Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with

Eva Caradonna

Carpenter

June 24, 2004

Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs
Walter P. Reuther Library
Wayne State University

Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project Advisory Group

Elaine Crawford [IBEW Local 58]
Cathy Dawson [UWUA Local 223]
Michelle Fecteau [WSU Labor Studies Center]
Ann Francis [UAW Local 652]
Pat Nuznov [IBEW Local 58]
Margaret Raucher [Walter P. Reuther Library]
Carrie Wells [Tile, Marble and Terrazzo Masons BAC Local 32]

Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project Sponsors

Greater Detroit Building Trades Council
Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO
Michigan Labor History Society
UAW Region 1
Utility Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO
UWUA Local 223, AFL-CIO
Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University

Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with Eva Caradonna

MARGARET RAUCHER: I'm Margaret Raucher and we're here at the Reuther Library on June 24th, 2004 interviewing Eva Caradonna, a carpenter and a friend of Elaine Crawford's.

EVA CARADONNA: And Pat's too.

RAUCHER: And Pat. And we're delighted to have her with us today. And I'd like to start off the questioning by asking Eva to tell us about her life before she entered the trades — where you were born, when you were born, what it was like growing up, that sort of thing.

CARADONNA: I was born in East Detroit, Michigan on June 30, 1939, but lived in Detroit all my life. My parents were Italian immigrants, first generation in this country. We lived in a very Italian cultural kind of household where men did certain things and women did certain things, and I grew up in a pretty Catholic environment. Kind of a quiet family, we're not real social-type people, but very emotional. We had a very emotional family life.

My father died when I was twelve and my mother assumed the role of mother and father and, you know, carried on the household during the worst years of anybody's life, which is the teenage years.

So I started working when I was sixteen and worked for Fred Sanders, shelling out ice cream and hot fudge sundaes. Did that for two years and then I went into school to be a medical technician, a medical assistant for a doctor. I got a job with a doctor and I

stayed with him twenty years, working in his office. Did patient referrals, patient injections, lab work.

Then I went to Wayne State and took the physician's assistant course and did that along with my other job. And that was basically my growing-up life before I went into the trades.

RAUCHER: Do you have siblings?

CARADONNA: Yes. I have one sister and I had two brothers.

RAUCHER: And what was it like growing up with them? I mean, were you a tomboy when you were growing up or . . .?

CARADONNA: Oh, yes. I was a tomboy and an athlete, yes. I was the second oldest child and seemed to be my mother's favorite, for some reason. And yes, I was quite a tomboy. I was more an athlete than a tomboy, I guess. But yes, I was a tomboy.

RAUCHER: What kind of sports did you play?

CARADONNA: Baseball, soccer, field hockey, basketball, everything except water sports. I don't like water sports.

RAUCHER: You played organized sports, on teams in school or . . .?

CARADONNA: Well, we lived right across the street from a playground, so all my life I've always been playing ball or ice-skating or something. And then as I got older, I went to school and did it there as well as outside of school, mostly during summer recreation programs.

RAUCHER: So most of your extracurricular stuff in school was sports-related?

CARADONNA: Yes. When I wasn't working, yes.

MICHELLE FECTEAU: I would like to ask a question, if I could. You said after your father died, your mother assumed different roles. Did that affect you too? Did you feel like you changed or your sisters and brothers changed roles as well?

CARADONNA: I felt like I had a lot more responsibility than I did before, insofar as I had to do more things. I felt guilty about leaving the house and leaving my mother, and those kinds of things. I felt guilty about leaving the lights on too long and that we wouldn't have enough to eat the next day. So I always felt guilty when I didn't participate, and I had to contribute, at an early age, to the financial part of the family.

ELAINE CRAWFORD: What did your father do before he died, and what did your mother do for income?

CARADONNA: When my father first came to this country, he sold food on the corners, because it was the Depression. And then, gradually, he got a job. He was a machine repairman before he died.

CRAWFORD: Where?

CARADONNA: He worked for Packard Motor Car Company, and then Briggs, which is now Chrysler. And he also used to work for Prince Macaroni, which is where he died. He used to work at Prince Macaroni on the weekends.

FECTEAU: How did he die?

CARADONNA: He had a coronary thrombosis. My mother never worked outside the house. She was always a homemaker, a housewife, so she never worked outside the home.

CRAWFORD: So what did you guys live on?

CARADONNA: Social Security and savings, as I know it now. I didn't know it before. I didn't know much about anything before, when I was growing up, but later I learned.

CRAWFORD: Did you feel that you were a lot different than the other kids when you were growing up? Were you financially different or were there things you couldn't do or couldn't afford to do?

CARADONNA: We were poor. We were made to think we were poor. I felt different because I only had one parent. I felt different because we spoke another language at that time. I felt different because I was Catholic and I lived in a primarily non-Catholic area. But, yeah, I felt different, basically because I didn't have a father.

CRAWFORD: So you went to public school, not to Catholic?

CARADONNA: I went to public school up until my father died, and then my mother insisted that we all go to Catholic school, so I went to Catholic school for the rest of my school years.

CRAWFORD: Boy, that must have been a change.

CARADONNA: Yeah, that was. Well, we never were talkers, so it really didn't matter. I mean, people went "boo" and we'd all jump, you know. So when we saw the nuns, it was even worse. I mean, it was like, [gasps].

FECTEAU: Why did you mother do that?

CARADONNA: I think she felt that she needed help with the discipline. There wasn't a father around, so she thought that we should go to Catholic school to learn discipline and maybe get some better grades or something.

CRAWFORD: How old were your younger brother and sister? Or were there two younger brothers?

CARADONNA: Two brothers, yeah.

CRAWFORD: How old were they your dad died?

CARADONNA: I was twelve, my brother was eleven, and the youngest one was nine.

CRAWFORD: So you were the second oldest.

CARADONNA: Second oldest. I have an older sister, three years older than I am.

CRAWFORD: And so she was like, fifteen when your dad died. But you were really the child of the four who assumed the most responsibility, not your older sister?

CARADONNA: Well, somehow my mother had a thing with me. I don't know what it was, but every time she went someplace, she took me. So, I had to go to the hospital when my father died. I had to see my father dead. I had to do this, I had to do that. And then after that, it was just like a continual, "You have to come with me and you got to do this," and so it was almost like a sick thing, really.

CRAWFORD: How long did you live with her?

CARADONNA: I lived with my mother until I was twenty-three. And then I went away to be a nun. And then when I came back from that, I lived with her until I was twenty-six, and then I moved out on my own when I was twenty-six.

FECTEAU: So you didn't become a nun? You decided not to?

CARADONNA: No. I couldn't, because my mother was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and they thought that I should come home and take care of her.

So they wouldn't let me stay for that reason, because they thought it was a conflict of interest.

CRAWFORD: Otherwise you might have, or otherwise you think you would have?

CARADONNA: Oh, at that time, yes, but today, no. I would have left.

CRAWFORD: I'm trying to fit that into the chronology that you gave us about your work life before you went into the trades. When did you go to Wayne to train as a physician's assistant?

CARADONNA: I was older. I was maybe twenty-four, twenty-five.

FECTEAU: Do you think there was anything in your childhood that influenced you becoming a skilled tradesperson?

CARADONNA: No, no.

CRAWFORD: Would you characterize yourself, though, as a girl growing up who maybe didn't spend a lot of time doing the typical girl things, dolls and all that sort of stuff, or no? I mean, as well as the sports, did you also like to do what was conventionally considered little girls' things?

CARADONNA: I don't remember. I don't think so. I don't remember a lot of the young childhood things. But I know I used to ask for holsters at Christmas. [laughter] I can remember getting a gun with a holster at Christmas. So I would say I wasn't real prone to dolls and things.

CRAWFORD: But did you have to do a lot of the cooking?

CARADONNA: No. A lot of the cleaning. Cooking, no, I didn't learn how to cook until much later, but no, I would say cleaning, mostly.

FECTEAU: But the work around the house, as far as, you know, what's considered male roles — like repairs and fixing things — as opposed to women's roles, how did that work with your brothers and sisters? Were you still pretty traditional in your roles or was there some mixing up with that?

