

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in Labor Unions

Personal Experience

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ROBIN GELET

Interviewed

by

Nick Tefakis

on

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ROBIN GELET

Robin Gelet is currently an employee at Delphi Packard Electrical Systems located in Warren, Ohio. Robin was born February 9, 1963 in Warren, Ohio to Lillian and Robert Gelet. She attended the Warren public schools and graduated from Lakeview High School in 1981. After graduation, Robin was employed at various local establishments until she was hired at Packard Electric in 1988. She has been a member of the International Union of Electrical Workers, Local 717 for nine years and has been active for six

T This is an interview with Robin Gelet for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Women in Labor Unions, by Nicholas Tefakis, Jr , on May 27, 1997, at the IUE Union Hall, Local 117 in Warren, Ohio, at 3:00 p.m

When and where were you born, and where did you grow up?

G: I was born in Warren, Ohio in 1963, February 9 [I] Grew up around here, raised in a union family My father worked here at Packard, he was a union rep Very active I remember going to union meetings with him

T Before you started working at Packard and got involved with the unions, were there instances in your life that stand out where you have been discriminated against because of your gender?

G Probably I never really thought about it I mean, I was one that was real quiet, real back, you know, just went with the flow It was not until I started getting involved in this stuff with the union here that I notice things like this The job I worked at before -- I was a director at a preschool, an assistant director; I started as a teacher -- that was mostly women So there was no discrimination there I worked at Automatic Vendors and I guess there was some there, because it was always the women that were running the lines and men that had the managing positions Or they have a secretarial job There was one woman, I think, that was my foreman at the time, and she was the only one at that time. I guess if you look back and really look at it, you know, there was some To pin point it, not really, because I was not that aware of it, I should say

T: What were your first impressions of your job at Packard when you had first started working?

G Amazing I could not believe there was actually stuff that goes on like this. Making the wire harnesses and what was going on It was fascinating For 90 days we were told to be quiet during our time in, do not say anything So you sat back and you watched a lot of foreman's calling people names, sexual harassment between the employees At that time you were not allowed to say anything So it was amazing and fascinating. It was like a little culture; a little world within a world here It still is

T How does the management act towards women? Have there been any changes today from when you first started working as compared to today?

G I do not think there have been any changes. I mean, I have a foreman right now, well, both midnight and afternoon turn For example, last night, he came over, he wanted to know who top dog was To me, you know, there is no top dog, no matter how cute that phrase is or not We are not dogs, top, bottom, or whatever you want to say, so that was the second time. But harassments there, as far as

mental abuse, it is still there. Being called names. We are just more aware of it now, especially since the work place violence papers came out. They have been doing some seminars with the foreman and the management there. Same with sexual harassment, how the law have picked up on that. It is still there, it is just that they are not as open about it. It is more of a joking, laughing matter. I do not think it has changed. It is prominent, at least where I am at. We have to deal with that all the time, them calling us a variety of little names and laughing about it, or making innuendos about things that have been done for the weekend. Like, last week, I was out because I was campaigning, and a girl friend of mine was out, too, so he wanted to know what the two of us had up, what the two of us had been doing together. So, it is still there. That will be, as soon as he gets back to work, that will be approached by me to him, and his ass will be mine.

T: So the foreman is, in fact, part of the management?

G: Yes, the foreman is the management, that is who he answers to.

T: Okay

G: The foreman I have right now is not that great. I have had some that have been really nice, very helpful, a lot of apathy, understanding. But then it goes both ways. I had a gentleman come up to me the other day and he wanted to know about the Family Leave Act because his daughter has been sick and his foreman said, "Well, do you not have a woman to take care of her?" He did not want to give him time off to take care of his child. So it does go both ways now.

T: You are a nine year member and have been active for six. Initially, what prompted you to participate actively?

G: The first three years I was here, I sat back and watched. In that time my dad had died. It was the first three years that I was here, I think it was like the second or third. He was so active in the union and he kept insisting that we buy USA-made stuff and union-made, and support the unions. Never cross a picket-line and that. And so I thought, well, you know he was always telling us about it, so I wanted to participate and see what it was really like. I think that is how I got in that, just to carry on his name, I would say.

T: Specifically, what positions have you held in the union?

