to run budgets and homes. You know, I told those guys a million times, "We have raised families. What are you going to tell us about not having the money?"

H: Why do you think the young workers are not questioning? Is it naivety?

B: No. We will see, now they are starting to question. This contract proves it, I think, because this is the first time they ever sent the Bargaining Committee back to the bargaining table in all the years that I have been there, every contract that the bargaining committee brought back was accepted. Now here is the shop chairman that goes on television and says, "This is the best contract we have

ever had.” After the membership sent them back to the bargaining table, he is still insisting that it is the best one. He had better shut up. That is not the union position. He should be saying, “My membership is telling me this is no good. This is no good. I am saying this on behalf of my membership.”

H: He is trying to sell the union for the company.

B: Exactly. It does not work. You know, somebody there is saying something. So it now is starting to come around. I think the need is getting bad enough. I said it from the beginning, from the first time that they agreed to the ten years. Ten years is a long time to reach parity. I understood that they needed to come up with a low wage; something, anything. Now I think that this is almost like a national movement. Everybody in the country is starting to understand the impact of just what has happened. Why do we have children that are out of college with horrendous college loans, having to tend bar in order to make money, while they wait their three years? On average, it takes them three years in order to get placed in a job. A lot of them cannot go into the field that they studied for, you know, so they are picking alternative things now. This is not the way this was supposed to go.

H: What about the three tier system?

B: That is the thing. Now these workers are here. We had two tiers, now we have three tiers. Unions are about wages, hours, and working conditions. That is what unions were formed for. That is how they started. Over the years, it is like, “Gee, we had it good. We worked on our wages, hours, and our working conditions.” Well, we did. But now we are retiring. Now it is going to dawn on the young people. They have to fight all over again. They have to start all over again. This is what breaks my heart, because we did this once. If somebody would have only listened. It is frustrating for me because I felt like I was in the battle all the time, trying to educate. But they were not listening because there was a whole world out there. Young people have their perceptions, just like you said earlier. We did not carry the message loud and clear, but we sure as hell thought we did.

H: I think the younger generation just takes things for granted.

B: They do take things for granted. They are getting to their thirties now, and they are starting to understand that, “Gee, we have to still live with our parents?” You know, this is a national thing. Parents are still subsidizing children in their thirties. They are not going to turn their backs on them. Here you are, you are a graduate student, right?

H: Right.

B: You probably have college loans and you are probably going to be paying for them until you are in your 40's and your 50's. This is horrendous that you should be burdened like that. Something is really, drastically wrong. And the corporations are making money hand over fist. The stock market is going crazy. And every day on CNBC, you can listen to them say labor costs are sky high. Well, why? If you are moving everything overseas and you are building shit in third world countries and you are not paying money, it certainly cannot be the American work force.

Nothing has changed. When I started working at Packard in 1964, Cadillacs were \$5,000. That was probably my yearly wage. The average now, for a steel worker or auto worker, is \$30,000 a year. And it takes every bit of that \$30,000 to live and to educate children. Cadillacs are \$36,000, so not much has changed. I mean, the thing that amazes me is I could never understand, when people were criticizing during the Reagan and Bush years, when people were saying, "Gee, the UAW makes so much money. They are building cars and they are making so much money." I could never understand why people were not saying, "That is a wage everybody should be getting. [Laughter] I want that wage, too." Instead of criticizing, I never did understand that.

We should be setting the example. People should be following that, but no, they were not. And the corporations were leaving and going down south and paying four and five dollars an hour in this country, and everybody in the country just accepted it. They just accepted it. So now it has come full circle and the young people now need to make more money. And they cannot make more money and make a low wage for ten years. Ten years to parity is a long time. That is a whole damn decade. At what point does somebody say, "Hey," and who is going to say it? The government? Or the people? Who is going to say the corporations have to have some kind of social conscience.

H: Ross Perot.

B: Yes. [Laughter] That real wack ball. He is going to say it, but is he going to do anything? The man has no credibility.

H: I wanted to ask you about your local conference. Was it Tri-County Local Women's Conference?

B: Yes.

H: What was that?

B: I was just looking at the program the other day. We did it during the 1980's. I am going to say, probably, 1989 was the last time. Maybe 1990.