CARADONNA: We were kind of traditional. In fact, we were very traditional, because that was the only thing my mom knew: boys did this and girls did that.

CRAWFORD: So your brothers took out the garbage and shoveled the snow and cut the grass?

CARADONNA: Some of the time, when we could catch them.

FECTEAU: But did you and your sister, as far as the chores, do things that would be considered men's chores?

CARADONNA: We would take the garbage out. We would shovel a path.

FECTEAU: Work with tools?

CARADONNA: No, never worked with tools, not until I was older.

RAUCHER: Did you have friends outside the family, kids that you played with in the neighborhood or kids in school?

CARADONNA: Yes.

RAUCHER: And you said that you spoke Italian in the house.

CARADONNA: My parents spoke Italian, yes.

RAUCHER: And did you kids too?

CARADONNA: No. They primarily spoke Italian when they didn't want us to know what they were talking about. So we weren't supposed to listen to it, we weren't supposed to know, so why bother with it, you know . . .

CRAWFORD: Did you have uncles and aunts and cousins?

CARADONNA: Yes. But we were never a close family. So when my dad died, it was just like everybody was kind of afraid to come by. They didn't want to have to help raise children or do anything. Dysfunctional, I would say.

RAUCHER: So did you enjoy your time in the doctor's office? I mean, did you enjoy that job?

CARADONNA: Oh, yes. I was there twenty years. Those days we did house calls. The doctor used to drive me home at night, so I used to go on the house calls with him. So you got to know people in their homes, got to know their families, their kids and their kids' kids. By the time I left, the young babies that were being born when I first came were now having children. It was like a whole family affair.

RAUCHER: In the city of Detroit?

CARADONNA: Yes, it was in Detroit.

RAUCHER: And that would have been — I'm trying to think — when were you born?

CARADONNA: '39.

RAUCHER: '39, so we're talking in the '60s.

CARADONNA: Uh-huh, '60s and '70s.

RAUCHER: Have you spent much time in the city?

CARADONNA: I only knew the city. I didn't know the suburbs. I never went past Eight Mile Road. I lived at Gratiot and Six Mile. I never ventured out to the suburbs. I didn't even know what a suburb was until I was about thirty.

FECTEAU: So why did you leave the doctor's office?

CARADONNA: I left the doctor's office because when a patient came in, I knew what was wrong with them before he did, so I got to be so proficient that I would have their shots ready, I'd have their pills ready, I would know everything that was going to go on with them because I'd been there for so long. And I was in a leadership role, so I knew everybody, I knew everything, and I was — I think I just went through a mid-life crisis. You know, I just said, "Enough of this. I mean, I've done this all my life. I want to do something different."

RAUCHER: So I guess now we're sort of moving into why and how you became a tradeswoman, so I'm going to turn the questioning over to Elaine or Pat.

CRAWFORD: I'm Elaine and I have a question. I have a recollection of this chest that you made. And I think that you told me you had made it in a woodworking class.

CARADONNA: Right.

CRAWFORD: And that chest is just beautiful, by the way.

CARADONNA: A cedar-lined chest.

CRAWFORD: Yes, a hope chest.

CARADONNA: Right.

CRAWFORD: And it was very detailed. It was a very lovely piece of work. And I think you told me that that was one of the things that pushed you in the direction of carpentry.

CARADONNA: Correct.

CRAWFORD: Where did you take the class?

CARADONNA: I took the class from a German master cabinetmaker on Springwells in Detroit.

CRAWFORD: Way down there.

CARADONNA: Way down there, right. I heard about him, and the reason why I heard about him was because at that time, I was on my own and I was starting to make bookcases and do things with wood and I thought, "Well, this is kind of neat. I'd like to be a cabinetmaker or something." And so the word got out through the grapevine and someone said, "Well, there's this old German guy that really is good, so why don't you go down there?" So I did. I signed up for a class down there. And then I got more interested in doing carpenter work.

RAUCHER: When was this? How old were you?

CARADONNA: Oh, let me think. I was probably late thirties.

RAUCHER: So you're still at the doctor's office?

CARADONNA: Still at the doctor's office, uh-huh, maybe thirty-five, thirty-six.

CRAWFORD: So how long did you take classes with this guy? Just one class or . . .?

CARADONNA: You had to take a class to make a project and the project was this tool chest, like a hope chest. So whenever you finished that, then you were kind of finished, unless you wanted to take more. Well, the fellow was like, eighty-some years old then and I wanted to take more classes. And he said, "I'm too old. I'm too old. I'm going to retire." So that was the first and the last thing I ever built there.

CRAWFORD: So how did you find out about the carpentry apprenticeship?

CARADONNA: Well, I heard little inklings that there were carpenter apprenticeships available for women. That was late in the '70s. But they said before you could do that, you had to go take classes at the apprenticeship school and you had to learn about math and spatial relations and stuff. And then you could take a test. And then if you took that test, you'd be eligible for any apprenticeships that might come up. The only problem with that was that it didn't have anything to do with carpenters. It had to do with other trades, because the carpenters were the only trade that I knew of where you had to have a job first, then you go to apprentice school. So then I had to try to find a job. So that was how I got interested in it.

CRAWFORD: So how did you find your first job?

RAUCHER: Excuse me. Before you answer that, Eva, for a non-tradesperson, why are carpenters the only trade where you have to have a job before you do your apprenticeship?

CARADONNA: I don't know. I've never been able to understand that.

CRAWFORD: The only guess I would hazard is that carpenters get virtually all their jobs by solicitation, so I guess it's like, right from the get-go, before you're even an apprentice, you better be able to be somebody who can solicit your first job.

CARADONNA: Right.

CRAWFORD: Otherwise, you're never going to make it.

CARADONNA: Now you can go to a hal, like the electricians, and say you want to sign the book, but back then the Carpenters Union would say, "Well, you have to have a job first before we can let you in as a carpenter and before you can be a carpenter, you have to go to an apprentice school." So it was a little bit different than most other ones.

FECTEAU: Did you feel that this might be an artificial barrier of some sort, because I'm having a hard time understanding why they would do this. It sounds like a catch-22 the way you explain it, that you had to have a job first. Do you think it was harder to get into that trade because of that?

CARADONNA: Oh, absolutely. It was harder for me to ask somebody a question. It's still hard for me to ask people questions. But it was harder to go to a local and say, "Well, how do I get a job?" And they would tell me, "Well, you have to have a job first." "But how do I get a job?" "Well, you go out to the sites and you knock on the door and you ask them if they need any help, can you be an apprentice?" And I thought, "Jesus, I can't do that. I can't hardly take a thing back to the grocery store. How am I going to do that?"

But somehow I got a break. I went over to the carpenter apprenticeship school in Ferndale. And somehow, I can't remember how, but when I walked in there and told them I was looking for a job and could they help me, they said, "Well, we don't have any jobs yet, but you come back and go to school tomorrow. You report to school tomorrow." So I think there was some pressure on them, because that was the late '70s, to get women in the trades.

So the next day I went to school and I didn't know what to expect. Here I was with all these young, hunky men. I was the only woman there. And before the day was out, the apprentice coordinator came to me and gave me an address and said, "You go out to this job tomorrow." So that's how I got my first job. Because you just couldn't go to apprenticeship school without a job. You had to have a job.

CRAWFORD: So what was your first job, and how did they react when you walked up there and said, "Hi, you have a job for me?"

CARADONNA: Oh, my first job was way out in Novi someplace. And I didn't have any tools. I didn't even know what I was supposed to do. So when I went out there, I found the foreman and he looked at me and said, "Well, where are your tools?" I said, "Well, nobody said anything about tools. I don't know what kind of tools to have." [laughter] Oh, boy! And I was thirty-nine or forty when I started, somewhere around there.

CRAWFORD: You were thirty-eight, I think.

CARADONNA: Thirty-eight, thank you. I was thirty-eight, and so, I mean, all I knew about carpenters was that I made this lovely chest, you know? So when I went out to this job site and I looked at it, I thought, "Well, this doesn't look like a cabinet place. I don't know what this place is." So the guy said, "Well, go over there and get a hammer from this guy and start toe-nailing these rafters."