G: Mostly just standing committees. I am on the Women's Committee, that is how I started out in the union. I am election teller, head teller. [I] Worked up to head teller where you have more responsibility. Education Committee. I worked with the PAC, the Political Action Committee, on different things. Here and there, I have gotten my foot in the door.

- T: What were your responsibilities as election teller?
- G: You take care of the ballots. There is usually one head teller for, maybe, one to five tellers who take care of the ballots. It is your responsibility to make sure that they are counted right. Any problems are directed your way. You usually put in a lot more time than everybody else. It is just more of a responsibility. If something is wrong, it is going to come back to you, as far as, if there is a problem. I work close with Sue, Sue Strawn, who is the chair of the Women's Committee. The same with Marylou Dever, I work close with her on the Education Committee. So I am learning. I do not really think I am ready to be a chair right now. I am just learning and sitting back and learning from pro's and people that have been here for a while.
- T: It had come to my attention that chairs and members of committees are appointed. Do you feel that there is any favoritism shown to any particular people?
- G: Our president is Nick Border right now. I think he is a very fair person, as far as appointing people to the committees. I have been on the Women's Committee three terms now, and each one has been under a different president who does all the appointments. I have been on each one of them so far. I think anymore, depending on who is in there, I think Nick is very fair. He puts people in there that are workers, that are going to do stuff, that are willing to sacrifice and to make the union a little bit stronger within the committee's, and working with the people out on the floor. Favoritism, I think everybody can say there has always been favoritism. Whether there is or not, I have never been a favorite of anybody, so I do not know if that is true. I could sit back and say yes, but I have no reason to back it up on anything.
- T: What about the Political Action Committee? What are the duties of its members?
- G: They go out and meet the candidates in Trumbull County, Mahoning County, support them, find out who is for the union, against the union, who to support. [They] Attend their fundraisers, help with their fundraisers, get the political aspects out. We just had a guy sign up, Worker's Competitions, where they want to take our worker's comp away and put more stipulations on it. So we petitioned it. It was just done at the last union meeting, as far as getting information out, telling them we did not like it this way. So they do things along that line, getting the information out to the people.
- T: How did you become involved in the Education Committee?
- G: My major at school was education, elementary education, with a minor in psychology. Education is very important to me, it is a must, it is a necessity.

anymore in this world today, whether it be if you are somebody who is working out on the floor, if you are shop chairman, or you are president. You know, if you are CEO of a company, it is very important if you want to make anything of yourself. So we started the Education Committee and they asked me to participate in it, so we can get parliamentary procedure classes out to the people so they understand how meetings are run. School information on getting people to schools, learning more about grievances, leadership abilities, things like that. That is how I got on that, because it is important to me.

T. What types of other classes do you offer?

G. They have done grievance handling, we have had a man from Michigan come down and teach grievance handling. We have taken people, they have gone to grievance handling classes, leadership abilities, labor history. Labor law history, I have taken. A variety of classes, just about anything. We have a summer school coming up in Michigan now, it deals with finances for the future, how to set up a retirement fund, things that we can apply now and yet use later on. There is a class on grievance handling, again, that is very important. Negotiations, public speaking or communications, which we lack a lot in. Classes like that that we enforce and we try to get people interested in because of the 8500 people we have in our local, we have maybe 300, 400 that are active. We have to get them more involved and educated or we will not have a local here in the next few years, because as these people retire, we need to replace them.

T: How much success have you had through the Education Committee?

G. It is still on its feet. It is just now starting to stand full. We had a parliamentary procedure class that was not attended that well. We had a lot of people sign up for it, but it was a week before the strike deadline. People were getting offers for overtime, so we had a very low turn out. We feel that that is the reason why.

T: What about the Women's Committee? What obligations do you have being on the committee?

G. Obligations? Giving time. We have fund raisers to send women to school, to educate the women. We just did, in conjunction with the education committee, a workplace violence seminar. We just had it in the last couple months. We had a financial seminar on how to, if the company offers us a personal savings plan with stock and different options like that, mutual funds, we can turn over and do stuff with it. So we are going to have a financial advisor from them come in and educate the women so they can go out and tell the other people about what is out there. We put on committee activities. We are doing a Spring Fling for the union people. Geaugua Lake, they went shopping just today to pick up gifts and items to raffle off. The money that we do raise, we send women to the schools.

