Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with Pat Nuznov

MARGARET RAUCHER: This is Margaret Raucher. The Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project Advisory Group is here today, January 5th, 2004, to interview Pat Nuznov, an electrician with IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers] Local 58 in Detroit. I would like to start out the questioning by asking Pat about her life before she entered the trades, what her upbringing was like, her family life, family attitudes towards work and women, and that sort of thing.

PAT NUZNOV: Okay. Well, I was the youngest of three, born in 1954. I have an older sister and brother. She is six years older than me and my brother is four years older than I am. And my brother, let's see, he was a sheet metal worker, a tin knocker. When I went into the workforce I got a job at a little Dearborn newspaper — Dearborn is the city I live in — making minimum wage, which I think was about $1.65 back then, and worked hard. It was a job that I worked hard at for a long time. I started as a co-op in high school, where you go to school three hours, then leave for work, and you're limited to twenty hours per week. And my father was kind of a jack-of-all-trades and my mother worked in a plastics factory.

So my mother was non-traditional, always worked outside the home in a factory setting. My father worked for the Dearborn schools as a building engineer, started out as a custodian. Well, my brother and my father did all kinds of mechanical things, which I was never included in, but always kind of hung around for.

So I worked five or six years in the newspaper business and was pretty unhappy with the whole office — the girl, this, that, and the low pay and the hard work and all of that. So in 1978, toward the end of '78, the apprenticeships in the Detroit area were all open because of Jimmy Carter and affirmative action, and they were finally going to take in minorities and women. I applied for a few and was accepted in IBEW Local 58's apprenticeship program in August of 1979. So that's when I began.

And that was my first experience with anything mechanical. I mean, I was a seamstress and an artist, but never did anything with tools until I got into the trade, and then we did it all [laughs], or sort of, as we went along.

RAUCHER: And would you say that your childhood was sort of a traditional childhood, though, playing with little girls and dolls and all that sort of thing?

NUZNOV: Yep.

RAUCHER: And nothing that would have set you up for this sort of career?

NUZNOV: Well, when I was younger, before I went to work, I could see that my brother always really enjoyed his work. He came home dirty and cruddy, but he made good money and he really enjoyed it. So after several years, when I left the newspaper business, I was sort of between jobs, and I thought, "Why can't I do this?" And I'm quite mechanical, so it hasn't been a problem.

But in my younger days when I watched my dad and my brother, they seemed to have a lot of fun with all those tools. I was never invited in until after I got in the trade, and then my dad started — every birthday, every holiday I would get some kind of tool. So I think he liked it, probably more than my mother, who was just appalled that I was out somewhere using a port-a-john that some nameless person before me used. [laughter]

So that's kind of where I came from. It was pretty traditional, other than the fact that my mother did work, which she thought was not traditional, but now it's very traditional.

ELAINE CRAWFORD: Did you think about going to college?

NUZNOV: Well, I was told as I was leaving high school that if I wanted to go to college that I would have to get there myself. And I did take a few classes. I did psychology and English. I did all those basic things, thinking that it would jettison me into a college education, and it never really did. It was a lot easier to just go out with your friends than go to college [laughs] — besides working a full-time job, that is.

CRAWFORD: And have you retained a lot of the friendships that you had with people from the time before you got in the trade, or have a lot of your friends become people in the trade?

NUZNOV: Well, I have a lot of friends now that are in the trade and very few friends from that time prior, but a lot of friends that aren't in the trade. But I've been kind of careful about the people in the trades that I've let inside my life. There's more women than men — a handful of people.

I was twenty-four when I started my apprenticeship and newly married. So my life was really changing, and friends kind of leave you when you change your life. And that's what happened to a lot of those friends I had before I went into the trade.

RAUCHER: Were you a tomboy when you were a little girl?

NUZNOV: Yes, yes I was. Well, the upbringing at my house was traditional enough to see that my brother had a whole lot more fun than my sister and I. I mean, my mother let him do everything and there we were cleaning the house. So it looked really fun to be a boy.

When I was a kid, I went to Catholic school as a young child. And I really thought — I was pretty naive — that if I prayed and prayed and prayed, God would make me a boy. I gave that up when I was about ten. I figured that wasn't coming. [laughs] I was kind of disappointed, because it looked — boys had a lot more fun, at least from a child's perspective. Now that I'm an adult I can see that they still have more fun [laughs], on some level. I mean, that's kind of a generalized statement, but the doors open for men. Women have kind of got to pull on them and kick them and pry them open and squeeze through and hope the door doesn't shut on them on the way.

RAUCHER: What does your sister do for a living?

NUZNOV: Well, she lives in Las Vegas, and she is a supervisor of housekeeping in the public areas in the Paris Casino. So she did some education, and she's more a hotel/restaurant type, but has done some mechanical jobs in her time, maintenance man and stuff like that along the way. So she's the one that's got the most traditional job of the two of us.

RAUCHER: And your brother was supportive of your going into the trades? You said your dad was buying you tools all the time, so obviously he was. And your mom was a little concerned. But what about your brother?

NUZNOV: Well, I think it was probably in the mid-eighties when there was a group of us women that tried to form a tradeswomen's group here in Detroit. And we worked really hard. We worked hard. We worked two, three years. And I remember at some point I was talking about my frustration of trying to gather women together. And my brother said, "You've got your job. What's wrong with you? What are you doing all this for? You've got your job." And I was really kind of appalled. But as I've gone

through life, a lot of people feel that way about opportunities: once you have yours, you don't help anyone else — which I don't agree with. I think you really have to give back.

RAUCHER: When you were growing up, did you know any other girls, women, anybody who did this sort of unconventional thing or had that kind of a job or would have been a role model or something?

NUZNOV: Well, it was actually very non-traditional, my mother was a setup man — I mean, she did tool-and-die setup, and she was the only woman that did. The rest of the women just ran the machines, where she actually put them together. She actually did all the physical work, tests, and all that. So she was really the most non-traditional person that I knew.

I mean, she worked in a man's world and got paid a pittance for many, many years. And I always thought that was pretty unfair. I used to get kind of ranting and raving about it to her, and she'd always say, "Oh, no, no, no, no. They've been so good to me." [laughs] "That's why you make lik,e half what the guys that work for you do? Okay."

CATHY DAWSON: I'll introduce myself. I'm Cathy Dawson, a machinist by trade. I'm curious, why did you choose to become an electrician? Was that the only trade you were interested in or was there some reason?

NUZNOV: Well, actually, I applied for sheet metal workers, electricians and pipe fitters. And '79 was kind of the beginning of a slow economic time. And Local 58 was the only union that took apprentices that year. I was accepted into all three, but I didn't find out about the other two until I was already in the apprenticeship for over a year. So that's how it happened. That was how the choice was made.

DAWSON: Tell me about your first job, how you got your first job, how you found your first job, and some experiences that happened on your first job.

NUZNOV: Well, we get our jobs through the apprenticeship school as apprentices and through the union hall, through our referral hall, as journeymen. So my first job, there was about eighty of us that day that were just starting and we went into the office two or three at a time. And the jobs were laying on the counter. And I wasn't the first one that was asked, so I stood back.

But I could see that one of the jobs was a Ford building that was being built in Dearborn. So I had my fingers crossed that the person in front of me wouldn't take it, and they didn't, so that's where I ended up. And it was across from the Ford test trac in Dearborn, on the corner of Rotunda Drive and the Southfield Expressway.

It was an office complex and lab. It was a huge four-building complex, and was just coming out of the ground when I got there. So it was still dirt floors. The steel was up, but it was all open to the weather. I got there in August and worked there until the following September. And I had lots of very strange things happen to me.

DAWSON: Tell us about some of the strange, wonderful things, hopefully.

NUZNOV: Pardon me?

DAWSON: Hopefully some wonderful things, too.

