Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Elaine Crawford

Electrician

Interviewed on February 16, 2004

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

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Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with Elaine Crawford

MARGARET RAUCHER: This is Margaret Raucher. The Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project is at the Reuther Library on February 16th, 2004 interviewing Elaine Crawford, an electrician by trade, and a member of, or I should say, an officer of IBEW [International Brotherhood of Elecrical Workers] Local 58 in Detroit.

We'd like to start out, Elaine, by having you tell us a little bit about your life before you entered the trades, about your childhood and your upbringing and family, if you could.

ELAINE CRAWFORD: I was born in 1949. I have a brother who is just eighteen months older than me, so we're very close. That was a good thing, because my father was in the Navy and we moved often. So everywhere we went we were always new kids. But we kind of had each other, which was very important to both of us.

Constantly going into new classrooms and moving into new neighborhoods (which actually continued after my father got out of the service) I think gave me — it was part of the process of being the "other" in a sociological fashion, where you're always a little bit of the outside observer. And I think that being in that position during childhood probably helped me later in life.

Anyway, my father got out of the Navy when I was about eight. We moved to Grand Rapids [Michigan], because he had decided that he wanted — he was alcoholic, he got saved — he wanted to become a minister. He'd never finished high school. But he

was, well, a self-educated person. He came from a family of sharecroppers in Mississippi. They had nine children. They only had one pair of shoes, and you kept those for Sunday. The rest of the time in Mississippi I guess you were barefoot.

My mother was an only child of very elderly parents in California, and probably if World War II and the buildup for that had never happened, they would not have ever met and would never have married. Anyway, my mother was not happy to move to Grand Rapids to be a minister's wife. I think my father had the GI Bill, so there was some help with tuition, but that seemed to be what there was. And we were very poor and very disadvantaged in relation to these thrifty, hard-working Dutch people in Grand Rapids. We were like the poor family — we were everyone's favorite charity.

We lived in a house that belonged to a church member. We got our clothes at the Salvation Army, but also from the church. I remember being in Sunday school and having a little girl say, "You're wearing my dress." And in Christian school in fifth grade, a little girl in front of me turned around and said, "Are you poor?" So it was obviously rather evident, I guess. Things like, you get a pair of saddle shoes for school and when the white part gets so scuffed up, then you polish that black. And when the soles wear out, then you put cardboard in there. I think this came from the Mississippi days.

Anyway, we made do like that for about three years, moved to Saugatuck [Michigan], where my father was the pastor of a small church. It was known as a chapel in the whole hierarchy of the Christian Reform Church. So once again, we were the "others." We were the minister's kids, and we had to be good.

You don't get paid well as a minister, so my father decided that he would buy this piece of property and we would farm. We would have animals and we would farm. So from the time I was ten, I was driving a tractor — not a big tractor, but a small tractor. And when I was ten, I got my first summer job picking blueberries and other kinds of fruit. It was necessary to earn money for school clothes, because the church paid very little. And by that time, we had four children in the family.

So anyway, I started working pretty early. We lived outside of town. We had pigs and chickens which we butchered regularly, once a year. We had a cow. I had a pony for a couple of years. Those were good years. My brother and I also spent a lot of time hoeing the gigantic garden that my mother canned.

And my father was a very domineering kind of person. We did not get to go anywhere. We did not get to go to things after school. Everybody had to be home for supper. It was that sort of thing. So, it was a very small house, and it was a lot of work. And my father died when I was sixteen. My mother didn't drive. My brother had just gone away to Western [Michigan University], so I was the driver in the family. And I got to drive the car to school every day. So this was quite a breakthrough.

Anyway, in spite of having this small farming operation, my father wore a white shirt every day and a suit, and went around and did pastoral kinds of things. And so my brother and I did the farming. But we really didn't seem to have much in the way of tools. I don't remember there being more than a hammer and a screwdriver. There was never a toolbox. More like farming implements, a few of them, and a lot of hand work. So we did not have a lot of mechanical stuff going on at home — my brother became an artist — but it was good training in how to work, very good training in that.

I was a fairly shy kid. After my father died, I had an excellent school counselor who taught English, and she did all of the drama productions. And she saved my life. My father died in the summer and she said, "I really need an assistant stage manager." And so I really — I had to come out of all of this horrible sixteenth summer.

So Fran really, really helped me. I went on to become the president of my senior class. And she also encouraged me to go to college. So I went to college, Grand Valley State. I really wanted to be a psychologist. People who have problems want to become psychologists. [laughs] But I'd had a horrible time with algebra in high school. I did not take any of the higher math. And when I discovered that you had to take math to be a psychologist, I switched my major to sociology, and eventually to anthropology.

I got pregnant. I was engaged. I got pregnant when I was a sophomore in college. That's another long story. But anyway, I ended up keeping my daughter, did not marry the guy, left the dorm and went back to my mother's for about nine months, eventually finished school. And by that time we were radical hippies and we moved to a commune in Detroit — strangely, in the neighborhood that we now live in.

But we came to be printers, so I worked in a printing collaborative.

RAUCHER: Who do you mean by "we — we were radical hippies"?

CRAWFORD: My sidekick, William Bryce.

RAUCHER: Okay. And you met . . .?

CRAWFORD: In college. So we came to be radical printers at the Anarchist Print Cooperative down on Michigan Avenue [in Detroit]. And we did that for a year. And so I learned a little bit about running small printing equipment. We weren't married at the time. I was on ADC. It enabled me to finish school, but I really needed a job..

But I still was doing theater sorts of things. I directed a play, a project for some graduate students at U of D [University of Detroit], through a friend of mine. It was a labor play. I'd found all these old labor plays that were about a half an hour long at the Labor Archives [at Wayne State University], because I was going to do a book on labor theater. I did tons of research. I would come in and spend days in the labor archives when they were over in the [Purdy] library, before this [the Reuther Library] was built. And then, of course, somebody else did that book about five years ago. I never did it. [laughs]

But anyway, so I had these plays. And two of the guys in the play worked in Personnel at Ford's. And I said, "Guys, I can't stand being on ADC anymore. I need a job." And they said, "Go down to [Ford Motor Co. Rouge plant] Miller Road at Gate Four and fill out an application." I did, and I got hired.

RAUCHER: And what year was that?

CRAWFORD: That was probably winter of '71, maybe early '72. So I got it. I was the first young woman that they had hired in the engine plant since the Korean War. So they were putting on — building up an afternoon shift. There were about four women on days who were quite a bit — they were probably in their fifties. They seemed very old to me. And they wore their coveralls. And they weren't really on my shift. I was the only young white woman.

It was on a loading dock. I was a capper. We would cap these holes in the fuel tanks before they got loaded into boxcars. So it was kind of a little odd specialty sort of job, didn't take a lot of skill. But there was a tight community of people. It was the first time that I ever spent any time with black people. There were none in Saugatuck where I

grew up — a few people in Grand Rapids, but we didn't live there very long. So it was like this introduction to a whole new culture that was very interesting.

And when you work on afternoon shifts, you develop this social grouping, because you've lost — you're not in touch with the days and you can't do anything that other people do in the evenings. It's a special — I don't know, hard to describe it, even. It's an odd thing to be an "afternooner," a midnight shift worker in a factory.

So I was doing that for a few months.

RAUCHER: What did you do, exactly?

CRAWFORD: Well, there were about six of us. And different fuel tanks would come down the line. There were sort of three operations there. They had these big presses, huge, tall presses. And the sheet steel would come in, and the presses would come down and make the different humpy shapes so that they would fit around other parts on the underside of cars or trucks. They would usually be running a combination of three or four different tanks. And they didn't come in order down the line, it was just how fast they were coming off. So you might get two truck tanks and a Mustang or a Taurus.

