THE 20th CENTURY TRADE UNION WOMAN: VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

BEULAH COMPTON

Waitresses' Union

by

Elizabeth Case

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

VITAE

BEULAH COMPTON

Beulah C. Compton was born January 18, 1905 on an Indian reservation near Kalalock, Washington, and was raised in Idaho. She dropped out of high school at age 16 to attend business school, but several months later dropped out of business school to marry. After seven years of marriage, Compton's husband deserted her, leaving her with the responsibility of raising their three children. She found a job as a waitress in Aberdeen, Washington, making three dollars a day. It was at this time that she joined the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders' International Union. After several years in Aberdeen, she moved to Seattle and worked at various restaurant-related jobs.

In 1947 Compton began working for the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union, Waitresses' Local 240, as a business agent. In 1951 she became the executive secretary of the local, where she was active in the areas of workers' education and safety regulations. In 1956 Compton left the local to work for the King County branch of COPE, Committee on Political Education. She was later appointed head of Washington State's Women and Minors' Division. Compton was instrumental in the drafting and passage of Washington's first minimum wage law. Seven years later, Compton left to become the head of the Seattle labor legislation. In 1965 she moved to San Francisco to become the head of the regional office for the seven western states. Compton was involved in the women's equal pay movement and drafted Montana's Minimum Wage Law. In 1971, she resigned and returned to Seattle where she has been active in E.R.A.'s state campaign and the state Democratic Party.

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INTERVIEWER: Mrs. Compton, would you tell us where, how long you've lived in Seattle and what other places you've lived during your life?

COMPTON: I'm a native Washingtonian; I was born on the coast of Washington, on an Indian reservation as a matter of fact near Cleloch. But when I was probably three, my parents moved to Idaho and gradually we migrated back to the State of Washington and I came to Seattle in 1930, and we have lived here all of the time since then, except for seven years in San Francisco.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned then your childhood. I remember that when you and I first met you talked a little about your family to me then and I believe you told me you remembered at least some of your grandparents. So can we start there? Do you remember your grandparents?

COMPTON: Yes, one grandparent. My father's mother I remember very well. I didn't know the others except from hearing about them. But my father's mother was a little woman born in Virginia who was a school teacher. I think she taught school until she was around seventy and then she did what she called canvassing; she sold Dr. Ordway's plasters and eucalyptus ointment and several things and she had a regular route between Missouri and Washington. She would stop off with her sons.

INTERVIEWER: How did she travel?

COMPTON: By train. I remember her visiting me when I was in second year of high school. The last time I saw her, I was having some problems with geometry and she got me over my problems immediately. She could recite theorems like yesterday and she also taught me to diagram sentences and to parse. She helped me a great deal in English. At that time she was way up in her nineties.

INTERVIEWER: How old was she when she died?

COMPTON: I think she was ninety-six.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say she's the grandparent that you remember? Would you say that she...obviously, she would have had the most influence on you because she's the one you remember; but were the other three, although you don't remember them, real people to you?

COMPTON: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Because of what your parents would tell you?

COMPTON: Yes, my father's father was an abolitionist, a follower of John Brown, and very active in the abolition movement. He was a lecturer, a pamphleteer and spent a great deal of time in jail. He'd go into the south and find himself a soap box and begin speaking about slavery. But during this time, my grandmother was raising the family and teaching, riding a mule to and from school in Misssouri. And he would come home off and on, but most of the latter part of his life he spent in the south.

INTERVIEWER: And had he died by the time she took to selling the ointment; was this something she did perhaps to support herself after he died?

COMPTON: Before she what?

INTERVIEWER: You said that she made this tour from Missouri west, as a travelling sales lady really . . .

COMPTON: Yes, he died rather early I think, because she remarried and had another son by her second marriage; and that husband died also and it was after that that she left Missouri and started travelling.

INTERVIEWER: And do you think she did this, she worked, did the travelling because financially it was necessary?

COMPTON: Oh yes; oh, she could have made her home with any one of her sons, but none of them, as far as I know, had more than just enough to get along--including my father. But she was very independent. I remember she always travelled with a big trunk, full of her items, that she was selling; but she always brought gifts, always had gifts for the family. And she would stay probably maybe two or three months at a time.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember, did your mother talk very much about her parents?

COMPTON INTERVIEW

COMPTON: Yes, a great deal. My mother was born on a farm in Iowa of a very...her father was a very successful corn farmer and quite an adventurer himself. He was the youngest wagon master to some across the plains with a wagon train. He was twenty-two.

INTERVIEWER: Was he with that group that came to Seattle?

COMPTON: No, he went to Sacramento. On one of his trips he was in Oregon, because Mama said she remembered his saying what a pretty little valley surrounded Portland. And, you know, it was very sparsely settled. He went down, he did some mining too and he went down with a gold ship. Now whether that went down in San Francisco Bay or the east coast I've forgotten, but it had to go around the South America to get back to the east coast, and he lost a great deal of gold. He survived, with his money belt, he had a lot of gold in that. But otherwise, his chest of gold went to the bottom of the ocean. But he was a magnificent person. If you want to turn that off I'll show you a portrait of him.

INTERVIEWER: I must ask you, before we go on, about your mother's mother.

COMPTON: She died, I think she, I don't know, I think she and Grandfather must have died pretty close to the same time. I guess he died first and she died later. She was the mother of, I don't know, I think they had eight or ten children. Mostly boys, three girls, I remember. And I think she probably was the typical loving Iowa housewife. The children all had varied interests. One of the daughters, the youngest of the bunch, got a college education, was a teacher. The older boys had rather good educations for that time. My mother wasn't interested in a formal education at all. She finished, I think, the sixth grade but a very advanced sixth grade; she much preferred to stay on the farm and work with the men and she had...she loved horses and she had what's called harness; she drove harness races and was a champion. She had all kinds of ribbons for that.

INTERVIEWER: This was in Iowa?

COMPTON: In Iowa.

INTERVIEWER: She was born and grew up in Iowa?

COMPTON: She was born in Iowa.

INTERVIEWER: Was it unusual to have a young girl doing harness races?

COMPTON: Very unusual; and one of the most unusual things that she did, that really upset her parents - she had a very heavy head of hair, it was just luxurious - so long she could sit on it and it was thick and it was so heavy that it bothered her, it gave her headaches, and their family physician used to have her cut just great hunks out of it so it would be less weighty on her head. Well, she finally got provoked with the whole thing and went to her dad's barber and had it cut like a man. Later on I'll show you a picture of that. That bothered the family because she had her hair cut; and it looked awfully cute, I thought. But she was all dressed to go to the fair with her costume, which she was going to drive in the races in, beaded, and her short hair cut.

INTERVIEWER: Did she, was there money involved, that is, if she won a race did she get an award?

COMPTON: I haven't any idea, but that family was very well fixed.

INTERVIEWER: And she wasn't expected to, she didn't work outside the home when she finished school. Did she stay at home and do this until she married?

COMPTON: I think she probably did pretty much as she pleased. She did work, oh she did work doing women's work; they did their own spinning, they made all of the suits for the men. That picture you saw, the suit you saw in that protrait was homemade I would guess. And she liked working with the horses outside and plowing, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting, because there were enough boys in the family that there could have been the traditional division of labor between boy's work and girl's work; but in this case your grandparents....

COMPTON: I think the grandparents just let them choose what they wanted to do.

INTERVIEWER: Was she one of the younger ones?

COMPTON: Yes. The older daughter--there were four girls that I know of--the oldest one in the family was a girl and was a second mother, really responsible in the home. There was an awful lot of work to do in a big family like that on a farm.

INTERVIEWER: Where did she meet your father?

COMPTON: Well she must have met him in Iowa. Oh I know: she had a brother, John, who was travelling in Missouri. And he had

COMPTON: some illness--typhoid or diptheria or one of those awful diseases--and my father knew him, was acquainted with him someway, and took him to their home. And so my little grandmother looked after him and I guess as a result of that meeting my father was invited to visit and when he met my mother he fell in love with her and they were later married.

INTERVIEWER: This means your father grew up in Missouri?

COMPTON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what kind of education did he have, and what did he do?

COMPTON: I don't know what kind of formal eduation he had, I don't ever remember hearing. He was a very literate person, and he wrote beautifully and his English and grammar of course were perfect, with his mother; but he was a surveyor and did a lot, he was a restless person and didn't stay with any one thing. He was successful at everything he started but he would fly into something else. He came out, well the family came out with the Poulsons, who were great, became great lumber people here. And my father was in the logging business here. His mother took a 360 acre timber claim and Papa took an adjoining claim, the same size. And Weyerhauser bought up all the land around and so there was no way for them to get their logs out. And one reason they had to sell the timber to Weyerhauser, and leave. Another reason they left Washington eventually was that my father had developed some lung trouble; he'd had pneumonia several times, and so they went to a drier climate. But while he was here, before they went to Idaho, he designed bridges and surveyed for the highway between Quinault Lake and up toward Port Angeles, up the coast. It was called, and still is, by the old timers, the Castille Trail. That was my father's name.

INTERVIEWER: Oh that's interesting.

COMPTON: It was interesting. Later on my husband worked on paving of the road, like forty years after my father had done what he called trail blazing.

INTERVIEWER: Oh that is interesting: the first time it was paved, then?

COMPTON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Well, if we turn to your childhood, then. As you think on it, what did you particularly like to do with your mother?

COMPTON: ANYTHING. I was the youngest of a family of six. There had been one child younger than me, a little boy who died two or three days after he was born. But it was just a great privilege to be with my mother, no matter what she was doing. I just loved her company.

INTERVIEWER: Were there things that she did in the home, or did she work out?

COMPTON: She never did work out. My father became very religious and oh by the time I was ten he was really more interested in the church than he was in his family. And so he deserted, and my brother was then about eighteen, and he took over the responsibility of supporting what was left of the family. The older girls were married, but there were the three younger girls at home and my mother. He supported us. He sent me and my sister to a little boarding school outside of Portland, from Boise. And during that period, yes while I was away at school my mother worked as a homemaker in some of the wealthy homes in Boise. She was a marvelous cook and then she came to, it was Gaston, Oregon, about thirty or forty miles from Portland, and she came out and my brother rented a cottage in the village so my sister and I could continue on in the same school for another year and then she and my father got together. He at that time was living in Aberdeen and so we moved to Aberdeen and were a family again for at least a few months. Then my father left again and that was, I only saw him maybe once or twice after that. It was a big old house, a ten-room house that my mother converted to apartments and then there was a store building next door that she owned and she put in a couple of apartments over that so she had some income there. And it really did very well. Then she ran a little store and gave everybody credit, and lost the whole thing in 1929. The bank failed and so she lost her property and then from that time on, she lived with my sister until she died.

INTERVIEWER: When you were young and growing up, did you have, I don't know if we think about these things consciously, but looking back did you have a sense of what your mother wanted you to do, or become?

COMPTON: Yes, I think she probably wanted me to teach, but there wasn't much talk about education, until after I'd quit school. I quit and got married before I was seventeen and then, oh my brother told me how disappointed he was, that the family had expected me to go on to college. And I had no idea how I could have gone to college. It just never had been discussed.

INTERVIEWER: Financially, was there a big difference between the time your father was living at home and the time after he had become very religious and was off? Did you have to move?

COMPTON: It seems to me that from the time I can remember we were very poor. When we were in Idaho we really were very poor. Papa

COMPTON: farmed, and here again he never exactly knew what he was doing, and he was just great, but he was doing it for somebody else. He didn't own the property. And he at one time was horticulturist for the state of Idaho. And he was experimenting with different sprays, and he was stirring them with his hands. And he developed--it was arsenate of lead--developed lead poisoning. So he was sick for a long time with that. And when he got well and he was rather, his legs never did straighten out properly, but no we were really poor most of the time. It just seemed to me that it was a sort of hand-to-mouth existence.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live in one house and then another? Did you live, you lived on a farm most of the time or in town? Did you have to move around?

COMPTON: Well let's see. We lived on two farms in Idaho that I remember, between the time I was three and ten.

INTERVIEWER: Were these farms that your father rented?

COMPTON: Probably it amounted to share cropping. He ran the farms for the absent owner.

INTERVIEWER: And the house would be provided, I imagine.

COMPTON: Yeh, the house would be provided. Another time he bought a hotel in Boise (Idaho) and was very successful at that, so far as I know. It was right downtown and had nice living quarters. During that time it seemed we had most everything we wanted. And then he traded his equity in that for two houses and then one rental house and the other one. And that's where we were living when he left. By that time I was ten.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a better house than the ones you lived on on the farm? You mentioned that your mother had grown up in really comfortable circumstances; was this really difficult for her?

COMPTON: She never complained about anything. I remember one winter in Idaho, there was no market for the apples. And all winter long, the apples were stored in sheds in straw, and we had to sort them all the time to try to keep good apples available in case there was a market for them. And probably some of them were sold from time to time. But all of the apples that had a little spot on them were taken off to one side. And we had apples every conceivable way. Applesauce, baked apples. We did have chickens and we had milk, I am sure. But we had wheat. And I remember Mama cooking wheat. It was just the whole kernel wheat in a big iron pot on the back of the stove. And telling such marvelous stories about

COMPTON: how lucky we were that we had wheat to eat. And you know I thought that was the most delicious food. Because at the time she was saying how fortunate we were we had apples and and we had wheat; and then we had butter and eggs and she told me about children in India at the time starving and the mothers stuffing mud in their mouths to keep their bellies from collapsing. So I really felt lucky eating this beautiful wheat, boiled wheat. But I am sure it was all we had to eat. And it never occurred to me until after I was grown. But, no, she never complained. She was a happy sort of person. Very loving.

INTERVIEWER: Whom did you play with when you were a child? I think you told me you had sisters who were fairly close to you in age. Did you play with them mostly?

COMPTON: Well the sister next to me was, she's about three and half years older. She was older and more grown up.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sorry, you were the youngest?

COMPTON: I was the youngest of all.

INTERVIEWER: But was it your sisters more than other children? You didn't have relatives or cousins around?

COMPTON: No, not much. But school chums I had. But on the farm, one farm in Idaho was really a beautiful farm and we had a lovely big old farm house with a verandah all around it. And lots of horses: I loved horses and used to ride a lot, when I had horses to ride.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a lot of chores to do, as we used to call them?

COMPTON: Yes. I was the errand child. I was the runner. I never had to do any housework because there were older girls around to do that. But I ran errands for everybody.

INTERVIEWER: And this was not because you were a girl; it was because you were the youngest and there were older boys to do things?

COMPTON: It was probably because I was the youngest and I just loved it, to show off. I was always asked to see how quickly I could do something. And I would just tear to the store, or to the neighbor, or whatever it was, to show how fast I could run. I would be bragged on. I'd just knock myself out for my older sisters and my mother.

INTERVIEWER: Were the brothers in the family enough older than you? You mentioned that one sent you to school.

COMPTON: I just had the one brother.

INTERVIEWER: You just had the one brother; and he was enough older that....

COMPTON: Yes, let's see; he was nine years older than I.

INTERVIEWER: And then what's the spacing on the rest of them?

COMPTON: They were all two years apart except for Ruby and me, there was a little more than three years difference.

INTERVIEWER: All this time that you were running and doing all the other things, what kinds of things were you thinking about what you maybe wanted to do when you grew up or what kinds of things did you daydream about?

