Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Linda Bart and Judy Ellul

Rod Busters

Interviewed on February 20, 2006

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Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with Judy Ellul and Linda Bart

MARGARET RAUCHER: — It's February 20, 2006 and we are here interviewing Judy Ellul and Linda Bart, [sisters and] ironworkers, rod busters actually, part of Iron Workers Local 25. And I will let Michelle start the questions.

MICHELLE FECTEAU: The beginning part of the questions, we want to just know your family history and background, your upbringing. So I'm going to ask some general questions about your background. Where were you raised and what was your childhood like?

RAUCHER: Either one of you, just go ahead and then I'll move the camera to whoever is speaking.

JUDY ELLUL: Well, we started out in Wyandotte, until I was probably about five and then we moved to Garden City and spent the rest of our growing up there. It was a pretty normal childhood to me.

LINDA BART: Yeah, of course, same with me. We were in the same house. [laughter]

FECTEAU: You could have different opinions. [laughter] So how many children were in your family?

ELLUL: We have one more sister, younger than the two of us.

BART: Just three girls, that's it.

RAUCHER: Well, what do you mean by normal childhood, though? I mean, what was it like? Were you tomboys?

BART: I was the tomboy. I was into sports, always active in something — softball, volleyball, ice hockey. Whatever I could do, I tried to do.

ELLUL: I was in between. I played baseball, but loved cleaning house. [laughter]

RAUCHER: Really?

ELLUL: Yeah, still do.

PAT NUZNOV: Wow. That's great. I wish you were a neighbor. [laughter]

FECTEAU: What years were you born?

BART: 1961.

ELLUL: '63.

RAUCHER: Babies. [laughter]

FECTEAU: Younger than me. So, when you were growing up, were you ever introduced to working with tools, or was iron working in your family? Did your parents follow the skilled trades?

BART: No, our parents weren't involved. We didn't have any relatives in it. But anything around the house — you know, we had no brothers, so we were cutting lawns, raking leaves, anything. My dad worked a lot of hours, so anything that needed to be repaired, it was like, "I'm going to show you this once, learn how to do it."

ELLUL: Yeah.

RAUCHER: What did your dad do?

BART: He was a security guard at Ford Motor Company. So he was always working like, afternoons or something, so he wasn't available as much as a 9-to-5 dad.

FECTEAU: But he would teach you how to do it, your dad.

BART: Yeah, yeah.

FECTEAU: Was your mother someone who did sort of non-traditional type things around the house, too?

BART: She was not afraid to work.

ELLUL: No, she was not.

BART: She gets her hands dirty. She doesn't hold back or nothing like that. But she never did any construction work or anything like that. She worked when it was needed, when we needed it financially.

FECTEAU: So she worked outside of the home.

BART: Sometimes, yes.

FECTEAU: What kind of work did she do?

BART: Accounting?

ELLUL: Yeah. She used to be at the railroads.

BART: Bookkeeping.

ELLUL: Yeah, bookkeeping at the railroads. I believe that was way before she got married, though, is when she did that.

RAUCHER: So, otherwise she stayed at home, though, while you guys were growing up.

ELLUL: Yeah.

BART: But well, after that she did go back to work a few times working for — oh, I can't even remember, a different company in Plymouth or somewhere, doing their books as well. She worked there for a little while. But after our younger sister was born, she pretty much didn't work too much after that.

FECTEAU: Is she much younger than you, your younger sister?

BART: Eight years younger than me, so she's thirty-six, thirty-seven.

ELLUL: Yeah, somewhere in there. [laughs]

BART: I'm trying to figure it out, if I'm still twenty-nine, she's . . . [laughter]

FECTEAU: Okay. What kind of hobbies or interests did you have? I know you mentioned a little bit about sports. But were there other things that you were involved with?

BART: No. I played sports.

ELLUL: I played baseball for a while, but other than that, no, not really. I watched a lot of TV when I was a kid. [laughter] Well, I always liked craft projects, like macramé and crochet. I always liked doing things with my hands, is the way I was. It's probably why I became a rod buster, because you're working with your hands constantly.

ELAINE CRAWFORD: So you didn't take any voc tech classes, high school shop or . . .

ELLUL: No. They were hiring and she showed me how to make two ties and I went to work the next day. So that's all I had.

BART: I had wood shop in junior high school and I think one class in high school, but that was it. It was the only thing I ever really did in high school as far as like, automotive or anything like that.

FECTEAU: Were you with other girls or young women who did it, too, or did you do it kind of by yourself?

BART: There were some girls, yeah, that were in the classes. This was about 1976, so there was just starting to be a bigger presence of girls in wood shop classes.

ELLUL: You know, I took home ec, and I still don't know how to cook. [laughter]

FECTEAU: So you both graduated from public high school in Garden City?

ELLUL: I actually dropped out in eleventh grade and got married. But I went back and I got my GED and when I was doing that, I found out I only needed three more credits to get my high school diploma, so I actually have both now.

FECTEAU: So that must have been something, to drop out and then come back — a pretty traumatic part of your life or an important part of your life.

ELLUL: Yeah, I was young and thought I knew everything and wanted to get married and have a child, and I did that. And then it's like, marriage didn't agree with me, so I had to do something, because you can't support somebody on six bucks an hour.

RAUCHER: But you said, Linda, that you became a rod buster right after you graduated from high school?

BART: I graduated from high school and about a month later, I got into a government program called Trade Union Leadership Council. And it was here in Detroit.

RAUCHER: What year was that?

BART: 1979? And their goal was to give you some schooling and on-the-job training. And we worked out at a dam in Belleville, one week at school, one week on this job. And the training in the school was math and it prepared us for entrance tests into electricians or plumbers or what trade we decided to apply for. I did that for almost a year. And at certain points they took us around to the various unions and we applied. I think I only applied to three or four. And rod busters called me first, so that's why I took

it, because I wanted to go to work. And I could only spend so much time in the program, and I knew my time was up, so I had to take something.

RAUCHER: And you mentioned when we were talking earlier that that was a separate union at that time.

BART: Yes, separate from Local 25, yeah. They had different trades — structural reinforcing, rigging.

ELLUL: Pre-engineered.

RAUCHER: And it was just called the rod busters union?

BART: Reinforcing Iron Workers, Local 426.

FECTEAU: How did you hear about the Trade Union Leadership Council program?

BART: I had some girlfriends that were looking through the paper and found it in the paper. And you had to qualify. You had to make only so much money and all this other stuff and I guess I qualified.

CRAWFORD: Were you paid?

BART: Yes, we were paid and paid for the school training, too. It was funded by the government. I didn't know much about all the financials back then, but we were only allowed to be there for a year. It was a pretty interesting program. Their goal was to get minorities into the trades, minorities and women. And from what I know of the class that I was in, I was the only one to get a job. I've never seen any of those people ever again in any of the trades.

FECTEAU: Did you go with your friends to the program?

BART: Yeah. They didn't stick with it. They quit.

FECTEAU: Why do you think that was, that you made it and others didn't?

BART: I think a lot of it has to do with my size.

ELLUL: Yeah.

BART: I'm physically able to do the work. Plus I have a different attitude: I'm not afraid to work, I don't have a problem with work. A lot of people want to stand around and talk, especially at that age. You're worried about where you're going to go on Friday night or what you're doing this weekend. We were only seventeen.

ELLUL: You had to have a certain mentality to do it.

FECTEAU: So you [Judy] didn't come in through that program?

ELLUL: No. She was in the union — I'd say, six, seven years — and they needed more women in the trade and she asked me if I wanted to get into the union. I told her, "Yeah," and she went and signed me up and I went to work.

RAUCHER: What had you been doing, working at, before then?

ELLUL: I worked at like, McDonald's, sewing boat tops, plastic factories. I used to be a flagger for an asphalt company. Just odds-and-ends jobs, and raising a daughter.

RAUCHER: So was the money one of the things that attracted you?

ELLUL: Yeah, that was the big part of it.

FECTEAU: What was the difference between what you were making and what a rod buster makes? Do you remember?