H: What did you do?

B: What we used to do was, Locals 1112 and 1714 UAW, and our 717 IUE, the Women's Committee's from all three locals would get together. We would set up a conference at one of the hotels and we would invite ladies from all the other locals that we had met at our conferences, from Michigan or from small little shops in the area. We would get guest speakers, we would bring them in. For example, Josh Russo, Professor of Labor Studies at YSU. Same thing, just still trying to educate women, trying to get more women involved in their locals. Trying to spread the word there to try to get them to organize. You know, we would teach them how to have meetings and what they could do and what they could not do when it came to organizing, of if they were interested in organizing, trying to set them up with information from the AFL-CIO. That kind of thing.

H: Do they still have conferences like that locally?

B: I do not think so. I have not heard. Actually, I think that we did the last one. I was just looking at the pictures when I was out in the garage the other day, from the last one we had. I am going to say, probably the last one was, if it was not 1989, it was 1990 or 1991. I do not think anything happened after the 1992 election.

H: How did you become involved with CLUW?

B: I had paid my membership for years, with Marian Cook, and I would get the newsletters and everything through the mail. Marian, when she was active in our local, she would always go around and see her contacts. She would come up and get our checks and keep us informed and send us all the information through the mail. And then, just prior to her retiring, she came around and said, "Come on, ladies. Some of you have to get involved now. We cannot be doing this." So we did the same thing, then.

We ran for office and I did sit on the executive board for a while. But once I saw what was going on there -- and the clincher, for me, was going to the conventions and seeing that it even went on at the International level, although I loved every bit of it. When they put on the women's conference, it was wonderful. I always came away from every event that I ever attended -- I do not care if it was a district meeting, a woman's breakfast, when I was the delegate to the convention, or any CLUW function -- where I did not feel rejuvenated or enlightened in some way. It was always worth it. But it was just always the internal politics. There had to be a better way. And I did not know what else to do, other than what I did, and it ended up taking such a toll on me. Getting my head kicked in every day, just trying to do a family event or trying to raise money for the local, then having to defend the fact that I raised this money, as if I was doing it for some un-Godly reason, when I did not even get my hands on it. It was, "Why am I doing this? Why am I wasting my time?" So once I saw that that went on at every level, it was just like, "No, it is time for me to back away from all this and just go one on one." It was always easier for me to go one on

one with the women. And I enjoy doing that.

H: How has being a woman affected your role in the work place? What are the positive and negative issues?

B: Like I said, the biggest positive was the fact I could work for 33 years for the same corporation. And the negative was the emotional toll it took on me.

H: How has women's acceptance in the union changed since you joined?

B: Well, in a lot of locals -- maybe not ours -- women are accepted. In a lot of little locals, they are leaders. They are presidents of their unions. In the textile workers, that is a good union, Service SEIU. They do have women leaders. Even the postal workers, communications workers, they have women that are active. So I think the acceptance in a lot of unions, it is there for women. Women can achieve leadership positions.

H: Did you say in your local there were more women in leadership positions?

B: No, but probably more now than ever. Not in leadership positions, but just being a part of the executive board. It is easier for women, now, to get elected, just because of the mere numbers. They are there now, they are running and they are there, and so, consequently, they will get voted for districts, for things that they would not have gotten before. As long as they are not a rubber stamp for the leadership.

H: How has your union encouraged political activism among the female members?

B: Well, as a part of the Women's Committee and the PAC Committee, we always did. I mean, we would leaflet the plants and go out there and try to get women to take part in the rallies to speak out. We always took part in the rallies and did the bus marches on Washington and all of those events.

H: How has your union's attitude toward women changed since you joined?

B: How has it changed? [Laughter] I really do not think that it has changed down deep. On the surface, it has changed, only because of what is going on everywhere in the country, and I think we owe a lot of that to the national issues, the Supreme Court Justice [Clarence Thomas], the sexual harassment issues, just the public awareness. Not because the men think differently. Just because men are being reprimanded now for taking part in sexual harassment. They are scared. They are simply scared, so it is like, "Let's just kind of tip-toe around this." Not because they really believe that anything should be done differently.

H: What kind of leadership positions have women achieved within your union?

B: Like I said, we only had one woman that ever rose to the vice presidency.