COMPTON: I should remember what I daydreamed about because I remember a favorite place I had to daydream. It was under a limb of a tree across the culvert, with the water running underneath it. I remember lying out there and looking up through the tree branches and daydreaming. But what I daydreamed about; probably a better, faster horse. At that time. Later on, I liked to do hand work. By the time I was eleven or twelve years old I was tatting and running around selling it by the yard. For handkerchiefs. Some of those dear ladies used to buy it from me for twenty-five cents a yard. And, you know, a yard really wasn't enough to go around a handkerchief. And it took me some time to realize that they were buying it just to help me. And then when we moved to Aberdeen and I was going to high school, I did embroidery and display work for gift shops.

INTERVIEWER: You said that after you married you were told that, they had wanted you to go on to college and that you had just assumed that that wasn't possible. Did you want to go on to college?

COMPTON: I would like to have.

INTERVIEWER: And you wanted to as you were growing up and you just assumed that it wasn't possible so you dismissed it.

COMPTON: That's about it. Another thing; this man I married, he was twenty-one and he had been in the service, he'd gone in very young. He came from a family my family knew and in Idaho. His father was a physician and his uncle was warden of the state penitentiary and he and my father were great friends. Anyway, he thought it was pretty ridiculous for a girl to even think about going to college because what were you going to do with a college education? You were just going to get married and have babies anyway. And so that may have discouraged me, too. But I had never heard of working your way through college.

INTERVIEWER: You hadn't? I was going to ask you that.

COMPTONL No, because, my goodness, I was energetic. I would have done it if I had had encouragement. I quit high school after when I had just finished the second year in high school, and started business college. I was doing janitorial work there to pay for my tuition. And, actually, I wouldn't have had to do that; my mother did have the money to pay my tuition and was paying it, as a matter of fact, but I got the job doing janitor work so I could spend the money she gave me for tuition for clothes. And I ran into one of my teachers on the street after the fall term had begun and I was in business college, and she really scolded me for dropping out and told me that I would have had a scholarship; she said there was no question about it and that I would have gone on and I would have been a great geometry teacher; I would have been a scientist maybe and she had the year before, she had had me take over for her and do quite a bit of the teaching. And she...it's just too bad we didn't have counselors in those days.

INTERVIEWER: And it was just too late to reverse it then; you couldn't really....

COMPTON: Well, by that time I was getting interested in business college and then I was also thinking about getting married; and finally I quit business college and got married. I was only, I think I had about three months of it. It must have been because I was married the last of November.

INTERVIEWER: I want to ask you some more about your education, but let me ask you a couple of other questions first. You mentioned that your father became very religious when you were a child. Was religion important to you when you were...was it always there before your father?

COMPTON: It was very scary to me. I REALLY hated sitting in church, and it frightened me to hear what I heard. It was really a rather radical religion. I don't know how the Seventh Day Adventists are today; it was the church he joined. My mother had been Methodist and I know the whole family had to be dragged out to prayer meetings, which went on late at night. There was a lot of preaching about hell fire and brimstone and I know that when I was about four or five years old we were living in the foothills outside Boise, and I was afraid to go to sleep at night because I was sure the end of the world was going to come rolling over those foothills and it was bound to get me because it was going to get all the sinners; and I knew I was a sinner because my father kept a ledger that the kids had to check in on for every sin they

COMPTON: had committed during the day. If they had eaten between meals, that was a sin; if they had said any cross words, that was a sin. Or if they had coveted or if they had wanted something they didn't have. All these little things, and I was very honest about it, and I remember pondering at night before I would check on whether I had sinned or not but there was never a day that I hadn't sinned somewhat.

INTERVIEWER: How did your mother feel about that?

COMPTON: Uh, I just wonder what my poor mother went through, being a wife to that man. I don't know whether she was afraid of him or not because he really was a cruel man. He needed some psychiatric help. He used to just beat the daylights out of the other kids. He never did beat me but I used to beg, oh my, I would beg, and I would promise. I was just scared to death of that whip. But now Ruby, the one next to me, used to carry buck shot in her pocket and she'd put a piece of buck shot in her mouth and bite on it and she swore that the whippings didn't hurt. But that's the way she got around it.

INTERVIEWER: You think your mother just felt she couldn't do anything about this?

COMPTON: I'm sure.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned what a lovely character she had.

COMPTON: Yeah, if she interferred, it would set him off worse and I don't know. It's hard for me to understand but I'm sure that she was, she did the best she could. I think that she was so indoctrinated to being a submissive wife that she didn't know anything else. I never knew her to cross him, never.

INTERVIEWER: Were you relieved when he left home?

COMPTON: Oh my, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you, did you sense that he was going away for a long time; or did he just...?

COMPTON: Yes, he left home over me as a matter of fact. The last time. I was fourteen and my sister who is eleven years older than I had taken me skating. She was twenty-five and there was a lovely skating rink there. She was a really fine skater and I was very good, skated on sidewalks and so she thought that I should have a treat and took me to the skating rink. And, when my father came home...he was working at this time; he had a blacksmith shop in Aberdeen, and he had been working late in his shop and he came home and he asked where I was

COMPTON: and my mother told him. Well, he went straight to...it was the Eagles Hall, and he went straight there looking for me and my sister saw him and knew there was going to be trouble. So, she asked a young man to get the skates off of me and take me home. And take me down another street and circled round past our home and by this time I saw my father leaving with his bicycle. He'd come home and got his bicycle and went to the police station and got the police matron and policeman back to search the hall. He thought Carrie had hidden me in the dressing room or something and so he came back with them and searched the hall for me. In the meantime, I had come right home and went up and told Mama what had happened and went to bed. I was, always went to bed early and got up early; and so then you know a half hour or so later, my father came back and came in and told Mama that he had searched the hall and I wasn't there. By this time my sister had returned home and so Mama said, well I was at home, I was in bed and he said what time did she get home? And my mother said ten minutes to nine and he said she didn't either. He called my mother a liar. Apparently, Mama didn't talk back, but my sister did and there was an argument there and so Papa said that he was going to have me sent to a reform school. And then my mother said "Oh no you're not." So that broke the marriage up for good then. Oh, yes, I was delighted. And it was after that when my mother began managing the home that she accumulated a little money and had money to travel. She could come up to Seattle and visit old friends here. I remember the second year in high school just very well; oh my, I had so much time with my mother alone; it was seventeen blocks from our house to the high school and I used to run home so that I could have lunch with her. And it was, you know, just such a treat.

INTERVIEWER: When did she die?

COMPTON: She died about 1935. I was in Seattle by that time.

INTERVIEWER: Um-um; did you have your children, your children are both younger than that aren't they, so they wouldn't have known....

COMPTON: Oh yeah, they knew her.

INTERVIEWER: Oh they did?

COMPTON: Yeah, let's see one was born in 1924 and the other in 1928.

INTERVIEWER: Oh I didn't realize. . .

COMPTON: My mother died in . . .

INTERVIEWER: We talked about your daughters once and I didn't realize they, that they were that old.

COMPTON: Yeah, they're, let's see, 1924--fifty three.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I guess that's right. (laughter)

COMPTON: Fifty three and forty nine.

INTERVIEWER: We turn now to thinking together about your education, Mrs. Compton. We talked about it some when we were together the other night, but I think we might, we might look at it kind of directly. You mentioned, I think, that you went to a different school that your brother had sent you to after, was that after you got into high school?

COMPTON: No. No, I was in the seventh grade.

INTERVIEWER: And was that, mayber we should go back a little further; for the first six or seven years then was it the same school that you . . .?

COMPTON: No, no, my father moved from one place to another he was a very restless person, and when I was old enough to begin school, we were too far out in the country on a farm in Idaho for me to walk; it was, I imagine, it was probably about four miles. So the older children walked and I stayed home. And later on, we moved into the town of Napa, Idaho, and then I began school, but I was almost nine years old.

INTERVIEWER: Did you already know how to read?

COMPTON: Oh yes, I went, well I went through the third grade that year, so I could read and didn't lose much at time at that end. My mother had taught me at home and then I don't think I was ever in one school more than one term from, if that much, from then until I was twelve and my brother sent me to boarding school outside Portland. I had gone half way through the seventh grade but I had to go back to the beginning; it was a good thing because the, the private school was much more demanding than public school had been. So I was there one year in the dormitory and my sister next to me also. And then my mother came out the next year and lived in the village and we continued in the same school and I finished the eighth grade there. And from there, I told you about my mother and my sister and I and my brother moved to Aberdeen with him and that was where I went to high school. I was just in high school two years.

INTERVIEWER: This meant that with a lot of moving around, a lot of moving from school to school you were, I suppose, constantly leaving and then making new friends.

COMPTON: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Were, were there a great variety of kinds of people, people from various backgrounds in these schools over the years. Was the boarding school different from public school?

COMPTON: Boarding school was Seventh Day Adventist school; it was religious school and we worked, I think, it was a minimum of two hours a day. However, I was the youngest child in the whole school and there were no demands made of me. I put in two hours but a lot of it was mischief, really. I'd, I'd get to peel hard boiled eggs and I'd eat half ot them--that sort of thing. So I really didn't hurt myself working. But my sister worked in the laundry. She was about three and one half years older than I am, and quite a young lady at fifteen or sixteen.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember, looking back at the various schools, the kinds of things you and your classmates were interested in? Were any of them political?

COMPTON: No. I was never interested in....as a matter of fact, I didn't know anything about government until I was in the eighth grade and had civics and it was very difficult for me. That was a hard subject for me and I had missed out on history too, in the moves; like maybe one school may have begun teaching US history in the fifth or sixth grade but I missed going to that particular school so I had had no history whatsoever until I got into the seventh or eighth grades and had a little then. But I don't think I had any history in the seventh grade; I think it was in the eighth grade that I finally had US history so I had a very dim idea of what government was all about. And we were so cloistered there for two years that we were there, that the end of World War I, and hardly knew about that--hardly knew there was a war.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

COMPTON: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask you; do you remember the amendment giving women suffrage passed?

COMPTON: Yeah, I remember my mother getting up all gussied up, so proud to go vote.

INTERVIEWER: Do you?

COMPTON: Oh yes, she was, she tried to explain to me the value of that, but what was that, 1919 or 20?

INTERVIEWER: I think it was 19, yes 1919; I'm not sure.

COMPTON: I was about fourteen so it wasn't very significant to me.

INTERVIEWER: Had politics been important in your home; were your parents of a particular party?

COMPTON: I don't remember any discussion of politics except that there seemed to me sort of a, you know, the president was our president and right or wrong; I remember some comments about Wilson, apparently they felt Wilson was alright. And then I, I do know where my mother stood after my father left; she was very strict about voting and she was a Democrat. I remember her being very much; well I can't remember who ran against Hoover?

INTERVIEWER: Al Smith; no that was, oh you mean the first time, yes wasn't that Al Smith, the happy warrior, 1928?

COMPTON: Maybe that was, no; was Hoover in in 1928?

INTERVIEWER: Then he ran for reelection in 1932 and was defeated by FDR; isn't that right?

COMPTON: Maybe so.

INTERVIEWER: I think so (laughter). I think so because I was born in 1931 and I think he was president when I was born though of course I don't remember that.

COMPTON: Yeah, I guess; FDR went in 1932.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned before about your, your father's religious zeal; but I don't think we talked much about what, about whether religion was a formal part of your life and especially after your father left. Did you go to church?

COMPTON: No, never except for some particular occasion; Easter or.... my children went to church but I was never, I never forced them to go. And they were free to select any sunday school they wanted to go to and it was usually one their girlfriends attended.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm; but when you were growing up, especially after your father left, you weren't paricularly religious, in any kind of formal sense?

COMPTON: No, no; it was very distasteful to me. I felt like I'd been unburdened. My mother, there was never any discussion of it, but she didn't go to church either, after my father left. I remember him, I think he offended her terribly, I

COMPTON: remember him at a testimonial service, asking the congregation to pray for his wife, to make her a better woman. And she quit going to church then and that was before he left home. But there was never any comment about it, I never heard anything about it; but I observed it, young as I was. I thought what a ridiculous thing it was, because God couldn't have made her any better than she was, in my eyes.

INTERVIEWER: With the amount of moving around you did, I suppose that affected the kind of, maybe the kind of social life that you had over the years. Did you, we talked again about this the other night, but did you have a lot of, were you in and out of other homes as you were growing up, in various communities where you lived?

COMPTON: You mean socializing?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

COMPTON: Not very much. In, well in Oregon the last year there were just a lot of socializing going on in the community, mostly around the school, and most the community were Seventh Day Adventists. But they were, you know, really friendly, nice people; and I enjoyed them. I had some very dear friends I kept in touch with until not too many years ago. And then in Aberdeen it was, the year my father was at home, I was never in any way, I had girl friends, and boy friends at school but could never have any of them at home, so I wouldn't go into their homes because I couldn't reciprocate. He was so very rigid about even reading a book for a book report I had to sneak it home and hide it under my pillow, because if he'd find it he'd burn it. You know the Bible was enough to be read, and he read it over and over.

INTERVIEWER: And then you moved from Aberdeen from, from when you were about fifteen from the regular high school into the business school.

COMPTON: Sixteen, yes.

INTERVIEWER: And what was your thinking in doing that?

COMPTON: I guess I wanted to get prepared to earn money and by that time I had, I had met my husband and he had pretty well persuaded me that it was silly for a girl to think about higher education because she just got married and had babies anyway.

INTERVIEWER: So it wasn't a case of your feeling that you needed, or wanted to go to work to help the financial situation at home; it was that you were in a hurry I suppose.

COMPTON: I suppose so; I, I, of course it's been an awful long time ago, but I doubt if I gave it a lot of thought. I remember my husband one time of accusing me of not thinking at all; he said: "I don't believe you think, I believe you just feel." So maybe I was just feeling the need to go to business college.

INTERVIEWER: Did you leave business college to marry?

COMPTON: Mm-hmm. I married that November.

INTERVIEWER: And you did some work, to buy your clothes you said. Your mother paid your tuition and you did some work to buy your clothes. And then after you married did you work then?

COMPTON: No, I had babies; the first little girl died and then I had two more children. I was married seven years and their father left. And during that time, oh I did work some but he again, he was worse than my father. I think at one time I counted twenty seven moves we'd made in seven years so that was an average of almost four moves a year. And I would work . . .

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of work did you do?

COMPTON: Mostly sewing.

INTERVIEWER: Things you could do at home, usually?

COMPTON: Or in somebody else's home. And I worked part time in a baby shop, making baby clothes.

INTERVIEWER: Again was this to help financially or because, you positively wanted to?

COMPTON: No, this was to help.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do with your own little girls?

COMPTON: Oh, I was with my mother. We would end up there every little while.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

COMPTON: My husband was injured. He worked in the woods quite a bit and he was injured a couple of times and then I would

COMPTON: go to my mother because there would be no income. We must have had no workman's compensation, I'm sure we didn't then.

INTERVIEWER: Well, now tell me how you went to work after your husband left. You mentioned it the other night but it was not when we had this on; I was so interested.

COMPTON: Well, I went to work in Aberdeen as a waitress and I had no experience--I hadn't even eaten in restaurants. I must have been a terrible waitress. I was very friendly; it was kind of interesting to me to have different people come in and so there was one table of one customers I'd just stand and talk to them and let the other customers wait. And so, of the five main restaurants I wore out my welcome in all five of them.

