Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with

Jola Stone
Draftswoman

October 18, 2004

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Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with Jola Stone

MARGARET RAUCHER: We're here at the Reuther Library on October 18th, 2004 to interview Jola Stone, a draftswoman, for the Tradeswomen Oral History Project. I'm Margaret Raucher. And I'd like to start out the questioning by asking Jola about her life before she entered the trades, where she was born and raised, her family, what it was like growing up, and that sort of thing.

JOLA STONE: Okay. I was raised in Charlotte, Michigan. I was born in Battle Creek, but my mother tells me that the hospital was closed in Charlotte the day I was born, so we went to Battle Creek. We lived in Charlotte until I was six years old.

RAUCHER: Where is Charlotte?

STONE: Charlotte is near Lansing. My dad worked for the GM plant in Lansing, the Oldsmobile plant in Lansing. And he had an opportunity to transfer to Grand Rapids to work for the trim and sew plant in Grand Rapids, the GM plant. It was a brand new plant that had opened. So he transferred up to Grand Rapids and our family moved up there when I was six years old. So most of my life has been in Grand Rapids.

Do you want me to talk about my sisters, my family and all that?

RAUCHER: Sure. Anything you want to talk about is fine.

STONE: All right. I'm the third girl in the family. I have a younger brother, also. I have one sister that is not quite a year older than me, so we've always been really close. And then my oldest sister is five years older than me. She lives in Oregon and

she's a potter. My sister that lives in Grand Rapids is a housewife. And my brother, who is two years younger than me, lives in Greenville, and he raises Christmas trees.

RAUCHER: An interesting family.

STONE: Yes. We're a really close family. In fact, I talk to my one sister that lives in Grand Rapids almost every day, so we're really close. When we were growing up, I can remember my dad would always take a month's vacation. He packed us all up and we'd go camping. That was way before there used to be state parks all over, so we'd go camp along the shores of Lake Superior and stuff. So I really had a nice childhood. I had a fairly unstressful childhood.

RAUCHER: What did your mom do? Was she a stay-at-home mom?

STONE: She stayed home until I was about nine or ten. And then she went to work at a department store in Grand Rapids. And she worked there full time, because I can remember my dad used to come home when she was working nights, and he'd make us dinner and stuff.

CATHY DAWSON: How was that?

STONE: His specialty was cold milk soup, which was a bowl of milk with saltine crackers crushed in it. And, of course, we loved it, but my mother would always get like, "I can't believe you'd do that." So she worked pretty much all the time that I was growing up. And then she eventually got a job at Consumers Energy and worked there as a switchboard operator for probably about twenty years, until she retired.

RAUCHER: It sounds like your dad didn't have a problem with your mom working, even though there were four kids at home.

STONE: No. And my grandma, my mother's mother, lived with us for several years, so we always had somebody at home when we got home from school and stuff. But yeah, my dad never had a problem with my mom working or anything.

RAUCHER: Maybe I wasn't paying close enough attention, but did you tell us the year you were born?

STONE: I was born in 1948, March 1st, 1948.

RAUCHER: And can you tell us a little bit about your experiences at school, your education?

STONE: I've been working since I was fourteen years old. I either was babysitting or I worked at the drugstore that was in the town that we lived in. We lived just outside of Grand Rapids in Comstock Park. My two older sisters worked there, and so when I turned sixteen, I was able to get a job there too. I made sixty cents an hour. I worked behind the soda fountain. And the good thing was that they let you eat anything that you could make back there. So we always had hot fudge sundaes and all that stuff. So I was either always babysitting or working at a job like that.

I wasn't an exceptional student in high school. The school I went to did not have art classes, and I loved to draw, so I was the first female to take a mechanical drawing class at school. And they were really concerned about whether I could take it or not, but I can remember my mom talked to the principal or something, and so I was able to take mechanical drawing. So that kind of made up for the art classes that I wasn't able to take.

And then in my senior year in high school, I started working at a furniture store in Grand Rapids. I had gotten the job through a lady that I babysat for. Actually, she was the first lady that I knew that was in management. She was the manager of the office and

so she hired me to work part time as an office clerk. But that was the first time I ever knew of a woman that was in any kind of management position in work. I worked there for probably four years when I was in high school, and then when I graduated and went to art school, I worked there also.

I went to art school for two years.

MICHELLE FECTEAU: Where did you go to art school?

STONE: Kendall School of Design. I liked it, but then I really didn't like it.

FECTEAU: What didn't you like about it?

STONE: If you were not exceptional, you were kind of ignored by the teachers. If you were an exceptional artist, you were really given preferred treatment and stuff. I was just kind of borderline. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. And so, after two years I dropped out and went to community college in Grand Rapids for a year and continued working at Klingman's.