NUZNOV: There were some wonderful things. I remember I was probably there a couple months. And I went there with another first-punch apprentice.*

*First period, brand new to the apprenticeship. In the seventies our four-year apprenticehip was broken into eight six-month segments or punches and pay raises coincided with punch increases.

DAWSON: Male, female?

NUZNOV: Male. And he got there before me, so when I got to the job trailer, the guys were like, "Oh, we're so excited! We wanted a woman. We thought we were stuck with him," and this kind of thing. So they all made it sound like they really wanted me there. But that wasn't really the truth. I think the men all tried to do whatever they could, their little part to make it hard.

Some of them were much more willing to teach than others. I have a really good sense of humor, so I managed to laugh my way through a lot of the stuff. Like, one day I was unloading a truck. I'd only been there a few days. I had all these clothes on because it was cold. I unload this truck. And this truck driver, who thinks I'm a man, turns to me, and he went, "Wow! You've got dirt all over your face." I mean, I had dirt all over me. And I probably had it on there all day, and no one said a word. Some truck driver had to tell me, "Wipe your face off." So it was then that I realized that if you had junk hanging on you or you were doing something stupid, they probably would be laughing. They wouldn't be going, "Well, let's help that person."

When I first got there, I really thought that everyone would like me and I could make a lot of friends and it would just be a terrific life. And the job itself was good, it was interesting. I learned a lot.

There was a small man from one of the other trades that did ceilings who came up to me one day and said that he was so happy to see me there. I was just really surprised. And he said, "My father died when I was young. My mother had five children and she worked three jobs to support us. If she could have had a job like you have, we would have been able to have our mother with us instead of always working." So I thought that

was pretty cool that this guy, at least, was glad to see that women were coming in and having some appearance in these fields. I would say that over time, and even in that time, other trades were more supportive of me than my own.

DAWSON: How did you feel when you went out to your first job? I mean, did you feel like you were prepared? Were you nervous? What was it like?

NUZNOV: Oh, I was scared to death. [laughter] And I parked in the wrong place and walked across a field of mud and by the time I got to the trailer, I was about a foot taller than I was when I got out of the car. And I was dragging all these tools. And everything was new. And the guys were kind of — one of them, in particular, was like, "Hey, how you doing?" It was break time and we all kind of crowded in the trailer. And he goes, "You want a cup of coffee?" And I go, "No thanks." He goes, "Good, because it's not mine" (somebody else was giving him coffee). I mean, they did that kind of stuff to me, where they'd try to embarrass me.

DAWSON: I wanted to go back to when you said you first came into — was it at your union hall where you got your job?

NUZNOV: Apprenticeship school.

DAWSON: Okay. I want to understand that process. You said there were eighty people that were waiting for a job. How did you come in? I mean, how do you determine who goes first and who goes second to get a job?

NUZNOV: I don't really remember.

DAWSON: Is there a process? Or first come, first served?

NUZNOV: There was 180 of us that came into the apprenticeship in my year, in '79. And anybody that had a job already that their bosses would let them miss a day

every other week to go to school, they were encouraged to keep their outside jobs because of the fact that there was sort of a lull in the work. So those of us that didn't have jobs, they told us to come back tomorrow. And then we just kind of sat in groups, and they came in and said, "Okay, you guys." That's how it went. It wasn't like they called us off a list, that I can remember. It seems like we just milled around until it was our turn to go in the office. I kind of tried to stay back so somebody else would go first, even though nobody came out and said what went on.

DAWSON: Okay. I'm curious about the apprenticeship process. Was it schooling, as in college, or was it just all on-the-job training? Exactly what was your apprenticeship experience like?

NUZNOV: We went to school one day every two weeks.

DAWSON: And what did you learn there, specifically, when you went?

NUZNOV: Well, it was a program where we learned about unionism, tools, electrical theory. There were four or five different — blueprints — I can't really remember all of those different facets. And each lesson had four or five different sections. So in any given time frame you would be studying tools, unionism, grounding — you know, the National Electrical Code — electrical theory, and then a lot of mathematical stuff, because everything is mathematical in electricity.

DAWSON: And how long was your apprenticeship program? How many years?

NUZNOV: Four years. It's now five years, but at that time it was four.

DAWSON: How did you feel when you were done with the apprenticeship program? Did you feel ready, were you ready to get out there and . . .?

NUZNOV: I remember that I was just really overwhelmed at signing my indenture papers, which made me responsible to fulfill this apprenticeship. And that unnerved me. I was pretty upset for at least a week after I signed those papers, because to me it seemed as serious as going in the military or making a huge commitment that you couldn't walk away from. So that in itself was really unnerving. And then one of the instructors really hated the women, and made life miserable for us.

DAWSON: It was pretty obvious, was it?

NUZNOV: Oh, he was blatant. He was worse than the worst I could have ever thought I would run into anywhere. And I was twenty-four, so it wasn't like I was a teenager. So he was pretty miserable. And the first six months of my apprenticeship, very rarely did I sleep the night before school, because he was really brutal. And there were four women in our class, so he was particularly brutal, because he had so many of us to be brutal to. But then, it was really odd, because at some point he just decided he liked all of us and he quit being brutal. But it was toward the end of that first year.

DAWSON: Do you think he was testing you because you were women?

NUZNOV: Well, I think the whole apprenticeship idea is that you're lower than low, and everybody else isn't. And that's not something you understand until you become an apprentice, so you take it kind of personally. Then you begin to realize that everybody's kind of getting it on different levels. Some people got it — the stories that were told about the old guys were brutal, how all you did was carry their tools for four years. Well, that kind of thing — the brain in me would say, "Well, that doesn't make a lot of sense. Don't teach them anything?"

So it all depended on the personalities of the people. Like, out on the job I was really fortunate to have a foreman that was very interested in me learning the trade and he put me with an old guy who was very interested in anybody that would work with him. And I worked along with him. He yelled at me constantly, he wouldn't let me talk. I just did electrical work. And even today I get upset when apprentices aren't interested in learning the trade like I was. Because they're not like that. [laughter] But I was. And I think some still are. I was relieved when my apprenticeship was over.

RAUCHER: Could you give some examples of that brutality that you talked about with this particular teacher in the apprenticeship program? What sorts of things did he do to the women?

NUZNOV: Oh, you mean the instructor?

RAUCHER: Yeah, the instructor.

NUZNOV: Well, I have a friend that when she was going to school, he implied that the movies they were going to see were going to be smokers, were going to be dirty films, and maybe she wanted to leave the room. It was that kind of stuff. And there was one woman in our class who reminded him of his ex-wife. Well, she took a lot because of that.

And he loved to tell stories about his dates and how they were cooking steaks, but they were in bed and the steaks were burning. This was the stuff he talked about. And I was a grownup. I'd already heard all this stuff. I could see these things in movies. I didn't need to hear it from him. So it was kind of unnerving. It just reminded you every two weeks that you were not the welcome part of the group.

And he was somebody that drank a lot, so he was kind of edgy and difficult. And if he had a bad day, we all had a bad day. And one of the women in our class, over time, he really wanted to go out with her. And she was one of my friends. I took her aside and said, "Do you want him telling stories about you to the apprenticeship classes? I mean, think about it." And he knew that I was friends with her. And he would sort of badger me, "Why don't you talk her into it?" I said, "Look, I already told her to stay away from you." And by then we were friends and he could take it. But I was like, "Come on."

I just think that in a lot of situations in that classroom he didn't think about what his behavior was doing to other people. He didn't care. He was in charge. He was the teacher. He told his stories. He ran his class, and that's just how it went. And it was pretty brutal. And I was real naive. [laughs] And of course, I'm sure I know a lot more now because of that experience, and I'm more prepared for the bizarre. It doesn't happen a lot, but you have to be ready. You don't want to be looking shocked at the wrong time. [laughs]

MICHELLE FECTEAU: I have a question. I'm Michelle Fecteau. I'm just wondering how you got through the apprenticeship classes and if all the women made it through the apprentice class. What sustained you through that time, or gave you the strength to keep going?

