Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Denise Greer
Millwright

Interviewed on April 28, 2004

Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs
Walter P. Reuther Library
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Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with Denise Greer

MARGARET RAUCHER: I'm Margaret Raucher, and we're here at the Reuther Library on April 28th, 2004 to interview Denise Greer, who's a millwright at the Ford Rawsonville plant. So I think we'll start out, Denise, by asking you a little bit about your life before you entered the trades.

DENISE GREER: All right. I grew up in Ypsilanti, the daughter of Kinney and Theresa Greer. I'm an only child. I went to Faith Way Baptist School from kindergarten all the way through middle school.

RAUCHER: Could I ask the date of your birth?

GREER: 7/8/77. Went to Faith Way until eighth grade and then went to Ypsilanti High School and graduated from there. And in high school I discovered a knack for music, so I went to music school at Vandercook College of Music in Chicago for three years after my high school graduation. I kind of got burned out. [laughs] Eight hours of practicing for six years.

RAUCHER: Vocal or instrumental?

GREER: Instrumental.

RAUCHER: What instrument?

GREER: French horn. I decided to go part time. Got a job at United Airlines, worked there for a little over a year and found out I could come back and work at Ford. So I packed up my stuff in July of '98 and moved back here and got a job at Ford Motor Company.

RAUCHER: Okay, you're an only child. Can I ask about your relationship with your parents when you were growing up? I mean, was there anything in that family situation that might have prepared you for being a skilled tradeswoman?

GREER: Well, I was really into sports and neither of my parents had a problem with that. I played soccer. I played guy soccer, because at that time there were no girls' teams. I don't know, I was the son my dad always wanted and the daughter that my mom had. So it was kind of weird. I didn't play dolls with my dad; I played them with my mom. And my dad would take me to football games and go hunting and fishing, and I did all that with him. So I had a good relationship, I still have a good relationship with my parents.

RAUCHER: And your friends growing up, would you consider yourself a tomboy?

GREER: Oh, yeah. I never have really gotten along well with other girls, [laughs] especially if they're like real girly and stuff, because I don't understand them and they sure don't understand me.

RAUCHER: This is even when you were a kid?

GREER: Oh

yeah. I only had guy friends. I'd rather be on the bike during the summer and riding the bike and tearing into trees and stuff like that rather than at home with my Barbie dolls. That wasn't a big issue with me. I had GI Joes. Plus my life was consumed with sports. I played soccer for fourteen years. I played baseball and softball for twelve. I did karate and volleyball in high school. I lettered in soccer and softball at high school. And then,

band kind of took over in high school, so I was very active, very busy, but mostly with guys.

RAUCHER: The French horn takes quite a bit of lung power, I understand. It's not an easy instrument to play.

GREER: No, it's not. A lot of lung power and a lot of hard . . . I'd say you have to be a perfectionist, and it drives you nuts, because there's no perfection in the instrument itself. So no matter how good you are, you're always making mistakes. So, that kind of leads to quick burnout. [laughs]

RAUCHER: Did you get a scholarship to go to music school?

GREER: Yeah, I did. They don't give full rides, so I got as much as I could from them. But I really enjoyed it and I miss it now, but I just don't have the time right now to go back to it.

RAUCHER: You say you burned out when you were in college?

GREER: Yeah.

RAUCHER: It was too difficult?

GREER: Well, my junior and senior year of high school I went to Ypsilanti High School. I was in the marching band, the symphonic band, the brass quintet, jazz band, plus I played in the Livonia Youth Philharmonic, plus I taught. So when I went to college, that didn't end. One of my sorority sisters had graduated and she had a school, so I helped teach her marching band. I was teaching private lessons. I was playing in pits for high school productions.

RAUCHER: You were in a sorority. Was it a musical sorority?

GREER: No. It's social — Delta Phi Epsilon.

RAUCHER: Now, I wouldn't pick you for a sorority.

GREER: Yeah.

RAUCHER: How did you end up in a sorority?

GREER: The neat thing is all the other girls in that chapter were just like me, so we kind of found each other. They scouted me out real quick. So it was neat, because I've met many — in fact, I belong to another chapter, and they're nothing like the sisters that I had. As I said, if you put us in a room together, you wouldn't be able to tell there was a room full of women.

RAUCHER: [laughs] What did your dad do for a living?

GREER: He was a millwright at Rawsonville. He retired in 2000.

RAUCHER: Did your mom work?

GREER: Yeah, she worked full time at the University of Michigan. She did forty years there.

RAUCHER: Doing?

GREER: She went from job to job as office support. Her last position I think she had for about ten years, she was the clerk at Food Stores. They make sure the food gets to all the dorms, the hospitals, that kind of thing. So she was in charge of routing all the food.

RAUCHER: What did you do at United Airlines?

GREER: I was part of baggage control. When they lost your bag, [laughs] I helped get it back on the airplane to you. So I liked the job. I liked the airline and I liked where I worked. I worked at O'Hare Airport, so I was right in the center of all the activity.

RAUCHER: Did you interface with people who'd lost their luggage?

GREER: No, I did not, [laughs] and that's why I think I liked my job so much. I wouldn't be a very good customer service rep. I did six years at Burger King through high school and in college. And yeah, I got kind of tired of the customer service aspect of things. [laughs]

RAUCHER: It sounds like you were very busy, if you were working and you were involved in all of the musical stuff and the sports.

GREER: Yeah.

RAUCHER: And regular academics.

GREER: Yeah. I kept a good grade point. I graduated with a 3.89 and National Honor Society and all that, so it didn't seem to hurt me.

ELAINE CRAWFORD: When did you come back to Michigan?

GREER: '98. I moved back to Ypsilanti in July, and I waitressed at T.G.I. Friday's until Ford called me in October, and then I went to Ford.

RAUCHER: Now, your dad, I assume, helped you get the job?

GREER: He got me an application. You get an application, and then you take a test. I had taken the test in June. So you take an entrance test, and then they call you and tell you which plant to report to and what day to report.

RAUCHER: What was the test like? I mean, what is it a test of?

GREER: They tested math. You had to know basic algebra. They tested basic algebra, could you add, could you subtract, could you multiply, divide, and then could you figure out a simple "A plus B equals C" problem. They had a test on how you followed directions. It was kind of similar to the trades test, in that respect, with a bunch

of colored dots, and go to the third one from this row and go up and go down and go sideways, and what color is it. And then they tested if you could see 3-D images. They'd give you a 3-D sketch, can you describe what it is. Is this a ball, is this a box, a triangle.

RAUCHER: Is this a test to get a specific job in the plant?

GREER: No. This is a test to get into the plant.

RAUCHER: Just to get in at any job?

GREER: Yeah. Everybody goes through the same testing, and then they pick which plant you're going to. Usually, if you put in an application from a certain plant, you're probably going to get into that plant, but you could end up anywhere.

RAUCHER: So they accepted you, so you passed.

GREER: Yeah, I passed. Then in October they called me for a job.

CRAWFORD: What was your first job like?

GREER: I worked on an alternator sub-assembly line. I got on a really great line, actually. [laughs] It was eight people, three shifts. I ended up on midnights for seven months, which was fantastic with me. I basically loaded parts into a robot, let the robot do its thing, and we'd rotate it around. Sometimes I had a production check and other times I just loaded a robot all night. So it was a good line as far as the ease of working, I guess. It was a lot of technical and computer skills, because you had to program the robots and everything, so that appealed to me.