And these caps were all different sizes and colors. And so some of them you would reach around and shove a cap in the back, and one in here. Or maybe you were doing one on the top and one on the bottom, or one here and one on the top, and then a little one in the middle. This is one of these perfect situations where you could set up your caps, because you knew what tanks they were running that night. And I would have caps on both sides of me, maybe three or four different kinds.

A friend of mine who had moved to California gave me a gigantic box of science fiction books and I would set them up in my caps and after a little while I could read all night and out of the corner of my eye I could catch the silhouette of the tank coming down and cap.

And there were two older guys who had been doing this for quite a while. They broke on and off with each other all night, so they would work like an hour or a half an hour, and the other one would sleep or wander around and play dominoes. [laughs] And I had a partner for a while, too, and we would also do this. It was an interesting group of people. We had great parties and great tragedies and all those sorts of things.

Interesting, it was the first time I ran for office, when I worked there. This was at the Rouge. It was the Engine Plant, fuel tank. So I wanted to be politically involved. And I wasn't on a slate, I was just running as this independent, for recording secretary. I was running against a guy who was part of the incumbent slate. And one day these four guys came — two of them were huge — and stood around my chair and said, "We'd like you to drop out of the race. We have some committees you might be interested in." And I said, "No, I'm going to run."

So I ran. And I came within — this guy had been in office for at least a term. He was an incumbent. He was African American. I lost to him, but I came within 100 votes of winning. But it was really very interesting, because working afternoons you could run around on the day shift and talk to people and hand out literature. And I got to know a lot of people. I did get put on the Fair Employment Practices Committee after losing. So they must have thought I was some sort of threat or something, I don't know.

But maybe after nine or ten months of working there, there was a guy named Joe Blanding, who was, again, an African-American guy, who had gotten on the Apprenticeship Committee. This was when Bob King was a skilled tradesman out there at the Rouge and he was beginning to build his organization to try and make change in [UAW] Local 600. And I believe Joe was part of that.

Anyway, Joe was trying to encourage women and minorities to get into the skilled trades at the Rouge. And apparently no woman had ever taken the skilled trades test, so I took it. And you are allowed to enter a trade, depending on what score you get. So if your score is really low, you can only be a laborer or a painter or something like that. But if you score at the top, you can be an electrician. So, I scored in the top and so I could be an electrician.

So, knowing nothing about electricity . . .

RAUCHER: I think we'll wait a moment here and give the next set of questions to Ann, because it sounds as if we're moving into your life as an electrician.

CRAWFORD: Okay.

ANN FRANCIS: This is Ann Francis. So you're about to begin your story of how you got into the skilled trades.

CRAWFORD: But I didn't.

FRANCIS: And what year was that [laughs] that you didn't?

CRAWFORD: That was in '73, probably early '73. I'd taken the test and passed it and was really excited about getting off the line and becoming a skilled trades person, who seemed to have all of this freedom. And then the oil crisis of '73 happened and people who were already in the apprenticeship program were getting bumped back to

production. So I stayed for about a year after that happened, after I had passed the test. But I was becoming more and more depressed.

There had been a time study and our capping breaking on and off had been broken up. So it was much more tedious. And we were on our third or fourth foreman, a horrible guy, Mike. I mean, he really didn't like me.

He took me off the capping line and made me load boxcars with the fuel tanks, which was sort of okay, except that he was doing it to punish me, because the truck fuel tanks weigh about fifty-four pounds. They're on those big meat hook things, so you got to grab them and lift them up off the hook and then slam them down on this roller table. And then if you're the person inside the car, well, it's not that hard to do when the piles are only about up to here, but when they start to get over your head, you have to throw them into place. So other people that I worked with were quite upset that he was doing this to me. But I hated this guy. So I was — I'm afraid I was not polite to him. So anyway, all those things added together.

I had taken a meter maid test with a friend of mine for the city of Detroit. Not that I wanted to be one, but I was on a hiring list for the city. I got a call one day saying, "Lady, we don't . . . "I'm taking your name off the list. We have these jobs at the waste water treatment plant, and we have no women there." And he said, "Would you be interested?" And I was so anxious to get out of Ford's, because I saw nothing — maybe it was my age, but I didn't feel like I could wait for this whole apprenticeship thing to happen.

So I took the job at the Waste Water Plant, and for two weeks I did both jobs. The Rouge and the Waste Water Plant are very close to each other, so I had that half an

hour to jump in my car at Waste Water and make it over to the Ford Rouge. And that's when there were a lot of workers at the Rouge and when you'd shift change, you really learned how to "pig drive," [laughs] to pig your way into the parking lot, or you would never get a space. So I did that for two weeks and decided that shoveling shit, which is literally what I was doing, was preferable to working at Ford's. So I quit. When you quit, they ask for comments, so I just wrote things like, . . . You were really burning your bridges. I hated that place so much.

Anyway, so I was working in Operations at the Waste Water Plant. They were teaching me to be an operator. There was an electric shop there. And the skilled trades guys would come around. They were repairing things in your building. And I had told them about my story at Ford's. And they said, "Well, we had one woman in our shop, but she really didn't, she didn't work out. She couldn't crimp the Stakon ends onto the wires. And she didn't stay. And the boss, I don't know if he'd be willing to try another woman, because he really didn't think much of her."

So one day their boss was in my building. And I said, "I hear you have an opening. Could I transfer to your department?" This was a guy that didn't say much. And he looked at me and said, "I'll think about it." And about a week later he said I could. So I went in as a mechanical helper, but it was just like being an electrical helper. But I took another test to be an electrical helper, and then I became an electrical repair woman.

And we were actually members of the IBEW, Local 58 — it's not an agency shop, so some people were members of the union and other people weren't — you don't have to be. When I became an electrical repair woman, I did join. I could have actually

finished, I could have done my apprenticeship there. They were sending their apprentices out to Local 58's apprentice school at that time. But I sort of felt like, okay, I have a pretty good handle on what maintenance is about, and I would like to learn construction, to be more varied.

I actually had applied for Local 58's apprenticeship program, but when I did, when I was leaving Ford's, or actually sort of while I was still at Ford's, I couldn't get in, because there was an age restriction and I was too old.

FRANCIS: How old were you?

CRAWFORD: At that time, let's see, I was probably twenty-seven when I first tried. So I actually got in to Local 58's apprentice program when I was twenty-nine. In that period, they had dropped the age limitation. So, where was I?

RAUCHER: You were talking about going for your training at Local . . .

CRAWFORD: Yeah. So I did reapply, and Local 58 accepted me. I found out that you take a test. It was very much like the kind of test that the military, at that time I guess, administered to people. It had mechanical reasoning and verbal skills and some agility pegs and holes, those kinds of things.

There were four women who tested, who started the year that I did. Two of them worked for the city of Detroit. And there was another woman named Cassandra Addington and myself, who were going to be sent out into construction.

Bryce and I were living in our third commune over this period of years and one of the guys in our house, Jeff Goodman, was a bus mechanic for the DDOT [Detroit Department of Transportation]. Jeff taught me quite a bit about cars. I mean, he had a

wonderful set of tools in the garage, so I did things like pulling the engine, putting a new head on it and exhaust systems and this kind of stuff.

When the National Joint Apprenticeship and Training Committee had interviewed me, they said, "So tell us some mechanical thing that you have done." And I replied, "Well, I just finished doing a head job on my Duster." I found out later that they just thought that was really funny. They said, "We just could hardly keep straight faces."