NUZNOV: Well, I know that about six months into this time when I was going to apprenticeship school — and I really worried a lot about it, and I was married just a little over a year — my husband, who came from a totally different background from me, said to me one day, "Don't stay in this apprenticeship for me and don't stay in this

apprenticeship for any reason other than yourself." And he said, "If you don't want to do it, don't do it."

That comment really kind of made me think about why I was doing it and who I was really doing it for and what I was going to get out of it. And that sort of took me to a new place. I mean, it was still hard, but it made me realize that I had the strength to do itand he would support that. He said, "Whatever you choose, I'm going to support." So I said, "Hey, if you can stand it, I'm going to keep at it." And I was just determined to make it through.

There was another woman in my apprenticeship class who was a little bit older than me and she told me once, "They will never have the opportunity to kick me out of this. I will be here and I will finish. And I will make sure that I don't get kicked out." I thought that was pretty good advice. So I was real careful. I made sure I didn't do anything that would cause any grief to me, and I made it through.

As I've said before, I have a pretty good sense of humor, and I could really laugh about things. And when I think about them later, I don't know why I laughed. I should have been crying. But I made it through. And I was determined.

And also, let's see, within that first year on that first job, I met Elaine [Crawford]. Having another woman around that had just a tiny bit more experience than me and gave me advice and was political and said, "Look, just watch what you're doing. Watch what's going on around you," that was the blooming of my feminism and that was the beginning of me being aware of injustices and inequities. And I'm still outraged by all of that. And I think that's a part, too, that keeps me going back to work day after day.

I mean, I've had opportunities to leave. And I've been at it twenty-four years now — or somewhere right in there. And I'm just too stubborn to leave without my pension. [laughs] I don't want to say I'm doing it just for the pension, but I'm getting close to that now, and I said, "No. I'm not leaving now." It upsets me when I hear about the young women that are leaving — they just can't imagine putting up with this. And some days I can't imagine it either. And I think, "How can it still be the same after twenty-some years? How can it be the same?" But it is, on many, many levels.

There's a lot more women. I've had a lot of women apprentices. And that's good. And that makes a big difference, for all minorities. I mean, I will try to teach any kid, any apprentice. If they respect me, I respect them and we work from there. And if they don't like me, I can say, "Well, I don't have a lot of power, but if you want to learn something and not move material for the next week or so, pay attention and learn." And it is about that, teaching the people coming up behind us.

I don't know that a lot of them have learned about the need for inclusiveness and diversity. Our political climate now is not nurturing the underdogs, the minorities. So we're seeing the resurrection of the Reagan times, really, where women and minorities are just sort of a nuisance. And I worry about that, especially in our business, because if we don't have the women come and apply in any of these trades, there won't be any women. And it's a hard story to hear, to tell a young woman, "Yeah, come on. It's going to be hard every day, forever, but come on. But you're going to get paid well if you work [laughs], if you have a job."

So I don't know what the answers are, or if that even answered whatever the question was, but . . .

DAWSON: Did all four women complete the apprenticeship?

NUZNOV: Yes.

DAWSON: Great.

NUZNOV: And all four — one went to work for Chrysler and I think she's not in the trades anymore, but the other two, the three of us still work out of the local and are still friends, stay in touch, and that's good, call and complain to one another [laughs], and share the joys, too, because there's a lot of good times, too.

DAWSON: Absolutely, absolutely. And you need that. To have other women, that's pretty good. Well, I'd imagine there were some men, too, that helped you out, and some that didn't.

NUZNOV: Yeah.

DAWSON: That's good.

NUZNOV: But it's always been comforting to me to meet the men that want to see the trade blossom and grow. And they want young people that know the trade. And those were the men that taught me. They knew that someday they'd retire and I'd be holding the ball. And if I didn't know what to do . . . I mean, they actually had the faith to think I'd still be there after they retired. And that's important. So maybe that's where some of all that comes from, from the men partners that did take the time to teach me. Many of my journeymen were real candid about how glad they were I was there — to me, to me, to me — they weren't going to tell anybody else that. [laughter]

CRAWFORD: I'm Elaine Crawford and I'm going to ask you a few questions. Um — here we go with the "um." Tell me a little more about your apprenticeship. Did you feel like your instruction at the apprenticeship school was giving you what you

needed? I mean, the subjects that were covered, did you feel that that was really helpful in what you did out in the field? Did you feel like you could have done your field work without the instruction?

NUZNOV: I would say, on many levels, yes, the instruction, a lot of times, got real off track. A lot of times they started out talking about something and then we had to hear about their investment policies or some other egotistical tirade that they could dig up. But probably the things that I felt — all the electrical theory, all the formulas, calculations, pipe bending, welding, those things, yeah, that really helped to know about these things before you went out into the field. There were times when I might end up with somebody teaching me that knew less than I knew in my little meager experience of the trade.

A lot of it seems sort of silly, but the basic mechanical parts of our trade — bending pipe and, actually, the formulas — once you learn how to do them, you can always do them. It amazes me to this day, I can be away from a pile of pipe for five years, but if you just give me ten minutes, I can bend whatever you need, because I've got my little pipe bending card in my pocket and I know the formulas, and I know how to do it. So some of that stuff was incredible. I've often thought I could open an exhaust pipe business, because I could bend pipe any direction, any shape, any form you want.

If you're not careful, you can lose that confidence in those things and people can create an environment where you can't get anything done because you don't believe in yourself. So I've had a fair romance with that kind of stuff in my time, not believing in myself. But I think about those couple of old guys that taught me stuff at the beginning of my apprenticeship that said, "You can do this. You can do this." And you just take a

deep breath and be thankful you learned a little bit of this stuff in school, in the apprenticeship.

CRAWFORD: So you felt that the training you got at this school and also out in the field was adequate by the time you turned out?

NUZNOV: Well, when I became a journeyman — and I could see this process in other people — I think it takes a couple years as a journeyman to be in charge, because they take you from one day where you're not allowed to think and the next day you're in charge and you've probably got an apprentice, and they'd love to see you fail. So I think it took a couple years, and then it became easier.

I had to make mistakes in front of people, the important people, and have them say, "This is how it's supposed to be." Bosses put meters in upside down and all those things that everybody says, "Oh, you're not right." Well, everybody does it, and you learn from that stuff.

So I did learn a lot in my apprenticeship. And I think that it would have been much harder to go into the industry as an organized person (brought into the union as a journeyman) just having learned this stuff from people that were learning it themselves along the way, too. So having the expert teachers, I think, really did help, even though it was very scary and hard. [laughs]

CRAWFORD: So describe for me what you do. Pick a typical day. Remember or imagine a day on the job, what the working conditions are like.

NUZNOV: Okay. I worked at the Ford Rouge complex in Dearborn on the new paint plant. When my partner and I picked up the job, we were the first people from the hall. Everybody that was there had worked for the shop for a long time. We were the

young people compared to everybody else. [laughs] We got sent to work in the penthouse for the foreman up there. And so there was scaffolding on the outside of the building. I'd never ever had stairway scaffolding before. And this was fifteen years into the trade already. So it was outside. It was winter. It was cold. The building was open. And I just really got a kick out of climbing up those stairs. I mean, you needed oxygen when you . . .

CRAWFORD: How many flights of stairs?

NUZNOV: There were 234 steps, I think. So if you carried a toolbox or anything up, when you got up there, you needed oxygen. We used to make jokes. Everybody would go, "Where's the oxygen?" We'd all be going [makes choking noise]. You felt like you could peel paint off walls just inhaling, because you were so out of breath.

But in the mornings there were the sunrises. I could see the Ambassador Bridge. You could see everything that was going on around the Rouge and the roads. The only other trade up there at this stage of the project was pipe fitters.

And we hung bussduct,* which is heavy. And we had a hoist. And we did a lot of rigging and we built a lot of racks out of Unistrut and rod.

