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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

with

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY

Oral History Interview

with

JULIA MAIETTA

Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America

by

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Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

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VITAE

JULIA MAIETTA

Julia Maietta, a life-long Pennsylvania resident, was born in 1909. At age 15, she went to work in one of the shirt sweatshops so prevalent at the time. It was in the sweatshop that she became involved with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers [ACWA], first as shop chairman and then for six years as president of her local.

Maietta left the shirt shop to become an organizer and international representative for the ACWA, working both in the United States and Canada. She is presently on leave from the ACWA and is employed by the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO as Field Services Coordinator in the Committee on Political Education department.

A concern for women's problems and goals is obvious in the work Maietta does as director of the Women's Activities Department for Pennsylvania. She is also a member of the Status of Women for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and is a member of the Women's Advisory Council in Pennsylvania.

Maietta has been very involved with electoral politics over the years. In 1948 and again in 1958, she ran for Congress on the Democratic ticket. She was a delegate to that party's conventions in 1964, 1968 and 1972, serving as a member of the Rules Committee during the last two. In 1972, Maietta was appointed to the National Democratic Charter Commission.

Oral History Interview

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JULIA MAIETTA

May 11, 1976
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

by Alice M. Hoffman
and Karen Budd

MAIETTA: [I was born] in 1909 in Laquin, Pennsylvania, a little logging town which is no longer in existence.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember your grandparents, Julia?

MAIETTA: Only my grandmother, my mother's mother, who we called "Mama Batera" who came to this country and lived with us a short time.

INTERVIEWER: She came to this country from where, Italy?

MAIETTA: Yes, Italy.

INTERVIEWER: Southern Italy?

MAIETTA: We come from the province of Avellino, about the middle part of Italy. We brought my grandmother back when I was just a small baby. We went there; we were going to live in Italy after our house burnt down, the house where I was born. Then there was an earthquake there [in Italy] which was in 1912 and my father, who stayed in the United States and who was to follow us, cabled us and told us to come back after the earthquake.

INTERVIEWER: There just was an earthquake in that area a few days ago.

MAIETTA: Yes, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: This was an earthquake serious enough to discourage the economy and everything and he felt [it was] better that you should come home. What did he do, Julia?

MAIETTA: My father worked at the brickyard. At that time he worked at what they called the "barrel-stay" mill in Laquin, Pennsylvania. They had met the other crew, which was laying the railroads; he helped lay the railroads in this country. When they finished the railroad laying he stayed there as did some of the other relatives and friends. They stayed at this little town.

INTERVIEWER: Now, let me understand. He came to this country first and then the family followed?

MAIETTA: No, my mother met him here.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, your mother met him here.

MAIETTA: My father came from a wealthy family in Italy who were lumber dealers. My mother, of course, was a very poor gal from Italy who came here and stayed with her sisters who had come here earlier and married, before she came to the United States. My mother was sort of being a maid to her sister. My father, who was one of the boarders, felt very bad about this, that she was exploiting my mother so. So he went off with my mother, and they got married. Then they came back and told her sister about it.

INTERVIEWER: This was when he was working on the railroad?

MAIETTA: Yes, this was when he was working on the railroad.

INTERVIEWER: So just shortly before you were born, they brought your mother's mother from Italy? Or your father's mother?

MAIETTA: No, no. I went with my mother--there were three of us--my older sister, my brother, and myself--and we went to Italy after our house burned down, or the house burned down afterwards, I can't remember. Anyway, we went to Italy, and we were to bring my grandmother back. My mother's mother. We were to stay there first, but then we came back, because my father didn't want us to stay there after the earthquake.

INTERVIEWER: Right. How many were in your family?

MAIETTA: Twelve children.

INTERVIEWER: And where were you? You were number three?

MAIETTA: Number three. Top of the list.

INTERVIEWER: What was your relationship with your mother and father?

MAIETTA: Very good.

INTERVIEWER: Were you closer to your mother or to your father?

MAIETTA: Both of them. Of course, my father died when I was sixteen. But we were a very close family. We did a lot of activities together, within our own home, you know, like teaching us to dance Italian and all those [things].

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents speak Italian in the home?

MAIETTA: Yes. Uh-huh. My mother didn't speak very good English until late in life.

INTERVIEWER: What did your mother do most of her life? Did she stay in the home or did she work out?

MAIETTA: She never worked out. She planted the garden, and she knew how to do everything and taught us how to do. She even half-soled and repaired our shoes. (chuckling) She had to. But she didn't like housework and she didn't like to cook. She used to say, "If I can raise the garden and raise the animals," (we even had a cow), she said, "And you can't cook it, then you should go hungry." (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: So she made the girls cook it!! So, in your young womanhood, obviously, you were closer to your mother than to your father, because your father passed away. How old was he when he died?

MAIETTA: Thirty-nine or forty-two.

INTERVIEWER: He was very young. Did he die in an accident?

MAIETTA: No, he died from a blood-clot. Of course, we didn't know this until later years, when my sisters who became nurses went back and checked over his medical record. But he had gone in just for a simple hernia, and the day he was to come home he died of a blood clot.

INTERVIEWER: And there was your mother left with. . . .

MAIETTA: Twelve children.

INTERVIEWER: Twelve children, nine of whom were younger than sixteen.

MAIETTA: Yes. The youngest were twin boys. And they were about sixteen months old.

INTERVIEWER: How in the world did she manage, Julia?

MAIETTA: I don't know, but she did.

INTERVIEWER: Some of you were old enough to go to work, I guess.

MAIETTA: Yes. I had quit school before my father died, because there were so many of us and we were three of us working in the shirt factory.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-hm. Where was the shirt factory?

MAIETTA: In Curwensville.

INTERVIEWER: Curwensville, Pennsylvania?

MAIETTA: We had moved there when I was three years old. We moved to Curwensville because the brickyard personnel had been going around trying to find people to come there to work. And my grandmother and my uncle had been there and a sister of my mother's were there. So we all moved there where they were. Most of the Italian people were the same people that lived in Laquin, were in Curwensville.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think it would be interesting to know something about the community. Obviously, you and I are familiar with that part of Pennsylvania, but these tapes are going to be as far away as California, and I think it would be interesting to describe the community and say something about how the Italian-Americans fit into it.

MAIETTA: Well, Curwensville is a small community even today. At that time I don't think there was more than about twenty-some hundred people there. As I said, when we moved there, we lived in what they called "brickyard shanties" really. We stayed with my grandmother until they built us a home, which they built in one day, if homes can be built in one day, which they were at that time. My father worked at the brickyard, but he was a very independent man and always was. He was the type that, if the boss did something he didn't like, even though he had twelve children, he would tell him where to go, and he would go home. Then they would coax him to come back. One time they didn't and he went to work in a tannery. The whole time he was there, which was about a week, he didn't eat a bite because of working with the hides, which was something he wasn't accustomed to. Curwensville also is on the banks of the Susquehanna River, the west branch, and was supposed

MAIETTA: to be a big logging town in the early part of the settlement. But at the time we were there they didn't do much logging. They had a tannery and this brickyard. Then, of course, when we were old enough to work, they built this factory, which they brought in to take over some of the young women in the community.

INTERVIEWER: This was a shirt factory?

MAIETTA: A shirt factory, uh-hm. And it's located in Clearfield County, which is about the center part of Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER: Who owned the shirt factory, Julia?

MAIETTA: At that time the Sunny Blouse people owned it, when I worked in it. They made these little blouses with round collars that you used to see choir-boys wear. And, of course, we didn't have the union at that time, but. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Was it locally owned?

MAIETTA: No. It was from New York. S. Leibowitz & Son owned it, out of New York City.

INTERVIEWER: So it was really a run-away shop?

MAIETTA: Yes, I would think so, because they had quite a few shops in other area, like Gallitzin, and in the middle part and eastern part of Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER: Right. What did your parents tell you about life in Italy as compared to Pennsylvania?

MAIETTA: Well, my mother had it hard, but my father didn't, because, as I said, he came from a more wealthy family. He didn't know my mother in Italy, but my mother used to go to the mountains in Italy, even in the summer, and bring ice down for the more well-to-do to use for their, you know, in their homes. In the summertime and in the winter they used to go and collect kindling wood. That's how they earned their living, both her mother and all of the family, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: So they were really very poor? Did your mother and father have different attitudes about America? In other words, one might guess that your mother felt better off in the United States than your father felt.

MAIETTA: Yes. My father came here to avoid serving in the Army in Italy, as did a lot of young men like him. That's the reason he came to the United States. But my mother came for a better life.

INTERVIEWER: Why didn't he want to serve in the Army?

MAIETTA: Because he was opposed to military conscription. Of course, he was one of the young fellows who came here because of that. And he never went back.

INTERVIEWER: Was he influenced by socialist thought? Was he a young Italian Socialist?

MAIETTA: Yes, I would think he was.

INTERVIEWER: What were his political attitudes once he got here?

MAIETTA: Well, you know, I was too young to know and, of course, I didn't vote and I don't remember him being very active politically, although they wanted him Chief of Police in Curwensville and he refused because he said he'd never jail anybody. So there wouldn't be any sense in making him a police officer there.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MAIETTA: And he always taught us that all people were alike, whether they were black, so I mean we really had no feeling against blacks. In fact, one of my father's very good friends was a black man that he used to play cards with. If they didn't have enough money to buy groceries, although my father didn't have very much, he always shared it with him.

INTERVIEWER: So what was the ethnic character of Curwensville at the time?

MAIETTA: It was a mixture of Italians, Irish, and Polish. It still is. I would say it was a combination of people.

INTERVIEWER: Were you aware of any prejudice as a young girl growing up?

MAIETTA: Yes, I was, against the Italian, because any of the young girls who became teachers were always sent out into the country to teach, where they had to build their own fires in the little schools. In fact, when we bought our home, my father had to buy it through a second party, because they wouldn't sell it to him because he was Italian. I mean he had to buy it through a so-called American name. When we moved there,

MAIETTA: there were two families, one next to us who were Italians and us, and the third house was a German family. They resented us moving in there and the children called us names and everything. And I booted one of the kids into the creek with my head, like a billy-goat, when he called me a'wop' one day. (laughter) He remembered that when we grew up, and he said [that] he was being very ignorant. I said, "Yes, you were!"

INTERVIEWER: But the Maiettas maybe got along pretty well because there were twelve of them and they could stick together.

MAIETTA: That's right. And they used to always say, when there were scraps in the neighborhood, "You can fight with them because there's enough of you, you don't need anybody else." And we didn't. We scrapped a lot with other kids, but we always were helping other people, you know, all of us.

INTERVIEWER: What did you dream about becoming, Julia, when you were, say, thirteen or fourteen years old?

MAIETTA: Really nothing. I don't remember, only that you'd think that things would always get better. But, like I say, when my father was alive, we never wanted for anything. We didn't have the best of everything. My mother tried to sew for us.

If watermelon came into Curwensville, we were among the first ones to get watermelon and things like that. We never wanted for food, not until after my father died. Then, of course, when he died, we didn't even have insurance or anything to bury him with, because he didn't believe in insurance. He said that was just making somebody else rich. But I guess he didn't realize it was also leaving his family in a very bad way.

My mother, of course, being like other Italians, who wanted to have the best of everything for the funeral and we were years paying off that debt, which is what some people do even today. They came to see my mother and offered her what they called "mother's assistance". That's a form of relief. When she found out there was a lien against our home on it, she immediately stopped it. We never cleared that lien until not too many years ago. When we wanted to do our house over, the first thing we did was to see what the lien was against our house and our property and paid that off.

MAIETTA: Because my mother was so independent, when there was Red Cross flour and that stuff given out, they never thought she was eligible for it because we never went out and asked for anything. Now it's in the form of surplus food, I think they call it, but at that time they didn't, the Red Cross came in and everything. But I was a very young girl at that time, went down where they were giving the Red Cross [food] and I told them that I had come down to get some and I expected to go home with some. And I did!

INTERVIEWER: [chuckling] You were pretty independent, too! How did you get along in school?

MAIETTA: Very good, except that I was absent quite a bit because even when my father was alive, my mother having so many children and my being the third, I missed a lot. But I made up all my work. When I quit school, which was in the eighth grade, I had passed into the freshman class. Then all of us girls went to--what were those classes they had in a lot of these communities? We learned to type. I forget who it was.

INTERVIEWER: The YWCA?

MAIETTA: No, no. The government had classes. They taught them to sew so they could go into the factory to work.

INTERVIEWER: Do you mean the WPA?

MAIETTA: WPA, uh-hm. And we took up typing. Of course, we knew how to sew because we were working at the shirt factory. This was at night. One of my sisters, the one next to me, took up accounting. After that we went to night school in Clearfield, the Catholic School, and then the priest at home gave us Latin; both of us wanted to become nurses. Of course, by the time we were through with taking the first course of an equivalent of high school, they passed a law that nurses had to be graduates, so that killed that dream. I wanted to be a nurse, really. Then I always said that, after I began helping organizing and working for unions, I became a mental nurse. [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother have your brothers and sisters at home? They were born at home?

MAIETTA: Yes. All of them.

INTERVIEWER: Did she have a doctor attend her?

MAIETTA: Yes. I don't know about those of us that were born in Laquin. I think they had midwives there, because I know one of the Italian women was a midwife. But in Curwensville, we had the doctor. I remember when the twins were born my oldest sister was very upset about it. She said one was bad enough, but two!! And she was ready to leave home. I can remember her coming down the steps, and she was yelling, "Two!! Two!!" (laughter)

INTERVIEWER: Was religion important to you as a child?

MAIETTA: Yes. My father didn't go and my mother didn't go very often either, but they always saw that we went to church. Of course, Italian men are known not to go to church, but seeing that their children go.

INTERVIEWER: Right. You mentioned that the priest was teaching you Latin in order to help you get ready to qualify as a nurse. Was the church in Curwensville?

MAIETTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: The Catholic church was in Curwensville. Did it have. . . you know in some places, but I wouldn't think in Curwensville would be large enough, but in some places there was an Italian Catholic church and an Irish Catholic church.

MAIETTA: No, this was just one church. There was no school there either, though. He [the priest] told us that, if we wanted to make up our one year of high school, that he would teach us Latin if the sisters would teach us the other grades. So we had to travel seven miles, one of the girls had an old Model-T Ford that we used to use to go down to Clearfield and then back.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you came back from Italy? You were just a baby?

MAIETTA: That was 1912. That's when we moved to Curwensville. So I was only about two or something like that.

INTERVIEWER: So you really don't remember anything but Curwensville and Clearfield?

MAIETTA: Yes, that's where I lived, that's where we moved. I don't remember too much about Laquin.

INTERVIEWER: That's what I'm saying.

MAIETTA: Laquin was where I was small, and all I can remember about Laquin is that, whenever the sawmill used to clean the dam, they always flooded all the land around us. And, of course, in the spring whenever the Susquehanna River flooded, it always came. So most of the houses were up like on stilts, sort of. I remember that about it.

INTERVIEWER: But do you remember going to Italy?

MAIETTA: No. That was before.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of arguments did you have in your family? Did you have arguments over who would go to school and who would stay home?

MAIETTA: No. Most of the arguments we had as kids was who was going to do the work. We were assigned work, so there was no arguments about who was doing what. We had to weed and we had certain--this was after my father died--responsibilities. Outside of one of my sisters, she took care of her responsibilities at home but then she also felt that swimming and taking in certain activities were responsibilities. So she used to feel it didn't matter what happened after she came home, once she got her swimming and activities in. But we all did, too. I mean we had certain things that my mother used to. . . Before my father died my mother was very strict. But after he died she changed; she made a complete reverse. As long as she knew where we went and what we wanted to do, it was all right with her. That was quite a shock to us girls because he [her father] used to have to tell her he was taking us to the movies in order for us to go to a party. Then he would meet us, as though we had been to the movies, and go home.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I guess she must have felt rather dependent on you when he died.

MAIETTA: Yes, she was, but she was also very liberal about us doing things.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, well, that's interesting. You said your first job was working in this blouse factory.

MAIETTA: Shirt factory. It was a blouse factory, then it became shirt.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get the job, Julia, and what did the work involve?

MAIETTA: It was very easy to get a job there because they needed people. I was a pocket-setter when I first went there. During the early years that I put in there I was a pocket-setter, but then in those days they used to teach you how to do almost anything. It didn't matter to them if you made ten cents or two cents.

INTERVIEWER: Were you paid on a piece-rate basis?

MAIETTA: Yes, uh-huh. Always were.

INTERVIEWER: How much did you earn?

MAIETTA: When I first worked there, maybe five or six dollars a week, and sometimes not even that. But then the weeks weren't forty hours, they were sixty hours at least.

INTERVIEWER: When did you start there? What year was it?

MAIETTA: I started working there, it must have been in the late twenties--1928, '29, something like that.

INTERVIEWER: What did you like best about the job and what did you like least about the job?

MAIETTA: I didn't like anything about the job! Only that I had to work. Up until, as I said, until the union started coming in. Well, the first time that I voted was in '32, and, of course, we were hoping that things would get better. We tried to see about getting as many people in the shop registered. We had nobody telling us what to do or anything. We just simultaneously organized ourselves, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: There was no organizer or anything.

MAIETTA: No, well. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Other than just the first person who came in.

MAIETTA: I think they came there in '32, the Amalgamated [Clothing Workers Union] did. Before that the Garment Workers came in there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really?

MAIETTA: Because the Amalgamated was putting on drives. And I think it was either. . . it had to be '32, because that was the year that some of them. . . I mean it was '32 or '33. The

MAIETTA: United Garment Workers came because the Amalgamated was organizing all the shops of this same company in the eastern part of the state. So I guess the company must have called the United Garment Workers in there. I know they came into the plant with the company man from New York. I thought it was strange. That wasn't what my idea of a union was. I remember my father saying that companies didn't like unions, but unions were good for the workers. And it flashed through my mind when this man came there with the company man and he said this man was from the union and they wanted us to join. The company was going to advance both the initiation fee and the dues for the first part. I thought: Well, that's strange. So I didn't want to have any part of it. But the next day, somebody told me I was elected recording secretary. I said, "I don't know how I was elected recording secretary. I wasn't even at the meeting." They said that all the girls wanted me to and I thought I'd see what it's all about.