ELLUL: I was making six dollars an hour as a flagger and I think when I got into the local, starting was $16 an hour with benefits. Flaggers didn't have insurance, didn't have benefits. So that was a . . .

FECTEAU: Huge.

ELLUL: Yeah. We didn't have any insurance, so raising a daughter, I needed the insurance.

RAUCHER: Can we back up a little to — you said you went into this program that was federally funded and it trained you on the job as well as in the classroom.

BART: Uh-huh.

RAUCHER: But not just rod busting, right?

BART: No. When we went to this dam and did work, we were assigned a different foreman.

RAUCHER: So what did you do on the dam?

BART: I spent a week doing carpentry work. I did laborer work. I jack-hammered. I did all sorts of stuff.

CRAWFORD: Cement?

BART: Yeah, cement work. I poured cement for samples. We did all kinds of things — under their supervision, of course. I don't know how many different trades were there, I don't recall, because I spent most of my time doing carpentry and labor work.

RAUCHER: So you didn't know what rod busting was all about when you . . .

BART: No, no, not at all.

ELLUL: They snuck that one in.

BART: Not until it was too late. [laughter]

CRAWFORD: So was there an actual rod busters apprenticeship?

ELLUL: Yes. I went through that.

CRAWFORD: How many years long was it?

ELLUL: I think it only took me a year. There's really not much to teaching rods. It's basically, bend over and tie. And the blueprints always got left up to the foreman. If you went near the blueprints, they thought you were taking their job, so we really didn't have to worry about that. [laughter]

NUZNOV: So then, you both went through the apprenticeship with the rod busters?

BART: Yeah.

ELLUL: Right. She went through the federal program, I went through the local itself.

BART: No, the Leadership Council was different from the apprenticeship for Local 426. I also went through the apprenticeship.

RAUCHER: It took a year for you, too?

BART: Well, it took me two years — they didn't give me my journeyman certificate until another year later. I don't know why, but they didn't. It didn't matter, it was a dime difference in pay and I wasn't working anyway, so it didn't matter. At that point, I said, "Well, whatever." Being an apprentice sometimes can get you a job before a journeyman. So that's why I kept the apprentice status at that time. But yeah, I went through their apprenticeship training. That was one day on a Saturday every other week for just about two years. I think we had to have something like forty school days, eight hours of school a day.

ELLUL: See, mine was twice a week, Wednesdays and Saturdays, so that's probably why it took me less time, because they doubled the school days.

RAUCHER: Well, what was it like, exactly? I mean, physically, was it demanding?

BART: The training?

RAUCHER: Yeah.

BART: The training was more — for me it was book work, blueprint reading. We did welding. I don't really remember too much of the apprenticeship.

CRAWFORD More math.

BART: Yeah, more math. [laughs] Can't get away from that math.

ELLUL: It's basically all book work. And then with my school, one day they set up a welding machine and everybody just got the gist of welding, and that was it.

RAUCHER: Because you do that, as rod busters, you do welding?

BART: In some cases, yes.

RAUCHER: So you actually went onto the job not really having done that type of work?

BART: No, no. There was basically hands-on training. It was, you go on the job and you figured it out.

RAUCHER: What was that like the first day?

BART: Interesting. [laughs] You kind of wondered what the hell you got yourself into.

ELLUL: Yeah.

BART: It was heavy. I mean, you had to carry the steel. Sometimes you had a partner, sometimes you didn't. You carried the steel, put the steel in the place.

RAUCHER: How much steel would you carry?

BART: Well, when I applied, I had to lift a sixty-pound bar to prove to them that I could lift a certain amount of weight.

ELLUL: It just all basically goes on what you can handle. There wasn't a set limit. Because you can carry one bar or a bundle of bars or you'd have two people carrying longer forty-footers together. It just all depended on the size and the quantity. You did a lot of climbing — not just climbing, but walking — because the steel would be in one place and you'd have to put it over here. So you were either carrying it or you were bent over tying in place.

FECTEAU: I'm just curious about that first day, if each of you could describe for me just what the conditions were like, including the weather and exactly what you were working on and how your co-workers treated you, being that there were so few women in your trade.

BART: Well, the first day for me, you kind of get to the job and you walk into the man trailer and everybody looks at you and goes, "Oh, gosh." You know, you could just read it in their expression. Not a lot said. You know, "Okay, here's your paperwork, sign it, fill it out." And then they all went out and got their assignments for the day and I'm filling paperwork out and then the foreman takes me out to my partner. And generally, as an apprentice, my partner was always some grumpy old man. [laughs]

And the first day, I get an older man that's grumpy. And we worked for a couple of hours. And when you say, "the weather," that's what cracks me up. I remember this date: July 15th, 1980. It was when we had a very bad green storm roll in and the power went out for about a week around here and we had dry ice and shortages and all kinds of

stuff. That was my first day on the job. And that storm rolled in and we hid in the man trailer, of all places to go. And that thing rocked back and forth. [laughter]

NUZNOV: The storm hit about 8:30 in the morning.

BART: Yup, it was right then. And that was my first day. So, my second day was different. [laughter]

FECTEAU: What were you building?

BART: A sewage and waste treatment plant out at Willow Run.

RAUCHER: So how was the second day?

BART: The second day was okay. Physically, I was drained at the end of the day. A lot of carrying, a lot of weight. You don't get to walk on flat surfaces. You're walking on bars, re-steel that are crisscrossed, and sometimes they're not tied.

RAUCHER: It's called re-steel?

BART: Re-steel. And they slip, and you've got to learn how to walk like a cat.

RAUCHER: And are these bars round or flat?

ELLUL: Round.

CRAWFORD: They're round, but they have ridges on them.

RAUCHER: Okay. And how big are they?

ELLUL: They range from anywhere from a quarter of an inch all the way up to three inches in diameter.

BART: Well, actually, an eighteen-size bar is like, what, sixteen pounds a foot, so it's a pretty big piece of re-steel. We don't deal with that too much. They usually have cranes for that. [laughs]

ELLUL: If you're lucky.

BART: Yeah, if you're lucky. [laughter]

RAUCHER: You were saying earlier that you do the skeletons, that's what you set up.

BART: Yeah.

RAUCHER: So you're walking, then, on the skeleton that you're building?

BART: Yes, you're climbing it, you're hanging from it, you walk across it.

RAUCHER: How high up are you?

BART: Well, usually there's forms around you, maybe not so much on like, a column, but on a bridge deck, you know, there's a floor, there's edges.

ELLUL: I'd say about four-foot high, because there'll be a mat on the bottom. And then you have the re-steel chairs and then the mat on top. And in order to fill that mat in, you'd have to walk across the frame of it.

BART: So sometimes you're walking on very little to get across to something else.

FECTEAU: What about your first day?

ELLUL: Mine wasn't that adventurous. I had a parking deck on Sixteen Mile [Road]. It was already basically poured. It was just a one-day job and they had to post-tension it. They gave me the post-tensioning cable and I held it while they unrolled it. And that was basically all I had to do.

But my next job — she never warned me that when you tie, you never hold the pliers close to your mouth, because I came home with a fat lip. [laughter]

BART: Yeah. It slipped off, and bam!

ELLUL: She laughed.

FECTEAU: How were your co-workers with you when you came on? How was the response?

ELLUL: My foreman was a little pissed off at me because I didn't have a reel. And I was told that they supplied them.

RAUCHER: You didn't have a reel?

ELLUL: It holds the wire for the tying. But basically they didn't treat me that bad, I think.

FECTEAU: Okay. You didn't feel that you were treated any differently being a woman than being a man?

ELLUL: No.

RAUCHER: What year did you start?

ELLUL: August of '87. But most of my apprenticeship was spent building [Interstate] 696. That's when you got into the heavy number elevens, six inches on center. I think I spent two and a half years on that job.

RAUCHER: Were there any other women?

ELLUL: Yes, there was one more out there with me. I went to school with three women.

FECTEAU: Out of how many?

ELLUL: I think there was only six of us, and that was it.