CRAWFORD: The racks were to hold the bussduct?

* Bussduct is a pre-made assembly of copper bars (buss) insulated from one another inside a metal case. Usually comes in 10-12 ft. sections that are bolted together to allow the power to be distributed to different loads throughout the building. Usually installed vertically in the ceiling.

NUZNOV: Yeah. We built what looks like a trapeze with rods and a base. And you build the racks, install them and then you go back and put the bussduct on the rack.

I worked with another woman. And rumors went around the job. I was there a long time. I was there a couple years, so I got to really know people. But they made jokes later in the job, when men were coming in and doing bussduct on the lower floors. And these men, they couldn't get anything done. Later I was told by one of the foremen that they used to make jokes. These guys would come in and they'd go, "Well, we can't do this. We need this, we need this, we need this." And the foremen would say to each other, "Well, we got two women upstairs that have hung more bussduct than a dozen of these wimpy guys."

It was humorous to hear later that the powers that be knew what Cheryl and I were getting done and they knew we were the best pair there. There wasn't anything they could do about that. But to hear later that they had said, "You can't get these three big guys to do this, where we have these two women upstairs who are doing this with nothing?" So that was very rewarding to hear later.

But that job, it was big. It took a long time. It was very interesting. And I just really got a kick out of it. I loved being outside.

CRAWFORD: What's the difference between a big job and a small job? Because you've worked both kinds.

NUZNOV: Well, I guess a big job would be physically large, usually, lots of other trades, and a long time period to complete it.

CRAWFORD: Lots of people.

NUZNOV: A lot of people, a lot of different trades. There was a lot of iron workers. I always liked it when there were a lot of other trades, because you get there and everybody is watching to see if you're really going to do any work. All the other trades are watching. And they're subtle, but you know they're watching you.

So once they see — it takes a couple weeks — that you actually know what you're doing and you plan to do some work while you're there, they start to befriend you and talk to you and want to know about you. And you get to know them. And they want to tell you their stories. I don't know if it's really true, but it seems like men love to tell me stories. I mean, "Oh, let me tell you, my daughter and my, blah, blah, blah . . .," stuff I don't think they'd tell a male coworker. [laughs] And at some point you're like, "Okay, I can't listen to any more troubles. I'm not Dear Abby." [laughter] But you try to get through it and not be like everybody else, nasty and mean.

I like that. I liked the outside part. And my partner hated being outside. And every day I'd see the sheet metal exterior going up a little more, and I'd go, "Oh, oh, a couple more weeks and I'm not going to be able to see the sunrise." Everybody is freezing. We've got this little warming area. I was the only one that would never go in there. Even the apprentices would say, "What's up with you?" I said, "Well, once you get warm, then what? You got to come back out here in this tundra! I'm not going to do that." So I always was real careful about that.

I still would rather work outside than in, even on a cold day. There's just something really neat about building it. There's something so cool about all of that stuff that most people don't know even goes into building a building. And when I first realized that, I just couldn't get enough. Like even now, if I could get on a ladder and

look in the ceiling, I'd go, "Oh! Look at that duct work. Jeez!" You just do that after a while.

CRAWFORD: So describe the experience of using a port-a-john in the wintertime, when you're wearing all of your clothes.

NUZNOV: Well, I don't wear overalls because of those straps. Where do those straps go? You know where they go. [laughter] So I don't wear anything with straps. I don't do overalls. I worked at a steel mill where I wore overalls because it was so dirty. And that was bad. Because just the idea of something that was on the floor in a port-a-john sort of being up by your face is really unappealing to me. So you try not to wear anything that's got to expose all of your body. And then, you're fast. And you hope the door locks.

CRAWFORD: You fast?

NUZNOV: You've got to be fast.

CRAWFORD: Oh, okay.

NUZNOV: No, no, I don't fast. No, no, no, no, no. But I'll tell you, I worked with a guy who was so anal that when he came on that job, he wouldn't eat because he didn't want to use a port-a-john. I said, "My goodness, you're the most anal man I've ever met." [laughs] Some of the larger jobs I've been on where there's a lot of contractors, a lot of trades, many times they'll put a port-a-john out there just for the women. I've never requested one myself, but I've certainly taken advantage of them.

And they're locked, which means the urinal is never urinated in. You could actually not worry about your overall strap hitting it, or your coat or your pocket or your sleeve. That's what I think about when I'm in there. I don't want to sit down, and I don't

want my clothes touching that splashy place that . . . It amazed me how few people — men — can hit that spot.

CRAWFORD: It's large.

NUZNOV: It's large and it's bad and reminds me of a port-a-john anecdote. There was a young woman that came on a job and she was — oh, my goodness, I was twenty-four, so she was probably eighteen. She would have had to be eighteen, because I think that's the youngest you can come into the apprenticeship. She thought that the urinal in the port-a-john was a glove holder. She thought the urinal was a glove holder. [laughter] As I sit and tell the story, it's the truth. I was like, "Kim! Did you wonder why it was" — she must have been in there first thing in the morning to even think you could — I don't know. I thought, "Wow, I thought I was naive." [laughs] That one, I laughed — you can see, I'm still laughing about that, and that had to be twenty-five years ago, almost. I was just amazed.

So the port-a-john experience, what surprises me about port-a-johns is that we're still using them and that the employer who pays for the facilities, or whoever is responsible for the sanitary conditions, they don't spend much money and they don't want to spend any more than they spend. And even on a big — like on that paint shop job, we had . . .

CRAWFORD: Yeah, where did they put the port-a-johns on that paint shop job? Did you have to go all the way back down to the ground, or did they lift them up while the roof was still open?

NUZNOV: Oh, they lifted them up. We had a smelly port-a-john in the penthouse that would just gag you. And it was up to the laborers to get it out so that the

crane could lift it down. And as long as it was a port-a-john that locked I was okay with it. I'm not real fussy, but if the door won't lock, I'm going to go find another one, especially with a lot of clothes. I mean, I don't want to be in there with my clothes half off, and then somebody opening the door on me. I mean, it's bad enough I've got to be around these guys when I'm dressed. I don't want the door flying open.

And they don't ever see the little red thing, the occupied sign. They're yanking and the whole thing is shaking. And you're thinking, "Oh, my God. I'm in here!" I always try to lower my voice, "Well, just a minute, I'll be out in a second," so they won't know it's me. But yeah, that's all the little games you play to keep yourself going to work, I guess.

CRAWFORD: So a lot of improvements could take place in sanitation and . . .

NUZNOV: Well, I reflect back on that carpenter or ceiling guy that had been so happy to see me because his mother had this terrible life raising her children alone. I just kind of thought that mentality would help create improvements. And I can't believe, in the year 2004, people that build buildings are not entitled to running water. They're not entitled to anything to wash their hands with and they're entitled to a port-a-john, but it might not be very clean and they might not empty it very much. [laughs] That just amazes me.

CRAWFORD: And there are no special facilities for women who are menstruating? Right?

NUZNOV: Yep. And that always bothered me about port-a-johns, because I was brought up to think that that part of my experience is private. I don't go to work and talk about whether I'm having my period or not. But I mean, if you've got perverted people

that read Hustler magazine, they're in there looking in those port-a-johns. Come on, I mean, scummy people do scummy stuff. So I always felt kind of violated by all that.

And usually I always had foremen that were pretty understanding about maybe you'd want to get in your car and drive somewhere at lunch and wash your hands. But just two or three years ago, well, it was during 9/11 — what was that, 2001 — I worked for a guy that was younger than me. I was the oldest person on the crew. We had no facilities. He didn't even want to get us water. He thought that I should take the water jug . . .

CRAWFORD: You were working out at Detroit Metro airport?

NUZNOV: Yeah. And he thought I should take the water jug and go over to the fire hydrant and when the truck that washes the streets comes by and opens the hydrant to fill his truck, I should run over there and fill up the water jug.