INTERVIEWER: In the course of how long?

COMPTON: Oh, maybe six or seven months. A couple of them I quit because of the advances of the boss or the dishwasher, or both.

INTERVIEWER: How did you happen to choose a restaurant to go to work in, to begin with?

COMPTON: I had....it was just the quickest way to make, to earn money.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how much you earned?

COMPTON: Yeah; it was, the wages were really good in Aberdeen for waitresses, it was three dollars a day. When I came to Seattle it was $2.20.

INTERVIEWER: And when was this in Aberdeen?

COMPTON: 1929.

INTERVIEWER: 1929. And did you get tips, besides?

COMPTON: I never made tips. You know, maybe thirty or forty cents in a day; but tips embarrassed me.

INTERVIEWER: How much would a man, doing the equivalent kind of work, have made? Not as a waiter, but as a kind of--what was the going wage, in 1929?

COMPTON: I don't know what the wages were, for a waiter?

INTERVIEWER: No, but for someone doing well, day work or whatever?

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COMPTON: Let's see. I think a man probably, five or six dollars a day. Like in construction.

INTERVIEWER: And the restaurants where you worked, did they have men waiters as well as waitresses, and how much did they get paid?

COMPTON: A couple of them were; I don't know whether they got paid more than the waitresses or not; I doubt it, because the waiter would make the tips and he would be given the good paying customers, and the choice station. Like booths were very popular in Aberdeen, and they had curtains on them even. So the men got to work all those and the women would work the counters and do all the clean up work. That really used to annoy me, because a waiter would stand with his, his tux with his arms folded; and the waitresses had to clean the side stands and do all the dirty work, right around them; never never did you see a waiter cleaning a fountain or doing anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have to do all the kitchen work too? You didn't do the cooking or the dishwashing?

COMPTON: No; no I didn't work in the kitchen.

INTERVIEWER: You were, was it unionized?

COMPTON: Yes, that's where I joined the union, in Aberdeen. I'd never heard of the union. And the way I joined, one of the girls asked me why I wasn't a union member. So I wanted to know what a union was and she told me; and very sweetly said they wouldn't work with a nonunion girl. So I just marched myself down to the union and joined. Otherwise, I just had no idea what a union was all about. I've always loved those spirited girls, giving me the word.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see them outside of working? Were there people at the restaurants that you . . .

COMPTON: Yeah, I saw some of the girls; I made uniforms for them, in between jobs. And quite a few of them were working--I didn't realize it at the time though their apartments--I was so innocent at the time I wouldn't have recognized a house of prostitution if it had had a sign on it. But I just vaguely thought that they had very gaudy tastes: lamps with all these beaded fringe on them and sofas all over the place with lots of pillows and incense burning. But they were very nice people, and they were very protective of me: they wouldn't have let me know what they were doing. But what I found out later was that what many of the waitresses did in Aberdeen was work as waitress for a front and then . . .

INTERVIEWER: They made their contacts that way?

COMPTON: They made their money in the houses; and there were a lot of them. There were just a lot of them because the male population down there was probably three to one with the loggers and so on, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. What was the population of Aberdeen in those days?

COMPTON: About sixteen or seventeen thousand; Hoquiam almost adjoins and it was about eleven or twelve.

INTERVIEWER: And with the male population that high, obviously a lot of them were not married. I suppose that there was a lot of business for restaurants, lot of food business; a lot of people would be eating out. Would the staunch citizens of the town be eating out too, or was it mostly single people?

COMPTON: I really....no, I don't think the citizens ate out much. Maybe on Sundays. But the families pretty well ate at home. I worked in some of the homes, later; and I never knew, I worked in a doctor's home and I never knew them to go out for dinner.

INTERVIEWER: During this period of time you were living with your mother?

COMPTON: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: So, what did you do when you got home?

COMPTON: Looked after my little girls.

INTERVIEWER: Looked after your little girls. And helped your mother keep house.

COMPTON: Yeah, usually I usually had to work nights in Aberdeen, so the children would be in bed asleep, but I would have most of the day with them. And I always did their laundry and sewing and looked after their food. I didn't trust anybody else to feed them I guess, even my mother; I had to cook for them--I wanted to, because somewhere along the line, I had read books on proper diet for children.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-Hmm. You said that when your husband left, and of course you had to have a job and a restaurant was kind of the closest, was the first opportunity, would there have been more opportunities for you if you had been a man? Can you, what would you have done in Aberdeen?

COMPTON: A man could go into the logging camps, or the saw mill; construction--there was quite a bit of building going on.

COMPTON: And there was fishing; it was a lively area. At one time it was the, it was the lumber capitol of the world. Lumber, more logs being, more trees being chopped down and sawed into logs then any place in the world. And of course it was shipped all over.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Did you, did you feel any discrimination against you because you were married, because you had children? Were there any kinds of jobs you couldn't get because you were a married woman, even though your husband had left home, because you had children?

COMPTON: No, I don't think so; but I didn't try.

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you. You said you joined the union when you were working in a restaurant because the girls encouraged you to do it or told you about it. Were you active in the union, other than just joining?

COMPTON: No, not for a number of years. After joining, in 1929, then I worked in Olympia for a while; I had incurred some debts in Aberdeen and I got them paid and twenty five dollars ahead, and then I came to Seattle.

INTERVIEWER: Let me go back for just a minute to Aberdeen; you said you worked for five restaurants in Aberdeen. Were you fired from some of these? You said you quit in one or two because of advances.

COMPTON: I was fired from at least two. One just because I wasn't doing the job. And it was really a nice place. And the owner had hired me because my older sister was the first one in the family to have a marriage fail; and she had two little children--this was about ten years before--and she had gone to work as a waitress. And she was a good one; and so I had gone to that very restaurant and told him I was Carolyn's sister. And he hired me on the spot; and the was very bitterly disappointed because I, I didn't understand what serving people was all about.

INTERVIEWER: Did the union, did the union get involved in any way, when you got fired?

COMPTON: No, not that I know of.

INTERVIEWER: This was pretty much a membership, at that point?

COMPTON: Well, they may have had some grievance procedure. But I knew that I didn't have any grievance: I did, in another one, when the dishwasher had been after me to take me home. And he'd heckle me; I'd walk home and he'd drive along, you

COMPTON: know, and try to pick me up. And so he was trying to get me to let him take me home one night and the boss came by and made some, heard this going on, and, it was a Greek restaurant--most of them were; and so he stopped and he got kind of nasty with me, asked me if I thought I was too good to go out with a Greek. And it was the wrong question to ask me; I told him, yes I did. So he said: "Well, I think you're too good to work in a Greek restaurant, then; I'll make your check out." He fired me. Then I can't remember what; usually I....I remember leaving in a flood of tears once; I wouldn't go back for my check even, my mother went to get it for me I think. But I was embarrassed that I had had my feelings hurt.

INTERVIEWER: When you finished that period of time with restaurants, what did you turn to? For an income? You said you worked in a doctor's house, was this . . .?

COMPTON: Oh, that was probably the year, it was the year before because Phyllis was only a year old. My husband had been injured in a camp and I worked in a doctor's home for several months. And the another time something had happened and I worked for the owner of the mill.

INTERVIEWER: But when you finished with the restaurant in Aberdeen, did you, did you leave Aberdeen then?

COMPTON: Yeh, I left Aberdeen and went to Olympia.

INTERVIEWER: Took your children with you?

COMPTON: No, I didn't; I left them with my mother and my cousin who lived next door looked after them during the day because my mother by that time was tending her little store. So although they stayed with her at night my cousin looked after them during the day. And it was just a matter of two or three months. And then when I left Olympia and came to Seattle I brought them with me.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do in Olympia?

COMPTON: I worked in a restaurant there. But it was a combination restaurant-bakery and really a high class, nice busy place. And the owners liked me. And saw immediately that you know I wasn't going to be any asset as a waitress. So they put me to work as a hostess and cashier.

INTERVIEWER: And how much did you make then, do you remember?

COMPTON: I think the wages in Olympia were pretty close to three

COMPTON: dollars a day. But when I came to Seattle, this was all within a period of a year, less than a year, the union here had gone to pot, there were only about 200 members in the waitresses' union in Seattle. And they were paying only about ten dollars a week in union houses. although the scale was maybe fifteen. And I went to work in--and they were giving worthless scrip for the balance.

INTERVIEWER: This was during the Depression, by now?

COMPTON: Yes, yes. But there was a state minimum wage for women in restaurants, and it was twenty seven and a half cents an hour. So I worked in a nonunion house that was under the state law. I suppose union houses were too, but they were getting away without paying wages.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

COMPTON: I don't understand why; because they issued the scrip and it was no good, it never could be cashed in. But I worked in a nice little restaurant called the Grotto. I worked 12 to 1 at noon and 6 to 1 at night. And I made $2.20 a day and I worked in the mornings and in the afternoon in a welfare office. To try to learn to type and file. I kept that up for some time and then I quit the welfare office and went to, went to school; and I don't understand, I don't know how in the world I could have been paying for this. It was learning to operate a multigraf; and there again, I would be in school from about 8:30 until 11 and then work at noon and then then back at school from 2 to 4 and the work from 5 to 1 at night. And I would get home about 2 o'clock or later and I would have be up by 7 and I didn't last long. I got sick; I had to give up the multigraph school. But I stayed working as a waitress; gradually, I got in, I went to work from the Grotto to a place owned by Mr. Joyce, a beautiful big restaurant, the nicest place in town. And here again he liked me and his hostess was leaving after; I'd work the morning shift as a waitress; he made me a captain right away, putting me over these wonderful oldtime waitresses that had to tell me what they were supposed to be doing. And so that went along for a while. And then the hostess quit; and because she was getting twenty five dollars a week and wanted thirty; and he asked me if I would take the job and I told him I couldn't work those hours because I wanted to be home evenings with the babies; I had them, at that time I had them in a day nursery, and paid ten cents a day for each of them. They had beautiful care. It was subsidized somehow. And so he said he wanted, he would pay me enough to have someone look after the children in the evenings. He gave me thirty dollars that he wouldn't give Miss Terrill who

COMPTON: had worked, had been with him a long time--she came up from Portland as a matter of fact. And he explained to me that she had a husband who was an engineer and made good money and that I had the responsibility of these two little girls. And he thought I had it coming. So I made good money until dear old Mr. Joyce went broke, paying good wages. But I was with him a couple of years and then . . .

INTERVIEWER: Now, was that a union, was that a union restaurant?

COMPTON: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: And you belonged to the union?

COMPTON: Oh yes; I continued, I kept my membership all these years.

INTERVIEWER: Ever since you took it out in Aberdeen?

COMPTON: Mm-hmm. Almost fifty years. And then I stayed on under another man for about six months. It was nip and tuck; I did have a little money in the bank.

INTERVIEWER: Did he sell the restaurant or somebody took it over when he went broke?

COMPTON: He just went broke and bankrupt, and they just locked the place up. But I had 360 dollars in the bank and that was enough I figured for, I think I was paying fifty dollars a month for the children in the home where we were living; and so I figured I had them taken care of at least for six months. And I picked up work whenever I could. This was, oh, about 1932, really bad times. And I'd work a banquet now and then, and maybe get two or three days work or holidays a couple of days--I remember over Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Years I got to pick up quite a little bit of work. And then another man bought the same restaurant that had gone broke and I went to work for him. I worked for him for four years I guess, five years. And then he, he sold out and, and took over the food department for the Bartell Drug Chain, in the city. So then I went to work in one of the stores as managing and later became supervisor there. There were twenty three food outlets and I was service manager for all of them.

INTERVIEWER: And how long was that job that you--that you did until you went to California, is that right?

COMPTON: No, I did that until 1947, when I went to work for the union as business agent. See, I came here in 1930; this was about seventeen years that I had worked.

COMPTON: Mm-hmm. Now what, where along these years after you moved to Seattle did you really begin to get active in the union?

COMPTON: About four years before I went to work I started . . .

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INTERVIEWER: Four years before you went to work as business manager you mean?

COMPTON: As business agent for the union, I started taking appointive jobs; I was recording secretary for several years, this was without pay; but there was a business agent that I loved; she was just a beautiful woman, a very strong woman, and she was the head of the union really, though the secretary treasurer according to the bylaws was the head person; the head business agent was running the show and she was a brilliant woman. And she kept trying to persuade me to come to work as her appointee as a business agent, and I was afraid of it. Some of the other women from the union I really didn't like at all; they were pretty rough and heavy drinkers. And, at one time, Pauline, the one I liked, asked me why I didn't throw my hat in the ring to get elected as a delegate to the convention being held back east. And so I did, and while I was back there, she talked to me and asked me to really seriously consider coming to work for the union--because, by this time, she had built the union up from about 200 to 3200.

INTERVIEWER: Over what area?

COMPTON: Seattle. And she explained to me that there were some dirty hands around our union and she didn't want the union to fall into them. And she told me she was dying of cancer. And I had no idea; and she said the doctors wouldn't tell her, but she knew, and she knew it was terminal. And I couldn't, I just couldn't quite understand that. She seemed so vital and robust to me. But I got sick, I developed, I started losing weight and I had developed TB but it hadn't attacked the tissues yet. There was just too much TB in the sputum. I was terribly run down; I had been working awfully hard at Bartells.

INTERVIEWER: It's been several weeks since we've been together. At the end of our last session you had told me about your friendship with Pauline, who had been a business agent herself--is that right? And who was the person who was really responsible for you taking on a more active role in the union, though you had been a union member for many many years. Would you begin this morning by telling me about your leaving Bartell, briefly, and so forth. You had mentioned that you were sick and perhaps almost tubucular--is that right?

COMPTON: Yes. Pauline's princpal appeal to me for becoming interested in the union was a statement she made. She knew that she was dying of cancer, but still apparently a very strong, physically a strong woman and she was certainly a very strong woman in other ways; and although her title was business agent, she virtually ruled the roost in the union as far as she could. But she made the statement to me that she didn't want the union to fall into dirty hands and she wanted me

COMPTON: to get active before her death so that I could guide the affairs of the union. Well, this sort of thing I just really wasn't interested in going into the union at that time. I had what I thought was a pretty good job with Bartell Company and then when I developed TB and was put to bed for sixty days but at the end of thirty days I was really feeling great but the doctor then recommended another thirty days in California in a warm climate and when I came back there was no more sign of TB. So I went back to Bartell's intending to go back to work.

INTERVIEWER: This was in 1947 now?

COMPTON: Yeah. And my very sympathetic boss asked me if I was sure, if I wanted to start back to work; that he was afraid I would overdo and set myself back; and asked if I had thought about doing anything else for a while. And he said it in all kindness; but I was very sensitive, and having been off work for two months for the first time in twenty years.

INTERVIEWER: Can I ask you parenthetically what did you have, did you have medical insurance, did you have sick leave?

COMPTON: Absolutely nothing.

INTERVIEWER: You just simply had to get by on what you'd managed to save?