My obligations, I do as much as I can for them. We are trying to bring it back around to the family, so we have got activities for the children planned up there. Those temporary tattoos, clowns, balloons, things like this. We are going to bring it back to the family setting within the union. We have bus trips coming up for the kids for the summer. Just one day trips and that. Our obligation is basically to educate the women and to let them know what union is out there.

T: Do you feel family is something the union has neglected in the recent past?

G: Yes, I do, because usually if you look back over the history, the union has been circling around men. The men have run this, the men have done this, they have done that. Their family or wives are supposed to stay home, cook. In fact, Kent State has the archives, and the archives have all the history. So we have been going back and forth up there. We found a letter to where the women arrive a half an hour late in the morning to work here at Packard, so that they can make sure that their man has their lunch, their breakfast, everything taken care of, and then they are allowed to leave a half an hour to an hour early before the men do, so they can get home and fix their dinner and make sure everything is all right for the men when they come home. This was actually negotiated within the first contract of the local, back in 1952, 1955, somewhere in there.

So I think, from there, we have gone up hill. But it has been centered around mostly men, men have run this, men have done this. Very few women were even employed at the time. It was not until after the First World War that they were actually employed there, and things began to change and turn around. The first company picnic they had was a company picnic that was put on for the family. Most of the activities that they had back in the past were softball for men, bowling for men, different things like that. I think, right now, we are starting to get back around to family-oriented, because we have a lot of people where the man and the woman do work here and provide for their family. Especially the young hires.

T: Are there different demands placed on women and men within the union?

G: As far as jobs within the union?

T: Yes.

G: I think the women are expected to be more organized, to not have anything go wrong with their plans. If there is something wrong with them, it is pin pointed right out. "Well, you did this wrong. You should have done it this way." Where as, if the man is in charge of the committee, or something happens, [it is] "I did not have time, I did not think it would work out this way." So, yes, I think there is. I think they are a little bit more harsh on the women and expect more because they seem to think we have more organizing skills and ability to pull things together. And then men, it is like, if they do not do something, it is kind of blown

- off and forgotten. Where ours, it is held over our heads for a while.
- T: Are men and women assigned different jobs inside the plant because of gender?
- G: No. They had to do away with that. Still, the foreman will come up, and if there is a service job or something to be offered, he will offer it to a man first, instead of going by seniority. And he has done that.
- T: What is a service job?
- G: Cleaning, emptying the cells out, doing a little bit of heavy work. Moving skids around with the skid jack, things like this. He will go to a man before he will go to a woman.
- T: Is there a grievance for that?
- G: Can we go along that line? Oh, yes. There is grievance procedures that would take to go to the union rep, and then from there you would take it up and it would eventually go to labor relations because it is dealt with company management. The laws that have come out now are out there more to protect any racism, any discrepancies between genders, sexual discrimination, I should say. They are really cracking down on it here. Yeah, there is stuff they can do.
- T: What do you feel are some of the major road blocks that women face in the union?
- G: The road blocks? There are two -- men and women. The women have a tendency, especially the older seniority women, not to support the women. Possibly because they are in the era where they think that the men are supposed to be in charge. So we have a hard time getting women supporting women, like such as a candidate for voting. I work with a lot of younger people so I see a lot of turn around, but then again, the other plant I have, they are older seniority. They are more apt to go ahead for the man because they think they can do the job. The men, it is hard to get a foot hold in here, as far as, you can get on the Women's Committee without too much hassle, and that is about it. Any other committee, you almost have to fight for to get onto it. And it has come to the point here, too, where they have to put a certain amount of men and women on the committees. And that is what it has come down. Which is fine with me, but it is a shame it is back to the thing where, you know, who do you give the job to? The minority who cannot do it or the person who can do it, regardless of who they are. And that is the way it is here.
- T: What is the ratio between male and female workers in Packard?
- G: That I could not tell you. I used to know those figures. We have a percentage of veterans, we have to hire in a percentage of minorities, minorities as being

women, blacks, black women, Hispanics, Indians, and any other minority I used to think it was 50 percent, but it is not anymore

T: Are there more men than women or more women than men?

G: I tend to work with more women, personally Where I work, there is more women than anybody I pretty much see that throughout the division But then you have to remember they are white women, black women, Latino women, Indian. I forget the ratio, as far as what it was, but I used to think it was half and half. I am not sure if it still is

T How has being a woman affected your role in the work place?

