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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

and

OHIO LABOR HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

FLORENCE LYNCH

United Rubber Workers

by

Debra Bernhardt

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

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VITAE

FLORENCE LYNCH

Florence Lynch was born in 1911 in Akron, Ohio. She was raised by aunts and uncles because her mother died when Lynch was seven years old. She attended Akron University and then worked as a public stenographer for the Hotel Portage in Akron.

In 1933 Mr. Green, president of the American Federation of Labor (AF of L) offered her 25 dollars a week to be a secretary for the Central Labor Union. She accepted the position and thus began her lifelong involvement with the labor movement and the rubber workers, whom the Central Labor Union was trying to organize. Working as a secretary for the Rubber Workers International Union, Lynch was loaned out to locals during the violent Goodyear strike of 1936 and the Firestone Strike of 1937. When the Rubber Workers split from the AF of L, Lynch went to work for the Goodrich local.

Florence Lynch worked at the Goodrich local of the Rubber Workers Union until the birth of her children; a boy and later a girl who was born with cerebral palsy. Since her daughter's birth, Lynch has been active with the Cerebral Palsy Association. She founded the Cerebral Palsy Association in Akron in 1948, in 1949 wrote the legislation for the first state aid for handicapped children, and served on the state and national committees for cerebral palsy. Lynch worked for the Firestone local after her children were born and has been employed there for 34 years.

Although she was never a member of the Rubber Workers, Florence Lynch organized and served as president of the first office workers union in Akron, and in 1934 became a member of the OPEIU (Office and Professional Employees International Union). She currently belongs to the Teamsters Union. Lynch served as president of and was chosen Woman of the Year and Outstanding Business Woman of the Year by the Akron Business and Professional Women's Club.

Lynch feels that politics has been detrimental to the United Rubber Workers and that through her role in the background she has stayed out of politics and has been very effective in the union. She recalls her first labor rally more than 30 years ago and remarks, "They all looked as if they had worked so hard. I couldn't believe it and I was so sad to see the deplorable way they looked and I made up my mind then that I would help them all the rest of my life. I guess that is what I did."

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November 28, 1978
Akron, Ohio

by

Debra Bernhardt

INTERVIEWER: November 28, 1978. This is Debra Bernhardt in Akron, Ohio, with Florence Lynch. You were just beginning to tell me how you got involved in the labor movement.

LYNCH: Well, I was public stenographer at the Hotel Portage, and Mr. Green, the President of the American Federation of Labor, came to Akron to lay the plans to start organizing the rubber workers.

INTERVIEWER: When was this?

LYNCH: This was in 1933. He would come down every day and he had a voluminous amount of work for me to do. He was very meticulous, and he would lay all of his papers out and then there would be other people coming in the office and it disturbed him. So he asked the manager if I could come to his room. The manager of the hotel said, "No." It was a steadfast rule that the stenographer could not go to any of the rooms. Then Mr. Green was such a fine gentleman, I think the manager of the hotel, Mr. Hopt, realized that. He said this would be an exception and he made the old statement, "A good rule is not a good rule unless you can break it." So he did allow me to go to Mr. Green's room. And, my goodness, some nights I would work until 10 or 11 'clock. My family was not too sure about the American Federation of Labor either, and of course I knew nothing about it. My uncle said, "I think they are hoodlums. I don't think you should get mixed up with that business." I said, "If you meet Mr. Green, uncle, I know you would not think he was a hoodlum. He is such a fine gentleman."

LYNCH: He said, "Well, I would like to meet him." So he came in to work with me and I had Mr. Green there. I introduced them and they visited and my uncle thought he was a very, very fine man.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of work did your uncle do?

LYNCH: My uncle really lived in Marion, Ohio, but all my family lived here. He owned a hardware store in Marion, Ohio. My mother died when I was seven years old and my uncles and aunts raised me. He kind of looked over just. There were three girls and one boy. He really watched us girls [illegible]. He helped to keep us. It was his prerogative to say what we could do and what we couldn't do. After he met Mr. Green he thought he was a very fine gentleman.

INTERVIEWER: So you were still a stenographer at the Hotel Portage?

LYNCH: Yes, at the Hotel Portage. So then I met my husband. He was a pharmacist at the Akron Pharmacy which was right in the corner of the hotel, and we were going to be married June 1, 1933. But in the meantime Mr. Green asked me if I wouldn't like to open up the office for the American Federation of Labor and he wanted me to meet the man that was going to be head of the office. I said, "I would like to meet him." I did, Mr. Coleman Claherty. He was a fine, fine gentleman. He asked me if I would like to be a secretary. I said, "I don't know," and I asked them how much it paid and I was flabbergasted. It was really more than what my future husband made as a pharmacist at the Akron Pharmacy. They paid $25 a week. That was a tremendous amount of money in 1933. So I talked it over with my future husband and with my family and they all said, "You ought to take the money. You will never get another chance like that with that much money." I was married June 1, and I was almost ready to back out of the secretary job because I thought it would be too much because I was going to have an apartment to take care of and a new job. But my husband kept talking me into it and he said, "Oh, you can't turn that down, that is a marvelous job." He thought Mr. Green was such a fine man and Mr. Claherty was a fine man. I took it and opened the office up and that was the beginning of working for the organized labor.

INTERVIEWER: How did you go about opening up an office for the American Federation of Labor?

LYNCH: Well, they took me to Washington and trained me for two weeks. I came back then and had to buy the furniture. We opened up and then we worked with the Akron Labor Council; it was called the Central Labor Union then. Mr. Patino was the president of the Central Labor Union.

INTERVIEWER: Was his name Frank?

LYNCH: Frank Patino. He helped me out a lot too. We would work maybe on Goodyear a while, signing up members. Then we would work with Firestone and sign up members. Then we would work with Goodrich and General and so forth. As soon as some of those people would sign up, just sign their card--how the companies found out I'll never know, but they did and they would fire them. At that time the American Federation of Labor hired the law firm of Patterson and Denlinger and they were in the Second National Building. We were, our office was in the Akron Savings and Loan Building. They were just across the street from one another. So Mr. Patterson and Mr. Denlinger helped me a tremendous lot. I would have to take affidavits from the people that would be fired, how it came about that they were fired. That was almost full time work. There were many people that got fired when they first signed up for a labor union. Whether it be Goodyear, Goodrich, or Firestone, any one of them.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me more about what kind of work you did managing the office there.

LYNCH: Of course, we had to make weekly reports to send to Washington. The organizing of it was a tremendous job. You would get a small group together and tell them all the things a labor union could do for them. In Akron, at that time, the Central Labor Union had all of the skilled trades like plumbers, electricians, and bricklayers. They had such fine contracts and were so well guarded, that is what we tried to sell the rubber workers. They were sorely abused because if they decided to fire anybody, 1-2-3, they were out and the supervision that was directly over the men were abusive to the men. They really did take a lot of abuse. Of course, they didn't have any hospitalization, no pension, none of those vacations, wasn't even heard of.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, things went on.

LYNCH: The first contract was the Firestone contract and I have a copy of the very original [one], the one that I typed for them. There was a man from Columbus that was sent up here from the American Federation of Labor. His name was Allen Haywood. He negotiated that contract.

INTERVIEWER: That was in 1937?

LYNCH: I wish you could come down to the office, I could show you that contract.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of things happened before that.

LYNCH: You spoke about the disillusionment of Mr. Claherty. He was an organizer for the American Federation of Labor. Just before he came to Akron, he organized the fisheries in Alaska. By his own craft he was a blacksmith and . . .

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, what did he look like?

LYNCH: Here, I have a lovely picture of him in here.

INTERVIEWER: For the tape, tell me what he looked like. [laughter]

LYNCH: He was a big, tall, very stately man. He was grey, he dressed immaculate. He was an Irishman. He could always say the cutest Irish remarks, you know, in an Irish brogue. He didn't ever bite his tongue, believe me. He always spoke out, just like he felt. See, when the Rubber Workers gathered momentum and were getting members, just signing them up--we used to spend a whole day signing up members--then they felt he should not be the head of the Rubber Workers, that it should be a rubber worker. Which I think is probably true. But the American Federation of Labor wanted to leave Mr. Claherty in there just a little bit longer because they felt they were too much of an infant yet to be on their own. But they ganged together--Goodyear, Goodrich--the big four joined together at the Rubber Workers Convention in 1935, September 1935. I shall never forget that convention. I never worked so hard in my life. I took all the minutes and I would meet with committees and I had all that to type up and work with the committees. At that convention they won out, the Rubber Workers won out. They were going to have their president be a rubber worker, which was Sherman Dalrymple, the first time.

INTERVIEWER: That meant there was a break with the American Federation of Labor. So what happened to you?

LYNCH: The American Federation of Labor wanted to send me to Cleveland, but, you know, I was married and I didn't want to leave Akron. Then that office didn't even want to take me in the main office because I was an American Federation of Labor employee. They didn't want anything connected with the American Federation of Labor, the rubber workers didn't. Then I worked at Goodrich local. I was secretary then to a Mr. Calahan, George Bass. George Bass was a very demonstrative figure in organized labor.

INTERVIEWER: George Bass?

LYNCH: And a Mr. Calahan, Lewis Calahan.

