

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Women in Labor Unions

Personal Experience

O H 1876

FRANCIS TURNAGE

Interviewed

by

Erin Holmes

on

May 20, 1997

## FRANCIS TURNAGE

Francis Turnage graduated from South High School in Youngstown in 1968, attended YSU for two years, and then began working for General Motors at the assembly plant in 1972. She is very passionate about her involvement in the union, but she never let that get in the way of spending quality time with her family. As her children are getting older, she is becoming more and more involved in the union and has made her personal quest to get more people actively involved in the union. She has raised 3 children, one of whom was a Homecoming Queen at Youngstown State University. Her oldest daughter, Dawn, is a YSU graduate. Her middle daughter, Damika, is a student at Kent State University, and her youngest daughter, April, is a student at Wilson High School. Francis' husband is also employed by General Motors, but he is on the management side of the company.

Francis has been involved in the Education Committee and held the office of Secretary, and she is not a member of the Women's Committee. She is active in the community and has helped with such activities as Voter Registration and a Soap Box Derby. Francis would like to run for a union office someday, but she has chosen not to run so far because she feels it is important for the women in the union to get together and vote for one candidate instead of splitting the vote between several

H: This is an interview with Francis Turnage for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Women in Labor Unions, by Erin Holmes, on May 20, 1997, at 2257 Volney Road in Youngstown, at 1 00 pm

Why do you not start off telling me about what it was like to grow up in Youngstown?

T Youngstown was very nice at the time I was growing up There was very little crime I had a lot of friends My father worked two jobs at one time just so we could move out, sort of move out of poverty So, we were sort of in the middle class We moved from what I would call the bottom of the hill, which is any place from Warren Avenue on down We moved up on Warren Avenue When we first moved up there we were about the second black family up there I was very popular at school I enjoyed school I had a lot of friends We played There was endless playing We never had to worry about being out after dark, riding our bikes from one side of town to the other side of town We actually did not know too much about crime because there was not too much crime here that we were aware of We were just trying to be kids at the time I came out of Princeton Let me see, what else I could tell you about I enjoyed it We just had so much fun I was homecoming queen in my graduating year I graduated in 1968 from South, and I was the first black homecoming queen up there So, I think I made a lot of accomplishments in my time coming up. I got married kind of young You still want to know about me growing up though, right?

H That is fine

T. Okay, I do not know. What else could I tell you about growing up here? I do not know I just had fun I just had fun, and all the friends that I grew up with, believe it or not, we are still all friends We still communicate We still have a very good relationship with everybody I see everybody, and we call one another, and when they are in town we always contact each other We constantly give our reunions. In fact, we are getting ready to have our thirtieth year class reunion next year We are planning on a cruise for that reunion

H That is nice

T Yeah, it is. Just the thought of being out of school for thirty years I do not know I look around, and I think of all the things I have accomplished in life Then, I look at my children growing up, and I have got to see how old I really am My kids are gone, you know

H. I was just in South High School a couple weekends ago helping A group of us from YSU are helping clean it up a little What do you think about South High

School closing?

T I was hurt. You know, when you come out of a high school, and you always think that when you have children they are going to come out of that same high school. None of my kids graduated from South High, none of them. I guess by the time my oldest daughter got old enough to go to high school, South High School, I guess, how can I say it? It was not as nice as it was when I was coming up. We moved her on to a private school. She went to Cardinal. She came out of Cardinal Mooney. But, I was devastated. I wish they could do something with South High School. I mean you have a lot of memories there. In fact, we went up there and looked around and got some of the memories that were in there that were available to us, you know? It was devastating. I wish they could do something with it. There is so many memories just riding by there. You can sit down there and ride by and think of all the things you did up there and all the things that happened up there. It is just memories there, and nobody like to get rid of memories. They will always be in your heart, if nothing else.

H That is good. I heard a rumor that they are thinking about turning the top two floors into a private school.

T Is that right? That would be nice. That would be nice to do something with it because it seems like it was a rich building. It had its own football field, and it also had the stadium back there, and it also had basketball. There was so much available there, and it seems like its just a waste right now. Most of the high schools now do not even have football fields, and that is devastating to me. You take East, Rayen, Wilson, they have to go to another school or pay YSU to play football, and it just seems so unreal. When you have your own school, you should have your own football field. To me, that is the way it was.

H Where did your father work as you were growing up?

T First, he worked at GF, and he worked at the post office.

H Okay, what about your mom?

T My mom was home most of the time. They had that kind of relationship that the father worked, and the mother stayed home. She was home up until our high school year, me and my brother's high school year, and then she was a chef, a cook, at the Mahoning County nursing home until it closed down.

H You said after you graduated from high school at South, you attended YSU for two years. Did you go right after high school?

T: Yes, I did. I went right after high school. I was taking a secretarial course and then, I did not really particularly care to be a secretary. I do not know. I guess that is what I trained in at school. I was in the business courses at school. But, when I got my first secretarial job, I realized that I did not want to sit there and type dictations. It was boring to me. I wanted to be people related. I wanted to get into the people scene. So, I got married, and I had my first child, and I dropped out of YSU. I went back after I started working out at General Motors, and took up fashion marketing, and I stayed with that for about two years, two and a half years. Then I was changed. Another baby came along, and it just seemed like it was just another job. It got harder and harder for me to maintain working, going to school, and taking care of the kids. So, something had to go. It was the school that went.