Never graduated from college. Had the opportunity to work at Consumers Power in the engineering department, and that's where my mother was working at the time. So I went out there and started working in the engineering department with the promise of being able to move into the drafting department when there was an opening. And that's really what I liked to do. I liked to do the mechanical drawing.

RAUCHER: What was your job, though, before you got into drafting?

STONE: I was a clerk. I finally was able to move into the drafting department and I worked at Consumers for seven years. And then they kind of cut back on all their staff, like what all the utility companies go through. So I was forced to go into the meter reading department and do clerical work. And I didn't really like that.

In the meantime, a friend of mine that worked at Consumers had gone to MichCon, which is now DTE, to be a dispatcher. And he knew that there was a drafting job at MichCon, so he called me. I went and had an interview and was hired, the first woman to be hired at MichCon in the drafting department. And I can remember sitting in the interview process and they're . . .

DAWSON: Any women in the interview process?

STONE: No, absolutely not. It was all men. They were kind of like, "I don't know if we really . . ." But they hired me. So it was me and two other men that worked in the drafting department.

DAWSON: Did they have any prior experience, because it sounded like you did.

STONE: No, it was all just on-the-job training. That was back when you would still do the pencil drawings. You had the big map plates and you did pen and ink drawings right on the map plates and everything. So it was very detailed work, but I loved it.

We had the opportunity to vote to join the union during that time, but unfortunately, it wasn't approved, so we had to wait another year before we could vote on it again. That was to join the International Chemical Workers Union. One of the things that convinced me to join the union was the fact that I had to train a person who had transferred into drafting, a male. And he made more money than I did.

DAWSON: While you were training him?

STONE: While I was training him. So I went to Human Resources and said, "Hey, it's not fair. I'm training him." And they pretty much said, "Too bad."

RAUCHER: When you were hired in with the two other draftsmen, were you hired in at a lower rate of pay than those men?

STONE: Yes.

RAUCHER: Can you back up a little? Because you said you started out in the engineering department with a clerical job and then there was an opening in the drafting department. Was it a training program?

STONE: No — well yeah, I guess it was. I was trained by the other drafters. It was kind of like on-the-job training. I've never had any formal schooling for drafting. It was all on-the-job. But it was based on the mechanical drawing classes I had taken and the art school and stuff.

RAUCHER: And what was that like, I mean, going through and learning that trade, that skill on the job? And what were your teachers like? I mean, were they open and helpful?

STONE: Actually, yeah. At Consumers Power, there was another lady who was a drafter and she taught me a lot of the stuff and she was great. Really, it was a very nice atmosphere. And then at MichCon, the training that I got was from the guys that were on the job. And they were very helpful too. I never was treated any differently by the people that I actually worked with. It was the issue of pay and that type of thing, which they didn't have anything to do with.

FECTEAU: Did they give you any justification for why the new person who was being hired was being paid more than you?

STONE: Well, because I was a new employee, I was still under probation, all that type of thing. Those were the reasons why. In fact, actually, when I complained

about it, they made me go through the interview process again. I don't know if they were trying to discourage me from questioning things or anything, but I did that.

So then in the meantime, we had the opportunity to vote to join the union again. And that time, the union was voted in by the drafters and the dispatchers, which was a group of about twenty people.

FECTEAU: How did that change the situation? What was the result of that?

STONE: Well, we couldn't see any change immediately, only because it took us almost two years to negotiate a contract with the company. I pulled out some of my notes, because I was on the negotiating committee. I think I counted over a hundred meetings that we had with the company.

For me personally, joining the union, I think, was probably one of the best things that ever happened to me. I had the opportunity to sit in on negotiations, actually find out what the company felt about people who belonged to the union at that time.

FECTEAU: How did they feel?

DAWSON: They loved the union, didn't they? [laughter]

STONE: They were not happy at all. In fact, actually, I can remember them coming in the day before we were going to vote, and they brought in a former union president who had gone into management. And he stood up and told us how bad the union was. And I'm thinking, okay, so you at one time were the president of the union and now you're telling us how bad it is. So really, it must be the best thing that ever happened. And I was really disappointed in him. But now when you look back, I'm sure he was forced to do it. He was in management, I mean, and what else can you do?

I wouldn't say the company lied to us, but they did make promises that they didn't keep. While we were in negotiations in that two-year period of time, we were supposed to get our yearly raises. They refused to pay those. We were finally able, through the NLRB, to get a ruling that they had to pay us all the back wages and everything. And I was reading through the hearing transcript (I have it here) and the judge that heard the case said the company was "less than truthful" [laughter] on a lot of things. And I'm thinking, "Wow, it's amazing that it was like that."