G Not much Perhaps, maybe safety-wise Getting things done, as far as it is not safe to have this cording across there. We are more apt to complain about something or make sure something is right At least I am If you insist that I do everything 100 percent correctly, then I am going to insist the same thing Safety reasons, I think we brought out more attention to people for safety reasons, because the vast majority of the women out there have a family to take care of -- I do not have a family -- and if they get hurt, the whole family will come down Not just her, or him, individually, but the whole family So I think we are more apt to get more safety things done than anything. The Family Leave Act finally came in, we needed that, so I think we have more family-oriented things that we are taking care of

T Are you familiar with the Family Leave Act?

G: A little bit It was developed in 1983 to 1993 A little bit. They can take off a year for sickness if they need to take care of somebody in their family. But that goes for both men and women

T Has management made information available to the workers?

G No, they have not The only way I heard about that is through here, and that is how the people I work with know about it, also We have a union paper that comes out that, we have an EAP rep, employee assistance counselor, who gets information like that out there Usually a lot of people do not know about that, unless they have a problem They go to their committeeman to try and figure something out Then they will direct them towards that

T What do you feel are the important issues facing women right now within the union and workplace?

G Within the union, being treated, being recognized as an individual Within the work place, a little bit more apathy, more concern Because even though, like I

said, the men are taking a more active role with their families, it is still feasibly falls on the women, and we do have times when we do not want to let them go because their child is sick, and they will have so much vacation time, and the foreman is not understanding and makes them use all their vacation time when the child is sick or something happens along that way. I think a lack of apathy and a lack of concern. You take care of your people, they will take care of you, basically that is not true, that does not happen anymore. But within the union, being recognized as the individual that you are, not just for you are a woman and complain a lot or something like that. Being known as for what you do. Your talents and your abilities, which I think they lack here

T: Are there any problems that women face within the union that men do not encounter?

G: Harassment, I think. Sexual harassment, more of being called a baby, you know, touch, feel, put the arms around each other. We are expected to do the dirty work, clean the kitchen up, make the sandwiches, but when the pictures are being taken, they are up there thinking that they did it all. For instance, we always do the Spring Fling, where we have a stage, we open gifts and that, we basically unload the truck and put all the gifts up there and all the prizes, and we raffle it off. Come raffle time, picture-taking time, there is no room for us to stand because the men are all up there (PA announcement in background). They expect us to do the work without any help, basically.

T: Are there any instances of sexual harassment that you are aware of?

G: If you are aware of them, you are involved in them. It is the law. There was one girl where he was after her quite a bit, the foreman was, calling her different things and offering different activities. You know, come out with me, different stuff like this. And she just laughed it off. She did not like it, but she did not want any problems with him either. She figured she had to work here for a while and she did not want any problems. So no matter how much you talked to her and bring it out to her attention, she was not going to do anything about it. It takes a strong person to file any kind of harassment charge. And a lot of them are not. Yeah, I have seen it and it is a shame.

T: To what degree has it gone?

G: As far as sleeping with them and that? That I do not know. As far as her saying, yes, he wants me to go out and have some drinks with him, he wants me to do this. I do not want to have anything to do with him, she eventually transferred out, is what happened, but she never brought any charges against him. He insisted that they would make a fine couple and it took her moving from a job she really liked in an area that she liked in order for him to leave her alone, because she did not want to cause any waves or do anything.

T Has there been any instances of that within the union?

G That is usually kept hush, hush and I do not know of any right off hand. I mean, you hear rumors about, you know, affairs going on or possible this, possible that, but unless you are involved in it, I have no idea about that

T How do you feel the solidarity is between your fellow women members of the union?

G. It lacks A lot of women are not educated, and it is a shame Like I was saying earlier, a lot of times the women will vote with the man because they think that they can do a better job than a woman They are not always willing to give a woman a try in there, and we do lack a lot of support A lot of back-stabbing as far as, I know how women like to gossip or say stuff, and I have met just as many men that love to gossip and say stuff, but women take it to heart more. A lot of back stabbing, as far as, you know, talking behind your back A woman will look at another woman and say, "Well, does she not look nice " Where a man will not look at another man and say that So we have a lot of play, as far as playing back and forth on emotion between women So, solidarity with women really lacks here And I think you can probably say that anywhere Plus, it is actually a woman's area that is strong in that organization, but still, I think they have a problem with that, because we are more apt to show our emotions and share things, and not keep it hidden So I think there is a lot more back stabbing, a lot less solidarity within a woman's group

T You had mentioned earlier about the different views concerning women that are older, as compared to the younger generation Could you go into that, please?