And I didn't know what he was talking about. I had no idea what he was talking about. So he came over and showed me. So I had to get up on a ladder. And they give you these big hammers and this one was like, about twenty-four ounces, because it was a roofing job. And he said, "Well, that's enough of that. Go work with that guy over there," because apprentices aren't supposed to work alone. They're supposed to work with a journeyman.

So I went over to this guy and he said to me, "There's only one thing you have to do." I said, "What's that?" He said, "When I drop a tool, you pick it up." I said, "That's it?" And he said, "That's it. When I drop a tool." So I followed him around like a little

sheep. He'd drop a tool, I'd pick it up. He said, "Now, you don't have to pick up every one, but make sure that if I drop a tool that you put two tools together. Don't leave one tool on the deck." And I'm thinking, "What?" [laughter]

And I'm looking around for someplace to go to the bathroom, you know, and there's no — I was too embarrassed or too ashamed to say, well, you know, "Where's the bathroom?" So, I whispered. He says, "What?" I said, "Is there someplace I can go to the bathroom?" He said, "You see that field out there?" I said, "I have to?" "Yep." Or you learn that you only go to the bathroom in the morning and at lunchtime, and when you leave, at the McDonald's down the street." And I thought, "Oh, he's got to be kidding me." But he wasn't kidding. He was telling the truth.

So that was my first day. I don't know why in the hell I went back the second day. [laughs] But I knew I was making some progress and I knew I had to work, so I went back the second day. And the second day was about as bad as the first day.

CRAWFORD: Did you bring tools the second day? Did you go right out to Sears and . . .?

CARADONNA: Well, I didn't have any money. But I happened to live next to a guy who did home remodeling. And I was feeling bad about it. He said, "I'll fix you up." So he gave me his old tool belt. And I had a tape measure and a hammer and a couple screwdrivers. But I didn't have one of those big fancy boxes that all the carpenters had, you know, the ones they throw on their shoulders when they walk. I didn't have that. I just had a hammer and a tape measure and a pencil, just the minimum things.

RAUCHER: How many guys were on this job?

CARADONNA: The first job? Not very many, maybe six or eight.

RAUCHER: What were you building?

CARADONNA: We were building a commercial building, a small commercial building.

RAUCHER: But other than the sort of gruff, "wait on me" attitude, they weren't really abusive, right? I mean, it doesn't sound from your description . . .

CARADONNA: They were awful.

RAUCHER: To you as a female, as well as generally, because you didn't know anything?

CARADONNA: As an apprentice, yeah.

CARADONNA: They were just awful. I mean, the first woman on the job, and they had to take me, apparently, because the apprentice coordinator was out there and said, "You will take this woman." And that was it.

CRAWFORD: And they had never had to work with a woman before on the job?

CARADONNA: No.

RAUCHER: What kinds of comments, like female-related comments did they make?

CARADONNA: I wouldn't be able to tell you that. I could only speculate what they were, but I never actually heard anything. There were a lot of insinuations. I could hear them talking to each other, but they never said anything to me. That was a little bit later, when they felt a little more comfortable with me, then I heard some things, but they

never directly . . . Because, first of all, I was older. And they knew I was older. I don't think they would talk to me like they'd talk to an eighteen-year-old.

FECTEAU: So what did they do that made you feel that they were terrible?

CARADONNA: Well, let me put it this way: These big trucks came in with boards that I had never seen before. I mean, I had never seen any of this stuff before. I thought I was going to make furniture. So when these big trucks come in, they said, "Well, it's the apprentice's job to unload those trucks." So I said, "Okay." So I go, and I don't even know how to pick up the freaking boards. The boards are twenty-foot long. So the guy said, "Well, put your foot behind it and put it up against the building." So it took me until noon to get these boards up. And I had never done that kind of physical work, so my muscles were just aching.

And right after noon, the foreman comes by and takes his foot and kicks them all down. And I looked at him, and he said, "Now, pick them back up and put them back against the building." I said, "Okay." So I picked them back up and put them up against the building.

It was that kind of stuff, that was intentional, to see what you were made out of. But I mean, to stand on top of the second level and just kick those boards back down and say, "Oh well, put them back up," to me, that was an awful thing. That was an intimidation. That was like, "Get out of here. We don't want you here. If you can pick them up again, well, I'll knock them down again."

FECTEAU: Did you feel that apprentices in general are treated like that or you especially were?

CARADONNA: I found out later that that's not an apprentice's job to unload a truck. It's a laborer's job to unload a truck. Apprentices don't do manual labor. Apprentices work with journeymen. Manual labor belongs to laborers. So . . .

CRAWFORD: Make of that what you will.

CARADONNA: Yeah.

RAUCHER: But after the first two days, did it get better, in terms of learning something about the trade?

CARADONNA: No. It never got any better, because they didn't want to teach me. They didn't want me to learn. That's the impression that I got. And I just hung around and felt terrible. I used to go home and cry every night, because I was so isolated, and my bones ached and my body ached. It was just an awful experience for the first job, but I didn't sense anybody wanted to teach me anything on that job.

CRAWFORD: How long did that job last and where did you go next?

CARADONNA: That job lasted about, oh, three or four months. And then I went to a second calling. I went to work at a mall, which wasn't too bad, for two days or something like that, putting up Formica. I'd never seen a piece of Formica before on walls. And I worked with a journeyman who hated women, totally hated women. And I worked there two days and then I got laid off from that.

Then my big opportunity came, because then one of the big construction companies picked me up, Darin & Armstrong. And that was probably the best experience of my life, working for them.

RAUCHER: How so?

CARADONNA: Well, first of all, they wanted me, for whatever reason. You know, another woman, a head count, or whatever. But they took the time to see that I had a partner. They took the time to partner me up with another person who they thought would teach me. And that was the first time I'd ever been with somebody who said, "Well, this is your saw and this is how you do this. And it's not one and three lines after the half inch, it's one and five-eighths," or whatever it is. And he took the time to teach me, so that was a good experience. Plus, they got me my own bathroom, I had my own bathroom. They brought me a pink Porta-Potty. [laughter]

CRAWFORD: Did it have a lock on it?

CARADONNA: It had a lock on it, uh-huh.

FECTEAU: Were you the only woman on the site?

CARADONNA: Yes, I was the only one. When I went into commercial, it was like, the biggest shock of my life, because they said, "Go to this job out here in Southfield," and I went out to this job, and it's this big hole in the ground. [laughs] And I said, "Well, where's the job?" And the superintendent said, "The job is down there." And I looked down there, and there's this big pit with all this water. And he said, "You're going to work with that guy right there." And this big, tall, black journeyman came up to me. He was probably the best thing in my whole life. The second day I was there he bought me a saw. He said, "This is for you," and gave me this saw.

RAUCHER: He was African American?

CARADONNA: African American, yeah. "This is a saw. This is for you." I still have that saw. He was just the kindest man. And he always protected me and kept me away from the other guys and stood up for me and everything. He really liked me.

And as time went on, when I was working with Darin & Armstrong, I got to be their sweetheart. They just loved me. Every time I got laid off from one job, they sent me someplace else. And I stayed there at the yard, where they make all the forms and stuff, the main office, the main shops — I stayed there for three or four months in the wintertime, so I didn't have to work out in the snow.

CRAWFORD: Fabbing up forms?

CARADONNA: Yeah, nailing up forms and stuff like that. And then they'd send me someplace else. They really liked me.

FECTEAU: Why do you think they liked you?

CARADONNA: Because I'm personable.

CRAWFORD: A hard worker?

CARADONNA: A hard worker. And it got to a point where they would ask for me on a job. They'd say, "Do you have any apprentices? Where's that girl apprentice?" And it got to a point where I had kind of a reputation that I worked hard and I would really try to do everything everybody else did. So it wasn't too bad at that job. That was a good job. That lasted about two years, two and a half years.

RAUCHER: And you were still an apprentice?

CARADONNA: I was still an apprentice and I was going to school.

RAUCHER: Can you talk about that, about the apprentice school experience?