RAUCHER: What happened between the first and the second time you voted for the union? What happened to change people's minds?

STONE: I think that what changed people's minds was when they got a two-cents-an-hour increase for that year. I mean, two cents an hour, that's just . . . And you had a group of union people in the same building that were getting their yearly negotiated increases and you saw the benefits they had. So that was what, I think, changed most people. When the company promised you lots of stuff, the majority voted against the union. And then they didn't come through with what they had promised. And then, like I said, the two-cents-an-hour increase was, I think, the ultimate insult to the majority of the people.

DAWSON: I'm curious. You said that part of why you became a draftswoman was because you enjoyed art. Did you know that there probably weren't a lot of women who did that? (I know you said at Consumers that there was someone there.) Why did you decide to pick that? Was it because of your art background? Were you discouraged that there weren't more women doing it?

STONE: I don't think I was discouraged. There were some other pretty strong ladies that I worked with that worked as dispatchers. Actually, this one lady was the first female dispatcher to work for MichCon, so there were some other strong ladies that worked for MichCon. And I guess I just kind of like to do different things, and so it really didn't bother me to be the only female in that department.

RAUCHER: Can you give some examples? By doing different things, you mean maybe when you were growing up you didn't always go with the flow or with the crowd? Can you give some examples of that?

STONE: I don't know. I mean, it's just like my one sister never worked. My girlfriends never worked. They all . . .

RAUCHER: You mean when you were growing up?

STONE: Yeah. Or after they got married too. They were always housewives. And I never had that desire, not that there's anything wrong with it. But I always liked knowing that I had my own paycheck. I could pretty much do what I wanted to do and wouldn't have to depend on anybody else. I guess maybe that's it.

FECTEAU: When I think of women artists, it seems like they gravitate towards maybe graphic design, where there's more women. They can still use their art skills, but they go to maybe an area where it's more female-dominated — art teachers or something like that. And it's just interesting to me why you didn't take your skills and go into a female-dominated career. It's interesting why you gravitated towards something that was male-dominated. Was it the pay, or was it just that drafting was a particular skill that you liked?

STONE: Yeah. I would say that probably the pay had a lot to do with it, but it was the type of art that I was doing, too. I liked the detail work and I liked doing the mechanical drawing part of things.

I was taking this stained glass class one time. And we were designing our own small windows. And everybody had real fancy designs and everything, and mine was all squares and everything. And the guy came up to me and says, "Are you an engineer?" And I said, "No. Why?" He says "Well, because you're very technical and precise." And I guess, yeah, I mean, I like doing that type of thing. I like being able to do the detail work and stuff like that.

RAUCHER: That's interesting. Can you think of anything in your background that might have made you like doing that sort of thing?

STONE: I was thinking about that this weekend, and I can't think of anything that would have made me want to do something like that. I don't know what it was.

DAWSON: Did you play sports when you were growing up?

STONE: No. Well, actually, I did play basketball. But that was back when girls could only play half court. And I wasn't very good, but I did play it for a couple years. But that was the only thing that I played.

RAUCHER: A lot of your extra hours, it sounds like, were spent working.

STONE: Yes.

RAUCHER: But when you socialized, what did you do? I mean, did you do girl things, go out with the girls, get your hair done, your nails, whatever?

STONE: Yeah. I always hung out with girls and stuff. I always had girlfriends, had boyfriends. Used to go to football games and basketball games, all that stuff.

FECTEAU: Did you work with tools or enjoy working with things that were more mechanical?

STONE: Nope. I don't ever remember . . . Even my dad didn't teach us how to build things or anything. So I don't know what made me choose drafting.

RAUCHER: What did your dad do at the Oldsmobile plant?

STONE: He was a supervisor.

RAUCHER: So he worked for the company.

STONE: Yes, right. He was in the union when he worked at the GM plant in Lansing. Then when he transferred to Grand Rapids, he went into management.

FECTEAU: What kind of work did he supervise?

STONE: It was the sewing plant in Grand Rapids, so it was the upholstery for the cars and stuff. So he supervised ladies that worked on the sewing machines.

FECTEAU: Why did he go into that? I mean, is that something that's in your family?

STONE: My grandpa worked for the Oldsmobile plant in Lansing also. He was in the paint department. And so I'm sure that because he worked there, my dad got a job there after he got out of the service. So that's why he was there.

FECTEAU: I always think of the paint department as a place where immigrant workers or black workers are. It was one of the dirtiest, hardest jobs.

STONE: It was dirty. In fact, actually, he got asthma — or not asthma, but he had problems with his lungs because of all the paint that he had inhaled.

RAUCHER: This is your grandfather?

STONE: That was my grandfather, yeah.

FECTEAU: Was he an immigrant?