H: You began working in the factory in 1972.

T: Yes.

H: What were your expectations when you began working in the factory?

T: I only expected to be there a couple years. I really did. Even my husband said he did not really want me out there. It was when women had just got hired, and there was a lot of talk about women should not be out here in the work place and the relationships they were going to carry on with other men. But, I felt like it was all in how you carried yourself. You did not have to get mixed up in all that other stuff. If you carried yourself like a woman and a professional woman, you did not have to worry about all that other talk. I thought I was going to be out there for two years. Then, it was for three years. Then, it was for ten years. Now, I am going on thirty. I hope I can get out of there in thirty. The money was good. The hours were rough, and the work was hard. It was harder than what I expected because I was so young when I came out there. But, I was able to do it because the money was so good, and it kept me coming back every week.

H: How many children do you have?

T: I have three, three girls.

H: Three girls. What was it like trying to balance working in a factory and having kids?

T: It was rough. It was definitely rough. Me and my husband, most of our married life with children we worked different shifts. We found it hard find a reliable babysitter. I started off working day turn with him for a while, but that meant getting up at four, having to take my children somewhere early in the morning,

and the roughest part was in the winter time, the cold months and bundling them up and taking them somewhere and depending on a reliable person to care for them. I grew up under the philosophy that maybe the mother should be at home because my parents stayed home. But, times had changed, and the economy had gotten worse. You needed extra money. That is why I went out in the work force to get ahead a little bit better.

It was hard. It was hard trying to juggle the two of them because I was constantly on the move. It seemed like you never had any time for yourself, to even realize or visualize what you wanted to do with yourself. It was hard on the children, especially when it was early in the morning, and they are crying, and you have got to leave them and go to work. But, luckily I did have some very dependable and reliable sitters. They were like my right hand. If it was not for them, I do not think I could have survived none of it. And my parents, my mother did help out. After her business at the Mahoning County nursing home closed, she really became my other babysitter.

But it was just hard. If you just think, I think it is really a personal and a mind thing. You think about dropping your children off here and there and going to work, and, then, you have got to drop them off while you go to the grocery store. It just seemed like I was always dropping them off somewhere. We never spent any what I would call quality time. That is what I missed because my father would always say, "You are going to miss all of this when your children grow up," and I am like oh, wow, I do not know about that. But, once they grew up, I saw what he was talking about. I did see what he was talking about.

H When did you become involved in your union?

T I have been actively involved in the union the last, I would say, ten to fifteen years. When I first came to General Motors, I did not have time for any union, and it seemed like the union was male dominated at the time. I met a few women that got positions in the union. They talked me into coming in there. Anything that has to be a part of me, governing my rights, how much money I make, my benefits, I think I should have a say so in it just as much as somebody else. My input was just as important as somebody else's. So, I have got to say, the last ten or fifteen years I have been actively involved in the union, and I am sorry that I did not get involved into it a long time ago. I really am. Sometimes to me they have, how should I say it, little cliques, and you have got to be a part of the clique. Well, I never agreed with cliques. I think everybody should go on their own person. I really do.

I guess for a while there I tried to fight the cliques and try to go for myself. You know, put in resumes, let them know I was interested in positions in the union. What I have come to find out is sometimes it is who you know and if you are actively involved, and, now, I do believe in order for you to get any kind of position in the union, you should be actively involved in the union. I do not think

somebody should just come off of the line and say, "Okay, I want to be a facilitator," or, "I want an appointed job " I think you should be actively involved and let them know so you can grow. You grow I think I have grown through the union, working there.

H· Have your family obligations ever kept you from being active as you wanted to be in the union?

T· Oh yes, definitely, definitely, because my husband is on salary for one thing, and I am on hourly So, we are on two different sides of the fence, and we try to leave that at work I guess my children The union meetings are on Sundays, and I was going to church, and that stopped me from going to union meetings because it was church time, and I was actively involved in church at the time And my children, if I am leaving them all week, on Sunday was family day, especially since we worked different shifts He is a day time person I am an afternoon person So, we do not really get together except for the weekends Saturdays were usually taking care of business, so Sunday was family day So, that stopped me from going to union meetings, because it like sit down First time we sit down and eat dinner as a family is on Sundays because during the week, I am off going to work, and the kids are just coming home from school, and he is just coming home from work So, we do not sit down as a true family during the week, so we set that aside for Sundays

H· That is good On the other side, has your involvement in the union ever kept you from doing something for your family?

T No, not exactly I think they really understand My children are older now, and they really understand, and I talked to them how important unions are I guess they have seen where I have come from and where I am going and what I stand for, and I am constantly preaching Even when my daughter, when she worked down there a couple summers, I would talk her into going to union meetings, even if its only for three months You are only going to be there for three months I want you to just be involved I want you to be a part of this because this is a part of you, you know? So, no, I cannot say it has

H Okay What do you do with the union?

T. Well, I am on the Women's Committee right now, just a member of the Women's Committee I started off a member of the Education Committee, and I enjoyed that, and I ended up being secretary They started downsizing different committees last year, so they kind of downsized our committee But right now I am just actively involved in the Women's Committee Sometimes, I go around and register people to vote, especially the new hires that have come into the

plant from other places I register them to vote

H Has your union encouraged you to become active in your community?