COMPTOM: I hadn't saved anything either, with the responsibilities I had. I may have had two or three hundred dollars in the bank, but not anymore than that. And no medical insurance; and what happened was, see there were, by this time I was supervisor of the food outlet, and there was something like 300 employees in the fountains and tearooms and cafeterias. And they took up a collection and sent it to me, of several hundred dollars. I did have King County Medical insurance that I paid myself--that's right. So that covered a lot of the doctors' bills. And then going to bed at home of course didn't cost me anything. And the trip to California didn't cost me anything because, I had friends down there and I had a free ride down and a free ride back so it didn't set us back financially. And when my boss made this suggestion off of, by way of answer and really off the top of my head, I said well I really had considered going to work for the union. I had had an offer. And he said well why don't you go and investigate it. Well after I'd said it, I had to follow through with it. So I did. I trotted right down to the union. In the meantime, my friend Pauline had died. And the head of the union, who had been the head when Pauline was living, but Pauline was the stronger person and sort of kept this secretary treasurer was the head of the union on

COMPTON: the books; and Pauline had sort of kept her in line I think. But anyway, I went down and she was very friendly, and the head business agent who had taken Pauline's place when Pauline died was also very friendly toward me. And I was hired on the spot. I was hired as a business agent. And then I, the first election that came along, I ran for business agent and was elected.

INTERVIEWER: Now was there a role of business agent empty, at the time they hired you as business agent. Would there be a number of business agents, or was there . . .?

COMPTON: Mm-Hmm. Yeah, there were, see at that time there were three elective business agents and two appointive. And there was one provision, the head business agent was elective, in a special category. I've forgotten just what it was, but this was a business agent and negotiator, and she got a little bit more money and then it was she who usually made the appointments of the two appointive positions.

INTERVIEWER: But you had an appointive position then to begin with and then after the following election you stood for election and were elected then as a business agent.

COMPTON: Uh-huh. And then, and then I was appointed by the local joint board which was an executive board of the five culinary unions; three from each union, and the chairman appointed the negotiating committee each year to negotiate the contract and he would select one from each of the five unions. And he selected me, which upset my two superiors no end. And that year we did get a very fine contract. The first time we'd ever gotten more than a nickel an hour. We had slipped way behind--three dollars a day beyond San Francisco unions, which we'd been on a par with in previous years. But it had become by this time apparent to me that there was some kind of a kick back racket going on to keep our wages down. Because I noticed my bosses never paid for anything; they had hotels, free hotels; they could throw big parties at the nice restaurants and that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Now who, what positions did these bosses have?

COMPTON: Well, executive secretary treasurer, who was my immediate boss. And then I'm not too sure of the other one, who was the head business agent. Anyway, I went ahead and worked very hard on the contract, and we almost struck that year, but we came out with health and welfare plan, which I had proposed, which was the first in the culinary union--it was the second in the culinary unions on the west coast at all. There was one in San Francisco, and then ours was the next one. And we got $1.35 across the board, which was

COMPTON: much better than the forty cents that we ordinarily had been accepting.

INTERVIEWER: Now, were you doing this in your role as business agent, or, so the business agent was a negotiator?

COMPTON: Well I was appointed to negotiate; wait a minute: there's some kind of a slip here. Maybe, maybe there had been a change in the bylaw or maybe there was some different kind of policy after Pauline died. I don't know how the joint board had, was able to appoint me over the person who had ordinarily been doing the negotiating. Anyway, we got a very fine contract.

INTERVIEWER: What would a business agent in a union ordinarily be concerned with, about what kinds of things?

COMPTON: Oh, enforcing the contract. And bringing in new members. Under our contract the employers were supposed to call the union for help. But they weren't very rigid about that. And if they hired someone, the expression is "off the street." anyone coming in for and asking for employment, they could do that; and then it was the business agent's job to go around and ask them to join the union promptly and . . .

INTERVIEWER: Was this a full-time job?

COMPTON: Mm-Hmm.

INTERVIEWER: How much were you paid, at the beginning?

COMPTON: I was paid sixty dollars a week.

INTERVIEWER: And how much had you been making at Bartells, before you became . . .?

COMPTON: Sixty dollars a week.

INTERVIEWER: Was that coincidental that you got the same?

COMPTON: No, the other business agents were getting sixty dollars a a week. Let's see, some of them were getting sixty and some were getting seventy five. And I got sixty for just a matter of a few weeks, and then I got seventy five. But it was all done very arbitrarily; the members were never told how much they paid their own officers. And contributions and all this were done just by the secretary treasurer and her little close group.

INTERVIEWER: The secretary treasurer was really THE executive officer in the union. Was there a president?

COMPTON: Yeah, there was a president who conducted meetings, wrote checks, but had no authority and no responsibility, really.

INTERVIEWER: But the secretary treasurer was a paid . . .?

COMPTON: Yeah, everybody was paid.

INTERVIEWER: But the president probably had a regular job?

COMPTON: The president had a very nominal, yeah she was not a full time, she got her dues and some expense money but very little.

INTERVIEWER: But she made her livelihood doing something else?

COMPTON: Well, she was retired and apparently didn't have to work.

INTERVIEWER: But in that particular position, that often would be the case?

COMPTON: It would often become the case in those days, yeah. In some unions the title of president meant the executive head but in ours, it was not.

INTERVIEWER: Was your union entirely women?

COMPTON: Ours was entirely women, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: You say the president, and then you say she; and it's just not the way we usually talk . . .

COMPTON Yeah, in our local union, it was a waitresses union; this is no longer true. And actually I objected to--there was a waiters union in town too, and at that time, I objected to unions being based on sex because we were doing identical work; that is, we were supposed to be doing identical work. Come right down to it, we didn't, because the years I worked as a waitress I worked beside waiters and waiters never required to do any of the scrubbing that the waitresses did. We cleaned the fountains and the side stands and did the dirty work. And the waiters, they were usually gussied up in tuxedos where we had just wash uniforms.

INTERVIEWER: Were the waiters....did the waiters' union in Seattle get larger wages for their people than the waitresses union did, and did you get into competition with the waiters union over the years?

COMPTON: No they didn't, they didn't get paid more except maybe oh on short shifts but the waiters, the union was very weak. There was only about 300 in the waiters union where at that time we had about 3000 women.

INTERVIEWER: Did that reflect the number, the ratio of men to women working?

COMPTON: Not exactly; they were not as well organized as the waitresses. And they paid higher dues than we did and then again paid for their jobs and things that wasn't really right, wasn't kosher. They paid the guy that ran the union, they paid him to get their jobs. And they didn't care about wages, because the restaurants in Seattle that hired men were very high class places where the tips were fabulous. And tips meant a great deal more to the men than wages so they never would get out and fight for wages.

INTERVIEWER: Were all of the restaurants, well all--were generally speaking, were restaurants unionized in Seattle by the late forties?

COMPTON: They were much better then; by the time I left.

INTERVIEWER: Which was when, 1956?

COMPTON: 1956, we were considered 90 percent organized.

INTERVIEWER: And that was one of your responsibilities over the years, to organize where, when the restaurant had not been unionized at all?

COMPTON: Mm-hmm; and where there were nonunion people working just floating around; and although the contract called for the employer to send them to the union within thirty days, they seldom paid any attention tho that. And, we picked up just about 30 percent more in membership, when I left we were just pushing 4000.

INTERVIEWER: Was the, I don't know whether we need to get into specifics, but I am just interested, was let me think, was Canlis's, was that a restaurant already going, in the late forties?

COMPTON: Yes, no, it opened in the early fifties I think, but it was going when I was . . .

INTERVIEWER: And was that a restaurant that you would have unionized?

COMPTON: We did, yes. Quite a few Japanese.

INTERVIEWER: Oh that's an interesting thing too.

COMPTON: A little tough to crack too, because up until I got involved in the union, they would not take a black, they would not take an Oriental; and here they would let them, you know, they would be defeating their own purpose in refusing them membership.

INTERVIEWER: You mean that the unions would not take blacks and would not take Orientals?

COMPTON: No. At one time there was a separate Oriental union that.... they just looked after their own.

INTERVIEWER: Were Orientals in Seattle interested in unions?

COMPTON: Not particularly; the Chinese particularly were very diffident. We hardly ever got any place with them. Because they were so, the workers were so intimidated.

INTERVIEWER: Yes; and traditionally had to take the lowest paying jobs, and that's the way they survived.

COMPTON: Yeah, and they worked for their family members, some smart Chinese, you know, would have all his underlings so frightened that they wouldn't . . .

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever unionize a Chinese restaurant?

COMPTON: Not that I remember.

INTERVIEWER: There were just some things . . .

COMPTON: Well, the pay, and we really set quite a record and I think; well you see, we couldn't enforce the contract to start with so we wouldn't have any hold on them. And my main effort was to keep or get all the houses organized so that the unorganized houses would not be in unfair competition against the employer who had a union contract and was paying union wages and the health and welfare and all that because I think the lowest thing a union can do is ignore--what's going here in the city now; now our union membership has dropped down to--there was a merger of the five locals just last April and--later than I guess--our membership had dropped down to 2600 women in the waitresses' union. When, in 1955, there were almost 4000. And there are twice as many . . .

INTERVIEWER: When you think of the number of restaurants now . . .

COMPTON: working now; so this means there's only maybe 25 percent of the waitresses in the city of Seattle now are unionized: maybe 30 percent.

INTERVIEWER: How do you account for this?

COMPTON: I blame the union officers all through the city. They got themselves a berth and aren't too concerned; they'll ride it out.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that there's a necessity for the union amongst waitresses as there was thirty years ago?

COMPTON: I sure do. There's all kinds of things for them to go into outside of bread and butter issues. We were just, when I left the union just getting interest aroused in child care centers. I don't say day care centers because waitresses work around the clock and but I had managed to establish a few little places but they were in homes like an older woman, a former waitress, whose husband had died, came down to see me about going to work and she was oh, sixty or more. And it would have been very difficult for her to handle a job for one thing, but it was again more than difficult to find her a job. And, so she said she was rattling around in this big home all by herself, up on Queen Anne Hill and was rather centrally located. So I asked here if she had thought about looking after waitresses' children. And she said no she hadn't and I said that would give her something to do and give her a little income and really help her. So she thought the idea was great, and I happened to have a few children staked out; I knew of mothers who were just having an awful time working and having children looked after. So she did this, and then there was, we managed pick up and delivery from among oh it might even be boy friends of some of the waitresses. There are more single waitresses I would guess than any other profession; legitimate profession. Because waitresses usually become waitresses because they had forced into it. I have never yet known of anybody who deliberately went to college to train to be a good smart waitress.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose it's the kind of thing that sometimes people do if they want to work temporarily or as in your own case, you were young and suddenly it was important for you to have an income.

COMPTON: Not much training required.

INTERVIEWER: It seemed to be the thing, yes.

COMPTON: About the only thing you could go into without some kind of previous training.

INTERVIEWER: Were you, well I suppose you are too modest to really answer this truthfully, but let me try: were you a particularly imaginative business agent would you say? The kinds of things that the child care . . .

COMPTON: I'm not too modest . . .

INTERVIEWER: All right, good. And what kinds of problems did you confront in getting your union to take blacks, to take Orientals? Of course, it's interesting if I may say just for the benefit of the poeple who are going to read this that there are many

INTERVIEWER: Orientals in Seattle; there aren't a lot of blacks in Seattle but there is this minority community but it's, much of it is Oriental.

COMPTON: Well, it was while I was still business agent when I was told by the secretary treasurer to feel free to, you know if I insisted, to feel free to bring blacks into the union but not to encourage them to attend meetings; they didn't want them to really be active in the union; they would collect their dues but let them stay away. And they wouldn't, they'd mark their cards and they wouldn't fine them, where white girls were fined for not attending unions. The blacks were not. And I really worked hard and made some very good contacts among the few black girls who were working as waitresses in the city and then after I became secretary treasurer of the union . . .

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

COMPTON: That was in 1951--it was right after I got the good contract and my boss went before the membership and tried to get them to turn it down because, on the basis that I had accepted a health and welfare plan in lieu of wages although I'd gotten three and a half times as much in wages as they had ever gotten.

INTERVIEWER: As well as health and welfare?

COMPTON: As well as health and welfare; and we just almost lost the whole thing because I got, I got frankly, I got hysterical; I had been working night and day. I couldn't even use the telephone in the office and there was just so much to be done and the contracts to be, proposals to be reprinted day in and day out everytime there was a change. And so another little colleague of mine, who headed up the hotel maids, and I would stay up all night mimeographing these new proposals and neither one of us could type worth a darn, so it was just really a big job and we would come all blurry eyed into the negotiations the next morning. And we needed back up from the International Union which we, we couldn't get, because they didn't want these upstarts getting control of the union.

INTERVIEWER: This was the problem?

COMPTON: Yeah, this was the problem; and they, the International Union always held hands with my immediate boss.

INTERVIEWER: And your immediate boss then was the secretary treasurer?

COMPTON: Was the secretary treasurer, yeah, and so when we were about to strike, I didn't see any sense of not observing the deadline; our contract expired at midnight May 31, I thought we should have another contract by midnight May 31st. So I had led the other unions into this and said for once let's stand on what our contract says; we're abrogating it when we just let it slide by. Because usually they wouldn't sign a contract until maybe August, maybe September, and by that time the members were, you know, they were not aroused and so, on the last day of May, we were in negotiations in the labor temple. Now here's another thing, a change that I instigated. Always before negotiations had taken place on the employer's premises, in the restaurant association offices. And they had legal help and they had all the expertise where the unions, you know, would have, none of us were really trained negotiators; so I insisted that we hold the negotiating meetings on our own ground, at least every other time. So this time happened to be in the labor temple and my boss who, our union offices were also in that building, and Lillian Sandburg, the secretary treasurer, came up to the negotiating room and called out the head of the restaurant association and the head of the hotel association and gave them copies of a wire that had been sent to well, to the negotiators, but had been sent to the union offices with copies to the employers, ordering us to call off the strike for fifteen days. Well you know everything was going to go ahead until at midnight if we hadn't had a contract. So the employer representatives came back into the room just smiling, and I hadn't even seen, I didn't know what it was all about yet. And I was, I was chairman of the negotiating committee, too; so they came in and practically thumbed their noses at us and said we'll call your best shots; you couldn't strike if you wanted to. And my first indication of what had happened was when one of them showed me his copy of the wire and so they just walked out on us and wouldn't even talk after that.

And my little friend who was really a strong person, from the hotel maids and I, went out for dinner ourselves and the employers called a meeting immediately we found out about. And they were celebrating, you know, their victory; they weren't going to give us anything. And so she and I were having dinner and I came up with an idea. I said I think I'll call a friend of mine who was my former boss at Bartells, a youngish man who was then supervising the food department and doing the negotiating for this chain. I called him and lied in my teeth, asked him if he would get, I named three or four people that I hadn't known very well among the employers, and they were halfway reasonable, and I told him that we had a wildcat strike by the tail, we couldn't do anything about it and that they would be striking at midnight. And asked him to get these other men and join us at the cooks hall so we

COMPTON: could get a contract before midnight. I said we'll be there right away. And so I called our negotiators, and we went down to the cooks hall. And we waited, and somewhere around 11 or 11:30 here they came the employers came in and we stopped the clock at midnight and by quarter after we had the contract. A funny thing happened that I really had nothing to do with it: but there were some pretty rabid members and they started pounding on the doors and calling "strike strike" . . .

INTERVIEWER: You think there MIGHT have been a wildcat strike?

