Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with

T. M.
Roofing Contractor

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Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs
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Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with T. M.

MARGARET RAUCHER: The Tradeswomen Oral History Project is here at the Reuther Library on March 21st, 2005 to interview T. M., a roofer and many other things. And I'd like to start off the questioning asking her about her life before she entered the trades, when she was born, where, what her childhood was like and her family, that sort of thing.

T. M.: Well, I was raised in Trenton, Michigan. I went all through school in Trenton schools. But I also did a lot of my growing up in Flat Rock, where my family had a business, an auto repair shop and parts facility. So I spent a lot of time down there.

I started working early, when I was eight, changing tires for my dad, and stayed in the business with him until I was nineteen, along with doing some other things. I became a licensed hairdresser in that time. I was a disc jockey in a bar.

I have one sister and two brothers. All of us are within eleven months of each other, so we're a pretty close-knit group. Mom and Dad raised all of us to do everything. The boys can crochet and knit and cook and I can change your oil and fix your carburetor and put a roof on your house.

So basically, growing up was fast. We didn't have much of a childhood — very sports-oriented. Mom kept us busy to keep us out of trouble. And if we weren't in sports, we were working.

MICHELLE FECTEAU: So was your mother someone who worked outside the home or who did nontraditional types of work, whether she was paid for it or not?

T. M.: Mom worked in the family business when needed, but most of the time she was home with us. With four kids, that kept her pretty busy, yeah, keeping us out of trouble. And Dad ran the business. As we got older, Mom would work the business when he needed help. Because my father bought the business from my grandfather, naturally, when they took it over, Mom had to go in and help. She did mostly the bookkeeping and things like that, but she also waited on customers. She didn't know a lot about cars, but she dealt with people until Dad could get to them.

RAUCHER: Are you the oldest?

T. M.: I am the second oldest. I have a brother eleven months older than I am and a sister eleven months younger. And I have another brother eleven months behind her. And I was a twin to a boy that didn't make it. Dad always said that the wrong one came out [laughs], but I got the best of both worlds that way.

RAUCHER: So then, you spent your childhood pretty much around the business, learning the business from your dad?

T. M.: Yeah, in retail, in tires and repairing cars and auto parts, and mainly dealing with people — sales is what I did as a child. I always thought I was twenty when I was eight.

ELAINE CRAWFORD: How close did you guys live to the business?

T. M.: About seven miles. We lived in Trenton, the business was in Flat Rock. So it wasn't that far away. As a matter of fact, back then, at eight or nine years old, we used to ride our bikes that seven miles down there. I wouldn't let my eight- or nine-year-old down the block without my permission now. And we used to hop on our bicycles and ride down to the shop so we could work. And back then, if you made a quarter a day,

you were doing good, you were doing real good. Fifty cents on a Saturday, and you worked eight hours to get that fifty cents.

RAUCHER: Can I ask when you were born?

T. M.: 7/2/63.

RAUCHER: Would you kind of call yourself a tomboy when you were growing up?

T. M.: Yeah, pretty much. Actually, I really didn't figure out that I was a girl until Mom made me wear a bra when I was thirteen. I don't think Dad figured it out until then either. But I was Daddy's little girl and his helper, so yeah, I was a bit of a tomboy. Played football and sports with the guys, and was better than most of them, worked on the cars and what-have-you. So yeah, I would definitely say tomboy.

FECTEAU: Did you play organized sports?

T. M.: Yeah. I was a competition swimmer from the time I was six until I was sixteen. I played softball. I was the first girl in Trenton High history to be on the boy's F League, which was kind of by accident.

FECTEAU: What's F League?

T. M.: F League is baseball, hardball baseball. I was out playing baseball with some of my friends and being younger, I had my hair up under a hat. It was long, but I always wore it under a hat. And the coach said, "Guys, come over here, we need some players." So we went over there. He never asked if I was a girl or not.

And we started playing, and I was lead second base for him. And then we got uniforms. And when we got the uniforms, you know, everybody is changing. And he looks at me and says, "Well, why aren't you changing? Your jewels too good for

anybody?" And I says, "Well, I ain't got no jewels." [laughter] Well, he about swallowed his cigar at that point. And that was like, two days before our first game that he finally figured out I was a girl.

And I ended up getting to play. It went to court and there was a big to-do in the papers and stuff back then about how a girl wasn't supposed to be playing boys' baseball and what-have-you. But I ended up getting to play. And the court ruling was that I had to wear a panty protector instead of a cup.

RAUCHER: A what?

T. M.: That's what they said. I never wore it, but that's what the court ruling was. And playing, naturally, I was great for batting, because either they hit me or I hit it. And when I hit it, I hit it far, or they would hit me, so I was always on base. So the coach loved that part. And I could play ball well.

CRAWFORD: So who initiated the lawsuit?

T. M.: The other parents.

CRAWFORD: To keep you off?

T. M.: Yeah, to keep me off. They weren't real happy back then about a girl — that was before coed gym and different things like that and girls just didn't play boys' baseball — they played girls' softball.

CRAWFORD: So who were your supporters? Your family?

T. M.: Yeah, my mom, naturally. But you know, a lot of the guys that were playing were the guys that I played ball with. The guys didn't have so much of a problem with it as their parents did. So, yeah, it was no big deal once we got through that little court deal and the newspaper publicity and what-have-you. I played just like I

always did. My hair was up under my hat, and half of them didn't know which one the girl was until you got up there, because I didn't look much like a girl then.

CRAWFORD: How long did the court case take? Did it keep you out of playing a season?

T. M.: No. It was just a city hearing type of thing. It wasn't like a big court deal or a federal issue. This was just a city league issue, for the Parks and Rec. And I think they discussed it and said, "Let her play" — that type of thing.

CRAWFORD: If she could do it, let her do it.

T. M.: Yeah. The coach said, "She's good, let her play."

FECTEAU: What year was that?

T. M.: Let's see, I would have been thirteen in F League, twelve, thirteen, so '74, '75. And even in the automotive field back then, there wasn't a lot of girls, aside from a little girl telling you what tires you should put on your car and then going back and taking your tires off the car, putting them on the machine and putting them back on your car. There weren't many women in auto parts. And there weren't women in the racing field, or not too many of them.

Archery was another thing that I did. You know, there were women archers, but not a lot of them. So most of the things I've done have been male-dominated or male-oriented, either sports or businesses, that type of thing.

FECTEAIU: Why do you think that is?

T. M.: Well, the competition with my brother. When I was young — and not to fault my mother, but my one brother was the oldest, my other brother was the youngest, so those were her babies. And she had said something to me years ago. I had started

smoking and she was really mad about that. I got grounded for a month of Sundays. And she, in yelling at me, said, "You'll never amount to anything, but your brother, Rob, will." So for the next thirty-five years, I've proved her wrong. So anything Rob can do . . .

CRAWFORD: I can do better.

T. M.: I can do, or do better.

CRAWFORD: Is your mother still alive?

T. M.: Yes she is. And I'm the first one she calls when she needs something done, not my brother. [laughter] And he also has a business, so you would think that she would call him, but she calls me first.

RAUCHER: What was it like going to high school being like this, I mean, not being maybe as interested in all the girl things? Or maybe you were, maybe high school changed you a little bit and you weren't so much of a tomboy?

T. M.: No, no. I was still a tomboy. But in high school you start looking like a girl and finding the advantages of being a girl in high school. And there are a lot of advantages to being a woman in doing what I do. Naturally, you're a minority, so you can get preferential treatment. By all means, if it's there, I'll take advantage of it. It was there in a lot of aspects and in other aspects it wasn't.

In high school, I liked boys. I chased them. On the other hand, a lot of times I was asked out on a date and found out it was only to fix the carburetor. [laughter] That wasn't really cool, but most of the guys I knew were fine.