The first thing that happened was that there were three girls fired for no reason at all. I kept, as secretary, sending wires to the representative of the United Garment Workers, whose name was Finlay. Nothing happened. So somebody gave us some advice and said that, if we had any money in any kind of fund under the Garment Workers, we should sort of put it in a trusteeship of three people. So I was one of them and we did. We took the money out and put it in a trust fund, sort of.

Well, it wasn't long after that 'til someone from the Amalgamated came. John Subczak, who later became the manager there, was the first one. I thought, enough for unions. The United Garment Workers didn't do anything and I'm not about to get involved in anything else. They were standing outside the plant asking to talk to me and I told them I didn't have time. I used to go home for lunch anyway. Half-hour for lunch, you know, so you'd run home and just gobble something down and run back. But that night, then, they were still out there. He and some young fellow who came from Uniontown was with him. This was, I can't recall the year at that time, but it must have been '33; this was after the election, because we'd had the NRA then. The wages went up a little bit during the NRA but they were still cheating as much as they could. He asked me some questions, and I said I didn't want to have anything to do with any other union.

Well, we had a meeting that night of the United Garment Workers, and the man came. He [Subchak] came and he said he wanted to talk to the girls. I said, "Well, you ask the president.

MAIETTA: I'm not the president." I said, "I'm resigning tonight anyway. This union's not doing anything and I don't want to have anything to do with it." And he said, "Well that's probably what they want you to do." As I was writing the minutes of what was going on, I kept thinking to myself--I was a little angry with the two girls. They weren't doing anything, they were making me do all the talking and do everything, the writing to the union and all that, trying to get these girls back to work. I kept thinking to myself: If I thought those two were trying to maneuver me out of holding an office, I'm going to stick in. And the more I thought of it, the more I thought that no, by heaven, I'm not going to. I'm not going to hand in my resignation; I'm going to stick it out.

He came over to me and he said, "Do you think they'll let me speak?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well, why don't you ask them: I'd like to say a few words." So I asked the president. I said, "There's a man here from some other union. He said his name is Soapcheck, or Supchack or something." I knew what it was; I just said that. I said, "He'd like to talk." I was trying to make it seem like it was indifferent to me whether he spoke or not. But I thought he was there and he ought to get the chance to talk. So the one girl who was the president--Sally Bunnell--could care less what we had. They just made her president, and the only reason they made her president was that she was a graduate from high school and I wasn't. They thought I didn't have enough education to be president. [chuckling] A little shirt-worker local! So I didn't care what they did because of that. You know, I was really antagonized because of that. I must have been.

Anyway, she said, "I don't know whether to let him talk or not." I said, "Well, ask the people. They're the ones who should say whether they want him to talk or not." So she was hemming and hawing, and I guess I must have said, "Would you people like to hear this man talk and see what he has to say? He can't be any worse than what we have." So they said, "Yes, we want to hear him." So he told them about the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and also told them that the unions in the other part of the state were joining the Amalgamated and this must have been why the company brought in the United Garment Workers, which, of course, he said was a union that sold labels and not really a union, which was true. I mean, we found out later that it was. But he spoke, and then at that meeting they decided that they would. . . Well, they elected me to go to Pottsville and bring back a report of what I thought about the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. They were having a meeting and Potofsky [Jacob] was going to be there. So they asked me to go and represent them. That's the first time I'd ever been away from home on any kind of business.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. What kind of grievances did they have? What were the working conditions like which made these girls interested in a union?

MAIETTA: The working conditions were the same as anyplace else. Very little pay, and at that time the NRA came in and our hours were cut down, but before that we used to go in to work at . . . it was nothing to go to work at five o'clock in the morning and work through your lunch hour. That was before the NRA came in. And then work until after it was dark at night. I mean there were no set hours of any kind and no set rates of any kind. Whatever they wanted to give you, they gave you. They would say it was a certain amount. Of course, when the NRA came in, then the minimum which we got was twelve dollars a week for fifty-four hours, it seems to me, something like that. I still have envelopes and all that information. Then the United Garment Workers said they'd cut our hours and we'd get more pay. They said they were going to get these girls, one of them was the sole break-winner in her family and the other two were also mostly breadwinners.

They told me the first thing they wanted me to do was to ask the Amalgamated if they could get these three girls back to work. That was really their main purpose in changing unions, if we did. To get these two girls back to work and make sure it didn't happen again. Of course, there was no time off to go to these meetings, so after work. . . I think Subczak took me to Gallitzin, and I stayed at somebody's home there. It was cold; it was in the wintertime or fall. Anyway, I peeked out the bedroom window. . . I'm trying to think of the name of the person where I stayed because she became the chairman of that shop, too. But I peeked outside, and all I could see made it seem like I was someplace in Russia. I couldn't see a thing but barren land, and I thought: My God, where am I? [laughter] I know we didn't go very far, but that's the way it impressed me. Then the next day, which was Saturday, we got up real early and we went to Pottsville. That's where we had the meeting of the Joint Board. Monas [David] was there; Potofsky was there; Gladys Dickinson was there, who was the [ACWA] Director of Research or something. But Monas was in charge of the [ACWA] Pottsville Joint Board. They had established it with very few members, and they were trying to get the people, especially from all the Leibowitz shops, to join the Amalgamated.

INTERVIEWER: What was your impression of these people?

MAIETTA: I thought they certainly were trying to do something for the workers. Especially I thought it was wonderful that Gladys Dickinson let these people that she didn't even know stay in her apartment, you know, and trusted us with everything. And this gave me a good feeling about the union. And I liked what they said. They had had some strikes in the East and they were waiting and trying to get all the people in the other shops to come together and then the company would have to deal with the Amalgamated.

So after the meeting on Saturday, when we went back, and somebody somehow shuttled me all the way back to Curwensville, we had a meeting on Monday after work. I told them how I felt about it, and they [the Amalgamated] said that, once they were established as the bargaining representatives, then these girls would be put back to work. My report to them was that we can't be any worse off than we are, because we're not getting any response, or anybody coming in from the United Garment Workers. Well, then Finlay came, and he tried to keep us from joining the Amalgamated. But the people voted that, if I thought we should join the Amalgamated we would. And I said my feeling was that we couldn't be any worse off.

INTERVIEWER: What role did Sally Bunnell play in all this?

MAIETTA: She's a cousin of mine now by marriage, by the way. She said that whatever they wanted to do was all right with her. We told them that we had taken the money out of the United Garment Workers name and put it under a trusteeship which they had recommended and whatever they wanted to do with it after . . . so we just disaffiliated from the United Garment Workers and voted. . . I had cards with me, and John Subczak came there and they gave cards out and everybody signed cards for the Amalgamated, wanting them to represent them.

INTERVIEWER: How many women were in this shop?

MAIETTA: Anywhere from a hundred to a hundred and twenty-five.

INTERVIEWER: And all women?

MAIETTA: Mostly women, except a couple, bundle-boys. That's all, they were all women. Only a few of the women left from that time, too. Not too many, but I imagine there's a few. Still in Curwensville.

INTERVIEWER: Well, the industry is completely gone from Curwensville, isn't it?

MAIETTA: No. McGregor's bought the shop. It went from S. Leibowitz in Trichan, who was a local man. Well, he wasn't local. He came there and had men's undershorts, in Clearfield, and then he became a sportswear manufacturer. And then from Trichan, McGregor's bought it. Now there's also another--Kent. McGregor's makes both the shirts and jackets, their leisurewear. And Kent makes jackets and shirts and what they call 'sportswear for men.' Different things they make. They're still there.

INTERVIEWER: Right, but it's not the same ownership or anything. How long did you work there, Julia?

MAIETTA: Oh, I worked there until 1938 or '39. But in the meantime, I was helping the Amalgamated organize some nights. And they wanted me to go out and help them. I used to go out, but just for short spans of time, you know. Then I'd come back, because I didn't want to really leave Curwensville or my family. And I worked there from '28. . . I must have started earlier than '28 'cause I think I worked for fifteen years in the factory before I went out organizing. In the meantime, I was chairman of the shop and I would go out and help with other unions in the community--not only Curwensville, but the area. Then the Amalgamated sent me and another girl up to New Castle [Pennsylvania] where they had a sit-in in a pants shop. I helped there until they settled that strike.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do to help? Tell me about it?

MAIETTA: Well, they [the workers] were on the inside and we would organize entertainment for them and when the negotiations or whatever was going on, we would report it to the people as to how and what went on.

INTERVIEWER: So you were kind of a link between the strikers inside and the community outside.

MAIETTA: Plus representing the Amalgamated. When nobody was there, you know, they asked me to see that everything went okay.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Well, I remember some wonderful stories of yours that I think would be great if you would put on tape. For example, I remember the story about driving down the mountain road. . . .

MAIETTA: That was whenever I was helping organize in the Barnesboro factory, which was also United Garment Workers. That was a Philip & Jones factory. We would go out--we would call it visiting--but people didn't really call it visiting because we were representatives of the union. But this one night

MAIETTA: I was going back. We had told the state police that the company had people out following us around and all that. Of course, they didn't do very much about it because they could care less. But I had a girl with me from the factory; her name was Mary--I can't think of her last name--and as we started going back to her place--she lived in a mining patch, they call it--I noticed a car was following us. So we went off of the highway and down the road to her house. I thought we had lost them, but first thing you know, there was lights in back of me, and then another car came on another road and was coming toward me. I said to her, "Now you just get down but don't get scared, because I'm either going to scare him into thinking I'm going to hit him headon or he's going to decide he doesn't want to be hit headon and pull off." And that's exactly what happened.

INTERVIEWER: Let me get this picture now. A guy is behind you and another guy is coming right at you. . . .

MAIETTA: . . . . toward me. . . .

INTERVIEWER: And the guy coming toward you is trying to force you off the road?

MAIETTA: Well, I decided that I was going to head toward him to see whether he would force me off or I'd force him off. Well, he probably thought this woman's a crazy driver and whenever we got almost close to each other, he pulled off the road and I went through then. And I didn't stop at her house, because there were two company spies with me. I went back to the hotel where we were staying.

INTERVIEWER: What do you mean there were two company spies with you? In the car, you mean?

MAIETTA: No, no. One of them coming toward me and one of them following me from the back!

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see, and you didn't want them to know where she lived and be able to identify her?

MAIETTA: And who it was who was with me. So then I went back to the hotel and somebody else took her home. We had some of the miners who were helping us in that. In fact, one of the miners had just driven home. I can't think of the name of the little town. There are all kinds of little towns around this Barnsboro area, and he had just gotten out of his car, this mine

MAIETTA: representative, and gone in his house and his car blew up. Somebody had put a bomb in there. And I'll tell you that car and the garage was just blown to smitherines. Just minutes. He had just turned the light on in the house, and the car blew up.

[INTERRUPTION]

INTERVIEWER: We are at the State AFL-CIO on Main Street, Karen Budd present. Julia, we've just been going over the first chapter that we did last May. Boy, it doesn't seem that long ago, does it? And we were talking about your first job in the blouse factory in Curwensville. When Karen and I were editing this, we were trying to say to ourselves, "How did she get fifteen years at the job before she started organizing in the thirties?" How did you get fifteen years at the job before you started organizing in the thirties?

MAIETTA: Well, I was working at the factory when I was still going to school, before and after school. I was in the sixth grade then.

INTERVIEWER: So, in other words, you started working in the factory when you were twelve years old?

MAIETTA: About twelve.

INTERVIEWER: . . . . as a pocket setter. How many hours did you work then?

MAIETTA: Well, I used to go in in the morning before school started, and I guess school must have started at 8:30. So I had an hour and a half or two hours in at the time. Then I worked after school, and we worked until about 6:30 and sometimes seven o'clock.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't leave you much time for play, did it?

MAIETTA: No, we didn't know what play was then.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, it reminds me of that song--have you heard that song?--"Come out of bed, little sleepyhead, and get your bite to eat; The factory whistle's calling you, there's no more time to sleep." Was that before your father died? Or after your father died?

MAIETTA: Before my father died.

INTERVIEWER: How did you kids feel at the time about working? I mean, naturally, you look back at it now and you say it was awful.

MAIETTA: Well, we had to in order to survive.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any fun at the factory? Or was it just all work?

MAIETTA: We had fun because we made it ourselves, playing tricks on the workers and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Was this a routine for most of the children to do, so it wasn't as though you felt different?

MAIETTA: Yeah, all of them. There were a lot of those children that did that.

INTERVIEWER: Did they hire mostly little girls? Or were there boys, too?

MAIETTA: Well, some of the boys. . . like my brothers came in, and they did things for nothing, like folding shirts, you know, out of the bins and things. They helped us.

INTERVIEWER: But your brothers were even littler than you were.

MAIETTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So what they were doing was increasing the amount that you could make by piecework.

MAIETTA: And we used to take cuffs home. Like one of my sisters sewed cuffs, so we used to take the cuffs home and turn them, and we used to take pockets home and crease them. Because that's what you had to do when you set pockets--you had to crease them. This was in order for us to increase our production. A lot of people took bundles of work home. It wasn't just us, but a lot of the workers did.

INTERVIEWER: Well, did you work on Saturday then, too?

MAIETTA: Yes, and sometimes on Sundays. Well, they didn't ask you to work on Sundays; but if we did, we always brought work home to do on Sundays. But Saturdays always, sometimes Saturdays all day. Most of the times it was all day.

INTERVIEWER: When you look back on it, Julia, was it a happy childhood?

MAIETTA: Well, we were a happy family because we did a lot of things together. When my father died, it was just like the end of the world.

INTERVIEWER: When you say you did a lot of things together, what sort of things could you do together where there was time?

MAIETTA: We used to dance. We used to. . . my father taught us how to dance in Italian, and my mother used to dance. That was the only time I used to see her dance. And my grandmother. Our family was always together. My mother and her brother were very close, but she was never too close with her sister.

INTERVIEWER: So your uncle lived in Curwensville?

MAIETTA: Right, and my aunt came there, too, when we were still small, and we were all in the same little town. It was just a small town, about 33,000 people. It still is a small town.

INTERVIEWER: How do you think your work experience in the factories would have been different if you were a man?

MAIETTA: Well, I wouldn't have been working in the shirt factory. I would have been working in the brickyard, which was there or a coal mine. In the shirt factory all the employment there was for a man was either a bundle boy or a mechanic. I don't know of any mechanics from the little town. They were all from other parts of the state where the factories were. This company had a lot of factories.

INTERVIEWER: Hm-hm. So the mechanics traveled around.

MAIETTA: Well, they didn't travel around, but I mean anybody that came there as a mechanic came from out of town.

INTERVIEWER: I see. In other words, there was no way for you to be trained as a mechanic in Curwensville.

MAIETTA: No.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you were talking about how you got involved in union activities and how you first got involved in this first interview. You were saying that the United Garment Workers was really kind of a company union.

MAIETTA: Well, the Amalgamated, I found out after I went to Pottsville, was putting on a drive in this S. Leibowitz & Sons Company, which had quite a few factories in Pennsylvania. They were a company out of New York. But before they came to Curwensville, the representative from the United Garment Workers came into the factory. They turned the power off, and they talked to us. I guess me being a bolder person than some of the others, the girls would ask me to ask this representative of the United Garment Workers questions.

INTERVIEWER: Why were you bolder?

MAIETTA: I guess I had a bigger mouth! [laughter] Well, we were raised to speak up in the family, so then we did outside of the family, too. In fact, all of us did except my older sister who was more timid than any of the others. But of those of us that were working--there were three of us, and my sisters followed me in age--I was sort of older than the rest, so I kept asking questions. As a result, I discovered after the meeting was over I was appointed as secretary.

So then one night when I was going home from work, this John Subczak, who I found out later was a representative of the Amalgamated, came to my home. Well, he tried to talk to me outside the factory, and I had been angry about something at the time and I told him I didn't want to be bothered. But after I was home, why, he came to the house. Of course, in our family you never turned people away from the door. He asked me questions, and I spoke to him.

We had a meeting that night, and he came to the meeting hall. As I said, it was a small town and everybody was friendly. I had made up my mind I was going to retire from the union activity at this meeting, and he said something about maybe that's what they wanted me to do. I said, well, if they did, they were going to get their wish. I was angry at one of the officers, and I thought to myself: If that's what she wants me to do, I'm not going to do it, and I'm going to stay on the committee.

So after I spoke--I told them that he wanted to talk to them and that it wouldn't hurt to hear what he had to say. We had been having problems. There had been a girl fired. We had sent wires and everything, and nothing had been done about getting her her job back through the United Garment Workers. So when this John Subczak spoke, people asked him questions; and he told them about this big meeting that was being held in Pottsville that Saturday--this was on a Tuesday, I think--and that they certainly ought to see about sending somebody to the meeting and let them come back with some kind of report and have them go gown there representing the group.

I don't know how it happened, but I guess because I did more talking, but they elected me to go. Whether it was a fair election or not, I don't know, but it probably was.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you at this point, Julia?

MAIETTA: That was in '33, and I was born in 1909. That meant that I was about twenty-four.

Anyway, I went to Pottsville. It was like going over to Siberia, really. I'd never been away from home. They sort of shuttled me from there to Gallitzin where there was a bigger factory. That's where we got our work cut from, either there or Myerstown, which is near here. And we arrived there during the night. You know, it was dark Friday after work because, you know, they wouldn't let you off for anything. I remember I stayed at this home outside of Gallitzin. I think her name was Bender, Helen Bender, and she was an officer. Gallitzin was in the Amalgamated or had decided to be part of it. I remember getting up during the night and looking out the window, and all I could see was snow for miles around. I couldn't see a light or anything, and I thought: Oh, my God, where am I? [laughter]

So then the next morning very early we. . . and that's the first time I ever slept on a feather bed. I remember that. I remember the next morning we got up real early, and this Subczak or somebody drove us to Pottsville, and at Pottsville I stayed at Gladys Dickinson's* place. I thought it was so unusual for somebody to let you stay in their house, you know, somebody they didn't know. But that's what they did with all the people because the Amalgamated was putting on a drive and didn't have any money.