CARADONNA: The apprentice school experience was a real mind-blower to me, because I am not a student, you know, like a book student. And when I would go to the classes on Tuesdays — I went every Tuesday — I was always mixed up with all these hunks of men, these young boys, who were always pretty smart about everything, and I

was not a student. Physically I could do things, but I couldn't do the math. The math was hard and the spatial relations were so hard and difficult to understand.

But gradually, as time went on, after a period of four years, they taught us all kinds of things. And then you had to have some work experience, so I learned how to make stairs. Had to make them twenty different times, because I made a mistake all the time. But in order to pass the class you have to make a riser, so I finally made one of those and did roofing and all those things, so I got a little more proficient at it. But grade-wise I wasn't very good at it. But I made passing grades, and that's all that really mattered.

PAT NUZNOV: It was a four-year apprenticeship?

CARADONNA: It was a four-year apprenticeship. And there was mostly young men, not very many women at all the day that I went. But there were other days of the week where they had other women.

CRAWFORD: Did you get to know any of those other women in the program?

CARADONNA: Just one.

CRAWFORD: Colleen?

CARADONNA: Colleen, yeah.

RAUCHER: Was she in your class?

CARADONNA: She was a year behind me, but we were together in one session.

FECTEAU: What was that relationship like?

CARADONNA: With her? It was so comforting to have another woman, to be table to talk to somebody, because, really, even the young apprentices didn't want to talk,

didn't want to be associated with women. They didn't want to be caught liking a woman or liking working with them, because that wasn't the macho thing to do.

RAUCHER: So you didn't talk to them or socialize with them when you were in class.

CARADONNA: No, I always ate lunch by myself and studied by myself and things. But I was always shy, so I think I was responsible for some of that, but I could just sense that they didn't want to be associated with me. And I was older. I'm forty years old and I'm working with, you know, twenty-two and twenty-three-year-old young boys. They're all super carpenters and super strong, hulks, and here's this older woman, could be their mother.

NUZNOV: So you never made any friendships with any of those men.

CARADONNA: Just the ones I worked with, just the partners that I had.

FECTEAU: I'm just wondering if you had to tolerate any sort of mistreatment in your apprenticeship program, or pretty much was it just the isolation that was bad?

CARADONNA: It was isolation and, then, it was the undercurrent. I knew what they were saying. But, like I say, somehow I commanded some sort of respect from most everybody, because nobody would call me a four-letter word to my face.

FECTEAU: How about the instructors? Were they supportive?

CARADONNA: The instructors were great, yeah. Like I said, they were all my age and they knew — because a couple of times when I was on my earlier jobs, they had to send the apprenticeship coordinator out there to straighten out these guys, because you have to provide a place for women to go to the bathroom. You have to provide her with a partner. You have to. And you have to teach them. That's what their job was.

And they came out a couple of times, because I would complain — especially the first job I went on, when they kicked all the boards off the side of the building. I thought the apprentice coordinator was going to go through the ceiling. I thought he was going to go out there that same day, he was so angry. But it was a learning curve. It was a learning curve for them, too.

But that never happened again. And every other job I went on, this apprentice coordinator was really protective of me and made sure that I had everything that the law says I'm supposed to have. Treatment was supposed to be better, you're supposed to teach these young people. So it got better as time went on.

CRAWFORD: You mean, the apprentice coordinator made sure that you had everything that the law said you had coming to you.

CARADONNA: That's right. Well, the bigger construction companies do, too. I mean, after getting slapped with EEOC suits, after a while they have to conform. I was very fortunate. A lot of other women didn't have what I had. A lot of other women endured a lot of crap that I never had to endure. But there were times when I was on jobs when people threw things down and, "Oh, I'm sorry." And, you know, four-by-fours fell off the ceiling and, "Oh, I'm sorry," that kind of thing. But after a while, that didn't happen so much.

CRAWFORD: Was most of the work you did on the job rough carpentry?

CARADONNA: Uh-huh. I always do the rough carpentry.

CRAWFORD: You didn't get a lot of the Formica experience?

CARADONNA: No. Well, my jobs were always in the mud, because we started from the bottom up. But the jobs that were the sweet jobs, you know, the display jobs, I

never got an opportunity to do those kinds of things. And those are the only jobs that we were working, anyhow, were the big commercial, concrete type of work. So I never was blessed with having an "in" with the display companies. Those jobs were left for the apprenticeship teachers' sons and daughters — sons, mostly.

CRAWFORD: When you finished your apprenticeship, though, did you feel that you had the skills that you needed to go out and solicit a job?

CARADONNA: No, no, I did not, because I only did one thing. I only poured concrete. I poured concrete, and my last job was erecting scaffold, down at the Fermi plant. So I knew how to pour concrete and I knew how to make scaffolds. That's about all I knew. The rest I learned in school.

CRAWFORD: But you didn't get to practice on the job, you didn't get to make stairs or . . .

CARADONNA: No. It was all rough carpentry.

FECTEAU: I want to go back for a minute. You were saying that that first job you had, where they treated you so disrespectfully and the first couple of days were horrible, but yet you stayed three or four months. Why did you stay?

CARADONNA: I stayed because I needed a job and second of all, I wasn't going to let them take anything away from me. I mean, I figured this is something that I wanted to do, this is something that I wanted to learn, and I wasn't going to let them frighten me away by giving me a hard time. I mean, I was determined.

RAUCHER: Did you have anybody supporting you in that determination — family, friends — or were you just sort of on your own?

CARADONNA: Just the skilled tradeswomen, other skilled tradeswomen that I knew. And Colleen was a good support, because she understood everything that was going on. And my family — well, imagine you're raised in an Italian cultural family where women are supposed to take care of men and have babies. Then you move into something totally different, where they don't understand why you'd want to be this in the first place, and these kind of things can't possibly be happening to you, because those things don't happen in the world. You know, they were very limited in their encounters with anything outside of their own lives. So, no, I was very self-determined, and Colleen was there, and then we formed this group and somehow we got through.

FECTEAU: How did you meet — the support group, the other skilled tradeswomen?

CARADONNA: You know, I'm not really sure, it's been so long. But there was this one woman who came in, Ronnie Sandler, she was noted for being involved with women in the trades and she was from the East.

CRAWFORD: She was a carpenter.

CARADONNA: She was a carpenter, right. And somehow, through this group, just through women talking to each other, we got to know this woman. And she kind of formed this alliance first.

RAUCHER: She came to Detroit from the East Coast?

CRAWFORD: I don't know. She was working as a carpenter here. She ended up on the East Coast, but I don't if she came from the East Coast. But I always got the sense she was from here.

RAUCHER: I'm wondering how you met each other. I mean, if you're in different trades, especially.

CRAWFORD: See, I don't even remember the first time I met you [Eva].

CARADONNA: I don't either.

NUZNOV: Was it the women in skilled trades group, the very first loosely-formed group?

CRAWFORD: It could have been. But for some reason, I feel like I met you . . .

CARADONNA: In another life?

CRAWFORD: Yeah.

NUZNOV: Building the pyramids.

CARADONNA: I don't know, it was just word of mouth, and it was the 1980s and there was all kinds of affirmative action groups going on, and the press. Probably the press. I would bet anything it was the press.

FECTEAU: What's that?

CARADONNA: The newspaper had something in it about somebody doing something, and I think that's how a lot of us got involved. I think that's how I got involved.

CRAWFORD: There was a really good interview of you in the newspaper, but I don't think it was while you were an apprentice. I still have those clippings.

CARADONNA: Oh, do you? It probably was when I was an apprentice, because it wasn't too long after that I went into the plant.

CRAWFORD: And when you turned out, there wasn't any work. That was in '82 or '81?

CARADONNA: '82, when I finished my apprenticeship.

CRAWFORD: And there was no work.

CARADONNA: And the only jobs that had work were the ones that were federally-funded, so you knew that if you did get a job, you had to go someplace and work, because they had to have you in order to meet their criteria. We're probably getting ahead of ourselves.

RAUCHER: Well, not actually, because you finished your apprenticeship, right?

CARADONNA: Uh-huh.

RAUCHER: So what did you do then?

