Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Carrie Wells

Tile Setter

Interviewed on March 24, 2004

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

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Metro Detroit Skilled Tradeswomen Oral History Project

Interview with Carrie Wells

MARGARET RAUCHER: This is Margaret Raucher, and we are here at the Reuther Library on March 24th, 2004, to interview Carrie Wells, a tilesetter. I'd like to start off the questioning by asking Carrie a little bit about her life before she entered the trades, growing up, her family, education, friends, that sort of thing.

CARRIE WELLS: I was a very unplanned pregnancy to a sixteen-year-old mother who married my father and subsequently divorced him, before I was old enough to remember. She then married my father, my stepfather, who is actually my father, because he adopted me when I was three. They were young and we lived a very bare existence for a long time, while they tried to make a go of it. My father worked in a steel mill. He got hired in when he was eighteen. His father worked in the steel mill. He came up from the South on the steel buses, and so he got my step-dad a job there.

My mother worked various jobs trying to put herself through college. She worked at a bank. She worked for the mob doing data entry for a cigarette importer downtown. They imported cigarettes, alcohol and candy. So she worked there afternoons for a really long part of my childhood, while she attended college here at Wayne State. She graduated in 1988 and then went on to get her master's degree, so she was a success story.

My parents are very young. There's just me and my mom and dad, and we lived in a blue-collar neighborhood.

RAUCHER: Here in Detroit? You were born here in Detroit?

WELLS: I was born in Detroit. We lived in Lincoln Park [a suburb of Detroit]. I lived in the same house my whole life, a tiny two-bedroom house.

RAUCHER: Can you give me the year you were born, Carrie?

WELLS: 1972. So my stepfather, Bill Wells, adopted me when I was five, and he's the only father that I've ever known, so he's my dad. And in order for him to adopt me, my biological father had to give up all custody rights and never be allowed to see me ever again, so I don't know anything about that family or who they are or anything, which is fine with me, because my mother was just trying to make a better life for the two of us, and she has.

So we lived a hard life for a long time, just the three of us. And it isn't until, I would say, about the last ten years that my parents have experienced a life that isn't hard for them. My mother works for a pharmaceutical company. She's in a very powerful position, and I see her not having to struggle anymore and worry about the groceries. They always worried — I mean, we just didn't have any money when I was little, and everything was about money, and we were really broke.

I guess I didn't realize it, but now that I am an adult, I think about all the little things. I remember being in the grocery store one time with my mother and she had a little counter that you could click off how much your groceries cost, to add them up. And I started playing with it, and I just remember my mother flipping out and then going back through everything in the cart to re-add everything because she just had enough money to buy the groceries.

So we lived that existence. They worked hard, and they're a success story and people that I look up to greatly, because getting pregnant when you're sixteen really sort

of comes with a stigma attached to it. And being a child of young parents, it also stigmatized me growing up, because when you have friends that have older parents and they see how young your parents are, they sort of make judgments on you based on the assumption that they're not good people or something.

RAUCHER: Where did you go to school? You're an only child, so what were your friends like when you were growing up?

WELLS: I didn't have a lot of friends. I spent all my time with my parents. If there was somewhere to go, with my mother working afternoons, my dad working days, maybe sometimes midnights, I was always with a parent. So I went a lot of places with my dad. I spent a lot of time with my dad, with my dad's friends. They were young, so they weren't the type of people to stay home. They had things to do and I went with them. I went a lot of places. I mean, they took me to Monty Python Film Festivals and Marx Brothers Film Festivals and just really places where most children were not at, but I was.

I didn't have a lot of friends. There weren't a lot of kids in our neighborhood, and I'm fine spending time by myself. But that didn't bode well when you went to school. I always only have two or three friends. [laughs] I'm sort of introverted that way, because I'm very comfortable being with my parents.

RAUCHER: Did you have any favorite subjects in school or favorite classes or anything like that?

WELLS: I liked to work with my hands, even then. My dad was a woodworker when I was younger and he built furniture, so I would work with him and spend time in his shop. So I knew that I liked to work with my hands.

In school I was mediocre. I went to college right after high school, but I wasn't really into it. My mother really pushed hard for me to go to college and finish it, but it wasn't something that was really speaking to me, because it didn't seem practical. I wanted to apply things. I wanted to not just have a piece of paper, I wanted to also learn how to perform tasks that I think are important to get along in life, because my parents — everything we have, they do themselves. My father built a house from the ground up.

So that is very much a part of who I am. So I want to know how to do everything that I possibly can myself, because that's just how we are. My dad thinks the best way to do something is just to read a book and do it yourself. So in college, I just felt like I wasn't learning anything at Wayne. I mean, I was learning, but where was it going to take me? I couldn't see the bigger aspect of it.

I was working at a public radio station here. I started as a student assistant and it rolled over into a full-time job. And it was an office job, and I hated it. I hated it. It was not me. Working in an office with people was not me. I saw an ad in the paper for an apprenticeship opening for the tilesetter, and I read it. And I was miserable, but I ignored it. And then two weeks later in the [Detroit] Sunday Journal I saw the same ad, and I thought, "You know, I have to go down and at least see what this is all about." I wasn't happy. I was almost done with my degree, but I didn't know what I was going to do with it.

So I went down and I got an application. I went down in my work clothes, and they tried to discourage me just from even getting the application, because I had a suit on. And just going there, they were already like, "This is a dirty job. This is construction." I filled out the application and I took a test and I quit my job like, three weeks later.

MICHELLE FECTEAU: I just have a question about whether your father was active in the union or if that was part of your experiences with your parents.

WELLS: He was a steelworker all his life. He was a crew coordinator. He was never active in his local, but he has always, we have always supported unions. We always say that "A family that protests together stays together." I've been on many a picket line with my father and my mother both, one or the other. So, they're really good social democrats. So they instilled some working class values.

My grandfather was a tool and die maker. My great grandfather was a watchmaker. My husband is a millwright. We come from a very blue-collar life, so I've seen people work. And we've survived terrible recessions in my household, especially in the steel industry. So that's, I guess, where I learned it at.

FECTEAU: Was your mother active around women's rights issues, or your father?

WELLS: My mother, yeah. My aunt, more so. My mother — there's never really been any sex-specific roles in my household. My father has always cooked, he's always cleaned — they're interchangeable. So in my household, I never saw Mom makes the dinner and Dad sits down to eat, that type of thing going on in my house, so I just assumed that most people live like that.

If my car broke when I was younger, my dad would . . . One time my alternator broke and I needed to get it fixed. He said, "Well, we're going to go buy an alternator and then you're going to put it in." So we would go buy the alternator and he would show me how to put it in and I would do the work. So they didn't ever teach me to be dependent on other people or men or, "You need to be married," or, "This is how a wife

is." They always instilled that being independent and being able to take care of business on your own is more important than being dependent on a man to take care of you.

RAUCHER: How old were you, Carrie, when you applied for the tilesetter job?

WELLS: Twenty-seven.

CATHY DAWSON: I'm curious, what were you getting a degree in at Wayne State?

WELLS: I was an anthropology major. And then I realized that at Wayne you cannot get an anthropology degree and not get your Ph.D. I mean, they didn't at the time have a really good applied anthropology program. Being the research institution that it is, there was nothing, unless I wanted to get a Ph.D., which at that time I didn't. I was young and I wasn't interested. So I switched to labor studies, actually.

FECTEAU: Why did you choose labor studies?

WELLS: Because labor has always been a big part of my life, and living in the area that I do, it's affected me greatly. I've always known, inside of me, that you have to be in a union, belong to a union in order to really have a good life and insurance and benefits. It's your basic right as a human being in the United States, even though the labor laws are so screwed up that it's not so great for people, but I knew that. I know that. I thought maybe I could at least apply that, so I switched. And I have a minor in anthropology, which I think helps, because it's the study of people.

RAUCHER: Was this after you became a tilesetter that you got to be the labor studies major or were you already involved in that?

WELLS: I was already involved in it. I think I took my last class at Wayne in '96, and it was a collective bargaining class. I had already switched over and declared my major, because I knew that anthropology was taking me nowhere.

I always wanted to be a social worker when I was younger, and my mother would not pay for me to go to school to be a social worker at all.

FECTEAU: Why did she say that?

WELLS: Because she said she had worked with social workers. Her undergrad was in psychology, and she worked for PACT, Parents and . . .

RAUCHER: . . . Children Together. It's a Wayne program.

WELLS: Yes, it is. She did an internship. She worked there for a while after she got out of college. And she just saw how miserable all the social workers were making $20,000. My mom is a very protective person, and she has never wanted me to be subjected to anything that would upset me — not shelter me, but she didn't want me to have to deal — she just thought I was eighteen and I didn't know what . . . But she would pay for me to get an anthropology degree to do nothing with. [laughter] It just didn't make any sense.

But now that I'm older, she realizes that — because she said, "See, you wanted to help. You wanted to do something to change society." But it isn't social work. It's more with working-class people. I mean, I don't think I would have been happy as a social worker, but I just knew that I wanted to do something to make change for women and minorities.

DAWSON: I'm curious, you had said that you were sort of unhappy about where your life was going, and then you saw this ad in the paper. Do you think you would have

gone for any job, or did this job, the tile setting, did that strike you as something in particular that you'd like to do? Would there have been an interest there if the ad was for a machinist?