Then of course the next day we went to this meeting, and [David] Monas spoke, and [Jacob] Potofsky was there, and they told us about the organizing drive and how many shops they had and how we should be getting more money. I think at that time we only got what the NRA allowed them to pay.

INTERVIEWER: You got the minimum wage, in other words.

MAIETTA: Yes. The minimum of whatever they were paying.

INTERVIEWER: Right. What was your impression of Dave Monas and Jacob Potofsky?

MAIETTA: Well, I though they were honest and I thought they were really trying to help the shirt workers get something from the employers. And I knew the things they were saying were true because nobody ever inspected our shops, and the people. . . I mean I knew from experience what was going on. And of course, in the other areas, I guess it was even worse than what we had maybe because some of us had joined this United Garment Workers. Although we didn't get anymore than what we had, they didn't take anything away from us.

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*Director of ACWA Research Department

INTERVIEWER: Well, also, I guess, it was an opportunity to talk and develop certain kinds of organizational skills, right?

MAIETTA: But I used to fight with the company anyway, even before we had a union because I know that they took. . . I don't know if I told you before, but they took the door off the toilet so that the girls wouldn't loaf in the restroom. When you went there, it just felt like you were out in the shop. Of course, the girls knew that I was going to fuss about it. They told me about it before we had come to work because we had been on a layoff at the time. I went back when I knew the manager was over in the tool section. . . he was sort of a mechanic, too. I said, "Well, this is something! I'm going to take time out and go home whenever I have to come to the restroom!" So he followed me all the way back to my machine, and he sat on the edge of the box that you have there to put work in, and he said, "Do you want to work here?" I said, "It doesn't matter to me." And I had to work like nobody else in that whole place! I said, "It doesn't matter to me whether I work here or not." He says, "Well, any more cracks like that and you won't be working here!" I said, "That couldn't have been your idea. That had to be Emery." That was the old lady that was the manager. "You're not that smart to think up an idea like that!" [laughing] I really thought he was going to throw me clear out the door!

Anyway, to make a long story short, at this period of this door being off the restroom, I said, "You know, if I'm not mistaken, I don't think you can do that. I don't think the law allows you to do that!" Somebody reported it to Harrisburg. They accused me of doing it. It wasn't me, but it was all right; I took the blame. Because when we came back from summer layoff, the door had been painted and had been ordered put back, and the office girl called me to tell me that. She was a friend of ours, of course. She said, "I thought you'd like to know that the state ordered them to put the door back."

INTERVIEWER: Had you had any exposure to unionism at all before this United Garment Workers? Had you heard about it in school?

MAIETTA: No, nothing. Only that the miners there [in the community] were organized. And my dad always said that the union was good for the workers, although they didn't have a union where he worked at the brickyard. And my father, too, used to. . . and I don't [know] why. He wasn't a religious person; but even though they didn't have a union there, he never worked on the fifteenth of August, which is the day of the Ascension.

MAIETTA: At one time, one of the bosses there, he [her father] said something to him. The boss got smart, and he [her father] called him something. The boss said, "You say that again and you can go home!" My father says, "Okay, then I'm saying it again!" He picked up his bucket and went home! With twelve children! [laughing] And he went to work at the tannery. He worked there three days, and he didn't eat the whole time he worked there. Then they called him back to work at the brickyard. He was what they call a hack man, the boss of the men that put the bricks that were all ready for the steel mills in the boxcars.

To get back to Pottsville, then, after the meeting we went back. Well, they advised us on certain things to do. They advised us to take the money that we had in the local and put it in a trusteeship of three of the members, which we did. Then we refused to pay any more dues to the United Garment Workers. Of course, there was no election, only by the membership itself at that time. There were no laws that said you had to have an election. Then we had an election. I don't even remember who the officers were at that time. I think we had a president and a chairlady, and I was elected the chairlady to take care of the shop. That's what that meant. But the president took care of the local, the way they do now. I guess the setup's about the same. The president that was elected president was also the president of the United Garment Workers.

INTERVIEWER: So that was your first official position. It was as chairlady of the shop.

MAIETTA: And I think I was chairlady then for about five years, and then I went out to help organize other areas.

INTERVIEWER: How did your mother feel about your union activity?

MAIETTA: She said it was up to us. Before we had the union there, by the way, a whole bunch of us got fired one day. One of my sisters got fired, and the rest of us all went home. There were four of us working there, and we all had key positions in the shop. I was the only pocket setter they had, and one of my sisters was the only sleever. The one that was fired was the buttonholer. She said something to the forelady. And another one was a hemmer. She was the only one that hemmed the shirts. She hemmed the fronts. I don't know how long we were off, and then they asked us to come back. The four of us marched out of the factory, and they were really crippled until we got back.

INTERVIEWER: How long did it take them to ask you back?

MAIETTA: It must have been about a week. But the first night we went home and told my mother that we had joined the union of the United Garment Workers, she said, "Well, you girls are the ones that are working; and if you think that's the right thing to do, why. . . " Although a lot of other people kept calling my mother and telling my mother that she should tell us not to.

INTERVIEWER: Was this all part of your mother's sort of change in character almost? I know you mentioned that before your father's death she was quite different, quite strict.

MAIETTA: She was straight-laced, didn't want us to go anywhere.

INTERVIEWER: She would have objected, then, to this?

MAIETTA: Yes, I think she would have tried to tell my father that we shouldn't do this.

INTERVIEWER: How do you account for her changing like that?

MAIETTA: I don't know. I think she knew that, whenever she said we couldn't go any place and my father said, "Okay, girls, we're going to the movies tonight," I think she knew that he was taking us to these social functions, even though. . . No, she was a pretty bright woman, even though she hadn't had any formal education of any kind.

INTERVIEWER: Well, why don't you just sort of trace your activities in the union, where you went from chairlady and. . . .

MAIETTA: Well, like I said, I was involved in everything in the community and also state-wide. But every time they would ask me to go out organizing, we would all of us in the factory that I asked, if there was anything to organize, whether it was a brickyard or anything, we all got involved and helped to do this. Then when they asked me to go to Barnesboro, for instance, which is only about thirty-some miles from home, I would do this but only with the understanding that I was only going to be helping and I'd come back. I made this clear that I did not want to go out too far away. We really didn't even know they paid people to organize. We did it for nothing. All I know is that all the lost time I had, I never got a nickel for, even though somebody else was making ten dollars more a week, which was an awful lot of money at that time, especially for my mother. I never got reimbursed for the money that I lost handling complaints.

MAIETTA: When I started working for the Amalgamated, I didn't know that they allowed you a food allowance. I went to work for fifteen dollars a week, and they paid for my room if I had a room. Then I found out from other organizers that they got so much a day--it wasn't very much--for food and, if they needed tires for a car, they got that, and they got certain car allowances. Well, I went to New York and I said, "You can keep your job! I'm going back to the factory." "Oh, now wait a minute! Wait a minute!" Then they outlined what you got and what you didn't get. I said, "Why didn't you tell me this when I started out to work because, if anybody out of all of your people that are working needed to stay at home and help the family, it was me." But I understand this was normal for all unions. They tried to get all they could. . . they're as bad as the manufacturers. I always said bosses could learn from unions! [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: True! That's very true!

INTERVIEWER II: So really when you started working full time for the union, you were working for far less than you would have in the factory.

MAIETTA: Yes, because when I was working at home, I'm a dressmaker, too. I mean, I taught people to sew. My trouble was I taught all my customers how to sew, and then they didn't need me any more. But I used to make evening gowns. I earned as much dressmaking as I did at the factory. I may have stayed up half the night, but that's how I paid off the sewing machine. I taught the girls how to sew, and then they'd buy sewing machines and they used to give me five dollars for every machine they sold to my own customers!

INTERVIEWER: Before we get to your going to work full time for the Amalgamated, as chairlady what type of problems did you have to work out for the other women in the shop?

MAIETTA: Well, I was given more authority by the union, maybe because it was way out in the boondocks. But I could negotiate rates for them where other chairladies had to sit with the representatives from the committee. But if you got a different type of a shirt or a change in making the placket on a sleeve and all of these things, or if they wanted more stitches to the inch, then we had to negotiate to see how many. . . .

INTERVIEWER: What the piece rate would be.

MAIETTA: Hm-hm. Then sometimes, if there were problems with the material, you could also get a whole group of collar makers to decide they weren't going to. . . you know, put out only so many pieces a day. Then I had to talk to them because I knew darn well they were loafing. I mean all of a sudden somebody that did sixty dozen a day went down to thirty and everybody in the whole section was doing thirty. . . I mean, you know, they can't kid anybody that worked with it because I was then an all-around operator, too. I could fit in in any part of the shop. Because we had one of the first line systems, what they called a line system, in the country. I think we were more or less guinea pigs. So they had to work with a couple of the operators to fit in where, if anybody was absent or sick, why, this person would just sit right in there, whether it was sleeving or putting collars or cuffs or whatever.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what was the line system then?

MAIETTA: Well, where instead of tying up the bundles. . . It was the same as the line system on cars.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, in other words it was an assembly line system.

MAIETTA: Yes, that's right, where you just started the shirt. . . and of course, each section, the collar makers had a section, the cuff making had a section so that the sleeves were all ready whenever they would start with the. . . joining of the shirt and then the collar setting and the sleeving and on down until it was finished. Then folding and everything. There were two of us girls, we learned to fit into the line.

INTERVIEWER: At any point.

MAEITTA: At any point where they got either bogged down or sometimes absentees.

INTERVIEWER: Did the women bring various kinds of grievances to you?

MAIETTA: Oh, yes, all of them.

INTERVIEWER: What for instance?

MAIETTA: Well, either if they weren't making out because the cutting was bad and they lost so much a day, then we had to try to get them some part of it. We never got the full amount, but we would get some part of that.

INTERVIEWER: And you had to negotiate that with the boss then.

MAIETTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How did the boss respond to you?

MAIETTA: Oh, he was all right because he was ordered from New York. That's the company. And I had very good relations with the company even before the union came in because, as I say, I used to go in and fight about other things. They told me that I was the only chairlady in their system that took care of things directly, that everything else was taken up through the union representatives. In fact, they tried to get me to work for them, to go into some of their factories as a forelady. They tried even to get [ACWA President Sidney] Hillman to encourage me to take a job with the company, and that meant a lot more than I was making even with the union.

INTERVIEWER: So why didn't you do it?

MAIETTA: Because I knew that. . . I had a feeling that they really would keep me a while and then get rid of me. They may have been friendly, but. . . .

INTERVIEWER: In other words, it was a way of buying you off.

MAIETTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Right. It's a time-honored way: Make him a foreman and then fire him. Okay, well, now, you said you went to work for the International in New York. Did you go directly from Curwensville?

MAIETTA: No, no. From Curwensville, I went first to West Virginia and helped organize in some of those areas. While I was still in the shop, though, I went to Newcastle, Pennsylvania, where we had the first sit-down of the clothing industry, and I stayed there until they settled that, and then I came back. I always made the arrangement that, when I got through with a certain job, I would come back to the factory. And even though the union negotiated that, if I wanted to come back, I could. I went and negotiated my own contract because I wanted to make sure. I guess I still didn't trust the union whole heartedly! (laughter) They said I didn't need to worry. I said, "That's fine. I'm glad you have made an agreement with me, but I'm going to make my own." Because I really didn't know that I wanted to do this work.

When I really went out full time was I went to the Arrow Shirt Company, Cluett Peabody, in upstate New York. We were organizing there. I think they already had a strike in

MAIETTA: Atlanta, [Georgia], where all of their white shirts were made, and then they started organizing all of the other Arrow Company shops. I went to Troy, New York. During the war they had big army contracts, and they were trying to get it pressed for a certain amount. The pressers there said. . . You know how they tried to use their patriotic. . . it was their patriotic duty to do this, that, and the other thing. The pressers there, which were all women also, said, "Okay, we'll make a deal with you. If you'll make the shirt without making a profit, we'll press them without making a profit!" [laughter] Of course, the company wasn't going to do that, and they had a strike there.

It was the most amazing thing. It was supposed to be a spontaneous thing, but it was really an organized strike because we had planned for some of the men to shut off the power and things like that. I don't know whether the company knows to this day. They tried to find out if it was an organized thing. But I'll never forget. . . We had the office up above a little grocery store, but you could see the door of the factory, which was along the river. I'll never forget it. It was just like one of these Mickey Mouse cartoons, you know, where the mice keep coming out of a hole and it never ends. Of course, there was about eight thousand people in there, 8,200 or something like that. But I don't know, they filled all these halls, both the ILG hall and the Amalgamated hall, and they were down the steps and outside the area, you know. There was just a never-ending line of workers.

INTERVIEWER: Now, this was the Arrow Shirt?

MAIETTA: Yes. And it was during the war, of course, and they kept saying how. . . But all of them came out, the department that was making army shirts and everything else. I think we were out maybe a week or so, and then they settled. And everybody from the national office came up. . . .

INTERVIEWER: I was just going to ask you about that. It would seem to me that with that number. . . How did you go about organizing these shops, Julia?

MAIETTA: You went to their homes and you got names. Like you went to one person's home and they would give you. . . they would say, "You ought to see so-and-so because she's really very angry and she does a lot of talking in the shop." And you'd get them to sign a card.

INTERVIEWER: I had asked you about your organizing, and I had said that it's a commonly-held belief that women are harder to organize than men, and you had agreed that they are.

MAIETTA: Yes, they are, and I think the reason is that there were very few jobs for women, especially in their home environment. You know, the mother and father would say, "If you don't work there, there's no other place for women to work." But once you got them organized, I think they were much better. They were much better on a picket line than men were and much braver, too.

INTERVIEWER: What do you mean better on a picket line?

MAIETTA: Stronger. They're stronger. They weren't as afraid as the men. I always found that they were bolder. Maybe they felt nobody's going to take a poke at them. But they really were much more solid on a picket line than the men.

INTERVIEWER: And more loyal to the union, you were saying.

MAIETTA: Yes, I don't think they could be convinced to break a strike as easily as men. Of course, the men always had more to lose, too, because they were blacklisted in those days.

INTERVIEWER: How important in organizing women do you feel that it is to have a woman organizer organizing them?

MAIETTA: Well, I think that they felt closer to a woman. I know that in the Arrow Shirt Company, for instance, I found some people that came from my mother's hometown in Italy. In fact, my mother told me that she thought her girl friend whom she used to go to the mountains with in Italy was living in that area, and I did find her. Then I brought my mother there to visit with her. I think my mother did a lot to convince these old Italian women that this was the right thing to do. I know that some of the most anti-union women were Italian. My mother asked me this one time. She says, "How are the Italian people?" I said, "Mom, when they're good, they are great! But when they're bad, they stink!" [laughter] I mean, this was true!

A lot of people didn't take me for an Italian, and I never told them. When I went into a house to talk to them, especially if there were three or four of their daughters working in the factory, I would go in and I would talk to the daughters. And pretty soon I heard the mother telling them in Italian, "Don't do this. You know you shouldn't be doing this, and your father won't. . . " And all this. And I

MAIETTA: would answer her in Italian, and she'd practically fall over! She'd say, "Oooh, you're Italian!" I'd say, "Yeah." I knew I would have to convince her before she would let her daughters sign up for the union. Nine times out of ten, I really convinced her, and then she'd say, "Okay. If Julia says it's all right, go ahead and sign up." Then she'd say, "Well, don't tell anybody!" And all this.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have any trouble getting in the door in the first place?

MAIETTA: No. The best way, I found, was to tell them who you were but never start right out in talking of the union. You know, you see something that they're doing and you praise the work that they're doing. You know, some women are doing handwork. Talk about everything but the union and then gradually you go into the union.

I got a woman signed up one time because her parakeet took a liking to me! (laughter) She had the parakeet flying around the house and she said, "Oh, the parakeet is very unfriendly." The first thing you know the parakeet was down on my hand, trying to take the stone out of my ring. She said, "Oh, he's never done that before!" I know it's because the parakeet liked me that before I left that night I had her sign the union card! [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: What about support from the Church? I mean, these women were probably all pretty good Catholics.

MAIETTA: In some areas you got good support, and in some areas you didn't. It all depended on how the head of the Church felt . . . although in most areas the Church was pretty good. Any place I've ever worked--maybe it was because I was a Catholic, too--the Catholic Church was always good. I always used that. . . .

INTERVIEWER: And what about the Protestant Church?

MAIETTA: In my work I never had any connections with the Protestant Church. Maybe it was because most of the workers in any of the factories, I guess, were Catholics. The majority of them were.

INTERVIEWER: And any other forms of community support? I mean, were there any other organizations?

MAIETTA: Well, we always, the Amalgamated always put out leaflets, and we passed them from door to door, telling them why there was a strike, especially in a big shop like Troy, New York, which had a history of some labor problems, whenever they were just collar makers, you know, they had a strike. At that time they used to own their own machines. If there were any problems, they had to pick up their machine and take it with them. So there was some history in this area, some bad history really, of strikes, which meant that we also had to win over the community. And that's what we did. We got together a community group of ministers, both Protestants, Catholics, and all, and we had to convince them that what we were doing was right and that there was a strike in Atlanta, Georgia, and these people needed the support and help of the people in New York. Of course, you had to convince them, too, that the company was making a lot of money off these people, which they were. The Arrow Shirt Company was not a small outfit.

INTERVIEWER: Did they have a differential in what they paid in the South and what they paid in the North?

MAIETTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And you were trying to eliminate that.

MAIETTA: Yes. We were convincing the people in the North that the people in the South were not being paid the same although the shirts were being sold for the same price.