CARADONNA: I scrambled around and tried to make a living, did some side jobs, what we call side jobs, washed dishes, cleaned restaurants, did whatever I had to do to make the rent, because there were no jobs. And I had a real hard time going out and asking people for jobs, because first of all, I didn't know where a lot of the jobs were.

And that was one of the things that Elaine was talking about: there's this underground good ol' boy network that people know where there's going to be a big job. So, they say to each other, "There's going to be a job over there, so maybe you should try to get a job over there," or, "There's going to be a new job coming up over here." And we didn't have that. I never had that, that good ol' boy network thing. So I would go through the school to see if there were any jobs available, because they always were good to me and they would tell me if there were jobs around, but there just weren't any jobs around.

RAUCHER: Who ran the apprentice school?

CARADONNA: The union ran the apprentice school.

RAUCHER: Which union?

CARADONNA: The Carpenters local.

NUZNOV: So how long did you scramble around before you decided to go into — I can't remember which branch of General Motors that you went into?

CARADONNA: Well, that's a whole different story. It was like, about three or four months that there wasn't any work. And then they had a big conference at one of the hotels or something, or there was an interview process or something. Channel 50 came and — I forgot where it was — were you there?

CRAWFORD: No. Was it like a careers fair or something?

CARADONNA: Yeah, something like that. And Channel 50 was there and interviewed me. It was during the day, when everybody else was working. I was the only one that was not working, so I went to this conference. And Channel 50 and the Detroit News interviewed me. And they asked me the same kind of questions like, "What are you doing," and, "How do you get your jobs," and stuff like that.

So this whole thing came out in the newspaper the next day. And the day after that, one of the plant engineers from General Motors got ahold of my telephone number and called me and said something like, "You looking for a job?" And I said, "Well, yeah. I'm always looking for a job." "Well, come on down here and talk to me." And I said, "Well, what, what?" He said, "Well, this is Cadillac Motor Car and we're looking for women journeymen." I said, "I didn't even know that they had carpenters in factories." I mean, I thought it was a joke. He said, "No, you come down and see me tomorrow." I said, "Okay."

So I went to the General Motors Fisher Body Fleetwood plant. I walked in, never been in a plant before. They were waiting for me, took me right into the plant manager's office. I got there at 8 o'clock and at 3 o'clock I had a job, just like that. And then he said, "Well, do you know any other women?" "Yeah," I said, "I know two or three other ones." "Well, bring them down." And I thought to myself, "Why is this? Why is this happening?" And then one of my friends told me that General Motors had a big EEOC settlement for $200 million, which also required them to hire skilled tradeswomen. So that's how I got my opportunity at General Motors.

RAUCHER: And what year was that?

CARADONNA: 1983. Yep. So I was off work almost a year when I got that opportunity. So that was like a dream. I didn't even know they had carpenters in plants, you know? What the hell did they do?

CRAWFORD: What would they have to do with making cars?

CARADONNA: Yeah, what the hell?

RAUCHER: So what did you do?

CARADONNA: I fixed floor block. All the floors were all wood at that time, so you replaced the floor blocks. And you hung plastic when the roof leaked. And you made stuff.

FECTEAU: What kind of stuff?

CARADONNA: Oh, you made stuff for the executives. You made clocks and plaques and you made tool boxes. Those were the things you did when you didn't have anything else to do. So it was like, "Oh, look at this." But basically, we were there to

maintain the building, maintain the factory lines and stuff, hang pictures, make picture frames.

CRAWFORD: You did a lot of work in the office areas.

CARADONNA: I made a lot of picture frames and laid a lot of floor tile, floor block, and stuff like that.

CRAWFORD: Moved walls?

CARADONNA: Yeah, moved walls. But I only did that for a short time, thirty days.

FECTEAU: How many other carpenters were there in the plant?

CARADONNA: In that shop, there was nine. And they were all glad to see me. It was just like a different world for me, totally.

RAUCHER: Than construction.

CARADONNA: Oh, what a difference. I walked in with my overalls on and a flannel shirt, because I thought I was going to work, and this big old tool case. And I walk in the shop and the guy says, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm coming to work." He said, "Give me that box." Took that box, put it on a bench. And he said, "Take out a screwdriver and a pair of pliers." I said, "That's it?" He said, "That's it."

And it was so nice because everybody was glad to see me. It wasn't an environment that was hostile. And the guys opened the doors. And I'm thinking, "Something's wrong here," you know? And the guy said, "You come on with me." And I thought, "That's the first time somebody ever said to me, 'You come on with me, we're going over here.'" And I thought, "God, there's something wrong here."

RAUCHER: Were you the only woman?

CARADONNA: I was the first outside skilled tradesperson they brought in. They had a few electricians and a few machine repairmen that were in-house people that came up from the ranks, but never had an outside person to come in to work.

FECTEAU: So you were the first outside person or the first outside woman?

CARADONNA: Outside woman to come in. And they all knew why I was there, because they had to hire me because it was affirmative action and they had to have women. But there was never that underlying thing in the carpenter shop. There was some outside the carpenter shop. But in the carpenter shop, they were just all happy to have another body.

RAUCHER: What do you mean there were some outside the carpenter shop?

CARADONNA: Well, some of the other trades, like the electricians — sorry — and the machine repairmen and the millwrights, had a real animosity towards women. They didn't have any, first of all — the electricians had some, but . . .

CRAWFORD: Why were they happy? They were so bored that they said, "A new face. She's attractive. She looks friendly. We like her."

CARADONNA: Well, first of all, the shop was half Italian. [laughter] And the other half of the shop was young, they were youngsters, they were like, in their thirties. And I don't know, like I say, something in my personality makes people like me right away, so they just kind of took me under their wing. They didn't do that with everybody, but they somehow seemed to like me. So I just fit right in.

And I was so suspicious when people opened doors and, you know, people weren't calling me four-letter words and I didn't hear anybody swearing behind my back. That was in the shop.

RAUCHER: Do you think they'd had any preparation from management or the union in what they were supposed to do and how they were supposed to treat you?

CARADONNA: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. When that Michigan sexual harassment law came through, oh yeah, they had all kinds of classes and courses and all kinds of things. They were under threat. If they mistreated women, they were in big trouble. They would lose their jobs for it.

FECTEAU: What is it that happened with the millwrights and electricians, and why do you think that dynamic was there?

CARADONNA: I just don't think they liked women on the job. I think they felt threatened. I don't think they had women around and a lot of them were just not used to seeing women in the trades. I think they just had a "You're taking my job, you're taking a man's job who has a family to support" attitude. I think that's basically what it was. I mean, "Why don't they pick up my son? Why did they have to pick up you? My son is home, you know, he doesn't have a job. They could have picked up him. Why did they pick up you? I mean, what do you have to do? You don't have a family to support, you don't have kids." They don't know. It's just their mentality.

NUZNOV: That was obviously at the very beginning of affirmative action movement.

CARADONNA: Right. That was in 1983.

NUZNOV: So over the next few years, did more women come into GM?

CARADONNA: Yes. There were more women. More outside women came in. None of them stayed too long. The ones that I brought in only stayed a year. They all left.

CRAWFORD: Except for Colleen.

CARADONNA: Well, see, I was only on my tools for thirty days, and then they needed a skilled tradeswoman in management to be a skilled trades supervisor. So they brought in a millwright and an electrician. And they interviewed all of them. And they asked me did I want the job. Because I didn't even have a college education, I was just in an apprenticeship, I was kind of green. And they chose me, and they asked me if I would go on supervision, because they were desperate. Number one was, "We need women in skilled trades." Number two was, "We need them in management, we need them as skilled trades supervisors."

So I agreed to go into management if they would replace me with a woman. And so they replaced me with a woman, and that was Colleen, from my school. So that's how Colleen got into the UAW.

RAUCHER: But why do you think the other women you brought in only stayed a year or so?

CARADONNA: Well, one of them wanted to eventually open her own business, a millwright business. She wanted to go into her own business, so she left. The electrician had a lot of problems with hostility and people calling her names and harassing her and leaving pictures in her tool box. And she just wasn't strong enough to let it go and made complaints. She just kind of faded away. When all those things started happening to her, I was in management and I'm not sure that a lot of things that happened to her weren't exaggerated. I think she had some underlying reasons why she wanted to get out, but she blamed it on other things, honestly.