COMPTON: Well they wouldn't have known what to do; but no I don't think so. But it served its purpose. And we had our banners and everything ready, and I arranged this meeting room with the door just open a little bit so that when the employers came in they could look in on those other tables and see all our strike banners and all the materials in there so it would kind of inhibit them.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you learn how to do that? You, we talked before you said how timid you were when you were, when you had to make your way in the world.

COMPTON: Well, I had, I always felt very free, maybe too free, to go to people who had been there before; and in this particular case we had a good man in Cincinnati in the national headquarters; he was editor of the union publication and also of, he was research and education director; and I had met him at an institute he put on at the University of Washington. He started this movement holding institutes for training union officers. I just thought he was great, and we'd had, you know, we'd try to cover an awful lot of ground in a week, in public speaking and labor law and economics and I don't know what all. But it was pretty concentrated. And so when, I called him for some advice, and he says why don't you ask Hugo to send me out. So, gosh I don't know how I got a resolution passed to get him out--oh, I couldn't through my own union but I got Eudora, my friend in the hotel maids union, and, or maybe I just got the negotiating committee to send for him; anyway, he came out and he was a great help. He had, he was a scholarly man and had just done a great deal of studying. He had been assistant to George Harrison, who headed up the railway clerks union for a number of years. So he, he was a great help. And then the man who headed up the state--it was at that time called State Federation of Labor; Ed Weston, a former coal miner, and a great speaker and just a great union leader was a friend of mine and a mentor. And his assistant Joe Davis, who now heads up the state labor council it's called, were big, great helps to me. As a matter of fact, they opened their offices to me when I

COMPTON: wasn't permitted to use the telephones, you see there was a wage freeze in effect and I had to be in touch with Washington on a number of occasions to see how far we could go and as it turned out we could sign a contract for anything but we had to get wage board approval. And so I would use their telephone, you know, when I had to get long distance calls in.

INTERVIEWER: So from 1947 to 1951 you were a business agent and you.... was it while you were business agent that you began the child care or was that after you became . . .

COMPTON: After.

INTERVIEWER: But you already were involved in such things as admitting blacks and Orientals into the union, and by 1951, when you successfully engineered a new and good contract, then you went on to become executive secretary, is that right? That is an elective post. Was there a lot of competition there? I assume, did you defeat in an election?

COMPTON: Uh-huh.

INTERVIEWER: Your boss? She didn't resign?

COMPTON: No, nobody resigned. And the bylaws had become so very, very tight that it excluded, nobody could run for office unless they had attended a meeting a month and there were, you know, some of the working hours didn't even permit them to attend; and they had to have their dues paid on or before the first of the month every month. And there just all kinds of little quirks in the bylaws that would disenfranchise a member from running for office. So when I started whipping together a slate I had to take some funny people on, you know, to get a slate--I think out of 3200 members by that time, there were something like thirty two or thirty three that were eligible to run for office. And some of them, of course, wouldn't want to. But I did bring in a clean slate, from top to bottom. Including a president, who really was a strong civil rights advocate, and was a big help in--for example, she would appoint blacks on committees and make them feel a part of the union; and some of the business agents I brought in were very good too, on that score.

INTERVIEWER: Was it your idea to run for executive secretary and bring in a whole new slate, wash out the old, or would, obviously you must have had a lot of encouragement, to have brought the whole slate in in November; but who did, after you got the contract, did you decide then I'm going to become executive secretary? Who proposed it to you?

COMPTON: I knew that I had to get all of the way out or all of the way in; I couldn't work with my boss anymore; and that was the only alternative.

INTERVIEWER: I see. What became of her when you went in? Did she leave it entirely?

COMPTON: She went to work, no she went to work for one of the nice restaurants in town. She's very capable, a very capable woman at running a dining room. A hard worker.

INTERVIEWER: Did she stay active in the union?

COMPTON: Mm-hmm. Oh my, yes; all of the old guard were there to heckle every meeting.

INTERVIEWER: Well now, how did, how did your responsibilities as executive secretary differ from your responsibilities as business agent? Did you do different things? Oh, before we go to that could I just ask you how did the, what were the wages when you went in, what was the contract when you went in in 1947 and what were the wages in the contract that you got in 1951? Do you remember?

COMPTON: Yeah, in 1951, waitresses were getting 75 cents an hour; and the new contract gave them $1.35 more a day, let's see from $6.00 a day to $7.35; and the health and welfare plan. And then a lot of better, oh seniority rights and improvements in the contract all the way along the line.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what the daily had been in 1947? It wasn't as low as three dollars then?

COMPTON: No, it was in 1947, it was probably about $5.20, $5.00 a day.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. And was the contract that you got through in 1951, the first one to be concerned with things other than wages?

COMPTON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: All right. So then you did become executive secretary, and then what kinds of things did you, how did your life change?

COMPTON: Well, my responsibilities were to run the office first, and then the appointive business agents I, well we put on one extra business agent, the executive board went along. I selected three women, one from the hotels and one from the tearooms and one from the banquet women for business agents. And in addition to their regular duties as business agents I set up well like a political interest group and one of them was interested in politics so she headed up this and we got the union active in politics. And another one was, had taught school a little in Canada, and she was interested in education, so I was able to help organize the school at what's now Seattle Community College up on Broadway; and got the

COMPTON: employers to permit waitresses to leave their jobs for a half day for a six weeks course I think they were and the employers paid them full scale. And they came up and went to school and had all kinds of training--not just in service itself but in grooming and in health care and hygiene and proper carriage. You know carrying a tray is really, you always carry in on one hand and throw your whole spine and body out of line. A lot of back trouble among waitresses. LOTS of foot trouble too.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to say, even just the right kinds of shoes to wear would be important.

COMPTON: This sort of thing was highly successful; even to sitting gracefully and using somewhat well modulated voice, and how to greet customers and how to ignore the fresh ones.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask you that.

COMPTON: Oh gosh, this was really important to me because it had been so painful to have to overlook the familiarity; and it seemed like a very shy girl would really get it. Some of these clowns would just love to embarrass her. And that's what it seemed that I was always subjected to. Anyway, that was one thing. Let's see, there was the political and educational and oh I had, one of the agents took the responsibility of calling on the sick. This always brought up other problems; you know if a waitress got sick there was often real problems without somebody looking after her kids, or getting her bills paid; in those days most ran around to pay our bills, we didn't have checking accounts. And I remember even picking up radios that were in the repair shops and somebody was in bed sick and needed their radio. Or get the laundry done for them. Things like this. We just, there was never a person that we knew about on the sick list that we didn't look after.

INTERVIEWER: Your union was made up entirely of women; therefore the paid positions within the union would be given, would be filled by women; nevertheless you did have--so there wasn't any competition with men there--but you did have to deal with men, particularly as you got more involved in the community. Did you ever find that the restaurant association didn't take you as seriously as they might have taken you if you had been a man?

COMPTON: Indeed; yes indeed; my goodness yes. The first two layers [in the International Union] were all men, and this would include like the president and the secretary and general organizer. And then under them the next layer would be the

COMPTON: field organizers on the International Union payroll. All men. And then the vice presidents who were sort of, formed an executive committee, there were about thirteen of them and there were two women. And then, of course, in the offices all the typewriters were manned by women. And on down the line. But none of the higher offices--although the membership was probably 75 percent women: the waitresses, the hotel maids; of course the bartenders were all men; and the cooks were about well the chefs would all be men and the high paid cook jobs would all be men. But the lower paid cooks helpers, and salad people they would be women. Dishwashers were usually men, except in tearooms and fountains. But probably the reason for that was because the pots are terribly heavy, you just can't imagine how heavy they are to lift around. And the dishwasher would usually have to juggle potatoes, a sack of potatoes and that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER: So employers seeing that the highest paying rank people in the union on the International Union level, were men, but would be dealing with women on the local level, and would probably get attitudes accordingly? Is that right? Can you tell me about any experiences you had in terms of the restaurant association in Seattle not taking you seriously? THEY didn't take, obviously they thought in 1951 that you were being run by the International, didn't they, when the telegram came. Did you, do you think you had more difficulty persuading them to agree to the educational program for waitresses because you yourself were a woman?

COMPTON: No, you know after, I think that experience really got me a lot of respect. I got along with the employers fine. I had gotten along with them well before that but mainly because I didn't know know what was going on. For four years I was the fair haired child doing as I was told by my superior. And I didn't step on any toes; and I didn't really know that there was so much skullduggery around.

INTERVIEWER: We tend, I tend, to phrase this kind of question, what were the disadvantages of being a woman; but of course we know there are always, sometimes advantages in being a woman too. Do you think the fact that your, that the union in Seattle was run by, was a woman's union and was run by women, gave you any kinds of advantages?

COMPTON: It gave me, yeah, it really did. I think I would have been intimidated by men if men had been heading up my union; because I was just conditioned that way.

INTERVIEWER: But, it seems to me that you perhaps imaginatively, more quickly, maybe even more creatively, put your finger on,

INTERVIEWER: were able to see, what kinds of things needed to be done. Such as the business of how to stand so you don't knock your spine out. And also what kinds of things of child care, what problems, what kinds of child care were necessary. Was your union more progressive than the average union in those years, in taking care of things like that, being concerned about welfare, meaning personal welfare?

COMPTON: Yes, at least for the four years I was there we were leaders in the Northwest, wage wise and other aspects too. I had really a lot of trouble persuading my constituents that a minimum wage law would be a good thing because many of them took the attitude let them join the union if they want better wages, you know. Well, I took the attitude that a union business agent who was, a union officer who was afraid of a little minimum wage law was declaring bankruptcy in leadership. Because their wages should be above that anyway. And, if not, they certainly should have a floor under their union scale. I got a resolution passed right after I became, after I was elected secretary, and my union, of course, went along with it; and the other five locals in Seattle endorsed the resolution and then I took it to the State labor council convention. And the International Union vice-president, Gertrude Sweet, who's still active, talked against it in our, well just prior to the State labor council convention there was a one-day session of the culinary trades from around the state and this was a legislative body and this was where I wanted to get the, was specially anxious to get the resolution passed unanimously, I would have thought. And she got up and said that to enact a minimum wage law would close the door on unionism and that proponents of minimum wages were accepting the communist line and so, of course, the resolution was defeated, much to my amazement--I couldn't believe it. And gosh, I was just really looked on--what are you trying to do, break the unions? And so, I went to Joe Davis who was then the state labor counsel head's assistant; and showed him the resolution and told him what had happened, and he was just appalled. And he said give it to me, I'll have another, somebody else bring it in. So he had service employees unions, this would be the janitors, brought it in and the only no votes were from a few that raised their voice from the culinary unions. But the resolution did get passed, and then later on, after I left the union--I say I left the union very glibbly; I lost an election, and . . .

INTERVIEWER: Did you really? In 1956?

COMPTON: Yeah, I don't usually say I lost it. I was diselected. But anyway, then I went from there....I organized the COPE [Committee on Political Education] organization in King County nad ran that for a year. This was the political arm of the AFL-CIO. And we hadn't had any here.

INTERVIEWER: And that's what you turned to after you stopped being executive secretary, however you stopped.

COMPTON: Yeah, yeah. And then I had been of some help in Albert Rossellini's campaign for governor; and he appointed me to run the, it was the Women and Minor's Division; it was to enforce all the laws, labor laws concerning women and children. And the first thing I did was introduce a bill for a minimum wage law and got it passed. So I got it anyway. This was Washington state's first statutory minimum wage law. We had the minimum wage orders for women and children but they were, didn't amount to much. Incidentally, I got them revised and updated. There were three things; my boss asked me what I wanted to do. And I said well there are three things I want: minimum wage law, I want to revise the industrial welfare orders, and set up a safety educational system within the restaurants, because by that time, we were covered by industrial insurance but there were no safety measures. There wasn't even a safety inspector in this hazardous work. Cuts, burns, slips, falls, strains.

INTERVIEWER: And so, your development was really a very natural development, wasn't it, from going to being a waitress yourself to being a supervisor of waitresses; then getting involved in the union and over the years seeing all of these things that just absolutely cried for somebody with determination and good sense to apply herself to. So I suppose that when you stopped being executive secretary in 1956, that must have been something of an adjustment; but you went on very quickly to doing other kinds of very interesting things.

COMPTON: You know, in many ways it was a blessing, because what happened--I don't mind telling this because I have no burden of guilt. But the dear women that I selected for business agents--and the two years later I got a couple more live wires--but it seemed like there always had been some competition between the business agents and the executive secretary. I don't know how much of a rift might have developed between the two before I became active, but I know that I just accepted Pauline, the business agent, as the head. She was running the show. And the bylaws didn't require that. But she was a very strong, forceful person. And well spoken: my, she was an articulate woman. Anyway, I was away on a trip in Washington DC, and didn't expect to be back for a union meeting. And, as it happened, the conference back there ended a day early and I got in to town and was able to get to my union meeting on time. It was an evening meeting and, of course, the executive board minutes were read and everything was OK as far as I was concerned--you know, paying the bills and this sort of thing. Then here was a proposition that all the union business agents, and me too, should get

COMPTON: a raise. Well that particular year we had failed to get a raise for the waitresses. And when this proposition came up it was just such a surprise to me. The business agents had gone into the executive board in my absence and made this proposal. And the executive board members just assumed that I approved; and they thought sure, they should have a raise, let's give it to them. Well I bucked it. In the union meetings, on the basis that we had failed to do anything for our bosses, the waitresses, and we didn't deserve a raise. And it was voted down. Well on the way out of the union meeting, one of the business agents said we'll get you. And come November. So they started grooming another person to take my job. And they were free you see--I had had the bylaws changed so that they could all be elected; I thought that was the democratic way to do instead of making appointments, elect them all. But I also had strengthened the secretary-treasurer's hand to give her authority to match her responsibilities; and naming her executive head of the union so that she would have some control over the business agents. Their reporting systems, and their, that sort of thing. Well, we had discussed these by laws time after time and had, they had been read, you know, the required number of times in the union meetings; as far as I knew the business agents were all for them. The night that they were adopted, the business agents supported all the things that would help them. And when it came to naming an executive head of the union, they all five got up and talked it down. So I lost this. Then they decided that they would take over running the union. So they, it was a coalition and they just had full time out in the field with no strings on them to campaign against me and for who was my assistant, that, who had gotten fired in our health and welfare office and it was just really unfair that they had fired her. So, I really needed an assistant in the union so that I could get out a little more and she was the one that the business agents chose to run. She knew all about the books, about what was going on; and so they elected her. And they immediately killed her off. I shouldn't say that; but she just started drinking so heavily that she killed herself off. And then they took the job dispatcher and the same thing happened to her. So all in all--and they, they always have been very squeamish about me. And I don't know why, because I have had several, gotten several good appointments for some of them that I thought were very capable. As a matter of fact, one of them was serving at my request on the Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women. I had come up from San Francisco and got Uhlman to appoint this commision and recommended the then secretary, who was one of the ring leaders in my diselection, and got her put on this commission. And I, whenever I could do anything that I thought they were capable of I wanted my union represented. I always kept up my dues. But this is the fact of the thing. I don't . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Did they ever, afterward--you mentioned that the laws, the bylaws were changed as they affected the business agents but they were defeated as they affected the position of the executive secretary; did they ever get those changes through? Did anybody ever want to after . . .

