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

Oral History Interview

with

ARLINE NEAL

Service Employees' International Union

by

Lyn Goldfarb

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

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VITAE

ARLINE NEAL

Arline Neal was born on March 12, 1917 in Kaiser, West Virginia. After her high school graduation, Neal moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked as a domestic for about one year. She then got married in 1941 and moved to Maryland with her husband. At this time she changed jobs and began to work as a clerical in the office of Price Administration.

It was at this time that Neal became very active with civil rights activities, and worked with boycott efforts to break the segregated atmosphere of the District of Columbia region.

Neal lived in various parts of the United States while her husband worked for the military, and held a variety of jobs.

In 1946 she moved back to Washington, D.C. where she worked as a clerk for the Service Employees' local union. She moved up through the ranks to become President of Local 82 of the Service Employees' International Union, the position she still holds today.

Neal has been active with the Democratic Party and the civil rights movement.



Oral History Interview

with

ARLINE NEAL

August 18, 1976  
Washington, D.C.

by Phyllis Boanes  
and Lyn Goldfarb

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

NEAL: I was born in Kaiser, West Virginia, on March 12, 1917.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you live in Kaiser?

NEAL: Until possibly, I think I started leaving Kaiser when I was about three years old.

INTERVIEWER: When did you decide?

NEAL: Well, when I left Kaiser, I went to live with my mother's sister in Grafton, West Virginia. And I lived there until I was eight years old but I did come, you know, back and forth, like in the summers or other times and lived in Kaiser. So those early days were really spent in Grafton, West Virginia.

INTERVIEWER: And you lived there until about what age?

NEAL: Until about eight.

INTERVIEWER: And then?

NEAL: And then I came back to Kaiser and stayed in Kaiser about two years and I went to school there and then I moved to. . . I didn't know that I was moving to New York, I went to New York for two week's visit and stayed in New York until I was sixteen, I guess, and then I came back to Kaiser.

INTERVIEWER: The first eight years of age you lived in Kaiser; then you lived in Grafton.

NEAL: No, at about three I left. I really. No, my family wasn't moving; they were just moving me out.

INTERVIEWER: Then your early years were spent between Grafton and Kaiser?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me something about the community in Kaiser? Roughly how large is Kaiser?

NEAL: I guess Kaiser now must have about ten thousand people. About that time, I guess, there was, population was less than five thousand at the time I was born. But I think it's around ten thousand.

INTERVIEWER: At that time, there were, roughly, five thousand people there. What was the ratio of black and white?

NEAL: I guess there was about 5 per cent black, if that many.

INTERVIEWER: Was the black population a permanent population? Had those people been there a number of years?

NEAL: Oh, yes, yes. No, at that time I think there was little migratory, it be among either black or white. It was a pretty settled type of community.

INTERVIEWER: What was the major industry or occupation?

NEAL: Mainly the railroads, B & O Railroads. We were a little away from the mining area, although it was near because Kaiser is in the Eastern panhandle of West Virginia and thus it's just across the river from Maryland and very near the Pennsylvania border. That's sort of the location there. And in Maryland, in that particular area, there was much more mining and then further up into West Virginia there was a lot of mining. But principally, around Kaiser it was railroading, what you call the roundhouse, where they worked on the entrance and the trains were located there, and it also served because it was a major stop on the railroads between New York and Cincinnati. There were the people who worked on the railroads on the trains, the porters, this was a stopover point for them.

INTERVIEWER: And most of the black population in Kaiser was engaged in some sort of railroad work?



NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: As porters.

NEAL: Well, mostly as people in the roundhouse were working on the engines and the trains.

INTERVIEWER: The other place that you mentioned, in Grafton, was that located. . . .

NEAL: No, Grafton is a little more in the center of West Virginia. Its primary work at that time was also railroad. In Kaiser, my father worked on the railroad and worked for the railroad 'cause he was stationed there. I don't ever remember him being on the road because he was also a barber, uh, and in Grafton my uncle also worked for the railroad and my aunt worked for the railroad. But she worked as a maid at the station.

INTERVIEWER: Roughly, what was the size of Grafton?

NEAL: It was a little larger. . . I really don't know the population but thinking back over the territory I imagine it was somewhere between nine thousand to twelve thousand. The black population there would have been larger than in Kaiser, I think. Um, but not too much so. I would've said it was well under 10 per cent.

INTERVIEWER: In either one of the places, is there a large or very influential middle class that is involved in, say, businesses, who owned their own businesses or who may own large amounts of land in the area?

NEAL: No. I guess in Kaiser, the only black businesses that I can remember were like my father owned his own barber shop and there were about two other barber shops that were owned by blacks and I think that those were the only, you know, black businesses that were around at that time. And Grafton, I really don't recall any, but I would imagine it would be just about the same kind of situation.

INTERVIEWER: So what you have is a large, not terribly small, black population that's been there for a number of years and almost entirely works on the railroad with the exception of a few small businesses.

NEAL: And the women would have worked primarily as domestics. And most of the men. It was, neither place was an agriculture place.

INTERVIEWER: How many brothers and sisters did you have?



NEAL: I had five brothers and one sister.

INTERVIEWER: Were you the youngest? Oldest?

NEAL: No. My mother had been married previously and she had been a widow before she was twenty-one, and, in fact, she was a widow about there months before her first child was born and my oldest brother was five years older than I. And I was the oldest of my father's children.

INTERVIEWER: You were the oldest girl, then.

NEAL: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember your grandparents?

NEAL: I don't really remember them. I think I hear so many stories about my grandmother, well, that's on my mother's side. I think I remember hearing so many stories that sometimes I'm not sure whether I remembered her or not, but I think she died when I was quite young.

INTERVIEWER: Were your parents born in Kaiser?

NEAL: My mother was born in Kaiser. My father was born in Cumberland, Maryland, which was just about twenty-one miles from Kaiser.

INTERVIEWER: And when did he come to the Kaiser area?

NEAL: Evidently he must have come a year or two before I was born to the best of my knowledge.

INTERVIEWER: Because of the railroad?

NEAL: I really don't know why he came. I only know that evidently my mother was in sort of a second or third year of her widowhood when she met him. Because I did know my grandmother on my father's side and I can recall her saying how she cautioned him that, you know, that he would have a son that was already born and a few years old, and if he ever mistreated him he would also have her to answer to, you know. And so evidently my mother knew not only my father but, you know, his relatives.

INTERVIEWER: Did they also come to Kaiser?

NEAL: My grandmother used to live with us for a while and my father's youngest sister. And this was when she was widowed and then

NEAL: later she remarried and, you know, moved away from us, but I don't think she stayed with us on a continuing basis. And I have to say I think because I had this sort of, you know, nomad kind of relationship roaming between Grafton and Kaiser all during those years.

INTERVIEWER: The reasons for this shift. . . do they have anything to do with educational facilities that were available in one place as opposed to another?

NEAL: Not so much. I went to stay with my aunt. There were two other little children at home and I recall my oldest brother also lived with me for a time in Grafton, and then when he had reached the high school or junior high school level, he had gone to live with our cousin in Clarksburg because there was no school for him to go to and both of us were, you know, away from home a good bit during that time. It might have been for economic reasons, and I know for me, the other reason was that I dearly loved that aunt and her husband because if any time during my life I came near being spoiled is when I lived with them.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother had been born in Kaiser. Her parents were also born in Kaiser?

NEAL: Um huh.

INTERVIEWER: So it was a very long, established family there.

NEAL: Yes. Um huh.

INTERVIEWER: Your father, when he comes to Kaiser, do any of his brothers or sisters come with him looking expressly for work with the railroad?

NEAL: Uh, no. Um, he. . . most of his family and he came, he had a large family. But most of them sort of migrated and in other directions. His two, two of his brothers, I know went to New Jersey; one brother went to Toledo, Ohio.

INTERVIEWER: Doing what?

NEAL: I really don't recall. I know that the brother who went to Toledo did come back to live with us for a while but I don't even remember what he did when he was there.

INTERVIEWER: How many brothers and sisters did your father have?



NEAL: Had six sisters and three brothers. He was the oldest child.

INTERVIEWER: And your mother, how many sisters and brothers did she have?

NEAL: I've never really been sure. Because a number of them died in infancy, and the best that we've been able to reconstruct there might have been about--because there were two sets of twins--there might have been about sixteen in all.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother's first husband, did he also work on the railroad?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned your grandparents. You said that you remembered your mother's mother vaguely, or you thought that you remembered her, and that they also, your mother's parents had also been born in Kaiser. What was their occupation? What was your grandfather's occupation?

NEAL: I don't know. I know that my grandmother worked as a domestic.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what date that might be?

NEAL: I don't know. You know like I as, I say I'm not sure that I really remember my grandmother. I know that I was born before she died. Whether there were just so many things that were said about her that made me, as I grew up, think that I knew her, but I'm not really sure.

INTERVIEWER: But your father's parents you did know.

NEAL: I knew well my grandfather was dead. And, well, I did know my grandmother.

INTERVIEWER: And she worked. . . .

NEAL: She must have worked at some time. But I never remember her working.

INTERVIEWER: And she lived with you full time? A couple of years or so?

NEAL: Uh, I guess and I think she probably lived with us more than one, I say I know that she still was with us in the early twenties.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever remember her telling you stories about what it was like for her to grow up? In Maryland, what her life was like in Maryland?



NEAL: No, I don't really remember. I know that perhaps I should have remembered more because hers was the first death in the family that I could remember and she must have died in about 1931 or 1932, something like that. But I just don't, I just don't recall that much.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother, did she ever tell you any stories about her childhood? About her education, about chores and responsibilities she was supposed to have?

NEAL: Well, my mother was the next to the youngest in the family. And I think she started working at an early age with her mother and her mother would take her to work and she would, you know, help her with her chores. My grandmother was also a midwife and, in fact, I think she helped to deliver me. And my mother learned midwifery from her mother and I think my mother ended up helping to deliver, you know, half of the people in the town that came after her. And I think she started that at a very early age.

I know that we had a little red schoolhouse and there were two rooms. And I know that my mother and I think all of her sisters and brothers went to that same schoolhouse that I went to. I think it had had a little remodeling but it remained pretty much the same. I know that my mother went to the same teacher that I went to and I know that she finished, that both she and my father finished the eighth grade because there was nothing else for them to go to past that point.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother ever tell you about her training as a midwife?

NEAL: Well I, you know, just think it's something that I don't think there was any formal thing at all.

INTERVIEWER: Did she ever tell you about any things she had to learn, or any of the techniques that she had to learn, any of the information that her mother passed on to her. Did she pass any of that information on to you?

NEAL: No, I guess I just wasn't around long enough.

INTERVIEWER: Did she ever talk about any outstanding experiences that she had had as a child that were very important to her, that perhaps shaped the way that she looked at things?

NEAL: I always had the feeling that she felt that where she came along in the line of children, that she was more put upon to do things than some of the older children were and that she



NEAL: always had to take sort of second place to her sister that was, you know, just younger than she and apparently she was the one at that time, you know, who had to go with her mother to work while the other one stayed home. But I think it was perhaps as close a relationship with her mother that led her into being a midwife because none of the rest of them.... Now and then she was always pretty shaken by some of the, you know, untimely deaths of her sisters and brothers. She had two brothers who lived into manhood. But I think and I've never been able to separate which children---There was illegitimacy I know in the family--and I've never been able to really to separate what was what. And I know that her two oldest brothers carried a different name but they were not my grandmother's maiden name, because they looked very, had very Indian features, very high cheek bones, very coal black, straight hair, very, you know, Indianish looking. And their names were Mason. But it seems as though all the rest of the children then carried my grandmother's maiden name of Fiddler and so I'm really not sure, you know, who was who in that situation. But I know that the small pox was rampant and I think there were several children who died and the one I know that one of my mother's sisters had grown and had had two children at the time she died of small pox. And one of those was the cousin that my brother lived with and went to school in Clarksburg. Then there was a child who burned to death, a sister who burned to death in her home.

INTERVIEWER: What were the circumstances of the death?

NEAL: Uh, I think from a pot belly stove, because I remembered when one of my brothers caught fire during a Halloween time from a gas heater in the room, my mother went about psychotic remembering her sister having burned.

INTERVIEWER: Her older or younger sister?

NEAL: An older sister. 'Cause my mother was next to the youngest. And I think that some of those children, you know, had died in between and this was the reason, from what I could gather, that my mother felt that she was not a favorite child, so to speak.

INTERVIEWER: Because of her death.

NEAL: No, because of, well that some of the children, you know, had died and that that then left some of a gap in there. I, you know, I really don't know, but I think she felt, I think she always felt that somehow or another she was not one of the favorites in the family.



INTERVIEWER: Let me draw, uh, on that part of it a little bit more. In West Virginia at that time when your mother was, were there many facilities available for blacks. In other words, was there a black hospital. I imagine things were segregated at that time?

NEAL: No, I think this went back, you see I was born sort of, you know, during that the wartime. I know that most people, black and white, were not born in hospitals. But there was a hospital that I know predated my time and the doors were always open. They were segregated when they went in, but the doors were always open.

INTERVIEWER: Well, the reason I asked the question was. . . a number of people in your mother's family who died from a number of different things, from the small pox sometimes, accidents, fires would indicate, I was wondering if perhaps that was unusual or usual, the usual pattern in the black communities at that time that you expected to lose a number of children. Either at a very young age, or to some other means?

NEAL: Uh, there were no. . . I guess the, you know, infancy mortality rate might have been a typical thing. Well, I just think that in that family the way I perceived it, they must have experienced an unusually high number of, you know, incidents of death among those children because I say that what we have counted that there must have been about sixteen and from my remembrance we had two uncles and we had two aunts.

INTERVIEWER: So four of the sixteen. . . .

NEAL: Five.

INTERVIEWER: Five of the sixteen were alive that you remember as a child. And one of those aunts was the one that you went to live with?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Outside of this mortality rate that you are talking about, are there any other incidents that your mother used to tell you about that had a particular influence on her life? Stories that she might have told you.

NEAL: Not, not that I can recall at this point. I think that in spite of whatever that family background was that my grandmother perhaps because, you know, she was the midwife or something, she seemed to have commanded a lot of respect. You know, I never can recall anyone ever saying anything derogatory, you know, about her.



INTERVIEWER: The midwife in the black communities occupied a fairly high position.

NEAL: Uh huh. And I think that might have been the reason.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother was a midwife at an early age. What were the other things that she did throughout most of her working life?

NEAL: Well after she did some domestic work but principally, though, I guess it was around the Depression times, and I had gone from New York back to West Virginia, and she became concerned because her principal interest had been in nursing and there was no opportunity to go into what she wanted to go in and at that time she started her own campaign and they admitted her to the hospital then in the category of practical nurse and that's what she continued to do all the rest of her life.

INTERVIEWER: Was there ever a campaign on the part of the government to have the midwives licensed?

NEAL: No. Not that I know of.

INTERVIEWER: Was there ever any chance of regulation of any of the activities of the midwives in the area?

NEAL: Only to the extent that I remember as though there was some licensing that went on because she became a licensed midwife in the State of West Virginia. And that entailed a certain amount of question answering, testing, things like that. And this was prior to her going to the hospital.

INTERVIEWER: Were there many midwives in the area?

NEAL: I don't recall any except my mother, to tell you the truth.

INTERVIEWER: And your grandmother.

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: In other parts of the South where there has been a number of black women who participated as midwives an effort to license midwives eliminated a number of black problems.

NEAL: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: I was just wondering if that was the case in West Virginia, that doesn't seem to be the pattern at all.

NEAL: Um.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother worked then as a practical nurse on sometime in the early thirties until, uh, roughly what time?

NEAL: Until 1957, and she died in '58, but in '57 she came to Washington to live with me.

INTERVIEWER: In comparison to the rest of the brothers and sisters, did she receive the approximate same amount of education?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did she ever talk perhaps about there being an emphasis on girls being educated as opposed to boys being educated or the reverse in her family?

NEAL: No. I think that the schooling was to the eighth grade and everybody went to the eighth grade.

INTERVIEWER: Obviously, with her campaign to be admitted into this hospital and her desire to finish nursing, she put a very high premium on education.

NEAL: She did. But both my mother and my father, you know, from long as I can remember, they were both active politically, and politics were always discussed in the home. They often negated each other's votes. They'd be so strong on a subject. I know that we always had, we always had books from the time I could open a book. There were always books there. And my mother was quite an orator. And so was the aunt that I lived with in West Virginia. And that was the reason that all of the things, they were always doing a lot of speaking and a lot of poetry; and by the time that I was four years old, I was repeating all of the things that they were learning. So much so, that Mom started putting me, you know, up on the stage and I was earning enough money to buy my clothes with (laughs).

INTERVIEWER: You got paid for doing that?

NEAL: They throw money at you, oh girl, you picked it up (laughs).

INTERVIEWER: Where did you usually recite the poetry and the speeches?

NEAL: Churches, halls and you know, community affairs and things like that. And I did a lot of, because they did, a lot of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and my mother did a lot of dramatic, directed a lot of dramatic plays and things with the schools and things.



INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the names of any of the plays?

NEAL: Oh, anything.[laughs] She would take things like from Paul Lawrence Dunbar and take one particular thing and draw it out to make a whole play out of it. So a lot of things were improvizations and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Your mother was widowed the first time. How did she support herself? That two or three year period before she remarried?

NEAL: I don't know. I imagine she did, you know, nursing and domestic work and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know when your mother got her interest in poetry?

NEAL: I don't know whether she got it from her mother or not because, you know, my aunt did too. Mom said that she didn't realize how much I was picking up until she would start talking and I knew everything she was saying and I'd be repeating it after her, but Mom was also, played with the band and you know, things like that.

INTERVIEWER: A band?

NEAL: Uh hum.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of band?

NEAL: She and my uncle both. Well, they played for dances or for weddings or anything (laughs) that came along, but she played several instruments and so did my uncle.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that you went to the same schoolhouse that your mother had gone to and you had the same teacher? What was the teacher's name?

NEAL: Mr. Lewis.

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Lewis.

NEAL: Yes. James Henry, John Henry Lewis.

INTERVIEWER: John Henry Lewis.

NEAL: Yes.



INTERVIEWER: And he had been teaching there for a number of years. Do you remember where he had gone to school?

NEAL: No, I don't. I know that apparently he had been with the, I think he taught school there for more than fifty years.

INTERVIEWER: By himself.

NEAL: Well, then there was another room that had another teacher. As I remember, that's the reason, that's really the reason that I stayed in New York when I went. When I came back to Kaiser from Grafton I should have been in the third grade, but I sat in the fourth grade row and the teacher never shifted me over to the third grade row, so I stayed in the fourth grade. Well, then the next year I graduated into the fifth grade into Mr. Lewis' room. And I had a little problem there. Because I found it very difficult to concentrate and I was always raising my hand and when I raised my hand he would say, "What do you want?" "I know the answer, Mr. Lewis." "You know the answer to what?" "I know the answer to the question you're asking, you know, to the eighth grade people." And whereupon I get called to the front of the room and I'd get ten licks in the hand for not tending to my own business and get sent back to my seat again.

INTERVIEWER: So from sixth to eighth grade was in one room, and then from first to fifth was in the other room.

NEAL: First to fourth was in one room.

INTERVIEWER: And you were that much more advanced than. . . .

NEAL: So when I was in the fifth grade, we used to have these regional meetings, you know, where you represented your school for scholastic things. Well, you had spelling bees and you had arithmetic and you had all of these reading and all of these things, and plus your athletic events. So I remember I represented my school at Hagerstown [Maryland] for scholastic achievements and I got all the blue ribbons and the next year I was due to go into the sixth grade but I was then ten years old, so I went to visit New York and I stayed and, of course, a whole new world of schooling opened up from that.

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Lewis, was he the one who perhaps, who instilled the love of poetry to your mother and your aunt, do you think?

NEAL: He would have instilled, other than the stick, he would have instilled mathematics and English. There are few people who ever went through his classes that did not have a handle on basic mathematics nor basic English.

INTERVIEWER: The teacher for the earlier grades, you didn't mention that name.

NEAL: That was Mrs. Moore, Mrs. Ruth Moore.

INTERVIEWER: Had she been there a number of years?

NEAL: Yes, she had been there for a long time. Um, she just died last year but she had, I guess, she had thirty years of teaching there, also.

INTERVIEWER: So she was fairly new when you were there.

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: She hadn't taught your mother.

NEAL: No, no, no. She was our next door neighbor. When I was small she and my mother were about the same age.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything at all about where Mrs. Moore might have had her education?

NEAL: I don't know. See, you really didn't have to have, I think at the time that she started teaching, I don't think you had to have much more than a high school in order to do it and I think she had been sent to Wheeling, West Virginia, as I recall, to live with some relatives.

INTERVIEWER: Wheeling was the closest high school?

NEAL: Well, they had one in Clarksburg but I don't think there was . . . There might have been one somewhere around Morgantown, which is just about smack dab in the middle of the state.

INTERVIEWER: These were segregated high schools?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was the high school that you went to where Mrs. Moore had taught you, was that a black high school in Wheeling?

NEAL: Yes. But the school stayed segregated until the Supreme Court decision, but there was no problem with the integrating of the schools when that came about.

INTERVIEWER: Let's take another look at Mrs. Moore and Mr. Lewis again. Were they very prominent in the churches in the community, very prominent in civil affairs and things like that?



NEAL: Mrs. Moore was prominent in everything. Of course, I, Mr. Lewis was more of an introvert after he would leave the school, but I guess he enjoyed, I can't say respect, because I guess he enjoyed respect as a teacher. But he was such a strict disciplinarian that I don't think that he was very popular with people, and his wife had a mental thing and she had been put into an institution and he had his family to rear. So I think that he spent more time at home rather than being active in the community.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a very strong black church in Kaiser?

NEAL: We had the Methodist church which was, I guess, the focal point of activity and then there was the Holiness church that, as far back as I can remember, that probably was an integrated church.

INTERVIEWER: Really.

NEAL: Because it was in the part of the community called Radical Hill and this was as near as you got to the hillbilly sort of area. It's now called Potomac Heights and the public housing and other buildings has all taken place there now. Where we lived at that time it was officially called Lincoln Street; unofficially it was called Nigger Hollow but the people who lived on Radical Hill lived in sort of, oh, shanty things there, their houses were papered with newspapers and funny papers and things like that and then there were some blacks that lived in that area. Well, this was the location of that Holiness church, and so it was just sort of a natural, you know, merger for the people who lived there.

INTERVIEWER: The Methodist church that you mentioned was the center of all the black community?

NEAL: This was located, now our school was located in what is downtown Kaiser and our church is down there and so it meant that we had quite a hike to school.

INTERVIEWER: And to church?

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you attend church regularly?

NEAL: Yeah. Uh huh. Now with my family, though, my father was Episcopalian and his family was practically the whole parish of the church in Cumberland. And my mother's family, of course,

NEAL: was Methodist because this was the, you know, the church there. But you know, you had asked me about the income and things like that, now I know that my great grandfather owned his own home and he owned the land around it, and I know that my grandmother had owned land and house and things like that. I really don't know how some of those people back at that point really got their money because the person that I lived with in New York that I also called my aunt, was reared by, and I can't say adopted, although she used their name, by my great grandfather. And the reason that she was reared by him was because she was the daughter of one of the prominent white families, daughter of one of those, and the son, was the son of an ex-slave, and when this child was born, the family, you know, would not accept the girl.

INTERVIEWER: Daughter of. . . ?

NEAL: An ex-. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Of an ex-slave and a prominent white family?

NEAL: His mother was the ex-slave and this was her son and the daughter of this prominent family, she was the offspring in that relationship and the family would not accept the daughter and told her she had to leave. Well, she tried to live for a while with some other women around and keep the child with her, but then she found, I guess the whole thing was just too much and she went away. And she asked this white family to take the child and they did take her for a while, but then it seems as though as the man in that house just didn't really want to be bothered and when the woman would ask for, you know, milk and things, [they] told her to. . . nigger in the corner and give her some juice or broth or something like that. So she decided that the child would have such a terrible life there that she was going to send it to the orphanage. And my great grandfather normally took people to asylums, orphanages and things like that; this was part of his responsibility in the black community. So he took the child to take to the orphanage. And I think before he got to make the trip, they became sort of fond of her and they continued to keep her. And as I say, I don't know whether there was any formal adoption but I know they gave her their name.

INTERVIEWER: And this was all in Kaiser?

NEAL: Yes. That was the person I lived with in New York.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that there was a Methodist and a Holiness church. Was there a Baptist church in the area?



NEAL: No. I don't know when that church came into being but there was a Baptist church in, uh, the next community which is five miles away, in Piedmont. Uh, but the, and there was also a Methodist church there, and the Methodist church in Piedmont and Kaiser were on the same circuit, so the minister divided his time between the two churches.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of activities were sponsored by the churches?

NEAL: I guess those that were allowable under the old discipline of the Methodist church which didn't allow too much.

INTERVIEWER: Did they ever, for example, sponsor educational programs?

NEAL: You had your Sunday school; you had your worship services; you had your singing groups; you had your league for training for, uh, young people. . . .

INTERVIEWER: You had your missionary society there?

NEAL: You had your missionary and you came and they had a lot, they would put a lot of plays and all other kinds of things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Did they ever have, for example, support things that they offered for the black community? Were there ever, for example, programs to feed people say during the Depression, if that was a problem, or a clothing program?