G I work with a girl, Darlene, her sister is quite a bit older than her She works at Packard and so does her husband I would say her sister, Barb, is probably 40, 45, in that area She goes home and prepares the meals, cleans the house, while he sits down and rests and takes care of the children That is her job, regardless of whether she has a job outside the home, her first priority is the job in the home She hands the pay check over to him, he takes care of all the financial business and deals out the money

A lot of women are like that, whose husbands are still alive, the husband takes care of the outside work, mows the yard once a week, does the gardening She still helps, but her main priority is cleaning, keeping the house straight, taking care of the children or grandchildren, if that may be And the husband still has the responsibilities of the finances, of the views, tell her how to vote. My mom and dad did that My dad told her how to do it She never worked outside the home, he told her what to do, this is how it was And I think with the women nowadays, the divorce, with the education made better with everything that is out there to offer the young people, it is a little less like that. But I have seen it many times, where the man, this is how you vote Being on the Election Committee

and that, you see them coming in and the husband and wife work in the same plant, and he will tell her how to vote. So it is quite common

T: Do you feel that the younger generation is more open to a modern attitude towards equality?

G: I think so. There are a lot of single parents out there, them wanting the best for their child. I think they are more open-minded. They are more independent. Maybe not so much open-minded, but more independent as far as what they want in their life. I think they have proven that over and over with marriage declining, as far as later in life. Women having children later in life, in their 30's, 40's, now, instead of 19, 20, like it used to be.

T: Have there been any measures taken on the part of the union to get the younger workers organized?

G: No, not really. The activities we have, we try to have a dance once in a while, fund raisers, Spring Fling. We try to have family-oriented activities. As far as getting the people, you know, involved, you have to be wanting and willing to go ahead and sacrifice stuff in here, and get your toes stepped on. I think the older people are a little afraid that if they start to educate the younger members, then hey, they are going to take over my job and do a better job than I am. Eventually, these people have to retire or die. They are going to eventually die, and they are going to lose their job regardless. It is a fight getting people trained and educated in certain jobs, with the older people in the union now.

T: Through my previous interviews, I have heard references the CHP's and PHP's and the tier system. Could you go into that if you are familiar with it?

G: CHP's are Competitive Hiring and the PHP's are the progressive hiring plan. It is a three tier. The CHP's are the last hired in, starting in 1993. The PHP's were hired in in 1985 and 1988. As PHP's move up and as people retire or die or quit, every three of those, a CHP moves up into a PHP status; better pay, benefits, hit parody in ten years, no matter how long they have. A lot of disgruntled workers, CHP's, they want to move up faster. They are not satisfied with the pay they have, the benefits that they have.

I am a PHP, a Progressive Hiring. When I came in, I knew what was going to happen in the next ten years. I knew every year I would get an increase in the benefits I have. CHP's came in with the same thing. They knew what they were getting, they knew that until they moved up to PHP status, the only increase they would get would be an increase as far as a raise when the company gave a raise for everybody and for the cost of living. They got in here thinking they change it all at once, and they cannot do it. That is why the contract had such a bad time passing this time and last time, because they wanted it all. They wanted the pay increase, they wanted the benefits, they

wanted everything at once and it is not possible. So they do not like working next to somebody who is making full wages for the same work that they are doing. So there is a lot of uneven conflict and disgruntled people, as far as that is concerned.

T: Discuss your involvement in strikes, in any labor disputes.

G: Well, being that this was the first strike, I was hired in 1988 and in nine years that was the really the first one I have ever encountered. I can remember my dad going out back in 1970's, for a short time. I remember other places going on strike, not allowed to cross the picket line. (PA announcement in background) We do not do that. I did picket-duty this time around and that was with some friends up along the road, and did picket duty there. And I have established the kitchen and getting it up and going.

T: Do you feel that when a strike is at hand, there are different jobs assigned to women than men?