COMPTON: No; yeah yeah: this is really a funny thing. When I came back from San Francisco, when I quit the federal job and came back, and attended meetings occasionally, well I was appalled to hear that the membership had dropped down to 2600. And so after the meeting, the current secretary treasurer, who was my appointed business agent and then one that I sponsored for election, and then after these other things happened, then she became secretary treasurer, she complained bitterly to me. She said I've got all this, she said of course the membership's falling down, the business agents won't do a thing. She says I've got responsibility but I've got no authority. And then she suddenly realized how it happened that she had no authority. I shouldn't be chuckling, because it's really a shame, I'm very sorry about it. But yes, she would very much like to have it changed now, but then there have been some other jealousies arise and she hasn't had a chance to do it. Because, the business agents started squabbling among themselves it just hasn't been a very good set up.

INTERVIEWER: When we were together the last time, you talked about your work as a business agent and then as executive secretary of your union. I want to ask you a question about the union; but first of all could I ask you: you mentioned the problems, toward the end, and the makings of decisions and then perhaps revoking them; the problem of getting rules passed about the business agents but not about the executive secretary. Very candidly, if you've had experience in this yourself, do you think that this kind of squabbling is more characteristic of women than it is of men?

COMPTON: No I don't think so.

INTERVIEWER: It wasn't, the problems that you saw there didn't have to do with the fact that women were having to, that women were making the decisions? Because as women, we often, we often are dismissed in some situations as people who bring their, as that part of the human race that brings their emotions into things and therefore cannot deal well. But I'm sure you and I would both have experiences in which men behave no more, no differently; I just wondered . . .

COMPTON: I think that there might be some other, the situation may not be as prevalent in men's organizations generally as it was in this all women's organization, but I don't think it would be based on sex. I think it would be based on lack of

COMPTON: experience probably, and--in the waitresses union we were, none of us well educated, with formal education. I doubt if, well as I said I finished tenth grade and I don't think there were many high school graduates in the whole organization. And I think it was lack of understanding how to get by, get along with other people and there was more jealousy, I think that some of the officers, well the business agents for example, I think that they were taken too quickly out of small, low paying jobs and put into positions of authority and I just don't think they could handle it. That was my bad judgement probably on who to select. Now the same thing has occurred in the cooks union, which was run entirely by men, although probably 60 to 70 percent of the membership were women but not women officers in that group. The men managed to get up there but after they got to the top, they were squabbling just like they were in mine. So I think it depends upon the caliber of person. There's almost a breed, generally speaking, there's almost a breed of person that works in restaurants. They're mostly forced into it. Of course, a high class chef, or cook, a man who's been well trained and all, doesn't go into union politics because he can make so much more money where he is. You know, if he's really tops he does well; and with regard to the waitresses, a cocktail waitress, or a sophisticated waitress in a high class hotel, one of those places, makes really much better money. And they are, they're pretty solid people.

INTERVIEWER: Would that, then--over the years did, was there a problem in some people working in the trade, in the profession, being unwilling to join the union? Would a chef who was very well trained not be a member of the union? Did you get support from the people who had the best jobs? Who would be eligible for union membership. Or not.

COMPTON: Well, you see the way it works, it isn't strictly voluntary, coming into a union. The union would have a contract with the employer, so if he hired nonunion help, they would have to come to the union within thirty days was the way it generally works. So, many joined the union whether they wanted to or not.

INTERVIEWER: But it would often be simply joining the union and not becoming active in it?

COMPTON: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of support did you get from the community? Did you ever have community resistance to the union?

COMPTON: From other unions?

INTERVIEWER: No, from just the community at large?

COMPTON: We had pretty good support generally. At one point I called a strike work, stop work meeting; well this was early on, before I became executive secretary; it was the year I negotiated the contract and we were having trouble getting the employers to talk to us; so I instigated a stop work meeting of all the culinary trades. And we had 12,000 turn out, although we only had a membership of about 10,000 of the combined culinary unions. And, they turned out. Well the public was very, very much back of us. Because, what I managed to do was get across the information on how we had slipped behind other comparable cities--mainly San Francisco; I used this as an example because the waitresses here at the time were getting seventy five cents an hour or $6.00 for an eight hour shift and they were getting $9.00 for comparable work in San Francisco. It's just about 50 percent more than we were making. The difference wasn't so great at the higher paid jobs, like the cooks and the bartenders.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get any community support when you were running the training institute for waitresses?

COMPTON: Oh yeah, great support.

INTERVIEWER: Financial, or . . .?

COMPTON: No, volunteer instructors, like from the Katherine Peck School of Charm, and doctors, orthopedists; we had one orthopedist who came in regularly and lectured on correct posture and what incorrect posture could do to the bone structure. And the employers even in sending their waitresses, and it had to be waitresses--waitresses had to be allowed to choose whether they wanted to come up or not--usually it was the best waitress in the house who wanted to improve herself. Anyway, the employers would let them come up a half day and pay them for the full shift. So they didn't lose any money; they spent a half day working on their regular shift and half day in school.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get any support from churches, from religious organizations?

COMPTON: No, I never tried. Actually, I didn't have any ties, I didn't know how to go about getting this kind of support.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't have a particular sense, then, that a religious organization was reaching into the community in any particular way as far as you were concerned?

COMPTON: No, I didn't.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Well, let us, now let me say, I know it's COPE, but I have to get . . .

COMPTON: It's the Committee on Political Education.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, Committee on Political Education, which you were the director of for a year, from 1956 to 1957. Will you tell me about it?

COMPTON: Well, after I lost the election with the waitresses union, I was, well as a matter of fact I went up for about six weeks and served as an instructor in the school that I had helped organize, the vocational school. And during this period the then head of the state federation of labor it was called, and one of his vice-presidents called and wanted to talk to me about opening up a COPE office and organizing the political arm for the King County labor movement. And so we discussed that, and I ended up quitting at Edison Vocational, and opening an office in the labor temple and contacting other unions, explaining what we had in mind doing and then getting ideas from them on how to got about it--some of them had been active in politics. I had never been particularly active.

INTERVIEWER: You became active? I know from our unrecorded conversations that you are very politically aware now and was this the beginning?

COMPTON: Yes. I was schocked to find out how few members of organized labor were registered to vote. And what we did was get cooperation from the various local unions and get lists of their membership, the names of their members, and then check them against the registration files at the county-city building. And those that were not registered then we would contact and we had, that year we had the greatest increase in numbers of registered voters of any city in the country, any county in the country. What we also did was set up registration booths like in Bon Marche, Northgate, was one place--right at the head of the escalator there we had the store gave us space and we had several others at strategic places around the county. Boeing let us put one there. Then we had a roving trailer at one time and would advertise ahead of time where it would be and would have a deputy registars in the trailer and go right into the neighborhoods and register people to vote.

INTERVIEWER: So was the main thrust during the year that you were, that you were in this position . ..

COMPTON: Registration?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

COMPTON: That was one of the main thrusts, but also to get out information on labor's endorsed candidates, and then we had regular meetings and sometimes, during the campaign, we might have a meeting once a week or once in two weeks, and get representatives from as many unions as would be interested. Sometimes we had really great crowds--several hundred, to maybe hear speakers or to map out campaign strategies, and to get volunteers to work, to doorbell; we had a regular assembly line up in the COPE office, geting out literature; and we would usually get--we always got volunteer services--from other unions, like the mimeographing and printing. And we'd get contributions in the way of stationery and envelopes. And then maybe for a big meeting, we'd get first on union and then another to run it through their franking system, so that the postage didn't cost much. We ran the office entirely on voluntary contributions. And after, let me see it was in November 1956, after the election, Governor Rossellini was one of our candidates who was elected, and before he took office he called and asked what I would like to have out of his administration. And I really didn't know what he was talking about. I said all I wanted was for him to be a good governor.

INTERVIEWER: He was a colorful governor, wasn't he--for people who will be reading this sometime, outside of Seattle. That was a kind of an interesting era, wasn't it?

COMPTON: He was such a marvelous listener; and even to look at him--many times I'd observe him at gatherings. And some person would come up to talk to him and he's tall, but this listening pose of his: he'd have that ear and he was really hearing what that person was having to say to him. You know, not that he always followed advice, good or bad, but he listened.

INTERVIEWER: How long was he governor--just one term?

COMPTON: Eight years.

INTERVIEWER: Two terms; it was when there were four-year terms.

COMPTON: And he ran the third time and lost.

INTERVIEWER: Dan Evans succeeded him, is that right?

COMPTON: Yes. He defeated him and succeeded him.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to Rosellini after he . . .

COMPTON: Oh he's still around; he's very active, he's just making a lot of money as an attorney. He's a cracker jack lawyer.

INTERVIEWER: He is related to the Rossellinis that owns the restaurants?

COMPTON: Yeah, they're cousins; but he's not related to Judge Hugh Rossellini, the Supreme Court Judge; although they, their parents came from the same area in Italy and they grew up together as boys in Tacoma. They're very close friends, but no relation.

INTERVIEWER: That's interesting. So that's why you moved to Olympia and to be supervisor . . .

COMPTON: No, I never moved to Olympia.

INTERVIEWER: Well, but I mean your work--or didn't, you didn't commute to Olympia?

COMPTON: No, I had my office here.

INTERVIEWER: Oh did you? And this was supervisor of the Women and Minor Division, and the Wage and Hour Division, within the Department of Labor and Industry?

COMPTON: Yeah. There was no Wage and Hour Division at the time I was appointed.

INTERVIEWER: Oh sorry, if I may just interrupt: When you said all you wanted him, all you wanted from him was for him to be a good governor, did he think up this . . .?

COMPTON: Yeah, he said . . .

INTERVIEWER: Then he approached you with this particular job?

COMPTON: Yeah, he approached me with the job, he said how about heading up the Women and Minors Division for the Department of Labor. And I said no I didn't feel qualified to do that. And I gave him an argument; I really was afraid to tackle something that, it seemed enormous to me. So he dropped the subject and asked if I would set up a meeting for him. He wanted to talk to Ed Weston who was president of the State Labor Council and Jack McDonald the vice-president, who was my immediate boss in COPE. And Joe Davis, Ed Weston's assistant at that time, and several other active labor union people. And he said will you set it up for me and call me back and tell me what time. And so I did and he said he wanted me to be there. And so I had no idea that the meeting was to concern me, so when he came in he announced that he had talked to me over the phone about this particular post and I turned him down. He wanted to know what they thought about it and my goodness they were all over me. And one of them finally got to me by saying don't you think you could do as well as and then he named

COMPTON: the present person. And I knew that she was a nothing person. She had been appointed to do nothing really, by the former administration. So I had to agree that I knew I could do that well. And so I accepted it, and was delighted in every minute of it, for, I was there a little over seven years I guess. My boss, then the director of the Department of Labor and Industry, called me one day and asked you know what I wanted out of the legislature. This was 1958 then, before the next session. And I told him there were three things I wanted; that was the Minimum Wage Law and to revise the industrial welfare orders for women and children and to get a safety program set up for restaurant workers. And so he said OK, we'd get together and write up you know, and send it in, for me to send it to the governor. And he endorsed the whole business, and I helped write, with--now this is one thing I got out of the US Department of Labor. From the bureau that I later worked in. Was a model Minimum Wage Law. And then an assistant attorney general for the state of Washington and I sat down at my kitchen table and tailored it to fit what we thought were the needs of Washington workers. And sent it into the governor; and he introduced it as an executive request measure, so we got the first overall minimum wage law passed in the state of Washington. Then the Wage and Hour Division was set up, and I headed that up too, to enforce the new minimum wage law. Which it really was the greatest one in the states at that time. It was later hacked by the legislature: overtime was cut off, and coverage was taken away from people that needed it the most, in some instances. It's still a pretty good law.

INTERVIEWER: Were, was your work during that period of time mostly working with people who were employed by the division, working with state administrators?

COMPTON: My responsibility was to administer and enforce all the labor laws on the book that concerned women and children; in addition wage claims for any person, any wage earner, the collection of wages. And Equal Pay Law, which had been on the book since 1943 and never had been....no attention had ever been paid to it.

INTERVIEWER: How did you enforce these? You pointed out to employers that the laws are here and they had to follow them?

COMPTON: Well, I got the governor to give me some help; because to start with, that office had just the supervisor, that was me, and two file clerks, for the state. My goodness, how many thousand establishments, you know, should be audited and should be looked over.

INTERVIEWER: And that was your responsibility too--travel around the state and do this.

COMPTON: That was my responsibility too, yes. So I got some field agents; the governor got into his own--I guess every governor has a fund, sort of an emergency fund; and he got into that because there was time to get it from the legislature. And got money enough to hire some help. And not only that; you see there were sixteen district offices within the Department of Labor and Industry. But they were set up mainly for industrial insurance purposes. And they had their auditors audit books to see whether the contributions were being made properly into the industrial insurance fund. So what my boss, the director of the department, did was turn over these sixteen offices to help me wherever I needed help. If I needed books audited to see whether minimum wages were being paid, or to see if minors were doing work without a minor's permit, or to see that minors were not doing hazardous work--now this was really a problem, because they could hire minors so cheap, so what if they lost a finger or a hand now and then, it wasn't too important; they could get another minor with both hands. And so I did get help that way. So we had a really good organization going without it actually costing much money. And then I did get the industrial welfare orders all revised; they were thirteen of them. And it took several years but I finally got a safety, a good safety program set up within the state of Washington for the restaurants, and got safety inspectors appointed to zero in on the restaurants. I claimed that it was probably the most hazardous employment in the state for women and children. But usually the accidents were, didn't last four days, you know didn't keep them off work for four days; and if they were back at work within four days then it wasn't reported to the Industrial Insurance Office. So it just went by the board. I remember getting broken glass in my eye, and getting scalded from here down with some, with boiling coffee; oh, getting my hip ripped open from a fountain. But in not one of the three cases was I off four days, so none of them was reported. But they were all serious accidents.

INTERVIEWER: Yes; and there must be a lot of slipping; floors get wet and . . .

COMPTON: Yes; slips and falls and strains; mm-hmm. It's a hazardous industry.

INTERVIEWER: Did you meet with a lot of resistance in the legislature in those years when you were trying to do this; and then would the employers, or was the climate right?

COMPTON: Well, the climate was right, for one thing; for Roselline himself was the governor.

INTERVIEWER: Did he have a democratic--he was a Democrat, so it was important that the party and the governor, that his party was controlling the legislature?

COMPTON: Yeah. Pretty well.

INTERVIEWER: For all eight years?