FRANCIS: So how was that apprenticeship? I mean, how was it, learning the skills and . . .?

CRAWFORD: I was lucky that the first contractor I got was a small contractor, actually a minority, African-American-owned company. We were doing a D.O.T. [Detroit Department of Transportation] bus garage over on Shoemaker off Warren, a big bus garage. This was a small contractor, who had maybe five or six employees on this job. The contractor and foreman were awfully happy to get someone who had two years experience with rigid pipe and motors and all the things that I had learned at the waste water plant. So on my first job, they would let me do this stuff by myself.

George Castigan, who was the second foreman there — we became pretty good friends. He was a really nice person. He gave me a set of tools. These were just old ones. He really liked me and he went down in his basement and just cleaned out the doubles and triples and quadruples of tools that he had. They weren't new. But he gave me a toolbox, because all I had were just a few tools. And he was very encouraging.

And he told me, actually, that he had bought his union card, probably thirty years before. Maybe that was one reason that he was nicer than some other people, because although I was coming in the "front door," I was definitely from a "back door" group of

people [minorities], and he had come in the back door. He was always kind. That company went out of business. I really enjoyed the work tremendously. I didn't have arthritis or any of those things yet, so it was just a pleasure to use your body and do all of that kind of stuff. And I was quite strong.

When that company went under, I got a job with — I was sent out to Motor City Electric. I had a couple of bad experiences with the foreman on the first job site I went to, which was the Chrysler Mound Road Engine Plant. And I think because that foreman really didn't like me, I got sent again to the Rouge, to the Engine Plant where I had worked on the line. And they were tearing all of that up to put in a new engine line.

I got put on the heavy cable-pulling crew. So you're pulling this cable that weighs, like, five pounds per foot, and you're pulling thousand-foot runs, and you do all this rigging, rigging wheels up in the air, because you're pulling it through cable tray, which is maybe — oh, it could be thirty-six inches wide all the way down to six inches wide, but mostly in the two-foot wide range. And every time you came to a corner, a ninety, whether it was vertical or horizontal, you had to have rigging there that was adjustable, with coffin hoists. And when you were pulling, you'd have to have someone stationed at each one of those places. You're all on radios.

There was an incredible comradery that developed among this heavy cable-pulling crew. We had a young foreman. Anyway, after I had been there maybe for just three or four days, the shop superintendent came by and said, "Do you want to be in this crew? This is pretty hard work. We have other work." And by that time, I knew I really wanted to be in that crew. We drank an awful lot. We closed the bars many nights. This was not good. But we did it.

I mean, it was really hard work and a lot of times it was dangerous work. If the rigging lets go, you can be killed. It took a lot of engineering. I like pulling cable. It's one of those things where you really do get to engineer things, and you have to think of strains. I mean, the amount of strain that is on a cable like the ones that we pulled is just tremendous. And with very few mechanical means, you will pull this cable, and hopefully you'll do it safely.

And then when you get one of the cables pulled through, then someone — and at that point it was frequently me — would have to go back and take this big rope — it's about maybe two inches thick — a thousand feet of it, and crawl back through the tray, sometimes using a rig in some spots, but frequently walking back through this tray dragging this rope behind you. It's dirty.

FRANCIS: What's a tray?

CRAWFORD: It's a cable tray. It looks sort of like a ladder, but it's made of aluminum. And it's usually about six inches deep. It can be twelve inches deep, about this wide. And it has rungs on the bottom side so that the cable can lay there. And one's here, and the next one is right next to it and . . .

FRANCIS: And you're up in the . . .

CRAWFORD: Right, right.

FRANCIS: Up in the steel?

CRAWFORD: You're up in the steel.

FRANCIS: How high up?

CRAWFORD: Twenty-five, thirty feet. Sometimes higher, sometimes sixty feet in high bay areas. So you drag this rope back through the tray. And people a lot of times are still at their ninety positions helping, because the rope will hang up on the rigging.

There was a guy named Eric and he and I were partnering up. This was after we had most of the cable pulled. Another contractor had the substations, which were on the roof. Okay. So these holes have been drilled — they're three-, four-inch holes — and we had to stuff these cable ends up through the holes to these other guys. We would put the connector on the end of the cable, and then they have the locknuts up there. And that's basically what's going to hold this cable up.

So here's Eric and I. We have these tails of cable — they're about fifteen feet long — and you have to figure out just the right place to put the connectors on the cable so that it'll sweep up like this. And it can't have more than a certain radius to it. So whenever you pulled, you would always leave these long tails for adjusting the sweep.

And we had a scissor lift. You would kind of take this big heavy, snaky cable and get it on the lift and then figure out where to make that cut, because you cut off the outer jacket. You would put that connector on it. And then you would have to stuff a goodly amount of this tail up through this floor. And you're yelling to these Harlan [Electric Co.] guys, "You guys up there? We're ready to stuff it!" [laughs] But he and I would just wrestle this stuff over and over and over and over again.

FRANCIS: So you're in a lift that's attached to . . .

CRAWFORD: It's a square lift.

FRANCIS: Attached to the ladder?

CRAWFORD: No.

FRANCIS: To the tray?

CRAWFORD: No. This is an independent lift with four wheels that you drive around on the floor. There's room for two people. If the cable is on the floor, you tie one end of it to the side of your rig and you lift that up. You're trying to put this cable in your lift with you. And then you have to leave the guys up top a lot of slack to work with, because they may be going into this compartment, but you don't know where they're going to end up terminating it.

Anyway, after that I mostly did industrial work. I stayed with Motor City for two and a half years, because there was another economic downturn and if a contractor wanted to keep you, you could stay with them. We weren't rotating apprentices then.

RAUCHER: You're a journeyman at this time?

CRAWFORD: No, an apprentice, still an apprentice.

FRANCIS: So did you make it to your journeyman's card without layoffs?

CRAWFORD: I worked for Motor City for almost two and a half years. We were building [the] Lake Orion [plant] and I was having some major personal problems. And I asked them for a layoff, because there were lots of untenable problems that I just couldn't deal with and go to work.

FRANCIS: In the workplace?

CRAWFORD: No, at home. So I asked them for a layoff. I was laid off for a short period of time, maybe a month, six weeks. And you're not supposed to ask for a layoff. But I had this crisis and I had to deal with it.

When I went back to work, I was working for another small contractor, commercial work, which was good experience. It was like doing whole houses because it

was Romex, which is that flat cable that is in your house, in the walls of your house. But we were doing six-story luxury apartments that had their own utility room and two bathrooms and a full kitchen and everything.

I actually turned out on that job with that contractor. There was one guy that really did not like me. The foreman was good, but this other guy really seemed to hate my guts. He sort of forced me to be the steward on this job, when I turned out. I didn't know anything, really, and didn't have a real effective Business Agent in that area. I learned a lot of things, but I felt very much unprepared for the steward's position. But over the years, I've noticed that crews like to do that to young journeymen. "Okay, you're going to have to be the steward, kid. You're going to have to learn all this stuff." [laughs]

FRANCIS: Like initiation.

CRAWFORD: Yeah. "Okay, who wants to do this? All right. The lowest person on the totem pole gets it." So maybe he didn't hate me as much as I thought he did. But he certainly did not try and help me as a steward. But that's not so unusual, either.

I did all right at apprentice school. I did not enjoy apprentice school at all.

MICHELLE FECTEAU: May I ask why?