H: Barbara Gleason.

B: Barbara Gleason came as close as anybody could as a vice president. To her, she covered his absence. She did not groom herself to take the helm.

H: Have you ever been discriminated against because you are a woman?

B: Oh, absolutely.

H: In what way?

B: In many ways, like I told you, when we were going on the jobs and everything. I had the same committeeman for 20 years. This absolutely astounded me, and we had already fought all of the issues, and this was over a tow-motor job. I was functioning for the local as consumer affairs representative at the time. And it was a given when we were excused for union activity, management could not bypass us for our overtime or for our job assignments, as long as we had signed the bid sheet. And it still amazes me to this day, after 20 years of supporting the one man in the local, I was off on a Friday and a job went up for bid, and I was the oldest signed person, among all men. Management did not want a woman in that position. When I came back to work, they completely bypassed me and gave the job to the man under me. I was just absolutely astounded. And when I went to the committeeman and said, "Gee, no, we have to do this. We have to file for this. I cannot let this go. I am entitled to this," he looked me right in the eye and he said, "You are not entitled to anything." And I just could not believe that he even said that. I said, "Oh, no. Here we go again." Just that kind of thing.

H: What did you do?

B: Well, at that point, I did think about it. I thought about it for three days and I thought I could protest this, and I could get this. I knew that I could get this. But it was at that point when I made my decision. I said, "No, I have been doing this for too long." And if it could happen to me, again, after all these years and after all my involvement, and with somebody I trusted and I literally thought I had a relationship with -- one of the men in the local that I truly respected as a committeeman, who I always thought was completely fair -- could look me in the eye and say I was not entitled to anything. Management was right in their position that they were going to bypass me because they did not want a woman in that position because the oldest mill right in seniority up there did not want to have a female tow-motor driver, because he thought he was going to be injured even though I had ten years experience. I was not ready for prime time? [Laughter] I do not think so. It was just like, "No, I think it is time for me to step

down." And I did eventually tell him that it was time for him to retire.

H: Did he?

B: Yes, he did. He really did. And I knew he was going over the edge at that point, because there was no reason for that. It should have been a given. It was automatic. I was a union official, just the same as he was. I was functioning on that behalf. The answer should have been, "Donna signed, Donna gets it." That is all. That was probably 1992 when that happened.

H: You never got the job, then, either.

B: No, I did not. Well, I did not protest it. I just walked away from it. I just let it go. I just let it go, but that was okay. This is what I say about taking the emotional toll that it took on me. By this time, my daughter was at Kent State, she was going to be graduating in 1993. Prior to that, it had always been about money and paying her tuition and getting everything. When I had my second tow-motor accident in 1994, I said to myself, "I need to know what it feels like to be a woman again. I need to dress nice and just not be in blue jeans, and to smell nice and just start taking care of myself again." So I kind of walked away from everything. I just got down off the machine I was in, went back into Quality Control, and now I am the calibrator for plant 15.

H: What do you do there?

B: I calibrate the measuring equipment in plant 15. I am using my brain again now. I get to do some computer work and I stay clean.

H: You like it better?

B: Well, I like it. It is nice for this time in life. Yes. But it was like once I looked at it and I thought, I am swearing like a truck driver, I do not want to smoke anymore. I just want to smell good and get in touch with myself again as a woman. I do not need to chase money like this anymore because I learned, I saved for my retirement. I just need to get in touch with me again. So I kind of walked away from it all.

H: What year did you get re-married?

B: I just got married in 1995. Two years, May 18. That is my anniversary. I turn 53 on Tuesday, on the 13th, and my anniversary is the 18th.

H: Do you feel that now you have a relationship outside of work and you have gotten in touch with yourself, you have got things more in perspective?

B: Oh, I think so, yes. And it is a great life. I put all of this stuff away, but then when I had to move, I threw a lot of it away. I mean, I probably threw a room-full of things away from the coalition, just from the union in general. But I did keep a few remembrances, some of the programs, some of the columns that I wrote, the Dukakis campaign.

H: I was there.