COMPTON: Yeah. Yeah, the climate was right; and nobody had ever attempted to get a Minimum Wage Law, for example; so it kind of sneaked through. It required time and a half for overtime after eight hours a day and also after forty hours a week. Where the federal government, the federal law for the workers to which it applied, provided time and a half after forty hours a week only. So this meant that somebody could work ten hours a day for four days and they wouldn't be entitled to any overtime. But with our law, you know regardless of what, how it was done, they had the overtime coming. So what happened, and it applied to public employment as well as private, which was just great because we had a lot of unemployment then, and there were places like in Yakima, I remember a big lumber outfit used only firemen, off-shift firemen; he ran his establishment of off-shift firemen who were getting full pay, and working a full shift every night or every day, with the lumber company. Well, the way they were working it then, the firemen, I think, then had three days on and four days off a week. So they would be in the fire station for three days at a time, around the clock--or maybe two days; that would be forty-eight hours; and then they had the five days off. So the lumber outfit would rotate with off duty firemen to run its business. And when this law passed, the fire department could not keep those men there twenty-four hours unless it paid them overtime after eight; so what it manged to do was set up regular shifts for the public employment, and put some out of work people to work. Like in the lumber yards and other places that were using....And they did it because they could get these men cheaper, due to the fact that they already had a fulltime, good salary. Eventually, that was one of the things that we lost: coverage of public employment. Another thing, the public libraries really....it was just a disgrace, particularly in the smaller communities, Bellingham and Ellensburg, small college towns. What they were hiring these kids for, to work in libraries, wouldn't have bought them their candy bars. And, so they were subject to minimum wage, too. And it really just had--and the nursing homes too--marvelous effects.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have, I know that there's been a lot of conversation in this state about nursing homes, though some of that may have been after you had this particular job. Were you involved with nursing homes in any particular way?

COMPTON: Yeah. Well, just the same as others involved, with any other industry that hired, particularly that hired children. Nursing homes would mostly hire cheap labor, and some of them, of course, were really fine establishments and well run. But, for the most part, they were really bad. I know when the Minimum Wage Law was passed so that the job was rated, not the person, the age of the person, men, women and children doing a particular job got paid the same, and a man came into my office asking for forms for minor work permits. He was running a nursing home, and I asked him what he was doing. And he said he was firing all the women aides over eighteen and hiring kids because--because, he didn't think he had to pay minimum wages to the kids under eighteen. He was mistaken; he just hadn't read the law right.

INTERVIEWER: I suppose that nursing homes is a very good example of the two-part kind of contribution you're making when you get a minimum wage through. That is, if you're a restaurant waitress, it's nice to have the customer well served but the particularly important thing there is to have the waitress making a living wage.

COMPTON: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: In the case of a nursing home, it's important that the people working there be paid properly; but as soon as you can get them that kind of money, then I suppose you do get, you're going to get better help in the nursing home and it's going to, it's terribly important for the welfare of the . . .

COMPTON: . . .of the patient.

INTERVIEWER: . . .of the patient, yes. I think that's terribly important.

COMPTON: I had a clipping that I kept for a long time. It's a hospital in Spokane. It was a newspaper item that they were going to, I don't know they were--oh they were going to raise their bed rate by three dollars a day because they were going to have to pay wages of at least a dollar an hour. And this was in 1959. So what were they paying before that it was going to cost three dollars a day to have--because they were only going to be making eight dollars a day.

INTERVIEWER: Goodness. Well; you--this was an appointive position that you had from the governor and it continued that way. Why did you, why did you leave it?

COMPTON: I left because my friend Esther Peterson, whom I had met only two or three times but I liked her very much, and just was big-eyed at her responsibility; she was at that time head of the Women's Bureau in the US Department of Labor. And she was also

COMPTON: Assistant Secretary of Labor--this was under Kennedy. And my job here really was secure; I think I could have hung right on to it through retirement because regardless of what administration came in, in this state they wouldn't have moved on me because all labor would have been up in arms. And I had a good record, and I had good relations with the other unions. And even an anti-labor governor would hardly have dared move me out to put in one of his own men. But I couldn't resist Esther Peterson. The first job, well she wanted me to take over the San Francisco office of....it was a regional office for the Women's Bureau; and several other openings had come up. And when she got around to Denver, I told her she was getting pretty close to home; that if she would open up an office in Seattle I might go to work for the US Department of Labor. And she said well that just might be done. So she did open an office here; but it was too, it was particularly for youths. I've forgotten what the office was called. And then, then they decided to extend it it to the Bureau of Labor Standards, so I took that position. And that was for the five northewest states. And my job was to work toward better labor legislation, state legislation, and any group that was interested. The YWCA was very active; and I got involved with, I finally got involved with church groups, paricularly the migrant ministry.

Then let's see, this was in April of 1963 and I was here for two years and then the San Francisco regional director went back to be Esther Peterson's assistant--by this time she was wearing her third hat; she was the President's person for consumer affairs. And so the San Francisco person went back to Washington to be with her and I voluntarily transferred to San Francisco and then I had the seven western states to cover. That was a great experience too; I was travelling oh from a half to two thirds of the time, and really relishing it; I miss--I miss DOING something and feeling productive. But I also miss a train--I love train travel. But mostly it was flying. Well, around San Francisco, I had a lot of business to take care of in Sacremento and, of course, I would drive there. I drove to Los Angeles a couple of times. I would drive; but usually I would fly. And I got really involved with the farm workers. And in several other things, it was practically none of my business; it wasn't my business to stick my nose in where equal pay wasn't being observed.

INTERVIEWER: It was not your business?

COMPTON: No.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

COMPTON: Well, I had no enforcement authority; there were other agencies that were supposed to take care of that. But what I did was prod them, or embarrass them until they would do something. A couple

COMPTON: women working in a pulp mill came to me because they felt that men were being advanced over them; and we talked things over and I asked for a copy of their contract and it was just as illegal as it could be. And here it was in print you know. And this was after the federal Equal Pay Law had been passed.* And Equal Employment Opportunity Law had been passed, prohibiting discrimination against women in advancing them in jobs.** And I looked at their contract and here was, you know, the occupations would be listed here in this column, and the hourly wage for men in this column, and the hourly wage for identical jobs for women in this column, soemwhat less, all the way down. That wasn't their main complaint; their main complaint was that, oh, maybe there was a fork lift operator or some other job that had been traditionally held by men that they felt they were qualified for they didn't get promoted. So it took two years.

And finally, I worked with these women--well what I did was get them to set up a rump group in their own union. Their own union officers wouldn't go to bat for them because their own union officers were all men and their men were being advanced; so what if the women didn't get it. And, they named themselves Women Incorporated, and we just had some great meetings up around Martinasl and what I coached them to do was get themselves elected on the negotiating committe and on the executive committee; and they did and one little fire brand--I remember she made the headlines in Portland in the big general meeting, and exposed the whole situation of how they'd been ignored. She managed to get the contract changed. And then I went to the various federal offices, like the Wage Hour Division, and the EEOC office in San Francisco, and prodded them until they forced the company to pay back wages. It was just a tremendous amount. At this moment, I don't remember whether it was two million dollars in back wages that the women got ot whether it was two hundred thousand--I've lost track of a cipher some place along the line, but it was really just a great amount of money. And this was extra curricular.

INTERVIEWER: Well, now the post that you had was a federal post, and I suppose you had no authority over either a state organization or any authority over organized labor. Was the office supposed to be a consulting, an advisory office; what was . . .

COMPTON: Yeah; promotional.

INTERVIEWER: Promotional; well then, why was it extra curricular for you to promote these people doing these things? It seems to me that's exactly what you should have been doing. Or was it just that you were too activist--that is, not too activist, but more activist than it had been anticipated.

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* 1964

** 1963

COMPTON: Yeah, and a couple of times I got in a little hassle with my own office over creating, you know, disturbing the status quo.

INTERVIEWER: Yes; they wanted you to do good public relations work and not be disruptive.

COMPTON: Yeah; not be disruptive. That's right. I remember one time getting a directive from Washington telling us that we were to help the State Labor Commission, or director, whatever they were called, to get whatever he wanted; if he wanted a right-to-work law, we were to help him get it. And oh . . .

INTERVIEWER: I see; the direction was to come from within the state.

COMPTON: Yes; this happened to be after Esther Peterson had gone full time into the Office of Consumer Affairs in the White House; and was no longer Assistant Secretary of Labor. And I was just, I couldn't believe when I read this. So I wrote, I answered the communication by saying that I had been hired by virtue of my union background--and I was; my goodness, I know that Esther Peterson had to do some wheeling and dealing to trade off my experience for, for the qualification to fill that job.

INTERVIEWER: The formal requirements, I suppose?

COMPTON: Yeah, yeah, and that like I had received this communication, and I repeated in it what I was instructed to do; and I said I begged to be relieved of any such, doing any such thing, that I couldn't in good conscience go out and try to help a state get a right-to-work law. That was enacted for the purpose of doing away with labor unions. And my immediate boss in Washington was just delighted; she had never had anything to do with an upstart who would dare challenge anything that came from the top desk. So the communication happened to come. She got it just as she was leaving to go up to a staff meeting. And so she took it with her; and who was visiting the staff meeting that day--Esther Peterson. So my boss read that aloud; and my gosh, did Esther Peterson ever give the director a dressing down. And the policy was changed right then.

INTERVIEWER: Where would the policy have come from?

COMPTON: From the director, the Bureau of Labor Standards.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

COMPTON: You see, each one had what it seems to me, this goes on in most of the federal agencies, the top dog in an agency has his own private little garden. Another time the word came through to water down the regulations regulating hazardous employment for

COMPTON: for children. And it had originated in the state of Washington, through Senator Jackson, because a little shingle mill operator had objected to the federal wage hour people coming in and looking around to see if children were working around saws. I worked hard on that to keep, well what Jackson wanted then was to exempt the shingle mills from this hazardous order.

INTERVIEWER: The shingle mills were precisely where you would lose your little fingers and hands.

COMPTON: Right; right as rain. So I really worked hard on that issue; but I lost out--I couldn't get enough from down there and I wasn't free to come up here and get anything organized, because the investigators were coming out from Washington to talk with people here; well what I tried to do was to get them you know, not just to go to the owners of the shingle mills but to talk to workers who had had the experience. And I did line up the safety division here, but they didn't take it as seriously; they didn't really take it very seriously. They did, they came out exempting kids which permitted them to go in and work right around the saw mills. Well, not to operate the saws themselves, but once a child is permitted to get in such close proximity to this dangerous work, then they can go on in. I remember asking the investigator if he had talked to any of the shingle mill--the shingle weavers is what they're called, the sawyers--and he said; "Oh yes." And I said: "Well, when you shook hands with them did you notice whether any of them had all their fingers or not." And he said: "Come to think of it, they did seem to have a lot of missing fingers." And I said: "You bet and you're going to turn out a lot of kids with missing hands."

INTERVIEWER: Did the exemption go through specifically concerning shingle mills, or did it go through business, small businesses?

COMPTON: Well, this happened to be particularly for shingle mills. You see, these orders were issued, they were theoretically, at least tailored to fit the various industries. And name hazardous positions.

INTERVIEWER: Was Willard Wirtz US Secretary of Labor in these years?

COMPTON: Yeah; and he was great too.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have the feeling when you were working for the Department of Labor that there was a filter down process from Willard Wirtz?

COMPTON: Yes, it would eventually have caught up. But he wasn't there all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Did he leave after President Kennedy was killed? I can't remember?

COMPTON: No, I think he stayed on quite a long time. But he made himself pretty unpopular with Johnson by objecting to the Vietnam War. He spoke out.

INTERVIEWER: We were speaking last time of the work that you did, particularly in California, for the Bureau of Labor Standards; and I wanted to ask you how the job changed over the period of time that you were there.

COMPTON: I don't remember, had I told you how I went out getting state laws such as the Minimum Wage Law for the state of Montana?

INTERVIEWER: No, no.

COMPTON: Well; I went into Helena, [Montana] I had a contact there--a judge who had been managing the campaign for the Governor-elect, a sucessful campaign. And I had asked him to get a few people together who might be interested in hearing the values of a state Minimum Wage Law. Montana had never had one. And so he did that--he collected oh I think about twenty-five people from a number of different walks of life: the head of the state labor AFL-CIO organization and people representing all different walks of life. And so, he had also invited the Governor-elect but doubted whether he would be able to come or not; and as it happened he did come. He was seated next to me at the head table at luncheon, and I had quite a little, a few minutes to talk to him in private. And he had to go to another appointment and so when he addressed the group he told them that it was going to be in his message to the legislature, this was going to be one of his requests. And he had two or three other things that he really wanted to accomplish in that session of the legislature but the Minimum Wage Law was to number one. And it had not previously been included in any of his campaign promises or anything like that. So he immediately appointed this group as the state Minimum Wage Law committee, and then he left, and then we really had a session. And drew up assignments for different segments of the group. So it took that year then it was introduced, the bill was introduced; I had drawn up a bill tailored to fit Montana's needs as I saw them. He submitted it as an executive request measure and it almost passed. In the meantime I was in constant contact with the various people who were taking the lead, helping them with testimony to present and that sort of thing; and it failed by two votes that year. But the second year it passed and it applied to virtually all employment; there were very few exemptions and it was for a $1.60, which was at that time the federal, equalled the federal law. I don't know whether you understand or not,

COMPTON: but the national Minimum Wage Law applies only to employment deemed to affect interstate commerce. Where this law applied to all those exempted areas and you know to smaller employers. I remember one testimony that was given in favor of the Minimum Wage Law by a man that I, he was so rough and tumble and sort of a diamond in the rough, and he said well he wanted to include baby sitters and there was just a wild guffaw at that very idea of covering baby sitters with a Minimum Wage Law. And he says: "Hell, you pay your sheep herders three times that amount;" he says, "Aren't your babies worth so much?" I thought it was a pretty good, a pretty good argument. Anyway, this is the way I sort of manuevered all through the states to . . .

INTERVIEWER: How did you learn how to do things like that?

COMPTON: I don't know; it just sort of came.

INTERVIEWER: Where, for instance, did you learn how to draft a bill?

COMPTON: Well, the Washington office of the Bureau of Labor Standards had its office there where it drew up sample measures, and then you could make the necessary changes to make it compatible with laws already on the state books, perhaps, things of this nature. Or, as in the case in Washington state--the Minimum Wage Law here was mine too, that I think I told you about that, when I was working for the state I maneuvered to get that law passed. And even at that time I used the model put out by the Bureau of Labor Standards. And where we had, we had a law on the books, a very old one that applied to women and children only it was for something, at that time, like sixty-five cents an hour. And so when we made the changes in the model bill, we took into consideration a law like that so that it would not be in conflict but that whichever law provided the highest standard would apply; whichever law provided the greatest benefit to the worker.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hmm. Was there ever any problem for you in deciding which side of a particular issue would be right, the appropriate side for the worker or did the programs that you tried to effect--were the programs that you tried to effect always clear as to what was going to be in the worker's best interest?

COMPTON: It was always clear in my mind, but for an example, the national AFL-CIO objected strongly to the equal rights; and they objected to, I don't know, I don't think they were even behind equal pay. The hierarchy caters to the primadonnas who have already arrived: Mr. Carpenter, Mr. Plumber, the building tradesmen; and they don't need minimum wage laws really. They've arrived and gone way ahead. So they don't pay much attention; Meany doesn't pay much attention to the service workers except to perform as a dues collecting agency. So they, you know, they

COMPTON: just never got behind: they finally have gotten behind the farm workers but that took . . .

INTERVIEWER: That took years.

COMPTON: Years and years and years; and public opinion, before they would ever move. As a matter of fact, I can remember when there were suggestions that Caesar Chavez was a communist and the whole thing was communist inspired and that was the way, you know, really turn your back on the poor little farm worker.

INTERVIEWER: Well; you left that job in California in 1971. Why, why did you decide to resign?