NEAL: No. Not that I can ever recall.

INTERVIEWER: Did the Depression greatly affect that community?

NEAL: Um, people lived. I remember that we had beans. My mother was very inventive and showed a lot of ingenuity. We had just plain, you know, navy beans; we called them soup beans. We had soup beans and we had soup beans with potatoes and we had soup beans with dumplings. My mother made very good dumplings.

INTERVIEWER: Soup beans.

NEAL: Yeah. We had soup beans with macaroni in it. Once in a while, we even had soup beans with meat in it. And in the gardening time, we had a good bit of cabbage and, but we could pick berries so we had berries with dumplings in them.

INTERVIEWER: Berries and dumplings?

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Very interesting.

NEAL: Sugar was a little hard to come by, but we had that. A lot of the people went to work on WPA and PWA and I think that it was in connection with the WPA, I guess, it was that my mother started her agitating for training at the hospital and being admitted to the hospital.

INTERVIEWER: When the Depression was going on, did the church then sponsor any particular program?

NEAL: Not that I can recall.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father lose his job during the Depression?

NEAL: No, my father by that time I don't think he was working on the railroad at all. I think he was exclusively working in his barber shop. Now he didn't always get paid, because he would bring home eggs, you know, things like that in exchange for haircuts. But my mother, I know, would go out and clean house for something like twenty cents an hour, and things like that, like spring housecleaning. But remember this was at the time I came home from living in New York. The Depression was still going on and I went to work taking care of a couple of little boys for a woman who taught music at the college there. And I worked for seven dollars a week and that's how I sent my brother that was just younger than me to school, Potomac State.

INTERVIEWER: You mention that your mother was very active in community affairs, and politics, and that she and your father often had political differences. Was your mother active in the church?

NEAL: Yeah. She was active in the church. Now my father still clung to, he was active in the church, also. But he still clung to the Episcopalian church and we did have a white Episcopal church there that he went to, but he was also active in the Methodist church. Now during the Depression and little afterwards, the men in the community organized a club and my father was the president of that club, and they met in the back room of his barbershop.

INTERVIEWER: What sort of club was it?

NEAL: This was sort of a benevolent thing. They knew people needed food or anything like that, they were the ones who got it together.



INTERVIEWER: What was the name of the group, do you remember?

NEAL: It was just a men's club.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a women's club, something like that?

NEAL: The women had something going; but I think they act more in an auxiliary capacity to the men.

INTERVIEWER: These were both clubs outside of the church?

NEAL: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: Were there women's clubs inside of the church?

NEAL: Not necessarily so because they weren't organized other than like the missionary group. But that club also served as the sort of the political center, you know. This is where they got together on who they were going to support politically and things like that. Now my sister is ten years my junior, and I remember when she was just a couple of years old there was a difference of opinion between my parents on a candidate. And my father must have been standing down on the corner with my little sister discussing politics, because she came home and my brother did something that made her very unhappy and she stood back and she put her hands on her hips and she looked out at him and she said, "You dadamn demotrats you." (laughs) My mother was supporting a Republican candidate (laughs).

INTERVIEWER: And your father was, too?

NEAL: But I don't know. No, my mother must have been supporting . . . because I know she was very displeased at the . . .

INTERVIEWER: At the language?

NEAL: Yeah. And the fact that it was Democrat that was being assailed because from then on, "You don't go down on the corner and stand with your father any more," you know. But my father, we didn't have any black undertakers, so when anyone died, my father would close his shop so that he could be there to take people over the hump. And my father stayed with it until the people got buried. You know, he was going to be there. So they got so that when somebody died, they sent for him before they sent for the undertaker, you know, (laughs) you know, it was just that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Would the benevolent society then help to bury the people?

NEAL: No, it wasn't a burial society. It was just the men in the community that sort of banded themselves together to do these things. Now, you know, they had their little social life in connection with it but they were the people who did things during that Depression time.

INTERVIEWER: Like what for example? What sort of things?

NEAL: Well, if they, if somebody was in financial problems, they would either from their pocket or their treasury, pool to do that or they put on some kind of little affair so that they could raise the money to slip that to somebody's pocket. Now I can never recall them making any big fanfare over doing things. I can remember people who were sick and I remember one person who was sick and like my father coming home and saying, "Ruth, they need sheets," and my mother going and getting sheets to take to the home to put on the bed and at the same time my father ransacking what little we had from the food shelves to take them something to eat. But I mean it was just sort of little gutsy things, services that they were giving and, of course, while my father's doing this, my mother's going to do the nursing, you know.

INTERVIEWER: They did that in connection with the benevolent society?

NEAL: Well, of course, they were not organized in anything. But it was just like the things that if my father came home and said somebody needs something, he knew that [was] all he had to say, and he expected my mother to get together what was needed. She got together and did it. And, you know, and others did, too. And because it was just that kind of thing going on. Like when my father was sick, my mother's brother-in-law by her first marriage, I mean he was the one who came every morning to see that we had fire, to scrub the floors, to do things like that. I mean it was always that sort of close knit thing in the community.

One of the other things that I have always felt was significant as I started looking back at us as a child, now the little street that we lived in was just down below the hill up here, we were just down below the wealthiest people in town and they also had children who were all about our age. And my father [used] to give us ten cents a week for spending money and it was, as I remember now, there was a little black store down near the end of that street and that's where we all spent our money. But those other kids didn't get but ten cents a week either and I have always thought how sort of far thinking they were to at least keep them on par, keep us all on par



NEAL: because we all played together and we all had the same amount of money to spend so we all had to learn how to share with each other and how to make that money last. And we really did. We would pull, now you buy this much, no you buy this kind of candy, I'll buy this kind of candy, you know, and that went on between us. And I think it kept down an awful lot of racial fights and everything else, you know, by our being on par with each other.

INTERVIEWER: Was that with other black families in the neighborhood or was it just your own family?

NEAL: We were the largest family there but it was with all of us. I don't know, some of them didn't get a dime but that was about the maximum that anybody got. And I guess my father would have moved heaven and earth to see that we got that dime. If you, looking at some things in retrospect, you don't know how much of it was just good common horse sense or how much people really looked at it. There might have always been little fights and things that I guess go on in any neighborhood but we have never been. . . it was never a place where people were torn apart racially. I'm not saying that prejudices and things never existed or don't now exist, maybe with some people, but it's always been a community rather than divisions.

INTERVIEWER: Well, in this community were there distinctions made between black and white as to where they could go. Was there a black movie house as opposed to a white movie house in Kaiser?

NEAL: No. There was the same movie house. But you sit in different parts of it.

INTERVIEWER: So segregation did exist in the area.

NEAL: It existed. Yes. Now then, like with the skating rink, there were certain nights that the blacks were supposed to go on and certain nights that the whites were supposed to go. And this was okay for the older people, but you always found the younger ones, even the younger ones in my time sneaking together to go to the same nights because you played together all day long and this was part of your fun. Now if you were outside not in the roller rink, we all went down to the white school grounds to roller skate up and down there together, it's only when you went to the [rink] that there was a thing. Now, like my father's shop was down town. Now the restaurants and drug counter and the ice cream parlor, these things were really not open to you. But my father frequented a number of them without any problem. But here I guess was a question of people knowing people.



INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that your mother was very active in civic affairs, and that they had political disagreements. You talked about her acting as kind of, sort of a women's auxiliary to the benevolent society. Did she hold positions in the church or did she hold positions in any of the clubs in the community?

NEAL: Well, when you have a small church, you belong to everything so I mean she belonged to everything.

INTERVIEWER: Was she an officer or anything of any of these things?

NEAL: I don't even recall at what times she was what of what. But I know she was there. Yeah. She was not, neither one of them were religious fanatics or even approaching it. They left that for other people to do. With the children, they had made a pact between themselves that we would all be christened in Episcopal church and then when we would reach the age of decision we'd go to whichever church we wanted. It came earlier around six or seven and time for confirmation. I was not confirmed in the Episcopal church because at that time I was more active in the Methodist church and my brother who was next to me was confirmed. I don't think the other brothers in between were. My sister was confirmed but I was never aware of them having any religious problems as far as the upbringing of the children. They were both active in church things and my mother sang with the choir, things like that, but they weren't, well, maybe I guess both of them did, at one time, but, uh, they were not overly so.

My father liked to gamble with the boys, made my mother very unhappy, which was always going out breaking up the games, you know. They'd get the. . . "Oh my God, here comes Carrie Nation." (laughs) But one of the other things that I guess made our house a little special, they always left the door open for us to bring in friends, you know. And the house always looked like a club house, you know, of young people. And my mother never really seemed to get too tired to do, to bake some cookies or. . . and they both shared in like preparation of Sunday meals and things and it was always a big thing. And my mother was always taking us out on weeney roasts and hikes into the country and up into the mountains, and things like that, the whole group of kids. And as I told her in a letter, one time that I wrote to her on my birthday, uh, I was telling her that these were the things in the short time that I lived at home because I was in and out so much, but these were the things that I remembered most.



INTERVIEWER: Your mother, did she ever talk about the segregated facilities in Kaiser. Did she ever try to make any moves to desegregate any of those facilities?

NEAL: She did (laughs). She was the one who did it (laughs). Before that, as I say, they were always, you know, active politically. They always worked the polls; they always, you know, had meetings with people for the candidates and to get people's thinking together, and to get people registered and things like that. I think they ended up with my mother--this is, you know, after some period of time--but my mother and my sister and her husband were the only three registered Democrats. Now they vote Democratic, they have for years. But they just never bothered to change their registration to vote, they vote Democratic, register Republican, they vote Democrat. It's a heavily, the black people there are heavy Democratic voters, but if everybody was handed down from the very first, you'd register Republican, but you just never switch over. And I became so appalled at knowing this, like I went to see Harley Staggers. Harley comes from Kaiser and he does a great job of representing the people there, but I said, "Do you really realize these people are not registered Democrats? Now what if you ever get in trouble with the primary or you need them to bail you out? You know, you just don't have it." But here in the later years, my sister has been very instrumental in seeing that people change their registration. But that was the situation then. But my mother, when I came back from living in New York, I had that next year, see this was back in '32, and so going into '32 and '33, my brother came out of that two-room school house in the eighth grade, and I should have been in high school, and the next year I had another brother who was graduating from the eighth grade. Now my mother had arranged to keep my brother back in school because of his age for awhile, and just let him sit back in the class again. And, but she said this is for the birds (laughs). So it was an election year and my mother said, "My children are going to school." And so they said, "But you know we don't have any schools." But, "My children are going to school." Now the year that I was home and worked, I sent my brother to school that year, and I got seven dollars a week and the bus fare to Cumberland, Maryland, was \$3.50. West Virginia, paid his tuition, and then I gave him a dollar a week for spending money. The rest of it I helped to buy--this is still during the Depression--I helped to buy some of the beans and tried to support myself some, you know, another dollar or so a week. But my mother said, "They're going to school." And she said, "I'm not going to do a thing for you. I'm not going to work for you at all politically. Ain't going to turn my hand to do anything, if my children don't go to school."



INTERVIEWER: Was it a black or white candidate?

NEAL: It was a white candidate. What you mean a black candidate? (laughs). No honey. There were all white candidates.

INTERVIEWER: Throughout the whole time your parents were politically, they were all white.

NEAL: They said, well, they would send us down to Store College to the high school there, and my mother said no. Um, she would, yeah. So then they offered to send us. . . see, they were dealing then just for us. And they also sent for my friend that I said eventually became the principal of the school there. They said they would send us to Clarksburg, since you got relatives out there. Maybe you could live with them and go to school and we pay the tuition. She said no. Said, "You know, that's the way just the way my son made it, that wasn't very satisfactory. I don't want my children away from me." So it went on and on. So, finally, one day she got mad. She said, "Look, I want to tell you. You got a white school down there. And the law says that children ought to be in school until sixteen or until they finish high school. And that school is down there. Now I'm going to be sitting down there,"--oh, and this was before the sit-in--"I'm gonna being sittin' down there, on the steps with my children. And I'm gonna to sit there 'til hell freezes over. You let them in that school or you make some provisions for 'em to go to school." And they knew that that woman wasn't playing that. She would do that thing. So they said, "Well, we don't think that we could send 'em; we can't build a school. And we don't think that there are enough of them that, you know, that would warrant us putting on a bus. But if you could assure us that there was that many, 'cause we don't think there that many of colored children that want to go to school, but if you can find that many in the county who want to go, then we will put on a bus."

So my mother and this friend of mine and myself we toured all over Mineral County and we didn't have to take the ones that were at the lower part, 'cause all they had to do was go across the river there in Cumberland. But all those that were up our way and when we started talking schools, some of those fellows were like twenty-one, twenty-two years old already, and they wanted to go to school. So we found all but about eleven or thirteen seats, something like that, of those who wanted to go. So they then said, "Well, if the bus will go up through Piedmont, which is five miles, then on over into Maryland up to Frostburg, Maryland, and pick up some students there that have to be bused into Cumberland, we will put on the bus."



NEAL: So they put on the bus and we went sixty-nine miles a day round-trip to school. We left in the dark; we got home in the dark, and the bus was so cold in the winter time that you sat on each other's feet and you stomped and stuff like that to keep 'em from freezing. So that when you got to school. . . but they went to school. And then after that, after I guess the second year, then they did a school in Piedmont and the children started going there.

INTERVIEWER: An all-black school?

NEAL: Uh huh. And then shortly thereafter, well I left after that year because it was really, even having been out from school a year, it was so pathetic, that I left and I went to, uh, McKeesport, Pennsylvania, to school. But anyhow, that's the way the school system got changed. And then, of course, it continued like that 'til, you know, the Supreme Court decision.

INTERVIEWER: Was she instrumental in getting any other kind of facilities or services for the community?

NEAL: Well, she also desegregated the hospital. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Was there a big fight about that?

NEAL: Well, the first thing that happened was that my youngest brother had rheumatic fever, which meant that he was going to have a long stay in the hospital. Now they had built another hospital from the time that I said that I knew that there was a facility there. They built this other hospital and my mother had, you know, won her little battle and had gone to work at the hospital and they would put. . . when they admitted blacks, if they went into the same room with whites, they would put up a screen between. And so, because he'd have a long stay, he wasn't going into, you know, that kind of room. He was going on the ward. And my mother told them, "Look, you better damn sight, so you better damn sight not." So they didn't [put the screen up], and then she got sick, and some, 'cause she was the only black person working in the hospital and they started, somebody started bringing in the screen, and she wanted to know "What in the hell you gonna do with that." And so, you know, "Just gonna put up a screen." And she says, "Uh, uh." She said, "If I'm good enough to be here taking care of everybody when I'm on my feet, I'm good enough to put my black ass up here at the bed without (laughs) without any screen around it. Don't put no screen around me." (laughs)



NEAL: So the girl went hauling out with the screen, you know, and so then she told the doctor and. . . you know, don't send nobody back here in again with no screen again. So he said okay. And then she recommended somebody else to come there to work as a maid and then they came in. Well, eventually, somebody else bought the hospital and my sister worked for that doctor for a long time. But then my sister went to work for the hospital too at one point. But at one point, they had taken on this black girl and put her on as the head nurse and there was a big thing that the staff was all going to quit. And that doctor went down on their lunch hour and told them he knew that he was infringing on their lunch time but "I will pay you for this lunch hour since I am infringing on it, but I want you to know that the time has come when anybody who lives in this community should not have to go away, go to school and then go some place else to find employment. They need to come back home with their skills. Now, she is the head nurse because she has the most training and the most capabilities. You can either stay here and work under her or the time you want to leave, you know, just leave your time and you know we'll see that your check gets prepared for you." Just as simple as that. And he walked on out. Of course, nobody quit. After a couple of years, she got another assignment and went some place else. But she stayed there.

INTERVIEWER: When was this?

NEAL: Well, this must have been about ten years or so ago. But it was just with my mother from that time on, they never put any more screens up around anybody and they started putting people in there according to whatever facilities they had open. That's the way they went in. And to my knowledge, you know, there hasn't been any problem. Of course, my mother popped one patient one night for calling her a nigger. (laughs) But, you know, one of these little things, and told 'em they didn't have to report it because she intended to report it. She wasn't going to stay there and be insulted, "Wait on you and carry your shit pans and things like that and be insulted by you." (laughs) But, I mean, they were just that kind of people and that's why I think that without maybe even being conscious of it, that I just sort of gravitated towards this kind of. . . because I just sort of grew up with it.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the number of blacks who registered Republican who voted Democrat. When did that change in voting pattern happen?



NEAL: Well, they started voting Republican, I mean Democratic heavily during. . . .

INTERVIEWER: . . . the New Deal?

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What was the advantage of staying registered Republican?

NEAL: Because you just didn't have. . . Well, laziness, I guess. They had permanent registration and so long as you were registered, you could vote, so they just didn't take part in the primary.

INTERVIEWER: West Virginia in that local area wasn't Republican controlled?

NEAL: Uh, yeah, pretty much so.

INTERVIEWER: It was Republican controlled?

NEAL: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: Then there's a possibility they might have stayed registered Republican because of that.

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: As a case in mind in Pennsylvania, so I thought that might be the same sort of thing. Your father, you mentioned, was in the railroad. He was also a barber. Was he a member of either one of those unions?

NEAL: He was a member of both unions. In fact, my father was the first black member of the barber's union in West Virginia, but that was the first that I ever knew about unions was when he was on strike with the railroad, and it just must have been in the twenties, must have been. Well, I don't know; I don't remember when it was, but it must have been around about '23, '24, something like that. He was on strike and he came, he rushed in the barbershop and he came out with his straight razor and this fellow was coming up the street and when this guy neared him, he started swinging his razor. And he said, "God-damn you, you goddamn scab, taking the bread out of the mouth of my children and got nerve enough to come out here. You know I'll cut your throat."

INTERVIEWER: Was the scab black or white?

NEAL: Yeah, he was black, and the guy got to jumping back and throwing up his hands and hollering, "Don't cut me, Bubba, don't cut me, Bubba, please don't cut me, Bubba," and my Daddy kept swinging at him and I think he must have turned around and seen us there and, you know, 'cause then he told him, "Well you better get the hell out of here, then." So we started playing the game, "Don't cut me, Bubba," and we really didn't know what is was all about. And then my father said, "Look, you know, that's nothing to be playing around with, you know," and he started telling us what was happening that, you know, he had been working in the. . . and they had to stop work because they wouldn't give them enough money for what they were doing so they had to stop work and that while they were trying to make the man pay them, this man went to work for less money and so, "That's why I called him a scab." And so then, he explained to us what it was. But that was my first recollection at all, you know, of unions.

INTERVIEWER: When did he enter the barber's union?

NEAL: It must have been in the thirties I would say.

INTERVIEWER: He was the first black man in the barbers' union in West Virginia?

NEAL: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a big fight getting into that union?

NEAL: Not that I know of, because the first thing that I knew was that he said "there is going to be a convention, of barbers in Charleston, West Virginia, and I'm going down to it." I remember him getting ready to go and then I didn't know when he left, and but when he came back with the convention pictures, and he was the only black person, you know, on that picture. So when we asked him why you're the only one on there and he said, "Well, I'm the only [black] member of it. You know, I'm the only colored member of it."

INTERVIEWER: He had been a member of the railroad union before that?

NEAL: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know why he was first interested in joining the union? As far as you remember, he was always in the union?

NEAL: Yeah, 'cause, see, when that incident happened, I was around six years old, something like that.



INTERVIEWER: Did his union activities ever affect the family any? Was there ever any kind of hostile reaction on the part of any of the community, of the white community or parts of the black community?

NEAL: No, well I guess most of them that were working for the railroad were all members of the union. Other than that strike, I don't recall him being there. . . There were other strikes and work stoppages around there, I remember, in later times but I don't think he was working for the railroad at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Were there segregated locals in the railroad?

NEAL: I really don't know.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned, I want to ask, as you were coming up, when you were younger, did either your mother or your father have particular plans for you or the rest of the children as to what you were supposed to do or could do or should do in terms of like, well, education or occupation?

NEAL: Always, it was always what do you want to do. What do you want to be when you grow up? I remember my brother next to me wanted to be a Chinaman (laughs) 'cause he liked to wash clothes (laughs), and one of them wanted to be a preacher. One of them said he wanted to be a roughneck but they were always like, they always wanted us to go to school. And that was the reason when I went to work after I came in, you know, back from New York when we set down and talked about it and we came to the conclusion that if I had the opportunity, I'd go back to school. But they were afraid when my brother came out from the eighth grade, if he started going to work and making some money, 'cause he had gone to work when he was about seven or eight--this was during the Depression, 'cause both of us were working. I was working by the time I was eight, too. But 'cause they told us we had to get out and help earn the bacon, so he took a job babysitting a little boy and he was working. But they were afraid that when, if when he came out of school that if he started working and earning some money, then he perhaps would not go to school. So that's when we made a decision, well I would go to work so that he could, 'cause they'd already held him back a year to keep him from working, that he would go to school. And then I was so afraid he had blown that year because in the spring of that year that I was sending him to school, he ran away from home and was gone, oh, I guess going into the second year. But when he did come back, his grades had been so good that they gave him credit for it and he went on to the next grade. So I was always glad that that year of sacrifice wasn't wasted and so then he got into then he started going to Bowie.



INTERVIEWER: Is this Bowie College?

NEAL: Uh huh. So then, but that time, I was working again and so I then I helped send him on there. Then he went into service and then, of course, when he came back, went back on the G.I. bill to get his degree and then he taught out here in Oxen Hill for awhile and he really wasn't so hot at that. He didn't like it that much. And he went back into the service and he stayed in for about twenty-five years.

But when he went in the service, he found so many, he says that there were so many blacks that were illiterate, that on his own he started a class and so he had himself a class going in there teaching and then later on, then he taught weather as a regular assignment, but he was teaching them reading and writing. Both my mother and father died of cancer and my father, cancer of the kidney, and he had lived for a number of years with only, with one kidney, and the brother that I was just talking about that also happened to him. But what my father worried about the most was my youngest brother getting an education and he saved, you know, and he had his big jar and saving, saving, you know, "I want my boy to have an education." And about the same thing happened to him. He was going to West Virginia, no he wasn't going to West Virginia. He was going to Bluefield, and he got pulled out of there for the service and he married one of the girls in school and then he stayed in the service so he just came out two years ago, after twenty-two years in. And, but he kept trying all during that time to get assignments. He was a jet mechanic and he kept trying to get assignments would give him enough continuity so he could get his degree in there and took a lot of classes, you know, never been able to pull that together.

But by that time after I left, went to Mckeesport and graduated from high school there, then I never had an opportunity to go back to school, so the only schooling that I got past that point was various courses and things like that. But at one point I was able to get into a number of things because I became a lay preacher in the Methodist church, and was able to pick up an opportunity then to get in some things.

INTERVIEWER: What I want to ask you about, let me backtrack for a moment. You quit school to help support your next brother in school. That just happened to you because your parents knew that you eventually would go back to school somehow while they were a little afraid that he might not?



NEAL: Uh huh.

INTERVIEWER: Was that just the case of you or at any other time did any of your other sisters have to stop to help any of the other boys get to school?

NEAL: My sister didn't stop to help him. She graduated from high school out in Toledo and she helped with my youngest brother when he was at Bluefield because by that time, of course, my father had died and so it was sort of a cooperative effort to try to keep him in school. But the other three boys in between, they all went their own ways after high school.

INTERVIEWER: Did they ever try to support, did they ever get responsibility for sending one of the girls to school?

NEAL: No.

INTERVIEWER: But you were sent expressly to New York to go to school.

NEAL: No, I just went to school; I just went to New York for a two-week visit but it was shortly before school started and, I guess, I got to talking with other children who went to school there and I wanted to go. And my mother was really unhappy about my not being able to concentrate on my own grade's work and she thought that I was, you know, advanced for, for that, and so she sort of welcomed the opportunity for me to go to school there. But I had a very, a very difficult life in New York, and I don't know whether it was the right decision.

INTERVIEWER: What difficulties are you talking about? Educational difficulties there?

NEAL: No, I always fit alright there. I guess except one year when everything was a little, uh, with the group of kids. Everything got to be a ball that year and our chief joy in life was harassing her, the teacher, but she was a very obnoxious woman (laughs). She really was. You know, she must have been. . . she was white and she must have been a very beautiful young woman, but she had such sort of simple teaching methods. She taught us mathematics and history. And the way she taught was, "In 1492 [clapped her hands] Columbus discovered America, landed on the island of San Salvador. Now everybody say that after me. In 1492," you know, and the same thing was, the same kind of methods in mathematics and so you just sort of thought of her as being somebody a little simple. And then, in addition, you know, she was very prejudiced and she'd talk in terms



NEAL: of, "I wish I could afford to buy a tree sometime, you know, so all you little monkeys could climb up into the tree," and you know this kind of thing. So you just did everything you could think of to sort of harass her, you know, things like that. But (laughs) I had a teacher in the sixth grade, boy, she was a flip. She was an alcoholic. And looked like she started her drinking, heavy drinking on Friday afternoon, and on Friday afternoon she would sit there and she'd say, "Arline, recite 'Columbus'," and I would recite Columbus in the manner that I knew would give the most entertainment to the class, you know, where "behind the blade of. . . behind the gates of Hercules," you know, when you get down to the part where, "Speak, speak, brave. . ." what shall I say and he said, "Sail on (laughs), sail on," and they knew that once I get to that part, she'd sit there and tears would start running down her face, you know (laughs) and her alcoholism, so it was always a nice Friday afternoon release (laughs).