B: I went to see Hillary Clinton in Akron when she was in Akron. That probably was the last thing that I did. I could have gone to President Clinton's inauguration, and then I did not go. And I always kicked myself that I did not go. I did go to Reagan's inauguration in 1980, but that was just a fluke because a friend of ours was a lobbyist in Columbus and he had worked for the governor. He was head of the FOP. [Fraternal Order of Police], he was a lobbyist for the FOP, so he took my husband now -- he was not my husband then -- and I as his guest. He and his girlfriend took us as their guests then, so we went to Reagan's inauguration. We laugh about it still, because I said, "My god, look at these people. What are they so optimistic about?" Well 12 years later, we knew what they were so optimistic about. That was probably the high light. I loved just being around it all. I would have loved to have gone to Clinton's but then I did not.

H: How have you or other women confronted or dealt with injustices when encountered?

B: [Laughter] We always fought against it. There were a lot of women that -- Gloria Lang, for one; I wrote about her in my papers and I will let you take my papers so you can read them, as long as you get back to me -- she was one of the first women on skilled trades, and she broke down all the barriers there to make it easier for women to go into the trades. Now we actually do have women that are in the trades, although they are still suffering with the sexual harassment issues. I do not touch it. I know that it is still there. I talked to a lot of people that are still involved with it, and they are still fighting that battle, and they probably always will.

H: Can you get support from the union for sexual harassment?

B: The guys still do not know what it is all about. They just do not get it. They do not get it. I think management, if anything, understands a little bit more, so management kind of polices management more. So consequently, the problem does not touch the union that much because, if anything, they are scared of the lawsuit. As soon as a woman goes to labor relations with a complaint or as soon as a name is dropped or anything, management is on it. They are on it; they are investigating it and they are trying to get to the bottom of it because they want to calm it right down, I think. But it is still there. You would think that it would not be there, but they are getting all confused about what it is and what it is not.

H: When I have talked to them from Lordstown, and they are a minority, it seems they are really petrified out there. This one woman, a guy touched her butt, and right there, that was it. He was moved out and reprimanded. Do you think that it goes on more?

B: I do not know where it goes on more. The only thing that I know is, now that women are on the trades, literally going on the trades where they have to be electricians and be pipe-fitters and be tool and dye makers, where they have to go shoulder to shoulder with the men when it comes to job performance -- and I thoroughly feel that they are qualified to do it, probably more so than the men, and talented enough to do it -- it still is an issue of power. And as long as there is somebody that can exercise that over them, they are going to do that. So where it is more, I cannot make any determinations. But you would think, in this day and age, we would just be able to go to work and do our job.

H: And it would not matter.

B: No. It is still there.

H: Have you ever encountered problems of equal work for equal pay?

B: Not really. I think, because of the way our wage structure is, we always filed grievances and had to deal with the issues of over-time. Management will still always try to work the people who they want to work, even though we took care of that a long time ago. It is not really an equal pay for equal work.

H: How is your union at addressing family issues?

B: Well, here again, they do it, but I also think that management has lead the way there, too, with parental leave and those kind of things. We have made the men, I think, probably more aware because we have been at the union meetings and fighting for the mammigrams to be included and the pap smears and questioning them when it comes to our benefits and just issues that affect women. There have been many women always there, always questioning them, making them try to address that and trying to bring them to the forefront.

Oh, child care is always something that nobody ever wanted to deal with. I think Charlotte, years ago, was probably the first woman to ever try to get a child-care survey done within the local. And a good friend of mine, Beth Brannon -- I do not know if you got a chance to interview her or not. I hope somebody did. She gave up around the same time I did, too. She was a benefit rep for a long time. This last election she got removed. She has always been an advocate of child care. So, I mean, there have been plenty of people there that were trying to get them to deal with it but, like I said, I think management probably, if anything, would have come to parental need because of what was going on out in the country. They may have presented it, and then the union followed. So we have

made strides. That is all I can say.

H: What are some of the issues that you feel the union still needs to address?

B: Well, I think they need to re-address them all because they are all starting over again because now they do have two tiers, they have three tiers. Big issues are going to face the young women. We went years when we had women trapped on afternoon turn because the company was not hiring. So, consequently, they had to be away from their families always if they wanted to work. So now you have younger women who are still out there, single women raising children, and they have to start all over again. They are making less money. They have less access to people that are readily available to take care of their children. We have no child care in place. The corporation, or the union, has nothing to help them, to assist them. So they have to start all over again. They also have to fight their health care battles all over again because now all of our benefits are starting to be taken away from us.