COMPTON: Well there were a number of reasons. Although, see Washington state was among the seven that I served, and I got up here oh at least three times a year and I always took my vacation here, but I was still homesick for a home up here, I think. And my sister--I had one sister living just outside of Seattle and another one in Auburn and my daughter lived in Seattle. And that--there was a strong pull there. But in addition to that, under the Nixon administration the Labor Department was suddenly sort of a tool of management rather than an agency for the protection of working people. This was what it was set up for by Frances Perkins.* And it was very difficult to get any kind of backing out of, out of the Washington office. Like statistics and things of this kind that we would need for the promotional work in the states. The Occupational Safety and Health Act was passed, which was a fine act and the attention was turned principally to safety on the job. And not so much, or hardly at all the other laws of importance: minimum wage, which was always my number one baby, and child labor laws, wage claim laws, and all these things that are of special benefit to the low wage worker. There would--as a matter of fact I think I told you about getting, getting instructions to help the state get a right-to-work law if the Labor Commission wanted one. So the job wasn't as, wasn't as attractive as it had been the previous years.

INTERVIEWERS: When you did resign, though, somebody succeeded you in job and the job still exists?

COMPTON: No; no.

INTERVIEWER: Oh that's interesting.

COMPTON: No it was wiped out.

INTERVIEWER: It was.

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* Secretary of Labor under President Franklin D. Roosevelt

COMPTON: Mm-hmm.

INTERVIEWER: Is--I don't remember whether you told me, is Esther Peterson still alive?

COMPTON: Oh, you bet she's still alive.

INTERVIEWER: And what is she doing?

COMPTON: She's President Carter's Asssistant for Consumer Affairs.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I was just going to ask you if that was right.

COMPTON: It's the same job that she did for President Johnson; she was first appointed to head up the women's, the Women's Division--was that what it was called? Bureau--Women's Division, within the Department of Labor. And just was doing a terrific job--that was when she started contacting me to try to get me to, to go to work in that agency. And then she continued on that job and moved up as Assistant Secretary of Labor. And before she pulled out of those jobs she became President Johnson's Assistant for Consumer Affairs. Then she had, she couldn't quite manage wearing three hats so she gave up the other two. And Mary Keyserling then was appointed to head up the Women's Bureau. And I don't remember who took her place as Assistant Secretary of Labor.

INTERVIEWER: And did she--what did she do during the Nixon years, and the Ford years: and did she reemerge when Mr. . . .

COMPTON: Oh: what she did was, she may have taken a little time off, but she was very active in the National Organization for Consumers, I don't remember the exact name of it. But she went to work for a huge chain market,* and was widely cricicized; but I know where Esther's heart was and I knew what she would be doing in there. Well, what she did was persuade this gigantic chain to, to start--what do you call the individual pricing--unit pricing; and before too long, their headquarters in Washington DC I think and they had these great markets scattered all over that city. Well, I was told that, that on a shopping day, the shopping area would be overflowing with automobiles at this particular, at her store.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that interesting.

COMPTON: And the A&P and other markets would be a third full. So . . .

INTERVIEWER: Good enough.

COMPTON: That company just thought she was great, of course. Well, then

* Giant Food Corporation

COMPTON: gradually the others fell into line. And then she would talk the company into something else that was good for the consumers; and really make Christians of them. They found out, you know, which side of the bread their bread was buttered.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, that's fascinating.

COMPTON: And so she was with them until Carter tapped her on the shoulder to come back. I've caught her on television several times; she's a terrific performer. Beautiful smile, and unruffled and low key and this lovely, soft voice, that, you know it really belts out but never to hurt you. No matter where you sit in the room she never needs the microphone. It just carries. And, oh, she is such a sincere woman. Just a beautiful woman.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you've been back in Seattle for six years; you obviously are not simply resting. Tell me about what you have been doing.

COMPTON: Well, my immediate interest when I came back: my favorite sister, the one closest to me, had developed cancer. And I guess probably her doctors knew it was terminal at the outset, but I didn't; and it, however it was almost an obsession with me: I was just so concerned--she lived out in the country and I wondered who was seeing to it that she got to her doctor and back and forth. So when I quit work then I just, although I had an apartment and stayed there nights, in town, I spend everyday with her; and this went on for, oh five or six months. And then she died and I was pretty, it was awfully hard for me to accept that: I'd had her all my life. She was about three and a hlf years older. And so my daughter in Kentucky wanted me to come back there. And I went back and spent a month with her. But I was there just a week when the sister over here in Auburn died suddenly. I don't know what it was--a heart attack, I imagine; but it was absolutely no pain, she'd been in great health. She was older then we were, and so then I lost the two of them. And I sort of didn't do anything for a while, I wasn't very much interested. I felt kind of lost without, without the job and the care of my sister. As a matter of fact, I, and I'd lost contact quite a bit--you know, six or seven years absence from the city. Then I made a half-hearted attempt to--oh I worked for the passage of the state ERA here. And I was pretty sure it was going to be passed, so I went down to Olympia and talked to the director of the state Department of Labor it's called, the Department of Labor and Industry. And I was sure I had persuaded him that he needed me, for at least six months, to reconcile the laws on the books to the new Equal Rights Law when it came in. And he agreed, because I considered myself the only expert in the state on labor laws for women. But, although he hinted that he would hire me, he never, he didn't. For one thing, I made the mistake of going down there with my automobile all plastered with Democratic

COMPTON: candidates for governor. Rossillini was running again. And, of course, this director would be out with a Democratic governor. So I think that probably had some effect. And another thing: that administration really didn't want to do anything. And what they managed to do was use, after the ERA was passed here in the state, was to use it for a smoke screen and instead of extending the labor laws that had previously applied only to women for rest periods and things like this, extending it to men, they wiped them out. In order to make women equal, they took their benefits away from them.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Do you think that that has happened a lot?

COMPTON: Yeah it's happened a lot because it's, if they had, you know they could really have accomplished the same thing under Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act. In combination with the national Equal Pay Law, they could have, could have effected the same thing if they knew how to go about it. But this was easy you see.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. So what would, what is your view, then, of the ERA?

COMPTON: Oh I think it's great, I, not only with regard to equal pay and equal employment opportunities, but to hundreds of other laws that are on the books that discriminate against women. In credit, and property ownership and a number of things that I, I'm really not familiar with, with the other laws like I am with the labor laws.

INTERVIEWER: You're not sympathetic then to those people who say that women are disserved rather than served by the ERA?

COMPTON: No, I'm not. No I'm not--this is a bunch of foolishness, the propaganda that's spread around that women are going to have to use the same toilets that men do, and that lesbians will be able to marry each other, and--has no bearing on that at all.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

COMPTON: Because if a law says that a man and woman may marry that's exactly what it means. It doesn't mean that two women can be married.

INTERVIEWER: Well; as you say you had Democratic stickers plastered on your car. You have then remained a Democrat; you're active in politics now I sense--would you like to tell me about that? Is that one of the things that you've been doing particularly in the last few years?

COMPTON: Yes; this has been just about my only public thrust, is working in campaigns of candidates that I feel would be good for the working person. Gary Grant I've worked in his campaign several times; he heads up service employees union I think it's with the hospitals. But, I've known Gary for many years and he's just a fine young man. I did support him for, he ran for Congress: that is I worked in his campaign and got some others to also work in his campaign but all the time I had my fingers crossed because there was another candidate that I really, I thought was just great. Marvin Durning. A Rhodes scholar, and I just think he's another Adlai Stevenson, but apparently the citizenry is about as ready for him as they were for Adlai. So, he won the nomination but was defeated by Cunningham. And, of course, right now you know I'm working in Rover's campaign for mayor. I got attracted to him when I first came up here from San Francisco. He was a political news analyst for Channel 5 here. And he was taking out after some of my former colleagues that, well one man really had been very helpful--he's a senator, he had been very helpful in getting the Minimum Wage Law for the state; and then later he became Insurance Commissioner for the state and he also became a crook. And he exposed him; and he was defeated. Then there were several others, you know right in, people that, well liberals and pro-labor perhaps, but just not the kind of politicians that I think we ought to have in our camp. So, I think he has a background in political science; I think he's a really a wholesome candidate; a good candidate, qualified for running the city.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think his chances are?

COMPTON: Well, I wouldn't bet on them; but I think next time around, he'll make it if he doesn't make it this time.

INTERVIEWER: Yes; one of the problems this time is that there are so many candidates, isn't that right?

COMPTON: Well--that might work to his benefit, I don't know. Because the people that saw him on television and that remember him, and even the fact that his campaign is being run by and large by novices; maybe that's what will attract the voters.

INTERVIEWER: Yes; and some of the really heavies may knock each other out, I suppose.

COMPTON: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I'm interested about the way politics works in the city of Seattle. The city council do not come from particular districts but are all elected at large by all the citizenry; isn't that right? We don't, we're not really, Phyllis Lamphere for instance does not represent one ward, we don't, we're not a ward city.

INTERVIEWER: I think that would be of interest to people who eventually will be reading this. However, of course we have precints; and what kind of involvement do you have in organized, in the political organization in Seattle?

COMPTON: I'm a precinct committee person; I canvass my own precinct here, and sometimes take another one if there isn't a regular precinct committee person heading it up. But that's about it; I, oh I'll help with fund raisers, and I have done some work at King County Democratic Central Committee headquarters. But, otherwise, I just pick and choose a candidate that I'm going to try to help.

INTERVIEWER: Do you miss your job?

COMPTON: Yeah. I still do. I'm sort of getting used to, not paying any attention to the clock or the days of the month; but, but I do. There's a feeling of being unproductive.

INTERVIEWER: You are productive, of course; as I sit here you have a nice garden and I see painting that you do and I know you're a helpful neighbor and so forth. And yet, I guess I understand, that if you've gone out to work most your life--yes, a particular kind of productiviity that, that you do miss.

COMPTON: Yes, I guess I worked about forty-three years, steadily.

INTERVIEWER: What was the best part of all of that? Is there a part of your life that you, that you think of as the most interesting part?

COMPTON: Oh a part of my life? Well I think the most interesting part probably was, surrounds my kids.

INTERVIEWER: Fascinating isn't it; because we've talked about the fact that you have two daughters. But of course we haven't talked about that part of your life an awful lot on this; and yet that's very interesting: you've worked for forty-three years and the most interesting part of your life has to do with your children.

COMPTON: Yeah. They were such great team mates. You see, one was a year old and one was four and a half when, when I first had them alone. And it was just nip and tuck to, to feed and clothe them and look after them. And I always managed--a couple of times I had to leave them with my mother, when I had a job out of town or something like that, but once we got established with the Chadwick family here in Seattle, we were home safe. We had a home and where I was making, you know, made as little as twelve dollars a week and paid ten dollars a week for their board and room; but I always had them with me and there's was always at least an hour or two a day that we could spend together. Part of that would be in my, we had a

COMPTON: little bathroom of our own and that's where we would have our little family gathering. And I'd come home from work and go in and take a bath and the little ones would always grab my hosiery and scrubbed it out and the other one scrubbed my back. And they'd tell me what had gone one during the day and it was just really a precious fifteen or twenty minutes where no outsider could intrude. And, the house was usually full of other people--wonderful people, but then we had our own little family unit and this was a precious time to us.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, that's lovely.

COMPTON: But a lot of the time I would work in other jobs, in order to make a little more money. And then several different times I tried going to school; I worked in the welfare office to, in order to brush up on my typing and then filing. I volunteered to work there, and I was working, also working a split shift like from 12 to 1 at noon and 6 to 1 at night; and then I would go down and work in the welfare office in the mornings and then in the afternoons. But in doing that then I would have to get along on four or five hours of sleep a night. And, it was walking, because street car fare in those days was a nickel and I couldn't afford it. So I would walk from Capitol Hill downtown to where ever I was going. And I would keep something like that up until I'd get sick, and then I'd have to give it up. And then, another time I got a few dollars ahead enough to pay, to take a course in multigraphing, and--but the same thing would happen over and over. I'd, I'd run out of steam; maybe it would be from, I'd get a sore throat that wouldn't go away and my doctor, the family doctor the Chadwick family doctor would find out about it and would you know tell me to knock it off.

INTERVIEWER: I don't remember; did you tell me how you got, how the relationship with the Chadwicks happened?

COMPTON: Yeah, they were my home when I was fourteen in Aberdeen, Washington. And I was in high school and the Chadwicks had, Mr. Chadwick had gone into business in Aberdeen and the daughter, who was a year younger than I but in the same class in school and I were friends. And my mother had a chance to go on a little farm about thirty miles away in, I think it was April, about mid-April, and look after it for the summer. And it was a nice way to get out of town and she wanted, she wanted to get up there early in order to get in some garden. So I went and stayed with the Chadwicks for six weeks then. And that was where I met Mrs. Chadwick; and--as a matter of fact I just and I'm sorry I don't have it, I just completed an oil portrait of her. It's really beautiful; it's my first attempt at oil portraits. I had it home here but I took it back to get it, to leave it with my teacher. I was going to frame it yesterday and I wasn't in the frame of mind to do so.

INTERVIEWER: And then they moved to Seattle?

COMPTON: Yeah, then they moved to Seattle; they were just there a couple of years. I was married then when I was sixteen, and moved around a good deal. My husband was a fine worker; he was a very restless one, he usually stayed with a job about a month or six weeks and then we'd move someplace else. So, we literally moved all over Oregon and Washington. And then when he left home I contacted--well, I wanted to get out, I was living back in Grays Harbor again and didn't like the area for the girls. It was a man's community--loggers and saw mill workers and really a pretty rough, rough place to live. And I wanted to get my little girls out of there as soon as I could. And I got a job in Olympia, and stayed there several months, til I got my bills paid in Aberdeen and twenty-five dollars ahead; and then I headed for Seattle. And took an apartment with another girl, a widow with a little girl. And we had an older woman, a one legged woman, to babysit, to look after the kids while we were working. Our shifts were different so we could do a lot for each other too. And then, it was then that I started working on Mrs. Chadwick to let us live there. She, she finally did; I persuaded her that--she didn't think that she should have younger children after hers were all grown up, but I persuaded her that my children were very different from any other children. They were different all right--they caused her a few headaches. But we moved there and we lived there off and on for twelve years.

INTERVIEWER: Oh that's very nice. And are the Chadwicks still alive?

COMPTON: No, no. The old folks are dead. The daughter and I are close friends. She lives in New Jersey. And I'm doing the portrait for her.

INTERVIEWER: That's nice. From a photograph?

COMPTON: Yeah, from a photograph. And it was taken just before I had met Mrs. Chadwick; I think she was probably somewhere between--she was probably around thirty-five when the picture was taken. And she was such a beautiful--beautiful woman. With the hour glass figure.

INTERVIEWER: Looking back on it--I always am reluctant to say to somebody if you had it to do over again because that's a silly way to talk I suppose--but looking back on it, are you glad that you had to work? Would you, if you could have done anything you wanted to would you have preferred to be, be someone who worked--someone who stayed at home, someone who devoted herself to her children and her family, within the house?

COMPTON: No, I think there was room to go away. Now at the outset there was nothing I wanted more than to be a wife and a homemaker; and I don't think--I think if my husband had stuck around I would have been completely dominated. I had absolutely no confidence in myself.

INTERVIEWER: I really do believe you about that, but as we sit here in 1977 you see, I really do know that you're telling me the truth and yet when I think of all the things that you've done, all the things we've talked about, we both smile about it don't we?

COMPTON: Well you know, it's very real to me.

BEULAH COMPTON INTERVIEW INDEX

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