FECTEAU: So, in your class, too, the government-funded program, how many people were in that class?

BART: Well, the funded program was different from the apprenticeship, but I want to say there might have been six women out of thirty people in the program. My apprenticeship, though, there was probably twelve women.

FECTEAU: Out of?

BART: There was more women than there were men.

FECTEAU: Why do you think that was? It's interesting.

BART: Yeah, it was really strange at that time. I don't know if they got a lot of women and seen how many would make it, because it was such a tough business. But there was about twenty people in my apprenticeship class, maybe twenty-five.

FECTEAU: Do you have any understanding as to why they recruited so many women for this particular trade?

BART: No. All I know is that when I got in, they were pushing for minorities, that when federal dollars were spent on a project, they started doing quotas — you know, so many women, so many minorities, so many me — for federally funded projects. And maybe there was just a glut of federally funded projects at that time and they needed the women. So, that's the only thing going on at that time that I could think of.

RAUCHER: Did you do anything to stay in shape for the job or did you just go to work, and that's how you stayed in shape for the job?

BART: I played sports.

RAUCHER: Even while you were working?

BART: Yeah. I just stopped playing sports like, three years ago. I still play softball, but . . .

ELLUL: Mine was the job. [laughter] That was enough exercise for me. It was like an eight-hour workout.

FECTEAU: I was curious, when you played sports, did you play with just women, or did you play with . . .?

BART: Just women, yeah. All women's leagues.

FECTEAU: My daughter plays hockey.

BART: Does she? That's what I used to play. I played for about thirty years. Where does she play?

FECTEAU: Livonia.

NUZNOV: So then Linda, you left the rod busters and became an electrician. How did that happen? I mean, am I too early on this question?

RAUCHER: Well, we can always back up if we want to. But go ahead.

BART: I was physically getting tired, my body. I was tired of sometimes coming home and cooking dinner and not being able to stand up. I'd have to kneel in a chair to cook dinner, my feet would hurt so bad. I just — I got tired of that. I liked playing sports. So I thought, well, maybe I can get into something else not as physical. But I loved construction. At that time I was spending more periods of time being laid off than I was working.

RAUCHER: When was that?

BART: Oh, boy, '92, '93?

ELLUL: Yeah.

BART: Yeah, somewhere in the early '90s.

RAUCHER: So you'd been working for about ten years or so then?

BART: Yeah, I spent a total of almost fifteen years with the reinforcing ironworkers by the time I switched over. But I was at Job Service at the unemployment office and they asked me if I wanted an apprenticeship, and I said, "For what?" And they said, "Electricians." And it was like, 11:00 o'clock in the morning and they said, "Today's the last day." And I made a beeline for the union hall and I applied.

It took some time before I was notified for a test. And then what else happened after that? I had to take a test and then it was a while before I was notified for the physical. And then I got to go to school. I had to do an interview process as well in there somewhere, too. But the whole process took over a year to get in.

FECTEAU: Was that a pay cut, then, for you to go back and do this?

BART: Yes, an extreme pay cut, but it was well worth it. And it worked out. It was a hard five years financially, but it worked out.

NUZNOV Well, then, let's see, did you hit the boom time?

BART: Yes I did. 2000 — that's when I turned out. Yeah, I worked steady all through my apprenticeship and probably two years after that. And then after that, it's . . .

ELLUL: Downhill.

BART: You know how it's been, off and on.

CRAWFORD: So are you a [IBEW Local] 58 member?

BART: Actually, yes. I'm a member of both 58 and 25. I took a withdrawal when I got into the electricians. And work has been so bad for 58, and 25 is starting to pick up. This summer, because of the casinos and everything, they're going to be working. And I'm so far back on the book for 58 that I probably won't be working. So

I'm going to go back and do rods this summer. It's going to kill me, but I'm going to do it.

RAUCHER: And how long has it been since you've done rods?

CRAWFORD: More than ten years?

BART: Yeah, in '94, I think I stopped rods. So, yeah, it's been a good twelve years. I did do a couple days here and there in the fall at a hospital, Harper Hospital, over here. And Judy can tell you, those couple of days, I couldn't walk after I was done. It was bad. You know, your body is just not — I don't know what can prepare you for that type of work.

ELLUL: The first week is always the hardest, no matter if you've been working for years. If you've been laid off for a while, that first week is always the hardest to get your body acclimated to what you're doing.

FECTEAU: I would assume the disability rate is pretty high for both men and women. Do you happen to know what it is?

ELLUL: That I don't know. But there's a lot of guys that I know that's already had back surgery, who've already been through knee surgeries. I'd say an average of half of them, there's something one way or the other wrong with them.

RAUCHER: And that's why being out of that trade for so long, you have no problem finding a job, because they don't have enough rod busters?

BART: At this time, yeah. They're starting to have so much work that they're going to need people. So I'd say in a month or two, I'll probably be working around downtown somewhere.

CRAWFORD: So what's the unemployment rate, then, for the rod busters, though, for the last three or four years?

ELLUL: It's been slow. The work's been slow. But we only have — I believe it's maybe around 400 that actually do rods. And half of them are retirees. So there's not too many left in rods.

CRAWFORD: So what are they going to do? Are they going to try and start new classes?

ELLUL: What they did is, Local 25 started a rods-only class. When you go to school through their apprenticeship, they teach you rods, rigging, reinforcing and structural. That's their four-year class. But because there's not that many people in rods, they're starting a two-year rod school, and you are basically bound to doing rods for ten years. And then after that, you can upgrade and go work somewhere else. Because you just can't find anybody to do that job, because it's so draining on your body.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, really. Signing something that says you'll do it for ten years . . .

FECTEAU: Yeah, that's a heck of a commitment.

NUZNOV: It's a long time to be bent over. I've watched — there's very little tying up here — it's all down on the ground.

ELLUL: Yeah.

BART: At your feet.

NUZNOV: And it's every cross, too. I mean, it's amazing. I've worked around — our conduit stuff ends up in it. A lot of hard work.

ELLUL: Yeah. I've done jobs hanging upside down or laying on my back, because the framing inside a column for like, a bridge overpass, the middle support, had to be poured in place and I'd have to climb through the steel. I've tied rods in many different positions.

NUZNOV: So you said you're disabled now. How long has it been since this happened?

ELLUL: Six years. My knees are shot, my back, shoulder. It's just that my body couldn't handle what I was doing.

CRAWFORD: Do the knees go because of squatting or kneeling on them a lot?

ELLUL: Well, a lot of it is kneeling on the concrete. And then, you know, every now and then you'll get that little pebble you'll kneel on. And then you're banging your knees climbing the steel and there is a lot of squatting or climbing. When you climb a wall of re-steel, you have a hook belt, but a lot of times you take your leg in between the steel, just for extra security. Well, you're basically hanging off your knee, is what you're doing.

NUZNOV: I'd say that would wear on you after a while.

ELLUL: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: And you guys don't use knee pads either, do you?

ELLUL: No.

CRAWFORD: Sissy knee pads.

ELLUL: When you're a woman and you wear kneepads, it's not a good idea. [laughter]

FECTEAU: Why is that? Just the teasing?

ELLUL: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: We know how you keep your job.

RAUCHER: You mentioned that the first day when you were in the man trailer — I love that , the man trailer — the men just sort of stared and didn't say anything. Did you gradually develop relationships with the workers?

BART: Oh, yeah. You kind of get that every time you walk on a job, but people warm up to you. They don't know you a lot of times. And you get a reputation. People will say, "Hey, yeah, I remember you from this job." And then they'll say to their buddy whether or not you were a good worker or whether or not you can hold your own and things like that.

RAUCHER: Were you usually the only woman on the job?

BART: Yeah. for quite a few years, yes.

FECTEAU: And you too, Judy?

ELLUL: Yeah. Some jobs I'd go on there'd be one girl I went to school with. On [Interstate] 696 we worked for about a year together. But other than that, usually I'm the only woman on the job.

RAUCHER: Was that nice having her there for that year or does it not make any difference?

ELLUL: It doesn't really make any difference. I had a lot more fun, but . . .