CRAWFORD: Well, we had three teachers and one of them was a wonderful guy named Jim McGill, who seemed like a Howdy Doody kind of figure. He had big thick glasses and he kind of talked a little bit like this. But the guy was a genius. He was the head instructor. He had been there a long time and everybody loved him. And he was a good teacher.

But there was another teacher, who liked to tell sexual innuendo jokes to the class. He taught a lot of the hands-on stuff. And he had the people in the first couple of years. So I was in a classroom full of guys and there were no other women on my school day. There were some other women, like Pat Nuznov who came the year after I did, but all of those women were on different school days than I was on, so I didn't see any of them.

I was so disgusted with the school and I was at the halfway point in my apprenticeship and I was just about at the point of quitting. I mean, it was the question of: Do you want to spend the rest of your life with these assholes? I've only invested two years. If I'm going to get out, let me get out now.

And I don't remember exactly what job I was working on at the time, but there must have been something about the job, and I also remember that I didn't seem to be doing anything right. At work — somebody would tell me a measurement, I would take a measurement, I would bend a piece of pipe — it seemed like I was in this weird rut where everything I did was wrong, and it was getting kind of overwhelming. I mean, I was going to my car at lunchtime and crying and thinking, "I can't do this!" But it was also just — I don't remember, the crew, something about it was really hateful, and then I had this instructor at school.

Then they broke my apprenticeship class up, because they had taken 200 people that year and all the classes had lost people — some people had dropped out, whatever, hadn't made it. So they reshuffled people so the day classes would have equal amounts of people. So I ended up on a totally different day and in a class full of people that I had never been with before.

On that school day, there was a woman who was finishing up her fourth year, who worked for the city of Detroit, an African-American woman. And she said, "You're not going to quit this. You've only got two more years." She said, "If I can do it, you can do it." We would ride to school together. She was really, she was the main — just to have Marion Fortson at school, to be able to sit with her at break and lunch, that made all the difference. Basically, she was my main support there. I had other friends by that time, but they weren't there on that school day. And I dreaded those days.

FRANCIS: School days?

CRAWFORD: Yeah. Yeah, I really did.

FRANCIS: You described this great situation of working with a crew pulling that big cable. That sounded like a really fun group of people. And then the school. But can you remember back to any situations that were really difficult? Was it just little things, or was there some . . .?

CRAWFORD: Generally, I was put with good journeymen. I mean, I felt they were good journeymen. Sometimes they would put me with a guy who had adamantly said he never wanted to work with a woman. "Oh, my God, a woman. Don't ever send that apprentice to work for me." And so they would send me there with me not knowing that. And usually after one day of working with me they were quite happy to have me as an apprentice, someone who was enthusiastic and conscientious. Anyway, so that wasn't bad.

But a lot of times it was having to deal with the pornography on the job, which bothered me a lot. The remarks that guys made about women and their wives. And I mean, I had trouble separating myself from that. I've gotten a lot better at it, but at that

time I would just internally stew over that kind of stuff a lot. It would really, really bring me down.

I remember there were a couple of iron workers who were — it wasn't directed at me, but they were cursing this woman that they worked with, a woman apprentice, an iron worker. And somebody had dumped a big load of shit or something, and I mean, there was just this horrible brutality in what they were threatening, what they were verbally saying they wanted to do.

It would just be little incidents like that, like having to go to the foreman and saying, "Can you take down those pictures in the trailer, because it's illegal probably and I don't want to eat my lunch looking at women's crotches."

CARRIE WELLS: What were their responses for the most part?

CRAWFORD: For the most part, I got pretty good responses. I learned to — I don't think I'll ever put up with them being on the walls, or the calendars. Somebody really needs to shoot the people who authorize the Rigid Calendar. It's pretty disgusting. But now, if guys have magazines, as long as they're just reading them and they're reading them down at that end of the table, I can deal with that, okay? But not if they leave them scattered, open along the table. But for the most part, I had pretty good luck with saying, "Come on."

CRAWFORD: So how many years later is this, now, that you . . .?

CRAWFORD: Twenty-five. And sometimes if I'm not prepared or if I'm just sort of having a bad day, they'll still really bother me. It still really bothers me that women still earn their living that way posing for pornography and that men still buy it,

and I don't know why I'm saying "still," because it's probably been that way for thousands of years.

FRANCIS: I had a couple questions. In your apprenticeship, do you remember how many women there were? Were you one of the first women?

CRAWFORD: Yeah, yeah. There were two women — there was a woman named Phyllis Turner who had started her apprenticeship four years before I did. She was an African American. And with the exception of Marion Fortson, who worked for the city, not in construction, they took no other women during Phyllis's apprenticeship.

FRANCIS: So you're the third woman, then.

CRAWFORD: Second, third. Cassandra and I were the people that they took after Phyllis had finished. Phyllis had a very hard time. People would come up and would shit in her hard hat. She was bending pipe and two guys unzipped their pants and took a leak. She was under an amazing amount of scrutiny. I mean, years later I would hear these horror stories about, "Oh, she was lazy and she was blah, blah, blah." And then there were other guys who had been in her class and obviously had very divergent views of her. She's been a foreman for the Board of Education for a long time, so she's still a member of the local. But I think she moved into the Board of Education soon after her apprenticeship, probably because she didn't want to deal with construction. So I never saw her again until maybe the mid- to late eighties, when a number of us, about thirty women, got in contact with her and had a dinner for her.

FRANCIS: So there were about four women at the time that you were in your apprenticeship. There were 200 in your class, so that would be four women and 196 guys.

CRAWFORD: Right. Well, there were only two in construction. The other two worked for the city of Detroit. So we were a novelty. None of these guys had worked with women, with the exception of Phyllis. And the majority of them had not worked with her, either. So you would walk on jobs, and you had these guys who had never worked with a woman before.

FRANCIS: And was this an affirmative action . . .?

CRAWFORD: It was certainly the laws that were passed, affirmative action laws. The building trades would not have opened their doors otherwise.

FRANCIS: If you had to do it over, would you still choose this type of work?

CRAWFORD: Yeah, I think I would. I have had some of my happiest moments doing this kind of work, where you extended yourself mentally or physically to your limits. And I don't think there are many other opportunities in a lot of other kinds of jobs where you feel that, where you look up and say that you did a perfect rack of pipes and you laid it all out. And it's just very, very, very satisfying.

And I have worked with some wonderful people. I had a partner for a few years, about six years. We just went from job to job together. He was a quiet guy. Sometimes we worked most of the day hardly speaking, which was fine with both of us. We just had good communication. It was like being one person with four hands a lot of times.

RAUCHER: Were you better educated than most of the people you worked with, with your college education?

CRAWFORD: Yes. And I always thought that having a major in anthropology and a minor in theater was very, very useful in analyzing this culture that I had walked

into. It's not easy to walk into a "man trailer," as they're called, a change trailer, the first day on a job, especially as an apprentice.

RAUCHER: Can you describe that, what it was like?

CRAWFORD: Yes. These are basically semi trailers, usually. Occasionally they'll be like a mobile home kind of trailer, but usually they're semis. So they're not more than eight feet wide. And there'll be usually a two-by-four and plywood kind of table, maybe two or three of them that are running lengthwise, and benches. And these are usually built on the job, or they may go from job to job, but they're not fancy — picnic sorts of things, usually.

And there's a bunch of hooks on the walls for people to hang things. And there'll be a microwave and a coffeepot — then there were toaster ovens more than microwaves — sometimes a little refrigerator, and lots of magazines if the job has been there for a while.

And so you go up these steps. And depending on the time of year, it's usually dark when you start work. And you're not really sure that this is the place you're supposed to be, the right trailer, because you're not sure whether you should go here, which seems to have lights on, or if you should find some office trailer.