And I got along with the girls, too. Like I said, I was in beauty school and got my hairdresser's license and I was in swimming and other sports. I played volleyball, I

played girls basketball, I played softball. So I was involved with the girls just as much as with the boys — marching band. So high school was really no big problem.

And me and my brother are still extremely close. In high school, there was one car for the family, so he drove or I drove, but we always had to share the car. So we were always going to lunch together. We were picking each other up from class and going here and there, because of the car. Plus we both went to work right after school.

So a lot of the teachers, not realizing our name's the same, figured we were boyfriend and girlfriend, because we got along so good. Now, we never held hands, all we did was pick each other up from class, but some people just assumed that we were boyfriend and girlfriend, because brother and sister don't get along like that. We also had a lot of the same friends, so we kind of just hung out together.

RAUCHER: Okay. You've graduated from high school. And then what?

T. M.: I graduated from high school. I was working with my father still, full-time down at the business. I moved out of home when I was seventeen, bought my first house when I was eighteen. Was on my third house by the time I was nineteen. [laughter] Found that buying and selling houses was fairly lucrative. That's how I basically started learning construction. You buy these houses, they need work. At that point, I didn't make enough to pay somebody to come and do it; hence, you get a book or whatever you need and you learn to do it yourself. Trial and error, basically, made you good at what you were doing.

At the time I was still working on cars, working in the shop, doing basically retail and sales. I had my car. The first car that I bought was a 446 Barracuda, which I raced at

Detroit Dragway in Milan. So we'd stay after and work on the cars late at night and then we'd take them out on weekends.

In doing that, I met other people. And actually, I ended up cutting hair for Ernie Petit of the Detroit Duster Wheelstander funny car, whose crew chief broke his leg right before the Jet Nationals. And he called me to see if I would crew for him. And he paid me well. So I took off for the weekend and ended up meeting the guy who would become my husband, who had just built a jet car. Next thing you know I was racing the jet car with him. For the next twelve years, we were on the road, traveling across the country, running the professional circuit with the jet cars.

RAUCHER: What was that like?

T. M.: Not as glamorous as it looks on TV. Going fast was great — these cars did 270 to 300 miles an hour in a quarter mile. The fire they blew out — the show was fantastic. And it was fun and exhilarating. You couldn't get that big a thrill anywhere else.

But on the road was hard. You were constantly running the car, packing it up. You were on the road getting to the next racetrack, eating out all the time in little dives. I've been all over the country and have never seen a thing except for racetrack and highway. I've been from one end of the country to the other numerous times and very rarely did we ever get a chance to do anything but race and drive.

RAUCHER: You drove the car, you were not a crew member?

T. M.: No. I crewed for the first few years. I was crew for him with the car. And then we built another car and he drove one and I drove the other. We were the first husband and wife racing team for the jets in the United States.

RAUCHER: Do you know — who is it — Shirley Muldowney?

T. M.: Yeah. As a matter of fact, I used to go out to Detroit Dragway when I was quite young, when I was about eleven, and Shirley was running out there back then. And I got to help clean her car off and ride down the track to retrieve the car.

RAUCHER: Then you've seen that film, *Heart Like a Wheel*.

T. M.: Yeah. It wasn't a real accurate portrayal of Shirley, but yeah, she was inspirational when I was young. And then I ended up getting married on the racetrack at the starting line of the Jet Nationals, my first marriage. We got married at the Nationals, right on the starting line. And Daddy Don Garlits — numerous big racers were there — Snake Prudhomme and all the jets. Shirley wasn't at that particular one.

But yeah, it made for an interesting life. But a lot of on-the-road. You were on the road nine months of out of the year, up late, ate at odd hours, basically worked your tail off with very little sleep, and drove the car.

RAUCHER: Were there very many women?

T. M.: Two. [laughter] Aggie Hendricks was licensed. She's Canadian. And then I was licensed. Rapid Fire and Heated Desire were our cars. And I think years ago, Sandra Sibley held a license, but she hadn't run in quite some time. So there were two women running.

Now I think there's a couple more, but I've been out of it now for enough years that I haven't kept up with it.

RAUCHER: So you did that for, what, twelve years? After you graduated from high school. So into your thirties, then, right?

T. M.: Yeah. And at the same time, I ended up with other jobs, other businesses. We also had a high performance shop for repairing and building race cars and repairing regular cars. I ran an auto parts store while I was down in Rittman, Ohio. I also drove a school bus for Rittman when I was in town. I've waitressed. A friend of ours bought a restaurant and needed some help. So in the midst of all that I would waitress for him when he needed help. I had a trucking company that we ran in the midst of all of this. So I've done numerous things, when I was down there.

CRAWFORD: And did you have children during that first twelve years?

T. M.: No, no. I don't have any children of my own. I did help raise a stepson and partially help raise a stepdaughter during my first marriage. Then I came back up here. I remained unmarried for a few years. And then I met my current husband, who has a son and a daughter, but they were grown. But I call them mine anyway. It's good, because they're older, and I say, "My son and daughter," and they go, "Wow, she looks good for her age." [laughter]

RAUCHER: Well, you folks want to go ahead and ask any questions? I mean, I suppose we need to get into the part where you learned how to be a roofer, right?

T. M.: My specialty is roofing. I do roofing and building. I'm actually a general contractor, so there's not a whole lot I can't do as far as building. And like I said, it was out of necessity, learning. When I was down in Rittman, I bought a 200-year-old Victorian, six-bedroom — they called it a mansion. At the time I considered it bigger than what I grew up in, but not a mansion.

But it took seven years of a labor of love putting it back together, from stripping wood to refinishing rosettes, to redoing walls. And I learned electrical with that house

and plumbing and foundation repair and all sorts of good things. So I mean, that led into a lot of the repair business and knowing what I'm doing.

A lot of it I learned from books. If I've got to know something, even today, I go to a book and I learn it. I've always had mechanical ability and the ability to work with my hands. So if I can read it and I can see it, I can do it.

Then I came back after my divorce and needed a place to live. My mother was living with my grandmother, and her house was sitting empty. It needed a lot of repair. And she says, "Well, you can live there if you fix it up." So I was doing that. And in the midst of that, the Knights Inn needed some Jacuzzi rooms built. So to make extra money, I went and built their Jacuzzi rooms for them.

When I got done with that, I came back and continued to work on the house. My brother had started a roofing company. And if you've ever had a roofing company or know anything about it, you know you lose crews and then you get them back, and then you lose a crew and then you get another crew — probably like in any construction work.

Well, he had just lost his whole crew right in the middle of a season. And he called me up and said, "Man, I need help for just two weeks. Just come and help me for two weeks." Well, eight years later I was still running his crews for him.

And then I remarried, and my new husband said, "If you don't want to work, you don't have to work." And I thought, "Wow, how nice is that? This is going to be wonderful." So I stayed home and cleaned the house for, gosh, at least a month, and I couldn't take it anymore. So I started my own company, went back to work.

And in doing that, my reputation was still there from working with new methods all those years, as the "woman roofer." They still knew who I was. And strictly referral,

one house led to another house, which led to another house, which led to my association with Owens Corning, because I'm one of the few that do slate and slate repairs.

Their new product, MiraVista Slate, came out. And they had a big project up in West Bloomfield. I was scheduled to do this church in New Boston, had the full crew and everybody there to go, and they put a hold on it. So then I thought, here I've got the whole crew ready to go, I've got all the equipment ready and we're going to have to call it a day.

And I got a phone call from Owens Corning that said, "Boy, we got this big house up here, we're in a bind, our contractor walked out on us" — because it was a new product, nobody was real familiar with it. "You said you knew how to do slate. If you could help us out, we would greatly appreciate it on this one." And I thought, "Well, we're not doing anything. Guys, get in the truck."