STONE: No. And I don't even know how my grandpa even started working there. And I believe that — and I probably should have asked my mother, because my father has passed away now — but I believe my grandfather started working there late in life. I know that he and my grandmother had, like, a boardinghouse in Charlotte, and so maybe that was what he worked at until he went to GM.

RAUCHER: You said the sister you're closest to is the housewife in Grand Rapids. That's interesting, because you have never been a housewife, right? You've always worked.

STONE: I've always worked. Yep. I was married. I've been divorced for close to thirteen years now. But yeah, I've never been not working.

RAUCHER: Did you talk about your job, what it was like on the job with your sister?

STONE: Yeah. She'd listen to me complain about stuff.

DAWSON: I guess I would like you to go into a little bit more detail about what exactly a draftsperson does. Because I'm thinking of a blueprint.

STONE: Uh-huh.

DAWSON: Could you go into a little bit more detail about exactly what you do with the blueprint.

STONE: All right. Of course, now everything is done on computer. But when I first started drafting, they were done on big Mylar paper that was clear, kind of like plastic. And there were a couple different things that a drafter for MichCon would do. If a main was dug up to have a repair put on it, we would put those repairs on the map plate,

so the crew would know, when they go out, if there was a pressure fitting there or if the main was going from six-inch to twelve-inch, what kind of fittings are there.

So we would show all the repairs on the mains. Then, if they were putting in an underground vault, we would also draw those up. So those were actually kind of like mechanical drawings. And the engineer would tell us what type of fittings were needed, so we would draw those all up. So our name would be on that, but then also the engineer's.

DAWSON: That'd be cool. To have your name on a print, I think that'd be awesome.

FECTEAU: So did you have to go to the work site and actually see the broken main or are you working in an office mainly.

STONE: For a broken main, if they were putting on a fitting or whatever, no, we wouldn't go out. But if they were building an underground vault and we were doing the vault drawing, yeah, we would go out and get measurements and all that stuff. Or if they were doing big offsets, where they'd have to change the lay of the main to go from say, twelve feet off the property line to sixteen or whatever, we would go out and get those types of measurements.

FECTEAU: I'm curious, when you walk into a work site, and maybe you're working with pipefitters and millwrights, what kind of reaction you would get from workers because you were a woman. Were most people accepting or did you ever have any instances where they were not accepting?

STONE: I would say that in most cases, everybody was pretty accepting. I never had any problems with anybody out in the field or anything.

DAWSON: You said that now everything is done by computers. How is that done?

STONE: Now, I'm not the expert in computers.

DAWSON: I know you told me that, but I was curious because my job [machinist] has become so computerized.

STONE: There are programs that you use to drag, let's say, the flange over and you put it on. So you're still actually drawing the drawing, but all the stuff is pre-made and you're just putting all the pieces together and then you just run the printout.

RAUCHER: Do people that were trained in the old methods think that they perhaps have more expertise or have a leg up on the ones who come and don't have to actually do the drawing themselves?

STONE: Yeah, that's what I always say: The new drafters, they're not really drafters. They're computer people.

DAWSON: And then if the computer went down, what would they do?

STONE: Right.

RAUCHER: Are they still trained on the job like you were or does the company require some experience?

STONE: The company requires some basic pre-qualifications, but most of it is on the job, even for the computer drafting. But I'm the last drafter in our department that actually did the manual drafting. So every once in a while some special job comes up and I get to pull my ink pens out and draw something. But everybody else is computer.

RAUCHER: Are there very many women in the trade nowadays?

STONE: There are two other women in our department, and one is a drafter. She does all the vault drawings, so she's an expert at that, that's her specialty. The other woman is clerical. But all the rest are men that are in the department.

FECTEAU: How many is that?

STONE: There's nine people in our department, so three of us are women.

FECTEAU: Is that for the entire company, or is that just . . .

STONE: That's for just our location. In Detroit, I'm not sure how many women are in the drafting department.

FECTEAU: Is this a job that you can bid on, so somebody could be promoted? Why do you think more women have not gone into it?

STONE: Well, I think originally, it was probably because you had to have some mechanical drawing expertise. And now that we've gone to the computer, there actually haven't been any jobs posted only because nobody's retiring or anything. But I'm sure that eventually we would see more people in the department.

RAUCHER: You were the only girl in your mechanical drawing class in high school?

STONE: Uh-huh.

RAUCHER: What was that experience like?

STONE: It was different. You walk in the first day, you don't know how the guys are going to react to it.

RAUCHER: How old were you?

STONE: I took it in my junior and senior year, so I was sixteen, seventeen years old. It was a pretty small school, so I knew most of the kids. I think there was only like, sixty-nine kids in our graduating class.