G: Picket duty comes, as far as, who falls in line, who signs up, and that is how you fall, so there is nothing you can do about that. I think they have a tendency, and I cannot be sure, to put more stronger people at areas where they knew they were going to have problems with. The truck entrance, the access road. So I do think that they try to plan that accordingly. And I know a lot of women that would not particularly whether they did that or not. And then I know some that would prefer they did not do that. Kitchen duty was left in charge of our vice president. He did not anticipate the strike, he thought it would not come to this, so he was not planned or organized.

So I was here at midnight offering my services, saying "Get the coffee," because these people had been here since 3:30. It was cold out that night. Nothing was planned. So we came back around 3:30 in the morning. Sue and Charlotte, the recording secretary, and the president asked us at that time if we could get everything up and going in the kitchen. Whether it was because we were women or it was because we were here, because he knew we had the ability to organize something within three hours, which we did. We had it up and going by 7:00. So you figure from 4:00 to 7:00, getting everything in here that we needed and getting the stuff out to the people by 7:00. More women were in the kitchen that day. I think I had one man come in and help us make sandwiches, take it up to the people, that day. Most of the men, "Oh, we will run." You know, they wanted to run to the store if we needed anything, but as far as rinsing out the coolers, or cleaning the coffee pots and that, there was not that much help from the men.

T: Are there any other activities you have engaged in to support other unions?

G: Personally, just the support as far as financially. When WCI went out, we made

sure that we sent money from the committee's we were on. If they needed any help, we would be there to help if they asked for it. Personally, I have not been on any other picket lines or, actually, any other demonstrations because of attending school and working midnights. It is a little bit more difficult to get out and about, for me it is. But we had people go to Superior when Superior was out, Superior Beverage, from our local. They had an organizing committee that tried to help that worked with Kmart distribution down here, handed out leaf-lets, held signs. Last time, the strike this past time, they went to Sawhill and areas like that.

So our union does support the other unions financially and the people, when they need them, for rallies and such. They just went down to GE IUE and GE will be having a head to head conflict this summer over their contract, and it has already been made known by video tape to the foremen and management, by Jack Wells, the CEO of GE, that he will be going head to head with him to get his people ready for a long, drawn-out strike. So down in Kentucky, I do believe, they had a rally down there for GE, and they took a bus trip down there for a day.

T: I had seen one of the union newsletters. In the back it had a list of different companies and agencies that were non-union, and they were asking the members to boycott their products. Have you noticed any participation in the boycotts?

G: I think a lot of people are becoming more aware of it. Like I said, growing up in a union family, I think we are more apt to look out for stuff. I did at first, you know I would buy what I liked, and then I started checking labels and such. Yes, people do it. People ask me out on the floor, "Why are we boycotting?" We were boycotting the black entertainment channel. They did not know why. Yes, they would boycott it when they knew the reason for it. Right now we are boycotting Michael Jordan and Nike, because of a child labor law that they do not have over there. I think the people that work with the union after they see a strike, or after they see this, they realize how important it is to support other unions and buy USA made stuff of anything. What is really hard is educating the children. I have a couple kids I have worked with outside of this, within our area, at church and such. "Why can you not buy Nike's? It is in. It is what everybody wants." Reeboks, a variety of things like this. It is hard to educate them as far as, you know, I do not get paid like that, I am not treated like that. But people have a tendency to buy more and more union-made stuff. It is a long road to get them to do it, but they are more aware of it. And that is what we want to do, is make them aware.

T: Are there any female members in management, and if so, how are they viewed by the union?

G: Management is not viewed too highly by anybody in the union. As far as women, I do not know. I would assume that they would be treated the same way. I could

not tell you that I would assume that they are treated the same way. They should be. I do not think they hold any punches back from them, the union reps that I know. They do not pull any punches, whether they are dealing with a woman supervisor or a man. They might watch their language a little bit more, but other than that, I do not think so.

T: Since you have been working for Packard, do you feel the attitude of your union towards women has changed at all?

G: Not really, no. It was hard getting my foot into the door and getting on the Women's Committee. I think a lot of that had to do with they knew my father, and that is how I got in here. At least initially that is how I got in here, I should say. Ever since then, it has been an uphill climb, as far as getting recognized. We just had this discussion the other day. The opportunities to give a man a position, as far as insurance rep or administrative assistant, a variety of positions like that are more apt to be given to men. He said no, I said yes. He happened to be here less time than I am. He is on committee's, he has taken an active part, where it has taken me six years to get to where I am now. They are more accepting if a man does a good job, to let him know. They are not as fearful of him as they would be of me. They knew my name down in the hall before I knew who these people were, whether it be because I knew that I had the ability to do their job, or whether they had just heard about me, or through my father or what I do not know. But it is easier as a man to be involved in the union, to hold a position.