INTERVIEWER: I am not familiar with either of those men. Can you tell me about them?

LYNCH: Oh really. George Bass was very outstanding in the Rubber Workers. He was president of Goodrich local for I can't tell you now how many years, but after that he went down to the International and he was a special representative for the Firestone chain and negotiated wonderful contracts for the Firestone local. Then I worked at Goodrich local until I was to have my first baby. I told them I had been married 8 years and we were so thrilled that we were going to have a baby. The office said, "Oh, that is wonderful, we are glad you are going to have a baby, but just keep on working. We need you." I worked up until two weeks to the day my baby was born; then I worked at home those two weeks, even. Then I had a little boy and I had a little girl and my little girl had cerebral palsy. That was real depressing and heartbreaking for all of us and everybody at the office that I worked for. Everybody felt so bad about it. After she was 2 years old then I went back to Firestone local, and I have been at Firestone local 34 years. I have seen a lot of presidents and worked for a lot of presidents.

INTERVIEWER: Well, tell me how you felt when the Rubber Workers split with the American Federation of Labor.

LYNCH: I was sad. I was so sad. I just couldn't believe it. Of course, they did offer me the job in Cleveland but I didn't want it. I didn't want to leave Akron. I couln't believe they didn't even want me in the office. But that's politics for you. Mr. Grillo was the Secretary-Treasurer and he did the hiring. He said he liked me but they had all agreed that they didn't want any one person that was connected with the American Federation of Labor. There were things like that that were hard to organized labor. That defeats their own purpose many, many times. Things they do. Suppressing women, and they really do supress women. I think they still do. I hate to say it.

INTERVIEWER: It's the truth.

LYNCH: It's the truth, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: Like I was saying, in the book Turbulent Years, there are only two references to women during the whole organizing of rubber workers. They tell about the waitress union.

LYNCH: Cooks and Waiters Union. They had a vicious strike, too.

INTERVIEWER: When did that occur?

LYNCH: I can't tell you the year now because I was always with the Rubber Workers. I remember their business agent came to me and asked me to help them with their contract here at home. When I was helping them with their contract was when they were on strike,

LYNCH: and I would hear them tell such terrible things, what they had to put up with. And those waitresses didn't make anything. It was really pitiful and then that Rose, what page was that?

INTERVIEWER: Rose Pesotta.

LYNCH: Yes, I remember when she came to town. She was a character and a half.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me how women helped out in getting rubber workers organized?

LYNCH: I don't think there was any such thing as women helping the Rubber Workers get organized. I really don't. That one woman, that Rose they sent here from Washington, she--this isn't very kind and she is dead, I should let her rest in peace--she didn't add anything to help women in organized labor. She was very lovely. She was the lovliest person, and I adored her, but she was very old-fashioned and she wore such old clothes and she was kind of a goody-good that didn't mix well with men. And that was detrimental. The women didn't care for her at all because she was very antiquated. She was a lovely, lovely person but so antiquated that the women didn't respect her or listen to her. She had good ideas and she could talk fluently and all that, but she didn't demand their attention by the way she dressed. She was just so old-fashioned.

INTERVIEWER: What did they have her do when she came here?

LYNCH: She called meetings for women to tell them to get in there and get elected for committeemen or stewards and whatever it may be. She tried to get them started, but they didn't. I guess just to look at her, they didn't fall in line. Of course, I point the finger at the women, too. They weren't aggressive and they didn't push in and they would always come to the men for help. Rather than represent themselves, push forward, they would always come to the men and ask them. They leaned on the men. I could count the committeemen on one hand that were women.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of jobs did women hold back in, say 1935, in the rubber plants?

LYNCH: Well there were quite a few women workers at Firestone in the Steel Products Building where they made milk cans and beer barrels and rims for tires. Oh, those women worked so fast, all on piecework and they would get their hands and fingers cut off. They really worked hard, oh mercy, they worked hard. And then, of course, women in the tire room were service girls to the tire builders. They would see the stock was there ready for the tire builder so he would not lose any time getting stock to build his tires and so forth. That was one thing; tire builders always respected the girls that were their

LYNCH: service girls. Because it helped them to earn more money, that was why.

INTERVIEWER: Were the stockers always women?

LYNCH: Yes, yes and then the girls also worked in the bead room. There used to be a lot more women working in rubber factories. Now there is none to speak of. The only women now are janitresses and the cafeteria help.

INTERVIEWER: What was the bead room?

LYNCH: You know the beads that go on the tires. They trimmed them and got them ready for the tire builders. Those were hard jobs, too, and fast jobs. But the women were very good at that because they were fast with their hands. Their hands were more nimble than the mens'. It was always bead girls, it would never be men, always bead girls.

INTERVIEWER: So the jobs women held were women's jobs, men didn't do them?

LYNCH: That's right. You never saw a woman tire builder, never.

INTERVIEWER: Were the jobs they had paying less than men's jobs?

LYNCH: Oh my, yes. Women never had a place in the Rubber Workers. Outside of the bead girls and the service girls their jobs were very menial, other than those two classifications. Again, I say, the women didn't help themselves any.

INTERVIEWER: Back when you first started getting involved with the union were those women young women, were they family women?

LYNCH: Yes, yes, family women, mothers.

INTERVIEWER: They were married?

LYNCH: Yes, the majority of them were married. The American Federation of Labor frowned on married women [working]. In fact, you will notice in this paper here where I had to use my maiden name and I was married. I was married June 1, and my name was Florence Snyder but I was really married. I started work June 15, and I had been married 15 days but I didn't dare use my married name.

INTERIVEWER: Why not?

LYNCH: The American Federation of Labor wouldn't have me be a Mrs.; I had to be a Miss. You can see right there. [Shows newspaper clipping].

INTERVIEWER: Was that because they thought that married women should be in the home?

LYNCH: They thought all jobs should be for men, not married women. They kept pushing that all the time. Married women took jobs away from men. That wasn't true. Because their jobs weren't men's jobs at that time. But they didn't have any married women. We've come a long way.

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to go back and tell me some of the dramatic events that took place in the 30's?

LYNCH: I think the Goodyear Strikewas about the most dramatic thing that happened. In fact, everything was so violent that John House used to send a man out to pick me up. I used to drive out but they got so frightened becuase they were turning cars over and everything and they were afraid to have me even come to work out there. They had a couple of men come and pick me up and take me home. I always tell John House he is the one that got me fat because there was this one lady that would bring the most gorgeous banana cream pies. They would be about that big and I was always the one that got the first piece of the banana cream pie. John House would always bring me back the gorgeous pie.

INTERVIEWER: The women brought the pie . . .

LYNCH: In for the strikers. You see, they would not let me go out and eat anything. I had to eat the same as the strikers had. During the Goodyear Strike everybody gave so much, and worked. They had wonderful food, and plenty; it was bountiful.

INTERVIEWER: During the Goodyear Strike, that was in 1936 you were working for Goodrich.

LYNCH: No, let's see, what year was the Goodyear Strike. The Firestone Strike was first.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe it is a different strike that you are talking about. The big one was in February, 1936.

LYNCH: The big strike of Firestone was in 1937. Well, I can't figure how I was working at Goodrich. It was because of my experience that they loaned me for the big strike. There was a lot of legal work and I was used to that work. Of course, there were girls that really worked out there, they were like clerks that took dues and wrote dues receipts, the bookkeeper and so forth. Having been a secretary, I had maybe the experience, I would say. That is why they loaned me for the Goodyear Strike.

INTERVIEWER: Were you working for the International, for the Rubber Workers main office?

LYNCH: Yes, but I got my money from Goodyear from the Goodyear local [during the strike]. Wherever there was a big strike, I always seemed to have to help out a little bit. There were, oh, tremendous times, Firestone has had the most severe strikes. Firestone has always sort of been the lead to go out on strike and their strikes have been real hard. The ones where you had to endure a lot. I can always remember when the sheriff sent out buses to pick up the pickets and take them down to jail. We would have to scurry around and get the lawyer down to jail. There was a lot of things happened.

Of course, there would be drinking on the picket line and fighting and things like that. We were talking the other day [how] our present vice-president now was down at Plant 2, Firestone, and there was a guy down there drinking terrible and fighting. He was a nice guy, you can't imagine him fighting like he did. He hit another fellow and broke his jaw. He just kept pounding away. This vice-president grabbed this fellow that was fighting so much and he was holding him until they got this fellow away to take him to he hospital to get his jaw set. He finally let him go, he said, "Will you behave now?" He turned right around and bit the vice-president clear down to the bone in his finger. He came up to the office and he was holding his hand up like this and the blood was just dripping on the floor. I said, "What in the world is the matter with you?" "Why," he said, "Clay bit me." I said, "Bit you, what is he, a cannibal?" To this day you can still see the scar where he bit into his finger. You know, drinking is always terrible. We laughed just looking at his finger.