INTERVIEWER: There are just three other things we would like to tie up before we go to any other things. You mentioned political differences between your mother and father. Do you ever remember what issues they might have clashed on? What positions they had on certain issues?

NEAL: Nothing definite.

INTERVIEWER: Was your father supportive of your mother's efforts to desegregate the hospital and to get schooling for the children?

NEAL: Yeah. Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And the other question had to do with the social life. What the social activities available for young girls in Kaiser were.

NEAL: I never, for instance, I never was interested in dancing, I guess, because I have no sense of rhythm, and so that didn't bother me. There were always those kind of activities going on. Television wasn't around, but you did a lot of parlor games; you read a lot, did a lot of crossword puzzles. You played cards; you listened to boys sing beneath your window, and especially if boys came and you looked out and you saw your little sister peeping in the window. . . but all these things went on, you know. There was a lot of activity. I had much more social activity at home, say, than I did in New York.

INTERVIEWER: Your parents are obviously very involved in political things. At school was there much discussion of political events? The



INTERVIEWER: period that you knew we're talking about from 1917 to the twenties and thirties was a very politically active period for black people, the lynching, the campaign against the lynching, the Marcus Garvey. . . .

NEAL: I knew Marcus Garvey.

INTERVIEWER: You did know him. Really? You met him in New York? Really!

NEAL: Uh. My aunt purchased one of her homes from Marcus Garvey. And so I spent a good bit of time because we didn't live far from where his office was on 7th Avenue, and so I spent a good bit of time dropping in. When I was in my early teens.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any of that influence in West Virginia? People talk about those kind of things? They talk about Garvey; they talk about NAACP; they talk about political things that were happening to blacks at that time?

NEAL: See, a lot of the most active of. . . I mean, in that period I was in New York because I was in New York from '27 to '32, and this was sort of the turmoil time. So I can't really say what they were doing at the community as a whole.

INTERVIEWER: When you were in school there, did you ever overhear any discussions about that?

NEAL: See, my parents were always. . . I never sensed hate in the house, you know, because there were always. . . they always had a large number of white friends. I mean very close to them, as long as I can remember. And I never really remember hate but they were always very race conscious. And so these kind of conversations, you know, were just part of the daily fare of anything that was going on and as I say, we always had, we always took the newspapers.

INTERVIEWER: You read newspapers? Black newspapers?

NEAL: No, well they always bought those when they were available, but, you know, there were always current things going on. Not every family took the newspaper. Come by past a lot of houses sometime to get up near where we were to get, before they start delivering the papers. There were always books there, and they made a big thing of having meals together until the boys started getting a little older, and then they started weaning themselves away from the table and we had a round table so, and we were never really silenced from asking questions and things like that. So anything that was going on got talked

NEAL: about around our house and it didn't make any difference whether it was the atrocities that were going on, that we thought of more in the South, whether it was the sex things or anything, it got talked about. You know, I mean, there was never any sort of hesitancy about talk of any kind and, as I say, they were always hepped up on making sure that at least blacks got their share of whatever there was to get, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Were there black newspapers in that area?

NEAL: No, we got the Afro from Baltimore and we got the Chicago Defender and the Pittsburgh Courier. But we didn't get them all the time and sometimes 'cause they didn't have them there on the newstands all the time. Sometimes, somebody brought them back from Cumberland or something like that. But there were never any, there was never much happening that if it hit the papers that there wasn't a discussion about it.

INTERVIEWER: As you look back, and this is the last question to this session, as you look back, were there maybe one or two people who served as role models for your people that they greatly admired and wanted to model your life after, say outside of your parents. Were there people in the community or people that you had heard about that greatly influenced the way you wanted to structure your life?

NEAL: I can't say that I had any particular person that, and yet there must have been. Like my sister said to me one time that how much she wanted to do some of the things that she'd seen me doing. But like I never had any ambitions to be, you know, a school teacher, like most kids say, you know, I want to be a school teacher and have many aspirations along that line. I never had any aspirations to go and be a nurse like everybody said. I don't ever remember my really having any real aspirations like that. I would change from time to time about the things that I wanted to do, like when I went into the lay ministry I thought that I would like to be a missionary, and then they talked me out of it.

INTERVIEWER: Who talked you out of it?

NEAL: The ministers. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: Why?

NEAL: Well, I don't know. They said that the amount of dedication and the kind of life that you really [need] to be a real missionary and all the true sense and everything else, especially



NEAL: if you were going to be a licensed missionary, they just didn't feel that it was. . . They were right, really right, but I know, felt that was the way I wanted to go. At one time I was all hopped up on being an undertaker.

INTERVIEWER: Is that 'cause of your father?

NEAL: No. (laughs) No, this I got in New York. For much too short a time, I wanted to be a part of, then I was part of a dramatic group, but Ma wouldn't let me stay with that group but I enjoyed it very much. I was travelling around with a fella who was a singer and we used to entertain.

INTERVIEWER: Who was the singer?

NEAL: I don't even remember the name. Frank, Frank DeMong. Celebrated tenor of New York and London.

INTERVIEWER: No, I don't think I knew him.

NEAL: No. And we did a lot of stuff for a spiritualist while they were waiting for the spiritualist to come on. We entertained the group, and he was Prince Ashan, straight from West Africa, City of Ashanti, very impressive. (laughs) But I tried, I knew I could never be a great musician but my uncle got my aunt's husband in Grafton, he was quite a pianist and I was very, very fond of him so I was just convinced that, given enough time, I could play the piano like him. But after a couple of years, the teacher says this is a hopeless case. And that she shouldn't waste the money. I went to dancing school in New York, and except that I never paid my fee. And I would pick up enough steps to come home to show something and the show-down didn't come until I wasn't in the recital. And Ma wondered why, and said well she doesn't take lessons from me. But that didn't work and then I decided maybe I could be a violinist, and 'cause they were letting you take violins home. Well, I went home and screeched for a couple weeks of that, and Ma told me to take that damn thing back where I got it and don't bring it back in that house anymore. So that ended my musical career, (laughs) but I don't know. One of the people who had a great impact on me though was the minister from the church in New York, I belonged to the Salem Methodist church. And Reverend Conti wrote. . . .

INTERVIEWER: Culon?

NEAL: No. It was Conti Culon.

INTERVIEWER: Father?

NEAL: Foster Father. And. . . .

INTERVIEWER: So it was Reverend Culon.

NEAL: Yeah. Uh huh. Reverend Culon. He was such a meek, humble, yet dynamic man. And I think that he was about the most compassionate person I ever saw. He was also a fool. (laughs) And I really think that there was so many things about him at a very trying period for me, that he had one of the greatest impacts on me of almost anyone I knew in my growing up years.

INTERVIEWER: I know its getting very late and. . . .

NEAL: But it isn't getting dark.

INTERVIEWER: I want to quickly follow up on one you were just talking about, your aspirations. Even though you didn't have any specific aspirations, did you always expect to do something?

NEAL: No.

INTERVIEWER: Well, did you always think you were going to have to work?

NEAL: Uh huh. You know, for one thing, I've always been a very independent sort of person. I never liked to ask for anything. Sometimes, my mother would say, "Is something going on at school?" And, you know, this was in my high school time, and I'd say, "Yeah." "Well didn't you need money?" "Yeah." "Well, why didn't you ask for it?" "Oh, I didn't have to do it." So I have always had this sort of feeling that however I made it, I had to make it on my own.

INTERVIEWER: Were your friends like that? Did any of your female friends ever think that they were going to be, to get married and never have to work another day in their life? Did they expect to work most of their lives?

NEAL: I guess most of 'em have worked. So I guess they expected to do it. Whenever I lived at home, I had a different kind of relationship with people than I did anywhere else. Growing up, I really didn't share the kind of confidences with people that I think most girls do, which makes it a little, you know, different. When I was home there were, I felt, friendships. The rest of the time I was away from it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, were your sisters expected to work when they could? Or did they anticipate perhaps marrying some very nice man and being taken care of?



NEAL: My sister never did.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

NEAL: Never. I don't think that I ever dreamed of anything except work. But never anything in particular.

INTERVIEWER: But you knew you always had to work.

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Did you always expect to be politically active with that? Were those values of your parents?

NEAL: I never really expected it. I don't have political, I never had political aspirations. I always wanted to do more of the actual doing of things or launching somebody else, like when they started even here, when they started appointing people to the city council. Jay Turner and a number of other people were just begging, begging, begging me to get appointed. Land, it could have been a rank! I did not want it. I kept getting pushed to be a candidate when they started electing, and, honestly, I just kept being belligerent with phone calls, even for the non-voting delegates. I don't want any of those things. I want, you know, I really want to work for things but I don't have those kind of ambitions for myself. I never had ambitions to be president of this local union. I had opportunities through the years if I had been so inclined from the members and they offered all kinds of support if you want to run. I was perfectly content to work in a partnership relationship. But to be motivated to be out front, there are a lot of things I accepted that is part of the job and I do them. Like I, there was nothing I dreaded worse than going to dinners and all that kind of activity. And I had convinced myself that this is part of the job and, you know, if you're going to do something for people you gotta do it, and so I made myself do it. But I think I've got a lot of introvert in me, in an extrovertish way. (laughs) If anybody can understand what I mean. You know, I always, I feel I've got to do the things. I think I have a lot of compassion for people but I always feel that I've got to do the things as expedient to be done if you're going to do something. So I mean, I think it's the only thing that has really motivated me to stand out on the street corners with literature, walk the picket lines, and do all the things I've done all through the years because I think they had to be done.

INTERVIEWER: Change the times?



NEAL: Yeah. But for a personal gratification or for limelight, I could care less.

INTERVIEWER: I'm going to get back to two subjects that we passed a long time ago.

NEAL: Well, well, well. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: One, in the very beginning when you talk about your grandmother and that you remember lots of stories about her. Do you remember what kind of stories and was that a way that you learned a lot about other parts of your past life, the stories about your relatives?

NEAL: Yeah. That's why I don't, that's why I don't really know whether I actually knew. . . but people would say, that Martha Fiddler, she's a great woman, and then they'd start telling tales about her and some of her midwife stuff and how she would show up and go through all these storms and all this kind of stuff to show up. They would talk about how hard she worked and how she reared all these children by herself, and just all these things would go on that she became just sort of a very real person to me 'cause I had seen pictures of her and I knew that she was sort of a massive woman, pictures of her with children and things like that. Everything I ever saw she would have the smile on her face and they would talk about that she was the best cook in the whole town and, now, have you ever tasted this that Martha Fiddler made? So some of the things were just so real that you couldn't have told me that I hadn't eaten one of her cakes, stuff like that. And yet I just think that I must have been too young to remember it. Like I swear that I remember Armistice Day and my mother says, "You don't remember Armistice Day, you weren't old enough," and I said, "Yeah, but I remember; I remember the bells and I remember people running and I remember. . ." She said. "But you don't remember it. You might remember a celebration of Armistice Day, but you don't remember it."

But they said that when my father was pleased with me, he always called me John, because I used to stand in the door and sing, "Gotta get the gun, get the gun, get the gun, gotta get your gun, get your gun, get your gun." So I know that there are things that I just think sort of become real to you.

Like I can recall once in Grafton, a group of women who. . . and I remember that my aunt took me there to this house and I remember them sitting around, and everybody was sort of talking in hushed tones, and I remember somebody wrapping up something in a newspaper and taking it out into another room, and



NEAL: it was years after that when I asked my aunt did that woman ever had a miscarriage. And yeah, yeah, but how did you know? And I said, you know, from. . . and I must have been like five years old, or something like that. But I could just picture the hushness and the secretiveness and as I got older, I was able to put together what must have happened. And I just think that there are some things about my childhood and family that I just, I don't know whether figments of my imagination or what, and maybe if I hadn't been so obnoxious that they put me out at three, I would have remembered some of these things. But I did shift around an awful lot and I think that the shifting sometimes was hard, and it wasn't a question of, I mean they could have provided for me at home so I know that part of it must have been, I mean they could have provided for me as well as they did all the rest of them, and I never felt a lack of love from my parents. I don't know; it might have given me some strengths and some more feeling of independence of knowing that I had to be resourceful, this moving around from place to place.

INTERVIEWER: Why, in fact were you moved around? Was it almost exclusively for the economic reasons or what?

NEAL: I don't really think so. I really think that some of it must have been that, well, I didn't like the lady in New York; she was alright at first, but I mean that woman beat me unmercifully, but from that place, it was just the question of moving from school to school and then, of course, back to Kaiser the year out, then the terrible school there, but I mean it took me ten schools to get through high school.

INTERVIEWER: Then you actually did finish?

NEAL: Yeah. We had about eight hundred or so I guess in that graduating class and I think I came out about twenty-six in the academic group or something like that out of eight hundred. But except for the time when my mother was sick, and I was sort of going back and forth and missing out on things like physics and stuff like that, I never had a problem at school. I don't like a lot of research, I like to fool around with statistics and numbers, but I don't, I'd rather get things as they go through, and my retention was pretty good, so I always got through with high grades in spite of everything.

INTERVIEWER: A year when your mother was sick and when you took on the responsibilities of the family?

NEAL: Yeah. I was running back and forth between McKeesport to keep home while she was sick and things like that. Trying to keep the things going at home as well as to school.

NEAL INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: McKeesport?

NEAL: I was in school there.

INTERVIEWER: And so, you would leave school to come here to . . .

NEAL: Which made me lose pretty big hunks of things.

INTERVIEWER: That wasn't the school that was sixty-nine miles away?

NEAL: No, that was in Cumberland, Maryland, and when I was going to school in Cumberland, see this was after mother got this going for us to go there. This was during the time that they had the NYC program, so I was on the Youth Assistance thing or NYA or whatever it was. Because of all of the school changing and everything in New York, there was subjects that I needed, and I wasn't able to make them up, and that school in Cumberland to any degree at all, and the principal was essentially a lazy man. Now I'd never had science, I had taken a couple of things of biology but I hadn't had science, and this too was a school that went from the first grade through high school, and so I, if the teacher was absent I got assigned to, you know, take her class or his class, the principal taught science and geometry, and physics, and he would go upstairs, take a magazine away from a kid, come downstairs and put his feet up on the desk and tell me: "Go up there and give that 7th grade class a science test." I say to Mr. Bracey: "I never had it." "You can read can't you?" "Yeah, I can read." "Well, go up and do it." And so I didn't have much problem going up and doing it. But the thing about it, when I'd come back down, and he told me to grade 'em, you know, I mean that was just . . .

INTERVIEWER: What school is this again?

NEAL: This was a school in Cumberland, Maryland. So I mean this was a gross exploitation of those students and I'd do it and ya know and he expelled kids from school, and wouldn't send for 'em. And I asked Mr. Bracey: "When are you goin' to have so and so come back in school? Do you know how long they been out?" "They out, yeah."

INTERVIEWER: Was he black or white?

NEAL: He's black.

INTERVIEWER: Really. It was a black high school.

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How did you end up in McKeesport?



NEAL INTERVIEW

- NEAL: Well, I had the minister from Kaiser who had that as a charge was assigned to the church in McKeesport, and when I was so unhappy with the school down there they said, well you can come out and stay with us and go to school here.
- INTERVIEWER: So the minister was the one who got you into the school in McKeesport.
- NEAL: Uh-huh.
- INTERVIEWER: So how long did you go to school there?
- NEAL: I went two, I went two years there.
- INTERVIEWER: And that's where you finally graduated.
- NEAL: Uh-huh.
- INTERVIEWER: And that must have been a really large high school.
- NEAL: But then he got....yeah, it was a big high school 'cause they only had the one central high school and, yeah, I had battles I had to fight there, too. The, oh god, the Daughters of the American Revolution, they use to give a scholarship every year, to the most outstanding white student.
- INTERVIEWER: Underscore the white.
- NEAL: Uh-huh. And so you have to go to assembly to listen to that crap. I remember this guy....he was a Frenchman, he was my home-room teacher, and so he had written up on the board, "Assembly this morning," and so they all started filing out to go, and I set there. "Miss Malone, you're due downstairs." "I'm not goin'." "What do you mean you're goin'." I said, "I do not intend to go down there, and hear them read out about a scholarship for a white girl." And he said, "Huh." I said, "Do you know what's going on down there this morning. They're going down there and give a scholarship, you know, and to a white girl. And I'm not going down there." So he set down then and started talking and I started telling him what an insulting situation, you know, it was. And so he said, "I agree with you. You shouldn't go." So he took it back to the next faculty meeting and after that, they didn't come back again, D.A.R. never came back to give out any scholarships.
- INTERVIEWER: I wish someone had done that in the other schools....each and every year. Was it always to be given to a nice white girl?
- NEAL: Uh-huh. Real sickening.



NEAL INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: The next question is, we talked a lot about your life in Kaiser and the time you spent in Grafton, I guess it was five years, was it much different there?

NEAL: Well, I was, you know, a little girl growing up, starting school there, and I had a very adoring aunt and uncle and they fought a lot and they threatened every time that they had an argument that that was the wrong atmosphere for me to be in and they were going to take me back home again, but somehow or other they, you know, kept me on, and, but, other than my cousin that my brother went to live with in Clarksburg, they had also reared her. Because it was her mother who died and left her an infant with small pox, so this aunt had taken her to raise, and so she had gone to school and she was teaching school in Elkins, West Virginia. So she came home on weekends, and I was very, very jealous of the man who became her husband because I always thought that, you know, he was coming to see me, and the fact that my cousin would show up every time he came to see me was more than I could bear.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you?

NEAL: Oh, I was around about six years old. (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: How old were your cousins?

NEAL: She was, you know, in her early twenties I guess, you know, she had finished school, and she was teaching (laughs). But the, you know, I didn't have many....there were no, there were very few children in the neighborhood to play with. But who needed them, you know, when you had these older people who, you know, that you could twist around your finger, you know. So it was a very, you know, here was my uncle who worked right across the little creek across the street in front of us, and here was, and both of them when he worked mostly at night, and when he wasn't working they usually took these engagements to play with the bands, so, you know, I got out with that.

INTERVIEWER: Did both of them play?

NEAL: Yes. My aunt also played for the church, so I got to go to a lot of things there, and then when he was working she would sometimes play with the band, too, if not she'd still go to the dances. Except that he didn't want her to go to these dances and he didn't want me out with her that time of night. So when we'd come down the street, I'd have to walk right beside her so it would look like it was only one person coming in and we'd get the walk he'd shove me in, she'd shove me in front of her so it would appear it was only one person coming in very late at night.

But I led quite a sheltered kind of life with the, but I enjoyed it very much. Those the times I guess I felt the richest in life,



NEAL INTERVIEW

NEAL: I had thirty-some dolls and even back in that time....dolls where all the joints moved and things like that, who could ask for more?

I learned to believe there was no Santa Claus at that time. I learned that around about four years old because she went to Pittsburgh and bought the doll in something like October that was to be for me for Christmas and hid it in the closet. I saw it, then when it appeared under the Christmas tree, and it said that this Santa Claus brought. "No Santa Claus didn't bring it, you brought that back from Pittsburgh." "Ok. You're so smart. So he didn't bring ya, and he ain't bringin' nothing else either." (laugh) But I believed in the Easter bunny. I believed in the Easter bunny until I was about nine years old, and you could not convince me there wasn't an Easter bunny, because my mother would dye eggs and our house--there was a hill in the back of our house--and my mother would climb up that hill and hide those eggs all over the place, and we'd have to go out and find these eggs. One day when I saw this rabbit hop across the hill and right where that rabbit had been was an Easter egg and no one could convince me that there was not an Easter bunny.

INTERVIEWER: So you lived in Grafton mostly around adults.

NEAL: Yea.

INTERVIEWER: You did go to school there. And in Kaiser you were more around children.

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And your aunt and uncle, were they also active in the community?

NEAL: Uh, not too much. They always voted and took part in things and they were heavily involved with lodges and all kinds of associations. They were sort of joiners, but they weren't the same kind of activists that my mother and father were.

INTERVIEWER: Were there books around that house also?

NEAL: Oh yea. This was a whole....evidently they got that at home, I mean my mother, they must have gotten that kind of stuff from all along because all of them, her brothers, the oldest, the youngest sister who just died last year at 80-some....I mean you had to throw away all kinds of papers and letters, there were things from back in 1912. She also was a widow before she was 21, both of them it was a really sad thing. Not from the same thing either. But, so, evidently this was something that was....the reading bit and stuff must have come from the family from back then, because as I say, this went up to she could poetry. God, she could recite. Fifty things in an evening, and



NEAL INTERVIEW

NEAL: not even stop....everything from Venetopsis to Boots, Boots, Boots--(laughs) you know. Part of my love of dramatic things, I inherited from my mother and my Aunt Katie.

INTERVIEWER: When you were in Grafton, did you see all of your family very much?

NEAL: Yeah. 'Cause my brother, by that time being five years older, he was going to junior high school, over in Clarksburg and then stayed over there. So we were close there. He'd come over to go home with me, and I went home every summer and sometimes in between any time, because when you worked for the railroad you got a pass, so we just rode all the time. So I saw them a lot, but I preferred to live in Grafton, I had to share too many things I guess with, at home with the rest of them.

INTERVIEWER: And why did you finally move back to . . . ?

NEAL: I really don't know. Just all of a sudden I came home one year and when school started I went down to the school, and sat in the fourth row (laughs) and they let me stay home and go to school. I mean I don't remember whether I wanted to stay home or whether somebody else made the decision that it was time for me to stay home, or what. I just know all of a sudden I was there.

INTERVIEWER: Earlier you mentioned that your father was from Maryland and that he was Episcopalian. I found that interesting. I wonder how strong the Episcopalian church was in that area and particularly how strong was the amount of participation in the Episcopalian church in West Virginia?

NEAL: Well, of course my father was from Cumberland, Maryland which was about twenty-two miles from my home in Kaiser. And the parish that he was in was made up almost entirely of the family. There might have been a few other families in the parish, but as I started meeting the relatives there, it was practically all our family.

INTERVIEWER: Were your parents Episcopalian in West Virginia?

NEAL: He attended the Episcopal church there. Of course segregation was still there, but he was always apparently welcomed at the church.

INTERVIEWER: It wasn't a black Episcopal church?

NEAL: No.

INTERVIEWER: Did he ever explain how he first attended the Episcopal church, whether his mother took him there as a young boy, or . . .



NEAL INTERVIEW

- NEAL: Well, as I say his mother, and apparently her father and all of my great aunts and uncles, they were all Episcopalians. But my father's side of the family I never knew anything, but, that they were Episcopalians.
- INTERVIEWER: Your father attended a white Episcopal church. Was he the only black person to attend that church?
- NEAL: I don't know anyone else that did. You know, we weren't with him sometimes, but as far as I know he was the only one who did.
- INTERVIEWER: Now you also mentioned a little later in the same interview that you were a lay preacher . . .
- NEAL: With the Methodist church.
- INTERVIEWER: When was that?
- NEAL: I don't even know when yesterday was. It must have been in, it was in the 1930's, when I was, I don't remember whether I was seventeen, eighteen, something like that, when I was licensed.
- INTERVIEWER: That young? What exactly does a lay preacher do in the Methodist church?
- NEAL: They're just not ordained. They can preach, they can exhort, they cannot perform any of the rituals of the church.
- INTERVIEWER: Did you ever give any thought to becoming ordained?
- NEAL: Um, I really hoped to have been an ordained missionary in the Methodist church. That takes a lot of study and....but before I went, we only had, in the Washington conference of the Methodist church, one ordained deaconess. ~~And I don't think they were~~ predisposed to put on another as young as I was. In fact a number of ministers from the conference actually talked me out of it. They said that the life was so demanding and everything that they just thought I, that I should not do it.
- INTERVIEWER: When you were actually preaching, what were some of the themes that you chose, what were some of the things you decided to preach about? Could you say that your sermons, were they significantly different from things that other people did?
- NEAL: I don't know that they were. You had to do a number of prescribed subjects for the conference, you know, so I guess I did some of the traditional sermons. And, there were a number of young people who used to be in the congregations a lot, so I think that part of it was geared to the problems of the day for young people. But, I guess I, I imagine that I, kept that license for about three years, something like that, and then I did not, after they had talked me out of the deaconess. I didn't ask to have it renewed.



NEAL INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: Did they ever have any special reactions to you because you were a woman and a lay minister?

NEAL: Well, you know, back, well I guess it still persists to this day that there are a number of people who think that, you should just not be in the pulpit at all. Surprisingly I got, I got encouragement from quite a few older ministers, as I recall it-- but they weren't jubilant about it. By and large the conference wasn't jubilant about it. But after I came, afterward, I still spent a lot of time working with some of the other younger people who had become lay preachers. Some of the males were working toward their ordination and I still did a lot of studying and research for a couple of them.

INTERVIEWER: There are a number of other questions, and while I have you here talking about your activities in the church, you mentioned earlier in the interview the kinds of religious organizations and community organizations your mother had participated in. You also mentioned having a great interest in the missionary society. As a young girl, what were the kinds of religious, political and community organizations you were involved in?

NEAL: Well, you know I really think that, most of my interest in any kind of work along that line stemmed from my affiliation with the church in New York, Salem Methodist church. I was a very great admirer of the pastor there, Reverend Cullen. He was the adopted father of Conti Cullen . . .