FECTEAU: Did you find that the guys would eat lunch with you, socialize with you, that you didn't feel isolated?

ELLUL: No, I had a good time on the job. I mean, we would play euchre during lunch or in the morning. Really, the only time was when I had one guy come out when

we were working and he says, "I'm not working with no damn woman" and walked off the job. Fine, you know, that's his opinion.

FECTEAU: As long as he left.

ELLUL: Five years later, after me working and knowing some of the people he knew, he called me up and offered me a job. And after that, he had another job offer, so he says, "I'm going to make you foreman of this job. I know you can handle it." So that was good for me, because at first he didn't want to work with me and then it's like, "Okay. From what I hear from her reputation, she can handle it." And I thought that was nice of him to do that for me. It made me feel good about myself.

FECTEAU: He had to make up for his bad behavior, too.

RAUCHER: What did your family and friends think when you became a rod buster? They probably didn't know any rod busters, right? So what did they think of your choice of jobs?

BART: They didn't give me too much of "You shouldn't be doing that" or anything like that, because I always did sports, I always did the guy things. I played ice hockey, I played softball. I wasn't on the cheerleading squad. I wasn't doing the girl things. So it really wasn't a big surprise to anybody in my family.

FECTEAU: How about you?

ELLUL: Nothing really.

CRAWFORD: How'd your daughter feel about you being a rod buster? I mean, did she really understand what you did at work?

ELLUL: At first, no, but then I'd be working and she'd say, "Mom, spend more time with me," and then I'd get laid off and it'd be like, "Let's go do this." Well, I'm laid

off and we don't have the money. She wants the money, but didn't want me to work, so she had her ups and downs on it. But I really don't think she understood too much about what it was.

FECTEAU: How does she feel about your career choice now?

ELLUL: I think she likes it. She understands that the things she got in life was because of what I did for a living. If it wasn't for that, she wouldn't have much at all. Because after I got out of my apprenticeship, I was able to buy my first house on my own and my first brand new car.

FECTEAU: Did you stay in Garden City or did you move elsewhere?

ELLUL: No, I moved to Wayne and I lived there for twelve years and I just finally moved out to Howell.

FECTEAU: The same with you?

BART: I bought my first house in Garden City. I've moved around a lot. Sometimes I moved for work. I worked on the Zilwaukee Bridge, so I moved up to Saginaw for a year or something.

CRAWFORD: That must have been a cold job — in the winter, the fall, the spring.

BART: Yeah, it was a cold job. It was cool, though. I mean, it was really neat being on that size of a project. I mean, everybody knows what the Zilwaukee Bridge is, not only because of the problem it had, but because they go that way to go up north. Everybody kind of shares in that. I moved all over the place. I've lived in Gibraltar. I live with Judy now, because I'm renting out my house, because I can't afford it and I can't sell it.

RAUCHER: As hard as the work was, though, you stayed just for the money or there were other reasons why you stayed?

BART: Health benefits. I love my work, I love construction. There's nothing that gives me satisfaction like it does.

ELLUL: Because you can see your results. Every time I drive down 696, it brings back memories of what I did. I did that, and it's like, "I accomplished something." And not to mention, if you didn't want to work during the winter, if you could afford it, the motto is: "Take off as much time as you want, if you can afford it." It's like my dad, "Well, I have to turn in for my vacation." Well, we don't have to. You have the freedom. If you don't want to go in, there's not a set amount of sick days. It all goes on your reputation and the way you want them to think about you.

CRAWFORD: So how did you feel about . . .? I mean, were you guys familiar with unions before you got into the rod busting trade?

BART: Dad was in the union, but he didn't really talk about it at home very much.

ELLUL: Yeah, other than that, I didn't really understand much about it.

BART: I kind of thought everybody was in one, actually, because we got in the union, my dad was in the union. Even though my dad's union was very small, he eventually became the president of his union. It was only a handful of guys at one plant, but still it was a responsibility. And all the people we know or became acquainted with have been in unions.

ELLUL: It's almost like it was supposed to be that way. And then when you're working you realize that, wait a minute, not everybody is in the union, and you started understanding it a little better.

FECTEAU: Were you ever active in the union? Did you participate in any way?

ELLUL: We would have an annual picnic I'd help out on and the Christmas party we'd give for the kids, I'd wrap the gifts — things of that nature. And then we have our own credit union, I'm on the board for that. But as business agent or — nothing of that sort. I don't want the headache.

RAUCHER: But did you go to union meetings?

BART: Yes, sometimes. But as far as any other participation, I'm ashamed to say I was too busy playing sports or going to school.

ELLUL: I had no life. I went to all of them. [laughter]

FECTEAU: Well, isn't your husband the [Ironworkers] local [25] president?

ELLUL: Yes. We didn't get married until '98.

FECTEAU: So I guess he saw you at all the meetings.

ELLUL: Yeah.

RAUCHER: But he was not president when you got married.

ELLUL: No, he was not president at the time that we got married. We actually met on Zug Island.

NUZNOV: Now, there's a romantic place. [laughter] To somebody who's never been to Detroit, you might think that's a glamorous place.

You said at the beginning that rod busters had their own union. So, when did it become a part of the ironworkers, and did that have any impact on you? Was it just good for the rod busters to join with the ironworkers?

ELLUL: It was in the early nineties. It was because our union was so small and we didn't have the power, the backing that we needed for the jobs. And if we wouldn't have merged with 25, I believe we would have been out of work. The only problem with the merger is that on jobs, you've got the ironworkers against the rod busters and you've got to start sharing, and that was hard in the beginning. But now, it's to the point where you watch each other's jobs if you're on a job.

FECTEAU: But you're saying they actually competed for work before?

ELLUL: Yeah.

FECTEAU: There had to be some understanding about jurisdiction then.

ELLUL: Yeah.

BART: Training, classification, things like that. Like, our journeyman's cards say journeyman ironworkers even though we haven't had the structural training. But because of the international, we probably could do structural work. I have done some structural work.

ELLUL: I have, too.

BART: I think we got lucky in that respect. There are some people that are a little older than I am that have "JR," journeyman rod buster. Their classification's different and at the beginning, they wouldn't have been allowed to do structural work.

CRAWFORD: But the structural work apprenticeship is much longer than the rod buster apprenticeship.

ELLUL: It's a four-year program, yeah. We have pre-cast, rigging, pre-engineered, structural and rods and they cover so many months in each classification.

RAUCHER: Were there rod busters in the ironworkers union before the rod busters local merged with the ironworkers or were all rod busters in the rod busters local?

ELLUL: I think all rod busters were in the rod busting local. I talked with a few ironworkers who said, "Yeah, I tried that for one week. I'll never do it again." Very few do the work.

CRAWFORD: Is technology making the need for rod busters less? I notice over the last few years when they're doing expressways — I know at one time somebody tied all those rods, but now it seems that each mat is pre-made.

BART: Sometimes they're pre-made in a field somewhere where the steel pile is and transported. I haven't been in in so long, so I don't know if there is any pre-fabrication houses where they do that sort of stuff.

ELLUL: There are some shop locals that do caissons like, for the casino that they're building. They have a yard where they're building everything and when they need it, they'll ship it in. The only thing that is really not helping rod busters is what they call "rod buster in a bag." [laughter] What it is is that they've got little steel fibers in the concrete and they've been using it for plant floors and stuff and instead of putting re-steel in it, they put it in the concrete. Well, that leaves us with no job.

CRAWFORD: I've read about that. They try different things like fiberglass or . . .

RAUCHER: And that does as good a job as the rods?

ELLUL: They say it does, but I only know of one plant — I believe it was a GM plant in Detroit — that actually did it, and I really haven't heard anything about it since then. I don't know if other states are still using it or if they're still doing it that way. I guess it all depends on the company, because it does cost a little bit more than regular concrete.

CRAWFORD: So, because you've seen both unions, the ironworkers and the electricians, how do you compare them?

BART: It's different types of work. As far as the union structure or . . .?