There were awful times then. People would come in the office, the wives, and they would bring their kids. I think right out there by the telephone there is a clipping in the Cleveland Plain Dealer of our last strike [about] a Mr. Wolfe who called me and said, "Florence, I don't have any money and I don't have any groceries in the house." He said, "I haven't had anything to eat for three days." I said, "For heaven's sake, come down here." We had a kitchen. We had soup and sandwiches, donuts and a lot of things to eat. I said, "Come on down, we will feed you." He said, "I am not able to come down, I am so weak and I don't have any money for gas." "Oh," I said, "I will send somebody out." He said, "How about my family. My wife hasn't had anything to eat either." I will have to look out there and see if that clipping is still out there. I said, "Bring your children down." He had two teenage daughters. I said, "I will send somebody down to pick you up," which I did. I will never forget how much they ate until I go to my grave. Why, they ate and ate and ate. I couldn't believe it, why, he ate eight

LYNCH: bowls of bean soup, eight bowls--big bowls. Then we packed a whole lot of stuff for them to take home so they could eat for a couple of days. It was a story that was in the Cleveland Plain Dealer. Of course, the company at Firestone, most all the management know me. They read this article in the Cleveland Plain Dealer and the Industrial Relations Manager said, "Well, Florence, I am glad you are in there doing your good deed." He said, "That was terrible." That man died just a couple of weeks ago with cancer of the lung. It was kind of sad. You couldn't think that in these later years that could happen. I remember so many cases way back in the 30's and 40's but not this [day and age]. It was this very last strike. That was a four and one half month strike, that was pretty severe. All day long. I could show you, down at the office I have a stack like that of cases in this last strike of people losing their homes, televisions, their cars and so forth. I would spend most of my time calling up the gas company or the electric company and asking them not to turn off the gas and their lights. You know, they had babies, small children. I asked them to call banks and ask them to put a moratorium on their loan and just try to help those ways. That seemed to be the most prevalent thing during the strike is the sorrow of those people, what they endured. I am going out by the telephone to see if that's still there. [Tape off].

INTERVIEWER: What was his hame, Harvey Firestone I?

LYNCH: And then Harvey Firestone II had a son Harvey Firestone III who had cerebral palsy. I sent my son to a private school, Our Lady of the Elms, and they sent their children all to this private school. They gave a spring program and I can't remember now about it, but my little boy was in a carriage that the Firestone Company had furnished for the play, a beautiful old fashioned surrey and their little girl rode in it. I had my Mike give the Firestone girl a little corsage to make it look cute. They came and thanked me for the flowers. He said, "Florence, you work so hard for cerebral palsy. Do you think it is worth it? Look what I have done for my son." Which they did, they built a special cottage all with ramps because he was in a wheelchair and he still had bad, bad cerebral palsy. A child--a man--at that time he was a man. They even brought a therapist over from Hungary to give him therapy. It probably helped him a little bit but not enough to suit them. He always felt I worked so hard. What was the ultimate end, they still are not self-sufficient. I said, "We are not to judge whether they are going to be self-sufficient or not." A lot of the little ones have become self-sufficient by physical therapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy. Just like they said my daughter would never learn to walk. We took her all over: to Boston, we took her to Pompono Beach, to Chicago, and everyone said she would never walk. All the doctors here in Akron. But she did

LYNCH: walk with constant therapy. Maybe she doesn't walk as delicately as most girls, but she walks. I am grateful for that.

INTERVIEWER: For the purposes of the tape and for history let's say what you told me, that you wrote the legislation that was the first state aid for handicapped children.

LYNCH: I have a copy of the bill that I wrote -- aid for handicapped children--I had written clearly, "physically and mentally." But at that time I wasn't as familiar with legislation as I am now and I didn't know that you had to ask the committee for allocation of money. You have to get approval of appropriations from them. I didn't know that at that time so they just gave a lump sum of $1,200 which we spent on a survey of how many children were affected with cerebral palsy. It ended up that on the bill they took out this word and they took out that word, this sentence and that sentence, and it ended up that the mentally retarded got all the money.

INTERVIEWER: When was this?

LYNCH: The bill was [introduced in] 1949.

INTERVIEWER: And when did you organize the group for cerebral palsy?

LYNCH: I was the founder of Cerebral Palsy here in Akron in 1948. August 16, 1948 I called the first meeting here in that living room. I put a notice in the paper that all parents interested that had cerebral palsy [children] to come to the meeting and used the picture of my own little girl. Helen Waterhouse [was] one of the feature writers of the Beacon Journal. I had asked everybody for help, help, help; they said, "No, no, no." Even the paper said they didn't think they could use any pictures because they didn't want to show that to the public. I said, "How do you know when you haven't seen her?" Then they sent out Helen Waterhouse the writer and she thought she was just a doll. I always dressed her just elegantly. That is the only thing she had so I really do go all out to make her look as nice as she can. She can't talk, but at least she can smile and look pretty with pretty clothes. Fine feathers make fine birds and she used the picture. That was the beginning of my fortune. That was a real fortune. Not that it helped her so much, but it helped a lot of other children and it still is today.

INTERVIEWER: You served on the national committee for Cerebral Palsy Association.

LYNCH: And the state.

INTERVIEWER: And you got a school started. This was at the same time you were working your regular job. So you are quite an organizer both of labor and other things.

LYNCH: I don't know so much about labor. I kind of just worked for them. But I certainly worked hard for the invalid children. I worked mighty hard for organized labor, too. I have worked all day, all night many, many times. I can remember when Firestone had 16,000 members and we had a contract [dispute]. The company wanted to get them back to work as soon as they could. [But] they wouldn't make the copies of the contract and we didn't want to have a meeting unless the men had copies of what the company was going to give us in their hands, and could read it and see for themselves. They asked me, "Florence, do you think you could get that out by...." I don't know what the date was they were going to have the meeting. I said, "If it has to be out, it has to be out." I worked all day, all night, and all day, but I did get it out. Of course, there was 16,000 members.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a crank machine?

LYNCH: A crank mimeograph; cut the stencils and stand there and crank them out. I can remember they still had the strike kitchen open and they would bring up sandwiches to keep me going and keep me awake. I have worked hard for organized labor, believe me I have. Long days, long nights.

INTERVIEWER: You were telling me about the women's auxiliary.

LYNCH: The women's auxiliary, when the Rubber Workers first started was very, very active in PAC*and union label committee.

INTERVIEWER: How did they organize the women's auxiliary? How did they get started?

LYNCH: Well, they just called meetings of the wives of the rubber workers. They asked, "Florence, can you fix a lunch or something--cookies, cakes, donuts or something." I said, "Yes," we would serve them something. I would have them on my hands too. They would have a speaker come here from maybe Washington or someplace. Sometimes they would bring them from clear out west. Those women were really activated [so] that other women respected them. They had the umph, you know, the push.

INTERVIEWER: These were also women in auxiliaries rather than rubber workers?

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*Political Action Committee of AFL

LYNCH: Yes, right. The Rubber Workers would finance bringing someone here, their transportation and so forth. They would tell them,"You can help your husband by buying union label dresses and underwear and socks and hats and everything." The garment workers from New York City would send their people here an awful lot and ask them to be sure and buy union label merchandise and union label hats and so forth. Then on the PAC the women would ask women to be sure and register and see that other people were registered. They would pass out literature and were very active. And now Firestone local does not have five members in their women's auxiliary. It has just gone down, down. I can't really put my finger on why it lost out so badly. I think poor leadership and, I don't know. It just went down, down. The women would feud with one another. Women are their own enemies. Many, many times that is true.

INTERVIEWER: There was a lot of work for them to do back in those earlier years.

LYNCH: Yes, and I think the work probably is not there anymore for them.

INTERVIEWER: Was it the Women's Auxiliary that organized the strike kitchen?

LYNCH: No, the men did most of their kitchens. You would be surprised how many men were cooks and would make the soups. The men did most of it. I would help work with them. Not that I would work in the kitchen, but to get the stuff in the kitchen, the supplies. The women didn't. A lot of the women that were members of the Rubber Workers, they all worked very vigorously. There would be members in the cafeteria. Women never played a very active part in labor itself. Now there is a rubber factory up in Ravenna who employ almost all women. She's a president and she is really active. I was the organizer of the first office workers' union here in town and it was quite a big organization when we first started out. I got all the courthouse employees and then it receded. It kind of went backwards then. I didn't have time to stick with it. I was president for quite a few years, then I got busy with other things. I was not active in it.

INTERVIEWER: Were you a member of the Office Workers Union?

LYNCH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: As a secretary of the Rubber Workers, you weren't a member of the Rubber Workers?

LYNCH: Never of the Rubber Workers. But I was secretary to Mr. Claherty. That is when I started the Office Workers Union. That far back.

LYNCH INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: 1933.

LYNCH: 1934. We had our office open two years before they became the [United Rubber Workers].

INTERVIEWER: That was the American Federation of Labor? [The Office Workers' local].

LYNCH: Yes, here in my biography in brief that was in the Beacon Journal. Is that [tape recorder] off now?

INTERVIEWER: No, it is still on.

LYNCH: I don't know what else to say right now. The girls at the international still belong to that local Office Workers' Union. Our girls in the office wanted to pull out and I pulled out with them. I didn't want to be dissenting when they all wanted to get out. They got a pension and we didn't have one and the girls got aggravated, that is why they wanted to pull out. I went along with our girls. Now we belong to the Teamsters. I am not active or anything in it.

INTERVIEWER: What was the local number?

LYNCH: I can't remember. It has been so many years ago. Because we disaffiliated [in] '68, I believe.