CRAWFORD: Drinking water.

NUZNOV: For drinking water.

CRAWFORD: And this was in the summer, right?

NUZNOV: Well, it was fall. So he thought that we should just drink water coming out of a fire hydrant. And I'm like, "Buddy, you don't like me, and you're going to like me a lot less very soon." Yeah, we really totally disliked each other. And I could never accommodate any of that; it just didn't make any sense to me.

And we're working outside in the rain. We have no setup. So you get done working in the rain all day, you're muddy, and you get in your car and you drive home with mud everywhere. And he thought that he was like, giving us some big break because we had jobs.

And then my mother died while I was working for him and he got mad at me for taking time off for my mother's funeral. I'm like, "What rock did you crawl out from under?" I mean, one of the most insensitive people I've ever met.

CRAWFORD: An all-around prince.

NUZNOV: Yeah, and this is two years ago. Two years ago! So I don't know, it's crazy.

CRAWFORD: Now, you've been asked to be a steward and been a steward a number of times on big and small jobs.

NUZNOV: Well, I was a steward on that job. That job I ended up being steward, because I called the business agent so much that he just couldn't take any more. And so then he gives me a letter. So now the foreman doesn't like me because I'm a woman, he doesn't like me because I'm the steward, he doesn't like me because I want water.

CRAWFORD: What's a letter?

NUZNOV: The union hall, if they appoint you as a steward, they give you a letter. And that letter is sent to the employer. And it tells the employer that you are officially the steward on that job and the union expects you, as an employer, to do everything to accommodate this person in their duties. It's an official acknowledgement, so the employer can't get rid of you for some half-baked reason. They can still lay you off, but they have to call the hall first. They have to call the union and tell them that you're getting laid off.

It was really a tough, tough job, that airport job. It really kind of blew me away that . . . I'd had lots and lots of years of wonderful times, and then in my late forties, run into some guy who is never satisfied with my work. It was weird, because no matter how

much you did for the guy, it was never enough. I worked really hard for him: I jumped in mud holes and I did all kinds of crazy stuff for him.

CRAWFORD: You were running underground pipe?

NUZNOV: Yeah, and doing road lighting for the new airport roads. It was just really incredible that he could never see that we were doing the job. He managed to always find some way to make us littler and treat us worse. It was just wild. [laughs]

CRAWFORD: And there was no port-a-john out there. You had to drive to it, right?

NUZNOV: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: So you really had to time that well?

NUZNOV: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: Like, don't wait too long.

NUZNOV: And we got ten minutes for break and a half hour for lunch. So if you drove down to the gas station it took twenty minutes, ten minutes there, ten minutes back. So when he was silly enough to give me a work truck, I just drove down to the gas station. And I talked to the guys at the gas station: "I hope you don't mind me coming in here and using the bathroom." They didn't care. It was a diversion for them to talk to me, I guess.

CRAWFORD: Do you feel like there are any differences between how men and women approach their jobs, their work?

NUZNOV: I think that you can't really generalize like that. I think that most people, if they have a work ethic and are interested in doing a good job, are going to approach the job in a certain way. If you're somebody that's hoping someone else will

do the job for you, you're going to approach the job in a different way. I've met men and women of both groups.

I remember the first woman I met that I thought was just a deadbeat. I was devastated that she thought it was okay to come to work, complain and do nothing. I can't tell you how many times I said, "You're a minority, you've got to be better. You've got to work harder." And she just didn't. I mean, I can't imagine how much work that woman has done, if she's even still working, because she didn't do anything! I mean, I carried her, and I did my work, and I begged her to learn something. And I just got to the point where I didn't want to bad mouth her to the foreman, but I just couldn't do both of our jobs anymore. Finally I said, "I think she'd be better served with a different journeyman." [laughs] "Someone take her!" It was really disappointing to me to see that element of disinterest in a woman. I just thought all the women would be just like me and go out there and beat their brains out to get the job done.

I've met a lot of men, too, who sure hope somebody else will do their job for them. I've had foremen that hoped you would do their job for them — not a lot, but a few. "Here's the blueprints. I'll be at the bar if you need me." [laughs] I would think to myself, "Really? Phew, good thing I've been on this job a couple weeks."

CRAWFORD: So if you had to do it over again, would you still choose this type of work? That's a hard one.

NUZNOV: As long as I didn't know what I know now. It's been a wonderful industry. I love the work. The work is incredible. If I could do it all by myself or with a hand-picked group, I don't think I'd ever have anything to complain about. So when I get upset and when I'm tired of the games, the politics and everything, I try to get back to

the real reason that I started this whole adventure, and that was to do something for a living that I enjoyed. It was nice to get a good wage for the work, but it was not about the money as much as about being satisfied with doing something, and when you're done you can say, "That light works because of me." I mean, not all of it is visible. There's a lot of pipe underground.

But if you can stick there until the end, you're going to see it finished, unlike some of the service industry jobs, where you've got to be happy that person smiled and then you're going to try to make the next one smile. It's easier to deal with the inanimate and even the grumpy men than maybe it would be to serve fast food, because the public isn't in my workplace. It's just our little world, which can be kind of brutal at times.

But I guess I sort of expected it to be brutal on some level. So I was kind of ready for it, I just didn't think it would go on forever. I just thought it would get easier, that you'd get accepted and it would be better, but it isn't. Because our jobs are so transient and you're always going to a new environment, to a new group, that whole interview, that whole watching everything you do thing happens over and over and over and over.

And yeah, I've worked with people that know me and would love to have me work for them. And I don't have to go through that with them, if I have the opportunity to work with them again. But there's 4,000 of us. There's a good chance I'm going to work with people I don't know. And so that two weeks can really be hard.

RAUCHER: And it hasn't changed in the twenty years that you've been . . .

NUZNOV: Twenty-four.

RAUCHER: Twenty-four years that you've been in the business, that this new generation of men electricians is not very much different than the one that you confronted when you started?

NUZNOV: When I think about it, the old-timers were always the easiest group. I mean, you could get a nasty old man that just hated you. But the men my age and the men younger are not supportive. How can that be? But those are the people I compete with for work. I guess the male model is about competition. I don't think the female model is.

But you have to be careful. You don't want to become a guy-gal. You don't want to become a guy-gal and be like a guy and be insensitive and everything. You want to be a gal-gal. You want to be a woman. But it's hard to explain. I don't know if you understand, if that makes any sense. But you don't want to become so much like them that you're not you anymore. And so there's a real struggle there.

Because to be accepted, when I was a young journeyman, there was always hazing and that sort of thing on jobs — not always, but a lot of the time. And the little group decides who the weakest link is, and they go for this weak link. And whenever it wasn't me, I'd always just really be thankful and try to stay out of the way. And now I know that that's basically getting right in there and hazing along with the rest of them.

I didn't realize when I was young and really scared and trying to survive that staying mute wasn't the answer, to let people be beaten down. Because I would say to myself, "Well, I'm glad they're here, because they're not picking on me." Well, that's not right. You can't let it be perpetuated, because then it never changes. I've only gotten real verbal about that stuff in about the last ten years, where I don't like to see it happen

and I do what I can to at least say, "I don't agree" and "I don't approve," and distance myself from it.

But there was a time where these guys hazed this man, and I didn't do anything, I didn't say anything, I just tried to stay out of the way. About five years later, I go on a job, this guy is there. He goes to the steward and tells the steward that I had thrown perfume on his clothes, that I had done all these things to him on that job. And I didn't do any of it. And I wondered later if the men did bring perfume in and throw it on his clothes and say I did it. And that was just a shock to me. Because the steward knew me and came to me and told me what the guy said and I was just appalled. This guy probably had a card missing out of his deck. I mean, there's a lot of people out there with a card missing out of their deck. Sometimes I think one of my cards is missing. But still, I felt just horrible that all those years he thought it was me and I had just stayed out of the way because I didn't know what to do.