So you go there and you step inside and you have your tools and in the winter you have a lot of clothes on and your hard hat. And so you step in there. And in those days, a dead silence would fall. And some people would — they're looking at you and they would just turn their heads away from you.

So it took quite a long time before you would start running into people again that you had met on other jobs who would say, "Hi, Elaine. What job you coming from?" or

ask if you were being transferred. But otherwise, and especially in times when there was a lot of employment or it was a really big job, you might hardly know anybody, in those early years.

I went out to do an overtime, like a weekend job down at Flat Rock, the foundry down there. And I think it was on afternoons. And so I get there, and I wasn't really sure where to go. It was a Motor City trailer I was looking for. So I find it, and I was probably early, quite early. And I thought, "Okay. This looks like the man trailer."

So I go inside there, and it's the man trailer. And this man walks in. And he said, "Who are you?" I said, "Oh, I'm Elaine Crawford. I'm an apprentice from this other job and I'm just here for the weekend." And he said, "Oh, good. My name is so-and-so." He said, "Yeah, I had a woman apprentice once in Alaska. She earned most of her money on her back."

Earned most of her money on her back. I had just gotten there, and I was so outraged at that statement, which I had no response to, that I couldn't stop thinking about it all night and the next day. And I mean, I really thought, "I hate this guy. I just hate this guy. Maybe someday I'll be in a situation where I can hurt this guy as much as he hurt me."

And thank goodness, over the years I have simply forgotten who he was or what his name was. I vowed I would never forget it, but I did. So I was probably nice to him sometime later [laughs]. But I don't know why, it just felt so much like an attack before I even started there. And yet there were other people that I knew that turned up later, and the work was okay. But I couldn't get it out of my head that he would say such a cruel thing to me.

RAUCHER: Did folks actually change their clothes in those trailers?

CRAWFORD: Yes, sometimes they did. But it was more of a case of people putting some covering over their blue jeans to keep the dirt off. Probably when women weren't there, it might have been that they literally were changing out of their blue jeans into a better pair of pants, if they had to go somewhere or something like that. But I have never seen a naked man in a man trailer. [laughs] They're not too shy about unzipping their pants to tuck their shirts in and not turning away, which I always thought was — I would never unzip my pants and tuck my shirt in while facing people [laughs]. But that was . . .

RAUCHER: It's a guy thing.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, it's a guy thing. And they always seemed to be wearing underwear, so I guess I could deal with that.

FRANCIS: During your apprenticeship, since you were basically one of four women and only one of two women in construction, did you have opportunities over the years to work with women, and how was that?

CRAWFORD: Not a lot of opportunities to work with women as an apprentice, although Pat [Nuznov] and I were both apprentices on a job in Dearborn for a few months, working for the same contractor. And it was really different and really nice.

FRANCIS: How so?

CRAWFORD: Just to have someone that was comfortable with you who became your friend, who wanted to sit with you and talk to you. Men have a lot of — not all men, and I don't want to generalize, but I think many men that I met in those years were so very uncomfortable with the concept of having a woman in their work life. They

had mothers, they had sisters, they had daughters and they had wives,but they did not have co-workers. So that set up a tension, even among men who were not necessarily against you, with them thinking, "I didn't know if I should say that." Or the kinds of things that with another woman you would just be comfortable asking personal questions once you got to know someone a little. You would begin to tell those stories that women tell to each other that are saying, "This is my life and I'm listening to your life." And a lot of men either didn't know how to do that or could not get past that level of discomfort, that they didn't know how to treat you. "I'll carry that." "No, no, I got it." That sort of thing.

And sometimes I think it made them . . . When more women got in, and I would run into men who had had opportunities to work with women, they would say, "Oh, some of those women, they just try and get by on their looks. They want you to do everything for them." And you would hear some of that stuff.

It's funny. I had a mastectomy a few weeks ago, okay. So I just went back to work three weeks ago and a lot of these people that I'm working with I've known for years now. But not all of them — it's a big company and some of them had just heard that I had had a surgery. And although men gossip, I'm sure, as much as women, there are a lot of men who seem to prefer not to gossip, not to inquire a little more deeply into . . . If I heard you were sick, I'd say, "Well, what's wrong with her? What does she have? Tell me all the gory details."

But I went back to work three weeks ago, and I'm fine. My muscles and everything feels fine. So I go on this job, and I'm working for a guy that I've seen off and on for the last few years. And anyway, it came up. He and I were walking. We

were leaving the trailer from coffee. And he had helped to get some materials together that I was going to use. And one is a box. It's not that heavy, but it's a little bulky. And then there's a little box. And we have to walk quite a ways. And so I'm carrying the bigger box and the heavier box.

And he said, "You were off for a while, weren't you?" And I said, "Yeah, I had a mastectomy." And he goes, "Give me that box!" [laughs] And I said, "No. You're the foreman. I'm the journeyman. I carry the box. You take care of your foreman." And he said, "Well, I take care of my people!" [laughs] So I carried it about halfway and then I said, "Okay. Your turn. Here, take this box."

FRANCIS: So in the last twenty-five years have you ever been on a crew where there was more than one woman besides you and Pat?

CRAWFORD: Yeah.

FRANCIS: And how was that experience?

CRAWFORD: Oh, it was great. It was great. [laughs]

FRANCIS: And what was it?

CRAWFORD: Well, at one point, I was running a job, and Pat and another woman were working for me. And it was a job that had been kind of winding down and so it had shrunk. I was the foreman then. I only needed two people. And we women put flower boxes on the outside of the trailer. [laughter] It was actually — it was not that easy. I was feeling a lot of pressure as a foreman. That was not one of my best experiences. I learned a lot, but it was not one of the best ones I had. But I had been on jobs where . . .

RAUCHER: Excuse me. Were you feeling pressure as a foreman because you were a woman, or just because it's the first time you'd been a foreman?

CRAWFORD: No. It wasn't the first time I had been a foreman. But this was a job that just kind of got dumped into my lap, so I didn't feel like I knew all the things that I needed to know, the answers to the questions. And I didn't have much support behind me, I guess. I didn't have somebody to go to very much, just a little bit. And I was probably a little concerned about how they were judging — the people that I did go to, did they think that I should already know this or not? You try and carry off a very confident air, while at the same time questioning yourself inside: "Am I doing too much or too little? Should I have done that or shouldn't I have done that?"

FRANCIS: So it sounds like because of that kind of pressure, the experience of working with these three women, it wasn't . . .

CRAWFORD: No. I would have much rather it had been somebody else up there and the three of us were working together. But any time when there are more women on the job, I feel like there's a different feeling, just a different feeling that is usually a better feeling. It seems to intimidate nasty people.

And the women seem to draw strength from each other. So you get a little cocky and kind of throw your weight around a little — not a lot, but a little bit — because it's like, "Hey, I'm not alone here. There's other women here." And it's a pleasure to see them and to run into them. Every once in a while I'll run into a woman at a job, don't know her, who will be very cold and unfriendly. You'll see women like that. But I would say the majority are happy to see another woman.

RAUCHER: This might be a nice segue into Carrie's relationship questions. I had one question, though, that I don't know if you've answered. Do you think things have changed at all between the way things were on the job for women when you started out in the late seventies and the way they are now? Has it gotten better for women?

CRAWFORD: I think it has. But this is through the lens of my own experience. Staying with one contractor for twenty years is a different experience than many women have.

RAUCHER: Have you been at Motor City all of your career?