RAUCHER: Did they train you?

GREER: Yeah, they trained me pretty quickly. Once they got over the thing of me being a snotty-nosed little brat, [laughs] they trained me pretty quickly. Because I

was on midnights — there was nobody on midnights with under thirty-six years, so they weren't used to seeing little kids in the plant. I had just turned twenty-one.

RAUCHER: And had also been at music school. I mean, your background must have been a little bit different than most of your co-workers.

GREER: Yeah, a lot of them had never graduated high school, much less thought about going to college, so the perception there . . . They had just started getting new hires within the past couple of years. Before I hired in, they hadn't had new hires in there in ten, fifteen years. So to get a bunch of young people in there was kind of disturbing for some of them.

RAUCHER: Why did that happen? They just needed more workers?

GREER: Yeah. A big wave of retirees come through. And with the '80s and the layoffs, they had gotten all their people back that they thought should have come back and they still needed people to put in. The economy was good, cars were selling. I mean, first six months I worked there I never took a day off. I worked twelve, sixteen hours a day, no problem. You want overtime? Come work for us.

CRAWFORD: And then it changed? Did the overtime dry up?

GREER: Oh, yeah. It's done now. [laughs] It's absolutely done right now. I'm on trades now, but we're not getting anything. I'm lucky if I get a weekend.

CRAWFORD: So what made you make the switch, and how did you make the switch from production to being with the trades?

GREER: Well, I hired in in October and luckily there was a trades test that April or May [1999], and it ended up being in May. And by then, the lull of production life had kind of set in. It's very tedious, it's boring. Some jobs don't take — you know,

production checking doesn't take a lot of skills. You kind of sit there and sit there and you watch parts all night. And you check 6,000 parts a night and you want to go home and scream. So I knew I didn't want to stay on the line.

And my dad was a millwright, so I mean, from the day I hired in it was, "We're going to get you on trades. You got to get on trades." So the test came up and I took the test and I found out a few weeks later that I had passed. So then your name goes on a list and they have a meeting. And they have some people come in and try to explain which trades you want, what the different trades do, because production, ninety percent of the time, doesn't know what each trade does. You have no idea. You might break something and call for an electrician and as far as you know, that's all they do. So they kind of explain it to you.

My three choices were a millwright, pipefitter and truck mechanic. They weren't taking truck mechanic apprentices, so I was put on the millwright list as my primary. I got called up for a millwright in November. So I spent just over a year on the floor.

CRAWFORD: So where did you do your apprenticeship training?

GREER: Right in the plant.

CRAWFORD: They didn't have classrooms?

GREER: We take school — you have a choice of Washtenaw Community College or Henry Ford [Community College], and I went to Washtenaw.

CRAWFORD: Is it a three-year apprenticeship?

GREER: It's not by year, it's by hours. And it was 7,400 shop hours and 600 school hours. So it was about nine classes at Washtenaw and then my work hours. I did

it three days shy of three years. Because overtime was good, I did 3,600 hours my first year on the apprenticeship.

CRAWFORD: Oh my goodness.

RAUCHER: But you're learning right there on the shop floor, then?

GREER: Oh yeah. Ford does it and I'm pretty sure the other Big Three's do it. We have a technical training center. What they do with us is as soon as you accept your apprenticeship, you sign your indenture papers, you go to the training center and they train you for three weeks. They kind of show you the absolute basics of what you need to know before you go out on the floor, so that you're just not thrown to the sharks.

Because when I went to Core Skills, I had never run a drill press, I had never run a grinder, I had never read a blueprint, you know, all these things. And had I not gone to Core Skills, I would have had to learn that in the shop in a hustle kind of attitude, "get the job done" kind of thing. And this way, for three weeks you could learn at your own pace. It's slow. They start everybody at the beginning. The first week is: "Here's what a hammer looks like. Here's what a screwdriver looks like. Here's how you use a drill." They do that for all the trades, so that helps a lot.

RAUCHER: Were there other women in that group training with you?

GREER: Yeah. One of my friends was there for stationary steam engineer and then we had another woman there that was a pipefitter apprentice. But I was the only millwright. They've only had a handful of women millwrights go through there.

RAUCHER: What was it like, the training?

GREER: It was good. It was really good for me, because I had never done any of that stuff before. I had no clue. I mean, I heard my dad and I'd seen my dad do it and

I had some idea of what my job was, but to actually have the hands-on and to actually do it, it was great.

It was intimidating at the same time, though, because my partner — they pair us up, because millwrights always work in pairs or groups — and they paired me up with a guy who was an airplane mechanic. [laughs] So he was in the Air Force, he'd done six years as an airplane mechanic and thought I was an idiot for not — he was like, "What do you mean you don't know what that kind of wrench is?" I'm like, "I'm sorry." [laughs]

So it was good experience, though, to have three weeks where you could kind of learn and ask questions. It was supposed to be that kind of an environment, to ask, to get all your questions out of the way as far as that goes.

RAUCHER: You didn't feel any discrimination because you were the only woman millwright? I mean, you felt that your teachers and your co-students were — it was a good learning environment with them?

GREER: For the most part. There's a few jokes here and there, which is nothing. Most of the instructors are pretty supportive. The pipefitter apprentice had it worse than I did, so compared to her, yeah, it was a good time for me.

RAUCHER: Why did she have it worse?

GREER: It was a shop environment and they let you know that right away. They expected you to — you know, jeans, T-shirt, that kind of thing, and she showed up the first day in a skirt and high heels.

CRAWFORD: So why do you think she did that?

GREER: Because her thing was she's still a woman and she's not going to change that. The clothes that she wore to Core Skills — and we were doing actual work,

we were doing actual cutting — for the three weeks, I don't have that nice of clothes in my closet for dressy occasions. You know, the fingernails, the jewelry.

CRAWFORD: So she didn't have to climb many ladders I guess.

GREER: No. They wouldn't let her operate a grinder or nothing either, because she had all her jewelry on and her long nails.

RAUCHER: Is she still in the trade?

GREER: Yeah. I see her every once in a while. My friend's husband works at her shop. She's still there, and that's how she goes to work.

RAUCHER: Seriously?

GREER: Yeah.

RAUCHER: Still?

GREER: Still.

CRAWFORD: Those people are never done making a point, I guess. [laughs]

RAUCHER: Very interesting. [laughs].

CRAWFORD: Did you work in the same crew that your father did?

GREER: Yeah, I got to. He's a millwright and I got to work with him for two weekends right before he retired.

CRAWFORD: Do you think that it helped that your father was — that it smoothed your way or made it harder or . . .?

GREER: It depends on the person. In a way, I would say for some people it probably smoothed it, but for others it didn't. A lot of the guys I've known since I was a baby. I've got pictures of them holding me, and their wives babysat me. I've known them my whole life and they're probably the ones that treat me the worst now, because

they just, you know, they don't agree. Number one, they don't agree with women being in there in the first place and number two, I should have known better, because of my dad. So in a way, the guys that have known me, I mean, they're the worst offenders, they really are.