WELLS: It's funny you should say machinist, because I always think I would really like to be a machinist, because now that I'm in the trades, I have more knowledge of what's going on with skilled trades. I collect pottery. I like fired objects, so the tile did appeal to me greatly. And it's a finish trade. And I hate electricity. It scares me. [laughter] I would not make a good electrician. But tile, it seemed very glamorous, just from the ad. It's not. [laughter] I don't think I actually really fully understood that it was a job in construction. I mean, my husband, at the time, had finished his apprenticeship. He was a journeyman. But I don't think it really set into me that it was construction, it was building trades, because I lived in the ivory tower of the university for so long that I was kind of removed from it. But I knew that I could do it, whatever it presented to me, I knew that I would be able do it. What I was going to have to do, I was completely unsure of, but it would be better than working in an office.

DAWSON: And you said that when you went down there, they were hesitant to give you an application, but obviously, you got the application.

WELLS: Yeah. It was the secretary. She was like, "Do you know that this is a construction job?" And I just said, "Yeah I do, and I want an application. Can I have one?" And she said, "Okay. But it's very dirty." And I said, "Okay, but I want one." So I filled it out, and there were some other guys in there filling them out. And it was kind of strange, because like I said, I came from work, so I had a suit on and it was sort of out of place. Very much. I stuck out.

And when I went for my interview, I also wore a suit, and that didn't go over well either. But it's an interview, so I feel that you should put your best foot forward. [laughter]

FECTEAU: Did they say anything to you in a negative way?

WELLS: Yeah, they did. They did. They broke every law in the book at my interview.

FECTEAU: What did they say?

WELLS: They asked me if I was married. They asked me if my husband would let me do this. My interview was very different from the other men that hired in with me. They asked me if I was claustrophobic, and I said, "No." And then they started to talk — it was a panel of four men. And they started to talk amongst themselves: "Well, how small are they making shower stalls these days? Like three-by-three. That's a kind of small space. Can you be in a space like that?" And this guy was like 400 pounds. [laughter] And I'm sitting there and I'm like, "I think I can fit in there." And I'm kind of thinking, "I don't think you can."

But they did a lot to discourage me. You know: my nails would get dirty and it's heavy and can I pick up a bag of concrete that weighs ninety-four pounds. I mean, they did everything they could to make me say no. In 1997, you would think that almost twenty years into [affirmative action] that this would be different. But then I found out that we were the first women to be admitted into this father/son local.

FECTEAU: You said "we"?

WELLS: What I signed on for was a three-month pre-apprenticeship training program, and so . . .

DAWSON: And what was that like?

WELLS: For three months, you go there every day from 7:00 to 3:30 like a normal job day, and they pay you ten dollars a day. [laughs]

DAWSON: And what did you do?

WELLS: I learned how to use tile tools, trowels, mix concrete, pull concrete. They put you on the hardest job they have when you first come in. You have to mud walls. I think that's to weed people out.

DAWSON: Do you think every apprentice person coming into that did the same thing?

WELLS: Yeah.

DAWSON: That was standard. That wasn't anything special because you were a woman.

WELLS: No. They start you two at a time. You have a partner, and that's the first thing you do. And it's quite obvious why you have to do that first.

RAUCHER: What is this job you said that's the toughest job?

WELLS: You have to mud walls.

RAUCHER: What is that, exactly?

WELLS It's taking lime, cement and sand, mixing it up in a mud box, and then you put it on your stand. You have sort of like a stand. And then you have a hawk, which is — you hold it in your hand and it's a flat surface, an aluminum surface. And then you have a flat trowel which is a big trowel with no ridges, and then you take the mud and you put it on the wall. So that's what your tile is set on, in really high-end houses. All tile used to be set on mud. Today, you'll go into bathrooms and it's on

drywall or cinder block, but in the olden days all tile, everything had to be mud, so they teach you how to do that. And you have to do a shower stall. And so you have three walls to mud, and they have to be square and everything. I mean, it's very complicated, but it's not hard.

FECTEAU: Did everyone who became an apprentice have to go through the pre-apprentice program? Was there anybody who just entered without that? And did you feel that that was a barrier, an artificial barrier?

WELLS: Well, it wasn't necessarily an artificial barrier. The BAC — and now I don't have the exact statute, but they were mandated by the federal government. Prior to my apprenticeship, they did not have apprenticeship training. You got a job because your dad was a tilesetter. You were a helper for ten, twelve years, slinging concrete up the stairs, before they'd even consider letting you set tile. It's very — it's cultural, it's Italian, it's this different kind of thing. [laughs]

And so they were mandated by the government that they had to raise their ranks, because the tile trades have like .05 percent women and minorities. And [Tile, Marble and Terrazzo Masons BAC] Local 32 is a father/son local.

RAUCHER: And BAC is Bricklayers . . .

WELLS: . . . and Allied Craft Workers, and we're the Allied Craft Worker part. The plasterers are part of it, cement finishers, cement masons, any tile trade.

So they created this Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, and you have to do the test and you have to do the three months and then you get sent out into the field to work for a contractor. It's a good program, insofar as it teaches you what kind of tools you're going to come into, because they can't send you out cold. Because with tile, as a

young apprentice, you're going to grout. If you don't know how to grout, you will mess up the entire tile job. So they have to teach you how. They can't just send you out. They have to teach you out to mix Thinset. I mean, they have to teach you these things.

But if you don't want to learn in the three months — and a lot of minorities, not that they didn't want to learn, but I could tell that the teacher wasn't really that interested in teaching them. And even myself — thankfully I did good, so I did a lot of projects there. And we had moved into a new house, so we spent time tiling the hall, and I was able to take part in that. But a lot of people that I think they figured wouldn't stay on, they didn't really give much direction to. You could go there and pretty much not do anything all day. And that was a problem. I thought that was a problem.

In the pre-apprenticeship they were very — they made sure everyone knew that there's not supposed to be any discrimination and they instilled in the apprentices that there's supposed to be this sense of equality and no bad talk and there's certain things that you have to follow. So I'm thinking, "Okay, well, this is really great."

But out in the field, since they never had any women, those people haven't had any training. The journeymen haven't had any training. And I mean, there are no minorities. Out of the local that has like, 600 people, I think there's maybe three black guys that have worked as helpers. There are no journeymen that are black. They're all helpers, like twenty years as a helper.

And the federal government says you can apply for a journeyman's card after doing a trade for eight years, so I always wondered how people could get around not giving out — they just don't give out journeyman's cards. Now, with this apprenticeship, you have to follow international guidelines. You can't just get your card signed for —

most people that I worked for just got their card signed for, and they didn't have to do anything for it. And they were very resentful of apprentices, because it meant that you would get the journeyman's card. As long as you jumped through all their hoops, they had to give it to you. So I would go out and work with men that had been working for eight years, you know, grouting — everyone hates to grout — never setting tile, and then I would come out and they knew that I would go through my program and I would get my journeyman's card. And there was a lot of resentment there. There's still a lot of resentment.

FECTEAU: How many years of being an apprentice would it take for you to be a journeyman?

WELLS: It's kind of silly. They've actually given out two journeyman's cards since this program has started, and the program started in '96. They've only given out two journeyman's cards, and they were both to women. And it took them six and a half years, because you have to go to school. You have so many classes to complete. Well, when you sign up, they don't tell you the classes are on Saturdays. So if you're working, or if you're a mom and you can't get someone to watch your kid so that you can't go to the upgrade classes, you're just never going to get your journeyman's card. And the guys don't like to go either. So they've given out two cards, which I think is not really great in eight years. That's all that they've managed to get out of the program.

DAWSON: When you had the three-month training, how many were in there, in that class with you?

WELLS: Twenty. They do groups of twenty.

DAWSON: How many graduated and went on from the three-month training?

WELLS: I can tell you that still working — some people only lasted a week in the field — still working, I would say three people, and myself. And I'm not even working right now. I mean, I know of two other people out of twenty, and that's it. The retention is very low, and they know that. I saw the numbers at a meeting last year. They had trained 200 people in this pre-apprenticeship training program. There's like thirty. The retention is not there.

FECTEAU: Why do you think that is?

WELLS: Because they've just had to accept women. It's like 1979 all over again, and they don't know what to do. They don't want to retain us. I've had conversations with bosses regarding harassment on the job, and I've been told to my face by bosses, "The union won't do anything, because they don't think it's their job." But the contractor doesn't have to do anything. And the union, according to a contractor, if we sue them, it's the members' money. So, "The union doesn't really own anything," is the convoluted answer that I've been given as to why — because I've suggested diversity training. "Can we get someone in here? Can we talk? Can we do something?" And they just think I'm this crazy . . .

DAWSON: . . . alien from outer space. [laughter]

RAUCHER: But all the people in that program weren't women and minorities, right?

WELLS: No. In my class there were two women — and Amy has her journeyman's card now — and probably eight or nine blacks. So it was heavy minority. They were all heavy minority.

RAUCHER: But they're having trouble retaining white men, obviously, if most of the people who went through the program were white and there are only thirty out of 200 who have stayed in the trade.

WELLS: Yeah, yeah. It's a very tough trade. There's a lot of intimidation that goes on. And it's a finish trade, so everyone's big concern is who does their work better. The first thing they ask is: "Well, how did his work look?" You know you're a hack if it's not perfect, which is that way in a lot of trades. But with a finish trade, if you can't make the work acceptable to the superintendent, you're just not going to work. And I think a lot of people just weren't able to hold a job. I have no answer for that. I was able to hold a job. All the time, I only worked for three contractors, so I was able to keep employed. But I know people that, contractor after contractor, you know, they just couldn't stay in place, for whatever reason.