INTERVIEWER: Ah, I see.

NEAL: And I guess we were pretty much an admirer of Conti too, and his poetry and things, but us . . .

INTERVIEWER: How long were you in New York?

NEAL: I lived in New York from the time I was ten till sixteen. But I think that perhaps the meekness and humility of Reverend Cullen had a very sort of deep influence on me, because, I went through periods of great despondency as a child, you know, even to the point of suicide--you know--things like that. But I think that really was a thing that sort of put that religious thing in there. But there were really not many things that um, organizations or anything else that are that prevalent in a small town. So you do, sort of the things that you know, are around to do.

INTERVIEWER: How about the societies and clubs associated with . . .

NEAL: I've never been like a joiner of lodges and clubs and things like that. I did the normal things, you know, taught Sunday school,



NEAL INTERVIEW

- NEAL: worked in the young people's group and worked with, you know the children in their . . .
- INTERVIEWER: I'm a little confused now. I'm trying to get the chronology, Kaiser to Grafton, Grafton to New York, New York to McKeesport.
- NEAL: Well, from Kaiser, I really started leaving home, they couldn't stand me, they put me out about three. (laughter) And that's when I stayed in Grafton till about seven I guess. Then I was back, or eight I guess, it must have been, because I only recall two years of school in Kaiser. And, I skipped a grade then. And, then I lived in New York for six years.
- INTERVIEWER: What prompted you to leave and go to New York?
- NEAL: Um, this aunt, was, she was adopted in our family, I really didn't know her when I went there. But they decided that I could go visit her for two weeks and that two weeks spread into six years before I went home again. They weren't really, um, they weren't really six happy years, but part of the reason that I stayed on there was, because there was no school to go to at home because we didn't have a high school, and I just stayed on there.
- INTERVIEWER: Outside of the church, what sort of activities were you involved in, when you were in New York?
- NEAL: Work. (laughter) No, the only other thing that I did, um, I did some entertaining with, wait till you get this one, with a spiritualist. Prince Ashan. Straight from the gold coast of West Africa, city of Ashanti. So I couldn't sing, so we had a singer with the group, and I did the dramatic presentations. And we would appear before the Prince made his appearance or we went to clubs and things like that. But other than that, I worked.
- INTERVIEWER: What kind of jobs did you work at?
- NEAL: I had, my aunt had a, a rooming house, she had an apartment house and she turned it into a rooming house and I did the work. You know, from four o'clock in the morning till time to go to school, and then during the lunch hour and back again in the evening.
- INTERVIEWER: Where did you get the time to deal with school with a work schedule like that?
- NEAL: I slept a lot at school. I slept a lot walking along the street . . . One night I woke up and I heard, we had dogs and I had to walk the dogs and I woke up one day when I heard someone say,



NEAL INTERVIEW

NEAL: "Look at that child walking along in her sleep." I'd go to sleep right out in the middle of the street sometimes.

INTERVIEWER: It seems awfully hard.

NEAL: It was a very, it was a hard life, I'll tell ya.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure you complained about it. Did you ever complain to your mother or your father about that?

NEAL: Uh, yeah. My father really didn't know all the things I was being subjected to, and had he known, there really would have been fur flying. And my mother came for me at one time and things had gotten a little better, and I started talking about the, you know, the school situation and I thought, well I'm gonna try to make it out a little bit further. But, but I ended up a couple of times down to the, what do they call it, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

INTERVIEWER: What was happening.

NEAL: (laughter) I'll tell you. Some of the things you could never believe, but if you didn't get some of these things done you really got beaten. I didn't get beaten at home. I lived a very sort of safe life there but I really got it in New York. In fact when my aunt died, I was in the children's society then and my mother came and got me and that's when I came back home. But, you don't have to tape this, but for an instance of what I'm talking about . . .

INTERVIEWER: Do you want me to turn it off? If you feel comfortable with it, you might as well.

NEAL: Well. (laughter) The types of things that that woman would do was; one time, she says put sweet potatoes in a bin, put potatoes in a bin. We had a big pantry. So I set them in there. A rat gets in there and gnaws the sweet potatoes so she says, "You damn little bitch, I told you where to put the sweet potatoes." So that woman sits there with a knife and peels off, cuts out all the places where the rat chewed, puts me on a chair and says, "Now you chew it." Yeah, that kind of dance . . .

INTERVIEWER: Oh, where did she come from?

NEAL: You know, (begins to cry--tape is off for a couple of minutes) didn't take bottles back, and there was about this much in one of those quart bottles I only been--take that bottle and bop me over the head with that bottle and I picked glass out of my head for a week. The, that woman would beat me till the blood would run out, I couldn't even sit in school. I could make it



NEAL:

if I got after the choir sang the anthem, but if I had to sit through that anthem I'd go sleep everytime. And that woman used to take--she had a fur coat and she had a hat pin about that long that she kept under here--I'd go to sleep, she'd jam my leg and so much so my leg got infected. Then, when these things would happen and she'd have to take me to the doctor or something, then she'd want you to lie about what you know how it happened. But one little kid used to sit in front of me, I used to envy that child so, her mother used to put her arms around her when she'd go to sleep. (laughter) But, she would just, I don't know, she was one cruel woman. And I guess it was, well I guess she had never known too much of a life you know herself as a child, but, I tried. One experience was a funny experience, I guess I was about fourteen and I decided I was getting out of there and going home. And I put on lipstick, and oh, and heels. Oh, I really dressed up so I could pass to buy a ticket to go home. (laughter) But my undoing was the train was late, and before--I got my ticket alright--but before I could get out of there, they found me and dragged me back again. But um, I remember one day she looked and I had broken a strap on my shoe so she used to make me wear, uh, but first she bought me a pair of shoes that had metal pieces on the toe and the heel and stuff--boy's shoes. I got through that one alright. When I got to school and they said, "Arline, you wearing boy's shoes," and I said, "Yeah, you know I am, I really had to beg for those shoes." (laughter) So then they decided well they'd get some too. Yeah, but do you know the shoes that come up, you know, kind of three-quarters that had the laces on them: They lace like this. My uncle's shoes. When she made me wear those to school, I knew there was no way I could persuade anybody (laughter) that I had begged for those shoes. Ah dear. But I just weren't going to wear them to school.

And that was one time that I ended up in the Children's Society; because I went to the station house and told them I wanted to call my mother and uh they said ok. Then they asked me where my mother lived, and when I told them they lived in West Virginia--oh, oh, wait a minute--next thing I knew the matron had me you know, but, uh, I remember I broke another one, and I was out on the fire escape hanging up the clothes and she came at me with a butcher knife, and I threw up my hand and the scar's still there, she cut me down across here, and you know that was the only reason she just didn't slice me down across the face. Something else....and curse me, boy, she would curse me like everything, and if she'd hear somebody else in the house cursing ya know, she'd be right up there on them. (laughter) "You're not going to use that kind of language in my house."



NEAL INTERVIEW

INTERVIEWER: Was she a friend of the family's?

NEAL: Well, she had been. Actually, the way I understand it, she, her mother belonged to one of the sort of prominent families in town. And her father was the son of the freed slave that worked at the house. And when they found out that she was going to have this child by this guy, they decided they didn't want to have her around there, so she left them with a couple of people, with some girls first, then they didn't have time for her, and then another white family had taken her in, but the man said he was so cruel to, you know, to her, that, the woman said it wasn't fair for her to keep it. And my great grandfather was the person who took all of the black people to asylums and orphanages, they usually had a person in town do that.

INTERVIEWER: This was in West Virginia?

NEAL: Yeah. And so when he was supposed to have taken this child then to an orphanage and after they got her home and kept her for a little while, they decided they would just keep her and adopt her. And that's really how she got in the family. And, but then you know, from the stories that I hear, evidently her, my great grandfather it was his second wife, that evidently she was not too, you know, kind to her, and so she ran away and married when she was about sixteen to a railroad man. He wasn't really hitting on very much, so they lived in Baltimore and then they went to live in New York, where she did; you know, amass a good deal of property and things until the bottom fell out. Then she started liquidating stuff, so actually she only had that one place left at the time of her death. But it was through her property dealings and stuff that I met Marcus Garvey and some of those people you know.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that. When you first left, was the reason to go to New York expressly to get an education?

NEAL: No. I just went for a two-week visit! (laughs)

INTERVIEWER: And stayed expressly to get an education?

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And you never went home in that six years?

NEAL: No.

INTERVIEWER: You were very young to be alone like that. From there you went back to West Virginia and then to Pennsylvania.



NEAL INTERVIEW

- NEAL: Yes. Well, I went, when I went home, when I went back from New York, uh, I guess, uh:...of course, whether we've been through this or not....but the year that I went back, my brother next to me had been held back, not, you know, he just stayed in school 'cause my mother said he was too young to come out, but he had finished the eighth grade. At that point I decided that I would go to work, so that, you know, he could go to school--because I felt that if I had an opportunity to go back I would. We were afraid if he got out and started making money or something, you know, he might not go back to school.
- INTERVIEWER: This was your younger brother?
- NEAL: This was my brother next to me.
- INTERVIEWER: Your family needed that extra income, so if you hadn't worked, he would have had to work?
- NEAL: He would have worked, there would have been, you know, he would have found work to do, and sometimes after you start getting in some money than you're not . . .
- INTERVIEWER: . . .less likely to go back to school.
- NEAL: Yeah. And this is really what they were afraid of, but now this was back in 1933. Things were still very, very, you know, tough around that time, and that already made, he could go--West Virginia was paying his tuition, and in Cumberland. And there were only two people, two from Kaiser who was going to Cumberland to school. But the bus there was \$3.50.
- INTERVIEWER: That's forty-four miles each day?
- NEAL: Well, yeah-uh-huh. But when we went on the bus after that it was further than that because we had to go all the way up through across Piedmont, West Virginia; Frostburg, Maryland and then down. So we went sixty-nine miles a round trip a day.
- INTERVIEWER: This was the kids from West Virginia, the black kids from West Virginia?
- NEAL: Yeah.
- INTERVIEWER: That's interesting.
- NEAL: But, uh, I had been working for seven dollars, seven dollars a week and I was taking care of a couple of little children whose father was on the road and the mother was teaching music at the school there, college, and taking care of them and doing everything else that had to be done.

NEAL INTERVIEW

- INTERVIEWER: Do you know how many hours you worked there each day?
- NEAL: Something like from seven o'clock in the morning to seven or eight at night. (laughs) So then I'd give my brother his bus fare and give a dollar for spending change and uh, then I guess I would probably spend a dollar or so on myself and the rest of it went into the family income. But, then, of course, the next year we had another one who was ready to go to school too. But by, before he'd finish then, of course, my mother had staged her, "I'm sick of it," thing--the thing changed. But from there I, well I went to school then in Cumberland for the year and then I went to McKeesport; and the reason that I got to, I went to McKeesport was that the pastor of the church in West Virginia had been assigned that pastorage up there, so I went up there to stay with them to go to school there, because the school at Cumberland was ridiculous. (laughs) After they were moved from there I continued to stay on.
- INTERVIEWER: And that's when you became a lay minister was in McKeesport?
- NEAL: No, it was before then. It was in West Virginia. I was sixteen when I came back from New York.
- INTERVIEWER: And became a lay minister in West Virginia, yeah, I see. Well, those are the only questions I have--follow-up questions about this part of the interview. Lyn is going to take over with a few other questions. I'll pick up again later.
- INTERVIEWER: Let's pick up from when you left high school in McKeesport. What did you do after that?
- NEAL: I came to Washington.
- INTERVIEWER: Why did you come here?
- NEAL: Well I was still coming with the pastor, remember I had lived with in Pennsylvania, this was their home and then I came on here and, you know, I had visited here with them a number of times before.
- INTERVIEWER: Times from when you were in McKeesport?
- NEAL: And from West Virginia 'cause this was their home. And then after I came here, let's see, I worked, I did part-time domestic work for a couple of years. I guess a year or so, I tell ya, I can't remember times now, they all seem far away. That was about 1938. And the, and then I moved with that family out to McLean, Virginia.
- INTERVIEWER: The family you had been a domestic worker for?



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- NEAL: And then they built a house and we all moved back in town again.
- INTERVIEWER: You did part-time work while living in . . .
- NEAL: I was doing part-time work to begin with, and after we went out there, it became a full-time job at that time and then after that, well, I guess while I was still there I got married.
- INTERVIEWER: What year did you get married?
- NEAL: Um, (laugh) it must have been 1941. That's right, that's right. 'Cause I remember my father dying in '42.
- INTERVIEWER: The year of the great war--this is terrible. I've never seen anyone going through such a trauma to remember when they got married.
- NEAL: I do remember coming in to watch them burn the papers at the Japanese Embassy. Uh . . .
- INTERVIEWER: Was burning the papers from the embassy . . .
- NEAL: Yeah, the night on December 7th, when they had bombed Pearl Harbor, they had a big bonfire at the Japanese Embassy, the people in the Embassy, because the, you know, they were afraid then we would get hold of--they burned their own papers of the Embassy. And I uh, remember coming down to watch that and I know I was married then. (laughter) Well, better to remember somehow, I really worked at it for a long time--in fact eighteen years, and then I gave up on it (laugh). You have to admit I gave it a fair try.
- INTERVIEWER: Eighteen years is a good time. Well, where did you meet your husband?
- NEAL: On the street corner. (laugh)
- INTERVIEWER: I'm afraid to ask.
- NEAL: What was I doing on the street corner? I was waiting for a bus. (laugh)
- INTERVIEWER: Oh, he was waiting for a bus as well?
- NEAL: No, he wasn't waiting for a bus. (laugh) No, after having waited about forty-five minutes for a bus I was willing to ride with anyone. (laugh)
- INTERVIEWER: All right. So much for that one. Did you work after you got married?

NEAL: Oh, let's see. Um, I guess the next job after I got married might have been working as a cook in a drugstore in Virginia. That wasn't so bad, I got taken to work and picked up, but twice I had to ride the bus and the second time I had to ride the bus I almost caused a riot on the bus and I quit the job.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you almost cause a riot?

NEAL: Well, there was a fella on there who insisted that I get up and give him my seat, and I kept ignoring him and he kept punching me, and telling me that I knew that he was talking to me and I kept ignoring him. Finally somebody from back further in the bus said, "If you put your fingers on that lady one more time, I'll have you thrown off this bus." [laughs] And things started picking up [laughs] on the bus, ya know, and I don't want any job that bad, so I went back the next day and quit the job.

INTERVIEWER: So you preceeded Rosa Parks?

NEAL: [laughs] Except I quit the job rather than ride the bus.

INTERVIEWER: Did the driver get involved in this?

NEAL: He kept looking back, I don't think he really knew what to do. That bus was kind of black, and I don't think he really wanted to encounter the whole thing. But it was real spread across past Rosslyn over there.

INTERVIEWER: I'm really surprised that it was in the District.

NEAL: Yeah, because I think that was my greatest surprise when I came to the District and found the schools were segregated here. I think that was my biggest disappointment with the District, I just didn't realize it.

INTERVIEWER: What were your other impressions of the District when you first moved here? Well, before you moved here and then when you came here?

NEAL: Well, I think I had come often enough just to, you know, visit, that pretty much the people I, uh, was no, I had no feelings one way or the other I guess there. But it wasn't until I moved here that I, you know, became anywhere aware of the social things were going on or the schools or anything, you know, it just never dawned on me. Because other than, you know, the early times in Kaiser and the year that I'd gone to school in Cumberland, I had never gone to an all black school. Good schools in New York were integrated and Pennsylvania they were, and I just assumed in the nation's capitol, you know, they would be, too. The, um, then too I was, uh, I was a little, I think the other thing that sort of bothered me was the sort of class thing among blacks was the next thing that got me.



INTERVIEWER: Were Dunbar and Armstrong still the two prominent black schools?

NEAL: When I first came, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Dunbar was an academic and Armstrong was a vocational school. How long did that stay the same?

NEAL: Actually, uh, when, by the time I moved....see after I got married in '41 I lived out in Maryland, but you know when you live in Maryland that close you also live in the District. And I guess it wasn't until a little bit later, maybe in the mid-forties that I became as aware of some of the deficiencies in the schools. But I could see a difference then, and like in 19--, uh, 1950, late 50's by the time I was ready to put my nieces into Dunbar, I mean they were just nothing, in fact it was so terrible I went through quite a traumatic experience.

INTERVIEWER: And that was the first surprise that you had when you came to the District, that there was a segregated school system and the class structure of the black community. I wanted to ask you some questions about that. Um, the structure, the class structure, I guess it wasn't as truly evident in the division between Dunbar and Armstrong, but I've heard many many stories, read quite a few things about the class structure and the color codes they had in D.C. Did you ever have any encounters with the so-called upper class?

NEAL: You know, when I, one time I lived on P Street Northwest, and I used to come by a church, oh, on Fifteenth and P. I'm not sure where the church was, but I remember I used to come by that church and I used to think, um, now this is a white congregation. And it wasn't until, I don't know how much later, that I found out that it was just a very light congregation. And somebody even told me that they had gone there with somebody else one day, they won't let him in, but you know the other fellow was too dark to go in. But it was this kind of thing. I used to hear, it used to be a particular gripe of mine to hear people talking about, "Oh, um, she's in the school system." [laughter] Yeah, you found that the, I don't know, I guess I was always sort of in a crazy strata where I sort of crossed over all the different lines and things like that, I guess, you know I still do. But I sensed, you know, a very great snobbery here and I think that when I became more aware of the snobbery, must have been when I started getting involved in some of the consumer things and the boycotts and things like that, which were, they were predominantly white and, with very few black professionals, you know, ever being involved in any of the things we were ever involved in. I don't know unless I was just very much involved with a very socialistic group of people or something like that, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Were the consumer boycotts, were those in the late 40's?



NEAL: Yeah, they were in, I would say that they were sort of spanning between when I was active with them maybe somewhere between '44, '47, or something like that. You know, seems like we were always handing out leaflets for something, uh, milk, meat, the whole, ya know.

INTERVIEWER: You started during the war?

NEAL: Ah, yeah, and I guess they reached their peak right after the war because it seem as though when I came back from....cause my husband was stationed in Denver and in Vincennes. Well, I lived in Vincennes. I guess he was stationed in Illinois. And I know that when I came back, in '46, I guess it was the early part of '46, I was still involved with some of those, you know, groups that had started.

INTERVIEWER: There were very few black professionals involved in consumer boycotts and things you were involved in. You mentioned that there were however a core of whites who were involved. Were most of them members of radical groups?

NEAL: Um, some of them might have, yeah, some of them were.

INTERVIEWER: The reason I ask about that is....couple of reasons. Perhaps it might be some way of explaining why you had so very little, outside of the snobbery, which existed in D.C., so very little participation from black professionals in any kind of organization that had white radicals involved in it, because of the very bad relationship that existed there between people on Howard campus and people who had formed the National Negro Congress and NAACP people; the big clash they had and they stayed away from it like poison. And that might be some explanation as to their absence in those particular things. There are other things of course.

NEAL: It might well have been, um, you know, I can think up until the 50's at least until '50, even past the McCarthy period when some of the whites that I'm talking about were still active. In fact, I guess some of them are still active in the same kind of issues that they were then. But with them there were a lot of, I don't know whether I would be right if I was saying a lot of white professionals, but some of them were, there were lawyers, economists....I guess what have been more the law type people involved in it, than there would have been, say, doctors or, you know, they're busy making money. [laughs] But, you know, you just didn't get that kind of involvement. Now I can even recall from as late as the March on Washington, the blacks in this city who wouldn't have been caught dead going to the March on Washington.

INTERVIEWER: '47 March on Washington or the '63 March?

NEAL: Yeah, '63. They wouldn't have been caught dead going there.



INTERVIEWER: I imagine you would have had that. But '63 March, I don't know it seem to me probably is more indicative of the black middle class and the black working class finally, symbolically coming together for the Civil Rights movement. But you had everybody, you even had me and I was twelve years old, hopped on a bus, I was there, everybody was there.

NEAL: Yeah, but there were. You know, I can recall, well, people calling me, "I guess you're going." "Well, of course I'm going, you know." "Well, I certainly hope nothing happens to you. I wouldn't be caught dead down there." Some people were probably just frightened. Some people were really snobbish, okay, some were probably frightened. The Civil Rights Movement, Civil Rights demonstrations, had a history of violence perpetrated against the participants and so perhaps they might have been a little leary of it. But I don't even think with the people across the country as a whole, black people across the country, that even with all that had gone on in the South I don't think they really started that feeling toward Martin Luther King until after that time.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know, I'd like to debate that with you, but we probably can't do that on tape. I'll turn the tape off. Have you ever been to any other cities like Durham in North Carolina or perhaps a place like Durham or Memphis or Chicago and know what the black class structure is like there? How would you compare it to, say, Durham, which has a very large black bourgeoisie with Washington in the 40's?

NEAL: I couldn't really compare any of them. I've been to all of them you mentioned, but, uh, I really don't know enough about . . .

INTERVIEWER: Or Atlanta?

NEAL: Yeah, Atlanta. [laughs] I really don't know enough about it to compare really.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I'll leave that alone. Moving right along. 1941 was where we left off.

NEAL: Oh, that's when I think I got married.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, you remember that day? Okay, it was right after you got married and you said you worked in the restaurant and stopped. What happened after that, did you go get another job?

NEAL: I think I went from there to the Office of Price Administration [OPA]. Didn't we cover that one time?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, we did it's on a completely different tape, it was on a film\* tape. Can you tell me what you did there?

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\* Interview conducted for the Women's Labor History Film Project.



NEAL: I was in the duplicating section, I, um, operated a mimeograph machine and collated papers and that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Must be stimulating work.

NEAL: Yeah, it really was. It really was. Somebody brought their little girl, six years old there, and I remember she brought her over from Baltimore one day, and we were there collating on the table, and she says, "Do you mean this is all you do when you say you come to work every day?" [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: What was it like there, was it mostly women working there?

NEAL: This was in '42. I guess, there were, I guess there might have, I don't know if I could say there was a majority of women, I doubt it. They were starting to go into the service, but there were still, you know, a number of young men around.

INTERVIEWER: About how many people were doing the same kind of work that you were?

NEAL: Oh, I guess we must have had about a....when I first went there, I guess we must have had something like thirty people or so in that particular section.

INTERVIEWER: What was the racial makeup?

NEAL: It was predominantly black. In fact I guess it must have been, um, something like ninety-nine percent black, something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Supervisors, were they black?

NEAL: What are you talking about? No, we had, yeah, I suppose we had a black supervisor, but from that point on it was white.

INTERVIEWER: White overseers.

NEAL: Yeah. This was, um, and of course, these jobs were at the lowest of the civil service scale.

INTERVIEWER: Was it unusual at that time for black people to be working in government?

NEAL: Yeah, that's one of my choice stories. In the original group that I went in with, I know that I had less academic education other than I think there might have been one young black kid, one young white kid who might have also been high school graduates and one older Italian fellow. But other than that I know that all of them, you know, far surpassed me as far as education was concerned. In fact, I think most of them that were there, you know, even had degrees and there were several in there who taught school. But they had taught school....one girl had taught school



NEAL: in North Carolina, in college but even at \$1260 a year, the pay was more than she got teaching in a black college.

INTERVIEWER: What did she teach?

NEAL: I don't remember, I can see her but I don't remember what her subject was. She went back to it after she left that job evidently at a higher, um, but at that time you had to pass an exam. You also had to list what is the lowest entrance salary you will accept. And they had not been hiring blacks on any scale before the war, but now, you know, they were hiring. So here was everybody so anxious to get in that they were putting down, you know, the minimum that civil service paid, and they were dragging all these people in who were really over-qualified for their job into this department. At the same time they were doing that, in the next aisle from us, typing the stuff and putting it, setting it and stuff hand over to us and doing a lot of these other sort of routine things. Well, the other group who were making the next two grades by and large above fifth grade. And um, but I didn't face up to what had happened. I knew it was a discriminatory thing, but I really didn't face up to what had really happened until I had been in the job for some time and I had become active with the union there and we had started processing some cases of discrimination and had them pull files on people. And sure enough, everyone of these people had put down salaries much lower than they should have ever put down, you know, for their jobs. That's my big thing about people under-selling themselves. But I worked on that job. And then after we had a number of incidents in, on the job because we really became, um, we worked in the evening for a large part of the time and we really became an active little group there. By the time we got switched back to daytime work we were ready to take over that whole agency and that's when we cleaned up the cafeteria, cleaned up the restrooms and did all the things that needed to be done.

INTERVIEWER: Was the black supervisor then appointed at that time?