INTERVIEWER: When you started it in 1934 was it the EIU [OPEIU]* at that time?

LYNCH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Were you a member of it at the time when you lost your job with the American Federation of Labor?

LYNCH: Yes, but I didn't pursue it through them because I wasn't really interested. I probably could have made them take me [back] but I don't think that would be very pleasant working.

INTERVIEWER: Would you like to tell me about your background before you got involved [working for] William Green?

LYNCH: Well, I was going to Akron University and also was working at the Hotel Portage as a Public Stenographer.

INTERVIEWER: You were a student at the time you met him.

LYNCH: Yes, I was still going to Akron U. But then I quit when I got the permanent job because it was too much for me.

INTERVIEWER: What were you studying?

*Office and Professional Employees International Union

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LYNCH: School teacher, I was going to be. I had finished actual business college and then that's when I worked at the Hotel Portage as the Public Stenographer. I liked that job very much because every day you would meet somebody with a different occupation. That was really interesting. I really made very good money with the tips and everything as a public stenographer.

INTERVIEWER: I have never heard of that before, a public stenographer.

LYNCH: Haven't you?

INTERVIEWER: Was that something that was common?

LYNCH: In all big hotels there was a public stenographer for the salesmen. All big hotels. That was before your time. We made good money. They paid well. I must have another scrapbook that has most of that. I am kind of disorganized you know, since the death of my husband. My sister came in and reorganized everything and I don't know where anything is. Here is a meeting of Local 7 in our union hall. Here is my little boy and my husband. I think that was installation of the auxiliary officers.

INTERVIEWER: There appear to be quite a lot of women in the audience.

LYNCH: Yes, that was the auxiliary installation.

INTERVIEWER: There is a piano on the stage and candles on the tables. It was quite an occasion.

LYNCH: How about that. That's the old hall. I look down that line of people and my goodness, there are so many dead. Yes, that is what that was. Well, that is about all I know to tell you. [Tape off. Lynch explains why she didn't pursue a career in health care]. I just walked out of there and never wanted to go back. I didn't like it. My sister wanted me to be a nurse and she kept prevailing on me and prevailing on me and then I stayed in there a couple of months and that was it.

INTERVIEWER: This article is quite graphic. It says there was an incident where the doctor lifted a sheet.

LYNCH: I don't know, I forgot that. Do you want that running?

INTERVIEWER: In this article they call you the second brain to a host of labor leaders. Is that the way you felt?

LYNCH: No, mercy no! I just liked to help all I could.

INTERVIEWER: You were the president of the Akron Business and Professional Women's Club. What was that organization?

LYNCH: That was an international for all business and professional women. I was president for two terms.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a union?

LYNCH: No, it's a social organization just for business women. I was chosen Woman of the Year. I will show you the proclamation of it. I was also chosen as the Outstanding Businesswoman of the Year. [Tape Off].

The first thing when they [new union officers] come into office, you have to orient them into their duties they are supposed to perform. They all have been rubber workers.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you taught someone how to write a grievance?

LYNCH: Yes, I started right in with Mr. Dalrymple and worked right up through all of them. Believe me I have. I remember when he made his first speech and he got up. He was powerful and dynamic and everything. But he opened up by saying, "Ladies and gentlemens." After he was through I went to him and said, "If you ever as long as you live say 'gentlemens' again, I will kick you in the shins! That is terrible." "What's wrong with it, Florence?" I said, "You never say, 'gentlemens'," I said, "Just say gentlemen, men is many men." He didn't get it right away. I said, "Don't ever say 'gentlemens'." I don't think he ever said that again. A lot of times when he would be speaking, when he started, "Ladies and gentlemen," he would look right at me as if he were making fun of me. He was a wonderful person. My sister was bookkeeper at Goodrich and she just adored him. He was from Goodrich local.

INTERVIEWER: He was from West Virginia.

LYNCH: Yes, he had that West Virginia brogue, the colloquialisms at least. He didn't deny it, either. He was very humble. You know, it was a new experience for him. Then Mr. Buckmaster was the president of the international. He was from the Firestone local.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about him.

LYNCH: He was just the reverse of most union leaders. He was very quiet and reserved. He was a schoolteacher.

INTERVIEWER: How did he end up in the Rubber Workers?

LYNCH: He would make more money being a rubber worker than a schoolteacher. He was a very good international president. Then when they threw him out, the Firestone local opened up an office to get him back into office. Those were long hours for me. I worked as secretary to the president of the Firestone local plus working for this Retain Buckmaster Committee. They sent a man here from Washington, a young, young boy right out of college to do the publicity. He was young and he needed a little experience and I tried to help him all I could. He would work 18 hours trying to get everything done.

LYNCH: We sent so much literature out all over the United States to expose the real truth of the story.

INTERVIEWER: What happened?

LYNCH: Oh, it was politics, just politics. The president of Pottstown local, which was a Firestone local too, was eager beaver to be top dog and he just kept finding things and finding things and you can build them up and exaggerate. It looked like a big mountain but it was really a molehill. They were nothing. In the end Mr. Buckmaster was retained.

INTERVIEWER: It was the Firestone local here in town that opened the office?

LYNCH: Yes, we took one special room and I did the stenographic work to get Mr. Buckmaster back into office. We worked real hard.

INTERVIEWER: [When was that?]

LYNCH: I am trying to think. I can't tell the year, whether it was 1946 or 1948; it was around in there. Politics was detrimental to the Rubber Workers. Even today it is. People in office don't always get fair shakes. Things seem to gang up on them. It grows and gets bigger and bigger. It isn't respectable that they get things piled up so much against them. It's really too bad. Politics is bad. But you have it in everything. It is detrimental to themselves; they are the losers.

INTERVIEWER: You have seen it all from the inside.

LYNCH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: If you had it to do all over again what would you do?

LYNCH: I think I would be right in there fighting with them. I have enjoyed it. I've lived with all of them in their happy hours, their sad hours, their sorrows, their pleasantries. It is just a part of me now.

INTERVIEWER: Did you yourself ever want to run for an office?

LYNCH: No, I liked the role where I was. Of course, I couldn't have anyway because I was never a rubber worker. But I wouldn't even want to be an officer.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

LYNCH: I don't think the officers get the fair shakes they should. I

LYNCH: really don't think it would be worth your time. I really don't because I have seen them give their all and then in return get kicked out just like nothing. No, I would never want to be an officer. I've liked my role, always in the background. You still know everything that is going on [laughs] but you are not in the thick of it. Of course, it is very difficult sometimes. When elections come and this side is rooting for this man and this side is rooting for the other way. If you are seen talking with this side then you are no good, and if you are talking with this side you are no good. It is difficult because you are the middle man. I have been able to go through all the elections and still be retained. I think I was pretty lucky. That was all luck.

INTERVIEWER: Did that happen to the office staff?

LYNCH: Oh, lots of times. I was very, very fortunate that I went through all of them. In fact, two years ago, I became 65. The president that was in wasn't too fond of me. He had the feeling I was with the last regime. He was the one that couldn't conceive of a person being for the man that was in there. That's who I had to be for. I have to be for the president that is active. After all, what else is there? You are for the man that you work for. It can be no other way. Right or wrong, you have to be for the man that is in there. When I became 65, he called me here at home and said, "Florence, did you apply for Social Security?" I said, "No." The officers before this man went in, at their last board meeting, had passed at the board that I could be retained even though everybody has to stop when they are 65. They waived that for me because they had never taken out a pension for me unitl I was 58 years old. Well, my pension was so small, $54 a month. And my husband had cancer. I was having a lot of expenses. He was self-employed. He didn't have any pension. He was on Social Security and I have my cerebral palsy daughter which costs a tremendous amount of money. I didn't want to quit, I wanted to work because I was physically able. So that board, they all thought so much of me, they waived the 65 [rule] and said as long as I was physically able that I would be able to hold a job there. He wouldn't recognize the board's action. Imagine, when I was the age of 65--he didn't know it until a week after--he asked me if I had applied for my Social Security! I said, "No." I didn't because of this memorandum that we had in our contract of the office workers. Because I am a member of the Teamsters. I said, "No, because I am not interested in retiring In fact, I really have to work because of what I have at home." He said, "Well, your last day is Friday." This was on Sunday and the following Friday would be my last day. I said, "Well, I'll see about that." So on that Friday was my last day [and I didn't

LYNCH: work] until the next business meeting to get me back. I said that was the most gratifying thing, that they really thought that much of me. People don't generally turn out at business meetings unless it's something drastic. They turned out and they really made him eat crow. I started to work Monday. That Monday he had to go into contract negotiations in Cleveland. He wrote me a note and said he hoped I wouldn't hold anything against him and that he hoped we could work together and I would forget and let bygones be bygones. I have the note in my purse yet that he wrote. I have always had a sad feeling about that. In fact, he drove up from the southern part of Ohio just to say hello and ask how I was and so forth. That is still in my craw.

INTERVIEWER: You just don't forget things like that.