T Yes, we are Yes, it has In fact, our Women's Committee is very active in the community We take on different projects every holiday Like, for instance, this last Easter our project a dance for some organization in mental retardation, they have this prom So, we took them on, and we sponsored that. There is a place over there in Warren that is for women, drug-related, and it is like a rehab, a half way house We took on that as a project So, yes, we are actively involved in the union. One year, we went up to Tod Children's Hospital and made Easter baskets for all the children up there at the hospital It is just enjoyment of being involved, you know? Just being a part of it, especially with the children, to see their faces light up to see those Easter baskets It fills your heart That is all you needed to do You did not need thanks or nothing All you needed was that smile, and that was worth it all

H Does your union also encourage you to be politically active in your community?

T Yes We are. They encourage us to be politically active We have speakers when it is voting time We have speakers that come, politicians that come in to talk to us They encourage us to talk people into voting because there is a thing with people, an old cliché People say, "Well, my vote does not count " Well, I never believed in that I never did So, I do believe in voting and, when we have our meetings, we encourage everybody to come out and vote In fact, not the last election but two elections ago, there was people on my line where I took on a personal challenge There was people on my line who have never been involved in the union, have never even set foot in the union hall, who probably do not even know who the president is, actually

I took them on a challenge, and everyone, every day for three weeks, I told them that, "Okay, voting is Sunday Voting is Sunday " I got them to come. It was a personal thing, and it got to be a bet with me and somebody else I will give you a dollar for everybody who you talk into coming because they said, "They ain't coming They never came " Sometimes there are people I have worked with who have twenty some years seniority who never came to vote, never came to a union meeting or nothing So, they was a challenge to me When I got finished preaching to them, I was so proud I made fifteen dollars There was fifteen people that came out there to vote, and I was proud of all of them. I really was Now I talk them into voting all the time Now, they see how important it is because we made some progress this year We did

H That is good. That is really good I have some more questions. I want to ask you some questions about the women in the factory and in the union What do



you think are the important issues that women need to be concerned with in being active in the union?

T I think every woman should be involved in the union I say that because, like I say, we work for the same company, and every benefit we get, I get, they are going to get So, why not have input in your life? You have got retirement. You have got your health care Why not have an input in it? A lot of women do not want to take the time But you find people who do not take the time They will be the first ones to complain about what the union does not do and does do But you can not speak to me about it if you are not involved You can not talk to me about it if you do not come out and express yourself. People just sit back and do nothing, who just have something negative always to say I think you can always turn anything negative into a positive if you have got input in it Everybody should have an input in your own life It is part of life Why sit back and talk about it when you are not doing anything about it? You have got to be a doer, you know? You have got to be a part of it, and I encourage all women to be a part of their union I really do

I think more women need to be involved in the union We need to have more important jobs in the union, more say in the union The union is full of women. At one time, there was not that many women They came out there in 1970, so, twenty-seven years But in the twenty-seven years we have made a lot of progress, and we are still fighting You are going to fight You are still going to fight. There is still going to be negativism because you are a woman, you know? Just like racism, it is part of it. I think everybody, every woman, should be actively involved in their union. There is five women on our line Like I said, they never came to union meetings. But they came They have been coming now I have been telling them I bring them articles and tell them how important they are, and they come

H. While you have been working in General Motors, have you ever been discriminated against because you were a woman specifically?

T. Discriminated against because I was a woman? I guess I could say a few times I felt some discrimination there I had one job, and it was a four persons job Four people worked together We worked hand in hand together My job was, I felt like, the most important one because I read the broadcasts and, if I read the broadcasts wrong, then they could not do their job right And any time a problem arose on our particular job, if a supervisor would come down, and I felt like the problem should have been directed to me or the question should have been directed to me, I was looked over They would go to the man automatically and talk to them, and that used to bug me to no end because it was my job they were speaking about

So, I felt like they should have just came to me and spoke I am the best

authority on my job. Therefore, the other person would have to relay what they wanted to relate to me. They would have to relay it to me. So, I walked around like I did not know because you did not tell me. So, I acted like I did not know until you came and spoke to me. You had to speak to me about it, you know? So, if they told somebody else this is the wrong color, okay. Or, this is the broadcast, okay. Until you spoke to me, I did not know about it because it was my job, and I felt like that is what you should have been doing. So yes, I can say I have been discriminated against because I was a woman. I still see that. I do not know what it is. I still see that. I guess they do not think you have as much intelligence as anybody else. But it is still there. It is definitely still there.

H. Has it gotten any easier for women in General Motors over the years?

T. Oh yes, I think so. I think so because we have got a lot of rights now. A lot of rights have been recognized, a lot. Like the sexual discrimination is recognized. You have got different organizations. You have got a group that is in there. That is all they deal with. So, yes, it has gotten easier because you can make formal complaints, and the complaints have to be addressed. When it is written on paper, it has to be addressed. So, yes, I think it has gotten easier.