T: What has been the most positive experience, as a woman, with your union?

G: Meeting the other women that are strong and capable. I think without some of the strong people that I know -- Charlotte Ingals, she is strong, Marty Moore, Marylou Dever, Olga Nevels, and a bunch of others -- who actually would guide you and encourage you and pave the way as far as, you know, there is acknowledgment, there is ability to move up in here. It is just that it is a hard, strong, long trip, but if you have it, you can do it. Meeting the people, the mentors, that have really helped me out, or I would not be able to run a campaign or even sit here and do something like this. But I think more of the women that helped me and encouraged me, as the most positive thing here.

T: What about the most negative?

G: The most negative? Knowing that what you do as far as your job, if you do a good job, it is not always going to be acknowledged, there is never going to be a thank you. That most often times, the credit will go to somebody else who did not do it, but who just happened to be a name at the time, or be in the area where they are doing something at that time where people thought they were in charge of it.

- T What would be your definition of middle and working class?
- G. Middle and working class? Well, I am at the bottom of the class, I know that, as far as money and such I really do not think that there is a lower class, a middle class, and an upper class anymore I mean, you either are comfortable in your finances, or you are not You are struggling I do not think there is really a happy go between They tell you that you are supposed to have three months of saving stocked up, three months of paychecks put away untouched. The vast majority of people I know do not have that They are struggling from week to week. If they are comfortable, then they still have to work. They cannot just quit their work or retire or just go and do what they want They still have to be watching what they want, what they do with their money They cannot blow it all at once That is how I personally think I do not think there is anymore class system anymore I am sure they will argue with you if there is Maybe, number-wise, but you talk to most of these people out here and they are all working class But if you talk to them and ask them if they are low class or middle class, most of them will tell you that, I think they are in the bottom wage of earning money They are in that class They are just working to make end's meat everyday I do not think we have that many people in this area that are that comfortable where they can just go and do what they want
- T You are attending Kent State right now What are you studying?
- G. I started out as an education major and switched over to public relations I am in a lot of classes, a lot of psychology I was always fascinated with the mind. I am working with people and such I want to get a lot of negotiating classes in As I said earlier, I think education is very important The company educates their people, their negotiators go to school on how to be a negotiator. We have to learn how to play their game, by their rules I think if we do not start doing that, then we are going to be lacking, we are going to be in serious trouble down the road. We cannot just come off the street anymore and play street-smart We have to be able to be on their level and talk to them as they are talking to us I think education is very important, but right now it is public relations
- T How much time to do you have left to go?
- G: Many years I have one more science class and I will get a liberal arts degree, so that is something I can go off of And I hate science, so I had a lot of communication classes Sign Language is one of them I tried to get that out of the way I think I have two or three years on that already. I will probably start Spanish, because we have a lot of latino workers here right now So I will start that
- T So you are doing this to help advance yourself here.

G: Yes I plan on being a shop chairman in here one day That is a dream that I would like to do, and I need the negotiation, I need the communication skills, and I need the people skills I need to be able to stay on their level but be able to advance when it comes to the company They think they can come down to my level, where actually I can go up to their level A lot of times you hear when they are in negotiations, they down grade you, they talk down to you. And a lot of times you see that in a company out on the floor They do not realize that most people go to school, most people are intelligent, and they have to treat them that way But, yes, personal advancement

T: How would you encourage the younger women members of the union to become more active?