But I don't remember being made fun of or anything because I was taking that class. And actually, I think that after I graduated, there were some other young girls that took those classes.

FECTEAU: What year did you graduate?

STONE: I graduated in '66.

FECTEAU: And I'm also curious about the teacher. Was the teacher receptive or did you feel like you were treated differently?

STONE: Nope. I don't remember that he was unhappy that I was there. I think he was receptive.

DAWSON: So no one discouraged you or anything?

STONE: No. I don't remember that they did.

FECTEAU: How were your parents when you told them this was something that you wanted to do?

STONE: My parents were encouraging. They encouraged me to do it. So I didn't feel like it was a bad thing or anything. And actually, it was only because, like I said, they had no art class, and that's what I was really interested in.

FECTEAU: But when you went on to make it a profession, how did your parents or family feel as far as making it into a job that you wanted to do? It sounds like they were receptive all the way around.

STONE: Yeah. And my dad was very encouraging and always told me that you needed to do what you liked. But it's just like when I got involved in the union. My dad was in management and my mother certainly never had any contact with a union, but they were always very encouraging and supportive.

FECTEAU: Why do you think that is?

STONE: I don't know if it was because my dad actually came up through the ranks and maybe understood. I know my grandfather was a UAW member. So I think maybe that's an influence.

RAUCHER: You said that — I'm backing up again, to the interview process, when you were chosen as the first woman draftsperson at MichCon. I was wondering, how did you sell them on hiring you? I mean, you said they were a little bit reluctant, right? There must have been other candidates for the job, I assume, men who wanted that job.

STONE: I don't know if it was just because I had the experience. I'm not really sure why they did.

RAUCHER: Do you remember what year it was?

STONE: It was 1975. And I think it was right on the edge, when women started getting into the trades more.

RAUCHER: Right. And there might have been some pressure on the company to hire more women.

STONE: Right.

DAWSON: Tell us a little bit how you got involved in the union. Were you a steward first or — we know now that you're president and we're very proud. But how did that whole journey start?

STONE: I was selected to be the drafter representative in negotiations. And I was the only woman on the negotiating committee.

DAWSON: Out of how many?

STONE: There were four of us, along with the president of the local and our international rep.

FECTEAU: What year would this have been?

STONE: That was in 1980. And I just think the other two guys in the drafting department really weren't interested. I was interested in it. I thought I'd like to be part of negotiating the contract, even though I didn't have any idea what it involved.

And my family was very supportive. I was married at that time, and my husband was very supportive. He was proud that I was involved. He was a member of the UAW, worked at the GM plant in Grand Rapids.

We started our negotiations, and like I said, it took us almost two years to get the first contract. All our negotiating meetings were held after work on our own time. We probably met two or three times during the week.

DAWSON: Did you know that beforehand, before you said you'd step into this position?

STONE: Well, it wasn't really clear how it was going to work. Actually, I've kept every note from those negotiations, so I was looking through them the other day. And one of them said that we had agreed not to be paid. And I'm thinking, why did we

agree to that? But we did. We agreed not to be paid. It was after work. I can remember going downtown, where we negotiated, at five o'clock at night.

RAUCHER: Downtown where?

STONE: Grand Rapids. Be there at five o'clock at night, and sometimes get home one, two o'clock in the morning. But it was a struggle to get our contract. The company was not happy that we had organized.

FECTEAU: And you're still with the Chemical Workers?

STONE: Yeah. And we had filed several charges against the company and won all of them. I can remember we always got taken out for Christmas lunch. Well, as soon as we joined the union, they took that away. We grieved it and the NLRB said that until we had a contract, the company had to do that. So, of course, they had to post it on the board that they were wrong in taking our Christmas lunch away from us. [laughter] It was great.

That was a great learning experience. I learned a lot from that. The president of the local, he was kind of like an old-time union person, always been around — he was a field worker. But he taught me so much that I would say he was a mentor to me. He was great. He taught me a lot of stuff. Unfortunately, he went into management, which really disappointed me.

So after we got our contract, I was voted in as the office vice president. And I was that for several years until . . .

DAWSON: You were still doing your job as a draftswoman?

STONE: Yes, right. So that was more part-time then. So I sat in on negotiations. Of course, when I came on as a vice president, the rest of the union, it was

mostly male. So, of course, they weren't real happy with the fact that I was sitting up front as an officer at union meetings.

And I can sort of remember one union meeting where one of the guys stood up and said that he didn't think it was right that the union paid a monthly expense, which was probably $50 a month, to two vice presidents — there was me and then there was the other vice president who came out of the field, and of course it was a man. So John said, "Well, which vice president do you think we shouldn't be paying for?" And of course it was, "Well, the one with less seniority," which would have been me. And I can remember John saying that, "Well, if we're not going to pay for Jola's, then we won't be paying for anybody's." I think there was a motion and it got voted down and everything. So at first, there were a lot of guys that weren't happy that I was part of the executive board, but we worked through it.