H. Okay. How about things in General Motors for minorities? How have they changed over the years?

T. Changed over the years? I guess we have gotten stronger, and I think this is the best change we have had. This particular election is the best change we have had so far because we got some more minorities in power. We got some power. We got some speaking power. They had discrimination. They had a law suit at one time for discrimination of minorities even on a salary level, and I guess that has changed a whole lot too. That changed. That helped change it. I think we have learned to stick together. We learned to be more of a group. I realized the only way we can ever get anybody elected in any kind of power if we stick together, and we vote for them. If we can get our people to come out and vote, that was the main thing. You had minorities that did not come out and vote, regardless of who was running, and the only way we can ever get anybody in any kind of power is to come out and vote for them. So, we did something to them this year. We did. We got some people in positions, and we are proud of it, and I think that minorities see it. They finally see that there is something to coming out and voting.

H. Do women kind of stick together to get women into power also?

T. Yes, we do. We try to. We try to. The only problem we have is getting people to come out of their homes on their nice Sundays and come out and vote. They do.

not realize it only takes five, ten, fifteen minutes to vote and go on back home Like I say, it was beautiful to see this last one We had people from everywhere come out.

H. That is really good

T It is It was something to see I think it scared a lot of people It scared a lot of people because they never realized there was going to be that many people There was people lined up everywhere I mean, I had tears in my eyes just to see the people that came out I really did because it just filled my heart with so much joy that they finally got the message They finally got the message I was so proud of them.

H. That is really cool Have you ever had to file any grievances with the union while you have been working there?

T. No, no

H That is good I want to go back to what you said When you first started working at General Motors, there was kind of a feeling that women should not have been working there You were working in General Motors around the time the steel mills were closing in Youngstown Did you ever get any resentment from the men that you were taking jobs away from the displaced steel workers?

T No, no I am a very strong woman, a very verbal woman, and that kind of gets people off of my back in a respectful way, in a very respectful way No, I never had a problem I am a people person. I love people I got along with everybody

H I understand that there have been strikes here and there over the years at General Motors. What has been your role in the strikes?

T I think I was involved in, I want to say, one strike. The other two I might have missed because it was a time that I was on salary I worked salary for a while, and there was two strikes when I was on salary. So, I really was not involved in it But the one strike I was, and it did not last that long. We just were supposed to set up picket duty, but I never got a chance to even do that because it was over with

H. What did you do while you were on salary?

T I was on salary two or three times I was a tally clerk We traced parts and ordered parts and stuff We checked quality on parts Then I was typing I

typed for a while I did not enjoy salary as much as I enjoy working on the line I did not

H: Were you still able to be active in the union when you were on salary?

T: No, no parts, no parts of the union No

H: Okay How about strikes in other factories around locally? Have you been active? Have you become involved in other strikes?

T: Yes, I participated in a couple strikes We went out and we walked, you know? We picketed and we walked with them I did that twice Only problem that I have found with that was that I could not be involved as much as I would like to be because most of them were early in the day, and I worked the shift The hours I worked do not allow me to get up in the mornings until after two, and most of them would be over with

H: What about the recent Packard strike? Did that affect General Motors?

T: No, not yet, not yet I think we have some parts It would affect us if they would not have went back to work But, we had enough parts up until they went back to work, so no. I should not say I was kind of looking forward to it I was looking forward to some time off, even though strikes are not good But, I was kind of looking forward to a day or two off

H: How about the women? What is the relationship between women on the floor in the factory?

T: Women on the floor? Like what are you talking about, supervision?

H: No, like women working the line

T: Oh, we are real close Yes, we are real close I work with a lot of women now. I used to always prefer to work with men because women have a tendency to create problems sometimes Petty jealousy problems They talk about one another, or they just look at each other wrong Somebody gets mad, and I did not come out there for any problems I just come out there to work, and I do not have to go home with nobody So, I do not have to really get involved in all of that I just like to work and have fun and do my job because I feel like we are a family out there We spend more time out there with these people that are my coworkers than I do with my own family So, we are part of a family

We have a relationship When we get sick, we call one another. We take up a collection, send flowers, cards, go visit. In fact, some people in my line, we

are thinking about starting a sisterhood thing. They have one in Packard where all the sisters get together. You have a little meeting, and you donate money once a month, and if there is some kind of crisis within the group, or maybe an outside crisis where maybe there is a woman whose house got burnt down who needs money, who would have money available for her. We stick together. I guess we are all fighting the same issues. We are all struggling. Most of us have children, growing children. So, we all are going through the same struggle. We are pretty close. We are pretty close. At least the women that I work with, we are real close.

H I do not know if there are union stewards at General Motors.

T Shop stewards?

H Shop stewards.

T Uh huh [Yes]

H Do you have many women in that kind of position?

T. No, we do not. No, we do not. This last election, like I said, we just finally got one on the executive board. We have got a woman over our Women's Committee, of course. She is the chairperson of our Women's Committee. There is about two or three women in the Election Committee now. But, no, women have just started coming to be. They really have. I think who paved the road was Miss Anna Biggins. She was the one that paved the road. She was my role model. She was my mentor, anyway. I worked with her when I first started out to the plant, and I always admired her, and she moved up in the union. She was vocal, and she showed me how important it was to be a part of the union, and I saw the progress that she moved up. Now she is sort of working for international. She is out of our plant and off the line, and she is a role model for every woman that is out there to know her.