And we drove up to Bloomfield Hills and ended up putting this roof on for them. And from start to finish, Owens Corning treated us great. It was basically a real well-paid learning experience. And from that job I ended up with eight, nine, ten other jobs of this MiraVista — I mean, people bringing their blueprints right to a job site with it.

RAUCHER: Is it real slate?

T. M.: It's an artificial slate. They call it a lightweight. Owens Corning no longer makes it. But there's numerous other companies now that make it. And the secret isn't so much in putting it on — although it's very time consuming and labor intensive, very expensive — it's knowing how to bid the jobs. And because I did the job originally when they paid for everything, now I know exactly what it takes to do the job. So I was

one of the only ones that knew how to bid this stuff to where you'd make money and not lose it right off the bat.

So because of that house, I got a nice article in *Roofing Contractor* magazine. I got a lot of PR from it, and from that PR, people kind of figure I'm the expert, I guess. People see the article on the Web site and call me.

RAUCHER: Going back to when you first started working for your brother, do you have to be licensed or anything like that? I mean, could you just say, "I know how to do it," and go do the job?

T. M.: When you're working for somebody, whoever is pulling the permit, the owner of the company, has to be licensed. My brother had his license then. When I left him to start my own company, naturally I had to go get my own license, because you've got to be licensed to get your insurance, pull your permits. But if you're working for somebody else, no, you don't have to be licensed.

RAUCHER: What is involved in getting a license as a business owner? Do you have to show that you have certain skills?

T. M.: Not really. And surprisingly enough, when I got my license, if you could pass the test, they gave you the license. You could know nothing. You could never have built anything in your life, but if you could read and pass the test, you get your license.

They've since changed, so that you have to have so many hours in the field now to get your license. Because too many homeowners wanted to build their own house, be their own general contractor. And they would go take this class and get their builder's license and all of a sudden, they're a general contractor. The problem was the money involved in the licensing. And we pay into a special fund to help for recovery and what-

have-you, and that wasn't happening. So they have changed it since I've gotten my license.

The fact is, a lot of people work without a license. And people should be aware of that, for liability purposes. When I got my license, I could have gotten it not knowing what I was doing. But you don't stay in business long not knowing what you're doing. I mean, I'm good at what I do and make sure I stay on top of everything.

RAUCHER: What was it like working for your brother? You were the only woman?

T. M.: Yeah. Well, when I first went there, my brother was working with me, which was nice. He's very good at what he does. And I learned a lot of stuff from him. He got injured and ended up in the hospital, and being a family business, if it's not running, he's not making anything. And he was laid up for a week or two, so I took the crew out and said, "Well, we can do this." And it took a hair longer in those first couple houses, but we got it done. After that he slowly but surely started not working with us as much, and I ended up going out with the crew, doing the work, and he handled more of the business end of it.

But we had a girl laborer there for a while. They come and they go. They didn't last very long on his crew. But there's a lot of things that I've changed, going into business for myself, that he didn't have — new equipment, safety equipment. Things like that make a big difference in keeping and building a crew. And when I started mine, I had girls working for me, and usually always have.

FECTEAU: Are you saying that with safety equipment, it's more likely for the women to stay?

T. M.: Well, I think it's more likely for anybody to stay, if they really think about what they're doing. Most guys will go out and work no matter what, because I mean, they've got to make a living and pay their bills, or whatever the case may be. When girls are on the job, there's a few things that you have to do a little differently. I mean, I'm stronger than most women, but I don't like lifting the stuff any more than anyone else. I have laddervators to lift shingles up on the roof. I have rollers to roll the ladders on and off the racks. I do anything I can to make it easier for myself, but it makes it so that the girls can do more, too. But yeah, it makes a difference.

CRAWFORD: And it makes it easier for the guys.

T. M.: Oh, yeah, it makes it easier for the guys, definitely. And then you have to be careful matching personalities with the girls. You have to have the right personality on a job site. Because even today, although we have a lot more women in the field, it's still male-dominated and very male chauvinistic on job sites for the most part.

RAUCHER: Yeah, I was wondering about any of those experiences you might have had when you first started working, in terms of: Did the guys accept you because you were the sister of the contractor, like maybe that made a difference?

T. M.: Well, it made a little bit of difference. Actually, the guys that were working with him were some of the same guys I grew up with, so they already knew who I was. Out in the field, though, I got along with everybody, sales people and different gentlemen in the field. But they all had that attitude, "Boy Tina, you're really good at what you're doing, but you better watch going out on your own, because you know you're a woman in a man's field." Well, that just put the fuel in the fire, just kind of like my mom did. You know you've got to prove them wrong.

For the most part, I'm treated pretty good out there by most people that matter. The ones that I consider don't matter are people that aren't going to affect my building decisions, my end of the money or buying power. If somebody wants to whoop and holler, let them whoop and holler. On the other hand, the guys would get upset when the women whoop and holler at me. So it really doesn't matter who it is.

You've got to have a pretty good backbone if you're going to be in the construction field, I think. If your feelings get hurt pretty easy, it's probably not the career for you.

CRAWFORD: So when you took that first crew when your brother got injured, what was that first week like? A lot of the guys knew you, so were they really helpful?

T. M.: Oh, yeah.

CRAWFORD: So that was a really good first experience.

T. M.: Yeah. I mean, just learning from my brother, number one, and then knowing the guys definitely helped. And everybody wants to keep their job. If I didn't go out with them and the equipment, there was no work for them. So if they wanted to work, they had to put up with me, because Rob was laid up. Which was kind of how that all that started. There was certain dissension as time went on: "Oh yeah, you're the boss's sister," or whatever. On the other hand, I never asked one of them to do anything that I wouldn't do myself. I worked harder than the rest of them. I could lay more shingles than all of them. I was there first and there last, so there was never any reason for them to say, "Well, she's getting something for nothing."

And still today, with my crews, I don't ask anybody to do anything I wouldn't do myself, or haven't done in the past.

RAUCHER: You're you a non-union contractor?

T. M.: Non-union contractor, yeah.

RAUCHER: But there aren't so many union roofing contractors in residential, are there?

T. M.: Not a whole lot. You can't compete anymore in residential with the union wage. Most of your union stuff is commercial, you know, apartment buildings, things like that, hotels. Those will be union, usually. Most of your residential is non-union, for the reason that it strictly comes down to money, strictly money.

FECTEAU: So residential isn't subject to the prevailing wage?

T. M.: No. Although, the better you pay your guys, the better guys you get.

CRAWFORD: So what do you pay your guys?

T. M.: Depends on the job. Most of the guys — laborers — start out at twelve, thirteen bucks an hour. And that's somebody who knows nothing — they just show up and are going to learn. Most of your shinglers are $15 to $20 an hour. You know, liability policies and what-have-you — most non-union don't have big benefit packages and paid vacation. Now, if you get a good guy, you're going to keep him and you're going to give him a paid vacation. And a lot of it depends on business. I have a tendency, if my business is good, my guys do better.

FECTEAU: I'm just wondering if there aren't benefits or — I know with the union, they have a multi-employer health and welfare kind of a thing. Is there anything comparable to that in your industry, for residential?

T. M.: Not really. If you're lucky enough to get an employer who will provide liability policies or who can afford health coverage, you're doing real well.

RAUCHER: But if they're injured on the job . . .

T. M.: Workman's comp and your liability policies. And see, roofing workman's comp is so high — you're at forty-three and a half percent. So if you're paying somebody ten bucks an hour, it's costing you almost five just in workman's comp to keep them. So, you can get a feel for what kind of money you've got to have.

FECTEAU: I was just wondering if there could be — even with non-union — a multi-employer group where people would spread the costs.

T. M.: It would be good. Unfortunately, a lot of the people that you get in the construction field, you've got a couple main guys that will probably stay with you for a long time if you treat them real well, but everybody else kind of comes and goes. So you set something up like that, it costs you more to set up the paperwork than you could afford for the amount of time they're actually there.