It's a lot of men being afraid that they're going to lose their job because there's no security. And you know, third, fourth generation tile contractors, they don't care, they just want you to move faster. Their grandfather did this. They don't care about silica, they don't care about safety. It's just tile and get done. It's different than other trades, and especially since they didn't have any women, they don't know how to act. They want to talk about sex all the time.

I mean, there's no — even in our bylaws there's nothing — I mean, there's nothing anywhere in any of our union information. I questioned some legalities and some things one time to my business agent and he showed up at a union meeting with a letter from a lawyer in Washington with the letter of the law in it and read it to the whole union hall meeting and then looked at me and said in front of the entire membership,

"Does that answer your question?" And I said, "I did not have a question about the law. I understand the law." And after that — so far, my friend Stephanie, who's a tilesetter, said she's heard that I've sued five companies. [laughter]

DAWSON: Only five.

WELLS: Yeah. Because after that the next day at work was, "Carrie's suing." And so I've sued five companies. Now, Stephanie can't figure out why I'm still working if I'm getting in all these lawsuits, why I'm still coming to work. But I've sued five companies.

DAWSON: So your apprenticeship, it sounds like it was a lot of on-the-job experience. But then you said on a Saturday you had to take classes?

WELLS: Yeah.

DAWSON: Was that in a university setting?

WELLS: Nope. It's at the hall. We have a big training facility. So it's the same thing like the pre-apprenticeship. You go there, you play in the sand, you set some tile. Mostly you sit around and eat doughnuts. I mean, it was not productive there at all. The Saturdays, to me, were a waste of time.

FECTEAU: How were the instructors and the co-workers, the other apprentices towards you? Was it a supportive environment?

WELLS: Yeah. It becomes such — you have to be supportive of each other because it's a lot of barking. Everyone is barking at everyone, so you kind of . . .

FECTEAU: Like a dog?

WELLS: Yeah. You know, they're just yelling at you all the time, so you kind of . . .

DAWSON: Is that their natural state? I mean, do they yell all the time, or just there?

WELLS: You know, in my three-month pre-apprenticeship we were like, "We're talking to you like this, because this is how you're going to get talked to on the job." And so they would just yell and bark and yell and bark and, you know, "Faster, faster! Come on! Come on! Come on!" I mean, it's like this and I'm not exaggerating. So you kind of do form a nucleus with some people. Some people are just weird, though.

But for the most part you do know each other, and a lot of guys are nineteen and twenty and they're not so set in their ways as far as what views they take. I'm not going to say that they all think I should be there, but they're a little more supportive.

Then you still do have some of your "my grandfather founded the local" guys. And you can see that they get a free ride. I mean, you see it happen. They never are laid off. They get the best jobs. And [sighs] the cycle continues.

FECTEAU: Did they receive special treatment?

WELLS: Oh, yeah.

FECTEAU: Like what?

WELLS: This one kid, whose grandfather did found the first local, the terrazzo local, he was a terrazzo guy, and terrazzo is — you know what terrazzo is. It's ground-up marble, marble pieces, and it's mixed together with cement, mostly epoxy now, and then it's troweled on and then it's sanded down. It's the flat floor, it's totally indestructible.

ELAINE CRAWFORD: You find it in many, many public buildings for that reason. Probably the university has a lot of it.

WELLS: Quite a bit of it. And he claimed he was dyslexic, so he didn't have to take the test. Someone got to read it to him. I mean, he skates by. And the union officers, you know, they smoke cigars with him and he's like the greatest guy. And he's a crappy worker — he can't read a tape measure.

DAWSON: Well, that's pretty basic.

WELLS: And everyone makes fun of him. I mean, he's like this kid who smokes a lot of marijuana and his nickname is "monkey-paw." I mean, he has no work ethic. And then you watch your union officers like, "Aaron Pistori, the greatest guy in the world!" So you do see still a lot of nepotism. Even though they've created this apprenticeship system, it still gets through.

CRAWFORD: Is there any language in your working agreement about how much work or how little work people . . .

WELLS: No.

CRAWFORD: In our working agreement, there's something that says the union will not, you know, sort of constrain people from doing too much, but the management cannot demand a certain amount a day. We hear sometimes that, you know, carpenters have to build, prep two houses a day, or whatever. But that would formally be illegal under our working agreement.

WELLS: There's always talk. I started out — my first job was working for a residential contractor. And residential is very different than commercial. Commercial is like you're at the Hyatt. After I worked on a residential site, I thought, "We just sit around, this is great." And the boss would tell you, "You need to tile this many tubs a day." And he would say it as though it was the word of the law, but there isn't any

contract language. In commercial, they say that you have to set 500 square feet a day as a journeyman. You have to set 500 square feet of tile, that's what you have to do. But it's not written down anywhere. I think it's just passed down through generations of Italians doing tile.

DAWSON: Is it possible to do 500?

WELLS: Oh, yeah. I mean, it's possible, although that's a lot of square footage to set for one person. I mean, I had guys tiling ten tubs a day, and so that's like, thirteen courses of tile, three walls over the tub. That's a lot.

And as an apprentice, I was up to seven, and he wanted more work from me. And he was paying me like, nine dollars an hour at that time, because I had just come out of the hall. And I just said, "Look, man, you're just never going to get it. It's not going to happen." It was apartments, and he would say to me, "Carrie, it doesn't matter how they look. Nobody will ever buy these." [laughter] They're renting. It doesn't matter how the tile looks.

They didn't want me to bring my level in. I mean, they laughed at me when I brought my level to work. "What are you doing that for? Just figure out how the tub is pitched, and go from there." And I don't work like — I mean, I worked for him for a long time, but I never worked like that. He would get in the tub with me and hold tile and say, "Come on, let me just show you," and try to show me how to go faster. [laughter] And they make money hand over fist in residential, and I just couldn't make them any more money.

DAWSON: How did you get your jobs?

WELLS: We don't have a hiring hall, we have a referral hall, so it's a little more difficult for us to get jobs. So I have to call a contractor up, who's never had a woman other than a wife or a girlfriend and say, "Hi, I'm a new apprentice and I want a job." So, I was pretty successful, and when I got done with my pre-apprenticeship, I got a job right away. I was probably out about a week and this residential job came up.

I was really glad that it did, because it gave me experience that I never would have had working in commercial work. It really makes you move. I mean, you start at 7:00 and you just go. I worked with guys that worked through lunch all the time, because they had to get enough done before the boss got there. And I just thought that was crazy, but it teaches you how to just move it along a little quicker.

But when you get laid off, you have to call the hall and then you ask them if anyone is looking for work, if they need someone. And they'll say, "Oh, well, you can try here or you can try there. Give them a call." It's up to you.

FECTEAU: I had a question. Do you remember the first referral, your first job, and what was that like for you?

WELLS: Very scary. I went to a condo in Northville. I was told I was going to meet the guy there and so I went. And he turned out to be a really fantastic man. My first day out he was fantastic. And I was all set to do helper work. I was going to grout, I was going to get water. That's what I was told I would have to be doing, so I had my tools set up.

And he asked me if I thought I could tile a bathtub, and I said, "Sure, I think I can." And he went through my tool bag and got out the tools he thought I needed, and he

said, “Here’s the bathroom, here’s the tile. Go at it,” because he was working in the master bathroom. So my very first day out I set tile.

And then my boss showed up later. And I remember I was eating lunch, and he went to look at the bathroom. And then he came back out and he said, “So, Carrie, why the tile?” And I had never met — I mean, you don’t meet these people, They send you to jobs, you might not meet your boss for a month. And I was so freaked out. I just looked at him and I said, “Because he told me to put that tile on the wall.” I was just so paranoid. And he said, “No, no. Like why are you here? Why did you pick tile?” And I was like, “Oh!” [laughter] “Okay, I will quit being so nervous."

But that job, it went really well. He was a nice man, Mark White. He taught me a lot of stuff. But as he would always say to me, “I’m not going to teach you everything.” [laughs] And that’s the big tile thing. They don’t want to teach you anything, because then you’ll be too powerful. I mean, they don’t want to teach you tricks. They don’t want to teach you shortcuts. If they tell you something, they’ll say, “Oh, you’re getting a little one today, remember it.” [laughter]

FECTEAU: So they really hold it over your head in a way.

WELLS: It’s cultural. I’m convinced it’s cultural.

RAUCHER: They’re secretive.

WELLS: Oh! I mean, people will let you do stuff for days that is so not necessary. For days.

FECTEAU: What do you mean, “so not necessary”?

WELLS: Like grouting. There’s many ways to grout. You can use a drag rag to clean it off. There are many different ways to do things, but there’s always shortcuts.

And they will let you do it the longest way forever, until they decide they've had enough of watching you take so long, until it's too much, like they need you to hurry up. And they'll say, "You don't need to do all that. Do this. Cut these two steps out. You do this like this." And you're like, "Oh, okay. Well, you could have told me that two weeks ago and we'd be all set."

Or, you know, people lie to you. When I worked in residential, a lot of the helpers were young, twenty. They had a chip on their shoulder, because I was setting tile. They were grouting and getting water and I showed up and I got to tile. And I was only following instructions. But they would tell me lies all the time.

I would be cleaning out my glue bucket, and I remember one helper said — I was just trying to scrape it all out because we used the buckets when we're done, and I was trying to get every last bit out. And this helper came in, "Oh, Carrie, that's enough. You don't need to get all that out. Here's a new bucket right here." Gets it for me, opens it up, and took the other bucket.