NEAL: No, he had been there before. But what had happened, um, well, there were three or four groups of us all under one division head and we saw them switching people in and out. 'Course one of our cases of discrimination was against, um, a man who was being denied a job, you know, was no other reason than because of his race because there had been a man younger than he who had been drafted who had been about twenty years his senior in fact who had been drafted, who had been in his slot and they had told him that he was too young for the job, and when we started them, you know, that this was ridiculous, then they came out and said, "Well, we have a number of young Southern white girls here and we don't think they will accept him as their supervisor." So after they went and asked one girl who was from Dalman, Tennessee, and she said, "Oh, that is wonderful, that is just wonderful, this is



NEAL: wonderful. He's such a nice person." Then they slipped him on. They had no recourse but to put him in the job unless they were going to have a big suit on their hands. But I got all involved in one myself, I really got involved in that, not because I wanted to be a supervisor, but because I just could not stay. They brought in a couple of other people and promoted them over him and did a number of things. And so when I started protesting the skipping over me and I never would have, we really didn't bother one girl because she was just dumb, you know, dumb, but harmless. But this other girl lived about two car stops out on the Cabin John line further than I did and when I got on that streetcar in the morning and I spoke to her and she didn't know me, she didn't know me till we got in that building. And it was hard to get repair people to come in and, you know, I could just about tear down and build mimeograph machines so they'd holler for me if something went wrong and she would come with this, "honey child would you do this?" And I said, "If you call me "honey child" one more time, I'm going to ram my fist right down your throat." I've never been a fighter but I think I would have done it. But we decided that she has to go, and we started really building, you know, up a case against them. Well, they threw them out and they threw the department head out and they just cleaned out the place on the basis of the case that we prepared.

INTERVIEWER: What was going on at that time? I understand the case you prepared was apparently a very sound one, what caused them to listen to that case, was there something going on at that time?

NEAL: Well, I think that there had been some cases of people with, well, Truman at that time was heading a committee on conflict of interest, for one thing, and we had ferreted out, that one of these people had been buying paper from a company that there was some interest coming back in to him out of this buying. That's how we got involved with the Truman committee in the whole thing. But also, I was active with United Public Workers at that time and I, you know we had, we had already cleaned up that segregated facilities thing, and I think in this particular section that we were in, I think we were the most active of all the groups in the whole building as far as the whole agency, as far as union activity was concerned.

INTERVIEWER: All black group?

NEAL: No, it wasn't all black, but it was predominantly black.

INTERVIEWER: Predominantly female?

NEAL: Um, by that time I think it was predominantly female. Because I know when they decided that, sure enough these people had to go, and they put in another administrative staff, they started promoting people out of the unit as they should have done, 'cause



NEAL: our whole case was based on discrimination, racial discrimination. Women hadn't learned to fight at that time. And some of them got pretty decent jobs out of it. They were made administrative assistants in some of the departments and things like that. When they brought in the new head of the department then, of course, he wanted to know what I wanted to do. Did I want to stay being responsible for my own work? Did I want to be the supervisor? "I want to be responsible for my own work, you know, that's all I want." But he says, "That isn't what I want you to do." But I had some interesting experiences after that. One was this little white girl they brought in, who, yeah, she wasn't going to work for me. "The job is there and you either do it or go home, you're qualified for it, you do it or you go home." And she became a good employee. She really learned to like people. But that new guy they brought in, he was the type of person that the group needed, like he had had experiences himself, like the says, he walk into a place where everybody's having--black place--everybody's having a great time and as soon as he walks in the door, everything quiets down, all eyes get on him, you know.

INTERVIEWER: What year is this?

NEAL: This must have been 1943, I guess, something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Were the people you worked with that started fighting cases and try to beat segregation in the cafeteria and the restrooms, were they activists before, or were they people who . . .

NEAL: Do you know what I suspect, I suspect that most of them were really members of the Communist Party.

INTERVIEWER: Were they white people or black people?

NEAL: They were mostly white. I didn't know at that time, but in



NEAL: later time I found out that a few of them were card carrying members. But there were also a number of people who were involved, I think the same way I was involved, just from the darn injustice that was going on. But I think that they were the ones who did most of the planning for the . . .

INTERVIEWER: Did these activities have repercussions in other government buildings?

NEAL: Well, I remember, Harold Ickes must have been Secretary of the Interior or something, whatever he was secretary of at the time, I think it was Interior. I know we went to the Interior Department and he was the one who presented the plaque to us as being the outstanding agency in terms of race relations, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Right down Ickes alley. Exactly what he liked to do.

NEAL: After we had that great celebration down there, I remember that the Office of War Production and a couple of the other sort of new agencies intensified their whole activities along that line. But I know we were the most fighting agency there was. [laughter] But I left after my husband went out to Denver and wanted me to come out there. By that time they, all your jobs were frozen. But I was given a leave of absence with option for renewal on the leave, so I did that and then eventually I was able to resign. But it was an interesting experience. I would not want to work for the government again. I just can't stand the regimental, you know, stuff they go through. I found government workers by and large a very snooty sort of people. Most of them really don't understand or did not understand at that time the things that I sort of felt were the common people's fight. I don't really know how to describe it, but we weren't on the same wavelength, I'll tell you that.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask a couple of questions about that. The thing that strikes me about government workers at that time is, that was seen as some sort of upward mobility for black people in any event. You had the beginning of Roosevelt's black cabinet and the idea of blacks being allowed into the government, was actually supposed to be a sign of upward mobility. The blacks involved in that were in the position of holding the banner of the race, being twice as good as anybody else. Being just paragons of virtue. You had all that going on, plus some other things. One of the things I wanted to ask you about, you said that you didn't like working for the government. My mother works for the government and she has some theories about that, and she maintains that government workers are probably mentally dead, that things are so designed, from the ways that the offices are set up to the schedules that are kept, that things are designed to deaden any mental activity at all. And things are pushed down to some sort of routine you take a piece of paper and hand it to the other person and someone staples it. She maintains that any system of



INTERVIEWER: mass mind control that the government comes up with they first try out on the government workers and if they succeed then they try it out on the general public. She also maintains that for black workers it's a particularly intense situation. It seems to me the hypocrisy of having a degree and stapling papers and that being upward mobility is, in itself, is probably a good example of what she was talking about. Did you notice the introduction of any kind of new systems or new designs for offices going on at that time? [Arline laughs throughout the statement]

NEAL: No, everything was so chaotic at that time, it was a type of situation that's absolutely different from what's going on at a time like this.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So much for my mother's theory.

NEAL: But she was probably right.

INTERVIEWER: I know she's probably right. You were a member of United Public Workers then. Was it already organized?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the first union you had belonged to?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any feelings about that? Were you glad to have, to get in a place that was unionized?

NEAL: I was glad to be....I didn't think in terms of being glad that I'm here in a place that's unionized. It was just that I was glad to be part of what was going on.

INTERVIEWER: What was going on in what way?

NEAL: The activities that the union was going through there, you know, I was glad to be part of that. No way I could have stayed out of that. But yeah, I didn't have the feeling, hey, hip, hip, hooray! you know, at last we're organized here. You just sort of fall into those situations.

INTERVIEWER: But you did have positive feelings about the union?

NEAL: Oh, yeah, you know, I guess when they came through us, I was the first to join up.

INTERVIEWER: Was that because of your father being in the union?

NEAL: But remember I come out of West Virginia. Um, yeah, you know, I mean I was attuned to the whole thing, no problems.



INTERVIEWER: Okay, you were active in the union the whole time you were there. Was there any reluctance on the part of the blacks who were working to join any of the unions?

NEAL: Some of them wouldn't have touched it, you know. I'm thinking of some people I hadn't thought of for a long time, who were active people so far as organizing was concerned. But we worked with a limited group, because I would say that, there wasn't any such thing as any formal recognition of unions. You just sort of had to pound your way in. I don't even remember why they really, we didn't do anything by way of collective bargaining. As I recall most of our things were grievance handling. I don't really know why they really allowed us to be their bargaining agent.

INTERVIEWER: Were you an officer in the union?

NEAL: No. I was a steward, but that was all. But some of the same people who were active there with the union, they were activists in a lot of other things. I would say, it must have been eighty percent white.

INTERVIEWER: The union?

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any problems then, you being a steward, racial discrimination or sex discrimination?

NEAL: I really wasn't aware of it.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of boycott were you involved in before . . .

NEAL: Whatever came along. I can recall a milk boycott. Meat then, must have come afterward, I can't remember really the time. But I know that some of the people I had worked with in the neighborhood, this is out around the Palisades area, I'd been involved with them with things out there.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about something like a boycott?

NEAL: Things were very, I don't know whether this was something that developed from the neighborhood groups or not, but that really wasn't my neighborhood. Somehow or other I got recruited into that group, I don't know whether they needed a black to sit by the door or what, but somehow or other I got in that group.

INTERVIEWER: Were you the only black person in that group? This was in the Palisades?

NEAL: Yes. Because I lived further out, I lived out in the Brookmount, that's out nearer to Glen Echo.



INTERVIEWER: Were these the people that you knew from work, or was this before?

NEAL: You know, right now I'm trying to remember how I ever did get recruited into that group. But I know that I stayed, and it was pretty much a neighborhood group, but it was a little out of my neighborhood, because the neighborhood that I lived in, I don't think could have ever recruited those people into anything, they were more, they were older and, you know, more settled. I lived in a white community, but they were more of a settled type of people, these were more energetic people who lived down this way.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have neighborhood organizations [tape unintelligible]

NEAL: Um, other than recruiting people from around the neighborhood, like there's a park out there, Palisades Park. That park was an all white park and I can remember that they were working for integration in that neighborhood park, and things like that. I really don't remember all the things we did get involved in, but as often as we met, we must have been involved in a lot of things. I can just see myself making that trip down there to those meetings so often.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you the only black person in the group?

NEAL: Well, when I was no longer active in the group, I was still the only one. [laughter] But I recall, we used to do a lot of leaflet giving out, out in Maryland, you know, at the stores and things, out in Montgomery County as well as the District, but more in Maryland. I don't remember now why we were going to Maryland.

INTERVIEWER: Neighborhood groups, were there other neighborhood groups doing the same thing as them?

NEAL: Not unless there were different days assigned, because usually when we went, there just seemed to, more, you know, our group that was there. Um, I know, like I say I know, that some of these same people were part of United Public Workers and later on I can recall union meetings where we decided we were going to take on certain causes and things and so it became an enlarged thing at that time.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any of these neighborhood associations in black neighborhoods?

NEAL: Well, the places that we went, we would not have been seeing many blacks anyway.

INTERVIEWER: To your knowledge were there many, do you know of any?

NEAL: No, I don't know, I know that the civic associations, you know, they were active during that time, but what they were doing, I don't know because I wasn't, you know, part of them, cause that's what I had a hard time understanding too: what was the difference between a civic association and a citizen's association?

INTERVIEWER: What was the difference they explained?

NEAL: Well, the civic associations are black, no they were colored . . .

INTERVIEWER: Ah.

NEAL: and the citizens were white.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting distinction. [laughs] God....Do you feel things like boycotts are effective? Did you have mixed support?

NEAL: Sure you have mixed support, but I think that some of them were perhaps pretty good. People were up in the air about some of the prices that were going on, and I think it may be in some areas more effective than in others.

INTERVIEWER: But were people like that in the neighborhood? Like, if you had a milk boycott, would it be one particular store, would you localize it from one store or . . .

NEAL: You see, that's what I don't, I really don't recall what was going on all over, because I knew, we knew that certain days we were supposed to be certain places and I don't even recall whether there were other, you know, groups of people who took it other days, things like that. But you know, so often we were supposed to be there certain hours and that's what we did.

INTERVIEWER: Did the group enlarge? Like, did you get more people to join from the boycotts?

NEAL: I don't think they were really, the people I was with, I don't think they were really trying to recruit anyone else to, you know, to actively join or anything like that. I'm not sure.

INTERVIEWER: Well, we'd like to ask you a few questions that I know we've asked. Okay, then you moved to Colorado, for a couple of years?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do when you were there?

NEAL: I don't think a whole lot. I, um, I went to work, I guess, first of all for the YWCA as a baker's assistant, and then I ended up being the first cook there after a period of time, not so long. We served something like between 1300 and 2400 customers a day.



INTERVIEWER: Oh my God....you were the main cook doing it?

NEAL: But I'll tell you, an inward reaction when I went there, when I went for the interview, they told me that of course, you know, we're hiring you as a baker's assistant, but there is chance for advancement and this was before they took me out to the kitchen and when I got into the kitchen, the baker was white and she looked like she might have been in her sixties, um, the cook, the first cook, was white, the second cook was white, the pot-washer was white, the salad maker was French, the headwaitress was French, the office assistant was a nisei. But there wasn't anymore blacks there [laughter] but me and all of them looked like they had been there since they built the Y. [laughter] So I really looked around and I went home laughing about my chance for advancement. That was funny though. But I, um, and it became funnier when I did become head of the kitchen. [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you did.

NEAL: The first cook, head of the kitchen. But, uh, I think one time we probably did take on at one time another black waitress or something. But it was sort of a melting pot, the thing. They fought the war there everyday, you know, we had Germans and Japanese and Italians. The war got fought everyday.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any resentment towards you moving up so quickly to your job as head cook?

NEAL: If so, I didn't feel it. And the reason that I took the job, was that the person who had the job was a huge amazon type German woman whose voice just boomed over that place and everyone was scared to death of Anna, and I had made up my mind that I was not going to be afraid of Anna, and I started giving her little tidbits from the bakery, and Anna started giving me little tidbits, like steak and stuff that was forbidden [laughter] from the kitchen. She became sick and she just started getting covered with boils, and, you know, she had to get out of there and she was going to get in her trailer and drive to California. So that left no one to take her place. The second cook couldn't do it, there was no one there who butchered, and we cut our own steak and roasts and fish and all of those things. So when the manager got to moaning and groaning about who was she going to get to replace her, Anna suggested that I do it. The manager was from down in Florida, we only had one racial run-in, but when they started talking to me about it, Anna said, "Well,...." I said, "I've only had experience cutting chops and things like that, I've really never butchered." But anyway, she taught me how to do the, I couldn't throw the quarter of a cow above my shoulder and walk the whole length of the place with it like she could, but I did learn to.... she did teach me to cut the chops and how to find the cartilage in the salmon and in the haddock and all those kind of things, you know. But when I did take over, I know that, for instance, you



NEAL:

asked me, did I feel a resentment? The person that I was leaving, the baker, you know, she seemed genuinely, you know, glad that I had gotten a job that was going to pay me more money and the woman who was the vegetable cook or prepared the vegetables and sort of my utility person, she had worked there for a long time, too, and she was white. She had lost one son had been killed, another was missing and a very, you know, she was just pathetic you know, I mean she didn't go to pieces, you knew the inward suffering that she was going through. But I know she turned to me one day and said, "You know, Arline, you are the best boss I ever had in all my life." The pot washer would come in, "I'm sure glad you're here." The waitresses, they all seemed to go out of their way to....I used to get disgusted with....the waitresses were the only group there that were organized, the rest of us weren't. But I know the cook, the second cook, she had a family and she lived in a hotel with her husband and children and so there wasn't a very satisfactory family life. She must have been a woman, at that time in her mid-40's, and she was of Italian descent. Rose felt she had to do everything those people told her to do, and I would get so annoyed when they would tell her to get up and scrub the hood of the stove, and crawl up into the icebox, you know, "You should not do these things", I would tell her, "You know, this is not your responsibility," and she said, "Maybe you don't have to do them, but I have to do it to keep my job." I said, "You don't have to do it to keep your job, you do the same thing that I do." Well, I tell her, "I'm not going to do it, but this is not part of what I'm supposed to do," and I said, "But if you turn around and do it, and I tell her you shouldn't do it," you know, but I never was able to really get, you know, any backbone in her. But it, uh, 'cause one of the most delightful people I ever met was little nisei who was her, the manager's assistant. She was, even though we were all involved with the war with Japan, the people really liked her, and you know, you just didn't feel any of that hostility. And they all knew that her parents had been put in the concentration camp out there in Colorado and everything, you know, and I think that everybody had . . .

INTERVIEWER: Colorado?

NEAL: Yeah, they had a concentration camp out there.

INTERVIEWER: These were people who were shipped from the coast?

NEAL: Yeah. Now, they didn't put Bernadette and her husband into it, 'cause they were running a business out in the state of Washington. It was some kind of a manufacturing thing because they put some of their Anglo-Saxon help and friends to run their place, and they had to give it up. But evidently they came out of, you know, rather affluent family, 'cause she said that it wasn't, she didn't really realize how aged her mother was getting until she saw, it was time to pack up and pack the china and all these things and she



NEAL: saw her in the midst of all these things and not really understanding why she had to give up her home and everything to move. So, and that was one reason why she came to Denver, so she'd be near to the camp. She had to come in, but that's why she chose there, so they could get, you know, see her parents. But evidently they were, you know, the business was still doing pretty well.

INTERVIEWER: [tape interference]

NEAL: Yeah, but they were able to hold some control about putting somebody else, but they just had to leave the coast that was the important thing, getting them all away from out there.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any reason why she wasn't put in a camp.

NEAL: Well, she was a second generation. If she'd been first, all the first generation Japanese that were out there had to go to the camps. They said that the second generation didn't have to.

INTERVIEWER: Well, then it really was a mixture, you had a German . . .

NEAL: Yeah, it was. It was beautiful, it was really a beautiful situation there. The time that I said I had a little racial clash with the manager, she was telling me, one day she was annoyed with me about something, "That's why, if you were down where I come from, no matter how talented you were, you couldn't come to the front door." [laughter] But you know, I walk out of that place one day and left that whole side of beef up on the counter and I left it right after the noon meal with all of dinner having to be gotten up, I went downstairs, put on my clothes, "You can have it, I'm leaving.", and walked out and I came back to Washington, came back on furlough. I went back and I worked in packing house for a little while and I worked in a laundry for a while, finishing shirts, and I worked in a sheep tannery.

INTERVIEWER: In Washington?

NEAL: No, this was in Denver.

INTERVIEWER: You worked in a laundry in Denver also?

NEAL: Yes, and then I went to work in a hotel and one day somebody told them at the Y that I was back in Denver, I had worked the other jobs this time.

INTERVIEWER: And they thought you had been out of the state?

NEAL: Yeah, they thought I was really gone. And don't you know, they contacted me and asked me would I please come back to the Y to work, same manager was there. But I would not have hired myself back if I had been her, because that was a terrible predicament to leave somebody in.



INTERVIEWER: But you left because of what she had said to you?

NEAL: Not because of what she said to me at that time, we really had a little exchange about that time, but there was something about the food she wanted to give to the young mothers who used to come there on a regular basis, for they had some kind of a little group. And she always wanted to feed them the same sort of slop, and she and I couldn't agree on and keep on and she was shouting at me about, you know, serve it or else or something and I elsed, so you serve it. [laughter] I went down and walked out.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever go back there when they wanted you?

NEAL: Yeah, she kept on sending for me, please come back, please come back, and so I went back and I stayed there in the same slot.

INTERVIEWER: Were things any better when you came back?

NEAL: I didn't have any problems and I stayed there until I....'til we shipped out of there.

INTERVIEWER: So how long were you in Denver all together?

NEAL: Oh, I don't know. It must have been three years, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: Till about 1944?

NEAL: Yeah. Then we went for a while to Indiana. The only thing that I did when I was in Indiana was to make Ike jackets out of the GI issue jackets, uh, coats, that they issued to the soldiers. I'm not really a seamstress, but I made jackets out of, Ike jackets, out of those coats.

INTERVIEWER: What were Ike jackets?

NEAL: Short jackets with fastens here. Oh yeah, I did, I went to work, I can't even think of it as being work, for a family there, for a mother and daughter, in between making jackets, but I didn't do much work in there.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you in Indiana?

NEAL: Oh, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Not very long?

NEAL: About, I remember I was there when Roosevelt died, '46. When did he die?

INTERVIEWER: May, 1945.

NEAL: ---5, '45.



INTERVIEWER: And you went there because your husband got transferred?

NEAL: Yes. We were still having a rationing there.

INTERVIEWER: Was he ever overseas?

NEAL: No. I remember one time I was being interviewed out in Denver about the possibility of him getting out, he had to have so many points to get out, he don't even have enough points to get out of the boy scouts. [laughs] They were laughing so about that. But then when I came, when I came back to Washington after that, I thought in terms....after I looked around and couldn't find anything, I thought in terms of going back to the government, and in fact went on a couple of interviews; Agriculture places, and I'd get there and decide, no, that's not for me.

INTERVIEWER: Seemed too much like the government when you got in.

NEAL: It was interesting though, when I, I really got this job with the union through the employment service. And I went to the employment service and there were a number of people there and I think I remember these girls who were sitting just ahead of me and were called just ahead of me, they went all through the books, you know, "We don't have a thing, we don't have a thing." I was about to go then, if they didn't have a thing and then I was next and then, "What are you interested in?" [laughs] And they started naming off all the jobs they had, and I said, you know, what a rip off this is, terrible, and so, oh, they had three or four things there and actually with the union, it was paying less than anything else was. But I had been, gone to work at this restaurant over on Capitol Hill.

INTERVIEWER: Which one?

NEAL: It was called the Ugly Duckling. And the only thing that was ugly there was the woman who owned it. She wasn't physically ugly, but I'll tell you, she wasn't....and I just could not take what she was doing, not that she did that much to me, but I remember one little retarded boy, who worked there, a little white boy, and she just used to shell all kinds of abuse on that child. I was the head cook there, and she and I used to argue over that, and you know, if you let him alone, 'cause really his greatest thing was peeling potatoes and if you let him do those kinds of things, you know, he was fine. But you get him any other kind of assignment where he had to think about something and he's just get discompooperated, you know. So we used to argue about him. And then, the window cleaners were about to go on strike, and this window cleaner told her that she, you know, they probably wouldn't be back because, you know, they were due to go on strike, that was probably the last cleaning they'd be doing there for awhile. And she went into a rage, how she would be so glad when the time came that these people would



NEAL: be back at their back doors again begging for a piece of bread, you know, talking about going out on strike, you know. I just can't....she treated her husband like she treated the help, and you know, I just can't take any more of this woman. She and I got in a big argument about that, about people having the right to better their conditions, you know, and she said, well, you know, you're not so great. [laughs] I didn't come there to be great, I came there to cook. [laughs] But anyhow, I'll never be as great as I have been, you know, tomorrow morning you do the eggs. I was putting in awfully long hours there, not making much money. But it was sort of ironic that I would end up having such a close association with the window cleaners, you know, that was the reason I quit that woman. But because one of the jobs they had was clerk with this union and it paid less than any of the other jobs that they had there. But I said, I think that's more to my liking than anything else, so I came to the local. Well, at that time the local had just been put under trusteeship and they had let, the former president's wife was the secretary-treasurer and they let her stay on after they put him out, for a period of time. Did you ever have people that you liked and didn't like at the same time? She was one of those people. After, when they appointed the trustee so the trustee wanted to know had I done. This was after a period of time and they put in an assistant trustee. Had I ever, you know, worked as a cleaner, and I said only in a hotel, and then he said you qualify then, if you worked as a cleaner. So then, the International then, you know, through them appointed me to be the secretary-treasurer and then a little bit later they brought over, they merged our local with another local, and put Bailey in as President. So that's actually now I came to be an officer.

INTERVIEWER: That was in '46?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about coming in in that way? I mean coming in when the local was under trusteeship?

NEAL: I didn't know the difference, except that I knew that things were in, just in a big turmoil. There were other things that were also, you know, happening around about the same time, around the corner. United Public Workers, one of the officers was busy being killed and his murderer never found, and this woman who was the secretary-treasurer of the union had been a friend of his, you know; there were all kinds of things to keep you busy and our offices were down on Seventh Street. They had big bars at the windows upstairs, the bars, you know, for the doors and everything, and I understood all of these were to keep the members, to keep the president safe from the members because Bailey was telling a story about it. He went into this apartment house to



NEAL: organize it and a guy picked up the shovel and threatened to beat his brains out and he mistook him for the former president and so things were really, you know, the members were all, you know, it was quite a time.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know why exactly they were put under trusteeship?

NEAL: For signing a lot of bad contracts and rip-offs.

INTERVIEWER: So they were really messing up at that point.

NEAL: Yeah, it was bad. And then, of course, the trustee that they brought on was one of the vice-presidents of the International union and then later on he got all caught up. He didn't want to come down here so often and they made, all these guys they brought in were white and so the acting trustee moved down here but he commuted back and forth to New York. Now actually I didn't get appointed as secretary-treasurer for two years, you know, because everything, all the stuff that was going on.

INTERVIEWER: But you were appointed in . . .

NEAL: '48. But I worked in the local from May of '46 on, and most of that time acting in the capacity, but not, we were still under trusteeship.

INTERVIEWER: How long were they under trusteeship for?

NEAL: It seemed like for ages. Because after, the person who was named trustee had a falling out with the person who was the acting trustee. The acting trustee said that the trustee was involved in Communism. So they started investigating him in New York and he was relieved of his office as a vice-president of the International. And then the acting trustee, this was after Bailey came aboard....I remember that date precisely because that happened on my birthday, that was March the twelfth, 1948. The acting trustee went to New York and never came back again. He just got sick of it. He showed up, I didn't hear from him for a long time, finally one evening, you know, a couple of years later, he came into the office on his way through. But he just walked out, we didn't know what contracts he had negotiated or anything, so we just had to pick up from there and go on and on, but we still didn't have any other officers. So they appointed another person then as trustee, but we never saw him. You know, he would come and sign checks, but he said if you ever want me, you can get in touch with me, but he never came to a membership meeting. I think he went one time to Griffith Stadium on negotiations and he had....he got so mad at Clark Griffith at that point because Clark Griffith made some kind of expression about, he was involved with somebody or other, but "I try to take care of my niggers." This was the ground crew. So he says, "I ain't going back with you up there anymore.



NEAL: [laughs] I can't stand that man." We never did see him, so in the meantime then we started trying to groom members of the union to take over as an advisory group or something and then finally petitioned the International to grant us, you know, our autonomy, and they did.