There's a lot of people that only work the field in the summer as a part-time job to make money for college. There's a lot of people that really couldn't get a job anywhere else, due to something in their past or the fact that they can't read or write — they can't do a lot of things, so they don't qualify for a lot of jobs. Those are the kind of people you'll see in construction. And that's the stereotype of what's in construction.

I break the stereotype a little bit. I am smart. Do other things. I can read. I can write. I can do numerous things. But you have to, just to be in business. There's a lot of smart people out there in the trades and that's what makes them good at what they're doing. And then there's a lot of people that are just kind of getting by in life, and those are the ones that help the good people, the way I look at it. But everybody has got to make a living, so you need all of them to get a job done.

CRAWFORD: So you mostly do shingle sorts of jobs or the slate ones. Do you do hot tar or flat roofs?

T. M.: I don't do hot tar, and mainly because it is just nasty, dirty work. And your insurance is outrageous when you're doing hot tar stuff. I do do flat, commercial, heat-welded white polyvinyls. I also do slate, slate look-alike, lightweight cedar shakes, which are your specialty roofs, and mostly asphalt roofs, too. I try and stick mostly to specialty roofs, rather than dealing with the asphalt so much. But I do quite a bit of shingles. And I do put additions on and replace screens for people. I do a lot of insurance work, so depending on what needs to be done, I've done it.

RAUCHER: I would think it takes some skill to do a shake roof, or something like that. I mean, can you take a roofer who's never done that kind of roofing and teach him in a few days on the job how to do that?

T. M.: Well, I can take somebody who's got some roofing experience and teach them what I need them to know in order to get it on. Are they going to pick it up in one day? Probably not. But if you've got roofing experience and somebody who knows what they're doing shows you how to do it, you can usually pick it up pretty quick. Same thing on the job. It takes longer, it's more labor-intensive.

And there are certain things about cedar shake or slate that are different from asphalt. Even the safety precautions — walking on it, dealing with it, cutting it, putting the flashing on — a lot of things are different. So as long as you know those differences and what to do with them — I don't think roofing is rocket science.

There's a lot of people that are afraid of heights and don't want to get up there, so that's one of the nice things about this particular profession that keeps us busy. A painter,

they can be really good, but that's something that a lot of people try themselves. Even down to kitchen remodeling, a lot of people are trying that themselves — tiling and interior work. But most people don't want to get up on a steep roof and take the chance of ruining their whole house by not putting a roof on right.

RAUCHER: Have you ever been injured on the job?

T. M.: I have not. Well, I can't say that. I've never fallen off a roof. I do take extra precautions. Now, have I been injured in building things? Yes. I cut my finger off with a circular saw. They put it back on. I got hit in the face with a ladder and cut my face up and was black and blue for a while, and a lot of injuries like that. I've gotten some stitches. I've torn my knees and my back up over the years. But as far as falling or some real bad injuries, no, I haven't been hurt that bad on the roof.

CRAWFORD: Has anyone who's ever worked for you been seriously injured?

T. M.: Nobody that's worked for me has been seriously injured. But that's one of the reasons I like being on job sites. I stay on top of that real well. I can look at somebody and see they're going to do something kind of stupid and catch them before they do it.

And I'm also big on safety equipment. I have harnesses and hard hats and all the equipment to make it safe. So it's not like you're out there hanging yourself over the edge without the right equipment. If there's a piece of equipment to make our job easier or make it safer, I'll get it. A lot of people don't, and that's how you end up with injury.

Plus if somebody comes in smelling like alcohol, I'm not going to let them on my job site. Alcohol and drugs are probably your two main contributors to on-the-job

accidents — that and just not paying attention — taking the guards off saws, not using safety harnesses when you're on steep roofs, just not paying attention.

RAUCHER: Do you work on jobs with other tradespeople who work for other contractors, so that you're just one of many?

T. M.: Yeah. There's a big, premier home we did out in West Bloomfield and I was the roofing subcontractor. They had the builders out there, they had the tilers, they had the drywall people and everybody it takes to put the house together.

RAUCHER: Do the trades treat each other differently depending on what kind of job they do? I know on big construction sites, the electricians and the ironworkers tend to be the prima donnas, right?

T. M.: That's more commercial. For the most part — and I don't know if that's one of the advantages to being a woman or not — I'm treated great by all the trades. Most of them are just a little shocked when you show up, and then you actually get up on the roof and start working and everything's all right. But most all the trades have always treated me well. I don't see a huge difference in the framers to the roofers to the plumbers and electricians.

The jobs I work on, I know that the siders are going to be coming behind me and the guys laying the gutters are going to be coming behind me, and that the plumber has to get his stack up through the roof so that I can get my job done, and what-have-you. So I have a tendency to work with them. I know the next phase of the house, so I don't butt my drip edge up so tight that the sider can't get his trim up in. I make sure that I think ahead to what they're going to be doing to make their job a little easier.

Now, if I was one of the roofers that didn't think ahead, and they came in behind me, and every time they went to work they had to take half of my stuff apart to get their stuff done, yeah, there'd probably be some dissension there. But for the most part, you work with the other contractors and they work with you. And I've never really had a problem with it.

FECTEAU: Have you noticed that there's been any change over time, that things have gotten better, or have things always been pretty agreeable during the time you've done this?

T. M.: For me, I don't think they've changed a whole lot. But I think it has to do with my personality out there. I have a strong, up-front personality. People, I guess, can kind of look at me and in dealing with me for a few minutes realize that although I can be fun and I've got a good sense of humor, I don't take a whole lot of garbage from people, and I get the job done. I do what I say and have integrity on the job. So I think for the most part, with that kind of personality, no matter what you're doing you can survive in a male-dominated field. If you have a weak personality, you're going to get run over a little bit, because they do test you. They do test you.

FECTEAU: Margaret kind of made a reference to it before, but do you think the fact that you were the boss's sister, then you became the boss, that that made a difference?

T. M.: I don't think being the boss's sister made as much difference as being the boss. When you're in control of their paycheck and their job, then people have a tendency to treat you just a little bit different.

RAUCHER: Can you talk a little bit about that transition into just becoming an owner, a boss, rather just working for your brother?

T. M.: Well, that transition, for me, was fairly easy, because most of the crew that my brother had followed me. They liked working with me. They liked the quality of the work. They could take pride in it. They knew I paid them when they were supposed to get paid and things like that, which makes a huge difference when you're out there. You've got to make sure that you're working with somebody that can pay you. So the crew that I ended up with when I started was a lot of the same guys I'd worked with all along. So it was an easy transition for me.

And most anyone I've had working with me — and a lot of times I go down to just a short crew — it's never really been a problem. People show up and they see a woman, and they think for a minute, "Wait a minute, here." But once you get up there and they see that you can outwork them two to one, then all of a sudden they have a different attitude.

CRAWFORD: How well do you think you're going to be outworking them in ten or fifteen years from now?

T. M.: Actually, I'm not. [laughter] And that's one of the things I'm realizing — the older I get, the harder it is to be up there. It really is. I probably don't plan on staying active working like I am for too many more years. I do plan on staying active in the field. As an estimator, I'm going to be hard to beat. And knowing what the job needs and that type of thing, and the fact that I have done it and I have a reputation puts me in a good position to deal with new people.

I don't have to be up there physically doing it, but I still choose to. But yeah, there'll come a time when I'm not going to be able to get up there. And there's a lot of mornings getting out of bed I think, "What was I thinking?" It's my dad's fault — if he just would have raised me to do my nails and hair, I wouldn't have this problem." But for the most part, it's been worthwhile. It's kind of fulfilling.

And there's the other thing, the stereotypes out there in the field have been incredible. And when people call and get me on the phone for a referral — most of my stuff now is all referral — they know they're going to be talking to a woman to begin with. But most people expect me to weigh about 300 pounds, have short dark hair, and I don't know what else they're expecting, but they're not expecting me.