LYNCH: No, never. But I know I have many, many friends at Firestone. I had a cancer operation four years ago. They have taken up collections at Firestone for years for things, and the collection they took up for me was the biggest that was ever taken up. They gave me $3,000, the supervision and everybody. When my husband died in March they did the same thing. Everybody gave, management came down in a body to the funeral and came the night before the funeral. The tire room sent my husband a big tire of flowers and the undertaker said that never in his life had he ever seen such a gorgeous flower piece. It stood so high and was so big. So I know I have a lot of friends there. A lot of friends. My husband was wonderful, a wonderful person. He was very understanding. Like when I worked all night and I would call and tell him I was working, he would say not to think about anything here, just to think about what you are doing there. He would have appreciated to see how wonderful everything was at his burial and funeral. People evidently appreciated that I had worked and was considerate. So I guess it all pays.

INTERVIEWER: Your husband sounds as if he was a very liberated husband.

LYNCH: Yes, he was; he really, really was. We would have been married 45 years in June and he died in March. He lived everything through organized labor that I did. He lived it with me, everything.

INTERVIEWER: Did he ever serve on the picket line?

LYNCH: No, but he would always visit them. He never would serve on the picket line. He would always visit them and take our kids in the car and stop at the different posts and visit. My mother-in-law lived with us for 34 years and she died when she was 103. She lived my life, too. She knew everybody and if there was any function

LYNCH going on I would always take her, my husband and the kids. She would visit the picket lines just like everybody else. She never missed one night. Of course, my kids would like it. They would give my son sandwiches and donuts and he enjoyed when the pickets were out there. They thought it was wonderful when the pickets were out there. They thought it was wonderful to see the tents and the fireplaces and all. It would really be cold. Our contract expires in April and you know it is always still cold then. You have to have big drums with fires. My family lived it right with me. They would have to be tolerant because I really was gone a lot of times and long hours. I raised my boy in the office almost as much as I did at home. I always tell the story about when Mr. Watson was president in 1944, my boy was pretty little. That was at the time [of] that picture I showed you where we were sitting at that table. I brought them down to the office then--we worked on Saturdays--and he would be out of school and would come down to the office and be with me all day. Mr Watson would say, "Mike, would you like to come into the plant with me?" I panicked, I didn't want him to go into the plant; he would get killed, all that big machinery would be so hot in there in some places. I said, "Oh, I don't think he ought to go, Mr. Watson. He doesn't bother me." He said, "No, he doesn't want to stay here. He wants to go with me." I said, "You watch him awful close." He said, "I raised a family, I know how to take care of kids. You don't need to tell me." He came back and the sweat and carbon would be flying around in the air. He would be all full of that carbon, he would have streaks down his face. Oh, he would be just filthy when he came back, he loved it. Oh, he loved going in that plant. I raised him right in there, I'll tell you.

INTERVIEWER: Did any of your friends think that was not the right thing for a mother to do?

LYNCH: No, they all kind of liked him. He was their boy. No, I never had any trouble that way. He was very personable even though he was down at the office. He was a marvelous student and he would read his books and he never bothered much. Everybody always liked him. And my grandchildren I did the same. Believe me I have raised two families. I have a granddaughter 18 and a grandson 20. I've helped to raise them in that office, too. Everybody knew them and liked them. So I am working two years over my time. [Tape off].

INTERVIEWER: You said you used to work for Patino?

LYNCH: At the Akron Central Labor Union when Mr. Patino was the president. Even the barbers union, the plumbers, and the electricians, the cement and hod carriers [belonged].

INTERVIEWER: When they set up that office in 1933, was that when the Central Labor Union was first started?

LYNCH: No, they had a building up on Locust Street. They had built the building and all the different crafts were in there. When the Rubber Workers came to town the Central Labor Union tried to help the Rubber Workers get organized. Years after that, the craft left the craft unions and moved and became Rubber Workers, and carried Rubber Workers cards. Really they helped them get started and they left them. That was the best way. When it became CIO, they believed if you worked like for Firestone Company, crafts and production workers should be in one union which I think is the best way.

INTERVIEWER: When they broke [with the AFL] you weren't so sure about this.

LYNCH: No, I really wasn't then, because I felt kind of close to the crafts because I had worked with them and they were really up in arms in losing that membership.

INTERVIEWER: Was Frank Patino against the break too?

LYNCH: Well, kind of, yes he was. That was his loss. Of course, he still had carpenters. Now, the Retail Clerks stayed in Central Labor Union a long time and the barbers union and the tinners, they stayed in a long time. See, now the organization that sort of takes that place now is the Akron Labor Council which embraces all the different crafts, the Teamsters and all.

INTERVIEWER: Did they merge after the AFL-CIO merger?

LYNCH: I don't understand . . .

INTERVIEWER: Well, after the Rubber Workers got started and the CIO got started did they start a CIO Labor Council?

LYNCH: The Akron Labor Council.

INTERVIEWER: Which was different from the Central Labor Union. Then those two came together, they merged.

LYNCH: Yes. The crafts and everything is now in the Akron Labor Council. It doesn't mean the crafts that are in the Rubber Workers, [but the independently organized ones] like the Carpenters. I am going to buy that book, I think it would be interesting to read.

INTERVIEWER: I wanted to ask you about a guy by the name of Eigenmacht.

LYNCH: Eigenmacht, I've got to tell you about Alex! I remember when he was so very poor. He owned the Exchange Printing Company and he was very, very labor minded. He was a Russian Jew and he did more

LYNCH: to help get the rubber workers organized, I think, than anybody I could say. He printed rally sheets and announcements of meetings and so forth. I can remember that the very men that worked for him didn't have socks on their feet; they just had shoes. He couldn't pay them because none of the unions had enough money to pay him. He really gave and gave and gave. Then when the Rubber Workers started--when they got their momentum built up and got a big membership--they still went to him and he became quite well off then. But I can remember when he didn't have anything.

INTERVIEWER: He was from the Typographical Union.

LYNCH: That's right. He is still living. He was a wonderful, wonderful guy. He is really old. His wife is dead. I can remember he had a little girl that he used to adore. They had her when they were quite old and he used to bring her along and she had long gorgeous curls. When he got into the money she blossomed out to be a beautiful young lady.

INTERVIEWER: He lived in Akron?

LYNCH: Yes, Alex Eigenmacht.

INTERVIEWER: Well, he stayed with the American Federation of Labor in the Typographical Union. What happened when the break occurred?

LYNCH: He always stayed with the Typographical Union. He was devoted to them. But he knew that the rubber workers should be organized into their own union and that the crafts that worked in the plant should be in with the production workers. He could foresee that. He was very unusual that way, that he could see that. I can remember when the big Goodyear strike was on. He helped so much. He was well off then but he still helped an awful lot. He always helped all the unions.

INTERVIEWER: And it was union business that helped him.

LYNCH: That's right. That's what made him wealthy. That union bug Number 4 has always been the Exchange Printing. Martin Beyerman, who now bought that from Alex, I can remember when he was a young boy carrying around bundles of paper and working under Alex. Now he is an old man. Alex was a wonderful person.

INTERVIEWER: I am surprised to hear he is still living.

LYNCH: He had a paper called the Akron Labor News. People couldn't afford to buy it. He would see that it was mailed to them whether they took out a subscription or not. He was a wonderful union minded person.

INTERVIEWER: I guess the story goes that he gave the people the idea for the sit-down strike.

LYNCH: Oh really, I never knew that.

INTERVIEWER: In Austria he said they had done that once in a print shop.

LYNCH: Oh really, that's where they got the idea!

INTERVIEWER: I don't know if that is true or not.

LYNCH: I wouldn't be surprised. He was always hanging around our office and he was always giving you ideas.

INTERVIEWER: How old was he at the time?

LYNCH: He was a young man then. I can remember when his little girl was born.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know Wilmer Tate?

LYNCH: Wilmer Tate was in our office and I adored him. He was from the Machinists Local and the American Federation of Labor took him and put him in our office. He was the first one to come into our office and we were open a couple of months before they delegated him to our office. The next one to come to our office was Bob Roberts who was an organizer. He was a Goodrich worker. He was a member of Goodrich Local. He had the gift of gab for organizing. Then the next man that came to our office was Bob Wilson and he was an electrician.

INTERVIEWER: Were these people on staff?

LYNCH: They were on our staff. I worked for all of them because they were in our office.

INTERVIEWER: They were working as organizers?

LYNCH: As organizers. That's right. They would go like out to Seberling, Goodyear and different places. That was before we had the checkoff system.

INTERVIEWER: They had to go out and collect the dues?

LYNCH: They didn't collect dues. They had girls in the office that collected dues. They would hold meetings all the time to get everybody to join and they would negotiate. If they fired two or three people from Goodyear, they would go out and try to talk the company into taking them back. Wilmer Tate was a wonderful organizer and so was Bob Roberts. I think Mr. Wilson

LYNCH: wasn't quite as good as the other two, but he did his share. Wilmer Tate was dynamic. I'll never forget one time he went down to Philadelphia to organize [brick workers]. They made bricks. I can't think of the exact name of the union. They had kilns. They made bricks in those kilns. The telephone rang and I answered it and he said, "What kind of a bird is it that doesn't fly?" I said, "I don't know." I said, "What's the matter with you, are you drinking or something?" He said, "No, I am asking you, Florence, what kind of bird is it that don't fly?" I said, "I don't know what kind of a bird doesn't fly." He said, "Well, it's me. I am a jailbird. I'm in jail." I said, "Are you crazy, are you drinking again?" He said, "How can I drink when I'm in jail?" I said, "I don't know if you are in jail." He said, "Well I am. Do you think you can get me some bond money down here and get me out of this hellhole?" I said, "Yeah, I don't know what to do but I'll start doing it." I said, "I don't know where to start. I don't have any money myself." I only had about $10 in my pocketbook. I said, "How much do you need?" "I need $100." "Okay, I'll get somebody to drive you down $100."