H: But you are safe, right? It is the ones underneath that are not.

B: Even after retirement, they took away salaried employees benefits, though, too. See, they have got the lawsuit going against General Motors, because they took their benefits away from them. So who knows? We have no idea. Nobody is safe. We have them now, but they always have the right to change it any time they want to.

H: What problems do women face in your union that men do not experience?

B: Well, the biggest problem is trying to get elected because of the fact that women will not elect women to leadership positions.

H: Why do you think that is?

B: Women do not trust women. And the men have just always gone around, patted them on the ass. I mean, we are all too old for that now, but when we were coming up over the 30 years, that was just always their way. "Come on, I need you to do this for me." And because of the fact that men love -- and they know women always buy into this -- they will be pitted against each other always. Two women cannot disagree and shake hands and talk to each other the next day. You know, they hold the grudges. And they cannot watch men, see how they operate, and then operate like that. There are very few of us like that. We have a group where we can do that continuously. It is not a fight. It is just I disagree with the way you think. Men do it continuously; women cannot do it.

H: Too emotional and personal.

B: They take it as a direct hit to their self-esteem somehow or something, I do not know, because I do not happen to agree with the way you are thinking. I see it a different way or my perception is a little different. So that is the biggest detriment.

H: How well do women get along with each other in your union or workplace?

B: I think the women get along real good in the workplace, considering what I have seen there. We have the most generous, most wonderful -- when it comes to helping people out in the community or raising money for them, and when I see the retirement parties they put on -- we have a wonderful, wonderful workforce of people there. They have got the biggest hearts in the world, the people at Packard Electric, they really do, when it comes to helping. So I think, for the most part, they do get along well. And like I said, over the years, we have had a lot of fun, on the floor, fighting the battles and getting to know each other. Yes, so for the most part, I think they get along super.

H: So do you think they get along better in the workplace than within the union structure?

B: Yes. Oh, absolutely.

H: Why do you think that women do not get along that well within the union structure?

B: It is just because of the man-woman thing. And because of that mentality of the women, that they think they need to be subservient to the men, or that they have to sleep with them, or that they cannot achieve it just on their own. In the union, I think, women -- how do I want to say this? It is a self-esteem thing with them. They do not think that they can achieve.

H: Insecure?

B: Yes. It must be a sense of insecurity or something. I do not know. They want to do something. They do not know how to do it. So, consequently, I think they think that the men are the answer and they do not understand that, probably, the woman helping women could have been a hell of a lot better for a lot of years. [Laughter] We know how to protect our young, so we could certainly protect each other.

H: What are the positive in-roads that your union has made for women workers?

B: That the unions made for women? If there has been any in-roads made, I am going to say our union, because all of those women there are the union. So if there has been in-roads made -- I am taking it away from the leadership now --

the women are doing it for themselves. And, probably, just because if there was a common goal for help out there in the community of any kind, because they can stick together to get something like that accomplished. If it is raising money for needy families, DARE, SCOPE, United Appeal, any kind of community involvement, there have been in-roads. But as far as issues, I do not think so. From the union working within the union, I do not think it has happened there, over issues, national issues and political issues, but if it has happened at all, it has come from the women within. Do you understand?

H: Right. It is not the leadership, it is the union membership.

B: As a whole. Right, and what they have chosen to do in the areas where they have chosen to work. I think it has been raising the money for the mission or unwed mothers, whatever their unified purpose has been, that is where they have made the in-roads.

H: How has the union worked to educate you of your rights?

B: How has the union worked to educate me of my rights? Probably with their publications, because they have. That is one thing from when Jenny Valeski started the first union paper -- there we go, a woman again [Laughter]. You can read about her in my paper when I give them to you. Yeah, probably with the publications, letting us know, especially in the area of worker's comp. They have always published that so, consequently, if you were smart enough to read about what was going on there and how the laws were changing, because it has been there, and the IUE has done the same thing in their paper that they put out.

H: What has been the most positive experience you have had, as a woman, with your union? And what has been the most negative?