FECTEAU: Be like a man.

T. M.: Basically, yeah. Real stocky build and what-have-you. Well, then when you show up, I think they're kind of taken back. And even a woman entering the field, you don't have to be a man to be good at what you do. It helps to have some muscle. It helps to be able to physically do the work. It helps to have an attitude and a tone in your voice and the personality to be able to back it up.

But when I go home and I shower, I can put a dress on and look just as good as the next person at the ball. So there's no reason for women to think that if you're not manly, you can't get into this field.

FECTEAU: You said it a few times, that you get up early or you stay later to do the job, that you do twice as much work sometimes. Do you feel that a woman has to be able to prove herself and to outwork a man in order to gain their respect on the job?

T. M.: I think you have to perform as well and, yeah, in certain cases, you've got to outperform them to get the same amount of respect. The reason I get there early and stay late is because when you own a company — and I don't care what you own — you get there early and you stay late, because it's your finances, your reputation and your livelihood on the line. I would do that for any business.

And it comes with the work ethic, too. I was raised with that kind of work ethic. A lot of people weren't. And the kids today don't have that basic work ethic. I'm now teaching building trades at Lincoln Park High School. And class doesn't start until ten to eight, and I'm there at seven every morning. And a lot of times I don't leave until four, five o'clock, whenever I get stuff done. And I'm doing stuff at home to get ready. And I get up early and go to Home Depot before, to save myself time and delivery for the school.

Now, do I get paid extra for that? No. Does it make my job better? Yeah. Are the kids better off because of it? Yeah. And am I teaching them some work ethics that hopefully will carry through? I hope so.

RAUCHER: You said that you were tested sometimes by men, maybe other contractors even. Could you give some examples of that?

T. M.: Well, when I say "tested," it was more on a verbal level, more than anything. It wasn't "who can shingle the most," although guys will — you know, arm wrestling is their big thing on the job site for some reason. And when you beat one of them arm wrestling, a lot of times that puts you ahead in their lights, because now they're scared of you.

But for the most part, it's verbal testing. They want to see if they can get to you. If you let them get to you, they'll stay on you. Like anything else, when you're a kid, the bully in school teases and messes with you. If he can see he's getting to you, he's going to continue to tease and mess with you. The same thing. Guys can be bullies on the job site. If you let them get to you, they're going to continue to harass you.

And a lot of times they'll harass you right out of there, if you can't stand up to them. If you stand up to them right off the bat and you stay firm and you don't let them get to you, they eventually give up to where nobody bothers you anymore.

CARRIE WELLS : Do you try to follow a certain code of behavior on your jobs for your whole crew? Because I know you do have women that work for you.

T. M.: When you say "behavior," I think being a woman makes a little bit of a difference. But I've also been in business a lot of years. I think that when you show up on a job, if your equipment looks professional, you're a step ahead of the other guys. You would rather have somebody with new trucks and trailers and new equipment. People just have a tendency to think you know what you're doing, as opposed to pulling up in a rusted old truck with a ladder hanging off the back, and everybody piling out.

Likewise, we work residential. I don't want a bunch of cussing and swearing and what-have-you on my job sites. Is it going to happen? Yeah. Can you get offended by it? No. Can you put a stop to excessive? Yes.

I want all my guys in the same shirt so they know they're with my crew. I also would like your shirt tucked in. I don't want your pants hanging halfway down your rear. I don't want you showing up for a job with a hole in your pants bigger than the size of the leg opening. Naturally, doing roofing, your pants are going to get torn and what-have-

you. Keep another pair with you, or at least start off in a decent pair, to where you look presentable. These are my customers, and you're representing me and my company.

I want the cleanup to be extra good. And being a woman, I don't want to kneel down in my rose bed and kneel on a nail. So I want all the nails picked up. I want the siding protected. I want the windows protected.

I have animals, so I don't want stuff on the ground that my animals are going to step on or their animals are going to step on. And that might just be partially because I'm a woman, or partially just because I've been in business long enough to know that's the way it should be done.

As far as training anybody any different because of it, you know, the girls, like I say, have the personality. I'm not going to put a mouse on my crew and expect her to stand up to the guys. By the same token, I don't expect my guys to treat anybody I hire any differently than they would treat me or the next guy.

RAUCHER: Do the women that you hire sometimes come to you as a confidant or to discuss things on the job that, you, as a woman, might have special insights into?

T. M.: You know, for the most part, anybody I hire, whether it's a man or a woman, I kind of keep them under my wing until they're good to go on their own. And everybody is available to ask questions. You ask me, you ask my foreman, you ask the guy working next to you.

The one thing about the people I have and I work with, I want everybody to work as a team. And they have to work as a team. If you're not a team player, then you're off my team. So everybody kind of helps everybody else. I don't worry a whole lot about putting somebody new on, because there's always going to be somebody to help you.

I've worked for other companies where I've showed up and they thought, "Well, she knows everything, let her go figure it out." Fortunately, I've been able to figure it out. But had you sent somebody who didn't know what they were doing, then, yeah, they would have had problems. And a lot of crews are like that, unfortunately. I try and treat people like I'd want to be treated. Other companies just throw you into the pit and hope you survive. And if you don't, you leave, and another one takes your place.

FECTEAU: It sounds like you set a standard by how you act. Do you have a policy when somebody's hired on, a routine that you kind of run through ahead of time, you know, "We don't tolerate this or that," or a verbal discussion around no harassment on the job? Or is that just kind of understood?

T. M.: It's mostly understood. I mean, I let people know, plus I keep an ear open for it. I don't want anybody harassed. On the other hand, I'm probably the worst one out there for making jokes and cutting up and what-have-you. Like I say, if you have somebody that's too sensitive on your job site, they're not going to be out there long. You've got to be able to take it, but you don't have to take any more than what normally would go around from anyone else.

I mean, there's no reason to be sexually harassed on a job. Are guys going to whistle at you? Yeah. Are they going to want to see you in a tank top instead of a T-shirt? Yeah. Now, do you have to show up in a tank top to keep your job? No. If that's the case, then it's the wrong job or you're working for the wrong company.

I'm not big on the issue of the sexual harassment stuff, only because if I was, almost every comment on a construction site could be construed as sexual harassment in one form or another.

RAUCHER: You said you're known as the "lady roofer," right? How did that come about? Because we were talking earlier about the logo, what you have on your truck. So maybe you can say a little bit about that.

T. M.: Well, the "lady roofer" just came because I'm one of the only women roofers in the area. So when people see me, naturally, "Oh, there's that lady roofer." That's how that came about. When I started my own company, I wanted a logo that would stand out, and since people knew me as the woman roofer or the lady roofer, naturally pink was the color to go with. My colors are pink and black, and I put a flamingo with a tool belt. But I also put a hat with flowers on it, so it had a feminine touch to it. And I just want people to make the association with the "lady roofer" when they see that. My license plate now says "MS ROOFR." That's all strictly an advertising point for me. And if it works, great.

CRAWFORD: I get the feeling that you do a number of things still, but is roofing your main source of income?

T. M.: It has been up until this year.

CRAWFORD: What changed this year?

T. M.: They asked me to teach.

RAUCHER: Elaine, you said you had a question. I had a couple things, too, before we get into the teaching.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, I think the last question I asked was going to lead into teaching. So you've been doing the roofing and the renovation or construction for how many years now — ten?

T. M.: Actually, renovation, counting that other house, close to sixteen years. I've been working roofing for thirteen now.

FECTEAU: I'm going to ask a series of questions that we sometimes ask about your personal relationships. The fact that you're a roofer, what kind of girlfriends do you have? Can they relate to the work you do or do you have other things to talk about? Or do you find that you feel more comfortable with women doing similar work as you?