And then some of the other guys, though, it kind of gave them an opening. I mean, these are guys that had one stationary steam engineer and a couple of electricians and two machine repairmen — that's all the women they'd ever had to work with. And a lot of them don't even know how to talk to you. I mean, seriously, they just don't know what to talk to you about. They don't know how to approach you. Instead of asking me something, they'll go to three other people and try to get the information instead of having to come talk to me about it. So it gave them a kind of way in, "Oh, how's your dad?" And then they could sit down and talk to me. But I don't know if it hurt or helped. [laughs] The jury is still out on that one.

CRAWFORD: But your father did retire a short time after you got hired?

GREER: Yeah, just over a month.

CRAWFORD: So he wasn't there to protect you, as it were.

GREER: No. He had dreams and visions of being my journeyman. And then we worked together for a couple weekends and he knew he made the right decision by leaving. [laughter]

CRAWFORD: It was hard to work with the man? Or it was hard for him to work with his daughter?

GREER: A little bit of both. I don't have the relationship with my parents where they're like the rulers over me. They've never really taken the "I'm your

authority" position on me. And in the shop, it's different, and he did, and I fought it tooth and nail. [laughs] And he fought it, too, but, yeah, we don't work well together like that.

RAUCHER: So what exactly is it that you do on the job?

GREER: Well, millwright is jack-of-all-trades, master of none. And in our shop — it varies shop by shop — basically we install machinery, we take machinery out and we do everything in between. We work on chains and gears and sprockets, anything that's mechanical, that's ours. Belts, drives, conveyor systems, that's all ours, building steel. We can put buildings up. We erect buildings using building steel. We do all the fabrication in our plant. We do all the rigging in our plant. We do all the ductwork for the HVAC systems. We do concrete work. We put up fencing. Anything that needs to be done, we do it. We stay away from electricity and water and air and hydraulics, but basically everything else is ours.

CRAWFORD: Was it always that way there?

GREER: Uh-huh.

CRAWFORD: So they didn't have painters or . . .?

GREER: Well, we don't paint. No, we don't paint and we don't touch wood. We have painter carpenters. But anything dealing with steel and fabrication for steel is all ours. So we have many different jobs. We have five areas in our plant and each area is its own unique beast. Our main shop is all construction all the time. That's all you'll do. When I went on the apprenticeship, I was fortunate because we were building a training center inside of our plant, so I got to do the concrete work on it. I got to help do building steel on it.

And mainly, for six months I did nothing but ductwork. So I could go to a tin shop now and just hammer out ductwork and be done with it. So I was fortunate enough to come in when I did, and reading all the building prints and everything, because you don't see those every day. And the apprentices that have come on after me haven't seen those at all, so that was a good experience. But each area is its own unique beast, so you just got to be ready for it. [laughs]

RAUCHER: Well, how do you get those assignments? I mean, how do you know which area you're going to be working in?

GREER: Well, when you graduate, they place you. And then when you bump, you go trade-wide. You just bump for a shift, so wherever the low man is, you bump them and that's what area you go to. So I'm in the die cast area right now.

RAUCHER: Do you work with different people each time you move to a new area?

GREER: Well, yeah. I've never moved and I've been there two years. We have bumps, but I've got twelve guys under me, so I'm pretty insulated where I'm at and I can't bump anywhere else. But if a position would come up on afternoons and I wanted afternoons, I'd bump the low guy, and whatever area he was in, that's the area I would go to. So we're considered plant-wide, but we have our own distinct areas where we sit, and that's what holds our position.

RAUCHER: So you've worked with the same people for the last couple years?

GREER: Two years, yeah.

RAUCHER: And are you the only woman?

GREER: No. We now have five. But for the past year and a half, I was by myself up there.

RAUCHER: And what was that like?

GREER: Bad. I've had two bosses up front for sexual harassment, plus a superintendent. And die cast is the worst area. We use molten aluminum to make our castings. And all the machines are heavy machinery. They're huge, they're nasty, they're dirty.

CRAWFORD: It's hot.

GREER: Yeah. The aluminum sits at 1,400 degrees. We have three furnaces.

CRAWFORD: And aluminum, you would think it's kind of a clean metal, but it's not. It has a black greasiness to it that gets on your hands and your skin and your face.

GREER: Yeah. My hands are greasy all the time. [laughs] And plus, what comes with that is the parts have to be cleaned after they're cast, so we have all the shop blasting systems to clean them.

CRAWFORD: Chemicals.

GREER: And after you work in one of them for a day you go home and you're literally black. I mean, you get it in your teeth, your skin gets all stained and it takes a couple days to wash that stuff off, and it gets everywhere. And especially with long hair, I always have my hair tied up and I have a hat on, because the black stuff, the die slick I mean, I've taken a bath in that stuff and it's taken me days to get it out of my hair.

RAUCHER: That can't be healthy.

GREER: Probably not. [laughs]

RAUCHER: You're a union member, right?

GREER: Yes. Well, just like in the food industry, there are acceptable standards of cleanliness and non-acceptable standards.

RAUCHER: Do you want to elaborate at all on the sexual harassment?

GREER: Yeah. Actually, the first boss I had in die cast when I was an apprentice treated me bad because I was an apprentice, and he treated all the apprentices bad. And as much of a jerk as he was, at least he did it to everybody else.

And then I graduated and I ended up there. And how my boss got that job was he had been accused of sexual harassment in another area in the plant and had been moved to my area.

RAUCHER: Is your boss part of management, or is he also . . .?

GREER: Oh, no. He's management. Yeah. We don't have hourly bosses. I guess right out of the starting blocks he started in on me. I got him for — I was moving a filing cabinet with a dolly and I didn't know what was in the filing cabinet. I picked it up on the dolly and I started moving it and it just started falling. So I braced it, and I'm like, "Hey, hey, can you help me get this back upright?," because I didn't want to drop it. So he came over, and I uprighted it. I said, "What the heck is in here?" He goes, "I don't know, it's locked." And I said, "Well, open the damn thing up. It's heavy." "Well, if you can't do it, I'll go have a man do it for you." "You better do that then." And I took my gloves off and I went and sat down, called a committeeman. You know, "Oh, he didn't mean that literally." Okay. He didn't say he'd just go get somebody else to do it. So that started it.

Then a couple jobs that I had done had mysteriously fallen apart, and he tried pin poor workmanship on me.

CRAWFORD: You mean something that was built or put together . . .

GREER: A machine that I had repaired fell back apart, mysteriously the bolts fell out of it.

CRAWFORD: [laughs] That's common. Those bolts that just can't stay in.

GREER: Yeah, they just don't stay in. So he tried to pin that on me. And the stupid thing is that I saw the guy go up on the ladder and change it. And he swore up and down that he never sent him up there. And I told him flat out, "I saw him do this, and you're trying to pin this on me." And a couple incidents of that happening, a fab project that I didn't even cut, that I had welded up because he ordered me to have it welded up, came out to the wrong dimensions, so he tried to pop me on that. The bad thing is, the guy had left his dimensions sitting on it, so I got out of that one.

And then I got hurt. I was working on a machine with my two partners, who really hated me and felt no qualms about telling me that they hated me. I don't believe it happened on purpose, but we both had the machine, a few thousand pounds at least, two of us had the machine on pry bars and he dropped his end, and I took it. And I threw my hip out, dislocated my hip, and three herniated disks in my back. I was out of work for over four months. My boss said that I had come into work like that and that he was unsure if I had actually gotten hurt on the job. I couldn't walk, I couldn't tie my own shoes, I couldn't dress myself, and he's claiming I came into work like that.