INTERVIEWER: What had happened?

LYNCH: That's when we had the attorneys, Denlinger and Patterson. I called Mr. Patterson, G.L. Patterson. I said, "Say Mr. Patterson, Pa Tate--" We always called him Pa Tate because if I ever had a cold or something he would bring in some kind of salve or something. He was always kind of taking care of us. I said, "Pa Tate is in jail." "For what?" I said, "I don't know. They were down there organizing and they threw him in jail." He said, "Well, he must have done something or other to get thrown in jail." I said, "I don't know, but we have to get $100 down." He said, "Okay, do you have anybody over there that can drive $100 down there?" I said, "Yeah, I'll find somebody." Pretty soon Bob Roberts came tearing into the office. He always walked so fast and he was such a busybody. I said, "I got a job for you." He said, "Never mind a job for me, I'm busy." "Well, you are going to get unbusy because you are going down to New Philadelphia." "What's down there? Any women?" I said, "Don't bother me with that women business." He was real young and real handsome. I said, "We have got to get $100 down to Pa Tate. He's in jail." He said, "Well, I will get right down there." He did go down with the $100 bail. They threw him right in jail just [for] organizing. That was something else. A lot of those guys have been in jail. They beat up on Mr. Dalrymple. It was unmerciful in Georgia one time. He was in the hospital a couple of weeks.

INTERVIEWER: He had a concussion. That's in this book, too.

LYNCH: Oh, is it. So was Dalrymple and John House. John House was beat up too.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get swung at?

LYNCH: Yes, I did. The president was then Mr. Hunter and we were in this old building and Plant 2 went down on a sit-down and this young fellow called in and asked that Mr. Hunter come down--it was on the 4th shift. We were on 6 hours then. It was 12 to 6, 12 midnight until 6 in the morning--and asked that he come down. Mr. Hunter didn't go down. So the next morning I was opening up the office. I was the first one in and pretty soon this young kid came in. He said, "Floyd been in yet?" I said, "No, I am expecting him any minute." When Mr. Hunter came in he said, "Good morning Florence." They started fighting right at my desk and all at once this young guy took a pop at Mr. Hunter and hit him right here. I stepped in front of Mr. Hunter to protect him because he was an older man and this young guy was just whipping him so. He didn't mean to hit me, but he did hit me, right here. Oh kid, I was black and blue and down my arm, clear down in my chest and under my arm, my neck here, and the veins were all yellow. That was the side I had cancer on. We always wondered if that was a reason.

INTERVIEWER: What were they fighting about?

LYNCH: He called and asked for help to come down, because they were on a sit-down and the president didn't come down. He was mad and started calling him everything. He said he had promised to come down and didn't come down. They got in a real hassle. That was the only time I got hit.

INTERVIEWER: Was it because they had some reservations about the sit-down as a way of organizing?

LYNCH: No, they were all organized then. This was to get something they wanted--whatever it was, I don't remember what they wanted. They didn't get what they wanted so they sat down and then they got nervous and fussy after they were down and wondered if they were going to come out of it alright. A lot of times they would penalize the men, maybe penalize them for 30 days--suspend them. They got nervous and that's why he came up and started this argument with Mr. Hunter. He should have come in and he should have helped them and this and that. That is how he got so wrought up. It was terrible for him to be hitting that old man.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when the first big sit-down took place in 1936 at Goodyear?

LYNCH: That wasn't a sit-down, that was a real strike I tell you. It was so cold and the company just would not meet after they went out. They just would not meet. People got panicky because they

LYNCH: would not have a meeting. You know, it was pretty rough times anyway. One man drowned down on Kelly Avenue. There was a creek there. He was on supervision and had stayed in the plant. Supervision stayed in the plant.

INTERVIEWER: [You were saying that] the Goodyear Flying Squadron was working in the plant.

LYNCH: They produced quite a bit of production. Then some of them got tired of staying in there and this man tried to get out through the back entrance. There was a big pipe, I don't know whether it was a sewer pipe, but a great big pipe. It was in the winter and it was slippery and he tried to cross that pipe to get out and he went down in the water and drowned. That was one of the calamities of the Goodyear Strike. The way that strike ended was the sheriff came out there with all his police and sheriff [deputies] and they were going to march. The union was out there, too. It was quite a mess. It was really rough those days.

INTERVIEWER: But the good thing about organizing in the rubber industry, there wasn't much violence. No one was killed.

LYNCH: No, not in organizing. I think they had that thoroughly organized properly because they would try to get in with a friend and start talking with them, maybe in a store or a saloon or something like that. They would get him interested and tell him, like the miners, what they had, and the typographical unions. The motion pictures operators were very well organized and they used them a lot. Then they would ask him to get a couple of friends and maybe they would meet in somebody's house in the basement or something like that. It really had to be on a hush-hush basis at the beginning. Maybe just six men and those six men would get six more. It just multiplied and multiplied. After it had gathered some momentum they would come in flocks. We could hardly handle signing them up. I can remember this when I worked down at Firestone Local, when I was working with the American Federation of Labor and I had gone down there to sign up Firestone members, they were upstairs in a rickety old building. It was just a little bit above the Firestone bank. There was an old potbellied stove. You had to put coal and wood in it. We had to feed it to keep that room warm. You would get your hands dirty and there was no water in there. So I went out one morning and bought a basin. There was water there and we washed our hands in that basin. I took a couple of towels. We kept signing people up. But we had to keep that stove going to keep it heated. Lord have mercy, those were really back in primitive times. We really signed them up. They would line up and wait in the cold to sign up to be a member. We would work them fast to hurry them up and get them through so we wouldn't lose any. Pa Tate, Bob and I would be right down

LYNCH: there. I would tell Pa Tate, "You write so slow." He wrote a beautiful hand but he was so slow. I said, "How come you are so slow? Step it up a little bit." He said, "You've got to have it so you can read it." I said, "I'll read it, just get those names down." We had a lot of fun working together. Pa Tate was a wonderful guy and he was union all the way.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to him when the Rubber Workers broke with the AFL?

LYNCH: He just kind of retired, then. Of course, they wouldn't use him. He was a machinist by trade. That left him without a job.

INTERVIEWER: Did he go back to being a machinist?

LYNCH: No, he was pretty old. He just stayed at home. He didn't live too long after that, either. Then Bob Roberts was a rubber worker so they retained him because he was fabulous. He would give speeches that would just render everybody's feelings right out and they would become a member. Then they sent him to California. He was the district director of that district out in California and the western states. He died. Everybody in that office is dead except me, that started out.

INTERVIEWER: And you were a sweet young thing.

LYNCH: [Laughs] Then, yes I was young.

INTERVIEWER: Speaking of speeches, were you there when John L. Lewis came to the armory and gave that rousing speech?

LYNCH: I certainly was. I took his speech and that was the day before Thanksgiving and the Beacon Journal--I was really good friends with the Beacon Journal because the labor editor did a lot of good publicity for us.

INTERVIEWER: What was his name?

LYNCH: Jim Jackson and a fellow by the name of Hinkle, I can't tell you his first name. Jim Jackson is still living. They told us they would give us $25 for the speech if I would get it typed up. We didn't have any recorders or anything like that, so I took it manually. I was so excited about that. I stayed up all night and typed that speech so it could be at the paper the next morning. I certainly do remember his speech. I certainly do.

INTERVIEWER: How did it strike you?

LYNCH: Oh wonderful! You got so excited and you thought you just couldn't do enough to help get them organized. He told how people came here from West Virginia and Georgia and all those

LYNCH: southern states, and started out with nothing. Then the companies took advantage of them and took advantage of their ignorance. He told how those people were used to being on a farm being on a plow and they were now pulling the plow in this hard production they were expected to do--not expected to do, but had to do--they really had to keep up on production. He really aroused everybody. That armory was packed from stem to stern. It really was. It was so blue with smoke you couldn't even see 20 rows by the middle of the speech. It was really packed. I remember another rally that we had in the fall. It was an open meeting in Perkins Park. We got a permit from the mayor to hold a rally in the park, and Pa Tate worked on his speech and I worked with him. He gave a marvelous speech and everybody there was ready to sign up the next morning.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever ghostwrite speeches for him?

LYNCH: Oh, I do all the time. Even now. And releases for the paper.

INTERVIEWER: There was another reporter, Ruth McKinney. Did you know her? She wrote the book Industrial Valley about organizing here.

LYNCH: Oh really, is it a good book?

INTERVIEWER: Well, you should really read it and you can see whether she was accurate in what she wrote.

LYNCH: Isn't it sad when you think Akron was the rubber center of the world and all these people that were employed, and now the shape it is in. To me I could just grieve over it. It's so sad.

INTERVIEWER: With Mohawk closing last week.