T. M.: Actually, no. The friends I have have been friends for thirty-five years, my close friends. So they have always known what I do and I've stayed involved with their lives and what-have-you. New people I meet — I get along with just about everybody. As long as you don't whine a lot and you've got some interests and you don't want to sit on your duff, I can usually get along with you.

Now, would I rather fish than babysit? Yeah. Would I rather go hunting than shopping? Yeah. But can I go shopping, have fun? Sure. I've got such an array of interests that I can get along with men or women.

I've got to watch sometimes because of the fact that I do get along with men, because of the hunting and the fishing and the roofing and the building, that some women will have a tendency to be jealous. So you've got to kind of watch who you're around and how much fun you have with the hunting and fishing, because of that. But for the most part, it doesn't matter. I get along with women just as well as I get along with men.

And personal relationships, I can't say it's never affected me. My new husband is probably exceptional, putting up with me, because of my personality and what I do. Like when I was dating, ego problems would get in the way. They would have a tendency to think, "If I can't repair a car better than her, then I can't see her," or, "If I can't build a

house better, then I can't see her." So the people that I dated and that, ultimately, I ended up marrying, you know, have the personality to be able to deal with me.

RAUCHER: Do you belong to any sort of contractors associations or groups?

T. M.: I was involved with some. Because of the teaching and the way I'm structuring "my new life," as I call it, I'm dropping some of the associations, basically because of the money and the fact that I just don't want any more work. I ended up with so much work that I couldn't keep up with it as it was. Advertising — I don't advertise anymore outside of my shirts and jackets, no yellow pages. I pulled the Web site off the Internet, because I just can't keep up with what I've got.

So for the most part, the associations are going. I'm a pro contractor for OC. And a lot of the different companies I deal with, I'm on their pro contractor list.

RAUCHER: What is the organization?

T. M.: Owens Corning, different products, because those are where people are going to go to find me. And for that reason, I'll stay involved with them. I stay involved with Women in Construction, helping the Girl Scouts, and things like that, help out with seminars and teaching girls how to hammer a nail and things like that. But as far as any of the big associations anymore, not really. Michigan Construction Teachers Association is who I'm associated with now.

RAUCHER: And your experiences with other contractors, men contractors, have been good?

T. M.: Yeah, for the most part. I haven't had any bad dealings with them. Naturally when it comes to bidding contracts, they don't want to lose it to you or anyone else. So I don't think that has any effect, the fact that I'm a woman or not. As a matter

of fact, being a woman gives me the advantage bidding contracts, especially when you're bidding city contracts and things like that, because I'm a minority. So it gives me an advantage over them.

CRAWFORD: So do the other contractors resent that?

T. M.: Well, they probably think it's an unfair advantage, just like we might think it's an unfair advantage that a black student might get a scholarship over a white student or a foreigner might get something over an American, same type of thing. On the other hand, there's got to be some advantages to being a woman besides just being cute.

FECTEAU: What do you think about affirmative action?

T. M.: People think because of what I do, from sports to my profession, that I'm a big women's libber. I'm not. Now, will I support women's groups in different movements? Yes. Do I believe the man should still be a man? Yes.

FECTEAU: What do you mean, the man should still be . . .?

T. M.: . . . a man. You know, because of their ego, you've got to treat them different. But my theory is: "If a guy can do it, why should I?" Unfortunately, I just haven't found a guy that can do it yet. [laughter] Hence the reason I have to keep doing what I'm doing.

RAUCHER: Well, you said that you're the only woman roofing contractor in the Detroit area?

T. M.: Well, in the Downriver area, where I'm at, there's women that work in the field. There's women that work in the office. There's even some women laborers. I don't know too many women owner/workers. Now, there is one I believe out of Flint. I saw a newspaper article on her, and she's got women on her crew. And her dad helped

her get in business — she has a roofing company. So that's probably one of the first ones I've heard about. So we have some of the same experiences. The only difference is, my dad couldn't help me get started.

RAUCHER: But do you run across other women whom maybe you would encourage to follow in your footsteps, since you yourself may be leaving the business soon?

T. M.: Oh, yeah, I encourage women all the time. Actually, one of the reasons I accepted this teaching position is to try and get young women involved in the trades.

RAUCHER: Maybe this is a good segue into that, to talk about that job and what that's all about.

T. M.: Basically, I was approached about teaching the building trades program at Lincoln Park High School — probably the last thing I thought I would ever be doing. Never really thought much about teaching, especially high school, in the trades. And plus, I don't have a teaching background.

With the trades, they have what they call a temporary voc certificate that you can get and an annual authorization, because my experience in the field gives me enough experience to teach it, where a teacher coming out of school might have all the teaching credentials, but doesn't know anything about building or being out in the field. So, I'm qualified to teach that.

They signed me on for a year, because they didn't know if I could handle the kids. I signed on for a year, because I didn't know if I was going to like it. And it turns out I love working with the kids. I'll probably remain there as long as they'll keep me,

because I guess with the teaching profession, you never know about that. It is hard going from being the boss to not being the boss in that kind of situation.

But in my position, I was thinking more about whether I could groom a real good crew for the summer. I'm thinking if I could take the best kids and teach them all year what to do, I could bring them out on a job site and have a ready-made crew every year with my work ethics and my teaching. I mean, what better could you get?

Plus the fact that in the past there were no girls in this program. I picked up two for this year and I'm hoping by next year I'm going to pick up five to seven more. And a lot of that is the difference in having a woman instructor as opposed to a man who's intimidating and set in his ways, especially an older man that may be a little chauvinistic on top of it, dealing with the girls.

CRAWFORD: Are you the only teacher in the program?

T. M.: I'm the only building trades teacher at Lincoln Park. I teach the first-year and the second-year kids. And we will be building a house next year.

CRAWFORD: And what grade are these kids in?

T. M.: It's supposed to be juniors and seniors, but I have a lot of sophomores this year — sophomores, juniors and seniors. And I don't mind a lot of the sophomores, especially the good ones, because it's going to give me three years with them. In three years I can teach these kids a lot of stuff.

As a matter of fact, my plan is to have them certified as a shingle master applicator by the time they're done with their first year, pass the safety training so they're certified for that. They'll be certified in siding and they will have different certifications

so that they should be able to walk out and get a job on most any crew with these credentials.

Plus they should be ready to take their building license exam, if they want to do that. They're going to have to get some hours in the field before they can now take it, but they will be prepared to take it.

CRAWFORD: So they have to be eighteen to work on construction, right?

T. M.: Well, I've been finding some different things out with the program and these kids. Now, with my insurance, yeah, if I were to hire somebody coming off the street, they've got to be eighteen. But these kids coming out of school, out of my class for instance, they're being trained to do this. So they can actually go out and get a job and work for somebody like me, being covered through the school for liability, as long as it's in the trade that they're being trained for.

So now, there's a fine legal line there, and I wouldn't want to put somebody too young out there to begin with, only because it can be dangerous. And I don't care who you are, whether you're seventeen or whether you're thirty, if you have an accident, it can lame you for life. Hopefully, it doesn't. But I would say that my kids are going to be more prepared to be out there than anyone else walking in trying to get a job, because they do have the tool safety and they do have all the personal safety training and they do have experience in doing what you want them to do on a job site.

RAUCHER: And they're serious about going into building construction? I mean, they don't think that they have to go to college or do something else, they see this as a viable career.

T. M.: Yeah. Which is one of the reasons I wanted to see the program continue. Not every kid is made for college. A lot of these kids have a hard time reading and have a hard time with math, so they're not going to do real good in college. Yet you show them something with their hands, and they're enthusiastic and hard working, and they're able to do it. This could be the only form of education to lead into a profession that they're going to have.

Naturally you have some kids that are extremely intelligent, but good with their hands. But there's so many fields in the trades to go into, not just sticking with building a house or being a finish carpenter or putting the roof on. There's support behind all of this. And there's designers and supervisors and safety tech people. There's so many jobs involved in the trades that people don't even stop to think about how many there are.