The day I came back from work I had restrictions. I hadn't seen the man in four months. I had restrictions, obviously. I just had problems. He told me to go home,

because he was not going to let someone with restrictions sit there while the men sat down and did my work for me. So I had to go back up front to Labor Relations and tell them I was being sent home and tell them why, and they had a fit and sent me back out on the floor, called him on the carpet, and three weeks later he got a promotion.

Then, the last boss was just about a month and a half ago, and he told my partner, who is also a female, and I that we might want to wait for our journeyman before we start working on a job. I said, "Well, I have my card, how about you?" Because he doesn't. He came from a scab, a non-union plant. He goes, "Well, just wait for the boys to come back. We don't want you guys to hurt yourselves." We caught him doing our work a week later.

I called the committeeman on him, because he'd been on me all day and then we caught him doing our work. I mean, it's a white glove policy, they're not allowed to touch anything. They cannot get dirty. I had the committeeman right in front of me and the bargaining man right next to him, and he came up and cussed me out in front of both of them. And they're like, "You can't talk to her like that." He goes, "Yes, I can. Who the hell do you think you are?" [laughs] And they're like, "Well, you can't talk to us like that either." And he's like, "She's my employee and if she can't do her damn job, I'll get a man to do it for her," and blah, blah. And he spewed off in front of them.

So I, along with my partner, went and filed a formal complaint, and they moved him to an off-shift. So he didn't get fired, and he only had twenty-seven days there. So I don't quite believe their policy on zero tolerance — I'm not thoroughly convinced.

RAUCHER: You were talking about when management was riding you, did you get much support from your co-workers, or did they just sort of sit back and let you take it?

GREER: The first time, none whatsoever. They told me I was too emotional, I took things too personally, why don't I just go cry about it. Yeah, no, none of them. They all said that, "Oh, he didn't mean it that way," you know, "Oh, they don't mean it that way." And, "Oh, you must not have tightened those up good enough." There's always something that I did that made the situation what it was.

And the second time we got support from a couple of the guys, because a couple of them had heard the way he talked to us and flat out told us, "He's wrong. He's way over the line." And in fact, after he cussed me out, he actually went up to one of the guys and said, "That Denise, God — da, da, da, da," and chewed his ear about me. And the guy turned around and went up front on him too. But otherwise, most of the guys think that there's something that you do to cause that or to put yourself in that situation.

RAUCHER: Is it better at all since there are more women working in your area than it was when you were by yourself?

GREER: It is. But I think it depends on who the boss is, too. I mean, the guys haven't changed. We haven't really changed personnel up there. It really depends on the management, how the management does it. Millwrights always work in pairs, just because most of our jobs are two-person jobs. You have to have four hands or whatever to get your job done. And the first boss that left, he was always sending me on jobs by myself, which he knew I couldn't do by myself, just so I'd have to come back and ask for help. And then, of course, he'd tell me, "Well, go find something else to do, I'll send the

boys on it," just to get that little edge in. So a lot of the guys thought I couldn't do any of my job for a long time, because that was right after I'd graduated.

CRAWFORD: So was the union fighting for you? Was your committeeman or your bargaining chairman or the Fair Employment Practices Commission helpful?

GREER: No one in the shop, obviously, because the one guy got a promotion and the other guy is still there. I was going to file a higher charge, but with word-of-mouth, those don't go very far. So now I have to carry a tape recorder and pray that this man says something to me while it's on so that I have concrete evidence, because I'm not one that's going to sit up there and go through all this and not be able to nail him to the wall.

They have complaints. The first guy that got promoted, this was his second complaint. I mean, they happened within three months of each other — between the other girl's complaint and mine, it was a three-month period. And my committeemen are of the opinion, "You're in a man's world, you need to learn to deal with a lot of this," and that, you know, "Women are more emotional than men, so there you have it." And that's their stance on it.

CRAWFORD: Well, they sound pretty progressive. [laughter]

GREER: Well, see, the last committeeman we had, I got really pissed at him and I read him the riot act and told him, "You know what, I'll beat you in the next election." And I did. Well, I ran for committee — I didn't win, but I ran. And I was happy that I ran.

RAUCHER: How did you do?

GREER: I got seven votes out of 550. [laughter] But you know what, though? That means six other people voted for me.

CRAWFORD: Yeah. That was good.

MICHELLE FECTEAU: Okay. This is Michelle Fecteau. I see that you're on the Civil Rights Committee. How did you get into this position, and what have you been able to do on that committee to make the situation better for other women?

GREER: Well, I interviewed for that committee. A lot of what we do is confidential, in that we hear grievances and we investigate grievances, so I really can't say anything about that. But I'm on the Women's Committee also, and I guess that's where I can make my views known publicly and be of more use publicly.

I've been on the Women's Committee now for five years. Every year we put on a women's luncheon, where we have doctors and lawyers and financial advisors and everybody come in and speak on issues that are dear and near. My mom's cancer doctor came in to talk about breast cancer for two years. We've had Karmanos [Cancer Institute] down there. This year we had Bank One come for financial planning for women, because a lot of women rely on their husband's incomes, and then when they don't have them, they're stuck. So we had that. We've had the Michigan Diabetes Education and all that down there.

RAUCHER: The Women's Committee is for all the women in the plant, or does your local cover more than one plant?

GREER: No, we just cover one plant, Rawsonville.

RAUCHER: What's the local?

GREER: 898.

CRAWFORD: But your Women's Committee is not only production, but also skilled tradeswomen?

GREER: Yeah, it's everybody. I'm the only skilled trades on the Women's Committee.

CRAWFORD: How many women work in the plant altogether? Do you have a lot of women, or not? Less than half?

GREER: Yeah, less than half.

RAUCHER: You said there were a total of how many workers in the plant?

GREER: We've got 2,200. I'd say it's sixty/forty. But on trades, there's 550 men, and I think we're down to about thirteen women. So we're pretty scarce.

FECTEAU: Have you been able to do anything on the Women's Committee to promote more women going into the trades?

GREER: Well, we just had a trades test about six months ago, and they put together their own committee to do that. I talked to everybody that I know to take the test. But the women on the Women's Committee didn't feel that they wanted to focus in on just that. Since they're not on trades, that's not really something that they wanted to pursue. But they did have a separate committee that headed up trying to get more women to sign up for the trades test. And they used me. I wrote a little article and told people to come talk to me, and I had quite a few come talk to me.

CRAWFORD: So what do you see as your — I mean, you haven't worked there that long, what, five . . .

GREER: Six years.

CRAWFORD: Do you see yourself staying there until retirement or until the plant closes?

GREER: Well, I have a transfer in to go back to Ford, because we're part of that Visteon spin-off, so they gave us the option to pick a Ford facility and sign up for it. Whether they move us or not, I don't know. I'm in school full time at Eastern [Michigan University] right now for pre-law, and actually I'd like to go to law school and get out of Ford. So [laughs] I don't want to do thirty years there.

CRAWFORD: What kept you in the first year and a half or the first couple years when you were all by yourself there and things were tough?

GREER: Oh, because I'm stubborn. [laughter] I didn't like the area, I don't like the guys I had to work with, but I'll be damned if they run me out. So I was there to stay. There was nowhere else I could have gone. They had to deal with me or not deal with me, so either way I was happy about that. They can't do anything to me. They can't get rid of me. They can't make me move to another area, so they're stuck with me.