LYNCH: Of course, it was closer when the Firestone Plant 2 closed and the mechanical building. I just couldn't believe that. I know Mr. Firestone would turn over in his grave if he could see that Plant 2 close. He was so proud of his plant. He was proud of his employees. He was such an average Joe. He was so refined and everything. Every week he would go through that plant, "Hi, Bill! Hi Joe, everything okay? So good!" When it went into corporation, big corporate, it was so different. It was so different. Mr. Firestone had a kind word for everyone, for every employee. It is unbelievable. Now you go past that Plant 2 and it makes you sick at heart, and that beautiful Mechanical Building. Oh, it is sad.

INTERVIEWER: Someone gave me a button, "Labor Loves Akron." Do you think labor is the cause of this?

LYNCH: Between you and me.... Our plant in Albany, Georgia doesn't

LYNCH: pay [what the Akron Firestone plant does]. The tire builder doesn't make as much as our sweepers do here.

INTERVIEWER: It's not organized?

LYNCH: It's a right-to-work state, too. I had a colored man come up [to the office] yesterday. He came home for Thanksgiving--his family are all here. He got laid off. He is working down in Albany, Georgia. He just hates it down there, just hates it. He says you have 10 minutes for personal fatigue--as they call it--in the morning, and 10 in the afternoon, and 20 minutes for lunch. He said, "I'll dare you stay one minute over. You know, at our plants in Akron at 10 minutes before the end of the shift you have what they call wash up time. That is to take their showers and so forth. They don't have that there. You take your shower on your own time. It's not true what the company says. They said they no longer have orders for the tires that were built down at Plant 2. But they took that machinery out and took it to their new plant. If they don't have orders, why did they move that machinery? A fellow came in from Decatur for Thanksgiving, too, and he said they are moving a lot of machinery in there for the same tires they built here at Plant 2. They are moving the machinery out. He has been down there two months and he has had two suspensions. He let me read the one, he lost the other one. On the one it says, "He wasn't performing reasonable effort."

INTERVIEWER: I don't think that's any kind of contract language!

LYNCH: Yes, "reasonable effort" has always been a highly controversial issue in the Firestone chain. How do you determine "reasonable effort?" But they are taking advantage of it. They suspended him.

INTERVIEWER: Is the URW [United Rubber Workers] trying to organize down there?

LYNCH: Well, some of them are. He transferred. He took his union transfer from our local to Decatur. But he said the president down there is afraid to move and seems to be under the thumb of the president of the company. There is a lot of controversy. [The president] probably isn't experienced. It's going through a real revolution, that's for sure. But as I tell them, "Don't give up. We had it much harder in the beginning than you are having it now. The groundwork still is there and they have something to work from. This is just a hard time for them that they have to face. And it isn't only rubber that is decentralizing; it's all industry, steel, automobile. I can remember when I worked for the Firestone Company when I was a junior in high school. I worked in the advertising department and addressed envelopes day, after day, after day. My boss would check every-

LYNCH: body's wastebaskets to see how many you destroyed or how many you made mistakes on. I can remember they had the girls that worked there--the secretaries and just like us girls that were working there in summer vacation--be the waitresses when he had a party for Thomas Edison and Henry Ford at the club house. I knew as much about waiting on a table as nothing, nothing. It was a great event just to see them. I will never forget Thomas Edison. He was so nice. He had a smile and a kind word for everybody. They were three great people.

INTERVIEWER: Was this party for management?

LYNCH: No, Henry Ford gave a party and they were the honored guests. I don't really remember. I think they were celebrating one of their anniversaries in business. I can't remember just what it was for now. That was a big event at Firestone.

INTERVIEWER: Have you lived in Akron all of your life?

LYNCH: I was born and raised here.

INTERVIEWER: So the smell of rubber has never left your lungs?

LYNCH: No, I love it. [Laughter] I think when the Firestones hired corporate people, that's when it started to go. Those people didn't care whether it was left here in Akron. The Firestones were Akron residents, where [as] the president now, President Riley, isn't from Akron. Neither is the chairman of the board, DeFredrico. They could care less. I like both men and they both like me, but I do the kick-off for the United Way. Mr. Riley gives a talk and so do I. This year marked my 45th year. He said that I should have a halo around my head having broke in all the presidents, and he really razzed the presidents quite a bit. He is a wonderful big Irishman, nice guy. But he isn't Mr. Firestone, I'll tell you. He is nice. When I see the statue of Mr. Firestone upon the hill by the Research Building and he looks down over his empire I think he is probably pretty sad to see the state of affairs it is in.

INTERVIEWER: The [problem of recalling] Firestone 500's.

LYNCH: Wasn't that a thing? How could they ever pick on one company like they did, I will never know. I just can't figure how in the world they ever, ever did that. Something went wrong some place. Again, I say these corporate people, they think they are so wise. Maybe they weren't so wise. When you start bucking the press, you have got a problem. The press can make or break you and I tell you that press just about broke them. If Firestone Tire was the only one that did that separation--when they put that rubber on steel it wasn't going to adhere. They

LYNCH: knew it but the other companies knew it too, and they still built it. Why did they pick on just one? If you are going to publicize that, [it] should be public knowledge, why would they pick out one company to destroy them? Evidently, they gave them some kind of lip and they said, "Well, we are really going to let them have it.

INTERVIEWER: Politics, I guess.

LYNCH: That was unmerciful. That is really too bad. I wonder if in years to come if people will forget that bad publicity. I think they will.

INTERVIEWER: I had a bad experience with one of my [Firestone 500 tires]. I got a 721 to replace it.

LYNCH: Oh did you, that is good.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you very, very much.

LYNCH: Oh, I don't think I contributed very much. [Tape off].

I think it should be noted that many--not many, a few of the members became Communists and were spies in the Rubber Workers for the Communist Party. It was hard to filter them out and detect who they were and what [they were] doing. Then we have spies that were paid by the company to come to our meetings and learn what went on in the meetings. That was a big problem at the beginning of the Rubber Workers in their infancy.

INTERVIEWER: What became of the Communist Party members?

LYNCH: Well, anytime they would find them out, they would get the cold treatment until they finally would move out and then they would get somebody else in. Somebody that you didn't recognize right away. I remember one incident they had on this guy. The union men became spies for him and they had a card party in his basement and here was all this Communist literature piled up in his basement. That's how they found out he was a spy. They had a lot to contend with. The Communists were very active at the beginning of the Rubber Workers, very active.

INTERVIEWER: Were they helpful or harmful?

LYNCH: Harmful.

INTERVIEWER: What did they do?

LYNCH: Well, they would pass out untruthful literature. They would say we were confiscating money from the members and then the members would get mad. They would believe some of that literature which wasn't true! Every cent was always accounted for. That is

LYNCH: one thing, the Rubber Workers had a lot of politics in their organization, that is all valid, but never any faulty operation in the line of money. But the Communists would just jump on anything. They were exceedingly sly. [Tape off].

The women were vicious many, many times when we were out on strike. [They] said we were starving them and we were causing their children to go hungry and things like that. Women were really up in arms many, many times.

INTERVIEWER: That's the reason they got their organization started in Flint, to get the women's support.

LYNCH: That's what the ultimate purpose for the auxiliary organization was. They never became real active. It has dwindled and dwindled. They truly were never real active outside of Political Action Committee and the union label. If there was going to be a banquet or something they would do the kitchen work, culinary work. That's helpful.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you suppose that was?

LYNCH: I don't know. I can't pinpoint it. They used to hold meetings, Bea Warwood, Mary Johnson, and this Mrs. John House. They tried to interest women to support their husbands and become active in union work and so forth. But then I think maybe the men always pushed them out and pushed them down. I really think that's about the way of it. They really tried hard, those three women that I named. I wish Mrs. House could have talked to you because she was very active. Maybe you could get a trip to Florida to see Mrs. Johnson.

INTERVIEWER: That would be nice with winter coming on.

LYNCH: Yes!

INTERVIEWER: For history, you were just telling me about the founding convention of the United Rubber Workers and what a sad occasion it was. Would you tell me that story with the tape recorder on?

LYNCH: Well, it was very hostile there in that meeting. They would shout at one another and were feuding back and forth. When the vote finally came in and Mr. Green had lost drastically, he was still the gentleman all the way. He thanked the people and said they were on their own and he would have no jurisdiction over them. They could elect their own officers and then he bid them goodbye. When he walked out he was a very sad person to the point of almost breaking. He really was sad and so was Mr. Claherty. He felt he had started them and he would like to

LYNCH: have carried on through until they really had a good foundation. Because they would be without money to start anything. They were so afraid that it might not gel without money. Because it takes money, an office, office equipment, and office procedures and personnel. They were really sad about the loss of the Rubber Workers.

INTERVIEWER: You said he was planning to enlarge the AFL offices.

LYNCH: In Washington, even, because they were 25,000 strong then. See, you had to send per capita in for every member into Washington. That took a lot of accounting. Their accounting office was a big office as it was, even then.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the one Mr. Morrison was in charge of?

LYNCH: He was the treasurer. We got our checks all from Washington, from the main office.

INTERVIEWER: You said you closed down the office there.

LYNCH: It took a while, I don't know how many days. It was a month, at least, to close the office up and walk out saying goodbye to one another.

INTERVIEWER: Was that when Mr. Claherty went on?