RAUCHER: But this wasn't an elected position?

STONE: Yeah, it was. But it was elected only by the office people.

RAUCHER: Oh, okay.

STONE: For a long time we were two separate divisions, the office and the field. So like I said, the office people voted for their own vice president. Since then, we've changed that and all the executive board officers are voted by all of the membership.

STONE: And there were women in the office.

STONE: Yes, there were women in the office.

FECTEAU: But I find that curious that you were accepted as a draftsperson, but you were not accepted as a leader of the union. But you said that came also from the field?

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: And that was all male?

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: And what is it that they did?

STONE: I know part of the problem was that there was concern about seniority, because there were some office people they had, they'd been there for a long time. But I don't know if they just felt threatened because it was a change, it was a woman on the board for the first time. There'd never been any woman, actually, because there were no women in the field.

But when I ran for president in 1987 — the former president stepped aside because he had gotten ill and he was no longer interested in running — I ran against another executive board officer and was elected, which I thought was pretty great, because it was a male-dominated union. So in 1987 I was elected president and I've been elected every two years since then.

So in 1988, I was able to negotiate, along with the executive board, my first contract as the union president, which was scary. But that was a great experience, to actually be the chief spokesperson for the local, present the proposals and stuff like that.

DAWSON: Any other women on the board then?

STONE: No.

FECTEAU: So you're the only woman in leadership in your local?

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: How many members?

STONE: We have 210 members in our local. We've had women grievance reps in the past. We've had women that have run for executive board offices and have not

been successful, which has disappointed me, because I would like to have another female on the executive board. But the women in our local are still active. But out of 210 members, we probably have thirty women in our local.

FECTEAU: Are they in the field as well?

STONE: We've got some in the field. And we have meter readers. We have some service people. We have a female in distribution and then, dispatch and drafting. Actually, we have some women that are in the service department who've come out of meter reading, who are learning the job. It's on-the-job training and it's how to work on furnaces, stoves, that type of thing. So that's a huge step for them, too.

RAUCHER: It must be difficult negotiating a contract with people doing such different things, all in the same local. Do you negotiate different agreements for these different groups of workers?

STONE: Nope. We all have one local agreement. But yeah, we address each department. Normally we send out a survey to everybody and ask them what they would like to see changed in their department, so we address individual departments. And then we negotiate economic issues all as one, also.

FECTEAU: So you're part of what was MichCon?

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: So you're separate from [Utility Workers Local] 223.

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: And you were separate from Local 80 — the gas workers?

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: Is it because of your location — because I know that Local 80 has meter readers as well.

STONE: Right. It's because of location and because we are a different international. And for whatever reason, when Local 80 was organized — and I'm not sure what year they got their charter . . .

DAWSON: A long time ago.

STONE: . . . we were already part of the Chemical Workers. Our original charter is 1948, I think. And that was just for the distribution and service. And then during that time, meter reading came in as another department. But yeah, so we're a part of the International Chemical Workers, which is affiliated with the United Food and Commercial Workers. We merged with them probably about five years ago. So we're a council under them.

I just wanted to talk a little bit about the international union, because that is the place where I felt the most reluctance to have women in a position of power — not power necessarily, but a position of leadership. When we go to an international convention, as far as the Chemical Worker part of it is concerned, you sit out in the audience and all you see at the head table are white males. And even though you talk about it at conventions and try to get it changed, it doesn't change. And that's the one thing I'm most disappointed about in belonging to a union, is that women are not represented, at least in our international, the way that I think that they should be.

RAUCHER: Is there any kind of women's caucus or women's group within the international.

STONE: With the UFCW, they have a women's network. I'm on the executive board from the Chemical Workers. The UFCW is pretty good about having women represented on their executive board. That is a much harder group to get into, because UFCW locals have 30,000, 40,000 members. We have only 210 people in our local, so if you're the president of a local that has 30,000 members, you certainly have much more influence than a person that has 200. And like I said, UFCW is much more forward in addressing the needs and concerns of women, whereas the Chemical Workers, I think they're kind of like back in the . . .

RAUCHER: You have one convention, though, since you merged.

STONE: No, we have two conventions. We have Chemical Workers, and then we also have the UFCW. I've run for an office on the executive board from the Chemical Workers . . .

FECTEAU: For the Chemical Workers, but at the international level.

STONE: Yes, right. It was for the recorder. Didn't get voted in, but that was a great experience. Had lots of people stand up in support of me. I was able to address the convention. That was a great opportunity.