NUZNOV: So when you got into management, you were now overseeing these electricians and millwrights and carpenters, et cetera, some of whom welcomed you so warmly. How did they feel when you were now the one giving out the jobs? I mean, I'm assuming that was your role.

CARADONNA: Well, I primarily took care of the building trades, which was tinsmiths and painters and carpenters. So that was something that wasn't really, really essential to making the plant work. You know what I mean? It wasn't like, "Oh, we have a woman now who's going to tell us how to fix the line." This particular assignment that I had was, "You keep the building clean, you paint, you do the air conditioning and stuff." So it wasn't critical to keeping the line running.

I had some difficulty on weekends when I was managing other trades, but not as much as I thought I was going to have. It wasn't that bad.

FECTEAU: It must have been economically pretty strange coming from poverty to this position. What was that like for you?

CARADONNA: Having no money and then money?

FECTEAU: I can kind of guess the answer.

CARADONNA: Or being able to live every day instead of job to job. I wrestled a lot with going into the factory, because I really didn't want to leave the union. I felt that I owed the union something, and I owed the women in the trades something. And I really had to wrestle with that for a long time, making that decision, did I want to leave the nitty-gritty and go a step higher. And when I came to that decision, I was peaceful with it, but it took me a long time to get there, because I thought I was betraying Elaine . . .

CRAWFORD: You were doing something easier.

CARADONNA: No, I was betraying Elaine and Pat and Colleen and all the other people for turning to the other side, going to the other side, from the union to management.

FECTEAU: You mean going into the factory or going into management?

CARADONNA: Going into management. The economic ramifications were just amazing. When I finished my apprenticeship, I was making like, six or seven dollars an hour and then went into getting a forty-hour-a-week paycheck every week thereafter. Because you know how it is in construction, if you don't work, you don't get paid. So if it rains, you don't get paid, so how can you have stability? And I was the kind of person that needed stability.

Well, the first time I got my check when I worked forty hours, I couldn't freaking believe it, because they were paying me like, sixteen dollars an hour. And I was like, "Holy smoke! Look at all this money I have!" And then it got better and better, because I was just working all this overtime. I mean, I was making this unbelievable amount of money.

But I felt like I betrayed everybody, for the first six or eight months or so. And then after that, I realized that, really, I could enable a lot of other women. I could do a lot of other things in that position to help more women than I probably could have if I would have stayed on my tools.

RAUCHER: So you weren't in the local for very long.

CARADONNA: No, I had to give up my rights to the local. And I still paid my dues to the Carpenters for five years afterwards, because I felt like I owed them. They

gave me this great education and stuff, and without them I wouldn't have been able to have this kind of job, so I kept paying my dues for about five years. I think you got to pay for everything. I'm one of those people that thinks you got to pay your dues.

FECTEAU: I was just wondering about your relationship with people who were not in the trades, as you were going through this, going from the construction trades to working in the plant and then a supervisor. How did people like your family or friends outside the skilled trades respond to you?

CARADONNA: When I first went on management, or just in general?

FECTEAU: Just being in the trades, being in the skilled trades. I know you've already talked a little bit about that.

CARADONNA: Well, my family wasn't really impressed, because they didn't understand why anybody would want to do that. I think I had more support from my personal friends, because I picked my personal friends that had kind of the same ideas that I did. They felt, like I did, that everybody has the right to do what they want to do, and getting into a trade or a skill or something was a good thing for a woman, because we've been paid so poorly all these years and now we had an opportunity to make almost as much money as a man. And there was a lot of support in that arena. But family-wise, no, they just didn't understand. They still don't understand.

FECTEAU: Was there any difference between your brothers and your sister?

CARADONNA: My brother seemed to be a little prouder of me, because he probably understood a little bit more of what that means to work in a factory and stuff. But my sister, no, my sister is just a picture of my mother, you know, a homemaker,

never worked outside the home, that kind of thing. Of course, both of my nephews are skilled, so I must have had some impression on them.

RAUCHER: What do your brothers do for a living?

CARADONNA: My one brother is a massage therapist. I had a brother who died, he was a restaurateur, worked in the restaurant business.

RAUCHER: But you say you have nephews who are in the trades?

CARADONNA: I have two nephews who are skilled, yes.

RAUCHER: Carpenters?

CARADONNA: One is a carpenter and one is a cement finisher.

CRAWFORD: If you had it to do over again, would you still choose this kind of work?

CARADONNA: I think I would probably have tried to do what I wanted to do, which was make furniture and do cabinetry, artwork and stuff like that, with wood. Yes, I would have preferred to have done that. In my second life I'm going to do that.

RAUCHER: But do you think you would have been prepared for the trades if you hadn't had that twenty years working in the doctor's office, if you hadn't been the age you were when you got into them?

CARADONNA: Nothing prepared me for the trades. I mean, there was nothing in this world that could have prepared me for that kind of work or the kind of mentality or the work environment. There's nothing. That's a thing you have to experience yourself.

CRAWFORD: Do you think that your years in the medical job, where you were really a competent person who knew that job very well and dealt with a lot of different kinds of people, that you learned lessons from that?

CARADONNA: Yes. I learned to be perceptive and I learned to kind of figure out what people needed. Yeah, it was a stepping-stone.

RAUCHER: Do you think that maturity makes a difference? Because you've seen a lot of women enter the trades, and you've helped some get into the trades. And do you think that being a little bit older and maybe having had more life experience makes it easier to adapt, to make it through?

CARADONNA: I think so. I think so. I think it's a little bit easier, because you know a little bit more about life. But we've been changing so much in the past twenty-freaking years, I mean, the whole world is different. People are different. Young people are different. Men are different. Women are different. But at that time, they weren't. I mean, something changed. Something changed people's ideas and something changed people's looking at women. And I think a lot of us are the ones that made that difference in the world. So yeah, you're a little bit older, you can see things a little bit better. I think it helps.

RAUCHER: Of course, you haven't been in construction for a while. But do you think things have changed on the job at all for women? I mean, is it better?

CARADONNA: I've been on inside construction, that's what I did with General Motors. I haven't been on outside construction. I don't know what's going on outside, except from what my friends tell me. But inside, I deal with contractors all the time — we build things — and I've always had that interaction, but I don't know what life on the outside is like.

RAUCHER: But have you heard from other women whether it's gotten better or worse?

CARADONNA: Sometimes I think it's gotten better and sometimes I think it hasn't changed at all. The way I hear things — and I listen to people — some of the younger electricians, some of the things that happen to them are just like what used to happen years ago. They're a little more subtle than they used to be, but I think that those kinds of things still go on against women, versus men. I don't think that they think women are competent. I think they give women the shitty jobs. The discrimination is a little more subtle than it used to be, I think, but it's still there.

FECTEAU: Why do you think so few women are choosing to come into the trades, even today?

CARADONNA: Well, look at our young people. I've been doing a lot of thinking about that, because when I read that question, I thought, "I don't really know why." I don't have a lot of interaction with young people. My average age group, when I work with people, is fifty, sixty years old. I don't know if we as skilled tradeswomen have done enough to talk to young people or if they're aware of some of the things that skilled trades people do or even if they want to be skilled trades. I mean, do they want to walk around in flannel shirts and jeans?

I think today, I look at young people, and they all look like Britney [Spears]. They got their bellies showing, and it's just a different generation of people, of young people. I don't know. I just don't know the answer to that. I think a lot of it is because they don't know the benefits of being skilled. I think some of us haven't done a good job in keeping contact with younger women, going into the schools, talking to them.

But somehow, I think — and I'm going to be real candid about this — I think the whole world has moved towards women being more feminine and doing feminine things and dressing feminine than just being what they want to be in their lifetime.

CRAWFORD: It's like a pendulum has swung.