INTERVIEWER: Right, okay. Well, did you begin to know women who were working in other unions at this time? I mean, obviously you were talking about using the ILG hall and. . . .

MAIETTA: Yes, uh-huh. We had also organized groups of people from all the unions, and the ILG, of course, and the Amalgamated were the only ones that really had women organizers or active women within the community. And the Textile [union] up there also had some women, but I don't remember the Textile having any organizers that were women; but they had active women in their group. So we organized all these groups to help.

INTERVIEWER: So did you get together socially with these other women?

MAIETTA: Yes, we did. Yes, we tried to have, during this period when the strike was on, a Saturday night get-together and invited all the union members that we had who were bold enough to

MAIETTA: come. At that time, of course, there were a lot of men in the Arrow Shirt because the Arrow Shirt had one department where they pressed the dress shirts, and these were all men.

INTERVIEWER: Why was that? Why was it all men?

MAIETTA: Well, that was sort of an historical thing--that these men traveled all over ironing just dress shirts.

INTERVIEWER: And it was considered more skilled?

MAIETTA: Yes. And it was a really heavy iron, a hand iron. See, the other shirts were ironed by an electric iron, and the women did that. But the dress shirts, the men had to dampen them the night before, and for a day's work they varied. Some men did twenty shirts, and some men did twenty-two. It all depended. But they were all done by hand. Of course, they were also stiffened by the starch. That is why the men dampened them the night before and then they ironed them the following day.

They traveled all over this country, and finally most of them all gathered in Troy working for the Arrow Shirt Company. They were organized before the other departments. The hand ironers and the cutters were the only ones that were organized out of the Arrow Shirt Company before this big strike. So we really had a nucleus there. The men had social events and invited different people from the different departments. Then of course, during the strike, we enlarged it, and we invited people from the other unions to not only meet with us to work out things but also socially. On Saturday nights, of course, it kept getting bigger and bigger. During the strike, we had it more than just Saturday nights. We tried to have meetings every night, followed by social affairs to encourage people to come. We'd tell them, "Well, if you don't want to come for the meeting, just come for the social hour." Or we'd have it away from the union hall so that it would encourage people to come because they knew that the company had people outside watching to see who would come. Because everybody we visited, the company had somebody visit them, too.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds as if your whole life was bound up in the union, that is, socially and in any other way.

MAIETTA: Yes, it had to be. I guess it always was. You never could plan anything personally because the union work always took precedent over anything else that you might do. My family

MAIETTA: always said that. They didn't think it was fair that you wouldn't say, well, we're going to do something on such and such a day, and you always said, "Well, if there isn't anything that the union's doing, I'll be there."

INTERVIEWER: Well, how did you feel about how the women organizers were treated as opposed to the men organizers? Did you feel, you know, that you were a little bit second-class citizens?

MAIETTA: Yeah, I think, we always were. In fact, I think up until . . . In the Amalgamated it might still be; I don't know. But I know when I left the Amalgamated and came to work here, there were still differences in pay and so forth.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about that?

MAIETTA: I didn't like it.

INTERVIEWER: How did the other women feel about it?

MAIETTA: Well, I don't think that we had enough backbone among the women or they wouldn't have had it.

INTERVIEWER: Did you yourself complain?

MAIETTA: Yes, I used to fight. Yes, I did. The only time I got any increased benefits was whenever I complained and went to the top.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well, let's continue. Where did you go from Troy? Back to Curwensville?

MAIETTA: No, from Troy I went to the Baltimore area and worked there. That was still during the war. There I represented the union on the War Labor Board. Besides organizing I was involved there, and I did nurse's aide work, volunteer nurse's aide. I trained. All of us, I guess, were involved. On weekends I worked in a hospital doing nurse's aide work.

INTERVIEWER: Now, that was a pretty high position at that time for a woman to achieve. Right?

MAIETTA: On the War Labor Board?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MAIETTA: Yes, I guess so. I never thought it was. I just assumed that, if I knew how to do it, I should do it. But I guess it was.

INTERVIEWER: Well, were there other women on the War Labor Board at the time that you served?

MAIETTA: Not from the union. I don't remember really who all was on. But the manager from the Baltimore area asked me to serve on the Board. I learned a lot on that board. I learned where some companies kept people on the payroll, whether they were specialists or just sweepers, and let them sweep floors because they got paid from the government by having certain people on their payroll. There was always a lot of fussing about it, too.

INTERVIEWER: Fussing by whom?

MAIETTA: Well, we fussed because we didn't think that was right because these people needed to be working in other areas in their own special field. That's where they should be and not sweeping floors for some of these companies that had big contracts.

INTERVIEWER: Right. So you were objecting to the allocation of manpower.

MAIETTA: Yes. And from there I went to Canada. I was in Canada for two or three years organizing there.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really? Where were you in Canada?

MAIETTA: I was in Kitchener, Ontario. There, of course, it was very unusual for a woman to be representing people on any boards. Every time you went to any meetings, it was always pretty surprising to some of these other people, especially industrial representatives.

INTERVIEWER: They thought you were somebody's secretary!

MAIETTA: Yes! [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: How did you handle that, Julia?

MAIETTA: Oh, I said, "I'm from the United States. We're a little bit ahead of you down there. Maybe not much but a little bit."

INTERVIEWER: Where did you live when you went to a place like this?

MAIETTA: Always in hotels. Most of the time in hotels.

INTERVIEWER: Was it kind of lonely?

MAIETTA: No, I always made a lot of friends within the workers, so I always had places to go and things to do. Of course, in the evenings you always had things to do because you were still either having meetings or going to see people whom you wanted to convince.

INTERVIEWER: A good bit of your work was probably at night.

MAIETTA: Yes. Well, like a sister of one of the women said in Baltimore, when she said, "Where are you going?". We said, "We're going visiting." We called "visiting" seeing workers. She laughed, and she said, "I don't know why you call it visiting when most of these people don't even want you to come to see them!" That was the term we used--visiting.

Then, of course, you got involved in some community work. Like in Canada, in the winter time, you know, they used to do a lot of hockey playing, so we always got involved in hauling some of the players to the different games. That was one way of getting into. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I was going to ask you, when you went to a totally strange place like Canada, how did you go about making the first initial contact?

MAIETTA: Same way. You just visited people. Somebody gave you names, and you visited them. Then from there you went to others. Of course, I was involved in some of the work with the YWCA there that they had. People that came to work in Ontario from Saskatchewan or some of these other places, they were really mistreated by some of the workers in these other provinces.

INTERVIEWER: I wonder if you could talk about some of the women that you met along the way. For instance, in Baltimore there was a woman named Angela Bombaci. Right?

MAIETTA: From the ILG.

INTERVIEWER: From the ILG, right. Now, did you make her acquaintance?

MAIETTA: Yes, we worked together in a lot of campaigns, organizing campaigns. And Sara Barron from the Amalgamated. There was another gal from the Amalgamated. I think she was only on the Amalgamated executive board just because she was a woman. I'm trying to think of her name.

INTERVIEWER: You mean she was the token woman?

MAIETTA: Yeah. There weren't ever many women on the different executive boards or councils. I think Angela was on hers. She was on the ILG. I think she was the only one. Mamie Santora was the ACWA woman.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, right.

MAIETTA: . . . .from the Amalgamated. She was only on there as a woman. Of course, Gladys Dickinson was on the Board. Gladys was southern director and research director at one time, too. She was on all of them until she died, I think, or retired or something. But I don't think they ever had too much to do or say. It didn't seem that way to me, anyway, because I ran into a lot of women that I thought were very good in their field, excellent, more so than some of the men. I know Frieda Schwenkmeyer* was never on the board, and I always thought she was an outstanding woman in the labor movement.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you meet her?

MAIETTA: Well, the first time I met her was up in Troy, New York, and I'll never forget that. She gave me a stencil and told me to cut a stencil for a meeting, and I thought she was being funny. I didn't even know what a stencil looked like at that time. I said, "Don't be funny!" I never knew enough to keep my mouth shut anyhow! [laughter] She looked at me and said, "So you'll spoil a couple of stencils. It's no great thing. You don't have to go to college to know how to make a stencil, how to cut a stencil. So you'll ruin a few!" She gave me the stencils and everything and said, "Here's a copy of one. All you have to do is change the date." From then on, I learned how to make stencils. But I did think she was trying to show off or something. That's the way she talked, you know. "It's no big deal. You don't have to go to college to know how to make a stencil! So you'll ruin a couple." She really taught me how to do a lot of things, even make up programs for conferences and things. The first time I ever did <u>that</u>.

So the only ones that really showed you how to do things were the women. Really, if there was a woman around, she showed you how to do things. The men were always trying to see if they could get you into some. . . .

INTERVIEWER: . . . .dark corner?

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*Also interviewed for this oral history project.

MAIETTA: No, not exactly dark corner, but always thought that you didn't know anything.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a kind of the feeling that the men wondered what you were doing there?

MAIETTA: Yes, always.

INTERVIEWER: Did you make any good male friends? I mean, were there some that had a good attitude?

MAIETTA: Yes, there were a lot of women that were respected. I know the men in the dress shirt department thought that this Frieda was just great and respected her for what she knew and then worked with me also, both of us. Before we had this big strike in Troy, we were both working, just her and I, with a lot of these men from the different departments that were officers of this local up there.

INTERVIEWER: But did you have the feeling--I know I get this feeling sometimes--that the women, in order to achieve, had to be a little bit better than the men?

MAIETTA: Yes, or more mouthy to show them that you knew what you were talking about. I always felt I knew what I was talking about! [laughter] Maybe they didn't, but I did!

INTERVIEWER: You didn't need assertiveness training! [laughter]

MAIETTA Where were we?

INTERVIEWER: So you went to Baltimore, and then you were on the War Labor Board. From Baltimore you went to Canada.

MAIETTA: Kitchener, Ontario.

INTERVIEWER: Kitchener, Ontario.

MAIETTA: Helped organize the Arrow Shirt Company there. There was a place where the men tried to take the women all the time. See, the cutting department, of course, was all men. In the stitching department [there] was between four and five hundred women. So they came onto a slow season. We were organizing, but the cutters were in the union, same as the Troy thing. So the cutters always tried to fix the weekend to suit them. Never mind about the women or anything. So everytime if they were only going to work four days or three days, they wanted Thursday and Friday off. Well, the women liked to have Monday and Tuesday off because then they could

MAIETTA: do their washing and do their house chores. So when I went there, it was always that the men decided when they would have the time off. I said, "We're going to vote on this!" These guys had a fit! They said, "Oh, no you don't!" I said, "Oh, yes, we are. Don't you believe in democracy?" They said, "Yes, we do." I said, "Well, we're going to vote on it." They said, "Well, we'll never be able to win that vote!" I said, "I know!" [laughter] "All these weeks you've been winning it." And we had some very good women active up there. In fact, one of them, I think, became one of the business agents. Anyway, I was there for about over three years.

INTERVIEWER: Who was deciding where you should go?

MAIETTA: The national office decided.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any input into that?

MAIETTA: Well, a couple of times I refused to go, but I used to be sent to take chestnuts out of fires for everybody. When you come from the national office, you know, it's sort of . . . well, they respect you better than they would if you came from some other local in the same town because you were going there with some authority. Then in Canada, they also had a lot of Italian people. In Canada, people come from Italy, come into Canada on Sunday, and would go to work on Monday, and they tried to break the union several times that way. They don't any more but they used to have a clause that you could withdraw from the union so many days before the contract expired. So a lot of these people did, you know. That was one way that they used to threaten the union.

Well, I had been up there, since I worked that full time, three years, and every so often they would have me go back to work, especially in Rolph, Onterio, where they had quite a few shirt factories there. It was always, you know, the people decided they didn't want the union any more and you had to organize all over again, you know, start from scratch. Lots of times you could reason with the Italian people that understood English. You'd say, "Look, they're using them to break not only you but your unemployment compensation." Because, see, if they refused to go to work, then they couldn't draw unemployment compensation. And if they had enough people to run the factory, it meant that the company won. But as a rule, the companies used to pay for the people to fly here from Italy, and they used to put them to work. A lot of them came from the part of Italy that my mother was from. That's the Italian I know how to speak--the dialect. And some of the mothers couldn't speak English either, so I used to tell them why.

INTERVIEWER: In Italian?

MAIETTA: Yes. And some of the younger--the sons especially--understood what you were trying to tell these girls that were coming here, breaking all the conditions and things that the people had.

So, occassionally, I would go back. The last time I went back I told the national office that I wouldn't go back any more if they didn't do something about a maintenance of membership clause in the contract. Because this was silly! You know, you do all that work, and then in a year or two you had to go back and reorganize, and there was always a new group there, very few of the old people that were there.

I was there when the war was over, by the way. Like I said, Kitchener. . . English and German people were settled there, and they were vicious, too, the German immigrants there, really. Like it was nothing for them to break up a German club and throw the furniture out the third or fourth floor window. They really were very ugly to them. Of course, we weren't any better here. We stockaded them, so I guess. . . [laughing] it's six of one and half a dozen of another!

INTERVIEWER: Changed the names of towns that were German and so forth. How was the Amalgamated organized? Do you want to talk a little bit about that? In other words, my impression is that it was organized around various subcrafts. In other words, you had shirt makers. . . .

MAIETTA: Yes, we had the shirt workers. The shirt workers and cotton garment were the same thing. I mean like those single pants and. . . I'd have to get the book. I have something here. But I belonged to the cotton garment industry, and that was shirts, pants--what they called single pants--and clothing and then outer wear, which is sportswear.

INTERVIEWER: Well, here's a list from the Philadelphia Joint Board.

MAIETTA: [Looking at the list] Yeah, journeyman tailors, they wouldn't let us come into their union, the shirt workers. . . See, when we first organized, we belonged to the Pittsburgh district. Well, we still do, my local. The tailors voted against having the shirt makers come into the joint board because, after all, we were just little sewing machine operators, didn't have any business going in with the journeymen who were supposed to be experts.

MAIETTA: See, [looking at the list] this is the clothing. We didn't have all these different. . . all cotton garments, like shirts and single pants and the jeans and work shirts and things, they were all in one department. Then they had what they call an outer wear, but this isn't the way ours was set up. It's not the way it's set up now, either.

INTERVIEWER: No, well, how was it set up in the Pittsburgh district, then?

MAIETTA: In the Pittsburgh district, we had the journeyman tailors, and then we had the retail stores, which were the department stores. They had that group. And we had the shirt workers and the clothing workers.

INTERVIEWER: The men's clothing?

MAIETTA: Men's clothing, yes. That was the three or four groups. We didn't have any other. . . you know, they didn't have any neck wear anyway in that area.

INTERVIEWER: And when did they create the joint board? After you became active? Or [they] had it before?

MAIETTA: No, had it before. Well, it was created really at the Pottsville meeting. I used to belong to the Pottsville Joint Board, see, and we used to have to travel from western Pennsylvania to Pottsville to a joint board meeting. I was an officer of the Pottsville [Joint Board], one of the local officers. Then Potofsky and New York thought that we should have a joint board in the West. Well, Monas didn't want that. That's why it's called the Pennsylvania Joint Board. He wanted that to be <u>the</u> joint board for the whole state of Pennsylvania, and he got very angry because I got all the women from that part to vote to have a joint board. Originally, we wanted the joint board to be part of the Pennsylvania Joint Board; but whenever he got real nasty, we decided we were going to vote on our own joint board. He never did forgive me. You know, it's only been lately since he started really talking to me. Now he's in Florida he writes me big long letters every so often! [laughter] He really gave a lot of his life to the Pennsylvania shirt workers.

INTERVIEWER: All right. I don't think I quite understand what the issue was. You had a joint board in Pottsville. . . .

MAIETTA: Yeah, that was the Pennsylvania Joint Board. That was where all the shirt workers belonged because they put on that big drive.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And Pittsburgh didn't want you in it because of the journeyman tailors?

MAIETTA: That's right. The journeymen tailors didn't want us. They only had a local there. It wasn't a joint board yet. It was just a Pittsburgh district office. Then Monas didn't want to create a joint board in that area because he wanted a joint board of Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER: Hm-hm, excluding Philadelphia?

MAIETTA: Well, he probably thought that then after awhile maybe Philadelphia would be part of it. I mean, this was the idea, you see.

But we decided that for them it was fine; but when we had to travel all day to get to a meeting. . . like we had to leave early Friday morning. . . .

INTERVIEWER: . . . . while you were still in the factory. . . .

MAIETTA: Yeah, well, all joint board officers are delegates from their particular locals. You're elected at the joint board by the delegates there, you know, for whatever office you run for.

INTERVIEWER: All right. When you left Canada, Julia, what was your next assignment with the union?

MAIETTA: When I left Canada. . . I'm trying to think. . . where did I go?

INTERVIEWER: Right at the end of the war.

MAIETTA: Gosh, I don't know. I may have been in Allentown or Philadelphia. I think it was Philadelphia. Yeah, it was Philadelphia. Some of their business agents were leaving Philadelphia. I was the only organizer out of the craft, especially shirts. So one of the business agents was leaving Philadelphia, and the New York office sent me there to train another business agent. Of course, while I was there, then Mr. [Charles] Weinstein* asked me if I wouldn't take it over; and I said no, I didn't want to be tied down, especially in Philadelphia at that time because that was too far away from Curwensville.

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*Director, Philadelphia Joint Board.

INTERVIEWER: I see. But he did offer you the opportunity to be the business agent.

MAIETTA: Yes. So I said no. I said, "In place of training a new one, I can get your old business agent to stay on." He said, "If you can get my old business agent to stay on, you're wonderful!" I had already figured what the problem was. The problem was that he was letting the people in this one particular shop run him instead of him being the business agent. One of the issues was that they didn't think they were getting their share of work.