B: Probably the most positive thing for me was doing the fashion shows with the kids, because that is what it was about. Giving these children a chance to do something that they had never had an opportunity to do before, or again, probably, in their lifetimes. And seeing that all develop, that was just so much fun. We really did just a first class, first rate show, and it was a big show. And we raised a lot of money. I was thrilled to death, even though it was nothing but a struggle. And my husband told me, after two years -- we were not even married yet -- but he said, "If you ever get involved like that again, forget it." That was probably my most because it just was so wonderful. It was just so wonderful. That day, after the dress rehearsal, when those kids went out there, they were just great. I mean, they just ad libbed and they just had a field day. The music, the lights, it was theater.

H: What did you do with the money that you raised?

- B: That is what we used to fund the Consumer Affairs Committee. And the car raffle, that is how we funded it, because the membership wanted it. So, Louie did not have the money to start the committee up himself, so that was how we raised the money. We did the car raffle and then we did the fashion shows for two years. So we generated like, \$5,000, \$6,000 every time.
- H: What has been the most negative?
- B: My most negative experiences? Probably some of the campaigns and running for office, when I ran.
- H: What did you run for?
- B: Executive Board. I never ran for a top position. I just ran a couple times for executive board. Whenever I ran for district or anything, anytime I put my name out there, it was like, oh wow. When you get called everything but a white woman. [Laughter] And when it gets so far that it comes all the way back to Girard and my sister has to tell me that she has people walk into her beauty shop and say, "Is that whore your sister?" They do not even know me. That is negative.
- H: Who do you think is most responsible for that?
- B: Well, naturally, the men. Naturally the men. Because they cannot get you any other way. They cannot defeat you, because you listen to what they have to say and you just might be brave enough to have an answer for them. Or maybe you are creative enough to come up with another idea so, consequently, they feel threatened by you. So if they cannot get you that way, what else could they do then to call you names, right? I mean, it is as old as the hills. They have been doing it for a hundred years. But it is, in this day and age now it is like, oh, come on. Every time that would happen, I would make a joke of it because I would say, "Yeah, when I was 20 and I wanted to be a whore, when I was cute and I had a nice body, I was not. And now I am an old lady, and now they are going to call me [that]." Come on.
- H: Is it still a problem?
- B: If I ran for office, yes. If I ran for office now, they would be doing the same things. As a matter of fact, yes. I probably was the first woman that ever had her name used, literally, just in a leaflet. Now he was smart enough not to call me anything in print, but he certainly laid the ground work for a major insinuation. He insinuated that the president and I were sleeping together and I was going to get this appointment that he was being taken out of. You know, that kind of thing. But he was at least smart enough to not put it in print. My girlfriend Beth, who happened to be working on his campaign at the time, she even warned him.

She said, "You know, you better not go there. You just better not go there."
[Laughter] Yes, he went anyway. I knew it was coming, and I even told him that. You know, I said, "The election is between you and Lou, and I certainly should not have a part in it." But I knew it was coming and it was there, and the insinuation was just laid right out there in print.

H: Did Lou support you? Did he speak out against what was happening to you?

B: Not out in the membership, no he did not. It took me a long time to deal with that. I did not really understand that until -- here is my leaflet, because I truly believe we were friends. He did it within his staff because it got so bad that one of them even went to his child and said that to his child. And she went home and told her mother, and it is a good thing her mom and I were real good friends because they expected it to blow up, to damage, and it did not work that way because it just was so absurd. But I did not understand until years later, until a couple of other administrations later, that he probably needed to do that, but he was not going to do it because he does not get it about women, either. He was my good friend and everything, but they just do not understand. So he just kind of brushed it aside.

They do not think that they have any responsibility that way. They just do not think that they have responsibility, and as long as they feel that they do not have an responsibility to speak out against anything, then consequently it just makes it worse. It just feeds it. It is all part of that. It is like, oh, this is the emotional toll that it all takes. You know, it is like, wow. You get to the point where you think, oh my god. Even my friends use me, when are they not using me? Maybe I just analyze it too much, I do not know. I just did not want to think about it anymore. Let me be done with it.

H: How does management act toward women?