CRAWFORD: No, since '84. For a while I was an apprentice. So from '84 until now.

RAUCHER: It's easier if you stay with one contractor.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, right.

FRANCIS: That is some kind of indication they must have liked you pretty much, right, to stay there? Or no?

CRAWFORD: I guess. I'm responsible. I come to work. I come to work all the time. I work the whole time I'm there. I'm the kind of person who you don't have to — if you, the foreman or the crew leader or whatever, are going somewhere else for a while, you don't have to worry about me working or not working while I'm not under your direct supervision. If there's nothing for me to do, I'm going to start cleaning up. I'm going to start organizing the gang boxes, even though I have a master's license. I don't feel like any of the work there is lesser work. And I like to work. I don't like to stand around. So I'll start washing the walls maybe [laughs], whatever. If I don't have a broom, I'll use cardboard. You just start doing stuff. That's how I work.

I'm not the best electrician in the world. I'm terrible with theory. I had a horrible time with math in the apprenticeship. Managed to cram enough trig in there to pass the tests and then have promptly forgotten it. But I'm a good worker, and I am a good engineer. I don't know how you can be a good engineer without math, but I am.

WELLS: I want to talk about your personal relationships since you've been working in the trades, and your professional ones. But I want to start with your personal.

First of all, you have a daughter? Is she supportive of your . . .?

CRAWFORD: She was young. She was born in '69 and I started my apprenticeship in '78. So she was still at an age where she needed a fair bit of attention. It was hard to do homework. I think that she's proud of me. She did not choose — I never could teach her electrical stuff. I wanted to pass all this stuff down. And she had asthma. She wasn't interested. It's really just been in the last year where she has begun borrowing tools from me for things that she is getting interested in. So maybe this will come. But she really wasn't — it makes you feel a little bit like a failure on some level to not be able to do that with your daughter.

WELLS: And your husband is supportive?

CRAWFORD: Yeah. He was supportive, and I think he's very proud of me.

WELLS: You talked a lot about being angry on the job with pornography. In regards to that, how does that affect the relationship that you have in the real world with men and women? How does it manifest itself or do you just leave it at the job?

CRAWFORD: I never am able to leave anything anywhere. [laughs] I wish I could. I really envy people who can do that. I've never been that good at doing it. I found, yeah, I would bring that anger home. And it was not necessarily directed at my

husband, but I would get frustrated. He has no interest in doing anything mechanical, so I would become frustrated with him sometimes that he did not have more of an interest and I had to do all this stuff. Well, I was the person, I guess, who wanted to do this stuff. I mean, I would come home and tell him all of these sorts of things. I was able to do that, and he was very willing to listen. He never once said that he would come to the job and beat someone up for me. [laughs]

I went through a period of feeling like the only way to really get by was to — and this is during part of my apprenticeship — was to really de-sexualize myself at work, like wearing clothing that obscures the shape of your hips, your breasts. I felt that just being one of the guys, the tomboy thing, that actually affected my sexuality. I mean, it was something I gave a lot of thought to: how can you go through eight, ten hours a day being asexual, as asexual as you possibly can be, and then turn the switch on and suddenly be a good sexual part of a relationship. And I think that did carry over, like everything else did for me.

But I think, and I don't know when or why, that I passed through some sort of change, I guess, where I started being more comfortable being more sexual at work, that I could joke with some guys and I could still choose to ignore the jokes that they made if I didn't like them, or give them a look, like, "What are you telling me that joke for? No, I don't get it. No, I don't get it." But I could still be all of who I was. And part of that is, "Let me tell you this dirty joke." But not a dirty joke that put women or men down, just one of those human dirty jokes.

WELLS: And the things that you viewed at a construction site, did it change the way you looked at the greater society as a whole, with constant degradation of women, being bombarded with talk?

CRAWFORD: And writings on the inside of the port-a-john walls?

WELLS: Yeah, all of that. All of that. Maybe even something about yourself on the port-a-john.

CRAWFORD: Actually, I have never seen my name on the inside of a port-a-john wall.

WELLS: But did it change the way you viewed . . .?

CRAWFORD: I think I used to feel a lot more hopeful about change in society. But whether that was a function of youth, naivete, I don't know. Construction, building trades unions are not very responsive to change. I don't even know if there's a great impetus that exists there for change. So just like with the work, a lot of times you have to accept illogical things that a customer wants, things that are actually going to end up costing them more money to do them that way. And you're sort of going, "Why do they want to do it this way?" or, "Why are we throwing away these perfectly good things?" I mean, literally throwing them in the dumpster simply because the customer changed their mind or the engineer decided that we're not going to install these kind of fixtures here. Look at all the wood that's used on construction sites — forms, railings, barricades, a million things — and at the end of the job, it all gets thrown into dumpsters and hauled away. There's things like that that you know impact society. I don't know, is it because we're Americans? [laughs]

WELLS: Who do you spend time with when you're not at work? Do you spend time with electricians?

CRAWFORD: The vast majority of my women friends are women who work in trades. So I do spend time with them. Sometimes we have gone on trips, adventures, things like canoeing up in northern Ontario, dog sledding. Did dog sledding twice, two different winters.

WELLS: Do you find that you have closer relationships with women that work in trades versus women that are in traditional work, as far as them understanding the nature of construction and sort of being on the same pioneering track?

CRAWFORD: I think that when I spend time with my women friends who are not in construction, I may talk about my work or the union or politics, but there's other things that I guess I concentrate more on with them. You know how you sometimes have a friend that maybe you go shopping with, you have friends that you share a particular interest with, and that's when you see them, because you both like to go to the Art Institute. So when something is happening there, that's the friend that you're likely to call, because that's the person you'll enjoy it the most with.

WELLS: Do you have any activities that you volunteer for, not in the trades, volunteer activities or organizations that you belong to?

CRAWFORD: I'm on the Children's Trust Fund of Michigan, which is — I was appointed by Governor Engler. He didn't know me. I refused to fill out the twelve-page questionnaire. I said — this was right after Ashcroft and those guys got in — "I'm not filling out a twelve-page questionnaire in great detail about my life for people who could use this information." So I refused the appointment. But they didn't know that, and the

appointments person in Lansing called and said, "The governor has approved your appointment." I said, "I didn't send the forms in. I'm not going to fill out these forms, so I guess I don't have the appointment." He said, "Are you willing to fill out the two-page form?," which just asks if you've ever been convicted of larceny or grand theft or ever filed for bankruptcy and a couple of other questions. And I said, "Oh, I'll fill that one out." So, it's a board of directors kind of thing. It's not very active. When there are things happening in my community, my neighborhood, I'll . . . But I don't have a lot of time for those things.

WELLS: Do you have time to be involved in union activities?

CRAWFORD: Yes, being an officer and being on committees, that can take up quite a bit of time. I don't volunteer on the Community Services Committee. I would like to, but I'm just tired. Being a foreman, which I have been a lot for the last three or four years, is really consuming and very, very exhausting. I think about the job twenty-four hours a day, even when I'm sleeping. Sick, sick. It's a sickness.

WELLS: Are you involved at all in women's issues? Have you ever belonged to any women's construction . . .?

CRAWFORD: Yeah. I think Pat [Nuznov] referred to it in her interview. Three different times we built Women in Skilled Trades, Women in the Trades groups, which lasted for varying amounts of time and then burned out.

I don't formally meet with any women's groups, but in the past I did. There was a lot more about women's liberation, consciousness-raising and those sorts of things. I came out of those places and used to do a lot more of that. Now, there's nothing active and regular, except for this [the tradeswomen oral history project], that I do.