CRAWFORD: Well, I mean, each union has a different kind of history and structure.

BART: They're both very proud unions. They kind of clash on a job, but there's kind of a clash between all the trades. But there's not much of a difference in the unions. They want to do what's good for their members, they want to get you involved. They try to do the best that they can, but they got a lot of voices yelling at them from all different areas. That's why I don't ever want to be on the political end of it.

CRAWFORD: But do you feel that the ironworkers business agents would come out more to a job than the electricians?

BART: Yeah, I've never seen an electrician business agent actually. When I was more active with the ironworkers, I saw them. Back when that merger was happening with Local 426 and Local 25, there was a difference between the ironworker and the rod buster. I was trying to do all the upgrading things, trying to get the education to back up the journeyman ironworker on my card, and I ran into a lot of resistance on that.

CRAWFORD: Kind of like organized guys or Book 3 guys doing electricians.

BART: Yeah, and they didn't want me getting that training. I mean it seemed like that. I don't know if that was the real reason or not. But that was the only thing that held me down as far as any union. And it kind of played a part in me wanting to say, "Well, if you're going to hold me back, then I'm getting out of here." That and getting out with my health is why I left.

NUZNOV: So in the electrical trade, what kinds of jobs have you been on mostly — commercial?

BART: Mostly commercial. Unfortunately, I don't like working in plants, but I like to be educated in everything that I'm supposed to be educated in. I haven't had much industrial work and frankly, I don't have a lot of hands-on with that. My apprenticeship was spent mostly commercial. My longest job was Metro Airport — I spent two years out there. And the time I did spend in the plant was as a first-punch apprentice. I cleaned robots for six months. My plant experience, I wish it was more diverse.

CRAWFORD: So will you draw a pension from the Ironworkers?

BART: Yeah, well, because of the issue with Local 426 and Local 25, I will draw a pension from Local 426, because when I left, all the paperwork was changing hands, so my pension is frozen for Local 426. That's mine. I don't really have one for Local 25. If I start working now, the moneys that I contribute at this time will go into that pension, but I don't know if I'll ever be able to meet the criteria for that, because I don't intend on spending any great length of time back as a rod buster. I'm using it as a way of earning money at this point. And hopefully, I will have a decent electrical pension as well.

NUZNOV: We're all hoping for that.

ELLUL: If we live long enough to collect it.

NUZNOV: And being that you said you left the rod busters because of your physical health, I think a lot of electrical work can be pretty tough, too. But I'm sure it's a piece of cake compared to a lot of the continuous hard work you do as a rod buster.

BART: Yeah, there are days in the electrical when you say, "Man, I haven't worked this hard in a while." And you might have a string of those days or a certain project that you're on might be difficult. And electrical — and I don't want to put down ironworkers — can be mentally demanding as well, because you have to think things through.

ELLUL: Rod busters is basically physical. It's really not mentally demanding. You just put this together and tie it and put it where it goes. The ironworkers got to make sure the building's plumb and have the right piece where it goes. Us, if it doesn't fit, you cut it off with a torch and make it fit. They can't do that. And so ours is more physical than mental.

CRAWFORD: You can always throw another rod in. Won't hurt, it'll just make it stronger.

FECTEAU: So Judy, it's been a while since you've been disabled. Have you gone on to do other work?

ELLUL: No. My knees can't handle it. I basically need them both replaced right now.

FECTEAU: So it's really disabled you in a lot of different jobs.

ELLUL: Yeah, and my back, I've got blown-out discs. I get shots every three months on it, steroid shots. So there's really not much more I can do.

FECTEAU: Looking back on all this, and where you are now, would you encourage your daughter to go into doing this as a profession?

ELLUL: I would if I thought she could handle it, but I don't think she could cope with it. I don't see her working with her hands a lot or not caring whether she gets dirty. Me, I didn't care. You got dirty. You put a hard hat on and you went to work. And I don't think she could handle — I won't call it guys picking on you, but you've got to have a certain mentality when you're talking to these guys, to make sure you don't get offended. If they dish it out to you, you have to dish it out to them, so that you can work with them.

RAUCHER: You think that's one of the reasons you stayed in the trade as long as you did, the two of you, that you have that personality that it takes to deal with that kind of stuff on the job?

ELLUL: I never let it bother me. I figure that's their opinion. I don't care. I'm here to do my job. If they don't like it, you can go. Because if you didn't like who you were working with, you could drag up, go to another job. If they didn't like who they were working with, they could drag up and go to another job. It's not like working in a factory where you're stuck with this guy for the rest of your life. That's okay, I'll deal with him for a week and then be out of here. I really never let it bother me.

RAUCHER: Do you think it was because you were a woman that these sorts of things were directed — or were these people who just wouldn't have gotten a long with anybody that they worked with?

ELLUL: I'd say a few were like that and a few were just a big pain in the butt anyways. But there was a couple guys that — I had one man tell me, "I don't think you

should be here. You don't belong in this trade, but if I see you working and you need help, I'll help you. But if you need help and I don't see you trying, I'm not going to help you." I said, "Understood."

RAUCHER: Why did he think you shouldn't be in the trades?

ELLUL: He just didn't like women in the trades. He never gave me a reason. He just said, "I don't think you belong here." And a lot of it, I've heard guys, "Well, watch what you say while you're on the job — a woman is here." And it's like, "You can say anything you want as long as I can say what I want." And that basically broke the ice. "You can say what you want, I don't care, but just as long as you can handle what I can say back."

FECTEAU: I've heard a criticism of the Ironworkers from one individual, and this was just a very general — and I guess it was a case between the Laborers and the Ironworkers around issues of race discrimination. And being someone coming in as a minority, I'm just wondering if you had observed any mistreatment or different treatment towards people who are black or other minorities in the trade.

ELLUL: I've really never seen that. There could be. But in my eyes, there are some guys out there who do not want to work. They like the paycheck, but they don't want to go out on the job and do anything. And a lot of them, when they do that, it's like, "Well, I'm going to pull the race card." I've seen women do it. I've seen a white man do it. Black men do it all the time. I had one guy come up to me, he says, "You don't have to work. They can't get rid of us. We're minorities." I said, "I'm here to do my job and get paid for it. You can do what you want."

But I've never really seen anybody personally say, "Well, I'm not going to send that guy out because he's black," or, "I'm not sending that female out." I've really never seen that. Because a lot of jobs, federal jobs, you know, "well, we've got to have so many minorities."

CRAWFORD: Have you seen many African-American ironworkers?

BART: No. There's not very many, no.

CRAWFORD: So what was probably the worst day and the best day that you ever had?

BART: At this point, every day I get to make money is a good day.

ELLUL: I had one.

BART: You had one bad day?

ELLUL: Yeah. Somebody had got laid off and we were working on 696, so we always had a layoff party. Well, I was three sheets to the wind, had to get up and go to work. And it wasn't good. Everybody — my whole crew was like that. The foreman stumbled out of his truck. I just went up and told my boss, I said, "Listen, you're either going to keep me stood up or bent over, because I ain't doing both, or I'm throwing up on you." [laughter] He said, "Okay. You stay standing up."

CRAWFORD: Now, do you feel like rod busters drink a fair bit?

ELLUL: Yeah.

FECTEAU: They have a reputation?

RAUCHER: More than the other trades? Is that what we're saying?

CRAWFORD: I don't know if it's more, but there are some trades I think of as drinking more.

NUZNOV: Bricklayers are supposedly big drinkers, but they're very physical, too. I think some of the most drinking I ever did was on a physical job.

RAUCHER: Well, there's a certain prima donna mentality, especially, I've heard, for the structural steel, some of the people who work with the high stuff. Like there's like a whole macho . . .

BART: Yeah. There's a big ego thing, too. But most of those guys, it seems like nowadays, they're so physically fit, I mean, that they don't want to do that to their body. I mean, that's the way I look at these guys now. It seems like they're more aware of what they're putting into their system. Maybe back in the day it was like that.

ELLUL: Yeah, you can't do that now. And the fact is, you get older, it takes longer to recuperate. [laughter]

CRAWFORD: Well, did it help that each of you was in the trades?