You know, building the stuff and doing the work with your hands is only one aspect of it. The marketing and the bidding and the proposal and the grant stuff — there's just so much involved — project managers and supervisors and the secretaries that make sure you get paid and keep track of it. There's just a million jobs in the construction field, plus it's one of the fastest growing fields out there with the least amount of people coming into it.

Over the last ten or fifteen years the big thing has been to make sure your kid goes to college and gets a four-year degree or an eight-year degree. And then they're coming out and those same kids are working for me because they can't find a job anywhere else. Whereas if they would have gone in and gotten a trade, they could have not only built their own house, they could have had it paid for by now, instead of still paying off college loans. I'm not advocating "don't go to college," because I think that any kind of

learning is great. But myself, I was in a position where I couldn't afford it. I wanted to be a lawyer. I could see that wasn't happening, because of the situation I was in. And with Dad owning the business, we didn't qualify for financial aid. They didn't realize all our money was on a shelf, so we were actually more of a pauper. But because of that background and doing what I did, I mean, things worked out well for me. And here I'm back teaching, without having gone to college. I mean, go figure that out. [laughter]

But like I said, I got a Ph.D. — that's a public high school diploma [laughter] — and you know, I got the school of hard knocks experience behind me. And as it turns out, I've relied on every experience I've had for the last forty years to be able to teach these kids.

And there's a lot of fields in the trades that you need a four-year or six-year degree to do. So by all means, if you can afford it and you've got the ability, get in there and do it. On the other hand, we need people out in the field, too. And those same kids can come out of high school knowing this stuff and can go right to work.

WELLS : What types of projects do you do with the children?

T. M.: The first-year kids have learned wiring. They are learning how to master most of the power tools. I'm a firm believer in pneumatic tools, although a lot of schools don't believe in giving the kids pneumatic tools. That's what you use on the job site, that's what I think you ought to learn to use. You've got to learn to hammer a nail also, but learn to use all the tools. So they have that.

They know how to solder pipes and do plumbing. But besides just knowing how to put it together, they know why they're putting it together. My first-year students can

wire a three-way switch. There's a lot of people that have no idea how a three-way switch works. And that puts them a step ahead.

They're learning floor framing. They can read a framer's square and know how to use it to cut rafters. And these are the kids that haven't even learned everything yet. They've had all the safety training, they can pull the equipment out and I don't have to worry about them anymore. They wear safety glasses and they wear their hard hats.

And they're enthusiastic about what they're doing. Not all of them can read a tape measure real good, but we're working on that, too. I've had to teach them the math to go with the construction. Not that they haven't learned the math before, but it didn't make any sense to them until you put it to something you're going to use.

By next year — well actually, by the end of this year — roofing, floor framing, wall framing, window installation, door installation, right down to hardware installation — they're going to know all this stuff to be able to start building a house next year.

FECTEAU: It sounds from listening to you, that you seem very fervent about treating everybody equally, giving everybody a fair shot, provided they work hard. But it seems to me that you're very fair-minded and not necessarily just looking out for the women, but also for anybody who works hard, but women included in that, not excluding anybody. Is it fair to say that is your perspective?

T. M.: I'm pretty fair. And I've got to say, I'm a hair biased towards the girls. I'll go the extra mile with any of the kids if they need it. And even on the job site, the guys are all part of the team, just like the girls. Would I bend over just a hair farther for one of the girls to help them out? Probably, just to let them know that these jobs are available and they can succeed with it. And if I can help them, that's great.

Do I bend over way farther for the girls? No. No, they've got to show initiative and have the backbone and be smart enough to do it, and want to do it. But if you're a guy and you have that same attitude, I'll help you just as much as I'd help one of the girls.

CRAWFORD: How do you feel about unions?

T. M.: I think they have their place.

CRAWFORD: In construction?

T. M.: Yeah. I think they have their place. In a lot of the jobs, you need the union. You absolutely need the union to try and keep the integrity of the trades up. My problem in what I've seen, over especially the last three or four years — and I've seen it more with like, framing . . .

CRAWFORD: Carpenters?

T. M.: Builders, Carpenters Union. If you're an apprentice, boy, they work you to death. You're out there every day and you're driving for hours and you're getting the job. And for three years you're busy and you're going to school. Then you get your union card, and all of a sudden you can't find a job. Now, that aspect of it I don't like.

There's a lot of people out there. And it doesn't matter how good you are. It depends on who you're in with, where you are on the list, is what it seems to come down to. Myself, I would rather deal with my skill and my ability, rather than hope I get on the right list over somebody who's been on this list for a long time.

I know right now four really excellent carpenters, great work ethics, nice guys. They should just go into business for themselves and skip the union stuff, because they

can't get a job as a union carpenter. They sign into the union hall every day and they sit and they wait and they do all this stuff and they're not working.

FECTEAU: They can't go right to the contractor and get hired directly?

T. M.: If you can find . . .

CRAWFORD: The carpenters can go and solicit their own work.

T. M.: They can go and get hired by a contractor, but if you're an unknown, not in the union hall, there's not a lot of contractors that are going to take you on a union job. Now, if you're tenacious about it and you just show up and are in the guy's face every day and say, "Hey, I just want a chance here. Let me work a couple days for you for free and then if you like me . . ." — you know, now most people aren't going to do that. But a lot of times it seems like that's what it takes. Once you get a good crew, then you want to keep them.

Unfortunately, especially since 9/11, I've seen the bigger commercial accounts and commercial building drop off. And those same carpenters that had been working up to that time, all of a sudden, they're all laid off. And there was a lot of them. The companies can't afford to keep you, even if you're working for a private company, if they don't have the contracts and the work. And with the bidding process the way it's been and the competition out there in the union, you know, the bigger your company, the more you can cut the margin down and still survive.

So the smaller companies aren't able to survive against the big companies when it comes to unionized work, because you've still got to pay a certain wage and certain this, certain that. So your bottom line comes off of the top end, not off the bottom end. So in

that aspect, I'm not against unions, but I couldn't make a living out there as a union worker right now. I don't feel as though I would make the living that I'm making now.

RAUCHER: Certainly not as a union contractor.

T. M.: No.

RAUCHER: Yeah. So these are all non-union workers on a residential job site?

T. M.: Mostly, yeah.

RAUCHER: Your workers are mostly Americans?

T. M.: Uh-huh.

RAUCHER: You aren't forced to hire immigrants because you can't find the Americans who want to do the work?

T. M.: Well, you know, you have that problem. I mean, it's out there. Although, if you look, you'll find Americans that want to work. A lot of companies are going to immigrant workers because they're so much cheaper. And a lot of companies aren't above board, either, so they're not paying all the taxes, they're not paying all the stuff that they should be paying, and hence, it's a lot cheaper to deal with things like that.

So yeah, a lot of your companies are going to immigrant workers. Number one, they show up. That's a big thing. On a construction site, if you get the guys to show up, you're doing good. Now, if they got a license on top of that and they're not high on drugs or they're not drunk, you got a pretty good one there. Now, if they know what they're doing, you really hit the jackpot.

A lot of these immigrant workers, they come up, they already know what they're doing. They don't speak real good English a lot of times, but they all show up for work every day, the same time. They're all riding together, so you got them right there. They

work hard and they do a good job, for the most part. And they do it at half the price. So basically, once again, it comes down to the almighty dollar.

Can a normal person survive on that kind of wage? No. Would I expect them to work for that kind of wage? No.

CRAWFORD: What about the students who complete your training? Can they compete with people who make six dollars and hour, with the illegal aliens? I mean, what are they going to do when they graduate?

T. M.: Well, when they graduate, I've got a group that is college-bound and I've got groups that are apprentice-bound and I've got groups that should be starting their own business. And they're going to have to deal with that aspect when they get out there. Now, can they compete with a six-dollar-an-hour worker? No. But can they speak English? Yeah. Is that worth a little bit more than six bucks an hour? Yeah.