CARADONNA: Yeah, it kind of swung, because young people are dressing different. I see very few kids at the malls dressed in flannel shirts and jeans. They all look like, like I say, Britney. And I just don't understand it. Maybe I'm too old. But it just seems like we've gone from, "Well, women can do everything," back to, "Well, we're all going to go to college and we're going to be executives in offices and we're going to do these kinds of things." People don't even want to be social workers anymore. I think it's just the swing of history.

RAUCHER: As a supervisor, do you work for management?

CARADONNA: Uh-huh.

RAUCHER: Do you have very much do with the local in the plant?

CARADONNA: Uh-huh.

RAUCHER: Do you have opinions about how management and the unions are dealing with the issue of women in the trades, or have dealt with it, in your experience, in the plant? I mean, have they done a good job, have they . . .?

CARADONNA: I think the unions have done an outstanding job, in a couple areas. First of all: women making the same amount of money as men. The union has done a terrific job in saying that you have to pay Elaine as much as you pay George for doing the same job. And I think that's an outstanding value that we never had before. The second thing I think is the treatment of individuals, regardless if they're women or

minorities or anybody else. I think the union is bound by law that they treat people the same way throughout, regardless if they're men or women.

In my last job, I did a lot of negotiating with the union and with management on issues of workplace violence, workplace interaction among people. And I think the union has really made an effort — inside, I can't say outside — on the harassment of women, workplace violence. They've really come and made a real ninety-degree turnaround, where they used to not care before. Now that they are more educated and they know the law, they seem to stand up a little bit more to the pressures that we have to pay people the same, we have to treat people the same, we have to stop the harassment. Yeah, I give them a lot of credit for that.

RAUCHER: When exactly do you think they changed? Because you've been doing this, supervising now for how many years?

CARADONNA: Twenty years.

RAUCHER: Twenty years. So, I mean, is that something that's relatively recent, or is it . . .?

CARADONNA: I would say it's been a gradual change. I would say especially the last ten, fifteen years, there's been emphasis put on equality among people.

FECTEAU: I'm also interested in the difference between the union contract around the apprentice program and the opportunity for people to be hired from within, and looking at the construction trade, just the different structure, how they're both set up so differently. And I guess my question is: Do you think there's things that the construction trades could learn from the plants, or the other way around, to make the

workplace better for women or to encourage more women to come in and stay in the trades?

CARADONNA: Well, there's been a lot of intermingling between UAW workers and construction workers. I've seen a big change in the interaction of those two people. Before they used to hate each other. I think one of the things that's really helped is that now if an outside contractor comes into a General Motors plant or a Ford plant, that contractor has to abide by all the rules that the plant has set up for its own UAW workers. So, in other words, you have to work safely, you have to take training, you have to have drug testing, you have to have all those things. And I think that has helped a lot.

One of the things I noticed is that the work ethic of the outside contractors is probably a little better than the inside contractors, because if they don't work and produce, they get fired. And our people, if they don't work and they don't produce, well, maybe they'll get disciplined, but they've kind of got an advantage.

I think that as far as training and education is concerned, I think the UAW people are far more trained and educated than the outside contractors, and I think they could learn from that.

Elaine was talking about Siemens training. It's communication wiring, right? Yeah. All of our people have to be certified before they can run wire. And I think you AFL union guys are just now coming up to that. So I think there's a lot of things that we could learn. And I think, from what I'm hearing, that the UAW does meet with the people on the outside and talk about issues and things like that.

Hiring practices are a little bit different with the UAW, because we have so many people, and when they close plants, they try to get those people into skilled trade jobs and

apprenticeships and things like that, so there's not a lot of outside hiring. We've seen some outside hiring in the past six months or so, but not a whole lot. So I think there's a lot to be learned on both sides. But there's less animosity, I think, between the two.

FECTEAU: Because they do inside hiring, do you think the plants tend to hire more women and minorities because there's a pool there? And does the union actually actively recruit those women and minorities? And why do you think that is? Is that something the construction trades could do?

CARADONNA: Because they are committed to hiring minorities and employing minorities as part of their practice and part of their business plan. And it's the law. And General Motors management has made a big turn in the past ten or fifteen years, where they are making great strides and efforts to get women, minorities into trade jobs, into the plant, into management jobs. And we have a lot to be proud of, because I think they really make a commitment and they try to do it.

FECTEAU: And one last question on this subject, because it's something I'm particularly interested in. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe that some trades have a greater pool of — maybe they're less skilled — but they have a greater pool of minorities and women. Like the laborers, and I'm trying to think of some of the other trades. And is there any program around trying to provide opportunities, apprenticeships, building people up to maybe higher skill opportunities in higher-paid trades within that pool of people already in the trades that would cross unions?

CARADONNA: Well, in order to be an apprentice with the plant, you have to maintain a certain average. They do all the testing and they have all the testing programs, and if you're not in the upper five percentile scholastically, your chances of getting a job

in a skilled trade are very low, because there's so much training. They go to school for four years. They have to go to college to take all their classes. Some of the non-skilled trades can usher women and minorities into the ones that don't require a long-term commitment to college.

And the plants probably do have an unwritten kind of understanding that they will take some of the minority people who are not in the top five percent. But the plant also has other programs — they call them employee-in-training programs — where if an employee wants to be an electrician, they'll train that person from within and they'll let that person go to school and they'll let them take classes. And over a period of eight years, they earn the journeyman status. But to go outside and test 500 people and say, "I need the top five percent," they can't do anything about that. But they can, from the inside, do it that way.

Did I answer your question?

FECTEAU: Yes, you did. I'm just really learning about the construction trades in the last few years. And I've been kind of bowled over with the degree of harassment toward apprentices in general. I had suspected about women and minorities, but I've become aware of things like the lack of health and safety, the lack of seniority rights and I'm still kind of bowled over with just the nature of the industry.

And I'm wondering, are there any ideas about changing or improving the structure of the industry to make it a better place for everyone, but in particular, women? Are there things that industry or the unions could do to insure more fairness, like you going into the finish trades, things that could be set up to make it a fairer system, and that way it would help women and minorities?

CARADONNA: I see that happening in the manufacturing arena, but I don't know what's happening in the construction arena. Because we live in a little utopia for women. Someone looks cross-eyed at a woman, she runs to the union, and the union gets all over this guy. But I don't think the construction trades have that kind of thing in their organization. So from where I sit, I think we do a good job. Where they sit, I don't think they're there yet.

CRAWFORD: No, I would agree.

RAUCHER? Your union doesn't jump when you complain?

CRAWFORD: Right.

RAUCHER: To support you and to back you up?

CRAWFORD: Right. They tend to take more of a . . .

NUZNOV: "We have to represent everyone" kind of attitude.

CRAWFORD: Right. So although other unions like the UAW seem to have dealt with this problem, our union seems to go, "Well, we have these two members," and it's he-said-she-said, usually. When things become a problem, there're frequently situations where either there were not people witnessing it or the people who witnessed it refuse to testify.

NUZNOV: Yeah, they can't remember. So, in a perfect world, as Michelle was describing it, it would be very nice if people were doing the right thing and trying to make it better for everybody. And it's really encouraging that the UAW has done what they have, because somebody has got to lead. I see from us, the IBEW, there's still a lot of animosity toward the UAW. I mean, they — "they" being the group — don't want to be friends with those people. And it's crazy, because, when you're divided, you're not

strong. So there's still quite a bit of that out there, I believe. I don't know if you would agree with me.

CRAWFORD: No, I would agree with you.

CRAWFORD: Over not just women's issues, but all sorts of issues.

NUZNOV: Exactly.

RAUCHER: But it must be intimidating if people are afraid to testify. Obviously, they're intimidated on the job and that's why they don't.

CRAWFORD: And part of it is not getting involved, you know. A lot of it is kind of a hands-off attitude by the people who might have witnessed something.

CARADONNA: But they have so much to lose, because there's a good chance it's not going to work. And there's a good chance somebody is going to say, "Get the hell off this job." But in my environment, you can't say that.

FECTEAU: Because there's more job security, there's more people willing to speak.

CARADONNA: Right.

CRAWFORD: The other thing is that any incidents like this that happen are really kept pretty much under wraps. So, you may hear a rumor or you may never hear that something happened. I would bet that it is much more open . . .