So that kind of stuff is sad, and it still exists. And when you have hard economic times, it can even get worse, because the job of breadwinner — people will take out knives and guns to be the breadwinner if they have to. I mean, I've never seen that kind of violence on a job, but there is an undertow of that survival stuff that starts to happen, and it's scary.

CRAWFORD: So do you have any protections, like seniority or . . .? How do you keep your job during hard economic times?

NUZNOV: Well, in our union, in [IBEW] Local 58, we have no seniority. We have no protections whatsoever. The employer can hire and fire any way they want, no explanation. Sometimes it's recommended to the employer that if they have a problem

with an employee, to document stuff before they get rid of them. To get a job, you go to the hall, you get a referral to a job, you go to the job, and they can refuse you and not tell you why. And that's all part of the contractor's rights.

So there's no job seniority. So you get a lot of, for lack of another term, butt-kissing going on. [laughs] And that's kind of how some people keep their jobs. And maybe it's other parts of the anatomy. [laughter] It's all about trying to be buddies. There's a lot of that that goes on, especially with no seniority.

A lot of contractors or jobs, they will try to lay you off in the opposite order of how you've come, just because they consider everyone equal. But that's unusual, that's not real common. There are no protections.

CARRIE WELLS: I'm Carrie Wells. I would like you to describe, Pat, the professional and personal relationships that you've had since you've been working in the trades. How has your family, your husband — I'm real interested that you started doing the apprenticeship right when you got married. Has your husband been supportive? Was he interested in you being a tradeswoman?

NUZNOV: Well, he's not very mechanical, so we are definitely different personalities. I'm very mechanical, very much a worker, and he is not mechanical. So, he's kind of interesting. I have always told the guys at work, when they ask how he feels having a wife whose wage is bigger than his, that he laughs all the way to the bank. It's okay with him. He's not intimidated by me making more money. He doesn't care. We really are a team and everything goes in the same pot. I've worked with a lot of people that don't work their life like that, but that's how it's worked for us.

WELLS: Did you get a lot of support from friends, co-workers, other union members?

NUZNOV: Some support from other union members, the occasional person that would get to know you, that would want to see you succeed. My first foreman, I worked for him for like, a year. Whenever I would get in a place where I would be building brackets or something really tedious, where you get kind of lazy and lackadaisical, he would come along and say, "Now, listen, you've got to really be with this. You've got to be working on it. Look around you. You will be competing with all these people for jobs someday." He was the first person that planted that seed. So he said, "You've got to be really good at what you do, because this is your competition." So he instilled in me the idea that if you were going to screw around, you don't do it where other people can see it. If you get ahead on your job, you can take a little breather, but you don't ever just barely work. It isn't about that.

WELLS: How has your non-traditional job affected your relationship with men and women outside of work?

NUZNOV: I think for a long time, whenever I went anywhere with friends that were not electricians, if they introduced me to someone, it was always, "She's an electrician." It was never about who I was, what my name was, it was always about this really odd thing about me. And that, over time, kind of went away. But I think I've kind of lost track of the question.

WELLS: How does your non-traditional job affect your relationships with men and women?

NUZNOV: Okay. You've got to be careful at Tupperware parties, because everybody wants free electrical work. [laughter] I could tell several stories about that. But most of the time, in new environments, I try not to say what I do, because it tends to temper what people are going to think. They'll make a decision about you before they really know who you are.

My children, I don't know. One day about five, six, eight years ago, I came home ranting and raving and my son said to me — and he's nineteen now, so he would have been about fourteen or fifteen — "Are you working with that guy again?" And that's when it struck me that the story I had been telling all of these years was the same story every day, over and over. And in his youth, he thought I was talking about the same person all the time.

But as far as kids are concerned, it doesn't matter to them what their mom or dad does. My daughter is pretty popular in the drama department because mom builds sets. Most moms sweep off stuff, and I build things, so that's a good thing.

But I know when I first became a journeyman — all my cousins are all real white-collar people and they all kind of moved back a little. I wasn't what they wanted anymore, I guess. I don't know what it was about. My brother told me that when he became a journeyman, he found that his friends thought because he had a good job he should pay for everything and he should always drive. So, in that sense, some of that kind of stuff happens.

But people kind of settled down. And it's funny, at family parties somebody will say, "How did you slice that lemon?" And I always have a pocket knife. Everybody comes to me for that kind of stuff. I'm pretty dependable about those sorts of things. So

in that sense, because I've been doing this for so long, I no longer see how it has changed things. Sometimes somebody buddies up to you because they want free electrical work, but that doesn't happen very much anymore either.

I can remember one of my husband's friends said to me, "Do you know what a 220 line is?" I said, "John, what do you want?" He goes, "Well, do you know what a 220 line is?" I said, "Yeah." He goes, "Well, I need one." I said, "Well, you're not getting it from me, because if you don't think I know what a 220 line is, I'm not spending my time putting one in for you." And he was a little appalled that I wasn't going to rush over and do this 220 line for him. I said, "You're going to expect me to do it for free on top it. You don't think I can do it and you're going to want it for free. Find somebody else." [laughs] I've learned these things along the way.

WELLS: Are you active with any organizations or volunteer groups or are there any feminist issues that you have a passion for that you are involved with?

NUZNOV: Well, I have tried and tried and tried to be involved with my union, but they really stonewall me. They say, "Yeah, come on in," and then they shut the door on my hands.

RAUCHER: Why do they do that, do you think?

NUZNOV: I think that when they get together and they get a consensus, they don't want me. There's somebody threatened by me within the little nucleus. And instead of seeing what I can bring to the table, they're threatened by my presence, I guess. I mean, what else could it be?

DAWSON: Is that nucleus all men?

NUZNOV: Yes, pretty much. Yeah, for sure, all of the administration, with the exception of Elaine [Crawford], who is on our Executive Board. But the business manager, president, vice president and all of our business agents, who are appointed by the business manager, are men.

And there's been a couple of times when I have volunteered — my best example would be when I offered to help do our newsletter. I mean, I only worked in the newspaper business for seven years, so I probably don't really know that much about it. But I offered to do it. I was laid off. I offered to do it for free. I talked to our Business Manager at our annual summer picnic, and he said, "Yeah, it's a good idea. Come on down next Tuesday and I'll take you into the staff meeting and we'll get the ball rolling." Well, when I got down there on Tuesday, they wouldn't let me go to the staff meeting and wouldn't explain.

I have only recently gotten my voice, where I'll say, "What do you mean?" If somebody's putting me off now, I say, "Okay, bye," and I leave. I was just absolutely appalled that they wouldn't really let me have control of it. They were afraid. I truly believe it was one of those inner circle guys who had to say, "We don't want her." So now, five years later, this newsletter has finally evolved, but it was somebody on the staff — a man — doing it.

DAWSON: Your business agents are appointed, they aren't elected?

NUZNOV: Correct.

DAWSON: Stewards elected?

NUZNOV: No. They're appointed by the hall, usually by whatever agent is in charge of the area you are in (our business agents each have a different geographic area).

So if you're going into a new job with no steward, generally the first person from the hall should be steward, but that isn't always the case. On bigger jobs, the business agent selects somebody that's got a lot of training.

I've been through steward classes and I've been steward on many, many, many small jobs. They wouldn't put me as steward on a big job. They'd rather put somebody that's a man, even if they can't tie their shoes or don't know how to do the job. I've gotten to the point where I don't want them to ask me, because if I've got to fight everyone to have it, why do I want it?

And the other question was other feminist things?

WELLS: Uh-huh, women's issues.

NUZNOV: Well, I belong to NOW and Planned Parenthood and support many of those things. But to actively be out doing something, other than supporting things financially, no.

RAUCHER: I'm wondering, because you know other women in the trade, obviously, is it your experience that these women are pretty much involved with their job and their home, their family and not with these other outside organizations?