Five minutes later my boss showed up with the bucket in hand, with the glue in the bucket and he's like, "What, are you trying to kill me?" And he started scraping it out into my new bucket of glue. And I mean, you don't say at that point, "Well, I'm only doing it because he told me not to." You just suck it up. And just stuff like that. You know, they take my tools, stuff like that. But they really made me on the ball, working in residential, because then I didn't — I don't trust anybody, because they're sort of tricky. [laughs]

That was my first day. And I stayed with him for a year and a half and I got a lot of good experience. He had mostly pretty okay men that worked for him. It was the

helpers that were — you know, those were the ones that wanted to talk about sex all the time, the helpers, because they were like eighteen and nineteen, and "Whoo-hoo! We're working with a girl!" And they want to ask you all kinds of crazy stuff.

FECTEAU: Like what?

WELLS: "Do all girls like to withhold sex from guys? What is that all about?" [laughter] I mean, just crazy stuff like that. And I would just have to say, "We're not going to have this conversation," and move on.

RAUCHER: Were you married at this time?

WELLS: Actually, no, I wasn't married yet. I got married the following year, after I started. But they knew I was engaged. But no, I wasn't married. And a guy there called me a cunt to my face, and I left the job and went home.

FECTEAU: Why did he — what prompted that?

WELLS: [sighs] I found out later. We had been working together, and he's a little bit older than me, married, kids, a really nice guy, though. We were having a great time working at this condo place, me and him. It was nice. Having lunch, nice conversation. I didn't think anything of it.

Apparently, the other guys were razzing him that he was working with me, what were we doing, is he screwing around with me. Well, he's the kind of guy that gets a chip on his shoulder and doesn't like to be made fun of or have other — I mean, he just was that type of person. And he started being really mean to me, and I didn't know why at all. Like he would go to lunch without calling me. I'd come downstairs, he'd be eating. I would ask him, "Why didn't you call me?" And he would — "Look at your

watch." You know, just totally out of character, and I couldn't figure out like, "What did I do? I'm still working. We're doing fine. What's the deal?"

And we went to another job, and he was in my bathroom one morning throwing tile around. And I said, "Jim, what is your problem?" And he just looked at me and he said, "Why don't you quit being such a cunt?" And I said, "Okay." And he left my bathroom, and I went down — I came back up, I got my tools and I went home.

FECTEAU: And you never saw him again?

WELLS: No, actually, I saw him at the union hall. And I extended my hand, because I just — I'm a better person than that, and I didn't want to have any words with him about that. I called my boss, and I said, "Look, Jim called me a cunt, and I'm not going to work with him. There was no reason for it. Maybe I'm crazy to think that I can't be called that at work, but I have a certain threshold, and that was it."

And he was, I think, a little freaked out. "Oh no, Carrie." And at that point I figured he'll probably just lay me off, that's what will happen. "He'll just lay me off. I'm done." And I went to work the next day. He had me on a different job, and I never saw Jim on a job again.

But according to the gossip mill, I filed a grievance against Jim. Now, my union doesn't even have a grievance process to go through. So I don't know what grievance this was, but I filed a grievance against him, and he got reprimanded. But he never did. I mean, I never did any of that. I didn't even call the hall. I mean, I just took care of it myself.

And when I saw him later, I had to be the bigger person, because I liked some of the men that I worked with and he was always there and he obviously has issues, so . . .

RAUCHER: How did you meet your husband, and what did your husband think about what you did for a living?

WELLS: Oh, he thinks it's great. Our bathroom is a testament to that. [laughter] He thinks it's great. We don't — again, like I said, my parents don't have sex-assigned roles, and I am with a man who goes with the flow. Whatever he needs to do, he does it. He doesn't say, "That's for a man, this is for a woman." So when I applied, he was very supportive of me and very encouraging.

Even when I would come home crying, even when I was like, "I'm quitting, I can't go back there again," he was very supportive, because he works with women, other tradeswomen. And I mean, it has nothing to do with being incapable because you're a woman, so he was always very supportive of me. And even in my darkest hours, he was very, very supportive, more than I could ever ask for, because a lot of times I know that I didn't want anything to do with him. I just wanted to close up because I didn't want to have to rehash what had happened that day, and he stuck by me. It made me a better person.

FECTEAU: How were your parents with your — how was your mom?

WELLS: She was happy with it, as her house is also a testament to. But she wished a lot of times I would quit. I worked in Ann Arbor for a while, and I was working with this guy who was this crazy coke head. He did horrible — I was just miserable and work was slow and I knew I couldn't go and work anywhere else, so I just had to suck it up and stay there. It was a hard time. And she would be, "Just quit. Just quit." I'm like, "I can't quit. I'm already out here. There's only four of us to begin with. You know, we would get these women and then they'd just disappear. And you just couldn't keep them.

And I'm like, "I can't quit. I can't. I'm not going to quit." So she was supportive, and she was happy with what I was doing.

And my dad was very supportive, very proud of me. I think that they both just wished that I didn't have to put up with so much stuff. I mean, I think they maybe hadn't realized themselves that things were still that bad in non-traditional work. Because my mother's been in an office environment for a long time, and my father, he works with all kinds of women. Most of his crew, they were women at the steel mill, so he didn't really see that as a problem. So it really was amazing to both of them that, you know, the level of dislike was so high, as was I.

DAWSON: You said you couldn't quit and you wouldn't quit. Do you know why? Do you think it was anything in your background, or was it just something in your gut that just said you weren't going to give in?

WELLS: Well, I enjoyed the work immensely, and when it was good work, it was great work. And when you went on a good job, it was just like everything lined up. So for that, no, the autonomy that it afforded me was something I had never experienced, and I loved it. It makes you more self-confident in every aspect of life. I mean, there's nothing I don't think that I can do, because I've worked in construction and things are pretty makeshift a lot and you have to kind of make stuff up and create things out of something that's not there. And I can do that. And I know that that kept me going.

I mean, women just dropped out. We would try, with this core group of us, to bolster them back up. And I think it's just something in you — you either will stick it out or you won't. I don't know what it is, because all the women that stuck it out have varied

backgrounds. So it wasn't like we all had the same support. I mean, they're all varied. So I don't know what it is, other than you want . . .

It's so much fun. Tile is so fun. It's all different. [laughter] I love tile! I mean, when you go into these million-dollar homes and they have seven bathrooms and every bathroom has different tile in it, and marble in the foyer, it's really a lot of fun to play with. I mean, it's hard work, but it was the most fulfilling thing I've ever done in my life, and continue to do.

RAUCHER: You worked mostly residential, or did you work commercial jobs too?

WELLS: After I left residential, I worked commercial.

RAUCHER: And those are larger jobs with more tilesetters, so are there ways in which that's different than working in a condo or a house with one other person?

WELLS: Yeah, it is. It was totally different. My old boss used to say, "You can take someone from residential and put them in commercial, but you can't take someone who's only worked commercial and put them in residential," because they just can't reverse themselves from that environment. On commercial jobs, tile crews are still small, but on a big job maybe there's twenty guys for a couple weeks, then they dwindle. They get bigger when there's a push.

But commercial jobs, people are a lot friendlier. The men that I had the pleasure of being with — the last contractor that I worked for had the most amazing men. I would never work for another tile contractor again, because the men that worked for him are not afraid of losing their jobs. They're not afraid of women. They've all worked for him for

about twenty to twenty-five years, is the average length. And they're very happy to teach you and see someone succeed.

I never had to interact with other trades, really, maybe some carpenters. But going to a commercial site is very different, because then I had to interact with everyone. And then it's like I'm the information booth. And I wasn't used to being the information booth. [laughs] So it was kind of a switch from being alone all day in one condo with two other guys to going to a giant site with a bunch of people, and everyone asking you where something is. And I mean, clearly, finding you in these small corners of the building where no one else is, "So, have you seen the super?" And just to talk to you, and that was a little . . .

FECTEAU: They want to talk to you because they were hitting on you or . . .?

WELLS: [sighs] Yeah. I mean, I never told one person my name on a job site, but everyone just knows your name, probably from the guys that I work with, I'm sure, because they probably ask them. But it's just that, I mean, chances are I'll be the only woman there, unless it's a really big commercial site, maybe there'll be some electricians. But chances are I will be the only woman there. And you know, if there's 300 guys at the job . . .

DAWSON: You're the easy one to remember. [laughter]

WELLS: Right.

FECTEAU: You've mentioned that there's been some really great guys and some issues of being kind of messed with and harassed. I'm just curious about, overall, what would you say was the rate of mistreatment to respect? Was it fifty-fifty? I mean, how frequently did you feel that you were being mistreated?

WELLS: Up until my last job, I would say most of the time. I can honestly say, as can my fellow tilesetter females who have level heads and aren't as crazy radical as me, we have talked about this, and we have all honestly agreed that we could sue every contractor that we have worked for for discrimination and probably win.

The lack of teaching aspect is where I have the biggest problem. I can blow you off with words, but you need to teach me. And I mean, that's the biggest problem, that they won't teach you. You know, they'll just, "Go sit over there. Just kneel next to me while I do this." And they won't tell you anything, and they won't teach you anything.

One of my contractors actually wrote on an evaluation that they gave me that I asked too many questions. And the union hall, my BA [business agent] said to me, "Well, that's not a bad thing." But they don't want you to ask questions, they don't want to teach you.

DAWSON: You know, I always thought they didn't want you to ask questions because they didn't know the answers. [laughter]

WELLS: Well, maybe that was true. But I mean, I was asking pertinent tile trade questions, and I've been told to "Shut the fuck up" by a drunk man.

DAWSON: How'd you handle that?