G I encourage them to come to the activities that we have, as far as the Spring Fling, the bus trips -- I got a lot of people signed up with their children there So, you are educating the women and the children I read a lot, I read a lot of books, a lot of self-help books I pass those on I let them when their school is coming up, I bring back literature that would pertain to them Little by little they become interested, and I just cannot, you know, pull them out and throw them on a committee and say, "This would be great for you, try "

They have to become interested, as far as what they can do themselves. But then they also see how much time I put into committee's and different activities down here, so they are a little bit more hesitant because they are not sure they want to put that much time into it because of their children or other family members That is all I can do, is take the information back to them and share with them what is going on here and encourage them to try something, come to the union meetings We just had that AFL-CIO Women Worker's Survey I went through our plant and passed those out to each of the women It is like a chance for us in this area to be counted You know, we are one of the people that they want to count, and that got them interested and they filled out the forms We had a real high turn out within the plant I work in, as far as getting them out there So it is a step-by-step process, getting involved in something that is fun first, and beneficial to them

T More recently, as far as the union as a whole, what do you feel are the major issues confronting your union across the board?

G: Decline in population, as far as union members It used to be they wanted 10,000 by the year 2000 It is not going to happen We hear a rumor that they are not going to be hiring in as the people retire and such We have to keep these people active, we have to organize Kmart distribution. Local 880 with the restaurants and the food workers around here, we really need to support them, as far as getting people But the decline in union people, the uneducated. Doing this picket duty, we had people go by and tell us to go back to work, we are lazy, we are greedy, stuff like that They are not aware of what, if we go down, what

could happen to the people here. A lack of education is another. The decline in the roles, uneducated people, as far as they are not aware of what the union can do for them and what the company will do to them if given the chance.

T: What were the specific issues that surrounded this most recent strike?

G: Job security, as far as, if they pull out, they have to provide jobs for us. If they do not provide jobs for us, they have to pay us until 30 years, until we are eligible to retire. A lot of people think that that is nothing, that it is not a guarantee. It is contractual, it is binding by law. This company is not going to go bankrupt, there is no way. They make too much money. These people do not understand that if we do go out, they would still have to pay us for sitting around doing nothing and I cannot see them doing that. But job security was the main issue that I was aware of. A lot of people wanted more money. The CHP's did. That is not going to happen in this contract. Maybe next contract, but they got a good health care plan. But what I knew of as of the night we walked out, they were holding out on job security, they did not want to give us that.

T: How long is this contract for?

G: The contract is negotiated every three years. It is a lifetime job security agreement, and that is for the life time of the new employee. When I got hired in 1988, they did not open up the contract for us, so we worked nine years without job security. We could be permanently laid off, they did not have to hire us back. This last contract they opened it and we were actually granted job security. So for the PHP's, they have one more year, but we wanted every contract and they were not able to do it. We did it this time around.

T: Once you have had your ten years in, you will no longer be a PHP. You would be eligible for full benefits and full salary?

G: Yes.

T: How much of a difference is there right now between a CHP and a worker with seniority?

G: They come in at 55 percent. So, all our job classes are at a different wage. Assembly line, I think they come in at 55 percent. They were hired in at \$10 something an hour, and then [with the] cost living, they are shipped upward from that. Right now, most of them are making \$10.84, something like that. Between \$10.50 and \$11, depending on what their job is. So, if they are on a cutter job, the cutter's actually make a dollar more than what the assembly line workers do. I will be making \$19.50 an hour as a standard, so I make 55 percent of that. So it varies every time around. We were hired in at \$8 something. A little over eight dollars, and we get an increase every year of five percent. And they do

not, but as soon as they enter the PHP status, they have been a CHP for four years, and are brought up into this PHP plan at four years, with all the benefits and a wage increase

T. Are you familiar with NAFTA?

G Somewhat When it was passed, I was aware of it, but I was not that into it It is not very good for us, as far as bringing in products from overseas. More has to come in than what we sent out Out products are better, and we need to give them a chance within the United States, to use that product and not ship so much in I never really kept up on it, and that is why I lack I figure there are other people, we have an Outsourcing Committee, we have another committee that educates the people on that It is no excuse for me not to know that much about it, but I know the basics of it

T. I would like to conclude the interview with one final question Where would you like to see the union be in ten years?

G Where would I like to see the union be? Strong as it can possibly be Educated members, excellent benefits, as many jobs in the Ohio operation as we can possibly have They are not taking jobs out I can see the union staying here. That is about all we can hope for, to become stronger and that they know that we mean business We need to be stronger, we need to be more educated. We need to show the people out there that we do mean business and we are taking care of the whole community and not just the people that work in the plants It is the whole area of Trumbull County, Mahoning Counting, parts of Pennsylvania. People that work there, we are looking after their benefit, not just ours

T Thank you

End of Interview