NUZNOV: I think that — I don't know about all industries, but our work is hard, and so you're tired when you get home. And if you have a family — I would think probably most women would speak to this and might say the same thing. When my kids were small, I just left one full-time job for the next one. I went from my paid job to my laundry and my food and my shopping. And I mean, I did all that. I don't do it as much now, but there's nobody else doing it, either. [laughs] It just kind of has fallen away. But I have found that for myself, once my children were born, I just didn't have the

strength to give another four or five hours to something outside of work every day or any day.

That exhaustion and need to care for many facets of life was one of the things that hindered our success when we tried to build the Detroit tradeswomen group. We must have worked at it for two years. We'd have monthly meetings. We'd get one new person at a monthly gathering — they would come and complain and we'd never see them again. They came and vented and got what they needed, and couldn't invest in the group. So we never got any new investors. We had five people that formed our core.

Finally, after two years, we said, "We're so busy, we don't even know how each of us is doing." We'd say, "Okay. What's our agenda going to be? Oh, let's do the mailing." But we were never able to build any kind of mass group out of it. And those women, they needed us, but they couldn't invest their time and selves. And I can understand, I'm not faulting them, because it's hard to squeak more out of your life, or into it.

WELLS: Do you think — since you say nothing has changed in twenty-four years — that the inability to form groups in Detroit, unlike some other cities, is sort of a roadblock to women achieving more success in apprenticeships, not having the fostering . . .?

NUZNOV: There's something here in Detroit that's different than other places, and I don't know what it is. Maybe because we are such an industrial place. But there's just something different. We never had a true success. There had been another attempt to build a group before I got involved and that one didn't go anywhere either. We tried, we made it a multi-trade group, just hoping we could build something.

I know that there was one time when the women of our local were charged with building a women's committee. Well, there were women within that committee who were third generation wiremen that could not understand what purpose a women's committee would have. We have committees to do all these things already. Having a women's committee didn't sit well with these women, and so if you're running into the stumbling block with your own women, how are you going to build something? We just could never get it built.

Now we're thinking that there might be something that a women's committee could do, but we've got to really look at it. Because mentoring would be nice, but then I don't know, I couldn't imagine the administration wanting us to mentor.

RAUCHER: This sort of thing segues, I think, into Michelle's area. I had one other question before Michelle starts. You mentioned your kids. What did you do with your kids when you started working? I mean, who took care of them? You'd start work early in the morning, right, so how did they get off to school? Your husband do all that, or what?

NUZNOV: Well, when I just had my son, I found an older woman in the neighborhood that came in for two years and took care of him. And then when I had my daughter, I was lucky, I found a woman in the neighborhood who was just quitting her job, because her husband traveled a lot. She was a nurse. And her son was getting ready to go into kindergarten, so she was having logistical problems. So she figured if she could get a couple of kids to take care of, that would smooth everything over. She ended up living three blocks from my house and was my caregiver until my daughter was four.

So for five years, I had it pretty good. And then it became crazy, because, of course, you're always getting them up early. In the summer they can't stay up late. They can't play in the yard. They've got to be in bed, because they've got to get up at 5:30 or 6:00 a.m., because you're taking them someplace, because you have to be to work at 7:00. That was real hard.

When my kids got to the age where babysitters were hard to find, they wanted to ride their bikes, they wanted to go to the pool, they wanted to go up to the park, I started manipulating my schedule as much as I could to be off when they were off, because I figured there's no contractors here begging me to stay working. I'd make the system work for me on some level. So that's really what I did for years. So now I just kind of — now they're grown up and I'm worried that I didn't do enough of the right stuff. So, [laughs] just another phase.

CRAWFORD: I have one other question about your kids, and you might have addressed it while I was out. But did you talk about your pregnancy during your apprenticeship?

NUZNOV: No. My first pregnancy, I was working with a service truck guy. We were at the University of Detroit working around some radioactive materials, and that really flipped me out. I was thirty and I'd never been pregnant, so working around those radioactive materials really flipped me out. I was saying things like, "I can't go near this stuff. I don't know. I don't want to have a thalidomide baby because of you people, and breathing fumes." My employer had no experience with pregnant employees, so they laid me off. So that pregnancy I was off almost the whole nine months.

While I was pregnant with my daughter, I had a partner and we were moving around to different contractors and different jobs. When we went to a job, he knew I was pregnant, but no one else knew. So we kept it between us as long as we could. Then I told my boss, and now nobody wants me to do any work, because I'm pregnant. That got to be a little old. But the foreman was pretty good.

The crew got to the point where they wouldn't let me on a ladder, they wouldn't let me have a drill motor. On top of all that, I had this obnoxious apprentice who wouldn't listen to me. So here I was saying, "Okay, I think I've had enough." I worked until I was six months pregnant with her and then I went on disability, because if you can't really do the work, you're disabled.

During my second pregnancy, those guys had a baby shower for me my last day on the job. They were a wonderful group. After that job, we got together with that group of guys and their spouses once a year for probably five, six, seven years. We became friends, which happened a lot on a variety of jobs over the years. Different jobs, you get to know the people and you become a little family. And then because we all know it's going to end, you kind of go for the gusto and have a good time and work hard. But the pregnancies were . . . interesting. [laughs]

FECTEAU: All right. We're almost done. Why do you think there are so few women in the trades?

NUZNOV: Well, I don't know if we actively recruit them. I wouldn't know about that aspect of it. But I know that there are a few women that have family in the trade. But in most cases, it seems like even the younger women we have now are so frustrated with trying to be involved and make a difference and being stonewalled that I

think we're going to see a big rush of them leave, because they're frustrated. When they're not working and times are bad and they're not being embraced on any level by anyone, it makes sense to them to exit. And I don't think any of those women are out recruiting women.

I would hesitate to recruit a woman. I realize that's not really being fair, because you've got to let people have their own experiences. But anyone I've ever talked to, I've always said, "When you come in, you be prepared to do all the work and learn everything you can. If you think this is going to be a free ride, don't do it. It's not." So on some level, the women that I've talked to, I've tried to really make them understand that there's a lot to learn. If somebody told them that this is a cakewalk, they've lied to them.

FECTEAU: So you think that the problem has to do with there not being a lot of recruiting out there. And also you said that they were stonewalling and that women are being frustrated that are in the trades right now. Give me some examples of what you mean, and what you've seen or heard about.

NUZNOV: Well, we had a particular woman who was pretty outgoing, probably vivacious, a little more talkative than she should have been. I never could quite figure out how to talk to her about that, because I figured it would be a problem. And ultimately it ended up being a problem. And I forget exactly what the situation was, but either she had said something or done something and somebody got wind of it, and one of the agents came along and took her aside and gave her some stern talking to about her behavior or whatever. Now we don't even see her at union meetings anymore.

FECTEAU: And she was just being outspoken?

NUZNOV: Well, she was probably — I can't remember exactly what the deal was, what had happened. But she ruffled somebody's feathers. And it was about her not conforming in a way these people thought she should.

I met some women recently at a birthday party that I'd never met before, that live in the north end of our jurisdiction. I said different things to them like, "Don't you think it's time for us to have a woman business agent?" And they all said the same thing: "Who'd want the job? Who would you get to do it?" And that's really how they feel. They're just like me, when they're working, they go to work. They haven't chosen the same path as me; I have at least chosen to be active in my union. I figure if I want to know what's going on there, even if I don't like it, I can't rely on somebody else to bring me information.

But these women don't even come to union meetings, and so there's no ability for them to even know what's going on, because they're probably listening to rumors. And most of them, when they have a job, they go to it and do the best they can, but when they don't, they're not looking for things to make them valuable to the union or make the union valuable to them.

FECTEAU: It sounds like they're not feeling accepted, is that it? And they're not putting forth the effort anymore, they're frustrated.

NUZNOV: Yeah. I think that's what it is. It's just like the newsletter story with me. I'm crazy, because I still write articles for that newsletter. And most people would just say, "That's it." But me, I keep thinking, "If I want to see some change, I've got to keep coming back."