WELLS: He scared me. He was a loose cannon. We were in a tunnel at the airport, all the way at the end of the half-mile tunnel, alone. I didn't say a word. And he didn't come back to work after that. He was on a bender, so I didn't have to deal with it. It was kind of shocking, but he could be dead now. He was pretty out there.

And everything was going fine until I asked him a couple questions about the tile we were setting. It was tunnel tile. I don't know if you've been to the airport, but the

two new tunnels have tile in them, and I worked on that job. And it was like a prison yard. Everyone was changing their clothes.

RAUCHER: Is this the New Age tunnel with the glow, with the lights and the music, where you go between the Continental and Northwest terminals?

WELLS: No, it's the car tunnel. They're the two car tunnels.

RAUCHER: Oh, the car tunnel. Oh, okay. Yeah, the one with the fans that are blowing. And they used tile inside there, huh? Because I've never paid attention.

WELLS: It's bright. It makes it super bright white. But that job was bad. Men were changing their clothes right next to me. I mean, they were like naked. [laughs]

FECTEAU: What?

WELLS: Yeah. Well, in their underwear. I mean, people undo their pants and zip them up all the time, you know, tuck their shirt in all the time — I'm used to that. But I mean, they were . . . It was a dirty job. We were mudding all of the walls, twenty feet high, so everyone was dirty. I mean, everyone was dirty. And there were probably about thirty guys there for a while. And every day, at the end of the day — and we all had to ride together in one van because of the airport security, so you'd have to wait. And everyone was just naked at the end of the day. [laughs]

I happened to work on that job with my friend Stephanie and we were like, "Okay, you need to put your clothes on." Because they didn't want to get in their cars dirty. But I really don't feel comfortable when everyone is taking off their clothes. I'm not a prude, but when they're making sexual jokes to begin with and then you're taking off your clothes — it's just weird.

This one guy, who was a pretty heavy alcoholic, he was mixing concrete and he would always talk to me about how he was mixing his special love juice in the concrete and, you know, just really infantile stuff. But then they're taking off their clothes. The tile trade is like no other, I'm telling you.

CRAWFORD: So, did any of the guys actually get bare-ass naked? Or did they have their . . .?

CRAWFORD: They had their underwear on.

WELLS: Underwear, yeah.

RAUCHER: It was summertime, I assume. Hot in there, huh?

WELLS: It was pretty nasty. It was a hot job, but I'm not taking my clothes off.

CRAWFORD: So they weren't wearing coveralls or those white paper suits?

WELLS: Nope, nope, nope. They were bringing clothes in the morning, and they would change them.

RAUCHER: So this is before they went home, they would take off all the work clothes and that?

WELLS: Yeah, yeah.

CRAWFORD: And would they put those dirty clothes on the next day?

WELLS: No. They would bring them home with them. Actually though, there were some guys that did leave their clothes there and the pants could kind of stand up, because they were so covered with cement. But for the most part, they took them home.

RAUCHER: Did they have to ride back in the van in their underwear, then?

WELLS: No, they had clothes with them. [laughs]

CRAWFORD: But the employers provided no changing area?

WELLS: No. No, it was just us in the tunnels, those two big tunnels and generators.

DAWSON: So what did you do when you had to use the restroom?

WELLS: Oh, there was one port-a-john.

FECTEAU: What was the port-a-john like?

WELLS: It was actually pretty clean and we were hoping that they would start writing in it. I was like, "Come on!" It was the cleanest port-a-john I'd ever seen in my life, and they never graffitied it. They just kept writing graffiti on the wall, but they never graffitied it.

And on that job, one of the tile contractor's kids worked on that job. I mean, he was there witnessing all of this, and that's his family. I mean, he was just this big, dumb idiot. And he hates women, didn't want women there to begin with. And he would take off his clothes too, and they are millionaires. You know, they have a lot of money. And to me that's just so crazy, I just don't understand.

FECTEAU: Was it humiliating for the men or was it just some sort of — because it sounds like the men just weren't afforded a changing room, or were they?

WELLS: Yeah, you're really not ever — in the tile — tile is a special breed. And it's true. I mean, these contractors, for the most part, are Italian, third and fourth generation. They don't afford their workers any perks. I mean, electricians, pipefitters, they have their nice chairs and their microwave ovens and their coffeemakers on jobs. And I'll tell you, tilesetters, uh-uh. There's your buckets, and you just have yourself a seat. You're not going out to get coffee. I mean, you're just staying on the job. And it's been like that forever.

These young guys, in a union, you would think would ask for some better facilities. And I always tried to incite action whenever I could, when things were really crappy, when guys were complaining too. I would say, "Well, why don't you call the hall? This is something that you deserved. We need to have clean hands. We need this." And they just aren't active.

My union and the contractors have been described like this: "You're great. No, you're great. No, you're great." [laughter] The contractors sit on almost every board of my local. We don't vote on elections. We don't vote on our contract on the pay raise. They voted, I think ten years ago, to give up ratification rights. In my years at this local, there has not been one election or vote for anything. The elected positions right now, both BA and the assistant BA, have been appointed. And that's been for four years, because our BA at first, he got indicted for some small amount of fiduciary misuse.

CRAWFORD: Are you talking about your business manager?

WELLS: Our business agent. We only have a business agent and an assistant business agent, a field rep . . .

CRAWFORD: So you don't have a business manager?

WELLS: Nope. It's very bare bones.

CRAWFORD: Is it a statewide local?

WELLS: It's international.

CRAWFORD: No, no. I mean your local, is it a statewide local?

WELLS: Yeah, yeah.

CRAWFORD: So you don't have a business manager anywhere in the state?

WELLS: Oh, no. It's seven counties. 32 takes up seven counties.

FECTEAU: So the business agent runs the local.

WELLS: Yeah.

CRAWFORD: And he's not elected.

WELLS: It's an elected position, but we had a business agent when I started and he was indicted on some fiduciary misuses of small amounts with some other contractors. I read the lawsuit; it wasn't anything bad. But all of a sudden, he was "stepping down." But he's still a member in good standing. And his assistant BA was automatically appointed the business agent.

CRAWFORD: Appointed by?

WELLS: The board, those four people.

CRAWFORD: The executive board?

WELLS: Which is four tile contractors — yeah, we have tile contractors on our E-board. It's not really like a union, I guess is what I'm trying to say. [laughs] It's kind of like for the contractors, but I don't know really who it would benefit. I haven't really figured that out yet.

RAUCHER: And is it like this across the international? I mean, are all the locals in that union like this?

WELLS: Well, I can't say that there aren't others like this. But Chicago isn't like this, San Diego isn't like this. I have some friends who worked in San Diego for a while. So, no, they're not all like this. But Detroit managed to escape any sort of integration for a really long time.

DAWSON: Is that because, you were saying, that it was pops, grand-pops, and just . . .? But you have an international union?

WELLS: Oh, yeah, we're part of the international.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, they're one of the building trades. [laughter]

WELLS: Yeah, oh yeah. We share a building with the Bricklayers Local 1. And they're very different, their whole operation. I mean, they have really nice people. I wouldn't want to be a bricklayer, but I can see that their half of the office, it's more egalitarian. You can tell that they actually kind of care. Our side of the office, there's four white guys and a secretary, and they blame everything on the secretary. Whenever something's wrong, "Oh, that's probably Pat." And so that's what going on. I mean, they're not very intelligent. They have business cards made with their mobile phone on it with "mobile" spelled wrong, you know, like the gas station, and they're handing these out. So it's kind of like a flaky sort of situation.

FECTEAU: Given all this that was going on with the local and the treatment at work, how did this affect your relationships at home, with your friends?

WELLS: I isolated myself for a long time with my friend Stephanie, because she got into the trade after I did. She graduated from Wayne, journalism. And as soon as I started out, she said, "Wow, that sounds great." She went out and took the test and started. Her and I spent a lot of time together, because there was no one — I mean, guys at work don't want to talk to you, and no one else could really understand. I mean, none of our girlfriends could really — as much as they would try, they would just say stuff that was stupid and you knew that they couldn't understand, even if they tried to. They would think things were funny and you're like, "No, it's not funny." I have a Romanian taking my tool out of my hand — that's not funny. That's serious business.

And so we would just spend a lot of time together and had been told by many of our friends that when we were together we weren't allowed to have tile talk, because if we were talking about tile, we were just isolating ourselves. And I had other girlfriends tell me that they felt inferior when we were talking about tile, that they didn't feel included if we were talking about building trades and stuff.

It makes me less tolerant of some of my male friends. I mean, I'm much less tolerant of misogyny. My friend Eric tells me I don't have a sense of humor anymore. I do, but there are things that continue to be perpetuated in society that I just would have to see every single day, and faced with that every single day, I don't think it's funny anymore. I would tell guys I work with, "I do think sex is funny, but I'm at work and this is work." I can count on one hand the men that I am friends with from the trade, that I would do things with, that call me on the telephone, that I'd go have a beer with. I mean, one hand. In five years, one hand.

CRAWFORD: Do you feel that there are women friends that you had from before you got into the trades that you kind of drifted away from or lost touch with because they don't understand anything about the eight or ten hours a day that you spend in your life?

WELLS: Quite a few. Actually, definitely three. I respect people's choices and what they've done with their lives and, you know, there's a lot of different ways to live life. But I just got to the point where I feel if they can't even understand how I'm feeling, then I can't even spend any time with these people.

Because you do get so wrapped up in the construction site. I mean, you don't necessarily take it home with you, that's one good thing about it, it doesn't hang over

your head. But things that happen to you, things that are said, you know, something about you on the port-a-john wall, I mean, these things add up, and they weigh on a person. And you need an outlet. So I just tried to find — you know, other tradeswomen have never been very friendly either, so I . . .