CRAWFORD: So how are you able to go to school? You're working and you're going full time?

GREER: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: That must be a big load to carry.

GREER: Yeah, yeah.

CRAWFORD: Are you working midnights or afternoons?

GREER: No. I work days for the summer, right now. My summer starts Monday. I work from 7:00 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon. Actually, I'm taking unpaid time for three days a week so I can go to school from 3:30 to 5:30. Then I

have another class from 7:30 to 9:30, and then I have a class on Wednesdays from 7:00 to 10:00. So that'll be for eight weeks. But I go to school, usually, four nights a week.

CRAWFORD: With the injuries that you had in that accident, I mean, you must still have some residual problems?

GREER: Oh, yeah.

CRAWFORD: Is that a factor in not wanting to do thirty years there, besides the other workers?

GREER: Yeah. There's not a millwright in there that doesn't have back problems. I mean, that's just a fact of life. We do bull work, and when you do bull work, your body is going to pay the price. And not to mention the chemicals we work with. I don't know how many guys in my six years there have died of cancer. So that's a factor. The danger of the job, that's a factor. And I've done it. I've been there, now [laughs] let's move on. I did what I wanted to do. So I don't want to stop setting goals for myself. And as far as having political ambitions in that plant, that's not going to happen.

RAUCHER: Was there anything you enjoy particularly about the job?

GREER: Oh, I like fabrication. I like fixing machines. I like working with machines. I like driving the heavy machinery and working on the cranes and stuff. I like my job, what I do. I just enjoy it. I like looking up and, "Oh, I put that building in." That's pretty neat to tell people that you put that building up and you did this on it and everything.

CRAWFORD: You said you were an athlete pretty much throughout your entire life. But were you prepared for the physical challenges that came with this job?

GREER: No. I don't think anybody is when they start. I mean, right off the bat, here's two eighty-pound bags of concrete, go carry them over there. I don't know who comes in prepared to do that. Plus, I hadn't done any of that kind of job before. I wasn't prepared to climb up top of a machine and rig anything off of it, and climb on top of a building and do this. You just don't do those things in normal life — at least I don't. [laughs] So no, I wasn't prepared for it totally, and I don't think there'll ever come a point in time where I'll say, "Well, I have enough strength now," because you can always use more strength. There's always one stubborn bolt that no one can break, so you always can use more strength.

RAUCHER: Did your dad encourage you to go into the plant?

GREER: Yeah.

RAUCHER: How did your mom feel?

GREER: She felt good about it, because there's hardly any other place where a young person can make that kind of money and have that kind of stable job without a college degree, just going into work. So she was happy I was getting out on my own and making a life for myself. She felt a little apprehensive about me being a millwright, because she had seen the effects on my dad and the guys that he knows that would come over and stuff. I think she's still a little apprehensive about me being on trades.

RAUCHER: The women that you work with, are they also in school and planning to do something else or are they in it for the duration?

GREER: My partner, she already has a business degree from EMU. I don't know, she doesn't have any plans to continue in school or anything, but she says she doesn't want to work there for thirty years. So I'm not sure what her plans are. And the

electricians, one of them wants to work at least until her kids get out of school. She started it a little later in life, so she doesn't want to be there for thirty years. And then the other ones are probably there for the duration, because they did it before they got hired into Ford's and that's what they're going to do the rest of their lives. We've had quite a few women that retired from there that have thirty years.

CRAWFORD: From the trades?

GREER: Yeah, we've had a few. Most of the women in trades, though, went on when they were in their late thirties or early forties. They didn't go on as young as I did or as young as my partner did.

CRAWFORD: You mean they started as millwrights later?

GREER: Well, yeah. All of the women millwrights are under thirty. There's three of us. The other women, most of them had fifteen, twenty years in the plant before they got their apprenticeship, besides the ones they hired in off the street that had already had their cards. But none of them had the opportunity to go on trades when they were just hired in.

CRAWFORD: You think most of them are there because of the money?

GREER: I'd say there's probably no other reason to be there. [laughter]

FECTEAU: You like your job.

GREER: Oh, yeah, yeah, I like my job. We're there for a paycheck, too.

CRAWFORD: Well, if the management and some of your co-workers were not so unpleasant and degrading, if they were nice people and you felt respected, even though it's a dirty environment and heavy and hard, do you think that you would want to stay there?

GREER: Yeah, I don't see any harm in staying there. I don't have a hatred of it or nothing.

CRAWFORD: I mean, do you feel like it's the people that make you feel encouraged to go on and leave?

GREER: Yeah, I would say that. I would say if everybody were to retire tomorrow and I could hand-pick who I work with, why would I leave? I got it all right here. I mean, that's not a reality. But a lot of it is the people. It's not the work. We can all do the work — it's the people you have to consistently deal with on a day-to-day basis. And a lot of it lately is the management people that they're hiring. And the co-workers, a lot of these guys that have been there for thirty, forty years. They're not changing their ways. [laughs]

RAUCHER: But you think if there were more leadership on management's part that there might be a different environment in the plant?

GREER: Oh, definitely.

FECTEAU: You mentioned that you couldn't see yourself moving up politically happening. If you could move up politically, would that be a reason to stay?

GREER: Definitely.

FECTEAU: When you said "politically," you mean within the union, correct?

GREER: Yes.

FECTEAU: So you would like to be more involved with the labor movement?

GREER: Yeah. That's what I'd like to do with law school, is go into labor law. But definitely, if I could — I'm considered a very radical person [laughs] and that's just

definitely not an appeal to anybody there. Maybe it might be different if I were male, but I wouldn't even go that far.

RAUCHER: But your politics are too radical for the mainstream union.

GREER: Yeah, basically, I'd like to disable the old boys club. [laughs] And there's too many people still there that hold those values dear to their hearts.

RAUCHER: Even the young boys?

GREER: Oh, yeah, yeah.

CRAWFORD: Do you feel there's any part of the old boys' network that got you the job, because your father worked there?

GREER: I'd say absolutely, because he was a skilled trades committeeman for twelve years. And I've always said that the people that hate me are the people that helped me out. I mean, the worse they treat me, the more I'm stubborn enough to say, "Well, you have to deal with me now." But yeah, my dad got me the application because . . .

CRAWFORD: Because he could.

GREER: Yeah, he could.

RAUCHER: So not anybody who wants an application can get an application?

GREER: No, they have a drawing for them. There's so few jobs.

CRAWFORD: So what was your best day on the job that you've ever had?

GREER: Hmm.

RAUCHER: A good day.

GREER: Probably about two summers ago when we had a big project. We have our own waste water treatment plant. Anything that goes — not sewage, but where all of

our coolants and oils and everything, what the cleaners clean, those all go out to our own plant. We treat them before they go into the sewers. And we had this big summer-long project. And they decided, "Hey, we've got six millwright apprentices and this is all millwright work. We're going to make this a complete apprentice job." So they gave us two journeymen and six of us apprentices, and we did this job all summer. And it was fun. The journeymen just were hands-off. They kind of didn't let you screw up too bad — so we didn't cost them any material that way — but they let us have at it, and we finished it all and got it done. And we got to run all the machines. It was pretty neat when we got it all done.

RAUCHER: Were you the only woman millwright?