B: Now? Well, a lot of people in management are women now, so it is good. It is better. My general foreman just got a promotion. It was a woman, and I love working for a woman; it was super for me. She was the most flexible general foreman I ever had. They are into it. She was a young woman, she just got a superintendent's job at the Neummi plant, too, out in California. I knew she was too progressive to stay here in Warren. They had bigger and better things for her.

Yes, I see that a lot, happening now. The young women coming in to management are much more flexible. They know how to delegate, they are educated, they remove themselves from all of that game playing. They do not have to compete. They have got the position and brain, you know, it is just simple. These are the rules, this is the way it is, and this is how we are going to do it. It kind of gets done. I see that happening more and more. And for women, if Packard continues with this hiring, it is going to be good because when it comes down to child care and changes and flexing hours, it is going to

be easier because you are dealing with somebody who can relate to that. A real woman.

H: Do you think it is going to come from the management or from within the union?

B: I think it probably is always going to come from the union, until there are people that are actually affected, until they get off their asses and get involved, just like in national politics. Just like I told my daughter. I said, "Honey, if you want a job in the courts system, there is only one way for you to get a job. Work in a campaign or run for office. They will either help you get elected because they want to use you, use your brain. They will buy you off, they will give you something." We tried everything, we did everything there was. That does not work anymore. It is not that way. And who knows better than you, after your father's name was in the paper and bandied all over the place. [Laughter]

H: Yes.

B: That is just the way it is. There is a whole new mentality out there and some of us, the old timers, we have a hard time even understanding what that whole new mentality is because the current politicians are probably on the take more. We only understand one way and the old way took care of a lot of people, kept a lot of people employed. This, I do not understand it. I look at the local politics, just with Mayor Ungaro. Ten years; he got everything he ever wanted. His wife got what she wanted. The city has gone to shit.

H: Right, and people love him.

B: And people just think he is wonderful.

H: Did you hear if he is running again?

B: Well, I heard the rumor that he probably was going to try to. And I think it is pathetic. It is absolutely pathetic. He probably stole as much as anybody else did. Look at the indictments. How can they point their fingers? Am I being recorded here? [Laughter]

H: Yes. We will talk about this after we are done recording. [Laughter] What is your definition of middle and working class, and where do you fall?

B: I do not know that there is a middle class. There is a rich class, and I am a part of the working class. There is just the working class, the rich, and the working poor and the poor. That is how my perception of it is. I do not know what is going to fix that, but I am definitely a part of the working class. My husband and I have always told his children and our daughter that there is only one thing that makes us different than the poor people that are out there on the streets, and

that is the fact that we have an opportunity to get a pay-check every week. That is it. We have been very fortunate in that respect.

H: Have you ever filed any grievances? If so, what for?

B: For all the same things that we have talked about, the over-time and grievances and discrimination. Plenty of them all through the years.

H: What activities have you engaged in to support other unions?

B: Well, that was one of the big things about the fashion show, too, that we did. That was the whole point of it. We helped AMERIMA when they were in Youngstown. The workers were represented by the textile-workers union. The theme of our show was "Made in the USA." So we featured AMIRMA. They used to be the old Weatherbee Coat Company [in] downtown Youngstown. Management and the union were struggling to try to stay alive as the AMERIMA Company, and they came out with this new line of clothes, it was called the "hot-dogger" line. They had a contract with a designer out of New York to do. The lady contacted me because she had heard that I was putting on this fashion show at the local, and she wanted to be a part of that. So we did do that for them, for the union. And we invited everybody from there and showed the tri-county area all the clothes that they were making down there at AMERIMA. So I think it helped somewhat for two years. They ultimately ended up losing the whole business, but we did our part and we have always tried to do our part.

H: What has been your role within the union during strikes? And discuss your strike involvement.

B: There has not been much because we have not had that many strikes. We always fed the guys, worked the picket lines as far as keeping them well-fed and everything. [Laughter] But that was it, because we have not had any strikes to speak of.

H: What are the major roadblocks that women face in the union?

B: Themselves.

H: What are the different demands placed on women and men in the union?

B: Well, the demands are that women are expected to be perfect. We can never give anybody a wrong answer. We are always expected to know, where the men are just incompetent as hell and they just lie and they can do no wrong. Everybody just buys into it, that they are the most educated, that they are the only ones that can negotiate a contract, that they are the only ones that know what concessions are and are not, and it is just crazy. Just crazy. Who knows

better than women about wages, hours and working conditions? No one.