RAUCHER: Was that your idea or did someone encourage you to do that?

STONE: Yeah, actually, one of the vice presidents had come up to me. And I was complaining to him about the fact that there were no women on the executive board. And he says, "Well, there's your opportunity, Jola. You can run for recorder." And I thought, "Well yeah, you're right, it is my opportunity." And so kind of at the last minute, because we were already out at the convention, I submitted my name. And I

thought, well, you're putting the challenge out there, so I'll step up to the plate. That was a great experience.

DAWSON: How did people react?

RAUCHER: Do you know what the vote was?

STONE: Yeah. I lost significantly, but I mean, I had well over 400 votes, I remember. Because it was roll call, so you knew who was voting for you and who wasn't. So I had some significant votes. People said to me, "Hey, if I would have known you were going to run, I would have voted for you, but I've already committed to the other person," which was, of course, a male.

RAUCHER: Will you run again?

STONE: If I had the opportunity, I might. I might. I'm getting close to thinking about retiring, so I don't know if I would want to.

FECTEAU: So the chemical workers in this union, they're not just people who work for the utilities.

STONE: Right. They work for the salt companies, Monsanto, a lot of big chemical plants.

FECTEAU: But do the jobs tend to be male-dominated?

STONE: Yes, right. In fact, actually, I can remember going to my first convention, and I mean, me and maybe ten other women were at the convention as officers with 300 men.

I'll tell you a story about how they don't encourage women to advance in the international. Our international bylaws that we got at every convention, it was always "he" this and "he" that. So I brought it up at one of the conventions and I said, "Look,

would you please make it gender correct?" And they said, "Well, because it's a convention, we'll have it ready when we get it reprinted."

So we have a special convention to vote on whether we want to join the UFCW or not. I went to that convention and spoke in opposition to joining the UFCW, only because we felt that there were other internationals that would represent utility workers better than the Food an Commercial Workers. But we were voted down.

So at that convention, we were all given our constitution. And it still was not changed. And so I stood up at the convention and asked the president why wasn't gender recognized, and it was kind of like, "Oh Jola, why are you bringing that up again?" You know, a little pat on the head. "Well, we'll work on it."

And I mean, it was just simple things like that, that they didn't even address, that would have made you feel like you're a part of your international. And I mean, even today, you look at the executive board of our international and it's white males. And I don't see that there's going to be any change in the near future, which I think is really unfortunate.

DAWSON: So you wouldn't sit on your international just because you're president of the local. How does your international work? Because our local president always sat on our international executive board.

STONE: Oh no. Ours isn't set up that way. Our international has elected vice presidents, or the president and vice presidents, who work full time for the international. And then it's broken down by region. Each vice president has a different region of the country. And then they have reps that work under them that help us, like in our

arbitration cases or negotiations and stuff like that. So, to be on our international board, you would have to be a full-time executive officer.

DAWSON: But I sympathize with you, as far as you're talking about women, because I know I tried to get a women's committee on our international [Utility Workers], because we don't have one. And I looked on it as something that when I needed help, it would be nice to be able to go through the international. And Marti [Rodriguez-]Harris — I think she was a vice president from California — put it on the floor. And the end result was that the president decided to make the three women who were sitting on the international at that time an organizing committee. And we're like, "How did we go from a women's committee to an organizing committee?" So it just sort of died. And it was disappointing. It's hard.

FECTEAU: What would you say the female percentage of the UFCW is? Do you know?

STONE: I believe probably more than forty percent. I mean, there's a huge group of women in the UFCW.

FECTEAU: And right now there are no females . . .?

STONE: On the UFCW executive board, yes there are. There's several women. But compared to how large that board is, it's male-dominated. And I don't even know how many women are in the Chemical Workers international, but there's definitely no females on the executive board.

FECTEAU: If you could make a proposal to change that, if you had the power to do something within the international to get better representation, do you have some ideas on what the international could do?

STONE: Well, for one thing, they had a great opportunity to put somebody on the executive board just recently and they hired a white male. I called the international on that and it was pretty much, "Oh Jola, we'll make it right." But they're not. And really, it would have to come from off the floor, I would say, at a convention. You would have to have a woman strong enough to be able to run against a vice president at a convention. Because right now, if a vice president retires, they're replaced by the president, they're appointed. And they're basing it on seniority.

RAUCHER: But you said there is a women's caucus within . . .

STONE: Within the UFCW, yes. And actually, there is within the Chemical Workers also, because I'm on it, and there's a couple of other ladies from the Chemical Workers that's on the UFCW one. And so we do represent the Chemical Workers in that convention. We do have women's caucuses.

RAUCHER: And what do you do at these caucuses?