If you've got a good work ethic, you're worth the money. If you've got a poor work ethic, I don't care if you're an American or not, you're not worth the money. The only difference is if you're American, you expect twelve bucks and hour, not six, whether you do a good job or not. And the same with the union wage. The union is great, the benefits can be wonderful. And if you're working, that can be great. But I've found that just because you have a union card doesn't make you a good worker either. So if you're a poor worker, you're going to be a poor worker whether you're union or non-union, is the way I look at it.

Now it may just be a matter of how far you want to drive or what you want to go through to make your living. Would I rather work for fifteen bucks an hour and stay busy all summer or would I rather work for a month here, be off for two months, and work

another month for twenty-eight dollars an hour? You know, when you're making house payments and car payments and you're trying to feed your family, that's what your decision is based on.

RAUCHER: Well, are there any other questions or was there something else you'd like to add that we haven't covered, that we've missed?

T. M.: At this point I can't really think of anything that needs to be added, just the fact that whether you're a woman or man in the field, it comes down to your work ethic. And for the women that want to be out there, you can still be all woman and work like a man, or vice versa. [laughter]

RAUCHER: So do you think there will more women doing what you do now, in the future?

T. M.: If I have anything to do with it, yeah. I'm already adding a couple now, so it's just a matter of getting some more out there. And with the programs the Girl Scouts have and the different programs being offered, plus the fact that these women are still going to college and getting the degrees and coming out and they can't get a job, they're going to have to work somewhere.

And quite frankly, I think that with most women, even though the work can be tedious, a lot of times they're more conscious of the work they're doing and they do a nicer job in a lot of aspects. So yeah, I think it's a matter of building the self-confidence level up and letting them know, "Yeah, you can do this." The next thing is physically being able to do it, because it's hard on your body. It's hard, physical work, no matter what you're doing.

RAUCHER: Somebody — and I can't remember who this was, maybe it was Cathy Dawson — but somebody we interviewed goes out and speaks to middle school students from time to time and said that the girls are really put off by the whole notion of that kind of physical labor, having to wear hard hats and all that sort of stuff.

CRAWFORD: And get dirty and . . .

RAUCHER: Get dirty and sweaty and all that stuff. She didn't see any evidence of any of them wanting to have anything to do with that kind of lifestyle.

T. M.: Yeah, but once again, I think a lot of that goes back to the preconceived notion of what a woman construction worker is. You know, the 300-pound, short, dark-haired girl with a mustache. I mean, that could be what they're seeing. They have no idea what the realities are out there or that you can show up in a dress or a suit and you look just as good as they do, doing their hair and nails, only you make a lot more money than they do. I can afford my house — they can't. I can afford a boat — they can't. So when they start seeing the play toys that you can get and the different things you can afford, all of a sudden, now it's, "Wait a minute, I might have to rethink this," instead of being totally dependent on a man for their living.

Now, would that concept be nice, and was it practical in the '50s and '60s? Yeah. Is it practical today? No. You know, with the divorce rate and women waiting longer to get married in general, they're having to have careers and do things so that they can survive on their own as well as with somebody else. And part of that is making a good living. And this field offers you one way to make a good living. Plus you don't have to pay for a gym membership, because you stay in shape pretty good, so it saves you four or five hundred dollars a year right there.

FECTEAU: You mentioned the Girl Scouts. What program do the Girl Scouts have?

T. M.: They have Working Women — things that their Working Women's Association put on. Down in Monroe all the Girl Scouts come together and they have little stations set up for drywalling and nailing and hammering and sawing and what-have-you. It gives the girls a little bit of exposure to working in some of the trades and working with tools and working with their hands. And it's a good program. You start them when they're young to let them know that they can do it.

A lot of people still raise their girls to where they do the dishes and clean the house and the boys cut the lawn and work on cars. I was fortunate in a lot of respects that my parents weren't like that. My brother, likewise, is happy Mom taught him to cook. So in that respect, I was quite lucky. On the other hand, there's some hundred-degree days and I'm up there roasting and I'm sweaty and I'm dirty and I'm tired and I'm standing on a slanted roof and my back hurts and I think, "Sure would have been nice to just clean the house and be happy with that." [laughter]

RAUCHER: What does your sister do for a living?

T. M.: My sister is in the medical field — she is in charge of cleaning all the instruments for an operating room. And plus, now she went back to school to get her teaching degree, so she can actually teach overseas.

CRAWFORD: So your husband is retired.

T. M.: Yeah, he was a train dispatcher for the railroad.

CRAWFORD: And you must have been working pretty long hours with your business.

T. M.: Uh-huh.

CRAWFORD: And it sounds like even your new teaching job is pretty long days.

T. M.: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: So how's that work? Does that work pretty well?

T. M.: Yeah, he's kind of a special guy. He puts up with me. And it takes kind of a special personality to be able to do that a lot of times, just because of the crazy hours. You know, if you have somebody who expects you to be on a time schedule and to be able to be here and be there at a certain time, then you know that's not going to work, because you never know what time you're going to get done. You never know what time you're going to start. You never know what's going to come up and maybe detain you or what-have-you.

He's real flexible and really backs me up on everything I do. And plus, he's also got his builder's license now and does a lot of handyman stuff. I mean, he's really handy. He doesn't work in the profession, but it's not like he doesn't know what's going on. He's, like I say, very supportive and really a special guy to put up with my personality — not that I'm a little headstrong or anything [laughter], but I have a tendency to be, once in a while, I guess.

RAUCHER: Well, you sound like you have a lot of self-confidence, too, which I think you probably need in order to be a businesswoman, period, or an owner of anything, period.

T. M.: I think that helps in anything. If you're not confident in what you're doing, naturally others aren't going to be confident with what you're doing.

CRAWFORD: Do you think that you just always had that or did you develop that?

T. M.: I would say it was developed very young. My father was just incredible with the business and instilled a confidence level in all of us, him and Mom both, that "You can do whatever you want" and "You're capable of doing anything, just a matter of getting in and doing it."

FECTEAU: Do you think it's because you had your parents encourage you to do things at a young age, to accomplish a project or a task, that that built your confidence in — like even going on your bike to a business seven miles away, like you said.

T. M.: I mean, the fact that they taught us to think for ourselves and allowed us to think for ourselves — I don't think kids are allowed to think for themselves enough, in certain areas. On the other hand, I think kids today are allowed to think too much in other areas. You don't ask a three-year-old, "What do you want to wear today?," because a three-year-old could come up with anything. On the other hand, you can give a three-year-old a choice, "Do you want the blue shirt or the red shirt?" They can make that decision. Likewise, as kids get older, there's certain decisions they should be making for themselves and they should be learning to think for themselves.

And common sense is one of those things that is instilled from the time you're young. Unfortunately, if the people raising you don't have a lot of common sense, it's hard to instill common sense in the child. Yet common sense makes all the difference in the world in dealing with anything you're doing. So everything starts from the time you're young. And I was blessed with, you know, not parents that had a lot of money to buy me everything, but they sure taught me the stuff money couldn't buy. So in that

respect, I was real lucky — although when I was younger, I didn't know that. [laughter] I didn't appreciate it until I got older.

RAUCHER: Is your dad still alive?

T. M.: Yep, he's still running the business, although it's changed now. It's commercial lawnmower parts and repair. As all the kids left the business, naturally he had to accommodate the business to work with something he can still do.

CRAWFORD: Downsize.

T. M.: But he's still as good a salesperson and deals with people the same way. Well, that's where I learned it, dealing fair, integrity, and being honest with people.

RAUCHER: I guess that's it. Thanks so much. It was real interesting.

T. M.: You're welcome.

CRAWFORD: You are probably the busiest person we've interviewed so far.