GREER: I was the only one on that project, yeah. We had another one. She was out there for a couple of weeks, but she didn't like working out there, so they let her go back into the plant. So I stayed out there. It was a fun time.

RAUCHER: And conversely, what's been one of your worst days on the job?

GREER: Hmm. Probably any of the days having to take my boss up front, because that's just not a good situation. You know, the boss gets on you, your co-workers get on you. Especially the one boss, everyone liked him. Everyone thought he was a great guy. You know, he's a guys' kind of guy, plays hockey and dyes his hair blonde. [laughter] But he's a guy kind of guy, and yeah, everyone loved him. And here I am ruining all their fun. And you know, "He didn't mean it that way! Glen's a great guy! We go drinking with him after work!" So, yeah, having to deal with that.

And there's been jobs where I couldn't have done them by myself. And you never want to tell anybody that you can't do something, and then you got to go get help.

And, "Oh, she's got to go get her reinforcements." That kind of lowers your confidence level hugely when that happens.

CRAWFORD: Was there a lot of competition between the apprentices? Competition to look good, or what kind of competition?

GREER: Yeah, who could learn what the quickest, who could be picked by the good journeymen to go on jobs with, who got the best areas, who got the best shifts, who was partnered up with who, who finished the quickest, who got the best grades in school. Everything was a little competition, which I guess is healthy, because of the five of us that went on — there was five millwrights that went on together — all five of us did all of our apprenticeships with just over three years, and none of us had below a "B" in any of our classes. So I would say for us that was kind of a healthy thing.

RAUCHER: I've got a question, Denise, about who you socialize with off the job. I mean, do you go to the bar with the folks you work with, or no?

GREER: The current people I work with, no. I'm not on a social level with any of them at all.

RAUCHER: Including the women.

GREER: Including the women. One of the female electrician apprentices is on the Civil Rights Committee with me, and that'd be all from the people that I currently work with. I'm dating another millwright from there, so I hang out with him. [laughter] And I have two close friends. One is a pipefitter. She's our only female pipefitter. And then another one is a stationary steam engineer, and she just graduated last week.

RAUCHER: Graduated?

GREER: The apprenticeship. So that's really all the people I hang out with. I hang out with my parents. They live up north. I still go on motorcycle trips with my dad. We go every Memorial Day to Nashville, so I'm getting ready to do that. We both have motorcycles. But that's really all my social life. [laughs] I go to school. I hunt. I'm going in August to South Africa with my boyfriend and my dad to go hunting, so that'll be fun.

FECTEAU: I was wondering how you'd get it back on the plane?

GREER: Actually, we're going to have them done there, and then they'll just ship them cargo to us.

FECTEAU: How do you relate with the other students in your classes? I'm just curious, in your campus life at Eastern Michigan where you're going, what that must be like for you, your experience and your contributions to classes, as opposed to some of the other kids and undergrads in class?

GREER: Well, going through Washtenaw in the apprenticeship, everybody was in the same boat you were. Everybody was working overtime, and you could complain about your bosses. And "I didn't get this done because this happened." And "Oh, yeah, I know what you're talking about."

Eastern is different. I'm taking night classes, because I'm on day shift, so some of the people in there have jobs, but not permanent types of jobs. They're working here or there — they work at a coffee shop because it's a part-time thing. And there have been a few adults that had normal, everyday jobs, and them I relate to fine.

I took a women's studies class, and there were three of us that had jobs and the rest were right out of high school. And I had very differing views [laughs] from the other ones — not the ones that were working, but the younger ones.

FECTEAU: How were they different?

GREER: One of the things we discussed was women and power and have women really gained a lot of powerful people in the last fifty years. And the one girl said, "Absolutely. I mean, we have so many powerful women that are running this and that and this and that." I'm like, "Okay, well, how many women are on the Fortune 500 that are CEO's?" "Uh." "Okay, how many women presidents do we have? How many women do we have in Congress itself? Things have gotten better, but I sure wouldn't say . . ." Because the thing came out, "Oh, the men are scared of women." Well, they're not. [laughs]

I guess that would deal a lot with politics, but we differed a lot on that and differed a lot on women making less than men. A lot of them didn't believe that if you had the same title that they could pay you less. They didn't believe that. "Well, I work at McDonald's and I make six dollars just like he does." "Okay, well, we're not talking about that." So different views in that way.

And then in my political science classes, obviously I cannot side with the Republican view and I cannot side with a business view. And so I've been in some heated discussions over different things like OSHA and the forty-hour work weeks and that kind of thing where people get real touchy on those kinds of subjects, especially when they're a business owner. [laughter]

And once in a while I'll wear a UAW [United Auto Workers] T-shirt in there, and I always get comments. And I think the union persona turns a lot of people off in higher education.

RAUCHER: Even at Eastern Michigan?

GREER: Oh yeah, definitely. I think they get a stereotype of me if I wear a UAW shirt.

CATHY DAWSON: What kind of comments do they make?

GREER: Well, I went in there a couple weeks ago in my coveralls. I had an appointment to see an instructor that was only there in the morning. And I got called a "grease monkey."

RAUCHER: By whom?

GREER: Just some kid passing me in the hall. [laughs] But as far as the teachers, I've had a couple of teachers tell me if the class work is too hard for me to let them know.

DAWSON: How generous.

GREER: And I'm just like, "Oh, okay. Thanks. I'll be able to do it." Or they automatically assume, I think, that I'm just going to like, breeze through the class and be lazy about it. And a couple of them have told me, "You know, you do have to do homework in this class." "Oh, okay."

And then, of course I've heard the comments, "Well, those of us that actually pay for our school," because the UAW gives us education benefits. We get $4,800 a year to spend on school. It can be college, or if you want to take a mechanics class, go take it.

You want to get your cosmetology license, go get it. But I've had that kind of comment, too, that, "We're paying for our school and you're not."

CRAWFORD: So that's kind of widely known?

GREER: There it is, because I think there's enough of us that a lot of them know it. Or if they've ever worked in any of the offices there, they see our vouchers come through, that kind of thing. Or maybe their parents — I've had a lot where their parents have worked — in fact I've been in classes where I work with their parents.

And that's another thing, the age difference. I'm twenty-six years old, and I'll sit next to somebody that's thirty and go, "Oh, my God, they're so young." Because the average age of a guy that I work with is fifty-five to sixty or older. So I get around a bunch of chatting eighteen-year-olds and I'm pulling my hair out, because I just don't have to deal with it any other time, and it's so . . . Even the friends I went to college with, I got with them over the holidays and I was like, "Oh, you guys are crazy. You guys are wild." And they're like, "What?" Just because I don't get exposed to that a lot anymore.

RAUCHER: Can you talk a little bit more about your experiences with the UAW in the plant and your work on these committees and how that went?

GREER: Sure.

RAUCHER: I mean, does the union make any attempt to seek out people like you, women in the trades, to help them mentor or bring in more women into the trades?

GREER: No, I don't see that happening at all.

CRAWFORD: Do you have any women officers in your plant?

GREER: Secretary-treasurer and one district committeeman for production, and yeah, that's it.

FECTEAU: At Ford's, is there some diversity committee or something like that?

GREER: Well, they just started the diversity training in our plant. And I haven't been through it yet, so I couldn't begin to tell you what it's about.

FECTEAU: Well, there was some sort of program to try to diversify the skilled trades particularly.