FECTEAU: What would be those outlets?

WELLS: Doing side jobs. [laughs] Doing tile on my own.

CRAWFORD: Working more. [laughter]

WELLS: Working more.

RAUCHER: But you're still working in the trade now, or no?

WELLS: I haven't worked in the trade since June.

RAUCHER: Of 2003?

WELLS: Uh-huh.

RAUCHER: And have you just sort of retired from it, or is this temporary?

WELLS: No. I injured myself. I have a herniated disc and I went out on medical. And I had already started finishing my degree at Wayne, so when I got released off of medical — as you know, the economy is pretty bad and so work is very slow right now (I spoke with my boss in December, and he told me he'll probably have some stuff in the spring) — I took a full load this semester.

And you know, I go back and forth. There are days where I know that my back is hurt and I tell myself, "You can't go back." But then there are days where I just miss it so much that — because I feel like just putting myself out there, just so people have to, even if I'm a cripple, they still have to see me and deal with me. I just miss it.

FECTEAU: Have you ever thought about being a contractor?

WELLS: It's too hard in tile. I mean, I do a lot of side work. I get a lot of side work. But tile is — I hate to say it, but I don't want to end up in the bottom of the river with cement shoes. [laughs] And that's not a joke. It's really incestuous and everybody knows everyone. You go to the distributor and you know everybody there. I still pay my union dues, so that if I want to go back to work, I can.

CRAWFORD: If you were to stop paying your union dues and lapse as a member, would they take you back?

WELLS: I believe so, yeah. I know people that have lapsed. I did lapse, actually, for five months and I didn't get a letter or anything. And then I decided maybe I should just keep them current, because if I can go back to work in the spring or for the summer and just work through the summer — because I know that the contractors that I worked for would hire me again. I'm a good worker and I come to work. And I miss those guys a lot. So I know that he would work me. My union isn't really good about collecting money either, so I don't think anything would happen to me.

But on the other hand, I would like them to take me off their books as a person — like if I never went back to work with them, I want my name removed off their list, because I don't want them to be counting me. I have been thinking a lot about that, that I need them to remove me, because I don't want them to be able to get credit for me, because I think that they probably do hold on to all those people's names. I mean, I really feel like all those people, they just continue to say, "These are our apprentices."

RAUCHER: How did you hurt your back, and what is it like for a woman, physically, to be a tilesetter?

WELLS: It's very difficult. I wake up in the middle of the night like this — you get really bad carpel tunnel. It's very repetitive when you spread — use your trowel. I mean, it's very repetitive. And you're on your knees a lot. I was working at Orchestra Hall, just me and another guy. And we were two ahead, there was no way they were going to send any more people to the job. The two of us were getting what we needed to get done fine.

The elevators had been down most of the time we were there. So, we had many bathrooms in the new complex, the Max — we were on that side. And there were a lot of bathrooms over the four floors and I had been carrying buckets of water up — it's eight flights of stairs when you count the two . . .

CRAWFORD: Five gallon buckets of water, forty pounds?

WELLS: Yeah. So I had been doing that for two weeks, because it was just the two of us. So he would set tile while I grouted and then I would catch up and then I would set tile and then I would just have more — I would think, "This is so stupid. I'll just keep grouting, because all I'm doing is making more work for myself." But I really like to set tile, so . . . And my foreman, Larry, felt bad. He said, "I'm trying to get a helper. I'm trying to get a helper out here, Carrie, but we're ahead of schedule. The boss is not going to pay anyone else."

And I just remember I came up the stairs and I was turning — and I was also carrying fifty-pound bags of Thinset on my shoulders and a bucket, and walking all the way up the stairs, too. So, however I needed to move the materials, I was moving it by my body. And something popped, and I just thought, "Oh, no big deal."

And my back hurt for about a week. I mean, I didn't have any strength in my — I was dropping stuff. And I still kept going to work and I was dragging my leg and my sciatic was killing me. And I went to the chiropractor three times and he finally looked at me and said, "I think you have a disc problem," because usually if I go to the chiropractor, I'm fine. And then, after working a whole week like that, on the last day I made my lunch and then I laid at the back door. And my husband saw me when he got up. I was asleep with my lunch box next to me. [laughter]

And then I didn't go back. I didn't go back. And I had a bulging disc and an MRI. So it hasn't popped back in yet, but since I haven't been working, it's not inflamed. So the doctor, the osteopath said it could take a year for it to move itself back in. I mean, my discs were so compressed in my lower part of my body from all the heavy lifting — I mean, bags of cement weigh ninety-four pounds and I only weigh 135. On my MRI, you couldn't even see through any of my bottom discs, and at my top, they were totally compressed.

DAWSON: So there's no way you can use anything with wheels to move this . . .

WELLS: Well yeah, I can. I had a hand cart. But if there's no elevator and there's no water on any of the other floors, that's where you run into the problem. So if there's only water on the first floor, I would do everything to try to detour any sort of work from the upper floors, because that just means more work.

There are a lot of easier ways to do things in life, but in tile, they don't do them the easier way. I mean, really, scaffolding — "You don't need any scaffolding, just buckets and some planks." I mean, you're lucky if you can get a little Baker out to a job. And that isn't a joke. If the walls need to be grouted and I can't reach it on a five-gallon

— and I've fallen off a five-gallon bucket many, many times. But they just don't want to bring anything out.

I mean, we hardly ever even have gang boxes — maybe one gang box, and that's it. You have your own tools and that's it. It's hard to get sponges out of the boss. I mean, things that you need, basic things that you need to do your job, it's just hard to get them.

DAWSON: Do you supply your own tools?

WELLS: The apprenticeship gave you all your tools that you needed, about $500 worth of tools, which is one good thing about that program. Crappy levels, crappy knee pads, but everything else was good, all the hand tools that you need. They give you any kind of tool that you need, you got quite a good booty of tools.

RAUCHER: What do you make an hour as a tilesetter and what kind of benefits do you get?

WELLS: Very good. We have a good pension. We have an international and a local pension. Journeymen, I think, are making . . . When I left, I was making twenty-six dollars an hour, plus my benefits. But I started at $8.10 for six months. [laughs] You get raises every six months. So when I left, I was making twenty-six dollars an hour, plus my vacation, plus my pension. And our medical is top-notch. It's a PPO. I mean, we have excellent medical care, even though no one seems to use it, and excellent eye care. We do have good benefits.

But it doesn't pay for the damage that you do to your body, because I know men that can't walk. And there are men that need to have themselves serviced, but they can't, because they have wives at home with kids and they can't not work, because when you

don't work, you don't get paid. There's no vacation time or anything. I mean, there's this vacation check thing that is really just money that you've already earned that they keep for you for six months and give it back. But if someone needed surgery, they would not get paid for it.

RAUCHER: And a lot of these residential jobs are union jobs, huh? Because I'm surprised to hear that.

WELLS: They're not. Tile is usually about the only unionized thing on residential sites.

RAUCHER: Why is that? There aren't non-union tile workers, then?

WELLS: Oh, no. There are non-union tile shops. But if it's a complex where everything is like, 700,000-, two-million-dollar homes, they're not going to hire a non-union contractor, because they're going to get crappy work. They're not going to get concrete. They're going to put down Durarock. They will get the best hands in the business.

But everything else is non-union and most everybody — I mean, I've worked on jobs where the INS has showed up, and people are coming out of every nook and cranny running into the woods. And I've worked on jobs where carpenters have been squatting there, because they were from Ohio, so they would just sleep in a totally unfinished unit overnight and we'd get there in the morning and they're getting out of their sleeping bags.

Residential sites are — they're kind of like the last frontier. You just don't know what you're going to get. They were very scary to me. I mean, I did not like working on them, especially when I was alone. There were times where I would turn around and

there would be three Hispanics standing in my bathroom, and I would tell them to get out, and they would just start talking, "Chica, . . ." I mean, it was very uncomfortable.

And I would tell my boss, and he would say, “You just pick up the heaviest trowel you have and you throw it at them.” And I said, “I’m not going to resort to violence.” And he said, “They’ll run.” The answer from him for every question was always to use violence. Or, “Pick up a straight edge and throw it at them, Carrie, they’ll leave you alone. Cut your hair."

FECTEAU: And he took no responsibility . . .

WELLS: Oh, no, no, not at all.

CRAWFORD: . . . for a safe work site.

WELLS: No. And right after that, some little girl got raped in a subdivision by a Mexican day worker. I brought the article in to show him I wasn't crazy. And he just thought it was the funniest thing. And I told him, “Look, you leave, I’m isolated by myself.” Because a lot of times I went to jobs and it was just me working. And it was kind of scary. Mostly I didn’t tell my mom about that.

FECTEAU: But it wasn’t necessarily because they were Mexican — what I’m hearing is that it was because they were somehow undocumented . . .

WELLS: Yeah.

FECTEAU: . . . you know, there wasn’t any sort of accountability.

WELLS: Oh no. They have nothing to lose.

FECTEAU: And they were also being aggressive. All of those reasons, and undocumented. I mean, they have absolutely nothing to lose, as far as I’m concerned. I mean, when the INS is showing up on your jobs, it’s kind of funny. [laughs] You’re just

like, "Okay. Where am I?" I mean, it's very surreal. And they really are there to get undocumented workers.

RAUCHER: Did you get to know any of the families in the tile business? You say these are Italian Americans. I mean, did they ever throw a company barbecue or something where you'd meet, and what was that like?