See, in the cotton garment industry, when work was slow, we shared it. Either shared it or else, if there was a layoff, it was always the last person who was hired, of course, who was laid off. But mostly we shared it. Let's say we got two hundred dozen shirts. Well, everybody on the particular operation got their share of that. Of course, if you were a little faster, you may have gotten a couple dozen more. Well, this one section was pocket setting. Of course, being a pocket setter, I was pretty well experienced on it. And most of them were Italian, which made it easy for me. Because when you're of the same nationality and they're pulling real dirty tricks, you can tell them. You can say, "Look,"--you know, in Italian--in a nice way--"who the hell do you think you're kidding?"

So I went into the office--I got their complaints and everything--and I checked. I asked the business agent, I said, "Did you check their pay records?" He said, "No." "Isn't that what you're supposed to do?" And he was a business agent for years! I don't know what he said, but he said the company didn't like it. I said, "Well, that's supposed to be one of our contract negotiations." He said, "You can go in and check the payroll." I said, "How do they expect you to settle grievances if you can't check what somebody is telling you from the shop?"

Well, I went in and checked, and every one of them were lying. They were all getting their fair share of the work. According to them, they weren't making any money at all. They were making more than the people they were complaining against! So I told them I wanted to have a meeting with them the next day at lunchtime, and I told the business agent, "I don't want you to come over there until I'm through. I'll call you."

MAIETTA: I went down and I sat down and in Italian I told them. I said, "You bunch of so-and-so's. . .!" [laughter] I showed them. I said, "This is what you told me you make. This is what you're making! And this is the amount of work you got!" And I went over the whole thing with them. And they each started to giggle. I said, "You know, that isn't very nice of you. You've been giving Dave such a hard time, and here he's decided to leave all because you people haven't been fair. First of all, you know he can go to the office and get all the information that he needs on any of you." So, anyway, as a result we really straightened the things out, so he decided to stay.

While I was in Philadelphia, it was the first time I had any real problem with the color situation. It was the first time. Coming from a small town, our black people and white people, there was never any problem. Well, one of the problems, I found out, was that the people in Philadelphia, the workers in a certain group, resented the idea that at Christman time only those on the executive board had big parties. And they thought, well, they pay dues, too, so why shouldn't everybody be part of a big party.

So I went into Mr. Weinstein. . . oh, he called me in, and he said, "Well, how are things?" I told them. I said, "Dave decided he's going to stay." He said, "Oh, that's good!" I said, "One of your big problems here is that you're always feeding the top people and the little people never get fed for anything or don't have any kind of social life." He said, "What do you suggest?" I said, "I suggest. . . (it was around Christmas time). . . you have a big party. Have sort of an open house." He said, "Where? All this costs money!" I said, "No, it won't cost you very much." You've been in the Philadelphia office; they have beautiful facilities there. I said, "There's a lot of wholesale meat places here. . . "

So we set up a committee. Well, one of the big arguments was that there was going to be a fuss because of the blacks and whites and all that. I said, "Mr. Weinstein, can I say something to you? What would you like to bet with me that the persons who are raising the most hell will be the ones who are dancing with the blacks the night of the party?" He said, "Oh, lay off. That's crazy!" I said, "Would you like to make a bet?" He said, "No. Go ahead, go ahead." I said, "Well, I'll just bet you it'll be the best party you ever went to!" I knew this was going to be because I could tell from the feeling of these people who were really making the biggest fuss.

MAIETTA: So, really, I had everybody working on this party, from the janitor up to the highest officer. You know, they were making things and we got meat wholesale and we went to the A & P and had them slice it for us. And it was really a wonderful affair. I think they had it for a few years after that. But as sure as I'm telling you, the persons that raised the most hell that they weren't going to a party with any blacks were the ones that were dancing with them that night! [laughter] I knew this was the way it was going to happen because it's happened that way every time, no matter if it's blacks, whites or what. The ones that do the most hell raising about a certain group, they're the ones that are the friendliest with them when you come right down to it.

INTERVIEWER: When it comes face to face, yeah.

MAIETTA: So then from there. . . let's see, where did I go? From Philadelphia--I forget how long I was there--then I went to. . . They had a big strike in Beaver Falls. The Teamsters [Union] were trying to take the shop from us. Well, our business agent wasn't doing his job there, so the people were upset. And the Steelworkers [Union] were trying to take them; the Teamsters were trying to take them. It was a shop of about five hundred people. It was National Pants.

So the first thing I did was I found out who the officers were. At that time, it was still AF of L and the CIO. They were separated. I knew I had some friends there, but I hadn't seen them for a long time. So I went to see these people, and I neutralized the top guys, you know, on both sides. I told them what I was in there for and I understand there might be a strike in this plant and all that.

So they did have a strike. It was a beautiful strike! Against us! It was really a model strike. The things that we would want done, these people did against the union! [laughter] It was something. National Pants also had shops in the South, so they brought up a couple of people from the South. One union representative was a girl named Eula McGill*, and she was as tall as a mountain. They had a black girl in there that was really tall. They were on strike against the union, and they were picketing, see. It was whenever the company could get an injunction against the union because of the contract; you know, they couldn't break the contract and all this. I want to tell you. It was something. I'll never forget. I looked out the door of the shop one morning, and

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*Also interviewed for this oral history project.

MAIETTA: they were picketing. And this great big black gal, she comes over to the door and she says to me, "I'm gonna get you if it's the last thing I do!" [laughter] I said, "You just do that!" Says me with my mouth and shaking inside, you know!

But you know, she became my best friend. The thing was settled and all that. But I found out afterwards when I was in there that the company had a lot to do with it. Here they had two floors--they made single pants--they were paying one rate on one floor and another rate on the other floor. And the business agent, that came from the Pittsburgh district hadn't. . . I don't know whether he hadn't caught it or anything.

So we negotiated some rates one day, and they were supposed to go into effect the next day. I told her, I said, "Do you know that they're paying this for putting zippers on upstairs and this is what they're paying here?" She says, "Well, they must have a different kind of a. . . maybe they don't fold them. Maybe they don't. . . " I said, "They do it exactly alike. I was up there!" I had never made pants in my life, but they thought I was an expert on pants. They thought I had sewed on pants! So I said, "I went up and checked both of them, and they're not doing a thing [different]!"

So we were negotiating, and finally one of the foremen on pants says to me, "How long have you worked on pants? How much do you know about pants?" I said, "Wouldn't you like to know?!!" [loud laughter] I didn't know a damn thing about pants! But I knew stitches and I knew operations. You know, I would take the pants and I'd let the girls tell me. "Now, what do they call this, and what do they call that?" Because I really had never worked on pants. Because the language is different on shirts and pants.

But anyway, we had negotiated and we had gotten some things straightened out. The next morning she calls me. It was a woman manager, and she was a son of a bitch. She called me at the hotel. I was to come right down there! So I came down. She says, "The integrity of the company is at stake!" I said, "Oh?" She said. . . Oh, I had raised hell when I found out about all this stuff. She said she wasn't going to do this, that, and the other thing, and I really raised hell, and I stormed out of the office and left. I said, "I'll see you tomorrow with the committee!" She said that they could hear me all over the plant, what I had said to

MAIETTA: her in the office. I said, "Yeah, they tell me I have that kind of a voice. Why shouldn't they know what's going on here. That's why you have all the problems you're having."

So anyway, to make a long story short, I was there for some time, and we got it straightened out. But all the unions really were involved in it because the Steelworkers [Union] kept telling these gals who were making a buck and a half that they should be making the same as steelworkers. But they'd go and buy their pants, that were made down South, to go to work in non-union for five cents less.

So I went to their meeting and I told them. I said, "I know where you buy your pants. I went around and checked, and they told me where all of you men buy your pants; but you're telling these women that they should be getting the same rate as you. But you don't know very much about single pants. They call that the rag industry, and that's exactly what it is. This guy can close his shop tonight and move every one of his machines down there. Can they do that with your steel mill?" So anyway, they all made peace with me, then. They agreed that they had said this to the girls. I mean, the girls weren't entirely wrong, either, but neither were the steelworkers right in telling them that, if they joined them, they could do this, that, and the other thing because they couldn't.

INTERVIEWER: Well, what about the Teamsters?

MAIETTA: Oh, they even brought in gangsters from Pittsburgh to help me! I didn't know this until afterwards! Did you ever hear of Johnny Beatrice?

INTERVIEWER: No.

MAIETTA: Well, he's a bricklayer. Johnny Beatrice, I think, took an interest in this problem, so he did anything for us. [chuckling].

Anyway, he called the Teamsters and told them they had to back off. He brought the guy in; I met him. In fact, they helped with some of these other guys that were raising a big stink and saying they were going to beat me up and everything. They told me, "Don't you ever be afraid to go any place because somebody will be watching you!" [laughter] I said, "You better make sure they're watching me and not out to get me!" So they all backed off and we really had a very good working relationship with the members after we settled all their complaints and everything.

MAIETTA: I was left behind to work with the locals to develop it, so we decided to have some kind of social activities and other programs. So I asked them what they wanted to do. Well, they said, "What do you want to do?" I said, "Well, I can't teach you to dance. Only a couple of very minor things which you probably know. What I know is how to sew. You'll tell me that you know how to sew, but you know that sewing clothes and things for yourself is altogether different than what you're sewing because you're only interested in one operation and that doesn't make a dress or anything."

So they decided they wanted to sew. So we started a sewing class. I told them, "When you come back, I want you to get a very simple pattern, preferably a apron or pajamas." What do you think they all came to class with? Suit patterns! Because it was Easter season!

INTERVIEWER: Oh, and they needed their Easter outfits!

MAIETTA: I said to them,"You girls are out of your minds!" They said, "Well, somebody said you made that suit you have on." I said, "Yes, but it took me a few years to learn to make a suit!" They said, "We'll learn." And they did. They really did very well. They had a lot of black people then. It's the first time I worked outside of Baltimore where there was quite a few blacks. When I was in Baltimore, I really learned to make a jacket by hand. I spent two hours every morning when I wasn't supposed to be out somewhere. I went into this factory and told this man that I wanted to learn. He was an Italian fellow, and he said, "Okay. You gonna learn it your way? Or you gonna learn my way?" [laughter] I said, "I'll learn your way." So he did, and I really learned.

INTERVIEWER: He taught you tailoring then?

MAIETTA: Yeah, I made a jacket for everybody but me while I was down there.

INTERVIEWER: I believe that! [laughing] Okay, well, you got things straightened out in Beaver Falls between the Teamsters and the Steelworkers. . . .

MAIETTA: That was also in between the time I ran for office, you know. I ran for office in '48, then in '58.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what office did you run for in '58?

MAIETTA: Congress, in '48. I was in Canada then, too. I was still in Canada and I came back and my mother told me that somebody had called me.

INTERVIEWER: Is that when you ran against Jimmy Van Zandt?

MAIETTA: Both times I did.

INTERVIEWER: How did it happen that you got chosen to run against. . . ?

MAIETTA: Well, I was mouthing off at a meeting one day. I said that it was kind of disgusting the way they just put a name up and the Democrats never really felt like they should do anything. . . .

INTERVIEWER: No one really tried to take a seat.

MAIETTA: Right. So after I went back to Canada, they invited me. . . They used to have Sunday meetings. When I got home or I called one day, my mother said so-and-so had called me. I said, "What do they want?" She said, "I don't know. But I heard somebody say they wanted you to run for Jimmy Van Zandt's seat." I said, "Oh, they have to be out of their mind. How can I run when I'm in Canada and I'm working?"

So when I came in, I called them and they asked me to come down and they said they had decided that I would be a good candidate. I said, "Who's gonna help me? You know I'm working and I have to work. I don't know if my union will even think of letting me run for an office." Well, they said that they would all help me and all this stuff. They said they felt that, with the help from the unions and all, I could really give the man a run. Which I did!

INTERVIEWER: What was the district at that time?

MAIETTA: Clearfield, Blair, and Center.

INTERVIEWER: Because it's been redistricted since, but at that time it was Clearfield, Blair, and Center Counties?

MAIETTA: And Blair is where Van Zandt was from. Well, he was a Pennsylvania Railroad man. Still is. But the AF of L believed that I could win, but I couldn't get the CIO to decide. They sent a man up from Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Now, this is the state AF of L?

MAIETTA: No. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Or the county AF of L?

MAIETTA: The county and the state and the national. They all thought I could win the CIO. They sent a man up from Washington to survey. He came in on one train and left on the next! [laughter] And he decided I couldn't win!

INTERVIEWER: He decided you couldn't win?

MAIETTA: You know him. Tilford Dudley?* The first time I saw him when I was working in Washington, he said something to me about having known me. I said, "You're the man that came up to survey my district. You came in on one train and left on the next and you decided I couldn't win. Do you agree that I could have won if all of you had helped?" He said, "Yeah, I think you could have." He [Van Zandt] beat me by 15,000 votes, and the registration was bad, too, at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Now, is this when you got to know Genevieve Blatt? Or had you known her before? Was it in connection with the campaign that you got to know. . . ?

MAIETTA: Yes, I knew her before, though.

INTERVIEWER: Did she work hard for you?

MAIETTA: Yes. The women all worked hard, even in the factories. They used to have little candy sales every Friday. That's how we ran that campaign--on little candy and food sales. Really! And volunteers. We had just volunteers all over the place. You know, everybody was really great. I think Mr. [Harry] Boyer thought I could do something because he came up and met with me one time. But the funds or anything weren't there; there was nothing there to work with.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of groups did you speak before, Julia?

MAIETTA: Oh, any group that asked me.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, but what kind of groups asked you? [laughter]

MAIETTA: The Italian group and all the Chamber of Commerce in Tyrone--anybody that invited. . . Really, I ran my own campaign because I didn't have any secretary or anything. If I saw

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*Staff member of CIO Political Action Department.

MAIETTA: where Van Zandt had appeared before someone, I'd call them and say, "You had him there. How about having me?" I wasn't bashful in any way! The only way I was bashful was asking people for some money for me.

The other thing that really angered me at that time was, see, Van Zandt was a fallen-away Catholic. When I found out that the Church and the Diocese were all for him, this kind of made me mad because I felt, well, here's an active Catholic person running for office and they should help me. So I told this to the Bishop one day when I ran into him up there. Clearfield is with the Erie Diocese, but Blair and Center are with the Altoona Diocese.

INTERVIEWER: This was the Altoona Bishop you were talking to?

MAIETTA: Yes. We were at a picnic and he was talking to me and he said to me, well, he'd say some prayers for me. I said, "Thank you, Father, but you say some for Van Zandt. He needs them, too!" [laughter] He says, "I can see why they got you to be a candidate!" I said, "What makes you think he doesn't need them?"

INTERVIEWER: He maybe needed them worse than you did!

MAIETTA: That was the first time that Van Zandt ever opened an office in his district in all the time he was in office.

Then the weekend before the election, he put out the ugliest, dirtiest scandal sheet. It didn't have his name on it, but in Blair County, where the vote was, they delivered it to everybody up there. They had references that I had slept with every labor leader man there was and that, if I won, the Pope would tell me what to do.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, gee!

MAIETTA: Just junk like that. I probably have it stuck some place.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of issues did you address yourself to?

MAIETTA: Oh, listen, I was the first one that had that "Put America Back to Work." After that everybody had it.

You remember Professor Keyes? He was my campaign manager in 1948. And Reed helped me and . . . .

INTERVIEWER: Hal Reed. What was Keyes' first name? I don't remember.

MAIETTA: Chet. No, Scott. Oh, I still hear from him. I can't think of it right now.

INTERVIEWER: Up at State College this was.

MAIETTA: But the professors really encouraged me to run. They had a big dinner for me before I decided to run, and they. . . Ferguson?

INTERVIEWER: Charles Ferguson?

MAIETTA: His wife just died. No, it's John.

INTERVIEWER: John Ferguson. That's right. And Duane Ramsey.

MAIETTA: Yeah, Duane especially. Yeah, he's your. . . .

INTERVIEWER: My uncle.

MAIETTA: Well, they really encouraged me, and they really did some work for me. They also did some work for me in '58.

INTERVIEWER: But this was '48, the first time you ran. Then you ran again in '58, ten years later.

MAIETTA: Ten years later the unions insisted that I run. I thought I'd get out of it. I thought that what's-his-name would beat me at the primary and I'd get out of it.

INTERVIEWER: Who's what's-his-name?

MAIETTA: Druckman. The party put one of the professors in against me. I heard Lawrence did. Lawrence said he didn't, but I told Lawrence, "A little birdie told me you did."

INTERVIEWER: David Lawrence, yeah. Van Druckman--wasn't that his name?

MAIETTA: Yeah. He [Lawrence] said to me, "What was that man's name that ran against you at the primary?" I looked at him and I said, "Governor, you ought to know. I hear you put him in against me!" He said, "I did?" I said, "That's what a little birdie told me!" [laughter] Somebody says to me, "You ought to keep your mouth shut! You shouldn't say that!" I said, "What for? That's what I hear, and that's what I hear is true!" So I hear that he told the chairman that, if he heard of any of them cutting me because I was a woman, they'd have to deal with him. One thing about Dave Lawrence--he did try to promote women in any office. I don't know about any other things, but he did try to promote them in political office.

INTERVIEWER: But you beat him in that primary?

MAIETTA: I beat Druckman, yeah. I thought he would beat me. When I went to bed, I was glad. I thought: Oh, good, now I won't have to campaign. About three o'clock in the morning, the Pittsburgh Press called me, and they said, "Congratulations!" I said, "What for?" He said, "You beat the pants off of that professor!" [laughter] I said, "I did? Oh, no!"--to myself.

[INTERRUPTION]

INTERVIEWER: Julia, in the interview that Karen and I did last time you talked about a number of the women who were in Baltimore with you--Angela Bombaci and Gladys Dickinson and. . . was it Mamie Santora?

MAIETTA: Well, she was that at that time. I think she had retired. I'm not sure. I don't think she worked for the Amalgamated.

INTERVIEWER: But you also said that you didn't think that they had the authority commensurate with their ability, that they weren't the decision makers in the union. I wondered if you could talk a little bit more about what role you thought they did play.