GREER: Yeah. Well, when we had our testing, there were posters put in the women's restrooms: "We need women in the trades. " They did have a woman on the committee to sign people up. They took our pictures and they let us write, you know, "I love my job," or "Being a millwright is great." [laughter] And they stuck your picture on a poster and they put it in the bathroom. [laughter] And that's the only place they put any of these posters were the women's bathrooms. Otherwise there is not a thing that they do to encourage women to get on trades, there's not a thing.

They don't encourage them to run for office in the plant. They're not encouraged to join committees, even the Women's Committee. I don't know, we're just — we're there. Make your parts and go home. [laughs] I really didn't feel they did much at all to try to get women to sign up for the test.

CRAWFORD: Are there very many African Americans or other ethnic groups in your plant?

GREER: In the plant there is, not on trades.

CRAWFORD: The trades are mostly white?

GREER: Yeah.

FECTEAU: Could you kind of break it down, like what are the major non-white groups of all the trades?

GREER: Four or five African Americans.

FECTEAU: Out of . . .?

GREER: 550.

RAUCHER: Men?

GREER: No, we have two females. One's an electrician apprentice and one is a stationary steam engineer, journeyman. Then we have one or two Hispanics. I think the rest would be Caucasian. Now, I don't deal a lot in the tool room, so there might be one or two up there, but if there was, it would be a shock, so I don't know.

CRAWFORD: Do you feel that the skilled trades in your plant would not be particularly welcoming to African Americans or Latinos or . . .?

GREER: I think African-American men would be all right. We have an African-American female and she's not very well taken to. And she's not outwardly — she's not like me, loud. If you tell me something I don't like, I'm going to let you know. She's not like that. She's not standoffish or anything; they just don't trust her to do the work. Hers isn't a personality conflict or anything, hers is they just plain don't trust her to do the work. Otherwise, there's not much diversity in trades whatsoever, considering there's only twelve or thirteen women total . . .

RAUCHER: But you say so many are old — they're going to have to start bringing in new people, right? They're going to have to start training younger people?

GREER: Yeah. That's not worked out yet, because we don't have an agreement, so we're not sure how that's going to work. We did have an apprenticeship

test. They have an apprenticeship list. But with the amount of people that's retiring — we have eighty-four millwrights and we just had six retire. They can't replace them with apprentices — that's too many. So with the amount of people retiring, they're going to have to hire or just not replace them at all. Out of eighty millwrights, over forty could go today, and that's just millwright trade.

CRAWFORD: Because of the age?

GREER: Yeah. Because of the layoffs and everything in the '70s and '80s, you either have thirty years or you have ten years. There's nothing in between.

RAUCHER: But you don't see any movement by the union or the company to deal with this problem?

GREER: I don't, not firsthand, no. I know they did put up signs for women. I know they didn't put up any signs specifically going out there to try to get minorities. I would have seen them had they done that. But I know they put signs out just for women.

CRAWFORD: Would you encourage or be willing to recruit other women to get into the trades in your plant?

GREER: Absolutely.

CRAWFORD: What would you say to them to encourage them?

GREER: It's a great job, and you're more employable with a card than you are having worked production. There's job security in it. There's pride in your job in it. You can look at things you've done and you're fixing things that people are relying on. I mean, there's a lot of self-pride that comes with the job. And you don't get that on production a lot. They're there to get their parts out and go home.

Plus, trades is kind of like the elite in the plant. You're not as elite as your elected officials, but you're that notch above, so that carries with it a lot of pride. In a plant of 2,200, we're maybe a quarter of that, so you're joining a close-knit group. But I do tell them, "Have thick skin," [laughs] and "Comments are going to be said about you, and just push them off and do your job."

RAUCHER: You haven't been in the trades for very long, but have you noticed any change in attitudes of men towards women in the trades over the period that you've been there? Has it gotten any better? Has it gotten worse, or it's just stayed the same?

GREER: I don't think it's changed a lot. Like I said, with the seniority, a lot of the older women had been on for a while — and then there's like eight of us that are new — and they said they hadn't noticed anything that's gotten better. I used two of them as mentors, and they said they haven't noticed a big change. Everything that I say, "Yeah, that's happened to me," and they said that, honestly, they haven't seen it change.

In the five years I've been on, there's been, well, two millwrights before me. I'm the last female millwright to come on. But we've had three machine repair females come on and they're not having any easier time than I did. I don't think they're having a worse time, but no one has really gone out there and changed their life and embraced the fact yet.

DAWSON: Do you have a zero tolerance policy in your company?

GREER: On paper.

DAWSON: On paper. I can believe that. [laughter]

CRAWFORD: You've read that paper, haven't you? [laughter]

FECTEAU: I'm going to step back a little bit. You mentioned your activities within the union that you've been involved with. Are there any other outside organizations that you're connected with or you're active with that tell a little bit more about who you are?

GREER: Yeah. I belong to CLUW, the Coalition of Labor Union Women.

RAUCHER: Do you attend CLUW meetings?

GREER: When I can. My school schedule didn't really allow me to get there on Tuesdays.

RAUCHER: Anything outside of Detroit? Do you go to any of the regional or national CLUW meetings? Or even tradeswomen meetings?

GREER: No. I don't know if they have a tradeswomen division. I've gone to the AFL-CIO Working Women's Conference, and I got with their Trades Division there and did that. That was an a unique experience.

RAUCHER: What was it like?

GREER: That was great, because there just wasn't trades in the plant. We had two bricklayers from Austin, Texas, and I'd kill to have their biceps. [laughter] I mean, these women were just huge, and they were all muscle. They were friends through high school. And they went on the apprenticeship together after high school as one of these forced diversity things. They had pictures of them in high school, just these little petite women, and I mean, they are muscular. And that was great, because I'd just gone on the apprenticeship. [laughter] That was great. It was people from all over the country, and that was great to get to hear their stories.

But I've gone to the University of Michigan Summer School For Women Workers — this will be my sixth year going there. I got to teach last year. I taught the diversity class. I ran a roundtable for skilled tradeswomen there. And I thought that was a good success. We had quite a few women from 200-hour apprentices all the way up to thirty-year journeymen, so we had a good time.

RAUCHER: What were some of the problems and the issues that were important to them?

GREER: Well, besides learning to deal with your co-workers, one of them was, "Where is our future coming from? How are we getting more women in trades? How are we getting them young enough to where they're thinking about going in the trades?" In my plant, we did a "Day in the Plant" with a middle school. And we brought them in, and they let Liz and I walk a group around.

And the girls were more concerned about the way we were dressed [laughter] and that we were dirty than they were with what kind of job we had. And when we told them we ran machinery, they were, "I don't want to do that," and, "Ooh, it's noisy in here," and "Ooh, it's dirty in here." And it got to the point that I said, "You know what? Your parents don't make the money I do. I don't wash my clothes and I can look like whatever I want when I leave. You don't know what you're turning down when you block this out."

And just getting women to where that's a feasible thing for them to want to do, you know, there's nothing wrong with doing mechanical work. I think everyone is pushing for tech, tech, tech. You've still got to have people out there doing the work.

FECTEAU: Do you think that was just those girls who are like that or do you think that it's more like that now than when you were younger?