H That is really impressive that she has done that.

T It is. She still comes back. She comes back sometimes for our union meetings. She comes back for our affairs. She let us know that her home is still out there, but that is what she started at.

H This is kind of a sticky question. You do not have to answer if you do not feel comfortable. Actually, it is a two part question. How do you battle injustices on the job site? You said before you would just pretend you did not know until somebody told you.

T No, I do not pretend I speak up I really do. If I see something wrong, I will speak up about it Anybody who knows me knows that I have never been one to be quiet I feel like being quiet does not get you anywhere. We have our Civil Rights Committees So we have people who deal with your problems Sometimes, I also feel like that I do not have to deal with my problem personally I can take it to somebody else I do not have to fight a personal battle I could take it to my civil rights, equal rights We have all those kind of committees out there for you, and that is their job to fight for you So, they have to take your report, and they have to deal with it Now, if I can not handle it on a one on one, I will take it to them after that. But, I will speak to that person and let them know that I do not agree with this I think you are wrong, you know? It gives me a chance to express myself. I do not feel like I should have to fight a very personal shouting match or have my blood pressure go up because I do not have to do that I have got people that can do that for me So, I will sit back and let them fight That is their job

H Have you ever engaged in any industrial espionage?

T No, do you want me to really say that? No, no

H I guess not espionage That is the wrong word

T What do you want to say?

H Sabotage

T No, no, no, I do not agree with that

H No? Do many people out there kind of deliberately do things

T No, not that I know of I do not know nobody like that That is our jobs You will get fired for that No.

H There has been a lot of stuff in the news recently about the role of unions They are branching out into other fields of labor Do you think that the strength of your union has grown or declined over the last ten years?

T I think our union has grown I think we have a very strong powerful union I am proud of our union We have fought a lot of battles, and we have won a lot of battles Yes, I think it has grown

H What are some of the battles that your union is fighting right now?

T Right now? Our battle right now is our unemployment we did not get Our unemployment and our, what do you call that? We were laid off, it has been a year, over a year, because of a strike at another plant For some reason, the unemployment office and General Motors company felt like we had a personal interest in it So, they denied us our unemployment It has been the first time I have ever been denied unemployment benefits in twenty-five years I could not understand that. I had nothing personal in this, except for the fact I was going to be out of a job Nothing personal about it to me We were denied unemployment benefits for over a year, and we just fought The union has just fought, and we just got our benefits from a year ago about three or four weeks ago Now, they are trying to take them back Now, the company wants those back So, that is the battle they are fighting right now for us, trying to get that

H With all the American factories moving out of the country, is there any fear that the Lordstown plant is going to pick up and go?

T I do not know I guess there is always a fear of it because you do see it We see daily what Packard is doing, moving all their things to Mexico, and General Motors does have plants out of the country already So, we stress quality We feel like quality is still number one. If we can supply better quality than anybody else, then we should be able to survive But, in the future, I cannot really speak on if I really think that they are going to be out there I am not sure I have my doubts like ten, fifteen years from now whether they are going to be as valuable as they are right now I do not know I really do not know It is hard to say because you do see that, and you do think about it I just hope and pray that I will be out of there by then

I feel sorry for the next generation just coming up, what kind of jobs they will have because, if General Motors and Lordstown move out, then what? We have already lost the steel mills, and we lost a lot of Packard and their operations now If Lordstown moves away, I do not know what would happen to the valley, and I worry about the future of my kids because of that There was a time when you could go into the steel mill and sign up for a job They always did summer hiring out here. I do not know about the future I mean, it has helped my children because I have one daughter who worked out there two or three summers already, and it has helped her But I do not know how long that is going to last I really do not So, I do think about it I do think about it I just hope and pray that it does not go that way, and, if it does, that I have gotten mine, that I have gotten out of there by then

H What do you think about auto companies around that do not have unions, like Honda?

T I do not know I do not know how they survive without a union I really do not I

have never even talked to anybody who was a part of a company like that, that was not in a union. So, I do not know. I am not an authority to speak on it. But, all I can say is I do not know how they survive without it. I really do not. I guess I look at my father. My parents was always in a union where good jobs was union oriented, and I started out in a union. I do not know. I do not know how they survive. And there was also a time when I could speak on being on salary. Salary people do not have unions out at General Motors. There was a time when you could see that it was more important. It was the importance of being on salary, the benefits of being on salary. But, the benefits of being in the union, to me, outweigh the benefits of being on salary. My husband is on salary. He is under my health care because my health care in the union is better than his. He has to pay a percentage for his health care. I do not have to pay anything. So, we had to drop his even though he has more time than I have. We had to drop his and went with ours with the union.

H: Do you think that your union is working to better the place of women in the factory and to help get the women and minorities, particularly, more involved in the union? Are they encouraging that?

T: I think that they have tried to better the workplace in the factory because there have been times when women have been sexually harassed, and they had to deal with that situation. Sometimes, these people have got reprimanded behind it or lost their position maybe as a foreman or something behind it. But you can see them speaking out for it, and that is a plus right there. It makes people stop and think, and there was times when I first worked out there the men used to play little jokes on you. Some people it did not bother. I chose to ignore it. It did not bother me. It did not bother me like that unless they touched me personally.