BART: I liked it more. I could talk to somebody that understood what I went through. Plus we could tell our stories, share our points of view, even though we didn't share them with other guys on the job, or something like that. I'm glad she was there.

ELLUL: When I first got in, guys would come up to me, "Oh, how are you doing?" They thought I was her. Some of the things I found out! [laughter]

BART: But I still get that when I walk on a job, too. They think that I'm her. And her nickname used to be "bitch."

ELLUL: It still is. [laughter]

BART: So I hear this through the corridor or wherever I was, "HEY BITCH!" You know, guys yelling at me. And some guys are going, "You can't talk to her that

way," you know, and it's like, "Oh, hey, how are you doing?" [laughter] And they can't believe that I let them get away with calling me a bitch.

FECTEAU: So it didn't bother you that these guys called you that?

ELLUL: No. I actually made sure they did. When I first got in, I was a little naive, but after a while, it was like, "I'm not going to take this. I'm not." I had a mouth on me. If I could insult somebody on the job, I would. But I did it in a joking manner, just to like, break the ice. And I've worked with guys who'd yell at me, so I'd maybe throw a tool at them accidentally or something. [laughter] And they'd tell me to do something and I'd go, "No, you do it. You got two legs." And I joked around with them that way and I ended up getting that nickname. And I've never had any trouble from anybody because of it.

BART: Sometimes when they pick on you, it means they like you.

ELLUL: Yeah.

RAUCHER: But they didn't pick on you necessarily because you were a woman.

ELLUL: No.

BART: No, they picked on us because they, I think, considered us one of the guys.

ELLUL: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: And it broke the monotony.

BART: Yes, yes, it does. [laughs] Sometimes it's fun having the different sexes. And you don't have to get into a sexual conversation, either. You can rib somebody about their hair.

FECTEAU: So there's a lot of ribbing.

ELLUL: Yes.

BART: Yes. And you better not be thin-skinned, because you won't last long.

FECTEAU: Well, it sounds like that's why some people drop out and others stay in. Some people just have a disposition that wouldn't be able to tolerate that. They'd get really upset and maybe even file a sexual harassment lawsuit.

BART: Yeah, that goes on a lot.

ELLUL: I had some guy threaten me.

FECTEAU: To file a suit against you? [laughter]

ELLUL: I said, "Go ahead, wuss, wear pink. The judge will like it." [laughter] "I can't win with you." I said, "No, you can't."

RAUCHER: But did you encounter other women at all who didn't have your thick skin?

BART: Yeah.

ELLUL: Yeah.

RAUCHER: And what happened with them?

BART: They had issues and problems And I don't know how you could even help somebody remedy that, either, I mean, to help them get along better, because it's all up to you and how you present yourself and how you accept how people are treating you.

ELLUL: I mean, there's one girl who did her hair, her nails and her makeup every day before she went to work. And the guys on the job loved it, because she was a size six and short and petite and blonde.

RAUCHER: And she was a rod buster?

ELLUL: Yeah, well, she didn't do much work, you know, because she didn't want to mess up her hair or things like that. So some guys would love her being there, but other guys were going, "I'm not doing her work. Why should I do her work?" So it was, you know, mixed. I had to work with her for about two days. And I said, "No, I'm not doing your work. I'm not going to let you sit here and prance around while I have to bust my butt for you."

RAUCHER: I assume she didn't stay in the trade.

ELLUL: No, she got out.

CRAWFORD: So how are the pay scales between iron workers and rod busters and the other couple of classifications? Are they all pretty much the same?

ELLUL: Right now, I have a problem with that. When we merged, we were making eighteen-something an hour and our pay scales were structural, reinforcing and then rigging and then pre-engineer. Well, now it's structural, rigging, pre-engineer and rods. Our pay scale is not going up like the rest of them.

NUZNOV: But so much of the rod part is structural.

BART: It's the foundation that everything else is laid on.

RAUCHER: So why aren't they keeping up?

ELLUL: A lot of it has to do with us fighting with the laborers and carpenters over our work, because they want to claim our work. Laborers are sixteen dollars an hour or below us. So we're fighting with another trade that gets a lower scale than we do. So they can't up our scale, because then we'd lose it to a different trade.

BART: I also think, as well, the business agents have never done any rod busting. They don't know what that is like. And rod busters are such a minority within the union that we really don't have a voice.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, they're really not as well represented.

BART: Not at all.

CRAWFORD: Very few rod busters become the president of a local.

BART: Or even advance into any sort of a position.

ELLUL: And that's always been an issue, as long as I know — with the laborers and our work.

BART: Yeah, it's always been an issue with rods.

CRAWFORD: The laborers are probably the greediest in terms of, "Well, I can do that work and I can do this work and I can do that work."

NUZNOV: Carpenters have always been pretty famous for trying to do at least our work, electrical work.

RAUCHER: But the laborers don't have problems finding people who are willing to do the rod busting. You said in your own union, it's difficult, they're scarce, right? You can't find people willing to do the job, it's so tough physically, and the laborers are used to that.

ELLUL: Well, the laborers really don't do that well at it. I've seen them on jobs — they think they can do it, but I don't think they can handle — like, there's this mesh, a thin, 8'x4' sheet that you carry that gets placed in concrete on floors. And they do that quite a bit. I've really never seen them tying actual re-steel. But the mesh is the big

problem with us, because we used to have the roadways, now we don't. The laborers have that.

NUZNOV: So how many members are there in Local 25, that now includes rod busters?

ELLUL: We have, approximately, I think, a little over 4,000 total.

NUZNOV: And that's not all of Michigan?

ELLUL: That's just Local 25, the eastern half of Michigan.

BART: They split it down the middle.

ELLUL: The western is 340, I believe.

RAUCHER: How many women in that 4,000?

ELLUL: I want to say, because I know there's a few in each apprentice class, I want to say ten tops.

RAUCHER: Wow.

BART: We're a small group.

ELLUL: I mean, they come and they go. I think that all the ones that she went to school with are no longer in the trade.

RAUCHER: So you two are very unusual to have stayed so long.

BART: Yeah.

ELLUL: And I'd still be in it — I would love to go back right now. It was a hard job, but it was a job I never had to say I hate it and I wish I never got into it. There was days I wished I wasn't there, but I never hated my job. I liked my job. I liked meeting different people, doing different things. It wasn't a continuous — it's the same thing, but always on a different site, for different people. And it was a nice change of

pace all the time. Even though you're doing the same thing, you get so many bosses, you do it in a different way. You could do the same thing twenty different times.

RAUCHER: Are there any of those ten women who've been around as long as you have, back to the early '80s?

BART: Maybe structural.

ELLUL: There was two structural girls, but I haven't seen them at meetings or anything, so I really don't know if they're still in or not.

RAUCHER: But I would think with only ten women, then, there can't be much time spent at any of these meetings talking about women or minorities or any of that sort of thing.

CRAWFORD: Well, we don't talk about it at our [IBEW Local 58] meetings. [laughter]

RAUCHER: But you don't have any women's group within the Iron Workers.

BART: No. There's quite a few more women in the electrical end of it than there are, you know, in the Iron Workers.

NUZNOV: But when you go on a job and you don't see any, it doesn't really matter how many are in there.

ELLUL: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

NUZNOV: And on that note — have you two ever been on a job together as rod busters? Did you ever work together?

BART: One time.

ELLUL: Yeah, I actually hired her. She had to work for me. [laughter] That story I was telling you about, that guy who gave me the foreman's job? Well, I replaced him and I had to get somebody to replace me, and it was her. So we worked together.

NUZNOV: How long did you . . .?

BART: I don't know, a month or so?

ELLUL: Yeah. We were building little tree pits in Ann Arbor. [laughter]

NUZNOV: How neat.

BART: Yeah, it was fun. It was very fun. Yeah, just the two of us. We worked at our own pace.

ELLUL: She had to listen to me. [laughter]

RAUCHER: You're going to school now and you're in a construction management program. What will you do with that degree? I mean, what kind of job would you get with that?