MAIETTA: Well, Gladys did. Gladys Dickinson had authority. She was director of the [ACWA] southern organizing campaign. She also was director of the research department of the Amalgamated. I think she also did some work in Japan after the war on prices and such. I think she represented the needle trades. I could be wrong, but I'm. . . .

INTERVIEWER: In Japan, she did.

MAIETTA: Yes. She went there as a needle-trade representative.

INTERVIEWER: What about Angela Bombaci?

MAIETTA: She was with the ILG.

INTERVIEWER: Right, not with the Amalgamated.

MAIETTA: No, she wasn't, but I know that she did a lot of work with the government on prices and things, too.

INTERVIEWER: What factors do you think made it possible for a woman to contribute and to have some authority? I mean, why did Gladys have it, for instance, when other women that you thought were very able didn't?

MAIETTA: Well, Gladys was capable and able. But some of the other women that I knew--and I think I mentioned Frieda--were involved in organizing back in the textile days during the 1936, etc. Frieda at one time worked for the Y.W.

INTERVIEWER: Frieda Schwenkmeyer.

MAIETTA: Yes. Then there was a gal named Sara Barron* from Baltimore. She worked as a very, very young gal in the shops there, and she was on the staff of the Baltimore Joint Board for a good many years. I think she has been and is being interviewed by the same group that's doing this work.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Well, what was the attitude of the men towards these women?

MAIETTA: I always thought that they accepted what they knew. I think it was better then than it is now!

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really? Why?

MAIETTA: I don't know. Maybe they felt that they needed these women to help them, and they had history back of them--you know, early days working and all the things they had gone through. I know Sara had a lot of knowledge of what the industry was about in Baltimore--both the industry and the political part of it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you did, too, if I may say so. You knew exactly what was involved in the various jobs.

MAIETTA: Yeah. Yeah, I do say "yeah"! [laughter] Yes! We did. We'd worked in the industry, and we had contributed quite a bit. We knew what the suffering of the old days, I'd guess you'd say, was all about.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Well, a lot of people are critical now of the labor movement because they say that in industries that heavily represent women, where a very significant proportion of the work force is female, there is not a commensurate number of women in positions of authority in the union. Of course, you and I have been talking about this and CLUW [Coalition of Labor Union Women] and various other organizations. I just wondered what steps do you think women ought to take? You were very,

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*Also interviewed for this oral history project.

INTERVIEWER: very active, and we're going to talk about the fact that you ran for Congress twice, and I think you and I have talked about CLUW a number of times, and I know that there's a women's committee mandated at the state federation level by action of the last convention. Some of the women here in Pennsylvania are very active and concerned about it. But I agree with you. I don't think very much is happening. I just sort of wonder what advice you would have for the younger women coming along.

MAIETTA: Well, I really don't believe that, because you're a woman, you should be put on any kind of committee. I think you should do things, and by doing things I mean that you should be actively working with some of the problems that are both for men and women. I think some of them think they ought to have a part of the thing just because they are women. But I don't believe that. I think that you should show that you have ability. I don't think anybody handed things to me because I'm a woman.

INTERVIEWER: No, I don't think so, either.

MAIETTA: I think that we went out and organized and took part in both politics and organizing.

INTERVIEWER: Where do you think you might have ended up, if you want to just speculate for a minute, where do you think you might have ended up in your union if you had been a man? Do you think that would have made a difference?

MAIETTA: Yes, I think so.

INTERVIEWER: In what way, Julia?

MAIETTA: Well, I think I'd probably have demanded a different post and got it. I don't know. I mean, I know there were a lot of men who came in after me and they ended up being managers of joint boards.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I guess that leads to a question in terms of how the union was structured and how you fit into that structure. Do you think that the structure of the union made it more possible for a man to become a manager?

MAIETTA: Yes, I think so. I always felt I could have. . . if they were doing seniority right, I would have been the manager of the Pittsburgh district which was established after I became active. Subczak came all the way from Wisconsin.

INTERVIEWER: Was that because they just didn't think of a woman in that kind of a job?

MAIETTA: I think so. I think they didn't. I know Pete Swoboda, who was manager and an officer of the Amalgamated, said that he thought I should have been a manager at one time; but I'm sure he didn't say anything. I said, "Well, why didn't you say something about it?" But I think that it's because you're a woman.

INTERVIEWER: What is the highest position a woman ever reached in your union, in the Amalgamated?

MAIETTA: Oh, Board member, the Executive Council, Gladys Dickinson.

INTERVIEWER: Gladys Dickinson, yeah.

MAIETTA: And Dorothy Ballanca who was also a Board member. She was one of the ones involved in the strike in Chicago when the Amalgamated was first established.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, why don't we talk a little about. . . well, let me back up a minute. Some of the things that we were wondering about from the previous interview. . . during the years that you worked in the shop, you apparently went to high school at St. Francis Convent in Clearfield?

MAIETTA: Hm-hm, yes.

INTERVIEWER: What did you study? And what were your goals?

MAIETTA: At that time I wanted to become a nurse, and I was just picking up the equivalent to the first two years of high school because you needed that. By the time we got finished, they'd changed the requirement to a high school graduate. So I always say, instead of becoming a nurse in a hospital, I became a mental nurse in organizing, helping people with their problems in the workshop!

INTERVIEWER: [Laughing] You nursed the Amalgamated along!

MAIETTA: No, not the Amalgamated, but some of the workers in the field.

INTERVIEWER: You had mentioned also, Julia, going back to the Navasky Company at Philipsburg and Osceola Mills, you had talked about a series of radio broadcasts during the organizing campaign.

MAIETTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was the nature of those radio broadcasts?

MAIETTA: They were with workers from the shop, explaining why they needed a union and the rate of pay and the work they did, a regular organizing campaign drive put on the air by involving some of the people who were from the factories.

INTERVIEWER: And the union bought that time, then, on the radio. . .

MAIETTA: Yes, they did.

INTERVIEWER: I notice that the CIO had a number of radio broadcasts at that time. For instance, Frank Fernbach did one in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, about the same time; and John Ramsay was on the radio in various places. How effective do you think this was in terms of trying to organize?

MAIETTA: Well, it must have had some effect because, as a result of it, we had elections and won.

INTERVIEWER: It didn't hurt, anyway!

MAIETTA: No, it didn't. It helped. It enlightened the public, and I think then they encouraged their relatives who were in the shops that this was a good thing.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think when we left off the last time, we were just about to talk about how it was that you got involved in the campaign for Congress in 1948. I wonder if you could elaborate on that a little bit.

MAIETTA: Well, I was still in Canada at the time. My mother had told me that some of the Democratic people had called and said they wanted to talk to me. So when I came back, I called them, and they said they had decided that I would make a good candidate. Because up until that time I think they just merely put a name in, just to fill the ticket, but no real effort had ever been made to unseat Van Zandt. So they decided that, since I was an officer of a union and belonged to them, the unions would help and I would get the support of the labor people. They understood it would be hard because I was a woman and all that, but they had made some commitments. Of course, I talked to the International, and I don't think they were too happy about it, but they didn't give me much encouragement.

INTERVIEWER: Why weren't they too happy about it?

MAIETTA: Well, they didn't think that a woman had a chance, especially in that area of the state or the country, rather, too.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think there was some sense on the Democratic Party's side that they were just sort of throwing in the election and they might as well let a woman run if they weren't going to win, anyway?

MAIETTA: Yes, I think that feeling was there, both among the Democratic Party officers. But the women didn't think so. They really went to work. Like I said, we ran a campaign on peanuts, really. One of the unions that really felt that I had a chance was the Stone Cutters who had the brickworks in Cleveland there at that time. Not the North American but the Harbison Walker workers. A fellow by the name of Gus LeBlanc and his wife, Shirley, really thought I had a good chance, and they really put everything in it.

INTERVIEWER: Were the stone workers largely of Italian extraction?

MAIETTA: Well, I think sort of 50-50. There were a lot of Italians there. LeBlanc was a New Englander, of course, and he induced or encouraged his union to put a lot of money in there; and they did. They raised money in Vermont for a gal who was running for Congress in Pennsylvania! [laughter] That's the first time, I think. . . I had never heard of Ruth Colombo*, only through him, and she's one of the gals that raised money back in New England. Of course, now she's the Eastern Director for the Women's Activities for the national AFL-CIO.

But the women in the factory really had food sales, candy sales, every week to raise money for me. We really had a lot of volunteers and a lot of workers.

INTERVIEWER: Well, if you felt that your support was largely the voting power of women, how did you address yourself to women's issues?

MAIETTA: No, it wasn't the voting power of women because a lot of women didn't even register at that time. One of the issues that I really worked on was putting America back to work, which in '48 was a dream, really. But we used it at that time. We used this for the campaign. A fellow by the name of Scott Keyes, a professor from Penn State [Pennsylvania State University], was really very much involved in my campaign. Every

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*Also interviewed for this oral history project.

MAIETTA: time he ever came to our house, my mother always felt that she had to feed him because he was so skinny! This was a feeling that she got! He really was a very hard worker. Together with the different groups of volunteers. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Was he professor of economics?

MAIETTA: Yes. We put on such a campaign that they tell me that. . . well, it was the first time that Van Zandt ever opened offices or really campaigned. He never did anything in that district except say that he was running. Of course, the Railroad Workers always endorsed him because I guess at one time he had worked on some bill that they were very much concerned with, and they felt that they should. . . And he would run all these different unions that make up the Railroad Workers, I don't know how many of them, listing each on TV and Radio making it appear he had the largest support from labor.

INTERVIEWER: All the different brotherhoods, yes.

MAIETTA: Even if they had only three members, you know. . . [laughing] And I think that he beat me by about 15,000 votes or something. As I said, I had no money, no people to put on a big campaign; but we worked. We worked from one end of the district to the other, and it's a big district.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, some of the newspaper clippings you gave us, Julia, indicate that you were ready to give up a number of times, especially in the early stages of the campaign. Was that for lack of money? Or what?

MAIETTA: Well, it was lack of money, and everybody kept saying, "Oh, you'll never win." All this kind of stuff.

INTERVIEWER: Just kind of general defeatism. I also read that there was a general national clipping to indicate that, at the time you ran, there were ten women Democrats running for House of Representatives seats. Was that an unusually large number?

MAIETTA: Yes, it must have been.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get some support, then, from places outside the district to support you as a woman candidate?

MAIETTA: No, I don't think so. I really don't remember, but I don't think so. I think women even worked against a woman because I think at that time they didn't think that women should run.

INTERVIEWER: Well, now, at that time Emma Duffy Miller was active in the Democratic Party.

MAIETTA: Yes, she always encouraged women. I'm sure she encouraged me. Genevieve Blatt, I know, contributed to my campaign, both in '48 and in '58.

INTERVEIWER: What was her position at that time?

MAIETTA: I really don't remember. I think in '48, she was an officer of the Democratic Committee. My memory isn't as good as it used to be! I'd have to go back through the clippings and see who and when and what. It seems to me somewhere I still have a list of people that helped in both of my campaigns.

INTERVIEWER: What did Jimmy Van Zandt say about you? Or did he pay any attention to you at all?

MAIETTA: Oh, he sure did! He said everything!

INTERVIEWER: Like what?

MAIETTA: Well, he didn't directly, but his people [said] that I was Catholic and that the Pope would be running me and the unions would be telling me what to do.

INTERVIEWER: How did you answer that charge?

MAIETTA: I'm sure I said plenty because I never knew enough to keep my mouth shut! [laughter] When anybody said anything, I always said things back.

INTERVIEWER: But there is a lot of anti-Catholicism in that district, right?

MAIETTA: Yes. And the Italians were for him, too. They weren't really registered. . . I've never used my Italian to. . . because I was never a nationalistic Italian anyway. But they were not. . . In fact, their registration was very bad, I found out. Running for office at that time wasn't like you run now. You know, you check the registration and put on a registration drive and things like that, especially among the Democrats. Although they had had that seat at one time when Roosevelt ran, the first time they ever had it. In '48 and '58, the district was made up of Clearfield County, Center County and Blair. Both times that I ran, the professors at Penn State were really the ones that urged me and thought I should run.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Did that help you or hurt you, do you think?

MAIETTA: Well, I'm sure it helped me in Center County. They tell me both times that I did better than any of the men that ran in that district, percentage-wise. Like I said, you know, the statistical point of view at that time among the unions wasn't as good as it is now.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Of course, there was very little trade union support in Center County because there's very little labor there.

MAIETTA: At that time there was, anyway. There's more now than there used to be. But the Miners [Union] and even the county [Democratic Party] chairmen didn't want to see a woman. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Did the Miners in Philipsburg support Van Zandt? Or did they support you?

MAIETTA: In '48, they supported me. There used to be a fellow by the name of Mark, Jim Mark, from DuBois who was the district representative. And over in Ebensburg they also backed me although it wasn't my district, but they were handy to Blair County. They helped me, too, the Miners did.

I'll never forget, I went to a meeting over in the Blair County part where there were some mines that bordered on Ebensburg, and you still had to give your name through the peephole, and then they would go to the chairman and the chairman would decide whether you were coming into their meeting. They were just a small group, you know, around the room. That always amused me because we always had such open meetings in the Amalgamated from the very beginning in that area that, when you went to one of the Miners' meetings and you had to give all information via the peephole . . . if you didn't know the password, the guy had to go and find out from the chairman whether you were going to be allowed to come in or not! [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: Well, that was District 2 of the United Mine Workers. They were pretty much on the decline anyway, right?

MAIETTA: They were.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I wonder if you could describe where you think your support was and where Van Zandt's support was.

MAIETTA: Well, my support, I felt, was from the Democratic Party and from the unions and the workers as a whole. As I said, I used this "Put American Back to Work" as a slogan. In '48 and '58

MAIETTA: both, I tried to convince the women that something should be done about the Social Security Law. Of course, now they're using exactly the same arguments that I did because under the Social Security Law at that time a woman, if she had children, she was helped. But as soon as they were eighteen, why, she was thrown off of social security. Or if they were married even earlier than eighteen, then she didn't have a penny. She didn't even get the same kind of treatment as the mule did from the mine owner. At least, when he couldn't work any more, they fed him. But the woman didn't get a thing.

I couldn't get the women to see that. Now I know that all the women's groups are fussing about it. I used to talk to all the legislators, too, why they didn't do something about that. They said there wasn't enough women that cared. I believed them.

INTERVIEWER: Well, there weren't as many women then actively employed as there are now.

MAIETTA: I felt there was always a lot of women because the Curwensville plant was all women. All the places I knew were women. Of course, now there's more in the business world than there were at that time. Like I said, I felt that the support that I had was just from the unions that I could convince and the Democratic Party. I don't know if the Democratic Party chairman was that much interested in having a woman! [laughing]

INTERVIEWER: Well, I notice that in one of the speeches that you made, you did stress the growing importance of women as breadwinners as well as homemakers. So you were ahead of your time in some of the things you were talking about, that's true.

I don't see very many clippings in which you talked about the Taft-Hartley Act. Was that an issue in this campaing in '48?

MAIETTA: When was that?

INTERVIEWER: It passed in '47, and of course in '48, Truman was running.

MAIETTA: It was part of my platform. If I didn't mention it, I'm sure I had it as part of it.

INTERVIEWER: Did Truman come into the district at all?

MAIETTA: He came to Altoona. I'll never forget the night that he came there. In Altoona, you know, they almost let you off in the boondocks, the train stops there, and that's where we were.

MAIETTA: So we got on the train. I got on the train, and we went to the car where he was. He says to me, "What made you want to run for Congress?" That abruptness of his. I said, "Well, I thought this district needed a better representative than they have, and I decided to run." "That's good! That's good"! He told me a few things about what was important to use and. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Gave you some advice.

MAIETTA: And he said he was going to win at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, did he?

MAIETTA: Yes, he did. Margaret was there and Mrs. Truman. It was early evening, and we rode with him to Johnstown and got off, those of us that were candidates from that whole area. It was the old-type train, not the fancy ones like they use now.

INTERVIEWER: The whistle-stop tour. What kind of response was he getting throughout. . . .

MAIETTA: He got a good response. I thought it was very good in Altoona, which was a Pennsylvania Railroad Company town and Republican. They probably came from Clearfield and all that area, you know, but it seemed to me like a large crowd. It might not have been large. I don't know what the paper said at that time. But it was a good crowd.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you on the train with him?

MAIETTA: From Alttoona to Johnstown.

INTERVIEWER: Which is what? About an hour?

MAIETTA: No, about a half hour, something like that. He talked about his campaign and the response that he had. He thought he was getting a good response. He talked to all the other candidates that were on there, too. There were probably statewide candidates on it, there to get publicity.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it must have been pretty exciting.

MAIETTA: Yes, it was.

INTERVIEWER: In the clippings, Julia, there was correspondence back and forth between you and the Altoona radio station, WFBG, in which you asked about getting equal time. Was that just in '58? Or was that an issue in '48 as well?

MAIETTA: Oh, it must have been in both because the same people owned both stations at the same time.

INTERVIEWER: Well, what about the press coverage and the media coverage?

MAIETTA: I don't know if it was in '58 or '48, but the Clearfield paper called me and asked me for a picture; and I said, "What for? You're not gonna use it, anyway, so why should I bother sending it to you?" He didn't think that I was being very fair. He thought that he'd been giving me real good coverage. I said, "It didn't appear that way to me. I saw these big editorials for Van Zandt." He said, well the editorials were another matter because Van Zandt was a friend of his. I said, "You know, Mr. Ulrich, I must be awfully stupid because I always had a feeling that good government came before friendship."

INTERVIEWER: [chuckling] What did he say to that?

MAIETTA: I said, "I refused to back a brother of mine for tax collector because I knew he wouldn't make a good tax collector." He said, "Yeah, that's what I heard about you!" [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: This is the editor of the Clearfield paper?