GREER: No, I think it's a generation thing. I think this started way before my generation, because when we were going through school, they never said anything about having a manual labor job, except that's what you did if you dropped out of high school. Like my friend Lori, she's a fitter and she's got three kids. Her daughter is seventeen, and her daughter just thinks we're grubby. She doesn't understand why we want to work in a factory. To be honest with you, I didn't understand why my dad worked in a factory, and that's why I wanted to go to college. I flat out told him I did not want to be a factory rat. Of course, I ate those words. [laughs]

But I mean, that's not given to you as an option, that you can do that kind of thing, even when I graduated high school in '95. So that was pretty recent, and no one said anything about getting a manual labor job. If you didn't get good grades, you were going to get a manual labor job. So I think that's a huge concern.

FECTEAU: So you said the women in the trades group was searching for answers about what could be done to get more women in. You mentioned trying to take young women around. Are there any other things specifically that you think could be done, and I'm thinking of by the union, and maybe by management, but to separate the two? What do you think?

GREER: Well, I know the training video that comes out, or the first video for the potential apprentices, they have one or two women. [laughs] And personally, I think that video turns a lot of them off, because they show them doing weird stuff — if you weren't used to it, you'd say it was weird. I mean, they're hanging from steel doing

something, and they're cutting with a torch. I think women could be approached differently than men, and I don't think it would hurt to take a different approach. When they did the apprenticeship, the posters and everything, I just thought that was the cheesiest thing in the world.

FECTEAU: What approach would you take?

GREER: I would — and I asked to do it and got turned down — I wanted to have it where all of us took the day off and went down to the local and had the women that wanted to know more about the trades just come talk to us in a setting like that, so they weren't hearing from some guy that had been a millwright for thirty years what it's like to be a female millwright, because he has no clue. And I can ask you about your job, and I'm not going to have the same experience, but mine might be closer than his will.

And I mean, a lot of them don't know that we're out there, because we sometimes don't have a lot of face-to-face interaction with production. And they might not know that we're out there. They do just see the men working on the — especially if they're on the off-shifts, I don't think there's many women at all on off-shifts. So if they're on an off-shift, they might not even know we're there.

As far as in the plant, I think that approach could be taken. Education-wise, we just need more women in engineering and sciences and math all around. So I mean, it definitely starts as early as elementary school when the boys are good in math and the girls are good in English.

RAUCHER: So who is it that turned down this idea?

GREER: The Joint Apprenticeship Committee.

RAUCHER: Which is union-wide, or for your plant?

GREER: It's one company rep, one union rep, inside the plant.

DAWSON: Did they give you a reason why?

GREER: They didn't think it would go over. They thought the posters and the questions and answers with them would be enough. And they were worried that we might not have the right answer.

FECTEAU: Is there something that management could do to get more women or keep more women? It sounds like your suggestion was something that the union or the Joint Apprenticeship program could have been doing. Is there any other program that you could recommend to management?

GREER: The company could own up to their own rules. If the company didn't allow us to be harassed continuously and promote bosses that do it, more women would be apt to say, "Yeah, I wouldn't mind taking a little bit." But when they push the line, I don't want to have to deal with that. So if the company could own up to their end of the bargain and enforce zero tolerance, it would be more attractive.

Because there have been women that have come on that have quit. A woman electrician quit, because of the number of comments about her breast size. So if the company could own up — and that's a management responsibility there — I think it would make everybody's life better, the men and the women's.

RAUCHER: Are there any women in the plant management?

GREER: No, we don't have any plant, well, any area managers. I think the highest is a production superintendent. We don't have any women in trades management. And I don't think we have very many women up front besides the secretarial staff.

FECTEAU: Even in human resources?

GREER: Yeah. All of our human resource reps are men.

DAWSON: Have there been like any lawsuits or anything towards the company for discrimination?

GREER: Yeah. There's one right now, Ford-wide, for their apprenticeship, for failure to diversify. And the NAACP filed that.

DAWSON: For trying to get into the skilled trades, and they're having difficulty.

GREER: Yeah.

FECTEAU: You said that's all of Ford?

GREER: Yeah. That's come down the trickle as to why nobody is getting any new apprentices right now.

RAUCHER: When was the NAACP suit filed, do you know how long ago?

GREER: Probably before the contract.

RAUCHER: Which would have been?

GREER: Last year sometime.

FECTEAU: Is it based on race, or race and gender? Do you know?

GREER: I'm not sure of the specifics. We're a pretty progressive plant — a lot of the other plants don't have this many women, or at least not in the trades that we have, I've never run into another female millwright from any of the other Ford locals. I know Livonia has five or six. But Milan and Saline, they don't have any. The guys I went through the apprenticeship with, none of them have to work with women at all.

CRAWFORD: They don't have to. [laughter] You said you have a Women's Committee and I know that in a lot of UAW plants there are women's committees. Is

there a regional conference or meeting that women from those women's committees go to?

GREER: Yeah. I go. The Region 1A Women's Council is in January, and I've gone four years to that. But they don't have anything trade-specific. There's not enough of us to push one.

RAUCHER: What do they do at those Women's Council meetings?

GREER: They have different classes, usually presented by somebody from the region, whether it be politics or, even like, family matters. One of them, the whole thing was understanding FMLA. So, the kind of issues that you need to get through everyday life in the plant. With Ford, we get so many benefits, a lot of people don't even understand your benefit package. So some of the classes deal with just understanding your benefits. And Region 1A is primarily all auto workers, so they can pretty much be across-the-board with it.

RAUCHER: Do you think maybe the union could do more to bring skilled tradeswomen together somehow in some sort of a forum? I mean, there's a UAW Skilled Trades Conference as well, right? Is there a women's group in that at all?

GREER: No. I don't think any of us have ever been invited. Those are appointed positions to go to that.

RAUCHER: Really?

GREER: Yeah. We have a Skilled Trades Advisory Council, and there's no women on it.

RAUCHER: So only delegates or representatives go?

GREER: Yeah. They must have lost my invite in the mail [laughter]. Or any of us [laughs] — they're lost in the mail.

RAUCHER: But you really don't know other UAW tradeswomen outside of the plant where you work.

GREER: Not unless I run into them at Summer School or Winter Leadership. U of M runs Winter Leadership, the Latino Conference, Black Men in Unions and the Summer School, so if I run into them there . . . But I haven't run into that many of them. They're just . . .

CRAWFORD: Scarce.

GREER: They're just not there. When I do, we sit down and pick each other's brains for the time we have, and then that's that. That's why at Summer School, the roundtables are important, because we did attract, I think, like, ten or twelve of us — and they had to kick us out of the room, because we just didn't want to leave.

FECTEAU: The stories are interesting.

GREER: Yes. [laughs]

RAUCHER: Yeah, that's what we want to capture on this tape — those great stories. So if you have any, feel free. Were there any other questions? Or is there anything that you wanted to add, Denise, that you think we've missed?

GREER: I kind of focused on negativity, and my life is not all negative. And trades is not all negative, and it is a wonderful experience. But you do have to have thick skin. And I don't think anybody is in the position they are because they weren't thick-skinned. [laughs] If you have a journeyman's card, automatically you have been stubborn, you have been a pain in people's ass, [laughter] and that's just how it is. I think

it's a badge of pride just to say you did it. I would encourage anybody, if they want to make a better life for themselves or they want to make better money — just overall a better life for you, the pride in it and everything — to go do it.

RAUCHER: Well, thank you, Denise.

GREER: Thank you.