BART: Oh, I don't know. There's different areas that they say that we can go into. It depends — surveying, estimating, superintendent. You can get into construction management, but you're going to have to work your way up the ladder. That's a long road.

RAUCHER: And you're working, obviously then, for the company.

BART: Yeah. You'd be working for a general contractor, whatever. I want to be able to work until I'm sixty-five, or whatever they put the Social Security age at now.

NUZNOV: Where are you going to school at?

BART: Oakland County Community College. They have a degree program in conjunction with EMU. And I'll spend three years at OCC and then a year at Eastern and hopefully end up with a bachelor's in construction management.

NUZNOV: That's great.

ELLUL: Well, you just got your master electrician's license.

BART: Yeah. I took my master electrician's license last June. And that kind of got me started. It was like, "I'm going to go to school." I've spent a good deal of time laid off lately, so I have the time. It's just that the money is a little hard to come by.

NUZNOV: But it's good to stay busy like that.

BART: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: But be careful with your pension.

BART: Yeah, I know, the 300-hour issue.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, and if you have a break in service.

BART: Yeah. I'm good so far, every year since this downturn has happened.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, I'm just saying that if you get a job in that other area that you're going to school for, they're usually not participating, because everyone that worked for them would have to participate in the pension plan. We don't have classifications like construction manager and foreman or general foreman. They're not really participants in the plan unless the whole company you work for is.

BART: Okay.

NUZNOV: So, are we ready for our tail end questions?

CRAWFORD: Do you guys supply your own tools?

ELLUL: Rod busting, when I first got in, they say the company is supposed to supply the reel, that and the yellow boots. Other than that, it's up to you.

CRAWFORD: So you supply the . . .

BART: Pliers, rulers, tape, your belt.

NUZNOV: Then it sounds like you could also have your own reel, even though the contractor is supposed to provide it.

ELLUL: Yeah. I still have my very first one that I was supposed to give back to them at the end of the job. [laughter]

FECTEAU: We didn't ask many questions in this area, about how working the trades affected your relationship with like, people in the community. Do you have friends that are not in the trades and you being tradeswomen, are they able to relate to you or can you relate to them?

BART: Most of my friends are from my sports days. But I guess they're all — I don't want to say aggressive women, but they're women who stand their ground and they go out and get whatever the heck they want. So they understand that aspect of it. They might not understand exactly what it is I do, but I can talk to them. I can say that getting a date is tough. [laughs] You tell somebody you're a rod buster and you just might as well show them your paycheck, because they don't understand. If they see the dollar amount, they might understand, but they don't understand.

RAUCHER: How about other tradesmen? Judy, you met your husband on a job, right?

ELLUL: Yeah.

FECTEAU: So how did you meet?

ELLUL: He was a foreman, and he's standing up — you know how they've got their legs — and he's looking up and I went in behind him and hit him in the back of the knees and knocked him down. [laughter]

FECTEAU: And it was love!

ELLUL: I used to do that to him quite a bit. He'd stand there, and he says, "Jeez, I'm the foreman, and I got to put up with this."

FECTEAU: So when did he ask you out?

ELLUL: That's when I first met him, and that was like, '89, '90. And then after that job was over with, when the merger took place, I started to see him at union meetings, and then we started going out about '94 and went from there.

FECTEAU: And when did you get married?

ELLUL: '98.

RAUCHER: And he became president a year or so ago, did you say?

ELLUL: About a year and a half ago.

FECTEAU: Okay. What was that like? Did you work on his campaign?

ELLUL: No, I stayed out of it.

NUZNOV: So that's president of Local 25.

ELLUL: Yes. I have a mouth and I tend to tell the guys the way it is. And I guess you got to be politically correct when you're running for something.

RAUCHER: So he was happier that you didn't get involved.

ELLUL: Yeah. His father is retired from it and his brother is in there. He's got two brothers, actually. One is a rod buster and the other one is structural. He had another

brother — he's now a Washtenaw County cop, but he used to be an iron worker, too. So his whole family has been in iron.

RAUCHER: What was he before he became president? Did he have another office in the union?

ELLUL: He was business agent and then he was an organizer and he's been on the E-board. He's been recording secretary. He worked his way up to where he is at.

RAUCHER: Have you dated any guys you've worked with on jobs, rod busters?

BART: Me? They're usually first dates, and that's about it. [laughter] No, I was married once. He was a computer geek, totally not related to any construction field at all. **ELLUL:** It's helped, marrying another iron worker, because then both of us know what we're talking about, just like with me and her — we both know what we're talking about in our jobs and there's not too many people out there that understand that.

CRAWFORD: It is sort of hard, don't you find — I mean, someone will say, "So what do you do?" And you say, "I'm a rod buster. I'm an electrician," and then they literally don't know what to say to you.

BART: Right. Like if you're just striking up a mild conversation at a party with somebody you don't even know, and they just look at you and they think it's neat that you're a woman and that you've accomplished this, but they don't know what to say after that.

CRAWFORD: Right. They might go, "Oh how'd you get into that?"

BART: Yeah.

NUZNOV: And then they start to drool. [laughter]

BART: Yeah, and then they're looking at their drinks, saying, "I need another one."

RAUCHER: But for tradesmen, not necessarily rod busters, let's just say a guy in the construction trades, he would have some understanding, some rapport, right?

CRAWFORD: Yeah, but you don't really run into those guys socially. It's rare.

BART: Yeah.

NUZNOV: And I think it's a generalization, but strong women can be very scary.

FECTEAU: What does your younger sister do?

BART: Nothing. [laughter] She's married. Watches TV, pets her dogs.

NUZNOV: Wow, one of the lucky ones.

ELLUL: Another computer geek. She used to design — I forgot the name of the company, but she'd design the software and stuff.

BART: Like a manual for a car part, how it works.

FECTEAU: So have you thought at all about getting more women into the trades, and what the union might be able to do?

ELLUL: If I knew somebody who would not be so thin-skinned . . . You know, you can't just pick out any woman — not every woman belongs in it. You got to have a certain type of personality. If they did, yeah, I'd encourage it.

CRAWFORD: So you think if you went to a minimum security women's prison and started a work release program? [laughter]

RAUCHER: Well, it's true the money is good, but boy, the work . . .

BART: The work is hard.

ELLUL: It is.

CRAWFORD: Every time I read about raising the age of retirement, I think, "Not for people like us."

BART: No. It's too difficult.

ELLUL: Yeah, I was mentioning earlier that I don't know any rod buster retirees that have lasted over five years past retirement.

CRAWFORD: In terms of dying?

BART: Yes.

CRAWFORD: You're kidding.

BART: No. They don't live long.

ELLUL: I mean, there might be a few, but the ones that I know have all died within five years.

FECTEAU: Do you think it's because of their hearts? I mean, I'm just wondering if there's any chemical exposure.

ELLUL: It's the drinking, health issues. The older ones were caught up in asbestos.

NUZNOV: And I would imagine they're not really worried about what you're breathing. It's dirt, dust, whatever's going on. I know I would be afraid to look at my lungs and what I've breathed in the last 27 years.

RAUCHER: And you don't wear a mask or anything?

NUZNOV: Well, it's sort of macho image thing. It's like you can't put the knee pads on.

FECTEAU: Well, the masks won't — I don't think it'll protect from silica dust or asbestos. The fibers are so small they go right through it. You have to have a respirator.

BART: I was on a job once, we were in some tunnels. It was a psychiatric hospital out in Northville. And we're underneath, walking through all these tunnels, fire alarm work. Must have been there for three weeks going through these tunnels. All of a sudden, one day, they think there's asbestos down there. "Don't go down there anymore." I've been down there for three weeks, you know. What are we going to do? So who knows what you've been exposed to?

FECTEAU: Is there any story or experience that you think would be important to be captured that we haven't asked about?

CRAWFORD: What's the most embarrassing moment, the moment when you did something that you just could have died? [laughter]

FECTEAU: Yeah, we want to know.