CARADONNA: We know everything.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, yeah. I heard that there was a woman electrician who filed a sexual harassment thing and what she finally agreed would satisfy her was that the men on this particular job or working for this company all got sexual harassment and discrimination sort-of lectures and a presentation made to them. But I only heard about

that long after it happened, from a business agent. While it was going on, I heard nothing. And I still don't know what woman it was or what job it was.

NUZNOV: And this is the first I've ever heard about it. [laughter]

CRAWFORD: They don't want this to be . . .

NUZNOV: That old boys' network is pretty strong.

RAUCHER: But it sounds to me like it's a leadership thing, too, because if the people up on top, both in the companies and in the unions, said, "No, it's not going to be that way," it would not be that way.

NUZNOV: Yeah, but they also don't want to lose their jobs.

FECTEAU: So what you're saying is that it kind of comes down to a lawsuit. Sometimes the leadership does it for the right reason, but it seems like, from what you're saying, that it's the fear of a lawsuit that affirmative action has any success.

CARADONNA: Absolutely, absolutely.

RAUCHER: But the UAW supported those EEOC lawsuits.

CARADONNA: But they didn't always.

CRAWFORD: There is much more of a sense that it's the employer who is supposed to provide a workplace that is safe from discrimination and harassment as well as safe from all the safety violations. So therefore, the onus is on the employer.

CARADONNA: But we've had incidences when we have had harassment from outside contractors on GM property, and it's been brought up and the person has been told they have to get off.

FECTEAU: What was that like? Were you involved in that?

CARADONNA: Well, yeah, on a certain level, you get involved in everything. But there have been opportunities that have happened, and when you work on a site like ours, you have to abide by all the laws, all the rules, all the regulations. And if someone in one of these offices has been taunted by some guy from the outside, that person is gone. She can go to her supervisor and her supervisor has a responsibility to go to whoever, the plant engineer, and complain. And the plant engineer will say, "Get that guy out of here. Get him out right now." And he has to go. There's no doubt about it.

CRAWFORD: Generally speaking, if an outside contractor causes any problem whatsoever on a job, that person is out of there, and usually they'd be barred from all General Motors jobs forever.

CARADONNA: That's how serious it's taken now.

RAUCHER: I had a question about your involvement with women's issues or women's groups outside of work. I mean, have you ever been involved in anything other than the women in the trades group that you tried to organize here? Or have you ever attended the skilled tradeswomen's conferences?

CARADONNA: Yes. I've been around. Well, I'm not as active as her [Elaine], but I've been to conferences outside of Michigan, like Chicago. Elaine is a lot more active in that arena, but I have, yes.

RAUCHER: Does it seem like their problems are pretty much the same as yours are here?

CARADONNA: Yes. But places like Chicago, they have very active skilled tradeswomen job opportunities there. They really seek jobs for women. And Massachusetts really seeks jobs for women. There's differences.

RAUCHER: And why do you think Michigan or the Detroit area doesn't do as good a job?

CRAWFORD: There's this black cloud over southeastern Michigan. [laughter]

CARADONNA: I don't really know the answer to that, but I think a lot of it is that we just haven't been real leaders in comparison to some of the eastern states, like Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire. The women that come out of there seem to be different. I don't know what it is, but I think there's a big difference between regions, as far as women are concerned.

FECTEAU: Do you think it might have something to do with job security, that Detroit is so dependent on the auto industry, that we have such strong cycles of unemployment that might make people more cutthroat about these jobs, like you said, "This job should go to a man supporting a family"?

CARADONNA: Well, I agree that we're centered on industry here and we're tied up to the unions and to the car manufacturers. And out East, they don't have that. They just have people trying to make a living. You know what I'm saying, Elaine? It's different.

CRAWFORD: Yeah. But the thing that I have seen that is different — and it doesn't mean I'm right — but one of the things I have seen is that in those areas where they developed groups that actively recruit and find jobs for women and develop relationships with the different unions to do that, there seem to be other women's organizations that were around, that were great resource groups. That's one thing that we don't seem to have here. And there was a conference we worked a long time on trying to

plan. We were going to do this national tradeswomen's conference. We met at Eva's house frequently, like two or three times a week sometimes. And we finally . . .

CARADONNA: Let it go.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, we finally let it go, because we were all working and we had no energy.

NUZNOV: We sure couldn't get it together. I think we worked two years trying to get that thing planned.

CRAWFORD: We hired an outside facilitator, we went through two at least. And it was like we didn't have those women, who were not tradeswomen, who were advocates who had resources. We tried to do all this shit on top of working. And if we were working, we didn't have the time to develop the resources. There has been a real paucity of women's groups in this area.

RAUCHER: Some of those women are academics who get involved with women in trades and those groups. They put out the literature, they produce the PR.

CRAWFORD: They have the resources.

RAUCHER: I don't know why that happens here, especially because labor studies is very strong in this part of the country.

CRAWFORD: But maybe they're unaware, and we did not know how to tap into that.

CARADONNA: But the same thing, Elaine, is that we're really like babies, because we didn't know. All we knew was that we were going to get a job that was going to pay some decent money, and that's what we were really zoned in on. I think at our age now, and with our experience, we would know how to go about getting

something done. But we're just like newborns in this arena, we just don't know. But in other places, other states, they have women that have been active for years, like you said.

But you can't expect us, when we were the first ones out there and trying to set an example and trying to be good role models for women, to all of a sudden figure it out. Where do we go? How do we do this? What do we do? We were ignorant of the processes of how to get things done.

NUZNOV: But we sure tried.

CARADONNA: We tried like hell We had energy, but . . .

CRAWFORD: We needed somebody who could like, write grants. We needed a lot of things, and we did not . . .

NUZNOV: We just couldn't find them.

CRAWFORD: And I'm sure there were individuals out there, but there weren't groups that you could tap into and ask for help. I mean, how come this is happening like, twenty-five years after . . .

NUZNOV: You mean this interview?

CRAWFORD: Right.

NUZNOV: It's like, Margaret, when you got up and said, "We have no oral histories of tradeswomen in our library." I mean, that's why this is happening.

RAUCHER: We have virtually nothing about the skilled trades, period, in our archives, because we've been collecting from industrial unions and not the craft unions, which is too bad.

FECTEAU: The UAW does seem to consume a lot . . .

CRAWFORD: The 900-pound gorilla.

RAUCHER: Yeah, that's true. But I thought it was interesting to hear what Eva had to say about what they've done in the plants and how successful they've been.

NUZNOV: It's very encouraging.

CARADONNA: But I think, at this stage of my development, I could probably be a good liaison. I could go talk to — because these guys don't scare me anymore — the people who run the unions and say, "Look, it's about time you get up off your ass and let's go out and get some recruiting done." But years ago, I would never have had the nerve to say that. I would never, never talk like that.

But now that I'm experienced and have some managerial experience, I would think I should be able to go get all those local guys together at UAW and say, "Look, why can't we work together?" You know what I mean? It's just we didn't have the experience to know how to do things.

RAUCHER: But do you do that now at all? I mean, is that part of your job, that you speak to potential skilled tradeswomen?

CARADONNA: No. My job was trying to convince the union to be nicer to people and stand up for people and back people and be there for them when they needed them. And that was what I did.

I had a good rapport with the union for a long time, and it was because we give and take. You need something, you get it, and they'll give you something if you give them something. So it's still the same: you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. But there's a way that you can do that where you can make it a pleasant experience. But it's just sad that it took me so long to get to a point where I could talk to these guys like I should have been talking when I was a youngster.

RAUCHER: Are there any other questions? I think we've covered pretty much everything, unless Eva has something else you wanted to add, something we haven't covered, something we've missed?

CARADONNA: But I think we have to bring some kind of good news about skilled trades to young people. It's a decent living, it's a good living. And there are a lot of people out there who are very talented who I think would excel at a lot of things. But we don't have anything to offer them anymore. We've got no stability in jobs. We've got people coming from other countries who work for less than what we work for and do things that our people won't do and it's this whole struggle of what's going on globally that's really, I think, affecting us.

RAUCHER: Well, thanks Eva.