MAIETTA: Yes, Ulrich. In Blair County there was always this tabloid, a scandal sheet. . . I don't know whether anybody ever tried to trace this to Van Zandt or not. He did it years later, too, that they gave it out the Sunday before the Tuesday of the election; and it really was a vicious kind of thing. It must have been about four or five pages--just ugly cartoons and ugly sayings, you know. I don't think I ever got one, but I did see it. The Pope's telling me what to do, what to say, you know; the Church was involved, and also [it was] insinuating that I went to bed with all the labor leaders. Things like that. So they had to endorse me, but they really didn't want to.

This was the kind of campaign that he carried on all the time, and this one was a special issue. The fellow that printed it was an Italian fellow. I don't know if he's still in business or not. And you didn't have anybody to fight these things.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any copies of that?

MAIETTA: I don't know if I do or not. I'd have to look. Some of my stuff got ruined in the flood, so I don't know if I have all the stuff or not.

INTERVIEWER: But this stuff was actually printed and circulated.

MAIETTA: It was passed around at the homes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you think about taking any legal action about it or not?

MAIETTA: No.

INTERVIEWER: Why not?

MAIETTA: Well, to tell you the truth, the last time I ran I really wasn't too enthusiastic, in '58. I was still kind of angry about the '48 because I also felt at that time that the unions could have helped me more than they did. I really wasn't running because I felt I was going to benefit from it. I thought they really meant it when they wanted good representation from their people. From what I know now of some of the people and the help they got then, I still felt that they should have helped me because I not only depleted what little finances I had but also the family's. Some of the politicians would say to you, "Oh, don't worry about your campaign debts. You don't have to pay them." Well, I didn't believe that. I thought you paid debts.

That's why in '58. . . I must say this about the TV and radio--they put my advertisements on. They knew they were going to get the money if I didn't have it right then and there. I know that this is something that they didn't do for most of the other candidates.

INTERVIEWER: Because they were afraid they might not get paid, yes. Well, after the election was over, you were appointed by Governor Leader to the Clearfield County Board of Assistance. Could you describe that?

MAIETTA: Well, I was the labor representative there. I was on for nine years on this as the labor representative. Our duties there were to see that they treated the workers fairly when they came for assistance. We voted also on members of the staff, their raises and all these things, and there were really interesting things that came to the Board's attention.

There was a minister on the Board at the time. I don't know what faith he was from, but I remember that there was a case brought to our attention. Two families [were] involved, and there was a baby born to this extra outside marital affair. The husband of this woman that had this child was willing to forgive and forget if they could get some assistance to take

MAIETTA: care of this child. So I thought, well, you'd be saving two families, and the state would be also saving money if both families were going to be part of public assistance funds. I voted that we give the assistance to this baby so that the families could be together. The minister voted against it, which shocked me. I asked him why he did that. The motion passed that we help take care of this infant. At that time I think it was sixteen dollars and some cents. I know the sixteen dollars sticks out in my mind. A month! I thought he for one would be the one to promote it. I thought he'd even make the motion. He said that this encourages people to be immorally wrong, do things immoral. I said, "Reverend, for sixteen dollars and forty-five cents a month?" [laughter]

Anyway, when I went home and told my mother about it, she thought that was shocking, too, that here was a minister who would like to keep two families together, plus saving the state a lot of money if they were not separated. . . I forget how many children were involved. One family had four or five, and the other one had some, too. But to take care of one little baby, he thought this would encourage other people to do things morally wrong! [laughter]

There were a lot of interesting cases that came before the board. . . the people who say that all you have to do is go to the Public Assistance and you get money. . . There was one family that I know that had been on public assistance for generations. So the brother and sister came to Harrisburg, and they decided they were going to break this cycle. At that time--I don't know whether it's changed now--the law was made up that, if anybody in the family is earning any kind of funds, they have to contribute, no matter where they're living. Somebody on the Board had sent a letter to both this brother and sister, that they should contribute to their mother and father. Well, at that time I think the pay in Harrisburg was either $3,200 or something, you know, for the year. They wrote back and they said that they didn't feel that they owed anything to their parents because all their life all they'd known was public assistance and they wanted to break away from the family and start earning their own.

So I decided that these two youngsters who were willing to go out and earn their way and not be on public assistance should not have to pay out of their meager wages anyway. This was a battle. Sometime or other I think some people ought to go in and sit in on some of these Public Assistance Board meetings because it's surprising how people react. I mean, people really don't vote on issues to do better for the person involved. . . .

INTERVIEWER: No, they vote on the basis of their prejudices.

MAIETTA: Prejudices or you got to stick to the law. This is the law, which is. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Right, you can't bend the law anyway. Well, did you win that one? Or did you lose it?

MAIETTA: Yes, we won it. It meant that if they couldn't live, exist in Harrisburg, they were going to go back home and follow the old tradition.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go back to working for the union after 1948?

MAIETTA: Oh, yes, I just had a leave for awhile.

INTERVIEWER: Where did the Amalgamated send you then after the campaign?

MAIETTA: In '48 from there I went. . . [hesitation]

INTERVIEWER: You didn't start to work for COPE at that time?

MAIETTA: No. Well, I worked with political action all the time. But I'm trying to think where I was. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Right after the Truman election?

MAIETTA: Funny, my mind is so blank. I was in Morgantown, West Virginia, for awhile. After that I must have. . . I don't remember even when the Navasky plant was organized. It must have been in the fifties or '52.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, the Navasky organizing drive was started in 1951 and organized in 1954. So you must have been involved in that campaign in Philipsburg.

MAIETTA: Yes, oh, I was there, but I'm trying to think if I stayed there after '48 or if I went someplace else.

INTERVIEWER: Now, this fellow named E. B. Gersh, the national representative. What was your relationship with him?

MAIETTA: He was an organizer. We organized there. From '48 we may have gone to Youngstown, Ohio. I was involved in a campaign to organize the department store workers. That was in Youngstown at the time. It could have been there. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a successful campaign, Julia?

MAIETTA: Yes. We had some firings and brought them to the attention of the labor board.

INTERVIEWER: Now, was the Amalgamated organizing the department store workers?

MAIETTA: Yes. They were the only ones that were designated to organize department store workers because we had the journeyman tailors and in men's stores we had people involved. That's why the CIO decided that we would be the international union to do it because at that time the Retail Clerks were not part of the CIO. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Of the CIO, yeah, right. What kind of support did you get from the people working in the department stores there in Youngstown?

MAIETTA: We got some good support. We got some of the big deparment stores. Of course, like I said, we had the nucleus in this store from the men's department, so it wasn't too hard for them to decide to belong to the union because they knew what the benefits were, and these people went and talked to them, too. We used to give leaflets out almost every other day in front of department stores.

Department store organizing is different than what I was used to. I was used to knocking on doors, but here you could go into the cafeteria where they ate and sit down and talk to somebody and get conversation going and give them cards to take into the store.

INTERVIEWER: From what I understand, department store wages, especially at that time, were very different between men and women.

MAIETTA: Yes, they were.

INTERVIEWER: Men tended to sell where they could have a commission. They sold the big items, they sold furniture, they sold men's clothing. And, therefore, there was a big wage differential. Was that an issue in trying to organize?

MAIETTA: Yes, it was. Of course, you had to also convince the men that you wouldn't. . . .

INTERVIEWER: You wouldn't take anything away from the men.

MAIETTA: That's right, that, if anything, they'd be gaining from it. This was true also in the factories. Men always had the cutting, spreading in departments where the pay was good, and the women did the sweating in the pressing rooms. Very few of the men worked in the pressing rooms. That's where I was involved. Except with clothing. The men pressed there. And, of course, the pay was always so much different. . . higher, too.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think you managed to make any kind of fundamental change in that?

MAIETTA: Yes, I think so because women then became involved in the cutting departments. So they couldn't very well pay less. . . and women spread, started spreading the material, too, which at one time was always a man's job.

INTERVIEWER: What is spreading material?

MAIETTA: You get bolts of material and you put them on a roller and you spread the work for the cutting. Then somebody marks the pattern on that, and then they cut. The entire cutting department, which took in the spreading of the material and the laying of the pattern and the cutting, was always done by men. If anything, the women put the tickets on them to show what the lot number and all that was. That was always done by women.

INTERVIEWER: Was spreading heavy work?

MAIETTA: Well, only to the extent of putting the bolt on that roller. After that you just pulled it over and then you put an iron bar at the end and then pulled the material back. It was always done by two people anyway, so, if two men can put a bolt of material on, I always felt two women could do it, too!

INTERVIEWER: All right, well, let's talk about the next campaign a little bit. I gather from what you've already said that they were quite different in that in 1948 you were enthusiastic and ready to run and really ready to try and show Van Zandt he couldn't have it all his own way. Now, in 1958, you had opposition in the primary from. . . .

MAIETTA: Druckman.

INTERVIEWER: Aaron Druckman.

MAIETTA: Professor.

INTERVIEWER: Professor of Philosophy at Penn State. Did you run against Aaron Druckman? I mean, did you actively campaing for the nomination?

MAIETTA: Yes, I did, but I didn't really want to. We had a meeting in Philipsburg. I don't even remember where I was. I was in Washington lobbying. Or was I? I must have been. I don't remember where I really was in '58, whenever this campaign was on. Anyway, the unions got together and they decided that they were going to put up a candidate because they always had to take the candidate that the party gave them. We had a meeting in Philipsburg of all the representatives from three counties, and it was really some meeting! They decided they were going to go to the chairman of each county, the Democratic chairman and tell him, "We have a candidate this time, so don't bother looking for one." They thought they had gotten an okay from all the county chairmen. They said, "Look, in '48, you folks decided you wanted her for your candidate. In '58, we want her. We think she's wiser and a better candidate than she was in '48."

So we had this meeting. I didn't want to run, really. I was tired from even '48, yes, and I knew all the problems, and there'd be more problems in '58. I didn't even have as much money. The few pennies that I had in '48 I didn't have in '58. We had a full meeting of the committee that was set up to run the thing. We adjourned for a few minutes, and they talked to me. They said, "Julia, you have to run. Even if you get beat, you have to run." I argued that I didn't want to run. I said, "Find somebody else." They said, "There's nobody as experienced or capable, and nobody has a chance." So I said, "Okay. On one condition. It'll be my name, but all the rest of you better do an awful lot of work because I don't have the money and I don't have the time and I don't want to go through what I did in '48." So they all pledged that they were going to work hard.

Somebody did a lot of the work--you know, like getting the papers and circulating them, petitions and everything. A few weeks later we found out that this Druckman was also going to run. We also heard that he was put in by Governor Lawrence, he was asked to run by Governor Lawrence because he didn't think that, since I was Catholic and he was Catholic, we should have that many Catholics on the ticket. I said I didn't know religion had anything to do with running for office. I said it was something new; I didn't know that it did.

MAIETTA: Anyway, to make a long story short, they tried to get him to withdraw. I understand some of the labor representatives talked to [Harry] Boyer and told him that he should talk to Lawrence because they had promised that I would be the candidate. Anyway, Druckman did not withdraw. I was really hoping that he'd beat me because I really didn't want to run. When I went to bed the night of the election, I thought that he had it; and I thought, well, this is good, now I won't have to run! About three in the morning, I got a call from the Pittsburgh Press congratulating me. I said, "What for?" He said, "You really beat the pants off that guy at Penn State!" I said, "I did?" [laughter] I guess I did. I don't remember what the vote was, but Blair County really came through. Well, I understand that he said that he wasn't going to have any problems beating this woman. They told him, "Don't underestimate her because she's got a lot of following here." So I guess I won, but, oh, brother. . . [laughter] I was sure a sad person. I wasn't as happy about winning as they thought I should have been!

INTERVIEWER: I can understand why! Having lived in that district at the time of that campaign, it was so solidly Republican. I remember, Julia, some big to-do. . . I don't remember the details now, but it was some big to-do about your supporters being Communist and some guy who ran the Belfont liquor store who was a legionnaire. Do you remember that?

MAIETTA: Yes, they started all kinds of rumors. We set up this committee after the primary, and there was some fellow by the name of Bill Germano, and there were rumors started that he and I were lovers or something. Some of the committee came to me and said, "You know, you'll have to really take him off of the committee." I said, "No, I'm not. I don't care what the rumors are. We had an all-day Sunday meeting on this. Well, I'm telling you right now, Bill stays on the committee. It's not the first time that rumors have been started, and it's not the last. I am not going to be a party just because somebody started some rumors." When I went home and told my mother about it, she said, "If you would have done anything different, you would not have been my daughter; and even I would not have voted for you!" [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: Well, I notice that during the period of time between the two elections, you were secretary-treasurer of the joint Clearfield-Philipsburg Council? Were you living in Curwensville at that time? Where were you living?

MAIETTA: I lived wherever I worked, but I still maintain a legal residence there, even to this day. I never have given up my residence. I vote back there and that's where I have strength.

INTERVIEWER: So you were elsewhere, but you were still functioning as secretary-treasurer of the Council.

MAIETTA: I wasn't secretary-treasurer, I don't think. I was secretary-treasurer of some committee, probably the Bicentennial or Centennial. I've never held an office in the Council.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Okay.

MAIETTA: But I usually was always the labor representative on any functions that went on.

INTERVIEWER: Well, what about the issues during the '58 campaign. How were they different than in '48?

MAIETTA: They weren't really very much different. I think the problems with jobs was still there, especially in our district. The women's problems were still the same. The social security had had no changes where women were concerned, and we were still trying to repeal the Taft-Hartley Law.

I'd like to go back to the primary first. You know, the Miners [union] endorsed me, and even to a man they spent their money for gas to get out the vote in the primary. But they didn't endorse me for the general because they. . . .

INTERVIEWER: I noticed that. They endorsed Van Zandt.

MAIETTA: They didn't want to have a woman represent them in Washington! [laughing]

INTERVIEWER: Why did they support you in the primary then?

MAIETTA: They didn't like the idea that the party people first said I was the candidate and then they changed their mind, but they were with us all the way until after I won the primary. I talked to some of them, and I said, "Why did you spend your money then?" They said, well, they didn't think I was treated right by them putting somebody in against me, but they just didn't feel that they wanted a woman to represent them.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that was frank.

MAIETTA: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: One of the clippings talks about the Women's Democratic convention that was held in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, at which you were a delegate and Eleanor Roosevelt was the speaker. Could you describe the convention a little bit, Julia?

MAIETTA: It was the same as most conventions, I guess, but the women were really at that time trying to push women into different offices, and I assumed that one of the reasons that they gave me a lot of publicity, or tried to, was because I was a candidate. I think I was the only woman candidate for Congress in the state of Pennsylvania. Of course, Mrs. Roosevelt had always been pushing women in different fields. All fields, she always felt that women could do almost anything that men could do.

INTERVIEWER: Did you meet her at the occasion of this convention?

MAIETTA: Oh, yes. I'm sure I had a picture taken with her. It was in the papers, too. But I had met her before. I had met her in the Troy, New York, campaign which I mentioned. She came up to speak to us. I can still see her trotting through the vegetables at one of these outside walk markets without an escort or anything. The escort was waiting for her at an appointed place, and she got out of the car and walked right through the vegetables and right upstairs. She said she didn't need an escort to go any place to speak to people. That's the way she was. Then I had also met her in Washington before the '58 campaign.

INTERVIEWER: What were your impressions of her, that is, your personal impressions?

MAIETTA: Oh, I always admired her very much. She always gave you a lift no matter what you discussed with her. I felt that she was the prime mover in this big Arrow Shirt Company campaign. I thought, when she came up there and spoke to the people and told them that this was their right and that they really should do it, I think, when eighty-some hundred people are involved in a plant and the story goes out to tell them that here's Mrs. Roosevelt who thinks that they're doing the right thing and that they should continue, I think that that was a big help there, too. She always impressed me very much, and I think she impressed almost anybody that talked to her.

INTERVIEWER: Well, not anybody because she was a very controversial figure . . . Would you say that Van Zandt took you more seriously the second time?

MAIETTA: I'm sure he did. He had offices every place you turned around. I mean he had more people working for him and he spent. . . I forget the amount of money that they said he spent for the second campaign that he hadn't spent in any other, even in

MAIETTA: the '48. I had been working in Washington before this for a short time, and he told someone, "Here I offered her my office to work in when she came to Washington, and then she comes back here and runs against me!"

INTERVIEWER: Did he offer you his office?

MAIETTA: He must have, but I don't remember. I wouldn't have taken it anyway.

INTERVIEWER: What were you doing in Washington?

MAIETTA: I was lobbying.

INTERVIEWER: For the Amalgamated?

MAIETTA: For the Amalgamated and with all the other labor lobbyists.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I notice that the period of time that you were legislative representative is sort of sporadic--like it was in '55, '58, 1960. What did the union do? Pull you in as legislative representative occasionally? How did that work?

MAIETTA: Well, they had one there--Esther Peterson* was the representative for the Amalgamated. But then at times they needed extra help whenever there were some bills being pushed in that the Congress was in session. So I was one of the workers from back in the factory, the unexperienced workers, so they used to bring me in to work with her.

INTERVIEWER: Was this primarily on what sort of legislation?

MAIETTA: Oh, it was on minimum wage and social security--social legislation, really.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work largely with the Pennsylvania delegation or with other delegations?

MAIETTA: No, we worked with all of the delegations nationwide. . . if we had become acquainted with any of the legislators in any way and had a better relationship with some of the other. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so you were saying that, if you had had some contact with them, then you were sent to see them.

MAIETTA: To any of them. We used to meet and then go over the list and assign people to certain legislators. At that time Pennsylvania had very few that were progressive anyway.

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*Esther Peterson is included in this collection of oral histories.

INTERVIEWER: Now, after the '58 campaign, were you in Washington more regularly then?

MAIETTA: Yes, I was there for about five years straight then until about '63 or '64, something like that. Anyway, I was there when Kennedy was chairman of the sub-committee on labor and worked with him then, and then he was President. We worked with him at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you were active in the Women's Labor Committee for Kennedy and Johnson?

MAIETTA: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any good stories to tell about that?