WELLS: Oh yeah. It varies. The residential guy, he was third generation. His grandfather started the company. And you know, you get your sausage and cheese basket and your turkey and you hang out with the family a little bit.

But the last place I worked for, you go to the bar. An eastside [Detroit] family, we'd go to the Clover Leaf, and it was very nice. And the whole family was there and everyone got bonuses and you get your ham. And what else did we get? We had a lot of good stuff — cheeses. And he pays for everything, he pays for all the drinks. On Christmas Eve, we'd get off work at noon. And that was nice, because I've worked for people where I mean, you know, Christmas Eve doesn't mean anything. So that was really, really nice. And actually they acknowledge who you are, "Thank you for working so hard," and whatever. So that was a benefit.

CRAWFORD: What percentage of tilesetters would you say are these descendants of Italian Americans?

WELLS: Ninety, eighty to ninety.

CRAWFORD: So Anglo-Saxons or African Americans or other minorities . . .

WELLS: No. It was like, .05 percent, and that was in like, '97. But the tile trades are typically very white male and they're very racist. I mean, I've never been around a bigger group of racist men in my life. It does not matter where. You build

friendships and you think, "Oh well, these guys are going to be okay." And then it's shattered, because they start with these really racist — I've never heard so much hate. Even men that I've liked and I've had a good time with, I've been really appalled.

Italians can't stand — and I think that that's also a cultural thing, but they think everyone, especially if you're black, is just here to fill a number. That's their big thing. If it's on a city job, you're just here to fill a number. I don't know if they really believe that, I feel like they really believe it, but they're very racist, I think.

RAUCHER: Are some of them from Italy? Do they bring over . . .?

WELLS: Oh, yeah. Right now we have a ton of Romanians, Romanians and Albanians. And the Romanians are pretty hard to work with, because they do not like — I mean, they're Romanian and the idea of a woman on a job is just wrong, completely wrong. Like I said, I've had Romanians take tools out of my hands. And I've had to grab them back and say, "No, I do, I do." And they just . . .

CRAWFORD: Were they organized through your local? Where did they come from?

FECTEAU: Were they helpers or were they journeymen?

WELLS: They were journeymen. One contractor that I worked for, they probably have fifteen Romanians working for them right now. And I made a joke, "They must go to the airport," because then once they start working, "Oh, my family is coming." And they just start bringing in their family. And I don't know why — I could never . . .

FECTEAU: Well, did the union give them journeymen's cards?

WELLS: Well, no. They were probably listed as a helper, but they were paying them journeyman wages, because in order for them to get their journeyman's card, they would have to go through the program. So, no, they weren't actually officially journeymen.

FECTEAU: So they were doing journeyman's work?

WELLS: Oh yeah.

CRAWFORD: But why were they importing Romanians?

WELLS: I don't know. I do not know.

RAUCHER: Maybe they were running out of Italians with the skill. Yeah, because economic conditions are better in Europe for them, so they're not necessarily having to come here for work. But Romanians, Albanians, they're poorer.

WELLS: But they're not that poor, because a lot of these Romanians that I worked with live in Farmington Hills. So I don't exactly know how poor they are, but to me it seems maybe not that poor. I don't live in Farmington Hills.

DAWSON: I do. [laughter]

WELLS: But you're a big machinist.

FECTEAU: Do these Romanians go to the union meetings?

WELLS: No. [laughs] Nobody goes to our union meetings — maybe ten people.

DAWSON: But they were skilled. They knew their job, though, so they had to get it over there.

WELLS: Yeah.

DAWSON: I mean, they were definitely journey people.

WELLS: Yeah, they knew their job. Yeah, they knew the tile trade. I mean, they knew what they were doing. The union, of course they'll sign them up. Our initiation fee is $500.

FECTEAU: So if somebody just pays 500 bucks they can come in the union?

WELLS: It's $500.

FECTEAU: Do they test them or make sure that they can do the trade?

WELLS: Nope.

FECTEAU: And they can come in and take journeyman's work?

WELLS: Uh-huh. Yes, they can. It's very backward. I wish it was different. I mean, I would love to work in another state. I've called other locals, because since it's international, I can go other places. And from what I can gather, they don't operate quite like this one. And someday I really hope to be able to experience a normal functioning union, where they have meetings where people can talk. I mean, as an apprentice, they won't even let me vote, if they had something to vote on. And for a long time, they wouldn't even let us speak at the union meetings. And I went to every union meeting for my first three years. Me and the girls went and sat down. And every week we'd open the door and the retiree row would say, "Oh, the dancing girls are here." [laughter]

DAWSON: In your own union hall?

WELLS: In my own union hall. And Molly was with us and she said, "You don't have enough money." [laughter] But it did nothing. It did nothing. They don't act. It's a bizarre little world. And it really opened my eyes and I realized that I needed to finish my degree, because this is a serious situation.

And I do feel for the men that belong to this union that pay their dues, pay a lot of dues and don't get serviced. We don't have a grievance procedure. They breathe bad silica dust with no dust mask, or the boss brings you out a dust mask that actually says on it, "Does not protect you from silica sand," just because it's cheaper. So I do feel for those men. I mean, silicosis is killing a lot of our members. It can kill you very quickly. You don't have to be eighty years old. It's the buildup. And what it does is it suffocates you. And there's no cure for it, and you'll die. They don't make any provisions for this. And these are good tradesmen. I do think they need something.

DAWSON: But there are some kind of masks that will protect you.

WELLS: Oh, yeah.

RAUCHER: And you wear a mask.

WELLS: Oh, yeah.

DAWSON: And you have to pay for that?

WELLS: Oh, yeah. I have really good masks, but they're mine. I paid for them. And people laugh at you.

CRAWFORD: Yeah, but your employer is supposed to pay for them.

WELLS: Yeah, I know. You can't get them to. I mean, they bring you the standard cheap box of masks that don't protect you from silica sand. I mean, I watch guys polish marble smoking a cigarette with no mask on. Every nose hair in their nose is white from silica dust, and they take it home on them. So that's a problem. I mean, it's the culture of "you can't hurt yourself, you're invincible." It's this whole macho thing.

And they would just think I'm crazy, with my mask. I've told them a lot of times I just won't do it. Like to polish up a wall, if it had grout haze on it, you can do it really

quickly with water, just as easy as you can with taking a towel and dry polishing it off. When you do that, it just covers you with silica. And I mean, they freak out. "Do you have to get a bucket of water? That takes too long." I guess I have to be my own safety person, because no one from the union is going to support you.

FECTEAU: Was there training on this?

WELLS: There was training in the pre-apprenticeship training for us. But, no. Safety, they just think it's a joke. I mean, I think they don't really understand the dangers.

FECTEAU: Well, I was just going to ask: You've talked about a lot of problems and issues for women in the trades. I want to know what you think can be done to attract or maintain women in the trades in general, but in your trade in particular. If you were to run the local — I know it seems pretty impossible — but if they were willing to do something, what do you think would work?

WELLS: I really think that you need to have outreach, because you're so isolated on a job once you leave that hall. I think that there needs to be more contact. Let's say, if I was the business agent, if there's only five women working in the whole local, it wouldn't be that hard to actually make contact with them. But they see all that as being weak, you know, doing outreach. Their big thing is that they don't want to have favoritism and they don't want to make it seem like they're doing special things for us. So they're very against any of my ideas, because they think then it sends a message to the men that we're being given special favors.

I think the membership really needs to be held accountable. There has to be an accountability system. I mean, there's accountability in plants, but there is no accountability, in my trade anyway, for serious infractions.

Just let me give you an example. We had a religious guy that I went to class with, Marty. And he wasn't a good worker and I didn't care for the guy either. But he didn't know when to quit and he was always reading his Bible on the job. And someone told me that they — and this is true — I mean, I know someone who witnessed it, so it's true. But they just hated working with him because he was always preaching to them. I mean, he just couldn't stop. They peed in his coffee cup! You know? It's like they have no tolerance for anything that is different.

CRAWFORD: Are you saying that this other person peed in the religious guy's coffee cup?

WELLS: Yeah, the guys did. The guys on the job did, because they were sick of listening to him talk about God and preaching at lunch. He's not a great worker, I will admit that, but it's the tolerating differences in people that is really a problem. They're, of course, homophobic, too, so if I say, "That's wrong. There's nothing wrong with gay people," people get really angry and they tell the boss they don't want to work with you.

I've been told by one of my bosses that, "They call me all the time. They don't want to work with you. You talk about stuff." And I said, "Well, if they're going to bombard me with racist rhetoric and sexist crap, I feel that I too should be able to say what I think." And they just laughed at me. But I do think that.

RAUCHER: What about your education? Certainly you had to be better educated than virtually everybody you worked with?

WELLS: Well, that's a problem too. Yeah. Thank you for bringing that up. That's a big problem. If they found out that I went to college, that's a problem. My union is the only building trade in the entire Greater Detroit Building Trades that does not require you to have a high school diploma. The laborers even require a high school diploma. We only require that you've completed up to tenth grade of high school. So our standards are not very high to begin with.

RAUCHER: Why do you think that is? Is that because there are so many immigrants in the business, or what?

WELLS: I don't know. It was recently pointed out to me by one of my girlfriends who had the booklet. And she was like, "Here's why you have all these dumb people." And she said, "You guys don't even need a high school diploma." And I said, "Oh." I didn't know that. I mean, I guess when I filled out the paperwork, it didn't matter to me. But yeah, once they found out I went to college, you know, they think that I think I'm smarter.