INTERVIEWER: The last trustee, was he black?

NEAL: No.

INTERVIEWER: When did you get your autonomy?

NEAL: Ah, you know, I don't even remember.

INTERVIEWER: But it was a few years after.

NEAL: Yeah, you know it was just like they forgot they had ever put you under trusteeship because they just didn't bother with us any more, you know. They knew he came around, but that he wasn't really doing anything other than signing checks, and he could be in the middle of signing checks he'd hear a fire engine, he'd "Well, I'll be seeing you all" and he'd go see where the fire engine was going. [laughter] But, you know, from then on it was just, you know, question of Bailey and I trying to battle it out. And of course, the International feels that, especially since we had, you know, a change of officers and everything, that they really did not give the kind of support that they should have given to the local to prevent some of the things happening. I think they realized that this last fiasco was, uh, Tucker, was part of their doing. And that was because they had asked me, before indicating that they would put the local under trusteeship, I would agree to be the trustee, or two, if I would be the President. And you know all that kind of stuff which I would not agree to because I just didn't think Bailey merited that kind of treatment 'cause I didn't think they gave him the kind of support they should have given him.

INTERVIEWER: What was he before he was appointed president?

NEAL: Well, he had been president of one other union, secretary-treasurer. I think he was president of the apartment house and hospital workers here and secretary-treasurer of the window washers union. But they were both very small organizations. Local 82 has always been the larger of the service employees unions here. But I know that I came into office as the president with the support of the International and pretty much with the support of the membership, so you know it's been frustrating, but it hasn't been that difficult.

INTERVIEWER: How long have you been president?

NEAL: Only since '73, starting in the second term now. But while I stayed on as secretary-treasurer from....



INTERVIEWER: The point where we left off was in 1948 when you had recently become secretary-treasurer of this union. Can you tell me what other things you might have been involved in at that time?

NEAL: In 1948 we were coming out of a strike situation at Fairlington, Virginia. We had more than a hundred people out on strike and we had some interesting things that happened in connection with that. Segregation was still pretty rampant at that time and we had an integrated crew that worked for this apartment complex. But there was nowhere in Virginia that we could have meetings and where the crew could eat together. And I remember fairly clearly a woman whose name was Mrs. Wanza who stood up to the Arlington police department and everyone else when they were going to, I don't know what kind of dire things they could have done to her, but when they found out that she was, she was a black woman, and when they found out that they were going to let, she was going to let white people eat in her house with black people and because it was sort of a soup kitchen arrangement, you know they were threatening her with all kinds of things. I can remember how she stood there and stood her ground and said that was her home and she would entertain anyone she wanted in her home. And so we were able to break down that kind of situation. But it was a very, it was a strike that was filled with racial overtones, communist overtones and everything else, it was quite a time.

INTERVIEWER: What were the issues at the time?

NEAL: They were economic. As a result of the strike we had, well, there was violence and we had three or four of our people who went to jail, some of them we were able to save from that but they were arresting them just like in wholesale numbers, lot of harassment. We had good support, not the best, but we had good support from some of the other unions and we had a good bit of newspaper coverage. The community came through well. At Christmastime for instance, for the strikers' families, because we had people who, who had large families, some of the workers came from West Virginia, Virginia, District of Columbia, and we had to work in some of their various jurisdictions to clear things for them. And this was at the same time the cafeteria workers had I guess the biggest strike that they ever had here in Washington. All of their people were out at the same time our people were out. I can recall, especially Shiloh Church being about the most sympathetic. Reverend Harrison, being about the most sympathetic of all the churches to the problems of workers and they opened their doors to the cafeteria workers for, you know, meetings and to our group. It was sort of, we were all in the same boat. But that very fall of '47 and the next spring of '48, these two unions really had a struggle here. We were not really successful in our strike because the charges of communism started penetrating as far as our union was concerned. The company and the press made big issues out of it,



NEAL: and then some of our support started falling away. So around '48 I guess, was a sort of cleaning up process for our union. And then we got involved, I think it was about that same time with another strike situation with the window cleaners.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned about the charges of communism. Why were they levied against you, was it just part of the red scare?

NEAL: No, there were some basis to what they were talking about, although it never entered into the operation of the union at all. We did have a person on staff, was a card carrying communist and we had in fact a little later the person who was then the trustee or the acting trustee brought charges against the trustee that he was being forced into some things because the trustee himself was involved in communism. Now, they came out of New York, the other staff person was a local person. So they were aboard, but they did not have to, as far as I could know, there was nothing that was involved with the union and their activities. Because even though we were in a trusteeship, sort of in a trustee situation, we had active members of the local and we held regular meetings and you know, voted on things. So there wasn't. Now if there were things behind doors, they didn't really charge that the union was communist inspired or anything else. They just were able to ferret out that these people were in fact connected with the Communist Party.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what you felt about that at that time?

NEAL: I think having known the people that were involved I was apprehensive what it would do to the organization, whether we would really come apart at the seams. But as far as the people were concerned and the contribution that they were making to the organization, I thought they were doing a great job and you know and I was convinced. Now all the people that they were talking about at that point, they were all white which I guess led to their first suspect thing because we were about an eighty-five percent black union. But to me there was a lot of dedication to the union itself, and the union goals. I was not really upset about it except to the extent that I thought it might do harm to the organization. One of the reasons that I really wasn't that upset about it was because I know all the kinds of accusations that, you know, were leveled at me for the kind of activity that I would get involved in and I knew that I was not connected with the Communist Party. But I did believe in a change in the system and so it really didn't bother me that much. But with one person, it went pretty deep, because they were related in a round about way to the Rosenbergs and you know this created...by a second marriage thing. [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: How many people were really accused of being communists?



NEAL: It was only levelled at this one person and then the trustee. Course, the International union removed the trustee and removed him from office with the International union. But that was something that had been a break between he and that acting trustee that caused, you know, that, so that was quickly squelched. The other person left the staff not too long after that because he really didn't want to, you know, jeopardize the local. We didn't ask him to quit, he voluntarily quit.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that he was white. Was he the only white staff member?

NEAL: Yeah. But this, but you know, course this was all part of the times anyway and there had been a time when two or three of the unions here at that time, officers had been, you know, kicked out and everything with the cafeteria workers, too, were part of the old United Public Workers union. They said, you know, we were all communists there. But there had been somebody there from the cooks' union, laborers' union, but I mean this going on all over the place around about this time that they were just, and some of them....like I know the person with the cooks' restaurant who had really founded that union had done a tremendous job for the workers. He was secretary of the Communist Party here in the District and made no secret out of the fact he was, you know, but a tremendous man. And three or four people they removed from the laborers' union 74 percent.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the name of the man who was secretary of the Communist Party?

NEAL: Yeah, William Johnson. Last year they had a celebration for him on his seventy-fifth birthday and he's beginning to get senile, but still a terrific thinker. They had a good turnout for him. Because even though he left and really his family and everything, but he went back into the field as a cook and could only get sort of minor jobs. But he has just never given up on you know, some of his philosophies. But he's still around. But the union still believes that you know had they not him for counsel in their union that they would not have made the strides they made. That's the way it was. [laughs] But I know that they did, like, it was during this time but I can't remember all of the, I know there were political things that we were involved, that I was involved in, but right now I just can't seem to sort some of them out in my mind. But I remember it was about this time that the FBI was doing a pretty in-depth search on me through the guise of investigating somebody else. But when they would go, they would ask them more questions about me than they would about the person that they were presumably, you know, investigating. And people couldn't understand why they were asking them questions about me because you know, it seemed like an irrelevant subject. But finally they came to the house and was trying to get me to do some informing but they knew that I worked with young people



NEAL: at the church and I had a group of young girls that you know, I would teach sewing and cooking and just sort of acted as their big sister. We got together every Friday night at my house. They knew that I did that and they knew that I was, you know, always carting children back and forth in my station wagon. And then when they started really questioning me: about the mail I would receive, like I don't know who subscribed to the Daily Worker for me, but they knew that I got it; they could tell me about meetings that I went to, for instance in Baltimore; the subject of the meetings, who I went with; and you know, they were really tailing me and I, you know, didn't know it. But as we came to the conclusion of the interview, they asked me if I would let them know or would I turn communications that I'd get from various organizations over. I never turned anything over to them.

INTERVIEWER: They had them already.

NEAL: Yeah, you know...but I just can't remember what specific issues that we were really involved in. You know, I can very clearly in my mind remember coming up to people out here in this area, and meetings we would have on whatever was going on at the time. And I do remember a number of meetings in College Park, in Baltimore, but some of them were more just political meetings on whatever were the issues and the candidates of that time. I suspect that some of the people even in earlier times, in the early forties, I suspect that many of them were in one cell or another, but they didn't reveal it, you know, to the group. You know, rather dedicated people, most of them were working for desegregation or integration and, you know, things like that. Whatever was going on politically at the time, I usually was there. But as I say, my mind just isn't clicking enough to really remember issues.

INTERVIEWER: You talked about how the FBI was talking to friends of yours, people you worked with, was that over a long period of time? Did they tell you after it was happening?

NEAL: No, I just seemed to have gotten, like they visited some friends of my sister-in-law, my husband's sister and presumably checking on him, he was a fireman. Then they were asking questions about my sister-in-law's husband who was going to work for Treasury Department. But they said they would keep asking them, well, what about, when they asked about my sister-in-law, well, what about her sister-in-law, what is she involved in, do you know? They couldn't understand why I even got into the thing at all. And I think this was the first that I knew. And then there were neighbors, now where we lived out in Montgomery County, all of our neighbors were white and I kept so busy that my relationship was not that close to them. But then they started saying to me, several of them, somebody was at my house asking for you today. And they hadn't asked them for identification, some of



NEAL: them, but others started saying, you know, the FBI was here asking questions about you, and I just thought you ought to know it. But evidently was going around a pretty good while.

INTERVIEWER: Were you frightened?

NEAL: I wasn't as frightened as sort of disgusted and then thinking back in my mind, oh my God, what have I done that maybe I shouldn't have done, you know. But it wasn't a real fear. I was a little angry and disgusted that I was being, you know, watched so much. And they had even ferreted out of the girls that was in this group and talked to their parents, her parents on some kind of other flimsy thing, and then they got the conversation around to me. So I knew they had done a pretty extensive thing. But evidently they were pretty well convinced that at least I was just on the fringe of whatever was going on and not really that involved.

INTERVIEWER: Had they openly accused you of being a Communist?

NEAL: No. In fact, they said we know that you are not and, of course, this could have been a lead-on, too. But because we know what you are doing, we know where you go, what you're doing, but we think that you could be helpful to us. It's not a good experience though, you know, especially after I told you about the woman in Denver that had contacted me and then come to find out that she had been involved with the Communist Party out there and was evidently sent to try to cultivate me or something, and then was found dead shortly after. But the whole thing is not a good feeling, I'll tell you that.

INTERVIEWER: Was the atmosphere around that time being more angry at it?

NEAL: Well, I didn't, you know, I knew that I knew people, but I knew that I had never been to an out-and-out meeting of the Party or if they had identified themselves as this being a meeting of the cell or anything like this. But like the fellow that I said was on the staff with us, you know, he'd talk pretty openly about it.

INTERVIEWER: During that strike, you weren't accused at all of being a Communist, only one staff member?

NEAL: No one else, they had named him. And, like I said, I decided he would go and didn't go boom boom like that, but you know, shortly thereafter. And especially when he saw that it was messing up the whole, you know, thing of the strike and, you know, communist inspired union and, you know, all of that stuff.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned there was violence during the strike, was it particularly, I mean, was it partially because of the whole thing about Communists?



NEAL: No, no, it was just things that grew out of a strike; strike-breakers, and there were a number of, you know, all these tanks were sugared. And you know . . .

INTERVIEWER: Oh, they brought out the guard and everything?

NEAL: Everything, it was really one of those. But I mean, it was all of those things go on with strikes. There was definitely people knocking people in their heads on both sides, and it was a bad strike.

INTERVIEWER: You started talking about the window cleaners strike . . .

NEAL: They had a couple of strikes but about that time they moved into our union office and so then we became more involved with them and their problems than we had even with the first strike they had. Because they had the first strike in '46, about the time that I came with the local. Then by that time they were back to another time for negotiations and still weren't doing any better, but that's a queer group of people anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Why is that?

NEAL: I don't know whether it's because it's a hazardous job, but they are people who act and fight before they think or talk, which to me is so dangerous. A lot of them are pretty heavy drinkers and, you know, I think that's one of the reasons now that they are merged with our union here. And that we just haven't done too much again in that field because it's just like dealing with a different group of people. And it's just not unique to Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

NEAL: I don't know, unless, as I say, it's because it's a, for those who go on the scaffolds, it's been a hazardous job. There's more safety things in it now than there used to be, because I remember it must have been about maybe around 1950 or something like that when the president of the window cleaners union fell off the scaffold down here at Thomas Circle and smashed on that sidewalk and he lived. He was, you know, not too great mentally, but he survived that crash from way up four or five floors up. But it's, every place we have a window cleaners' union, they say the same thing, you know, they're just a different group of people. Now whether it's a psyche that develops because of the hazardous work. I don't know whether people who like, who are bridge builders and things like that, whether they have, go through those same things, whether they're drinkers and stuff like that I don't know. But we'd have meetings with the window cleaners or even during the strike, you know. You'd have to make sure their chairs were not



NEAL: too near, 'cause we had stairs you came up and they were pretty steep. We had to make sure the chairs weren't set too near that exit because they're just as likely to pick up a chair and knock somebody down the steps with it. So we had to learn how to set up the hall a little different for them than we do for the others. [laughter] I really know why but, 'cause we had experiences like that, but they're very quick with the tongue and very quick with the fist.

INTERVIEWER: I had never heard that before. So what happened with the strike?

NEAL: Well, they imported a company from Philadelphia. They were dealing with an association of window cleaners. The employees weren't really an association, but they bargained collectively and they weren't very strong anyway, but the employers wouldn't give in on any of the demands so they finally brought in a company from Philadelphia who came in, signed a contract with them and they were able to give them enough work to sort of force some of the other companies into signing contracts. We still have here about the worst window cleaning contract of any place in the country. It's pitiful. I don't know when we're going to be able to rectify it. But they finally got the companies to sign the contract, was not that good, they never had, the union itself never had much money. When they took the business agent who came on a full-time basis with them, but they never did pay him more than, he was on full-time, fifty dollars a week. So you weren't getting too much production out of that and he just retired two years ago. But they never got above that level.

INTERVIEWER: The questions I have to ask have to do with your involvement with desegregation fights in Washington and most of them are going to center around late forties and fifties but you can carry it on to the sixties if you like. If you have any other points that you want to bring up or comparisons you want to draw, I invite them. My first question is, since you were involved in that early desegregation movement in D.C. in the late forties and early fifties, can you tell us something about the movement itself, the character of the movement and the nature of your involvement, how you first became involved and what you were doing and that kind of thing.

NEAL: I guess I was one of the early participants in it. Not one of the initiators, but one of the early participants. I guess I got involved by way of an invitation to attend a meeting where they were making some of the early plans of how we carry on the campaign. Mrs. Mary Church Terrell, Dr. Terrell, was the convener of the meeting and as I recall the group at that time had asked her to lend her name and influence to the, to the committee, because they felt her stature in the community covering the whole spectrum was beyond suspect. Perhaps some others who were going to be involved in it would not be and she agreed to do it. She did attend some meetings, but after the initial meetings on it,



NEAL:

then usually we carried on just as a task force. As a group we agreed on the targets for our testing and who would go. Usually we took daily assignments to go to various restaurants and various ten-cent stores. We decided that we should go first of all to the places the masses could go, rather than only those places that more affluent people could afford to go because then it wouldn't be as meaningful if they got in there. So we pretty well concentrated on places like the ten-cent stores, Hecht Department Store, and Landsburghs, those places. We had other assignments, we were trying every place, but those were where our concentrations were. Usually we, some got assignments for lunch, and some got assignments for dinners and mostly my assignments were lunchtime assignments. I recruited a couple of other people from our office and so that we went to these things together. Then we would get back and compare notes, sometimes shift our objectives and things like that. But then we were able to draw on some community people, sort of activist-like people. The committee was, I guess, was more white than black. It was more union involvement, I guess, than, if you wanted to single out any particular group of people, those who did the day-by-day testing. To me, my own impression was, and I guess the record would show it, that the group that was most lacking would have been the professional group. We had a minimum number of people from the ministerial alliances and what-not who participated. Of course Reverend Helms was in it from the beginning and stayed in it through the test on the Thompson restaurant. But there were not a great number of, they had asked for participation from the various ministerial alliances, you know, the Methodist ministers, the Baptists, things, and things like that, they didn't come pouring in. It was, of course, a very interesting [laughs] experience, you know, especially times, like I remember one time we were testing Murphy's down on G street and one of the other staff people and myself and one of our white members was sitting at the next counter. And I think she was more interesting to watch than the whole treatment we got that day because she had already been served and she was aware that we weren't being served. And she seemed to be quite embarrassed by the fact that, you know, we were not being served, but yet hesitant to make any acknowledgement of it, you know, she would just keep putting down her head and [laughs] sort of looking up, you know. That was one interesting day.

INTERVIEWER:

She was a member of the group?

NEAL:

No, she was a member of our local union. And then we had some interesting times at the Hecht store down in the, at their, I forget what they call it now, wasn't the runway, it was some kind of "way" down there. Because we usually decided we'd go on Fridays or Saturdays because these were the days they tried to use up all of the food that was left over from the rest of the week, and of course, if they couldn't use it that day it became waste to them because they couldn't hold it over to work back in



NEAL: the next week. So we learned things like that. But I recall one time, the same person, Mrs. Fairfax from our staff, she was very fair complexioned and we went there that day, they served her and wouldn't serve me. And... Was to occupy all the stools so that they couldn't serve anyone else.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, let me ask you a few questions. Back up a bit about the beginnings of the group, exactly what the composition of the group was and then I'll ask you a few more questions about the targets you identify. You mentioned Church Terrell and you mentioned Reverend Helms. Who were some of the other people that you could identify as being very active in the desegregation movement in D.C?

NEAL: There was, as I sort of think back around the room at the time, Oliver Palmer who was, because we used to meet in their place and he was quite active, but here again he had interesting experiences because he was very, a very fair man and was not too good a person to send out, you know, for a real trial.

INTERVIEWER: He was tied to what organization?

NEAL: The cafeteria workers. And there was Joe Beavers who was with the cooks' union. There was, I think that man might have been a lawyer, a man named Robinson, I never knew, he and his wife were both sort of in that first group, but then along the way we lost them. I don't know why or, you know, they just weren't with what we were. There was, I was trying to think of Marie, I can't even remember her name now, there might have been with the planning group, there probably were more men than women in the planning group, 'cause I recall there were usually only three or four women there.

INTERVIEWER: There were three people, out of a whole group of roughly how many people?

NEAL: Oh, I guess there must have been about ten or so of us that met more than anybody else met.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work out strategy?

NEAL: Yeah. But you know it would move, it didn't always have the same cast of characters.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any people who were almost always involved in strategy, strategy planning?

NEAL: Those people that I had named were always there. They very seldom missed a meeting. There was also one other man that went to California, but I think the reason that he left, he also got involved with a communist tag. I can't remember his name now. Marie Richardson I think was one of the, one of the more active women, in fact, I think that she might have been doing a lot of the coordinating.



INTERVIEWER: Was she tied to any particular union?

NEAL: Cafeteria.

INTERVIEWER: The cafeteria workers union was extremely active.

NEAL: Yeah, they were.

INTERVIEWER: Most of the people that you mentioned as core people were all tied to unions with the exception of the Robinsons, who were, he was a lawyer.

NEAL: Yes, I think he was a lawyer. And, but you know, there were other people who were in and out but right now their names escape me. Some of them I can visualize, but I just couldn't call their names now for anything.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember if they were associated with any other group aside from cafeteria workers? Were there, for example, people who were very active in the NAACP, involved in...or people who were involved in other sorts of organizations?

NEAL: I'm not sure of what affiliations some of the people would have had, but these sort of normally, the people who were involved here were the people who were normally involved in any activist sort of things in town. You know, they were the people you saw if you went to different kinds of meetings as well, you know, as something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know much about the initial meeting, who really was responsible for that?

NEAL: No. No, because let's say I probably might have been at either the second or third meeting, something like that, of the group by invitation. So something had happened before that time. I really didn't feel that I was that, you know, really active with the group, for instance, that I would have been one of them they would have asked to participate in the Thompson case. But they had . . .

INTERVIEWER: What was this group was trying to do? Just for the record, was it to enforce a forgotten law that had banned segregation of restaurants and public facilities in the District in the late 1850's and those laws had been inadvertently removed from the law books and they were discovered, I think as the story goes, they were discovered by Charles Houston. The reason I bring that up, because you mentioned there was not much participation on the part of professionals and I imagine you meant also black professionals.

NEAL: But Houston was different.



INTERVIEWER: Ah, Houston was different.

NEAL: I mean you couldn't by any stretch of the imagination classify him with the normal black professional, he's far ahead.

INTERVIEWER: I won't even touch that. Aside from the people, the institutions who came to the group, were there other clubs or churches or other types of things that were active, other than groups that were active?

NEAL: I don't think we ever really talked about other than asking the ministers, you know, to become involved in, you know, I don't think we really went after identifying with groups per se. I think they were talking more about individuals participating than groups participating as I recall.

INTERVIEWER: Were accusations of communism ever thrown at that group?

NEAL: There probably was but that was one of the reasons for deciding on Dr. Terrell.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Terrell's secretary was Annie Stein. Let's see, it's kind of an interesting history. You mentioned earlier about why you chose the [tape interference] as you did in an attempt to really open up those doors that working class people would patronize: cafeterias, Murphy's and whatever. There's a kind of an interesting story behind the Thompson case. The Thompson restaurant case, everything that I would read suggests that you had to go back three different times before you were able to sit. What were some of the....what's the story behind that?

NEAL: But it was an agreed upon, it wasn't just crashing the restaurant, but there were certain, and I forget right now what, but there were certain things that had to occur if it were to, if we were going to apply it to the law, and not just a matter of having been served, it had to be, you know, the thing of refusal and so forth. When on the other occasions it just hadn't [tape interference] in what they had to do. So when they had the last time they went, they had worked out all the details very well and both management and the people who were going to do it all knew their roles they had to play in order to make the test.

INTERVIEWER: Who handled, after the initial work was done, the Thompson restaurant case, the picketing, whatever, who handled most of the court actions, 'cause eventually that's where the whole thing was won, in court.

NEAL: I don't even recall because even though it went, that's the way it went, once those people started breaking down, law, promulgation of the law, was not that important. It was just the very fact that it had happened. Like at Kresge's on Seventh Street. They didn't even have sit-down stools but once this thing broke and they



NEAL: put one side where they still kept stand-up counters, the other side, you know, sit-down. They were serving way before we went to, they went to court with it 'cause they had broken it down and so once this happened they just went on serving.

INTERVIEWER: I was just wondering who handled the legal end.

NEAL: I don't even recall who did it, but I do know by the time that came about it was just sort of after the fact, except that it got back on the books, but once they broke it down, it was . . .

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned the racial composition of the committee was predominantly white . . .

NEAL: And some of those people I just don't even, I can just see them, and some of their names I just couldn't call now if my life depended on it, because many of them went, some of the times they were people like I say I was involved with other things with. There were a few people there that I had been in the union with when I used to work for OPA, and they had been members of the United Public Workers.

INTERVIEWER: They were the organization that was labeled communist?

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: To your knowledge were any of the people who participated in this committee activity, were many of them communist, any of them communist?

NEAL: I don't know, but you know, some of the same people who were active in some other things . . .

INTERVIEWER: The cafeteria workers . . .

NEAL: They were labeled and that was the reason I said this one man who had been active with this case when they started leveling on him, he went to California and he's been out there ever since, can't even recall his name now. But it, he had been, it was all around the same time that they start leveling at him and he left.

INTERVIEWER: The decisions probably made about '53, then '54 comes Brown v. the Board of Education in Topeka Kansas.

NEAL: [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: What is the significance of the movement that happened here in D.C. as you see it, in light of what happens to the Civil Rights movement from that point on? Is there, is this the end of some other kind of movement or the beginning of the Civil Rights movement as you see it?



NEAL: I just think it was the time for things to happen, this kind of thing to happen and I wouldn't really think that now. I guess maybe some of the sit-ins in North Carolina triggered people off to do some other things that they hadn't done. But along this time, I just think it was sort of a spontaneous thing. But I think the very fact that this was a legal thing here might have given some credence. Well, this probably gave heart to some people maybe even, you know, got them to go. But I just, this sort of thing, what do they say, an idea whose time has come. And people were just ready to go into another phase of it.

INTERVIEWER: One more question. There was some civil rights activity going on in the sixties in this area, a lot of it sparked by what was happening in the South, quite a bit of it in courts. I don't know a great deal about picketing or whatever but there was some. If you had to compare what went on here in the late forties and early fifties in terms of the momentum of the movement, the people who were participating in it, the people who were responsible for organizing it with what went on in the sixties, what sort of conclusions would you draw, what comparisons would you make?