MAIETTA: Well, first of all Kennedy really wanted me to set up and work on his committee for Pennsylvania, but I felt that I could do better by being in the labor movement, so I refused that. But he did send a man over to where I lived in Washington, and we went over the whole state of Pennsylvania. I can't remember his name right now. That's one thing about Kennedy. It didn't make any difference to him whether you were a woman or a man. If he felt that you knew what he wanted done and what the assignment was, he respected what you knew. He asked me, since I had told him that I didn't want to direct the campaign for him here, would I mind sitting down with this fellow that he was putting in charge. So we went over the whole state, and I gave him names for different places in the labor movement that he could put together with his people that he had for the whole state of Pennsylvania. I really had worked quite a bit in Pennsylvania. Of course, we set up women's committees in different areas. Everybody really worked hard.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, now, those were the days of the so-called WAD's [Women's Activities Department], and you were the director of the WAD's here in Pennsylvania, right?

MAIETTA: I wasn't then, no.

INTERVIEWER: When did you become the. . . ?

MAIETTA: In '65 or '66, after I came to work for the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO steady. I didn't start here until January of '65. But I worked here off and on in campaigns. The Amalgamated loaned me to the State AFL-CIO to work campaigns.

INTERVIEWER: In your work with the Women's Labor Committee, what kinds of contacts did you have with other women's groups, Julia? Did you attempt to contact other groups like the business and professional women?

MAIETTA: Yes, we did. This labor committee, I think it was the Women's Committee. I don't think it was the Labor Committee. So all the makeup of the women was from all variations, so we worked together with all of them. Of course, I really worked harder with the people in the labor movement because I felt that they were more aggressive than some of the other women's groups. You could talk differently to the women in the labor movement. I still feel that way.

INTERVIEWER: How so?

MAIETTA: Well, I don't think they're as hesitant about taking on jobs and doing things. I myself have never felt that there was anything too overpowering to do. I think that, if you want to really do something, you can do it. That goes for raising money or anything.

INTERVIEWER: What about trade union wives? Were they a target group for your. . . ?

MAIETTA: Well, I have found that, even today in my work, it's not the wives, it's the husbands. The husbands really and truly like to keep them at home.

One of the best experiences that I've had. . . I've had two of them. One I had in Johnstown at one time. I went to a COPE dinner, and I was sitting next to a steelworker. I asked him what his wife did, if she was on any committees, and he said the only thing that his wife ever did was to vote Republican or go to a Republican tea. I said, well, that's because they paid attention to her. He said that she was too dumb and didn't know how to do things anyway. I said, "The only thing dumb I can understand that she did was get married to you!" [laughter] Well, he didn't know what to say to that, and he gave me quite an argument, a smarty argument. Anyway, later on that evening he came and apologized to me. I told him, "If you men would go home and talk to your wives about what your union's all about and what you're doing and why you're doing certain things, then they can help you and they can talk for you. But when you go home and they ask you anything, you just say, 'Oh, it's nothing.' You're afraid she's going to learn more than you by telling her things." Anyway, before the end of the evening, he came and apologized to me for saying what he did. He said that I was right.

MAIETTA: The other incident that I had was up in '64 in Allentown. We set up this committee there, and we really had a good working group, both students and everything. When I opened the office, the first thing that I did was I said to some of the men that were there--and most of them were auto workers--I said, "How about getting your wives to come down to help in the office and do things?" One of the fellows says, "Oh, my wife will come. She'll clean the office." I said, "That isn't what I had in mind. We can get somebody that does janitorial work to clean the office. I'm talking about other things." Well, he didn't think his wife would do this, that, or the other thing. I found out that his wife was a typist! Then she brought other people. To this day he'll say to me, "If I hadn't seen it, I never would have believed it, that she or any of the other women would have got so involved." And they really did get so involved. I think ever since then they get involved in most campaigns. That's where we had Lady Bird Johnson Day, which meant that we had so much work to do because we brought people in from all over that valley, the Lehigh Valley, for her. We took over the square in town to put this on.

INTERVIEWER: In Johnstown?

MAIETTA: No, no, in Allentown.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, in Allentown.

MAIETTA: . . . to put this on, and of course the Secret Service people had to come in there and check hotels out and everything. But really these women were just great.

INTERVIEWER: Is this when Lyndon was running for Vice-President?

MAIETTA: No, no, in '64 when he was running for President for the first time, and she was doing a lot of campaigning. Of course, the papers didn't say how many people there were there, but the whole area of the square was packed so we knew that we had a good crowd.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of people in the labor movement today say that the wives were very effective and so forth. How did the creation of these wives' groups come about, Julia?

MAIETTA: Well, the national COPE decided to set up a department for activities of the women. They decided on a name. I don't know who figured the name out. It's Women's Activities Department. Esther Murray was the first director, the eastern director.

MAIETTA: Then they had a western director. It was not in place of the Auxiliary because the Auxiliary was still in existence at that time. This was really more of a political arm of the different locals in order to get the wives and friends and daughters of the union members. Of course, then it started having men in the department, too. It was never just all women after a few years because some of the men decided that they put in volunteer hours so why shouldn't they have some kind of a citation.

INTERVIEWER: Is that when you started calling it VIP?

MAIETTA: No, VIP originated here in Pennsylvania, and that was really for our volunteers here, which took in everybody.

INTERVIEWER: Hm-hm, both men and women.

MAIETTA: That's right. But I understand that the WAD's going to be changed nationally, too. I don't know how soon, but I understand it's going to be. I like VIP better, too, because I really think that the women are very important people even if they are just women! [laughing]

INTERVIEWER: What was your relationship with Jim McDevitt who was the national director of COPE?

MAIETTA: Oh, great. He was one of the first people I met in the AF of L. I never felt that there was a difference between the AF of L and the CIO, and I never accepted it. I worked with the AF of L locals as much as I did with CIO. In fact, in some area I worked out of their offices [AFL] more than I did the CIO because for some reason they seemed to be more friendly and warmer. Jim McDevitt was one of my first contacts when I was in the Altoona area. He was in the Union Label at that time. Then he was president of the Pennsylvania AF of L. When he became the director in Washington, he was always finding me jobs. He offered me a job for the director of the Women's Activities in the South one time for a state. Then he wanted me to take New York State. I felt terrible because I didn't want him to think I was ungrateful, but I always told him, "Jim, I don't want to work any place but Pennsylvania. If I'm going to be any place permanently it's going to be in Pennsylvania." But up until he passed away, he was always looking for some corner for me. He felt that I should really be in charge of some of these states. He felt that I had the capability and I could do it. We were very, very close friends.

INTERVIEWER: So when did you come here to the Pennsylvania state office?

MAIETTA: In January of '65.

INTERVIEWER: That was well after the merger then.

MAIETTA: Yes. Like I said, I came in every campaign to help. I was here during all of the '64 campaign. I don't know just when I came in, but I was here working. They had asked me several times. After the campaign of '64 then the officers here asked me if I wouldn't come and work on the Pennsylvania COPE department. I was the first one they hired here.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved, Julia, in any of the efforts to put the merger together here in Pennsylvania?

MAIETTA: No, I wasn't here. But in any areas that I was, I talked to people and all. I think Pennsylvania was one of the last. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes, it was very difficult here. Why was it so difficult here?

MAIETTA: I don't know. I really don't know. I always went to the conventions and all, but I really don't remember why. I know why. It was just personalities and top offices as usual when men don't want to give up their positions. [chuckling] Maybe they should have had a woman running at that time! [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: It would have been easier, maybe! I think that the project at Michigan, Julia, is interested in a number of questions that sort of relate to women's participation in the life of their union. These are questions that are not relating so much to your particular involvement, but based on your experience . . . for instance, they ask you to think back to women in your local who were active and then dropped out to see if you can think of any reasons why a woman is likely to drop out. What kinds of factors cause her to continue to be active?

MAIETTA: Well, I come from a very small town, so you really can't use that as a barometer, I don't think. The women who were involved when I was there and we organized, they stayed until they either retired or were sick for some reason or other. In fact, I think a few of the women who were there in '33 are still around. So I can't say that they dropped out for any reason. We were just a little, small factory of about 125 people and one man as the mechanic. After we became organized, we just thought everybody in the whole area should be organized. So we went out and helped organize a tannery. When

MAIETTA: the brickyard got involved, we got into that. We really got into everything. Besides that we got into other things to help people, things that they needed. For instance, when we were unemployed for any length of time--and we had a big office in Curwensville--a committee of us went to Clearfield and we couldn't see why we had to travel seven miles--it was fourteen miles really--to go and sign up for unemployment. So we just set up ourselves a committee and we went to Clearfield's unemployment office and we told them we wanted certain days for the people to sign up in Curwensville. It was a hard fight, but we got it. And we did all of these things. There were just women, nobody else.

INTERVIEWER: So you really had in your own background, then, a good support group of active women.

MAIETTA: Right.

INTERVIEWER: There weren't any men to do it, so the women did it.

MAIETTA: That's right. They built a new post office there in '33 when Roosevelt first came in. Somebody got word to me--they knew I was always the one that was the rebel around there--that they were bringing in stone from Georgia and that the contractors were also bringing in their own men. Well, we started a real fuss. We went to see who ever was involved. We called for a meeting of who ever the people were who were involved with our congressman. That was the first time they had a Democrat there. We told them there'd be plenty of trouble there if they did this. So we were responsible for them canceling the Georgia stone. Because we have a stone quarry in Curwensville. We told them there were plenty of stonecutters there and there was plenty of stone in that quarry and they didn't need to bring in any men from outside.

So when they dedicated the post office, I got a special invitation. My mother said, "They knew they wouldn't dare not invite you to this ceremony!" [laughter] "They'd be afraid of all the women in your local having an uprising!"

This was nothing new there. We just got involved in everything.

INTERVIEWER: But when you began to move out into other areas--for instance, when you were organizing in Troy, New York, and in Kitchener, Ontario, and Baltimore, Maryland--you must have given a lot of thought to how to go about organizing women and what were the factors that enabled women to be active.

MAIETTA: Well, the problems were the same. Organizing in our field was the same way because you went to their homes and you knocked on the door and you told them why they should be getting more money than they were getting. Usually the women were hesitant, especially the ones who had to support their families. They always were. Then, of course, some of them who just helped to balance out the husband's pay check, they felt whatever they made. . . if they made a dollar, it was one dollar more. In the clothing industry, both with women and the men, it was very hard to organize these people. The women were hesitant. Sometimes their husbands were very belligerent about them joining a union. Lots of times they were. The women couldn't speak with me because they had to stay with their husbands in their homes. So after I left, even though they gave their husbands an argument, I'm sure the husbands probably said, "You had a lot of nerve saying what you did in front of that woman."

But once you got the women involved, they were really very strong. I think I mentioned it before. They were the best on picket lines. They weren't afraid of anything. They had all kinds of spunk.

INTERVIEWER: Once they were convinced, yeah.

MAIETTA: I think it's true today, too. I think some of the things that the women venture out, the men wouldn't dare.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I notice there seems to be more of a tendency. . . I don't know what the statistics are on it, but just as a woman looking at the women who were just ahead of me, like one generation ahead of me, there seem to be more women who were single, who were not married. Today married women seem to be more active than they were. Do you think that's a fair generalization? Do you think that, if you were a married woman in the 1940's and the 1950's, it was harder to devote yourself to the union in the way that you did?

MAIETTA: Yes, I think so because I think that the woman in the home was expected to do more than she is today. Then they didn't have the facilities that they have today, either.

INTERVIEWER: Like day care and so forth.

MAIETTA: Day care and also in the house they can just throw the dishes in the dishwasher and leave them or throw the clothes in a washer. At that time they had to do them by hand. I know

MAIETTA: I washed many clothes on a washboard. I used to tell my mother that was the reason I wasn't growing--because she made me wash clothes so hard. . . . [laughter] I used to tell her it was her fault!

INTERVIEWER: When do you think you were the most active? In what period of your life? I don't notice that you're any less active than you ever were.

MAIETTA: I said after this last campaign that maybe I could take things easier, but it seems like right after November we got involved in a lot of things. I'm more involved now, I think, in many things. I'm a member of the Women's Commission for the State of Pennsylvania; I'm also a member of the commission of the International Women's Year, which is from Washington. This was set up by Ford's Administration, through Congress.

INTERVIEWER: What is your impression of these commissions? What sort of work are they. . . ?

MAIETTA: I'm not a fair person to ask because I have always felt that, if you wanted to do something, you could do it. I have never been put on any committee or done anything because I was a woman but because of what I had done before that work or whatever you want to call it. I don't know really. . . outside of the Women's Commission here in Pennsylvania, they have done something where loans are concerned. Now, that's something else. I've never had any problem in getting a loan. I never had any problem in getting a credit card. My mother always said I had enough credit cards to play regular cards with; I had a whole deck, she used to say. I've never had any problems at all. I was able to purchase a home with no effort at all. Maybe credit came too easy for me although I didn't abuse it. There are people here who think, in this Women's Commission, that a lot of these things were just done because a commission was set up. I have already told them that I don't agree. One of the women from State College--you probably know her--Dr. Norma Ralphes. . . .

INTERVIEWER: No, I don't know her.

MAIETTA: Well, they claim that, since the commission was set up and the ERA here in the state, it's the first time girls are able to have their own newspaper route. Well, I had my own newspaper route fifty years ago! More than fifty years ago! They said to me, "It was probably in your brother's name." I said, "No, it wasn't. It was in my own name. Not only was it in my name, when my sisters took over, it was in their names, too. I'd never have anything, only in my own name."

MAIETTA: Like I said, they probably have done something in the credit line and the consumer thing, but I'm not the right person to ask that question. They claim all kinds of victories. At one of the meetings we were at when we were going over this, I told them I didn't think it was so exciting because to me it wasn't. I had had all these things.

INTERVIEWER: Well, there may be a difference in the way single women are treated and married women are treated in this respect. I think, if you're married, then there's a tendency on the part of banks and credit people and so forth to insist on putting it in your husband's name.

MAIETTA: Yes, this is true.

INTERVIEWER: Even if you want it in your name. Like I know, for instance, I applied for an American Express card, and I had to fight to get them to put that in my name rather than in my husband's name. But they eventually did it.

MAIETTA: That's because you filled in that you were married on the card.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MAIETTA: Well, you know, we girls. . . when I say "we girls", I'm talking about the Maietta girls. . . we were the only ones in this country that got a loan through the FHA, through the early Homeowners'. . . When my father died, we were under the old Building and Loan, which took all your money but very little on the principal. So I inquired as to how we could go about getting us from under this rat race we were under. It wasn't very much then, but whatever it was was a big burden on us. So the federal man came to talk to me, and he said, if we got behind on a couple of payments, then they could do something about it. Well, that was easy to do because in the summertime we didn't have any work anyway. We were able to get a loan to redo our house. It had to go through I-don't-know-what-all kinds of committees, but I really fought it the whole way down and got other people to help me. They told us, "We want you to know that you're the only loan that has gone through where there's no signers on it except women." Because when they said, did any of the boys want to sign it, we said, "They're not the ones that are earning the money."

INTERVIEWER: Right, they were too little anyway.

MAIETTA: We said, "We're the ones that are working. We're the ones that are going to pay for it." Maybe someone else, when they said no, would have just said okay and accepted it, but we didn't. That's why I say it's not fair to ask me. I know that you're right because in a lot of places I've had to help people or maybe raise a fuss with them about things.

But we did that with everything. After we became a local in Curwensville, we went to the high school and asked for time to use the gym. They raised such a fuss about it that we were out of school and it was too bad, but we carried it all the way to the school board and we won. So we had the gym for use on Saturday afternoons.

INTERVIEWER: So it sounds like you're a very good example of what you can accomplish because you just won't take no for an answer.

MAIETTA: That's right. Like girls going to work and we had no paved streets and it would be raining; so a car come by and splash a girl's clothing. We'd take their license and we'd make the people who did it [pay] or else we'd go to the borough council and say, "You don't have that street fixed so you pay for her cleaning."

INTERVIEWER: [Laughing] You were a scrapper, Julia!

INTERVIEWER II: One other question that I wanted to ask you and that is--what advice would you have for a young woman coming up in the labor movement today? I know you said earlier you thought it was harder today than it was. . . .

MAIETTA: The way I feel now. . . I told this to some young fellow that asked me about getting into the labor movement, and I said this: that if you're really interested in doing something in the labor movement, whether it's a woman or a man, you have to make good in your own local. You have to be willing to volunteer to do things and you have to show them that you're really interested. Because I don't believe the way some of them do today. You know, you come out of college and maybe you take a labor course and then you think you ought to be president of an international! I mean, this is what some of the CLUW [Coalition of Labor Union Women] people think, too; I know that. If they are a secretary to an international union president, I know they think that they have enough experience that they can run for that office. I've had them tell me this.

MAIETTA: This is the advice I have--that once they are interested and they become active in their locals and take offices in the local and make good, then they have all that back of them. Not only in their local, in the other unions!

INTERVIEWER: What should they do, though, if they have already taken that step and as time goes by they keep being by-passed for an opportunity to run for office?

MAIETTA: Well, they ought to get their members to back them, get their members and any other people in the labor movement. I know this happens a lot. It happens not only to women but men, too, more so to women. A lot of unions nowadays, though, I think like to have somebody with a Ph.D. or something. They've learned how to set pockets on a shirt by reading it in a book! [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: I don't think reading it in a book would be too. . . you wouldn't set a very good pocket if that's the only experience you had. Well, I do think that young women are looking back to women who were active in the past and trying to see how they did it, and in some ways, I think, it was easier in the past--I agree with you--because there was more organizing going on.

MAIETTA: And they didn't have such a big backlog to follow the people who had gone to college and become interested in the problems of the labor movement. Like I said, they like to hire people who have titles.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Okay, do you have anything you want to add?

MAIETTA: No, not right now. I'm going to get some correct dates, and the next time I'll go over some of these things with you.

JULIA MAIETTA INTERVIEW INDEX