WELLS: I have one more question, and then we'll let Michelle take over. And I don't even know if this is something I should be asking. If there are no local women in trades groups in Detroit, what do you think will happen?

CRAWFORD: If there are no groups of women who come together who are in the trades? I don't know. Detroit has a very long tradition of being a hard place to build groups and organizations. I don't know what it is. It's a dysfunctional sort of place. Women's liberation groups never lasted very long. A women's credit union didn't make it and now the food co-op is probably going to go under. What is it? The air, the water? Women will probably continue working in the trades in this city, but they will not be able to make the kind of changes that you can make as a group. I don't think they will develop political power. And I think if the wind begins blowing hard in the other direction, there will not be an organized group to try and harness that wind.

RAUCHER: I had two questions. One has to do with women in the trades. You've been at regional conferences or you've met women in the trades from outside of the Detroit area?

CRAWFORD: Right.

RAUCHER: Do you ever discuss this? I mean, if they have a successful group, what it is that makes theirs successful and makes it so difficult for you here in Detroit?

CRAWFORD: Well, there are different things in different cities. I'm a little familiar with some in California, Denver, Chicago, New York. There is a nationwide tradeswomen's group right now. Part of it seems to have been luck, women in a particular place who knew how to write grants, got some funding, women who were not wrapped up in marriage and children, a particular grouping of women at that time.

Maybe because they also had a tradition of women's groups that existed, and then they were able to draw on those groups for resources and support. And those groups just really don't seem to exist in Detroit.

RAUCHER: Could you talk a little bit more about your experiences at the union, in IBEW Local 58, and as an officer, and the local's encouragement or attitude towards women in the local and that sort of thing?

CRAWFORD: I think for a long time there was no encouragement for women, probably through most of the eighties. And when I was an apprentice, it was not a comfortable experience to go to a union meeting. You just felt uncomfortable, like you didn't belong there at all. And there were no particular activities for women.

The IBEW has what's called a Progress Meeting once a year, "progress" like the king and queen of England used to do years ago. So every month there is a Progress Meeting at a different district. LU 58 is part of the Sixth District here and we have a Progress Meeting usually in September. It could be anywhere in the five states that make up the Sixth District.

Well, apparently for close to thirty years now, part of this Progress Meeting was a Women's Conference. It was a one-day conference right at the start of the Progress Meeting. I don't know who started it, but our local sent no one. And many locals — it was not required — would send no women to this women's conference.

I hadn't been turned out for long — well, maybe four or five years — and I had started coming to union meetings all the time. The business manager invited me to go to the Progress Meeting, I and a woman who was an electrician married to a business agent who was in his administration. And this was this real sort of touchy, hands-off thing.

The Progress Meeting was up at Traverse City [Michigan]. So this business manager — who's no longer a business manager there — he takes us out to dinner. He is really uncomfortable. He was really uncomfortable about the whole idea of what we would say. But that was the first time, probably eight or nine years ago. Maybe ten at the most.

And really, if this one guy had not been married to this woman who was an electrician — I've never asked her completely, but I think that there was a connection between that and our going. Without her, they might not have felt comfortable about us going.

I did run for a convention delegate in '84, which is just a couple years after turning out. I was on a job where there were quite a few people and elections were coming up, so I just threw my hat in the ring. So my name was out there.

And you really have to be willing to take those risks. You have to be willing to run, you have to be willing to go down to the damn meetings and just — you have to be present. And if you're not, then a lot of them are not comfortable paying attention to you, and they're not going to anyway if you're not there. So you got to go.

FECTEAU: I just want to follow up on some of the questions about your union. Have you held any positions within the union structure, elected offices?

CRAWFORD: Yeah. The first office I held I was appointed to.

FECTEAU: Okay. And that was?

CRAWFORD: That was on the Examining Board.

FECTEAU: And what is that?

CRAWFORD: The Examining Board is a really old institution. If you can imagine back in the days when there was not a lot of electrical installations across the

country. But in cities, electrical local unions were forming. And so here you have someone who says he's an electrician, and he comes in from out of town. Well, you want to examine that fellow and make sure that his skills are up to your level before you let him go out to work out of your local. I believe in those days, it was probably an oral examination. Over time it became a written thing. For many years each local wrote their own. You can imagine how fair those things could be [laughs] or not be. It was just a test — the one that we used to have when I was on the Examining Board had been written by people in the local. There were wiring diagrams and fill-in-the-blank questions, a lot of stuff like that.

About two or three years ago the [IBEW] Sixth District decided that they would put out standardized tests that they would change every so many months. All of the Sixth District's tests are multiple choice. I think there was a problem — I think a lot of organized people were having problems passing our old Examining Board test. And that was seen as an impediment to organizing. Anyway, we tested every other week.

FECTEAU: What other offices or positions did you hold?

CRAWFORD: The Executive Board, which is a board of five people. We handle questions of membership, dues protection, approval to take the examination that the Examining Board gives.

F**FECTEAU:** The Executive Board of the union?

CRAWFORD: Yeah, of LU 58.

FECTEAU: So it was an elected position?

CRAWFORD: Yes. We serve as a Trial Board for charges. The business manager comes in and sees us every week. We meet weekly. He doesn't have to do that,

but the business manager we've had for the last couple of terms seems to like to keep us informed and to use us as a sounding board about different things. Business agents come in because they want to talk about some members. We make some financial decisions in between union meetings and then they have to be affirmed by the membership, which they do by just accepting the dues or the minutes of the meeting. So usually everybody is talking while our sort of boring-sounding minutes are being read at the meeting. They're very formulaic, and they can put me to sleep. I did do the minutes until I had this surgery, and then I dumped it off on one of the younger guys.

FECTEAU: So you've been on the Executive Board for how long?

CRAWFORD: I served part of somebody else's term who retired and then I was elected. And now I have been elected again, so about five years, six years, total.

FECTEAU: How was it running, when you ran for election, and how were you at campaigning?

CRAWFORD: Well, the first time I did a letter, I did a mailing, which cost about $3,000 if you mail by yourself. That was then. The second time I was not even sure that I really wanted to be on the Executive Board, so I did nothing. And then this last time I didn't do a separate mailing, but there was sort of a semi-slate with the present administration, and so I had a couple little blurbs in there. And I got a healthy count, one of the highest votes.

CRAWFORD: Why do you think so many men voted for you?

CRAWFORD: I think I have a reputation as a hard worker, okay? And I think I have a reputation as being smart, although I'm as dumb as the next person. [laughs] Having a big vocabulary helps, it helps people do crossword puzzles at lunch and coffee,

but it also . . . Blue collar people, of which I am one and from whose ranks I come, have an admiration and a resentment that exists at the same time for people who are more well-educated or smarter or what have you.

Recently I have volunteered for and was accepted to be on the Contract Negotiating Committee for the local. And when I told one of the guys who's the general foreman on this job — I called him over the weekend to see what I needed to bring to this job and I told him I was on the Negotiating Committee — he said, "Ah, they've tried everything else. Now they're trying brains." [laughter]

I like to talk about politics and I like to talk about issues. I read a lot and a lot of the stuff I read I pull into conversations with people if I feel like it's appropriate, so people probably think I'm much smarter than I am.

FECTEAU: I'm going to talk about changes that you think would improve the situation for women in particular — for all workers, I suppose, but women in particular. And first I wanted to just ask you what you think the obstacles are that exist for women coming into the trades the way the structure is now?