NEAL: This is probably a mute question, but to my mind the whole civil rights thing, not the school thing, not anything, maybe some of Little Rock, but the whole thing I don't think really captured the imagination or the dedication or the "let's get up off our butts and do something." In Washington until after the March, I mean I just saw such a difference in participation of people and who did things. You could go to church before that time and you didn't hear "this is our fight" or the encouragement from the pulpits to be involved. And you didn't, ministers willing to go on picket lines and school teachers, you know, those, all of these people, it was up to that point to me "it's somebody else's fight". And I'm just so sure that there are just thousands of people in this city who are now ashamed that they didn't have the guts to even go down and participate in the March, you know, because out of what somebody would say about them or from fear, but now they wish they had been part of the whole scene. But to me that was really the turning part in the psyche of the people in Washington.

INTERVIEWER: After '63 what sort of way were they involved in the Civil Rights movement?

NEAL: If not in, there was somewhat, you see, another of the things that was happening here was getting into the voting bit which they had not been involved in before, which was starting to get people organized and thinking into something else. You know, the Democratic committee, central committee, here started flourishing and being active and people were vying to be part of that and part of the new power struggle. From I guess '60 on, Washington to me, now I've been here since '38, but more like '60 on, people became a little more aware of a lot of things that were going on.



NEAL:

We were able, even with the union, to get some more involvement from the white collar workers who hadn't done much toward organization and they believed anybody that belonged to a union, you know, a queer breed of people. But you were able to start getting them to listen and you had nothing, you know, spectacular was happening. The civic associations were starting to look at some issues a little bit more and the whole question of civic citizen thing and there was some movement on that part. The movement on housing was building up at that time, and then there was a group up in this area who started forming for integrated housing and living and, you know, I mean communities. All of those things really started rolling around in the early sixties, you know, around that time. But, I don't, I guess you had two groups that were not really so involved. You had just the people who were in, I guess you call street people who didn't care either. Now, of course, their involvement came at the time of the riots and then they came out with the soul and the, everything and started taking more of an interest. But I don't think their interest at that time and, you know, I'm just not talking about somebody who hangs on in the street, you understand what I'm talking about, they weren't that involved either in....They would say, "oh look what they're doing," there was sort of an admiration for what was going on in some other places, not a thing of wanting to be involved themselves. You couldn't have gotten them anymore to go down and picket, than you could have gotten the professionals that I say, you know, should have been involved because they should have had a greater understanding.

INTERVIEWER:

Northern syndrome. Most likely people in the North thought they were better off....What sort of things were you involved in then in the sixties?

NEAL:

A lot of my time in the early sixties was divided among things like community services. I spent a lot of time on health welfare council, budget and allocations, memberships and working with family and child services and boys clubs and all of these kinds of things and being active for the Central Labor Council in that stuff. And all of the things then that were offshoots of that. A little, then, oh, in the mid-sixties OIC came through and I became one of the early board members for OIC.

INTERVIEWER:

What is OIC?

NEAL:

Opportunities Industrialization Center of Washington Institute for Industrial Training. It came out from Reverend Sullivan's dream up in Philadelphia. And here again, I was very frustrated because the board was composed mostly of ministers who had never really been involved in the world of work, and they were setting up, making policy on training and work and so forth. They didn't really understand it. And I guess it must have been '66, '67, something like that when I started working on, growing out of my frustrations with OIC, I persuaded J.C. Turner that the unions had to start something in training for the youth. And we got Project Build and started writing our proposals for Project Build and got that funded.



INTERVIEWER: So your involvement at OIC came as a result of your involvement with the Civil Rights movement?

NEAL: No, it came from involvement with the unions. You see, most of the things that were starting then, they were starting the quotas on all these things.

INTERVIEWER: But that came as a result of the Civil Rights momentum.

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I'm trying to find, develop the sequence. If you were involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the fifties and then there was not much activity here in the sixties until after '63, what did you become involved in right after this great push after '63 to become involved in civil rights, what did you choose to involve yourself with, OIC?

NEAL: I didn't choose to do it. No, I guess it grew, well, let's see, I'm not sure what the sequence of events were. But I was very active with the Central Labor Council and I think that I was the first woman to go on its board.

INTERVIEWER: When did you first become active?

NEAL: Well, I had been a delegate to the Council since in the fifties and then after....well, then when they were putting together the, I don't know which came first now, but they were putting together the program for OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity], now whatever year that was.

INTERVIEWER: '64.

NEAL: Something like that. Yeah. Okay, when they started putting together the OEO program and founded UPO here, then I became part of the labor group that was advisory to setting up the UPO program and writing in....we were doing our proposals for a piece of that action for the Central Labor Council. But this was how I was spending most of my time other than my union activities: working with the health and welfare thing, and with the OEO programs, and with training and what not. Then when we did get a piece of the action with UPO, then the Central Labor Council asked me to take a leave of absence from the local to be the liaison person between the Central Labor Council and United Planning. So then I....we had a piece of the Manpower action, so I think growing out of my work there when they started forming OIC, that's how I went to the OIC program. Then out of that we did the Project Build thing. And then, of course, I was a member of the Democratic Central Committee and a precinct chairman and, so that's how I sort of divided up my time, between the union, 'cause I still maintained my position as secretary-treasurer for the local. In fact, in order to give me a place to operate, after I became frustrated being located in the UPO headquarters, not being able



- NEAL: to do a program, I made a deal with the local union to let me use the first floor on our building--we were located on Seventh Street Northwest at the time--to let me use that first floor as an intake center for the Council's program in exchange for my continuing to do my work as secretary-treasurer for which I was no longer, of course, getting paid. So they made that exchange. So then, I was able to, then I was serving on some Manpower committees and was able to get the employment service to move part of their staff into the Center, to my intake center, for job development and placement and for an outreach center for them. And then when the AF of L-CIO started thinking in terms of tying in what we were doing with poverty programs and the unmet needs of youth and minorities, then I worked with Julius Rothman on a task force to get a handle on that. Out of that grew the Human Resources Development Institute. So after that came along, then the Central Labor Council shifted its program from UPO to the AF of L-CIO, and then I became the area Manpower representative for that. So most of the things then that I became involved in were all a composite thing of the whole. So I was working with the advisory committee for vocational education to dovetail things into the school. But so many things then became the quota thing, and that's how I started getting really worked to death because you didn't have that many black women who were active participants in unions, so they needed a black person, they needed a woman and they needed a person from labor, so here I was three people and just became sort of on demand for a lot of the things.
- INTERVIEWER: You mentioned you were involved in the Democratic Party central committee. When did you start to become involved in that?
- NEAL: This must have been in the....let's see, must have been in the late fifties, it was before 1960. Yeah, I know it was before 1960. Let's see, because I was involved back, well, before we got, we had our first vote for President here, I was already involved.
- INTERVIEWER: I'm going to go way back again when you were first involved in the desegregation movement and becoming really active in this local. You had mentioned at one time there had been some sort of conflict in your family about going to the desegregation meetings and getting involved in that. Can you talk a little bit more about that, and if it was the same as also involved with the union?
- NEAL: It wasn't only at home, it was also with the union. Of course, at home they, because we were the only black family in that particular area, they were talking in terms of the house being bombed and everything like that when people found out that I was involved in the desegregation stuff. I think I could have stemmed that tide alright if I hadn't been getting so much pressure from like the President of the union who kept saying, "You know we just come out of this business about this communist thing as a result of the strike and you're going to drag us on back into it again by all of this activity and it's not going to mean anything anyway, you're really going to get the local labeled." This, day in and day out.



NEAL: So I, we had many real serious arguments over the whole thing and I think it was just a coupling of the things, the union pressure and the home pressure.

INTERVIEWER: You felt fairly isolated then in what you were doing, outside of just the people you were involved with in the movement....you weren't getting . . .

NEAL: No, they really didn't understand, you know, but it was "I understand what you're doing but you've got to realize that things are not gonna....they'll happen, they'll happen someday, but they're not going to happen in our lifetime." That was the kind of thing I was getting. "I understand why you're doing it, I agree with you, but you've got more to think about than doing something that satisfies you, you've got the organization to think about."

INTERVIEWER: So the local, Local 82, is very important to you at that time, that you would have chosen to go with what the President said rather than . . .

NEAL: Well, I guess the local had always been pretty important to me but I knew that this would not really stop my activity and to me it wasn't so important who did that particular thing, as everything else that had gone on. I knew I'd be back out on the streets. I knew he would be throwing me back out on the streets on a picket line somewhere. I think I was just more frustrated because people couldn't envision, you know, what was really going on. That's what bothered me, you know, and part of my idea was, nothing will happen in our lifetime unless somebody stands up and be counted. And that was my whole thing. And, nobody wanted to stand up and be counted. "Let John do it." That was about my only reaction to all of that.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, what does it mean to be living in an all white neighborhood at that time and why decide to live in that kind of neighborhood?

NEAL: It wasn't that. They were there first, and then the place sort of built up around them and they found no reason to move out. I don't really know why they felt like that, I just didn't really have time to see the neighbors. I didn't see that much of them, but, you know, there were no animosities going on. In fact, one of the people that I was saying that the FBI had gone to interview about me was a family that had moved in with a couple of little children and this was their first experience after they came here, going to a school where there were not black children. And things they couldn't understand. I would have suspected that they would have been asking me about those neighbors before they would have been asking those neighbors about me. [laughs] But it was just one of those things that people....it was just part of the psyche of black people here, that you don't get involved in these things, you know. But there was nothing that would have given them any



NEAL: real fear, they just didn't know what other argument to use to keep me from getting involved. My mother-in-law felt, well, you know, it's a great privilege to be able to go to work and come back home. And if you never got involved in anything else, that's a great privilege. You're able to work and able to earn a living and that should satisfy you.

INTERVIEWER: Who did you live with at that time, what members of your family?

NEAL: I lived with my dear husband and his mother, she was a nice person.

INTERVIEWER: So when you talking about your family then you're talking about your husband?

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: What did your own parents feel about any of this? Did you ever.... I guess you saw your mother, what did she . . .

NEAL: She was busy doing her thing in West Virginia. [laughs] They were always busy doing their things there. About the time, she was desegregating the hospital there.

INTERVIEWER: So you got support from them for what you were doing, 'cause she was involved in some kind of activity.

NEAL: Didn't make any difference to me.

INTERVIEWER: For a person....I guess you said in the first tape that you didn't really belong to any, like....you join organizations.

NEAL: [laughs] Not for the sake....I'm not a club person. Everything I....one time I belonged to a social club for a year, part of the year, and then that was enough for me. But most of the organizations that I belonged to or do things with are activist organizations. I mean they're organizations for a purpose. I'm not a lodge person. Like one affiliation seems to lead to another. One full committee leads to a sub-committee. And then you're in it.

INTERVIEWER: Was your husband active in any way?

NEAL: [laughs] If you hadn't said in any way . . .

INTERVIEWER: Okay, was your husband active?

NEAL: [laughs] No. No. [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: So the two of you led completely different lives.

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, what did your job involve as secretary-treasurer?



- NEAL: All of the things that no one else did. 'Course you do the normal things that a financial officer would do as far as that record-keeping is concerned. All the routine things, but in addition to that, my responsibility was more or less to the membership. I did the newsletter, I did the educational training for stewards and members, I guided them through their needs for services in the community or, you know, their personal needs, off the job problems. I did some organizing, some negotiating, but principally mine was relationship with members and their families.
- INTERVIEWER: So you did about everything.
- NEAL: [laughs] Yeah.
- INTERVIEWER: Is that normally what the job as secretary-treasurer is?
- NEAL: Of course, if you break it down, the secretary-treasurer is supposed to receive all communications on behalf of the union, take care of financial things....but I guess each organization, you know, does it the way they do it. Now, part of the reason I guess that these jobs befell me, was this particular organization was under trusteeship for such a long period of time, that it really only left the two people who were appointed officers--the president and myself--to carry out most of the functions that had to be carried out for the union. And the kinds of things that I did definitely were not his forte, and he was tied up with negotiating and organizing. These were the things that he liked to do and his finesse with the members was not the greatest. So if you had to talk about public relations, I was at times trying to ease him out. [laughs] So in that respect we were able to work more as a team and the things that we each did complemented each other and at least kept the thing together. We were able to better our condition.
- INTERVIEWER: Sounds like you had a tremendous amount of responsibility. Did you ever feel that there were things at that time you might have wanted to do in the local, or even in your political work, you weren't able to do because you were a woman? Or, things that you had to do that you felt that you shouldn't have had to do?
- NEAL: You know, I guess there were always times that you felt that, those things were in the back of your mind. I don't know whether I have felt as much frustration over inequities as far as being a woman is concerned as I have being black, if you all get what I mean. They might be coupled, were a double burden. But I've been more acutely aware of things that I have resented more by being black. We were in the District....we've been more closely allied with Maryland as far as the unions are concerned, state federations, than we had with Virginia. And always were active in the state conventions and the work of the state. I date back to the time there were no blacks at all on executive boards. And then when they decided--this would have been the fifties--that there should be a black person on the board and so the way--they did not elect



NEAL:

the person, they did it all in caucus--that we would have a vice-president-at-large with the understanding being that that person is going to be black and maybe this time might come from Washington, maybe another time come from Baltimore. And my frustration was not only with the whites, but equally as much with the blacks. So often, when you know that you have specialized problems and you're going to face them, and know you got to deal with them sooner or later, I just think that you need to deal with them. Now from convention to convention, there was never a time when those black delegates would caucus. And I was very critical. I was not in position to call the meetings because we had somebody by protocol who should have been calling them. We should have been caucusing. At least if we had to take the second-class treatment we ought to have been able to have made up our minds before we went into convention. But when I'd sit on that convention floor and hear the chairman say, "And our colored delegates will caucus in such and such a room," I tell you, I would get angry. I would just fume because I just felt that we knew we had particular problems, but they weren't saying that any other groups who had particular problems either were going to caucus other than the area delegations. Now I could see area delegations caucusing. But then I would fume just as much that we were not prepared when we went into our caucuses and, you know, would get there and wrangle and stuff. And I used to just dream of the day when we would have moved so into the whole system that somebody could get elected for their own worth instead of having to come through a process like that. Those are the kinds of things that have really bothered me more than anything else. And they had nothing to do, except that most of the time I was the only woman in the group. In all of my early days, practically any group, I was the only woman there. But I didn't feel particularly left out or anything else. I know sometimes people were just being courteous and were not really listening to what I said or something like that. But I didn't feel particularly put down. And I have not suffered, say an inequity in wages because I was a woman. I suffered them because nobody was doing any better. So I don't have the same kinds of frustrations I know a lot of women have had, although I understand them because I've seen the thing in action. But I've just been in a more of a unique situation than a lot of women have been in in my circumstances.

INTERVIEWER:

But has it been difficult then to have been in all these different organizations where you might have been the only black person or the only woman? Did you feel isolated in that way?

NEAL:

I didn't feel isolated, I was not unconscious of the fact why I was there. But you know, I...because I think when I really... now there had been one other, say with the Central Labor Council, because most of my involvement outside of Local 82 has been with the Central Labor Council. There was one other, I guess, black person who had served on the Council Executive Board before I went on as the first woman and as a black. But here again, I



NEAL:

think that from, and I don't think that some of the things I got wheeled into was because I was either one, but there was a great sort of empathy between J.C. Turner who was the chairman, president, of the Council and myself. And it could be that he was seeing this as a quota thing of making it, but I don't really believe that. I think that most of the assignments and things that I got from him were because he thought I would do the job he wanted done, he felt he needed done. So that took away a lot of.... maybe the feelings I would have had as far as feeling put down on either score. Within the local union, as we worked along, I was just as confident that I had as much going and as much to offer the union as the president had. And, in fact, had to do an awful lot of counseling to him to help him with his job. So I didn't feel that kind of stuff there. Had I been making perceptibly less money than he was making, I would have resented being, I guess, a woman and having to lead him along. But that wasn't the case. And even on, I could laugh about it because I knew why I was on a lot of those boards and things, you know, but I didn't have a, I didn't have a resentment because I knew that this was part of how "we shall overcome". [laughs] It's difficult for me to explain but I just don't have....and then, too, even racially speaking, when, if you will recall I grew up at home without a lot of prejudices. You know, we didn't have hate there. So part of it has not been my nature to. I hear people saying, I don't trust him or hate him because he's white or she's white. But I have never gone through that experience of seeing people with no more than color. I haven't gone through it. I can't say that this is true of all my family even. But I just think I came up in a different setting and at a particular time when something was going on.

INTERVIEWER:

[tape interference] and your mother had to go through all that battle to get the children into high school and your brothers . . .

NEAL:

I didn't hate anybody.

INTERVIEWER:

Not hate but . . .

NEAL:

But I thought, hey, this is great, oh, I recognized it. I clearly recognized it.

INTERVIEWER:

You recognized that that was something being done to you.

NEAL:

Yeah. But you know, I don't even think that I resented that as much. I wanted to go to school and thought this was great what we were doing, but I think that maybe I had resented more than that, stopping at some little roadside stand and not being served. You know especially when sometimes you can look at the person whose serving you and think, well, you know, I could buy and sell you, you don't want to serve me. That kind of stuff I couldn't abide. You know, when you start really thinking in retrospect of what your life has been, I think given the period that I have lived in and the changes that I have seen, not back as far as....from the span



NEAL: of time that I have lived from 1917 through the Depression, through Democratic and Republican administrations and the things that have evolved with civil rights and all those things. I rather think that I am glad that I was born a woman and born black. I just don't think that I would have had any of the wealth of feeling about the whole thing had I come some other way. I have no resentments about it.

INTERVIEWER: In the local, when you first became active, were you close to anyone that was active?

NEAL: We didn't have many active people at all when I came aboard. And of course, I guess the reason for it, the former president and his wife who was the secretary-treasurer really didn't let anyone get close to them and know what was going on in the organization. They just didn't want anyone in. In fact, they were afraid of the membership, I mean, literally afraid, so they put up bars at the doors and the windows and everything to keep the membership away from them. So the people who became active with the union came through our cultivating of them and bringing them into legislative . . .

INTERVIEWER: You almost started having to build the union from the grass roots. What kind of activities were you involved in getting the membership more involved?

NEAL: What do you mean? [laughs] Well, of course, I didn't do that much visiting of the sick because I really didn't have time for that. I did go to a lot of funerals and visited a lot of people when, you know, death came. I started the newsletter and did personal things in....I was always mixing up the sexes of the new babies to my horror. But I had....we started having regular membership meetings and that was like pulling teeth, getting some people out. I started an orientation session before the meetings started for new members, old members. They had not been involved in taking an oath and obligation of membership, so I made great ceremony out of having people come forth and be sworn into the union, then the shaking of hands and all of these kinds of things. Lot of it was just one-to-one communication, you know: "I want to start this committee," "we need to do this," and "when can I depend upon you to help?" Some of those people who came in at that time, now back in '46, '47, are still active members of this union, some of my most active members. I did what I'm doing now, cook a lot. [laughs] But we had a....like I had.... oh, it was another very nice occasion. We had just organized the people at Doctors' Hospital and we had the office building but all the people in the hospital were white. After they'd been in, oh I guess six or eight months or something, we had a dinner for shop stewards. And we served about a six-course meal. Roast turkey, everything from fruit cup all the way through dessert, salads, everything. And we didn't have anything but a hot plate and one of these roasters. But by getting somebody to cook something here and there, and stuff, so we could heat and everything.



NEAL: We put like a stone wall around those bare bad walls, stuck flowers up over the wall. And those people from Doctors' Hospital volunteered to come to serve. Now this, we're talking about back in 1948 I guess, something like that. And they....so all the people, of course, that they were serving were black other than their own steward. They came and they did a beautiful job. I thought now here was a breakthrough we had done by just giving some attention to a group of people. But I guess in just as many ways as you take to do things. We had picnics, God, we had picnics. We would go to Rock Creek Park Island, we went to. I remember Jesse Scott who just went off of our Board after about twenty years on the Board. We'd go to her house and we'd cook hundreds, literally hundreds of pounds of chicken and potato salad and all the stuff and cart it all. So you had to get people who were willing to come and do that. But we had good times while we were working on the food. And then we had, always had in excess of a thousand people at the picnic and the children and then we bought prizes for the children, all these kinds of things. But the people who did the most work were your strongest members in other things. But it just takes....took, you know, working with people and being there when they needed them. I say I got active with community services, became a union counselor, took that course and then, you know, started knowing where to refer people for other problems and things that they had. So you got them calling you for all kinds of things. You keep on and you build some semblance of an organization.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any plan for what you were doing, or did you just start responding to the situation?

NEAL: Just like what I'm doing now, I'm responding. [laughs] You just never know.

INTERVIEWER: I didn't mean it in a negative way at all. Did you and the president sit down and work out long term plans?

NEAL: Well, most of the things, and this is not speaking from a vanity point of view, but most of the things we've been able to do are things that I have dreamed of in the middle of the night or something, and then just started formulating into some kind of plan. And I've just been fortunate that when I would present the plans that people would accept them and we'd go on from there. But most of the things we do are the middle-of-the-night brain-childs. I don't know whether I'm in a thing of dreaming or half-awake, but most of the things I put together are things that come, you know, at two, three, four o'clock in the morning. And then if I can remember them all when I get up at seven o'clock, then I can go on making plans for them. If they're dreams. I really don't know what state I'm in. Like we just had that kick-off thing for senior members and by the time I had gone all over it, through the night, then I'm into making my plans: who's going to be the speaker, who's going to be the participants and what kind



- NEAL: of form it shall take and where we shall go from there. And then they usually evolve into more formal things. Through the years it just seems like I've been able to do more thinking, dreaming or something, that's when I'm able to sort of bring about plans.
- INTERVIEWER: My father is an inventor and he does the same thing, wakes up in the middle of the night, writes the idea down, and then he'll work on it, his mind is always working in the wee hours.
- NEAL: You heard about the woman who took the pencil and paper to bed with her. She wrote down her great thing, "higgamous, pigamous, metapolygamous, hogamous, mogamous, woman monogamous." [laughs] My husband was always saying to me, "Another god damn pencil in the bed." [laughs] But that's the way I usually go to sleep, the reason I have it there most of the time, I like to work on crossword puzzles before I go to sleep or something like that, it's the next thing to television for putting me to sleep.
- INTERVIEWER: I want to talk about things that you've been involved in outside union activity. I also want to know one thing before we get on to that. There's all this stuff on all the union activities from the different locals and then there's the Local 82 picnic.
- NEAL: [laughter] Everybody organizing, signing contracts and Local 82 has a picnic. [laughter]
- INTERVIEWER: What would you feel were the most important issues that you have not dealt with . . . ?
- NEAL: Oh, I don't know. I sort of keep going back to that little thing, "what were you worrying about this time last year?" 'Cause as every year comes, you got some things that you think are insurmountable or you think you've made a big gain and then that year passes and the next year comes and something else comes in its place which seems just as big, just as important or as serious. You know, if I were to look at my own job with the local now, some of the things have to be the same kind of things you've always been encountering, yet I find the responsibility of twice the membership that I dealt with when I was secretary-treasurer, that I deal with now as president, and a staff that is responsible to me instead of being responsible to somebody else. I feel that's quite a challenge, and you know, I question quite often whether I'm really adequate for the job. As far as, you know....everything has really doubled and, you know, the responsibility has certainly shifted from what I had been accustomed to doing and that makes a difference. I know that part of the organizational gains that we have made are....some of it's due to our activities on behalf of the members. Some of it's due to the economic shift. But when, you know, you think that from the time that you've come aboard with the organization that you have seen people's salaries, wages multiply ten percent or more during the time that you've



NEAL: been with them and when you've seen practically no fringe benefits increase to things that are more the norm for most workers, I count those as substantial gains and changes over the years. I have seen the....they're not belligerent, but I've seen the militancy of the membership increase ten-fold from the docile sort of people that I knew when I came on. And here too, you can't take all of the credit for that kind of change because they've also changed with the times. But I don't know really how to answer, I really don't know how to answer your question. You know, the years, take the couple of years that we spent out on the sidewalk up at the Dorchester House up on Sixteenth Street. Those things come . . .

INTERVIEWER: What happened there?

NEAL: We had a two-year strike at the Dorchester House. At one point I would not have thought that anything before or after would have equalled the trauma that went along with that strike. But yet, there are times that other things happen. We were the first union to put out a picket line of the Federal Government buildings. We had seven of those buildings with picket lines around them at the same time in the late fifties. It was the early fifties that we were at the Dorchester House. The kinds of things that we did there....and I can recall the last two people to leave that picket line were people sixty-five years old who had worked there. I can recall the Easter that we were out there and all of a sudden I dreamed up the idea of let's have an Easter parade. So we found all these old clothes and rags and everything, and our big signs, while everybody was riding out for Easter: "This is all that we can afford on thirty dollars a week." There've been momentous occasions. But each year brings its own.

INTERVIEWER: You always had a number of activities and things that involved the families of the members as well as the membership itself. Did the members of 82 ever get involved in any project that dealt with childcare?