They used to read their magazines, their little girly magazines, and they still do. I still run into that. They read their little girly magazines, and they pin them up in your area. One time, I did work with this guy who had girly magazines. He worked another shift but we occupied the same space. But, on his shift, he had all these naked women all over the place, and then on my shift there was three women. So, we had to fight. The three of us had to fight to get him to take his pictures down. And they say their little jokes. There is the little jokes. But, you can direct them. You can direct them. A lot of times I go speak to that person themselves. I say, "Look, you have got to stop this. This is not cool. I do not care for this. It is very offensive." If I can talk to that person themselves and get my problem resolved, fine. Other than that, yes, I think they do try to clean up.

I will tell you another incident. There was an incident out to the plant. It was, I think, two years ago. The women's bathroom is a small bathroom, only three stalls. The outer stall closest to the wall, there was a little hole in it. Nobody paid no attention to it. It was just a little hole. We saw it, but we did not



think nothing about it. Well, some man had drilled a peep hole. So, I guess somebody really started investigating him. I do not know if they peaked through there or what. But, it did not seem like it was big enough to look through. That is how much we did not pay attention to it, you know? We brought it to the, what do you call it, equal rights. Civil rights. We brought it to their attention, and they had to deal with it. They found out who did it, and they dealt with that person. So, it was good to see.

You are always going to run into something. When you work with a lot of people there is always going to be one or two, three or four that are always going to create a problem. As you run into those problems, I do not think you should ignore them because those problems will just keep going on. You have got to deal with it, if not for yourself, but to make it better for the next person. You have got to address it. I think you should address it, any kind of problem that you have. Now there are men who have backed off. There are men who have backed off. They are not as verbal. They are scared now. They do not say things the way they used to because they know they can be addressed, and they will be addressed. I guess, through the years, they have seen how they have been addressed, and they will slow down. But, like I said, you are always going to run into one or two. You are always going to run into some. I do not care if it is at the work or at the grocery store. There is always somebody, and a lot of women take it offensive when they say, "Hey babe," or "Hey darling." To me, they are nothing but words, and I can look over that. I mean, it is just the way the male is made up. As long as they do not direct it personally to me, I do not take their remarks that personal. They are nothing but words to me.

H In general, do the men respect the work that the women do in the factory?

T I think so. I have worked with more men than women in my twenty-five years, and I got a lot of respect from them. Like I said, I do feel that it is all in how you carry yourself. If you carry yourself respectable, you are going to get respect. Now, I do not play games with them. I do no joke with them. I deal with them as a person like I want them to deal with me. Therefore, I came out there feeling that way. I have seen women who did not mind somebody slapping you on the back or rubbing your shoulder. Well, do not touch me because that gets personal. Because you think that once you start the touching thing, you might go further than what you expected to be. You put them in a place where they think that it is alright. Sometimes, it ain't alright. So, stop them from the very beginning. The men that I have worked with always have respected me. In fact, I have got to say I have gotten along better with all the men. They took care of me. They take care of me better than the women. They look out for me. Women, sometimes they fight against one another. Men, they take care of us. I think they took care of me all the time.

H How is your union addressing family issues?

T Family issues?

H Like family leave

T We do have a family leave policy. We do, and we also have an organization that, if you have somebody in your family, a child or something, that is on drugs, they have an organization. I cannot think of the name of all these things right now. They have this organization that deals with that. Then, they have programs for you. I have a good friend that raises her grandchildren. So, periodically, she misses work. But it is down there on her paper that she raises her grandchildren and the problems that she has, as far as her daughter being on drugs and whatever. They know that, and they are very lenient about it. They are. They have something for you now. They have a program for you. All you have got to do is initiate it and get involved into it.

I think they are more so family oriented. In fact, I just went to a training program, and it is all about families. They get more involved into the family because I think they finally realized that a happy soul is a productive soul. Your well being is brought out in the way you work, the way you carry yourself, your livelihood coming to work. So, like I say, a happy soul is a productive soul, and I think they finally realized that. They have something for you. They do. They have a program for you, and it has not always been like that. I just see the progress within the last ten years, as far as families.

I think they finally realized that the work they have for us out there is the older work for us. Most people have been out there twenty years or more. So, therefore, you have got to give them forty, forty and over, at least. Your values change as you get older. There was a time where I would come to work six, seven days a week to make some money. That was before I got involved with my family and all my children. Now, I have got older, and I do not think it's my body talk to me. My mind talks to me, and my values changed. My priorities changed, too. I treat my job with the utmost respect. It ain't top priority in my life no more because I feel like, if something happened to me today, somebody is going to be able to do that job. But nobody will be able to take care of my family as well as I can. I am expendable, I am replaceable out there at General Motors.

H What has been your most positive experience as a member of the union?