STONE: Well, we meet with other women. At our last convention, we put on a lunch for ladies and honored two of the women that's in our international for their years of service, what they've done. One is an organizer out of Texas, who's been in the international for many, many years. And then the other lady was education director for our international and she just recently retired. So we honored those. And we meet and talk about women's issues, stuff like that.

RAUCHER: What are some of the women's issues?

STONE: Some of the issues would be, certainly, health care, child care, you know, the same issues that all other women have.

RAUCHER: But mostly within the contract, negotiable, contractual things, rather than your place within the union.

STONE: Yes.

RAUCHER: And I wasn't quite clear. There's a convention for the Chemical Workers, they have their own, and then the UFCW has its own. Do you come together and have one together as well?

STONE: Yes. We would come to the UFCW convention as delegates from the Chemical Workers. Each local can send so many delegates to the UFCW convention, which is held every five years. So I've been able to attend two of those.

RAUCHER: And do they send delegates to the Chemical Workers convention?

STONE: No.

FECTEAU: So what do they call the women's organization? Is it the Women's Network?

STONE: Women's Network, yes.

FECTEAU: Why don't you talk about representation within the union?

STONE: We do.

FECTEAU: But I'm getting the feeling it's kind of undercover.

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: And why do you think that is?

STONE: I don't know. I mean, first of all, I don't understand all the politics of the UFCW. It's much larger than what I would even care to know about. But we do talk about it. I think it's just because there's so many locals, large locals that are run by males

and they have lots of influence. And there aren't too many women in the UFCW that are presidents of locals that have, you know, 30, 40,000 members.

FECTEAU: Do you think that there would be retaliation if it was brought up or some resistance?

STONE: I'd hate to say that there would be retaliation. Probably I'd just say there's resistance, that they don't want to see change.

FECTEAU: It just seems so destructive to the union in the long run.

STONE: Right, because there's lots of women that would do a great job sitting on executive boards. I mean, you would get a totally different perspective on so many things that you're not now. And we're not really being given the opportunity, which is a shame.

RAUCHER: Are you a member of the Coalition of Labor Union Women?

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: Has that been at all effective or helpful?

STONE: I'd have to say I'm not a very active member, so in my case, I don't see that it's been very effective. I know Susan Phillips, who's the head of the Women's Network at the UFCW, was just voted in as the president, because Gloria [Johnson] just retired.

FECTEAU: Well, I guess I'm still coming back to: What would it take to change that? My feelings and my understanding are similar to yours about CLUW and the Network — they're good for networking, but there's still so many constraints to create actual change. And it's like you're in a bubble. You know what I mean? You're

in your own small world, but you need to influence change outside of that small support group.

Are there any things that could be done, even if it's in a gradual sense? Or are there things that, if you could replace the leadership that exists now and you became the leader, what kind of policies would you implement? What are the policies that could make it a more egalitarian union? Do you have any ideas? That's a big question, I know.

STONE: That's a big question, right.

RAUCHER: And I think it must be kind of frustrating if you've been butting your head up against the wall for years, and as you say, you're getting close to retirement, and thinking, well, I've done everything I can do.

FECTEAU: And you've brought people up behind you, too.

STONE: Yes. And I think that coming from a larger local has a lot to do with it. The larger local has more influence, I think. And they're the ones that would be able to influence change.

FECTEAU: So maybe getting the right leaders at some of the larger locals could make a difference.

STONE: Yes.

FECTEAU: So do you see that things could be changing in the near future, say the next ten, twenty years? And what changes have you seen, or what progress do you think has been made over your lifetime in the union?

STONE: Personally, I've learned so much being in the union, things that I never would have had the opportunity to participate in, and that's been a great thing. I couldn't even imagine working someplace without a union, because of the benefits and the wages

that we were able to negotiate. And I think women need to get more involved in the union, if only because all we keep hearing about is how unions are dwindling. And I think that women are a great source to get that turned around. I mean, how many women are in the workforce? I think there's a great opportunity to get more women organized that aren't organized.

RAUCHER: But are you frustrated at all with the level of participation of women? I mean, for various reasons — some of them maybe have families or they have other obligations and they just can't spend the time that you need to spend on that business.

STONE: Yeah. But I mean, I can understand why women aren't as active as you might wish they would be. But I still say, when you really need women to do something, they're always there ready to help you. While they might not come to all the union meetings and be very vocal about the union, I think when it comes right down to it, they would support you and be there to help on important issues.

FECTEAU: Our very, very last question: Is there anything else you didn't mention that you'd like to talk about?

STONE: Not right now, but probably when I'm driving home I'll think of something else. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here.

RAUCHER: Oh, we thank you for agreeing to be here.