And I like to travel. I'm sorry, but in my opinion, white men, life is theirs to make whatever they want of it. I really truly believe it is all about choices, and everybody makes choices in life. I don't think that minorities and women are given that opportunity to make the choices to have the life that they may want to have. But as white men, I think that they pretty much can.

And they don't like to see people make choices that maybe — like traveling was always a big problem with me. In construction, you know, you can just say, "I'm not going to be here next week," and you're not there. And so when they'd ask me where I

was going and I would tell them, they weren't always happy. I mean, they were noticeably angry — "Well, it must be nice." You know, lots of comments.

FECTEAU: Where'd you go?

WELLS: China, London. I mean, but they don't know me and they don't know my life and they don't know how I live, but they would put values on that. And it was probably not the smartest thing for them to find out what I was doing, but I don't see anything wrong with it. I work really hard and I live my life according to how I want to live it and I don't judge them because their wife makes their lunch for them every day and isn't allowed to go to the grocery store without getting special permission. That's just the way they live.

CRAWFORD: What do you think most tilesetters gross in a year, if they're working kind of steady?

WELLS: Well, sixty, steady. Most guys I work with work steady all year, they never get laid off. They made about sixty.

FECTEAU: I know you you don't have children, but you have nieces. If your niece was interested in going into the skilled trades in general, the tile trade in particular, what would you tell her? What advice would you give her?

WELLS: I would encourage her. I would encourage her to probably finish college first. [laughs] But I would encourage her. You just have to find your own voice, and it takes a while. But eventually everything, I feel, does just gel and you can be who you want to be. You've earned enough respect and you've paid enough dues. And if you're a hard worker and you're good at what you do, then it all comes together.

And it does take a while, I think. I mean, it took me over three years. I mean, I worked with crappy people and I just thought that was all I was getting. And then I arrived, and I couldn't think of anything else. You know, I wouldn't call off — I'd go to work and that was great.

And I encourage women all the time. I just met a girl at Wayne who works for Lear. And she told me she had been trying to get into the skilled trades program as an electrician. And I said, "Oh, well why did you turn it down?" "Oh, I don't want to be an electrician, I'm trying to get on the other side of that line," because she's a business student here. And I'm like, "You'll make more money. It'll be more fun." [laughter] And she was twenty-two and she was like, "I don't want to do that." I said, "Well, you took the test. You did good." "Yeah." Any person that shows me any little bit of interest I try to push. Why do all these men get to keep having all these great jobs and be autonomous and make all this great money, when there are single moms and other women that deserve a chance to do this? It's not rocket science, you know.

RAUCHER: You sound like you're a little bit political, maybe. Have you been involved in women's issues or any of that during the time you've been a tilesetter?

WELLS: No. I do my own boycotting. [laughs] Like I said before, I'm sort of introverted, so I whatever I do, I usually just do on my own level, as far as boycotting things that I don't agree with and writing letters. I've never really been active with other groups.

I tried to find some sort of tradeswomen group at one point here in Detroit, but there isn't any. I was actually hoping to find some other women, but there isn't anything in Detroit. So, no, I just do things on my own, I guess.

FECTEAU: Did you notice after you came into the trades, after the first two, that there were any other women coming behind you?

WELLS: There were, but they lasted like, two or three months. There were. And I even said to our teacher, "Can you just give us their names when they come in? Can you call us? Can you call me? Can you hook us up with these girls?" "Oh, well, that would be violating their" — you know, "We can't give that information out." I'm like, "Well, could you call me? Then maybe I can come down to the hall and I can introduce myself." I mean, they just . . .

CRAWFORD: . . . stonewalled you.

WELLS: Yeah. They just don't want to — it's threatening, you know. It's a threat if we all . . .

DAWSON: One woman bonding with another is a threat. [laughter]

WELLS: They really don't like to see that at all. It really freaks them out, which is kind of powerful. But it creates — I mean, you get stonewalled. And I would encourage every woman to work with their hands. I think it's the most liberating thing you can do, really.

FECTEAU: I'm also curious, what do you think the unions could do to deal with the treatment of women and other minorities or people who are harassed for whatever reason? Is there anything the union can do?

WELLS: I mean, plants have "no tolerance" policies, you know, against striking each other. I mean, you'll lose your job. The union can't save you. And something where there's like, "no tolerance," I think — I know that that seems so radical, but it's 2004. It's hard to regulate these things. I mean, construction sites, you're a transient,

you're a nomad. It's really a difficult place to do regulation. General contractors, superintendents can regulate, but they've got other things — you know, it's not a priority for anyone, because there are so few women involved.

FECTEAU: Also, what are your feelings on affirmative action? Do you think that that helps or does that hurt women and minorities?

WELLS: I think it helps. I'm not against affirmative action at all, because without affirmative action, we wouldn't have made the strides, I don't believe, that we've made, even the small ones. They never would have had to start their training program for me. They would have just continued to hire grandsons and nephews off the street. And so they have given people opportunities, albeit on their terms. But I agree with affirmative action and I think without it, it's just going to revert back to these sex-assigned roles.

And with minorities, with tile especially, the treatment of blacks has been the most deplorable to me. I just can't believe the stuff that people — and for them I feel more sorry, because I can kind of blend in like, "Maybe they won't pick on me today." But I just know that for those people, that they'll always stand out, because there are so many white men that just hate for no reason.

RAUCHER: Is that it? Was there anything else that you'd like to add at this point?

WELLS: After all my rambling? No.

FECTEAU: Did you tell your ten-foot penis story? [laughter]

RAUCHER: What was that? I didn't hear that story.

WELLS: Oh, they just drew ten-foot penises on the wall. And I was working on the scaffolding with them, and so we were really twenty feet up in the air. And me and Stephanie were feeding mud boards, that is I'm just shoveling concrete onto the boards so they can put it on the wall. And you know, I just don't get it. They just decided it would be fun to draw some big penises right in front of us.

RAUCHER: This is the airport job?

WELLS: Yeah.

RAUCHER: And how did they draw them? They draw them in the mud?

WELLS: Yeah, with their trowel. You know, trowels are sharp, the concrete is not dry yet, so they can do whatever they want with it, and so they did. And actually, Stephanie called the hall on that and they did come out. But when she called them, she didn't want the guys to know. And the BA had been coming to the job a lot, because it was a big job. So they had been out there, so it wasn't weird that they showed up. But she was kind of telling them where it was, but didn't want the guys to know that she called the hall. So when they came, they looked up, and it was, you know, ten feet up in the air, twenty feet up in the air, and they said they couldn't see anything, [laughter] and they left. And we were like, "Okay, thanks."

DAWSON: They said, "I'm not getting involved in this."

WELLS: Yeah, so I mean, I pretty much knew never to call them for help, even though they would tell me after I would unload, because I would let it all build up, and then I would just unload and I would tell them these really foul things. And my BA would say, "Carrie, you shouldn't talk like that." And I said, "I'm only repeating to you

exactly what has happened." "Well, you're a woman. Don't talk like that." And I'm like, "Okay, look. I'm just — this is what went on and I just need it to stop."

And that's what precipitated the letter from the international's lawyers that he read to sixteen people at the union hall so they know what the law is and they'll be abiding by it.

CRAWFORD: So you were accused of filing many suits, okay. Do you think that if anyone actually had ever filed a suit, someone would have started paying attention?

WELLS: I don't know, because I haven't seen Molly in a long time. Again, bucket rumors. But my friend Stephanie really believes that she did file a lawsuit. But we have no proof. And since nothing has changed, I don't think that she did, because I haven't worked for five tile contractors, let alone sued them. So I don't think Molly did either. I think she just walked away, which I wish she never would have done.

FECTEAU: But do you think it would make a difference?

DAWSON: Or would it be harder on you, on women?

CRAWFORD: It would be harder on you, but it might make a change.

WELLS: Yeah, I think it would be harder. But every contractor I've worked for, the company is in their wife or mother's name, so they're minority-owned businesses. The wife signs the checks, and they tell me, "I don't have to have you on this job, Carrie, because I'm a minority-owned business." And they try to intimidate you.

And I did get laid off. I'm pretty sure that one contractor thought I was going to sue him, the one that I worked for at the airport. And I never was. We met with him over breakfast to discuss some things that were going on — the changing, the penises. There

were some other things that were a little too foul for me to go into. But we had breakfast. We laid them out. We did not tell him any names. We weren't trying to get anyone in trouble. We just wanted him to know the general mood of the job, that it was not so good.

After that, I got pulled off the job and I worked by myself for three months. They had given me a performance appraisal: "Stellar, very good." I never asked for a copy of it. He showed it to me. I was like, "Oh, okay. Thank you. Send it to the hall." He submitted another one for me and gave me — you get one through four for various things — gave me ones on everything.

CRAWFORD: One being . . .

WELLS: The lowest. And before I had had all three-and-a-halfs and fours.

CRAWFORD: This is while you were an apprentice?

WELLS: Yeah. But since I didn't have the one that he showed me, because I knew I could just get it from my files at the hall, I never thought anything of it. And that was, I think, about the maddest I've ever been in my life.

And they, my union reps, were like, "Oh, don't worry about it, Carrie. It's no big deal. They're just trying to send a message, you know, that you're making too much about these things." And I'm like, "No, this is on my permanent record." All my performance appraisals are very good. And so then I had this one which was just retaliation.

And I mean, I never — we didn't mention lawsuits. We were just like, "Look, they're naked. You need to make them put their clothes on." "Oh, yes. We'll take that into account," you know, and, "We'll have some sensitivity training," and all this crap.

All he did was blow smoke, I mean, for two hours, and nothing has ever changed. My friend still works for the same company. Nothing has changed. I wish it would.