T The most positive experience? I guess one of them is, like I say, watching these people come out and vote last time. It was the most positive. That was one of my most positive ones. But, before that, I was chosen to go to a seminar. It was a workshop. It was a women's workshop. It is held once a year in different states, and different locals sponsor it. This particular one was in Cleveland. It

was for three or four days, and to see the women that was involved from every walks of life with different jobs, I left there so strong. There was women that was presidents. I met about three or four presidents of their local They gave a lot of strength right there to see that there are women that have survived that And they gave talks on their trials and their tribulations of being a president and how long it took them to get there But, it made me feel how valuable our positions are in the area and just to be a part of that workshop

When I left out of there, all I could talk about was women I came home preaching to every woman because they gave me so much inner strength Society has built us up not to be a equal. I guess I was different all my life All my life I always felt that I was equal to anybody Sometimes, it would create a problem in my life, in school, with my family But I survived it because I guess my parents raised me to feel like I can do anything I want to do or be anything I want to be It was up to me to do this and, when I came out into the male dominated world, you are not accepted as well You are vocal If you are strong, you are a threat to them sometimes. They are scared of you. They do not know how to utilize this strength and capitalize on it and work together with me and make us stronger as a team I am not walking alone I am trying to walk with somebody all the time. Those two incidents last still

I guess coming out of that workshop because I had just joined the Women's Committee, and I had been trying to get on the Women's Committee for years I felt like I had the seniority to get on the committee, and I did not know what was stopping me. I got kind of bitter about it because I was a woman Maybe I was not always involved in the union But, I finally went to the president of our union one day, and I said, "Look, I am tired of asking I have got more seniority I have got a lot of seniority for a woman in this plant, and I felt like I wanted to get involved and I should be part of it I want to be on the Women's Committee." He said, "Okay, you ask me every month I am going to put you on there "

That year, I also got chosen to go to the convention, the women's convention I came out of there strong and more vital, more positive I had so many positive aspects In fact, I was the speaker for our local at the convention and, at first, I was scared to death. This was time being there. Why me? Why me? You all come every year Why are you choosing me? But, I was vocal, and I enjoyed it I enjoyed it I really did

H: How does your union go about placing people on committees?

T: Well, you have to ask first You have to ask somebody You have got to let somebody know that that is what you want to do to be on a committee So, you either direct it to the chairperson of that particular committee, or the shop chairman of your union, or the president But, you have to ask somebody because nobody will know you want to be on if you do not ask I think that they

only allow so many I do not know what the number is, and you have to be active You have to come to your meetings Being on a committee, I have to attend two out of three union meetings Now, I know if I do not do that they have the right to take me off the committee and replace me with somebody else So, that makes you be an active member. That makes you active because you want to be a part of this committee, and you grow You learn You do learn So, you must ask, though You have to ask

H. So, being active is very important to you?

T It is Being active is very important to anybody because you get to be a part of it You grow You can not just step up on something and say, "Okay, I know this " You have got to be a part of it. Let them know that you are part of them and you are willing to support them and fight with them and support them Yes, I think that yes, being active is important I do

H Now, I want to clarify. Are you on the Education Committee now?

T No, I am not.

H You were before

T Yes, I was

H What does the Education Committee do?

T Education Committee's job was to go around and educate your fellow coworkers about union business, about different educational programs that are available to them, or different issues that might come up, new issues that might come up That last year I was on it, we took on a project of a school There was a school over here in Warren that needed computers They needed books, library books. They needed computers So, we got involved in the community We raised money. We got money from our Education Committee itself, and we supplied the school with books Now we are in the process of getting them a couple computers. So, you help out with the community and the education to educate the people

We also have went out into the schools and educate the children coming up about unions, the importance of a union and being a part of the unions There is a lot of negativism about unions, and a lot of it is false A lot of people do not know the true value of a union So, our project one year was to go out and tell them the value of a union If you can change the way a person foresees something, you have got a winner You have got somebody on your side if you can change the way they are thinking. The only way to change the way they are

thinking is to show them the facts and the logic of it. So, that is what we were doing.

H Somebody asked me this question, somebody interviewing me for a job a few weeks ago, and I will see if I can ask you the same question. If you were working as a union organizer and trying to convince people to sign the union cards and join the union, what would you tell them?

T I would show them. I would show them the good of a union, what it has, the progress it has done, what we have done as far as with our own union, the steps that we have made to improve the union, the importance of it. If anybody followed the UAW, they could see the strength that we have and see how we have grown. I would show them, and I would tell them all of that. You have got rights. You have got somebody speaking. You have got power. You have got other people speaking. What was that in the Bible? I mean, strength comes in numbers, and the more people you have, the more strength you have, the more power you have. I do not have to survive without a union, so I do not know. I guess I just would start off showing them the importance of a union and the steps that we have taken and all the things that have survived and the accomplishments that we have made at being part of a union.

H Okay, I asked you the positive. What has been a negative experience that you have had in the union?

T In the union? Negative? I do not know whether I should say this is negative or not. The only problem I have with the union is the cliques that they have. I do not like cliques. I think that it is prejudiced, and I look at it in the way of being prejudiced. I do not like cliques at all. I think people should stand on their own feet and who they are, not who you know all the time, who you are. If I can break up a clique, that would be my ultimate goal. I do not like cliques at all. There was one time I was at these facilitating jobs, and I went to this class, and they were very interesting. But I felt I could stand up there and speak just as well as anybody else could speak. Plus, I had education. I had two and a half years that was behind me as far as being in education. I had more seniority, and the people who taught me the class, was teaching me the classes, they had just come off the line. They had no education. They just knew somebody, and I have sent in resumes, you know? I spoke verbally about it, and I was not part of the clique.