H: And a woman has never been on the bargaining committee?

B: A woman has never been on the bargaining committee. Well, maybe before the men were, yes there was a bargaining committee made of women. But that was way earlier on, before the place started to evolve in the 1960's.

H: What do you think the future is of women in your union?

B: Well, I am optimistic. I hope that eventually, women are starting to get elected easier now, that maybe we are on the verge of something happening. Charlotte and I were just on the phone, and I just told her I think that a woman can win. I have a woman in mind at the local now, who I think could win it. I do not even know if she has any desire to run for it. I think they should be there, though. They should just run and just take their chances. But they are terrified, too. They are, probably, absolutely terrified because they have not been a part of the inner circles, so they think there is something to it. But they can run houses and they can do budgets and they can write checks and they can pay bills, they have to negotiate with school teachers, with car dealers. [Laughter] They can certainly sit across the table from management and discuss issues about what is right and what is wrong and what those workers out there on the floor need.

H: It appears that women have a lack of self-confidence. How do you think that can be corrected?

B: I think they just have to go out there and do it because even being a committeeman, you get your experience from the floor. No matter what it is that you do, you never have the answers. Nobody can write a handbook out and say, "This is the way you do it." Every issue is decided differently, every safety -- I do not care what it is -- every accident, you know, you have to listen to what is going on and, my god, your good judgement is going to bring you somewhere. You have gotten this far. Half of those women have raised families. They can do it.

H: They have to get more confidence.

B: Exactly. Unless they get out there and do it, you have to just reach that level where you are just going to go out there and do it. But, see, I think that is why it is going to try to take care of itself, though, because I think the younger women coming up, young women your age, my daughter's age. She is 25 years old. She is probably more confident. I would have never thought, when I was 25, to even say something like that to a foreman or to a boss. "It is not worth firing up the Jimmy." I mean, here she is, she is college educated, so it is going to be different because the work force will be different. I think it has to be a natural progression.

For example, Hillary Clinton is wonderful. To me, she is the ultimate. I just think she is great. Now there are people that are criticizing her, tearing her apart. Come on, she is an attorney, she is married to a wonderful guy that can put his shoes under my bed any time, [Laughter] and she has to deal with that issue, too. I think she is terrific, and she handles the politics in quite a classy manner.

I think that is what is going to be out there for the future change. I do not have the answers for the young people. We had the answers for our day. I think it is going to be better, but I think it is going to be people like you that are going to do it. Other young women that are smart, intelligent, have different ways, different techniques. You know, maybe you do not have to go out there and swear and beat on the table. You know, you might have another way. It is that kind of thing. I mean, attorneys, you see how they do it. They got the facts. They are like 45's, they just keep shooting those facts out there and that is what is going to have to happen for women to go up against the unions and management. Just keep firing those facts away and do it in a manner where you are coming from confidence, and not emotion. It will happen. That is where the resurgence will come around and where the new leadership will take place. And we will eventually have a female president one of these days. And we will have younger women in the union. There are more and more in Congress all the time, and in the Senate. So we will see what happens.

H: You are off of work right now, right?

B: Yes.

H: Is it for injury or because you said that they are changing the plant?

B: Oh no. It is for injury.

H: Did you get hurt at work?

B: Yes. I had an accident in 1994, so I had a little flare-up again.

H: Is it your back?

B: Yes. My back and my head. I had a head injury when I had my tow-motor accident.

H: What did you hit?

B: Well, I had two accidents. One in 1984, one in 1994. In 1984, the tow motor that I was driving was in the trailer and the truck driver was pumping up a trailer in the next truck well. There was a faulty switch. So my trailer was in the air when I rode out of it. I fell back onto the dock. That was in 1984. In 1994, the

accident happened the other way. The trailer dropped beneath me. I was almost in the same exact spot in the same truck well ten years later. When I backed out of the trailer, this time I hit the dock. I said, "This is enough of this stuff. I am going to kill myself." Both times, I was thankful that I was not crippled. It was enough. It was time for me to get back in touch with myself again. [Laughter]

H: Is there anymore that you want to comment on the tape.

B: I do not think so.

H: Thank you.

End of Interview