FECTEAU: My next question is kind of in three parts, and it's about what you think could be done to change things for the better. And my first question is: What do you think individuals can do on the job to make it better for women in the trades?

NUZNOV: Now, see, when I look at that question, I think about what could be done to make it better for everyone, like sanitary facilities. That wouldn't be just better for women, that'd be better for everybody. Remember in the old days when you went into a ladies room and there was a couch? They're gone now. And they're gone because men didn't like us having those couches. Now, in my mind, they should have asked for a couch. Why couldn't we all have a couch? Why couldn't we all have it? Instead, it's gone for everybody.

I don't think you can do anything exclusively for women, because there would be way too much resentment built into that. But it just seems that as a people, if we could raise everything up a notch, that that respect that you would be giving everyone would help the men and the women.

FECTEAU: Well, my next question was: What could a contractor or an employer do and also what could a union do to make things better? So it sounds like you're saying what could be done by an employer is to raise the standards for everybody? Do I have that right?

NUZNOV: I believe on most projects it's the general contractor that's responsible for sanitary facilities. So all of this is decided long before the job ever starts going, who's going to pay for what. And they must not put a lot of money into this segment. Even in times when there was a toilet trailer, where they bring it in and this

side is men and this side is women, the different trades would give their laborer up for a couple hours a day to try to keep that facility clean.

Because one thing that happens is when you are invited into the facilities, all you need is one person mistreating them, and everybody gets kicked out. And I'm telling you, there is always that person. There is always that person wiping things on walls, or doing something that even a laborer shouldn't have to clean up. So then the door gets locked. So maybe education would be something. We'd have to educate everybody.

And if they built a little more money into that portion in the pre-job, or however they do that, put a little more money into the facilities . . . But I think because construction workers are so transient, we are thought of as the lowest of the low, and nobody thinks about our comfort, safety, nothing.

I think a good example of this would be in the installation of a transformer. There are electrical connections that happen in a transformer. Well, there's very little room in there to put your hands. Everything is sharp edges and if you're not careful, you're coming out bleeding. It isn't about the installer; it's about the performance of the equipment. I think it's the same way with buildings: it isn't about who puts it there; it's what it's going to be when it's done.

So I guess we need to shift . . . Somewhere in that segment of society that builds the buildings there has to be a component added in to provide for the human beings that actually do the work. But this brings us back to the political climate that exists now in this country. The little worker bees aren't very important, and they're less important when the bottom line is a dollar sign.

So I'd like to think that if we could raise our consciousness and realize that every human being should have the right to wash their hands before and after they go to the restroom, that would be a real improvement. I don't know that it would bring more women into the trade.

I think that many of the women that come in think, "Ah, lots of money. I'm going to make lots of money." Well, you've got to do a lot of work to get that paycheck at the end of the week. And minorities are not going to be able to hide in the system and not do a lot of work; they're going to be very visible.

FECTEAU: Well, is there something that if you were a contractor or you were the employer and you wanted to set up the ideal kind of work situation, what kind of practices would you put in place as a contractor? I'm going to ask the same question as the business manager, but right now I'm just trying to get at if you were an employer, what kind of practices do you think would make a difference for women or all the workers there, but in particular, women?

NUZNOV: I have worked for small employers that tend to value their employees. They give them gifts when they're safe, little incentive things, every once in a while a lunch or something that goes with a training program, any way that would establish that there's people involved, that you cared about what people were doing, that you just didn't expect them to act like machines.

FECTEAU: And you also mentioned the seniority system before, where they actually seem to try to treat people equally as well.

NUZNOV: Some of the littler contractors will sometimes set up little things that are separate. Please understand that we work under a working agreement, so there's a certain amount of stuff that you're supposed to have, and everything else is beyond that.

For instance, some smaller contractors have little 401(k) programs and stuff. Well, that basically is sort of a violation of the working agreement, because it's supposed to be everybody getting the same. So when you're getting anything more, it's a privately negotiated thing, and then you kind of lose the whole union part of it. Now you have people that are like, elbowing one another out to move up into that position.

As a contractor, what would I do? I guess that I would want to give everybody the opportunity to have some sense of involvement. Maybe that would backfire, when I think of some of the individuals I've worked with. [laughs] I've heard something about the management model that the boss should be trying to include people more in the decision-making. And I don't know if you could do that building a building, because certain steps have to be followed. But I'd like to think that if people treated each other the way they wanted to be treated, we'd be right at the core of a lot of things.

FECTEAU: How about if you were the business manager of your local, in some fantasy world, and you could adopt policies or take on certain issues to make the work life better for women, that was a project that you were working on, what kind of things would you do, or I guess, what would you recommend to a business manager?

NUZNOV: I've been to a couple IBEW conventions where we've heard other locals talk about their tools, the things that they've developed. And one of the things that struck me, and I can't remember if it was Chicago, Portland or Washington — it seems to me it was one of those western states — they actually have a mandatory foreman's

training. It's a forty-hour foreman's training, and it's in their working agreement, which makes it mandatory. Something like that, where people were actually taught some diversity, taught some people skills. Because our foremen come right out of the work force, so you might just be getting that job because your buddy is somebody's brother. You might not have any ability to do that job, but we're going to give you that job because it's your turn. And so then you've got this bully that doesn't know anything [laughs] being in charge. So you have a lot of that kind of stuff.

RAUCHER: In Local 58, are there very many women foremen?

NUZNOV: Oh, there's been women foremen.

RAUCHER: Well, is there any difference? Have you worked for women as well as men on a job?

NUZNOV: Yeah. It's been different.

RAUCHER: With a woman as a foreman?

NUZNOV: Yeah. And I've only . . .

RAUCHER: In terms of how you're treated?

NUZNOV: I'm trying to think. I've only worked for one or two. Now, I have a friend that worked for a woman foreman for ages. The two of them had been partners, and then the one became a foreman. And I believe she's still somewhere being a foreman. I've always heard from both women and men that worked for her that she's very fair. But she came out of the postal system. Somewhere she was in management in the postal system when she got to the trade, so she had a lot of management training already. And I think that's a part of it.

Any women foremen I've worked for tend to have a real good sense of the fact that you're a woman, and there's a kindness that goes with that. Those same women get beat to death if they treat men that way.

FECTEAU: Going back to policies and rules, you came in on an affirmative action program. I just want to know what your views are about affirmative action now, and if there's any recommendations you would make with regard to affirmative action, either to the union, to contractors or to the government, for that matter?

NUZNOV: Well, we wouldn't have needed affirmative action if people would have done the right thing to begin with. So I would say that the bottom line is people don't do the right thing, so when they don't do the right thing, something or someone has got to regulate it. I don't believe that affirmative action should be abolished, because we will return to what we saw before affirmative action. I realize that a white man isn't going to say the same thing I'm saying, because they're the supposed top of the heap. They want it to stay this way or maybe even become whiter or more available to more men, or whatever.

I know that the tests that I took to get into my apprenticeship were really real tests. They weren't phony, they weren't less than what everybody else took. I had to pass those tests and have the qualifications to do the job. I have a real fear that people thinking we don't need affirmative action are living somewhere on some planet I'm not on, because I think that without some kind of guidelines and regulations, just the buddies are going to have jobs. The rest of us will all be going, "Whoops, that door just slammed and my fingers are flat like a piece of paper."

RAUCHER: Well, there are several answers that I'd like to hear more about and have fleshed out, but it's already 5:00 o'clock and you must be tired, right?

NUZNOV: Well, how long have I been sitting here? It doesn't seem like it's been that long.

RAUCHER: At least an hour and a half, maybe more.

FECTEAU: Well, we're supposed to ask the question, the last question is supposed to be: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about?

NUZNOV: I think I've already probably talked about a lot of it along the way. But I really, really hope that someday we all treat each other the way we want to be treated, and it could be perfect, in a perfect world.