CRAWFORD: I think that we do not, as a union, openly and energetically state that we are opposed to discrimination on sex and race, that we don't emphasize and express that as a real principle. For example, when we do stewards training, very little time, maybe fifteen minutes — and that's only a newer thing — is given to sexual harassment and discrimination.

There was a woman who was on the Apprenticeship Committee that interviewed candidates for apprenticeships. She became ill. She was replaced . . . There are a lot of people who don't think that it's important that we should appoint a woman to that

Apprenticeship Committee. People say, "Well, you don't want to just appoint somebody because she's a woman." Okay, no, I don't want to just appoint somebody because she's a woman. But there are a lot of very capable women, or women and minorities out there. And if you want, if you really genuinely want to bring people like this into your union, it's going to be very helpful for you to have good people who have those faces, women's faces, minority faces.

It makes a big difference to walk into a room of all white guys, who are looking at you very sternly. As a woman or as another minority, you've had bad experiences with those groups of all white guys. It might be a minor difference. But on the Executive Board, when women or minorities come in, I know that they feel better that I'm there. They feel more comfortable. And I may not know them, and this is not scientific, but I feel like I can tell by the way they look at me. I don't give them an advantage if there's a decision that needs to be made. But I at least know what they feel like. I have been there. I am there.

FECTEAU: So you're saying that one thing the union could do is have a more representative body at different levels within the union.

CRAWFORD: Right.

FECTEAU: Are there other obstacles?

CRAWFORD: Well, I think the obstacles are that women are frequently isolated out on job sites. It means a lot, I think, to most women that there is another woman there, somewhere, for the kind of support that we're used to getting from other women, but no effort is made to do that. On the one hand, you could say, "Well, why should we have to

make a special effort for these creatures? We'll just be fair and treat everybody the same." Well, I guess there's a little bit of an argument there, but we are not all the same.

Some of us will do better — studies show that people will do better under different circumstances. Guys who come into the apprenticeship, not 100 percent, but they are drinking together, even if they're both married or one of them is married and the other one is not. They go hunting together. They got cars — I mean, there's a whole vast array of male stuff that they easily talk about and do together.

These are not things that the bulk of women who get into the trades are either conversant in or . . . Those guys, their wives don't really like it if you're calling them at home to set up — "Hey, let's go to the bar." I'm sorry. We are different. So is it making special allowances? I don't think so. I think . . . Do you want your kids to be able to learn? I guess we all do. You don't expect that they're all going to be able to learn the same way. But if this is a social good or a need that we want to promote, we will try and search out what will make them more likely to be successful. I don't think that the building trades are there yet. Maybe they will be someday, but they're not there yet.

FECTEAU: You've talked somewhat about the union, what the union could do. Are there things that the contractors or the employers could do that you think would make things easier for women?

CRAWFORD: Well, again, contractors are responsible for hiring and layoff and work assignments and all of those sorts of things. I think trying to put women with good journeymen, if they seem to be a woman who is serious about the business, trying to keep her on a job, so that she actually learns a whole process. And being clear with your supervision, that you don't put up with discrimination and sexual harassment, even if it's

only for the reason that you don't want your company to be sued. That kind of leadership really does have to come boldly from the top.

FECTEAU: Has that happened where you're at? Is there a sexual harassment policy or anti-harassment policy within the union, and do the contractors have a policy? Is there something like that . . .?

CRAWFORD: Well, there is these federal signs that are put up that say things about wages. And a company, when you sign in on a job, they may have an employee orientation type of thing, usually a booklet and you read it and you sign it. And most of the time, if they have that, it will make some statement that "We don't tolerate this." But that really needs to be transmitted forcefully down. And I think that would help. I think that better-trained foremen would help.

But problems with the union, a lot of times it's a problem because they're democracies. People frequently make choices and do things because they need or want to be re-elected.

FECTEAU: So they've built a majority?

CRAWFORD: Well, it's the notion that it may be political suicide. They might agree with there being women and minorities in the trades and they may do things a little under the surface to make that happen, but boy, that's a hot potato to open up on the podium of a union meeting, when you're going to bring out the most, you may incite hostile, lots of hostile verbiage. [laughter]

FECTEAU: Can you give me an example?

CRAWFORD: Although I want to live in a democracy, one of the weaknesses is people needing to be re-elected. Many times I see that they don't do necessarily what is

the most principled thing or the right thing, because it could be political suicide. And I'm sure it's a factor in any organization where that exists. And yet, I don't want to live under an autocracy. It sometimes expresses that you can't get too far ahead of the membership.

FECTEAU: So there's these political obstacles to . . .

CRAWFORD: There are political obstacles. And some may be more imagined than real. But do you want to risk your election or your position challenging those things to find out if they're really real?

FECTEAU: Do you think things are changing for the better or changing at all?

CRAWFORD: I think that there have been changes because of lots of threats to unions. I think the building trades are probably, by their very nature, one of the slower segments of the union movement to change.

FECTEAU: Why do you think they're one of the slower ones?

CRAWFORD: I think the building trades have continued to have very strong centralized power at the top, all the way back from the beginning of the AFL, virtually — long-running top people. The business manager is in place for thirty, forty years and international presidents until they look like they're cadavers. These sorts of things, these practices, although they insure stability, work against positive changes too. So you always have these dichotomies. People don't like to change.

FRANCIS: You've been active in a union for a long time, right from the get-go. And looking over that period of time, what contribution to that union, whether it was for women or for the workforce, are you the proudest of that you've done?

CRAWFORD: [laughs] This will probably sound very funny, and probably if I thought about it longer, I could think of some other things, but . . . I don't know if "proud" is the right word. One of the things that I won — it's probably very self-serving, but I fought very hard to not have someone taken into membership. It meant getting up to the microphone, which I don't do very often, a number of times and arguing these points. And although I had some personal animus there, I believe that it was for the good of the union, and that allowing this to happen was going to put the local at risk in terms of lawsuits. It was going to open the possibility of a floodgate of applications for membership in this area. Yet the person who was the applicant was related to people in the local, okay. So there were a number of people who wanted to make this person a member, who were falling back on another tradition. It was very vociferous. I think that if I had not gotten up and fought hard during that meeting, it might have tipped the other way.

FECTEAU: Why did you not want this person in?

CRAWFORD: Because we had consulted with the local's lawyer, who said the best thing is to continue the policy that you've had. Letting this person become a member was going to be a change in that policy. And you know how things are — if you do things, you can never keep these things secret from the membership. And someone says, "Well, you let that person — everybody else is doing it, what's wrong with me? What's that person's qualifications?"

There were a lot of areas that I believe we would not really want to, down the road, get into. And we would lose some control over our membership process. So I felt it was very important, I felt that people were . . . If you accept the minutes of the

Executive Board, if you're not listening and you accept the minutes, then whatever happened during those minutes is what is now de facto. Sometimes things have been passed by the local, by the membership, without them being quite aware of it. And I was not going to let that . . . I was working on a job with a lot of people, and you don't really talk a lot about what goes on in the Executive Board — that's kind of the Executive Board's business — but I just kept saying to people, "If you listen to the Executive Board minutes and you do not approve, then those things do not happen."

FECTEAU: So you took an unpopular position?

CRAWFORD: Unpopular with a certain large segment, yeah. And said, "If you don't vote to accept the Executive Board minutes, something will not become a fact," and encouraged people to come to the meeting and listen. So a lot more people came, and it was, rightly or wrongly — I think it was right, a lot of people think it was wrong.

And I have also — a number of times people have referred women to me who are having a problem. I'm proud that I could help them, or women who were thinking about getting into the apprenticeship, being able to give them information and encouragement. So I'm proud of those things too.