BART: The day there was so much noise on the job, they were pile driving or something like that. And I'm standing at this Port-a-john, knocking on the door trying — the only one around — trying to see if there was anybody in there. And I pounded on that door several times. So I just opened it, and sure enough, there's a guy in there. [laughter]

CRAWFORD: Sitting down or standing?

BART: Sitting down.

NUZNOV: Well, they would never lock the doors, c'mon.

BART: Yeah, I know. They never lock the doors.

RAUCHER: That's my question: Are there no locks on these things?

BART: They're in disrepair constantly. You're lucky if you can get one that closes solidly. That's my biggest beef about a construction site. And it's not as far as the women, it's just we are treated inhumanely sometimes. There's no simple decencies, like hand washing stuff. And that is a bathroom.

RAUCHER: Well now, that's a theme that's gone through several of the interviews we've done, that it's not just women, that it's everybody that's treated inhumanely.

CRAWFORD: Yep. And there are men who are even more finicky about it. I'm not very finicky, but there are men who'll like, hold it all day so they don't have to use the Port-a-john.

ELLUL: Well, I believe — and I'm not sure if it's a new law or a statute or whatever it is, but a woman can actually go on a job and request a Port-a-john for herself, and have a lock on it, with her the only one using it.

CRAWFORD: I don't think it's the law.

ELLUL: Because I've been on several jobs where they come up, hand me a key — "This is your Port-a-john. Only you have the key to it."

NUZNOV: Bigger jobs, I would think.

ELLUL: Well, they did that to me. I worked at the airport, I had my own Port-a-john. Guys didn't like it. I'm going, "Well, you piss and shit all over yours. I don't." [laughter]

RAUCHER: You didn't ask for it, they just gave it to you.

ELLUL: They just gave it to me, yeah. Because I've learned to hold it for eight hours, too.

FECTEAU: I'm aware of a boss, who was at Detroit Edison or whatever it was before it was DTE, who somebody sued, because they provided the men a changing area, but they didn't provide the women a changing area, a wash-up and changing area. And she sued under gender discrimination and won, that they had to provide similar facilities.

RAUCHER: Well, the man trailer doesn't fit that bill, right, so you don't change at work?

BART: No, we don't change our clothes down to our underclothes or anything like that.

CRAWFORD: You're just taking coveralls off.

BART: Yeah, you're just taking your winter gear off and walking out with just your coat on.

CRAWFORD: Although, a couple of times in my life I did walk into a trailer where some guy was down to his boxer shorts.

NUZNOV: I scared this one guy so bad — I scared me, too, but he was more scared just standing there in his underwear changing his clothes. And I'm thinking, "Get out of here!" [laughter] So would you encourage other young women? You said only if they were . . .

BART: Yeah. Yeah, if they were able to handle it mentally and physically, then, yeah.

CRAWFORD: Don't you ever feel, though, that before you turned eighteen, in your case, that you weren't even really conscious that these trades existed?

ELLUL: I had no clue.

BART: In high school, we had Army recruiters come in, we had college recruiters, all this other stuff come in. Nothing for the trades. They had no idea that it existed.

RAUCHER: Did you find that you were giving advice at all to other women on the job? Because you seemed to hold up a little bit better, so were you sort of a mentor or something to some of the other women?

BART: Sometimes.

ELLUL: I gave more advice to men that I did women. [laughter]

BART: Yeah, sometimes they'll ask you, "Well, how do you do this?" or, "How come they treat you like this?" And you just have to say, "I don't let it bother me" or "I give it to them back just as bad as they give it to me."

FECTEAU: Have you ever worked in a place where there was a lawsuit based on harassment, where somebody did sue? I mean, have you ever been in that kind of an environment?

BART: When I was a first-punch apprentice with the electricians, I was at the GM Lake Orion plant. And one of the women — I wasn't in that crew — anyways, she was on the job as well. I never had seen her except at lunch or coffee. She filed a suit of sexual harassment against one of the foremen. And because I was privy to a conversation held in the lunchroom, I had to go to make a statement. That was the only thing I had to do. I don't think she won her suit. But I don't even know if she's even around anymore. I have never seen her.

RAUCHER: Well, I guess then, if you guys don't have any questions or comments or other things you'd like to add . . .

BART: I do have one question. Why is it that women — when we go onto a job for a federally-funded project, why is it, "Oh, we have to have a woman." Why isn't it kind of like on every job? You know what I mean? There are companies, they do a lot of smaller jobs, they don't do federally-funded projects and they don't hire women. How do they get away with that?

RAUCHER: Because you don't have a law. The law is a federal law. And who knows how much longer that law is even going to be around?

CRAWFORD: Michigan has Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, which sometimes can be used in terms of sexual discrimination and harassment, but it does not have the goals guidelines, you know, the quotas, if you will, that are the teeth . . .

NUZNOV: But there's language in there about what is harassment, and it's right in there in black and white.

CRAWFORD: But there's nothing about, you know, you will try and have a goal of reaching this percentage . . .

RAUCHER: . . . and actively going out and recruiting . . .

CRAWFORD: And if Bush has his way, that federal law will go by the wayside. And that was the only thing that opened the doors. And I don't believe that the trades will continue to hold that door open.

FECTEAU: Unless they're forced to.

CRAWFORD: No matter how well we've done, they will shut us out.

NUZNOV: We'll end up being an anomaly, kind of a bubble in the middle.

CRAWFORD: That's why we're doing these interviews.

BART: We WERE here! [laughter]

FECTEAU: Well, there was more than just the EEOC's law and the Michigan Elliott-Larsen Law. There was also some push for affirmative action, which is what forces these employers or contractors to hire women. And affirmative action is very unpopular. There's a proposition that's going to be on the ballot in Michigan this year that's trying to wipe out any sort of affirmative action. But to me, without affirmative action, it presumes that people are not discriminating. You know what I mean? It's like, "We don't need affirmative action, because nobody discriminates."

RAUCHER: But do you think your skills are to the point where you could get a job just based on your track record, regardless whether it's a federal job?

BART: If times were good. Even now, when times get rough, the girls get shut out, I think. I think we get put by the wayside a lot, regardless of our training. Sometimes it's like, "Well, he's got a family." Well, what about my quality of life? I've earned it.

ELLUL: Well, the federal jobs are still there at the good times and the bad times, but you hear nothing about these executive orders and that we have to have so many females on the job when times are bad. It's just when times are good, "Oh, we got to get you in here."

BART: Yeah. I know we want to promote women in the trade, but hanging onto my own job is going to be tough. So I'd just like to know where that's headed.

NUZNOV: Well, and the removal of all this is based on the presumption that people will do the right thing.

CRAWFORD: Based on the presumption that they never liked it in the first place and now they have a chance to get rid of us.

ELLUL: So basically, society is going backwards now.

CRAWFORD: It sure feels that way.

ELLUL: We hit the high point and now we're going to go right back.

FECTEAU: But you've got to put up a fight.

BART: Yeah. And a lot of times it seems like no one is fighting anymore — I don't hear anything. I don't know if it costs too much in the courts, you know, to . . .

FECTEAU: Well, the courts are screwed.

CRAWFORD: The judges that Reagan appointed when he was in office, which has been, what, twenty years ago, we still have those judges.

FECTEAU: Well, our Sixth Circuit — I was just doing some work on this — has more Bush Jr. appointees than any other circuit in the nation. Because under Clinton, they had all these vacancies, eight vacancies. But once the Republicans got a hold of the Senate, they refused to process any of his appointees. So now the last seven of those eight have been appointed by Bush Jr. And these people — they're not like judges who are kind of neutral. No, these are people who are political fundraisers for the Republican Party, are activists, are people who believe in rolling back things like civil rights and worker rights.

RAUCHER: And they're appointed for life.

FECTEAU: And that's our federal courts.

RAUCHER: I just want to tell you, because I don't want you to be late, but it is 5:00. Okay, so thank you both so much.

FECTEAU: It was so interesting.

LB: No, thank you. Thank you very much. It was fun to talk.

RAUCHER: And good luck on your test.