That bothered me, and it still bothers me to this day, them cliques that they have out there at General Motors. I would like to see the cliques break up. I would. I do not know. I am only one person. I cannot break them up by myself. Maybe it is time for a change. Somebody else has to feel the same way I do. Other people have to feel the way I do. Other people have to see it the

way I do. A lot of people speak on it, and a lot of people do not get involved in it because there is a clique out there. We will never be a part of it. We ain't part of the clique. That is something negative. That is what I see in it.

H Okay, I think I will start wrapping up this interview. It has been really interesting.

T Yes.

H Since this is your story, what is something that you want to say that you want people who listen to this tape to know about you?

T About me? About me? I just think that people should stand for what they believe in. Sometimes, you have a battle. Battles have been won before. Maybe it will not affect your life. But you look at the quality of life that it will affect in the long run. Maybe it will affect your children. Maybe it will make life better for somebody else. I just think that people should not judge people for the color of their skin or for their beliefs. They should look inside. They should go a little step further and look inside that person and see what they are about. In order for them to see you the way you want them to see you, you have to show yourself. Let them know how you are, you know? I feel like a smile goes a long way, and a hello goes a long way. There is no harm in either one of them. You can say, "Hi," to me and keep on stepping because you do not have to deal with me no longer. But, you never know where it comes from. It has got to come from within and, if you are true with yourself, you can be true with anybody else. But first, you have got to be true with yourself and be strong with yourself and always fight for what you believe in. I have always been a fighter from the time I was a little girl. I have been kicked out of school fighting, not fighting, but standing up for what I believed in because that is the way I was raised. That is the way I will be.

H Also, you wrote something on the remarks on the sheet that you turned in. You do not have to read the whole thing but maybe you want to elaborate on it, because I think that is a really important statement.

T I would like to see more of our brothers and sisters be actively involved and, like I said, now that I have been involved in a union, I preach on it constantly, constantly. They will tell you. Sometimes, I think they run away from me, and I tell them, "Okay, union meeting this second Sunday." I think they all should be involved, and the ones I speak on that always have something negative. "Oh, we ain't going. Our union sold us under the ground." I cannot deal with them because they do not even come to the meetings. They do not even be a part of it. They are part of the problem, not the solution, and we have got enough problems. We want people to be a part of the solution. So, if you have got

something to say, bring it out. You have got a chance to stand up before everybody and speak on it. You do not know until you get involved.

I felt the same way they did. That is why I do not knock them too much because I used to feel the same way they did until I got involved. Once I got involved, I am there. I am there. I am there until I retire. Probably, when I retire, I am still going to be involved in it because I try to make it a better place, not only for me, but the people who are with me and the people who are going to come behind me. They have got to have a life, too. They have got to live, too. Our women, I want to see more women in positions, in appointed positions, in executive positions in our union. I want to see more black people in executive positions and important positions in our union. We are all there together. I thought we was one big happy family. Every issue, everything, every benefit that I get they get. So, why not be a part of it? Go down there and say what you want.

H. Okay, maybe just one last question.

T. Yes?

H. What are your personal goals for the future, being active in your union?

T. In the union? Not only do I want to be a part of the Women's Committee, I would like to one day see myself in one of these jobs at international. That is why I say I wish I would have started a long time ago. I have only got five more years where as I could possibly retire. I would like to see myself with an international job, facilitating job, educating job. I think I wasted a lot of knowledge and time on the line. I think I could have been more valuable if I had been part of the union a long time ago. I have only got five years now. So, I ain't in for a whole big battle. But I would not mind getting off that line working five years. I would like to move on. I would like to move on, maybe get me one of those executive positions that I speak on. I would like to move on. I think it is possible because I have been having a ball, and I think it is possible. But I have got to work with it, and I have to talk to my family about it, see how they think about it. But they are behind me. They are behind me. They know how I am, and they are behind me.

But that is what I would like to do, maybe get me one of them little office jobs, sit up there in the office and educate people. Yes, I would like to move on. I would like to move on. I think I wasted a lot of time on the line. The line is nice, and I have gotten a lot from it. I grew on it. But, anybody can do that job. Anybody can do the same job over and over and over again.

At one time, I was not as vocal as far as a fighter. I was not. Cliques stopped me and, as much as I preached about fighting, I was not fighting until somebody made me realize that you are always talking. You are always preaching about fighting and standing up. But, you did believe in something, and

you let them walk over you That is when I realized I was not talking, I was not doing anything So, that is when I joined the union, and I have been fighting I have been working with the union ever since, and I think I can go on with it I really do This might be hard It might be a struggle

I think I could open up the doors for somebody else because even at this last election, even though I did not run for anything, and I would have like to But I felt like, if there was one position open, why have four women run for it and one guy, because you are going to split the votes. The women ain't going to know who to vote for So, I let a lot of positions go because I said, "Okay, maybe somebody else can move on up with it " But, I can be the backup I can bring these people out here to vote for these people I can still push them in position That is my role I took this time I did not take a role, as far as getting a position or signing up for a position, because I felt like there was too many already out there, and we only needed one We only needed one strong one. So, okay, I got people to come out and vote for these people, and that was my job That was my goal this time, and I felt good because I felt like I accomplished it I really did That is it

H Okay

End of Interview