LYNCH: Yes, he went on to Cleveland. They invited me to go and wanted me to move up there. My roots were in Akron and I couldn't leave. My husband was here.

INTERVIEWER: You said he worked organizing the plumbers?

LYNCH: In Cleveland.

INTERVIEWER: And shortly thereafter you were hired by Sherman Dalrymple.

LYNCH: No, not by Sherman Dalrymple. Sherman Dalrymple then was president of the International.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see . . .

LYNCH: I was hired then by Mr. John F. Delaney, who is the treasurer of Goodrich Local.

INTERVIEWER: It was through the good offices . . .

LYNCH: I think it was the kindness of the people themselves, Mr. Dalrymple.

INTERVIEWER: You also told me a very humorous story about what happened [at the founding convention].

LYNCH: Oh, at the end of the convention with all the hostile feelings and all, they had taken up a collection among the delegates and bought all kinds of presents for me, including panties and undergarments, nightgowns and so forth. And they made me open the packages at the convention and we all had a lot of fun about it.

INTERVIEWER: This was in appreciation for all the stenography you had done.

LYNCH: That I had taken the minutes of that first convention. I thought the end of the world had come,because I had had so much happiness in that office with my fellow workers that I really was just as sad as they were.

INTERVIEWER: Looking back on the decision they made, do you agree?

LYNCH: I really think I did better by working at one of the locals to work with people because you have more contact with people, helping people and that's what I enjoy doing. Whereas if you work at the International you do not have any contact, only with the office personnel. I don't think I would have been happy. It is a pretty big office personnel in the United Rubber Workers. You see, they never meet the workers and their problems.

INTERVIEWER: [The convention was] where the decision not to split up into the crafts [was made]?

LYNCH: It was certainly injurious to the AFL. [Tape off].

[Speaking of the Goodyear Strike] It was really exciting because those deputies were 150 strong and they had tear gas. They let a lot of the tear gas go and a lot of people's eyes were full of tears. We were in the office there at Goodyear and we could see them starting up the hill and it was really tension there. Finally the mayor called it off. Kellers was the sheriff and the mayor was Shrie. His wife was a real good friend of mine. She was a member of Business and Professional.

INTERVIEWER: You told me the story about going down to the picket line there and I didn't pick that up on the tape.

LYNCH: The first night they went out, the next morning I said to the fellows, "I think I will go out on the picket line." They said, "That would be a good idea." They thought it would be nice if I did it. The fellows would feel I was really with them all the way. I had a raccoon coat from being in college and I put on my raccoon coat and stood right out there at the first gate and picketed a little while. There was a drum full of fire and I didn't mind it because I had on my raccoon coat. But I tell you, some of those men didn't have apparel to combat that weather. They were mighty cold even standing close to the drum. But that was the only time I ever picketed. They thought it was too dangerous after that.

INTERVIEWER: You said there were no women on the picket line?

LYNCH: No women, not one.

INTERVIEWER: You said they imported strike breakers?

LYNCH: From Youngstown. They had their shillelaghies, believe me, they did.

INTERVIEWER: You said that one of the flying squad people was killed.

LYNCH: He wasn't killed but he tried to cross a big pipe--whether it was a sewer or what--he slipped and fell. I think he died of freezing exposure and not from the fall. It was so terribly cold. It was unmerciful. I don't know how cold it was. I know it was way below zero.

INTERVIEWER: It says 12 below zero in that book.

LYNCH: Does it? I know it was awful cold.

INTERVIEWER: I missed all your commentary on this book* what you think of what Bernstein writes.

LYNCH: I think it is a fabulous job and I think very authentic. I really do. I met Senator Wagner. He was the one that wrote the Wagner Labor Law.

INTERVIEWER: Did he come here to Akron?

LYNCH: No, [it was] one time when I was in Washington that I met him. I think Ayers was our representative and I was in Washington and he made it possible for me to meet him. We weren't very fond of him.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about meeting him?

LYNCH: Not very much because he kind of gave me the brush off. Just hello and goodbye.

INTERVIEWER: I missed all of your stories about Franklin Roosevelt and LBJ. I think that was all before I turned the [recorder] on.

LYNCH: Did you! Well there is not too much to tell. I was the secretary of the Young Women's Democratic Club and they chose certain people to meet Eleanor and Franklin D. at Rittman, Ohio. So we drove out, got on the train and rode into Akron on the Erie Railroad. They came in from Chicago to go through Akron. The thing I remember the most was when Eleanor reached over and tapped Mr. Roosevelt on the knee and said, "Doesn't Mrs. Lynch

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*Bernstein, Irving, History of the American Worker.

LYNCH: have beautiful hair." He said, "Charming." He was very charming. That was I think what I remembered most about the ride in from Rittman. I never will forget the crowd at the Union Depot. Oh, it was simply packed, people sitting on rooftops and everything. Just to see him. That was a big event in my life. They were so ordinary and so down to earth, you know. They were very likable people.

INTERVIEWER: You also told me you led the grand march for his birthday.

LYNCH: Yes, we were in the Akron Savings and Loan Building and that was the first ball to raise the money for the Polio Institute. I think that was in Hot Springs, Georgia, wasn't it? We rented the armory and had this ball. People bought tickets and Mr. Claherty would have been the proper person to lead the ball and he couldn't because he had trouble with his knee; it was hurting him and he said he just couldn't do it. And I really think he was a little bit bashful, too. So he appointed Bob Roberts and I to lead the ball. The armory was pretty big and we had a lot of fun. Bob and I started it and we danced the first dance together. I will never forget the problem we had. They put girls in the coatrooms to take care of the hats and coats because it was in January. The girls weren't experienced and they goofed it all up. They gave wrong tickets for the wrong hats, wrong overcoats. It was terrible. The next day in the office at 408 Akron Savings and Loan Building, I tell you, there was a line up you wouldn't believe! Everybody lost a hat, everybody had a Stetson hat. There would probably be one out of a 100 that had a Stetson hat in those days. But every hat lost was a Stetson! I remember that so well. We didn't want to buy all those Stetson hats and take away the profit from the ball. We were so proud because we had worked so hard and did fill the armory to capacity, then had to buy those hats. Oh, that was a mess! We all laughed about everybody having a Stetson hat. [Tape off]

INTERVIEWER: Last night you were telling me a little bit about your family background and what it was like the first time you went to a rally. Do you want to describe that again?

LYNCH: Well, I had never really been around workers and laborers and when I went to the first rally meeting to take the minutes. I was never so sad in my life when I looked out in that audience and saw how old they looked and how poorly dressed they were. They all looked as if they had worked so hard. I couldn't believe it and I was so sad to see [the] deplorable way they looked and I made up my mind then I would help them all the rest of my life. I guess that is what I did.

INTERVIEWER: Describe to me the background where you came from.

LYNCH: Well my mother died when I was 7. My uncles and aunts raised me. The uncle who raised me was a Presbyterian minister. It happened our parish was pretty well-to-do. They were mostly retired people and well-off. We lived in the parish house. It was beautiful, it was a mansion. We always had it pretty nice and when I say this, it is really sad for me to see how people really lived.

INTERVIEWER: You said the Quaker Oats people were in the parish.

LYNCH: The management were the deacons and elders of the church. I really had never seen working people. I would see poor people maybe on the street but you see just one or two then. When you see them in a mass it would really get to you.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say you were frightened?

LYNCH: Kind of, really, yes I was. At the beginning they would holler when people were speaking and I had never heard that and been within that kind of an atmosphere. It was really frightening to me.

INTERVIEWER: There was a lot of anger?

LYNCH: Yes, there would be hollering up to the speaker.

INTERVIEWER: A real eye-opener for a middle class girl.

LYNCH: That's right. It was so different then from now, because now the business meetings are so well organized and the presidents really know how to handle a business meeting. In fact, I can remember when we would hold meetings, we would call them schools. One week maybe we would teach parliamentary law and the next week maybe explain the contract procedures. Maybe the next week we would have a false arbitration hearing. Maybe the next week we would have a grievance meeting with management.

INTERVIEWER: This came out of the head office?

LYNCH: No, this came out right at the local union level.

INTERVIEWER: Did you teach?

LYNCH: Sometimes I would give the parliamentary law.

INTERVIEWER: Were there other educational programs?

LYNCH: We had an education program every year. We usually had it in the month of February. We put up notices in the [locals].

LYNCH: We would have different times for these classes so all four shifts could attend. Now it isn't necessary. You would be surprised how many people are rubber workers that have graduated from college now. We have had lawyers that were practicing law and still working in the rubber factories for finances. We still have a lot of schoolteachers who teach and work the third shift. We have eight hour shifts now where we did have six hour shifts. The six hour shift made it convenient for them to teach school and go to college and do the different things they were interested in.

INTERVIEWER: It is a little bit different than 1934.

LYNCH: It surely is.

INTERVIEWER: In reading about the Rubber Workers, there were a lot of people from West Virginia and Kentucky who worked there.

LYNCH: Oh, and Georgia and the Carolinas. Mostly the southern states. They said at the opening of the rubber factories they just simply came in droves.

INTERVIEWER: Are there still a lot of southerners working here?

LYNCH: Yes, and for vacations they all go home. Now some of them are going back to work there, transferred to rubber factories [in the South].

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