NEAL: No. It's been discussed and hoped for. In fact, when we looked, one of the things we were considering when we were looking for another building this time, whether or not we could bring in something for, be a place for childcare or for health services, one or the other. We were doing a survey on what people do with the children and then I was doing something with it using 82. Because this was what I had access to, but I never could get anybody to really follow it up. Because I am concerned about what effect moonlighting has on children and how many children who are known to the courts are children who come out of homes with moonlighting parents. And they're trying to tell me that this isn't where their problem is, you know, "I don't have a problem." But I don't think they've done any study on it. I think they were just telling me that off the top of their hats. But we have been concerned, not as much with full day care but of childcare that would also take in after school care and care for night, up to ten



NEAL:

o'clock at night when people could pick up their children if there were no one at home to take care of them. The survey that we did, it was not a very good sampling, showed that a lot of grandmothers or people in the home, they also work but they dovetail in as babysitters. And that's how a lot of them get taken care of. Now there are a number of people who put the children into nursery during the day, but a lot of them don't do that. So I don't know whether we...it's not foremost in our mind now as it was before we started asking around about it. But I have, within the last two months talked to somebody else who's trying to put together a program like that and wanted information from us, perhaps some kind of commitment to maybe see if we could...hers is a for-profit kind of arrangement for evening care. Until we would do more work on it, I don't know. That's at this time one of our big priorities. I think one of the things though...a lot of our members...although it only covers about a third of our membership, is the health welfare fund. That's being used much more in the last two years than it was before. That's because we're letting more people know the employer is contributing for that and how they can use it. We're doing a much better job. Mary Martin is doing a good job with that, on a volunteer basis, too. She's really been doing a fantastic job on a volunteer basis and then working at night. Yeah, I tell you without a few people like that, [tape interference]. He just keeps plodding along and he's what, sixty-seven, sixty-eight years old at least? No. Mr. Murphy is older than that, he's in his seventies. And he's here every day. It seems as though the people that you really are able to get, become pretty dedicated to the job. I don't say that much for the office staff, but for the membership, a lot of times will give you all they can give you by way of time and everything else and still live their own lives.

INTERVIEWER:

I'm interested in issues that would affect women workers. That's one of the reasons I asked about daycare. Has there been anything else done through the union particular to women or has it been towards both women and men?

NEAL:

Naturally we have a lot of issues that affect women because of the nature of the work that we really take in consideration and have to give very careful consideration to in contract negotiations, and also in the application of the thing. You got to do an awful lot of role-playing and things like that. Because in order to... most of the women are not that happy about equal opportunity in our industry because with them it has meant they are now being required to do jobs that have been traditional men's jobs. And, see, a long time ago we dealt in our union with the question of equal pay. So unless someone is doing something of a higher skill for which they get paid, all of our people have gotten the same pay. We really fought that battle twenty years ago. So now when they're being asked to do things that they traditionally thought of as being men's jobs, they are not happy. And so it's had sort of a reverse feeling with them on the whole question.



NEAL: I mean they are, even if, say, with the question of mopping, most times we were able to get it, women weren't going to mop, but now when they're handed a mop, even though we can get the size cut down, the very idea of doing it is something else. But I've had to use all kinds of things with employers, lies and everything else. Like for instance, at George Washington hospital they had asked this woman....part of her job is going to be go out and sweep the street sidewalks and stuff. Women hadn't been asked to do that. What I finally came up with management was that the men resented it as much as the women. And I even had to bring in a racial bit. I said, "You wouldn't be asking your women to go out and sweep the street, and they're not going to have their women out there sweeping the street." And you know, you go through all that bit of tomfoolery but they get your point and they don't have to do it. Same thing with washing glasses--windows and stuff and things like that. In New York, Local 32J, which has been primarily a women's local as opposed to 32B, which did more of the, got a higher rate of pay, they're mostly men and everything. Well, they're talking about merging. And the women there are really very fearful that they're going to lose jobs because of it. I mean officers of the union and everybody else are women.

INTERVIEWER: Is it a strong possibility?

NEAL: Yeah, it is. They know that they are going to lose slots within the union with merger. And they feel they're going to lose slots on the job because of it. But because we have so many women, you know, you just got to keep being particularly on the alert for them and especially now since under the minimum wage, District minimum wage law, that used to spell out some of these safeguards for women and minors, now that they had to include men, they've done away with some of the safeguards. You still got to make sure that they've got certain safe, adequate sanitary conditions of work. The membership is very conscious about the sex thing within the union. Of course, I guess, here again, Local 82 sort of a unique organization in as much as most of the officers are women and we set a new Executive Board meeting. I think we got four men on there, everybody else is women. Of course, they get elected, too. But it's certainly not true of most local unions, especially in unions of any size to come through with much female leadership.

INTERVIEWER: So that's always been encouraged here?

NEAL: What?

INTERVIEWER: Female leadership.

NEAL: It just grew. 'Course, I said the president when I came, just before I came, I mean, his wife was secretary-treasurer, after a while they put her out. And then I came on and some of the people, women are better workers than men as a rule and things, so you get them. It's just something that grew, but the men accepted. [laughter]



August 3, 1977

INTERVIEWER:

I'm going to begin this last interview by asking you to talk a little about the nature of the service industry during the time when you first came to . . .

NEAL:

When I first came to into the union, the industry was mostly a.... industry, people worked from eleven at night till seven or eight in the morning. It was a shift that most women wanted to work because then they go home, get them off to school and then they would take a little rest. Then they would be up to get the children in the door from school and get the dinner and then they would perhaps rest for another hour or two and then go to work. The rate of pay was less than fifty cents an hour at that time and then we started seeing a change in the industry I guess in the late fifties or in the mid-fifties when the work started to be contracted out more than it was when it was with the private ownership. A lot of building owners had management firms that were responsible for the cleaning, we had as we have now, a large number of women who are in the industry. Of course, this was before the great emphasis on EEOC [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission] and women were primarily dusters and they cleaned toilets and often stairs, anything where you had to get into corners or be a little more particular. The men by and large did the heavier kinds of work. Although some companies used people for window cleaners....mostly that was an industry that was apart from the general cleaning of the building. Then when the contractors started coming in, and this was largely due to the government deciding that they would sub or they would contract out their cleaning. We had contractors who came mostly from out of town, large number of people from New Jersey especially I think....all they had to do was be able to make performance bond. It was really no protection whatsoever under those first government contracts that would guarantee that workers would get their wages. They had no way of collecting vacations from one employer to the other. What would happen is that an employer contractor would come in and after they had been there a year; then the next year a building would go out on bid again, and the next lower bid contractor came on, that contractor was out. Well, there was nothing in the specifications with the government that said that you have to keep workers or that you have to pay them their vacations or give them any sick leave or anything. So it....let's see, when the union negotiated contracts, all they could do was require the contractor that was there to grant vacations, usually it wouldn't exceed a week. But when the new contractor came on, if he was going to keep the workers, he needed that person from day one, so all the people got money....a paid vacation. I mean you got pay, a week's pay, extra pay, they didn't get any vacation, and this led to a lot of things, like excessive leave. People were tired. This was one of the first areas that we've tried to get corrected and conditions were so bad that for years we had cases that



NEAL:

we had taken to court, the Local 82 had taken to court, for the contractors from out of town who had not paid all of their workers. We had subpoenas waiving if we ever found them getting off a plane in Washington and the Minimum Wage and Safety Board was a lot of help to us in that time. I think maybe out of the terrible conditions that existed in Washington might have grown the interest of the international union in trying to get that service contract act passed. That would give at least people money that was comparable to private industry, and it would insure that the government or the agencies wouldn't let out, especially GSA, wouldn't let out contracts to just the lowest bidder without anything else being built in for protection for workers. Well, when...and the contractors liked this, they hired a lot of military people usually non-coms to be supervisors, and in most instances they knew absolutely nothing about the cleaning industry, but they had learned to holler in a military fashion and so they came aboard. It was easy for the companies to get the military on such, you know, to work in the evenings like that, so it worked out pretty well. When other private owners and companies saw that this was working they started cutting their shifts, and uh . . .

INTERVIEWER:

What were the shifts cut to?

NEAL:

Well, they started changing to a part time. This is when the industry really changed to part time industry. There were a few places that worked...oh, well they always kept a skeleton crew, one or two people during the day, but as I say, most of the work was done after everyone had left their offices at night. Then even before the great energy crunch and great turn-off of lights and everything, some building owners thought that there was more in it where they could hire more people to work part time and accomplish as much as having people on all night. They started adding up the cost in keeping a building open and operating all night. It was...it's never been uncommon for the air conditioning to get cut off when the office people leave, which means that the people who work cleaning and even now when they shut if off at five in an hour's time while people are working, just in baths of sweat trying to save the energy cost. During this time our records show, and surveys that we have done have shown, that the ages of the people who are doing this work have changed from, say a mid- or late thirties and forties was about the average age when I came into the industry. Now they're shifted to, I guess, about a mid-twenties or early thirties being almost the average for women in the industry and men are also younger than they were. Now one of the reasons that we think there's been this shift...of course, it's been the whole economic situation, women could not work and make a living at these short hours, so they've sort of....I don't know where some of the women who did this work have gone really. But people who worked in offices by day because of the high cost of living have said well, you know, we can work these additional hours in the evening, and that way make enough money that we can exist on. A lot of



NEAL:

them are doing and so many of 'em that just shift from their desk job in the day on over to the contractor at night in the same buildings as they work in. We've also another interesting thing that I've found, though, this is largely I think as an outgrowth of this Civil Rights Movement. In the summer we used to be really bombarded with college students primarily from Howard and Minor's Teacher College who were looking for work during the summer in our industry and then all of a sudden they weren't there anymore. You know, we still have students but they weren't there pouring in like they were because other jobs became available for them in other industries and they sort of, you know, vanished from this. So there have been through the years, changes in the industry that I feel have been based on the social, the overall social changes in the country, and the economic situations. Things are certainly much better now for the people who are working in this industry than they were, in the way the jobs are performed. It has not been that long ago when people who were workers were expected to get down on their hands and knees and do a lot of the work and, of course, they wouldn't, they hardly dare. Sometimes the man might do it to get the corners and the things but they wouldn't really dare to ask people to do them in that fashion and, of course, the machinery's better to do it. The turnover is very great, perhaps greater now than it was a few years ago and this too is because of an economic situation. We don't always agree with employers when they tell us this, but we know that there are a number of people who take the jobs because they want a car or they want something that they can't possibly buy working on just one job. And, of course, my argument with the management people is that if people are willing to put in sixteen or eighteen hours of their life for something that they want and are willing to work for it, and they have a right to enjoy those things as much as anybody else enjoys them, then they've got a right to do it. They should not say, well because they want to buy something that is standard for them but they feel is a luxury for these workers, that they shouldn't pay them a decent wage.

INTERVIEWER: That's their excuse for paying . . .

NEAL: Yeah. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that the situation was worse in D.C. than other places, that was one of the reasons for the service contract . . .

NEAL: It's not that the conditions were worse, I guess they were pretty bad all over. But because of the concentration of government buildings here and other, you know, few other places are faced with the sort of . . .

INTERVIEWER: This real clear picture.

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Before the contractors came in, was there more respect for the job?



NEAL: Well, I think people took more pride, I don't know. There is some people now, but I guess they tend to still be the older workers who take an awful lot of pride in the work they do and they find it hard when the level of cleaning changes. Well, you used to have jobs where people cleaned everything in sight every night. And then they started shifting, that you only do a thorough cleaning every third night and the government largely started that. And then they go almost to a situation that they call warehouse cleaning where you get the open space and, you know, the person whose sitting at the desk finishes the dusting on the seat of their pants. But when people felt so....some of us still do, feel so concerned and so jealous about the areas that we're assigned to. Then they really get upset if they say that you have to work on another zone or clean another area because "I've been doing this and I do it like, you know, the tenants want it done. You have no right to change me from this floor to another floor, this is my floor." But I think that some of the younger people might just roll with the punches, "so what the heck, you know, if you want to clean, this is dirt no matter where you go, and so I clean it on this floor and I'll clean it on that floor." They get the job done and that's it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you....the percentage of women and black people worked in the industry and has that been changing?

NEAL: I think the number of black people in the industry has increased, in fact, I'm pretty sure that it has. Maybe that might have started some twenty years ago. Now we had, in the forties for instance, we had many shops that were all black or all white. There was a lot of playing people against each other a lot of threats, if you don't do then I'll put, they say we'll put in colored, and because they'll do what we're, they're told to do. And then they would threaten blacks with the same, you know, let's get rid of all of you, they're all shiftless and lazy, and we'll put in whites. And then we had other places where there were all kinds of mixture of things. We had some buildings where all the elevator operators....and of course, we were really known as the elevators operator's union almost, in the early days. Well maybe all the elevator operators will be white and all the cleaners would be black, or all the elevator operators would be men and practically all the women except for scrubbing would be, you know, all the other cleaners would be women and then we had a few buildings within integrated groups. We had buildings even during that time where there was designations for white locker rooms and colored locker rooms. Well, there've been a lot of things that have gone down. I don't know, some of them we had to fight for, others I think just fell with the changing of the times.

INTERVIEWER: When did....do you know when things stopped being segregated?

NEAL: Not really [tape interference] a crazy situation, doctors would only hire whites in the hospital. They would only hire blacks



NEAL: for the office building cleaning, they would only hire women for elevators unless it was at night. They had one black woman who was a maid who worked in the morgue and did something else around there. Now she locked with the other people, with other white women in the hospital, but they all ate meals but she couldn't eat meals with them.

INTERVIEWER: That was the management's rule?

NEAL: Yes. But it was just all kinds of crazy things I remember. The head nurse I guess, oh no, she was the head housekeeper at Doctors', call me at one time and she wanted me to refer some people to her. She says, "But you know, you've got to refer whites here because this is a very high class hospital and that's all we can hire."

INTERVIEWER: What do you say to something like that?

NEAL: [laughing] I don't know, for a long time I didn't know what I said, but now I don't even remember what I told them about the caliber of people....but something to the effect that no matter, you know, who we referred was high enough caliber to work at Doctors' Hospital. And of course, but I do remember at one point I told her that, well, I wouldn't be able to send her any negroes anyway because they just wouldn't accept the conditions.[laughing] You don't have to work under Doctors so, you know, if we send you anybody they'll have to be white. [both laughing] But then when they did start hiring on, the administrator was, had been at St. Elizabeth Hospital and he was very conscious of the plight of people who came out of that hospital being able to get work. So he took on a lot of people from St. E's and he was also quite interested in the people coming out from the war, the DOP's, I guess they were called or something.

INTERVIEWER: POW?

NEAL: No, weren't prisoners of war. But anyway, so he started putting on a number of people. And then as they moved out from that point when they started taking people like from Asia, India, and around that and then pretty soon, of course, the whole thing broke down. Everybody.... and like for the kitchen employees, they hired almost exclusively Spanish-speaking people and I think that was one of the things that bothered me most. Those people were not organized and we were having a....in fact, they didn't get organized until this year, and they used to just treat them however they wanted to treat them. I've gone into the locker rooms and found them.... they worked split shifts and during the afternoons they'd be sleeping on the floors, and around and on the benches, waiting to go back to work again. When I was talking with Carmen about it one time and she was saying that she recalled as a little girl her mother or her, I don't know her mother or her godmother, one or the other, working there and taking her and how she had slept on the bench at Doctors' Hospital.



INTERVIEWER: They couldn't be covered within your union?

NEAL: Yes, they could be covered and we would sign them up, but before, but they would always convince them that they didn't need a union, so they had a hard time getting them. They had problems, but they would, you know, they'd give 'em some money when we would get new contracts signed for the rest of the people. Of course, the interesting thing about our union, in our whole industry is that it's so, the jurisdiction is so broad. And you know I mentioned before that in the early days we were known more as an elevator operators union and then as they started going self-service, more and more people joined the union from the cleaning. And then we merged with the hospital workers union 192, and that took us into more of the hospital area. And we had the old Griffith Stadium and we had all the people who worked there and we've had the newspaper plants for umpteen years. But always it's been a very diversified union, so . . .

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned that there were more black people in it now than there were....percentage-wise.

NEAL: Percentage-wise, yes. I think....just take the place we were just talking about, Doctors' Hospital, where the unit was carved out exclusively white and now it's no more exclusively white, and you find, you know, so the whites have dwindled there. Now we have a number of other buildings that were exclusively white that are now integrated. We have very few accepted places like Capitol Center or airlines and places like that where we have young whites, a few apartment houses, but they're mostly male, except for at those recreational or guard situations, we have very few young white women. The number of Spanish-speaking people are increasing. I would say that twenty years ago maybe two percent of our total union might have been Spanish-speaking and I dare say now we're hitting on about fifteen percent level.

INTERVIEWER: Is that just in the Washington area or is that happening all over?

NEAL: Well, I guess it's happening anywhere they're getting large number of workers that have had the same kind of patterns. Now if you were to take New York City, I think perhaps the number of whites that are in....the number of whites that are in the service industries perhaps exceed the number of blacks. And there is a growing number of Spanish-speaking people who are becoming more active in unions that, you know, places like New York, than they've ever been. At least that's what they told me.

INTERVIEWER: Is it also older whites or is it young . . .

NEAL: I think it's pretty much the same kind of pattern that we have here, now for some of these because they have some other kind of things going that we don't have here. For instance, here we have....well, it was a verbal agreement, I guess it was made forty years ago, that we would not invade the hotel industry as such.



NEAL: Like in New York, the Ulva Hotel front service people are members of our union, and in Washington those people belong to the hotel-restaurant union. So they would have a larger number of people in front service work that, you know, we don't have around here. So their picture might look a little different.

INTERVIEWER: One other question about the Washington young white workers. Do you think that the industry discourages them from coming in because I mean it certainly, the economic situation is bad enough here too, that . . .

NEAL: Well, perhaps....oh, I don't know, that they're discouraged as such, but I think that now it's sort of going the other way. At one time blacks would say, well, there's no point in applying for that job 'cause that's a white job, and I think maybe a lot of young whites now are saying this, no need to apply for those jobs because that's a black job. And they might have fears of, you know, apprehensions, that they wouldn't get hired anyway, so they just don't go. Because it is, it's rare for us to have....we do occasionally have young white girls but not, you know, they're not even a measurable quantity.

INTERVIEWER: How much....the union's always mostly been women, how high . . .

NEAL: Not that much. We....and that's one of the things that, you know, we need to do. We need to look at, do another profile on our union. The last survey that we had to do for summaries and we found that we were almost fifty percent but at one point, I would say we would have been about seventy-five percent women.

INTERVIEWER: Seventy-five percent?

NEAL: But, I don't think, because you do find a lot of young black males who are in this industry.

INTERVIEWER: So it's not....is it still segregated at which jobs men and women have?

NEAL: There, well, there are still....now if you find women who have been working in a job and it's a long established job, they will resist till hell freezes over that they should not have to use certain equipment or mop and things like that. And the psyche of the employer and of men on the job matches the resistance of the women, and they're going to find some way, even though there's equal pay, they're going to find some way of keeping those women doing the lighter work, where there is a differential in pay. And this is still under scrutiny of the courts and the board and.... all we have said was that if there is a differential in pay, women must be allowed an opportunity if they want to try for those higher paid jobs. Now we do have some places where we have some female buffers and waxers and they're perfectly happy doing it. One girl came in early one morning and she really had a grievance.



NEAL: They took her....she was working in Dulles Airport, and they took her waxing machine away from her, and you know, she didn't want to do anything else. But until this time there is still a general reluctance on the part of everyone to require women to do certain jobs. It's almost like an unwritten law that "Thou shall not do it."

INTERVIEWER: And women who want to do it are still having problems depending on which . . .

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And how long they've been at the job.

NEAL: Yeah. We have had....well, there....I can recall one job very vividly where we had a woman who is now in her sixties and she's been employed twenty-eight, twenty-nine years, and they wanted her to carry trash out in barrels and put it in dumpsters and some other jobs that she just didn't feel that she be asked to do. The sort of compromise that we made with management was that if these longtime employees did, you know, resist doing these jobs, that they should not be required to do 'em and they should not be hassled. But any new employees who are hired, if after they have been given the job description and if they take the job on that basis, then they should, you know, they could be required to do whatever they hired on to do. We had one male shop steward that works in that same shop just two weeks ago appear screaming all over the place about if women are going to get the same pay that we get, then they should carry their own trash and we shouldn't have to go by and pick up their trash and take it to dumpsters and things like that. So we haven't started to win the whole battle yet.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, okay, go on to another area unless there's anything else you wanted to say about that....When you first became secretary-treasurer of the union, from what you said it doesn't seem like you really envisioned the job to be what it ended up being, and along that line, did you feel capable of doing that work and did you like having all that responsibility?

NEAL: No, I didn't envision the job. I didn't envision taking on all the responsibilities that later came. I didn't come on....you see, when I came to the job, the local had just been put under trusteeship and I had come on as a clerk in the office, and things were so very bad. And they had let the former secretary-treasurer stay on for a period of time and she was the wife of the former president, but they needed some kind of continuity and then they had her leave also, so that left no one there who knew what was going on except me. So I guess the International was sort of in a bind at that time.

INTERVIEWER: So you came on expecting kind of routine job.



NEAL: Although I was looking forward to coming to work for the union. Did I tell you before how I came to the union?

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Through the window cleaners . . .

NEAL: Well, I didn't come through there, it was because I was angry about the window cleaners on the job that I was working. But I was actually referred there from the employment service and I had several other offers at places at that time. I could have gone back to the government or any number of things, but I was really so disturbed about the window cleaners, and I knew it wasn't the same union but....I had also told you that I had been active with the United Public Workers in the government and coming from West Virginia and everything, so I did look forward to it. The job really wasn't paying what some other jobs that were available to me were paying because it wasn't paying but twenty-three dollars a week, but at that time I think was just looking for the challenge of working with the union, and that was the main reason that I accepted the job. I certainly didn't anticipate all of the things that I would be doing. I didn't realize that when I went that I was going into a fireball situation that the union had just been placed under trusteeship, and I was part of a long line of people who had held this job, and some of 'em only for a couple of hours and some for a half a day, [laughing] two days, . . .

INTERVIEWER: How did the membership feel about you when you first came one since they had had such a rough history of people taking that position?

NEAL: I don't think they were ever....until about that point, I don't think they were ever really aware of what was going on. I mean, I don't think they were....I guess this was all part of the problem. They had meetings when the president wanted them to have meetings, which was practically never. They couldn't even come and talk about their contracts or anything. So, at that point, any change would have been better than what they had, and of course, during that first year, the trustees were down from New York and the acting trustee had a lot of time on his hands so he was able to make a lot of shop visits that hadn't been done in perhaps the whole existence of the union. So they were getting much more attention than they had ever gotten before and I started early doing newsletters, things like that, and they had not been used to getting mail, so the whole thing was an involvement that they hadn't been used to.

INTERVIEWER: So you thought that it was very important that at the very beginning to get the membership involved in the . . .

NEAL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: At that time who was actually in the office of the union? Was it helping . . .?



NEAL: There were three of us. There was the...well actually the acting-trustee, because the trustee only came occasionally and the former secretary-treasurer and myself.

INTERVIEWER: So the former secretary-treasurer stayed on after you . . .

NEAL: Yes, she was on for a couple of months, about three months I guess.

INTERVIEWER: So there was....there were no business agents or anything like that?

NEAL: [tape interference]

INTERVIEWER: How does it, did the shops get organized at all?

NEAL: Uh, well, I guess he did it or didn't happen. There were a few people, like we had a few members who were with him almost from the beginning and they shifted over very well, and spent a lot of time laughing about some of the things that went on. But there was a much closer knit group than we have now. There was now, the first few years they, you know, you could almost....you couldn't ask 'em to do anything that they really didn't try to do. We started having picnics and a lot of things had started drawing people in and some of those people are still in the nucleus of what we've got going now.

INTERVIEWER: It seems that a lot of the activities that you did in the earlier days involved the family members also.

NEAL: Yeah. Well, see it was in late, it was in '47, I think, when the window cleaners and Local 192 moved into our union hall, and then the International merged 192 which was mostly hospital workers and apartment workers into 82, and when they did that, that's when they appointed Bailey as president of 82.

INTERVIEWER: You were already secretary.

NEAL: Yeah. Well, no actually I was functioning, but the real appointment came almost simultaneously with that....you know, well, you'll continue to serve as you are and, you know, be available....with a strike situation at, over in Fairlington, Virginia, and then we had taken, I guess, at that time the fellow that was involved with 'em. That's when we got charged with the communist activity thing and so we didn't get our autonomy then, and we went through, we went all together, we went through almost eight years of trusteeship. But under those last four, five years, the trustee did nothing except come in, sign checks, and say, "If you need me, you know how to find me," and, you know, you all just run the union. Well, that was unwieldy and now we started talking to members that, you know, we needed our autonomy and that we needed the back-up of people who were going to be officers so we started working on that and they really didn't have any reason for, you know, not granting us our autonomy. Everything was cleared out but we just



NEAL: went into one phase after another and when it was time for us to hold our first election neither Bailey nor myself had any opposition and I have never had opposition during the whole thirty-one years that I've been with the organization.

INTERVIEWER: [tape interference]

NEAL: [laughing] But I guess I involved myself more with members and their problems and communications. Now that was sort of how we divided up the things that we would do. I mean, Bailey did most of the negotiating and most of the grievances, but then we started taking on additional staff.

INTERVIEWER: So when you first had your first election, or between the time you merged and had the first election, had the staff increased much?

NEAL: We had to, I guess. We had taken on one, I think we had taken on one person at that time.

INTERVIEWER: One person and Bailey.

NEAL: Yes. But we didn't have, I don't think we ever exceeded three other people for business agents-organizers. But we did take on another person in the office and then we took on another one, so I guess we have had, oh for a long time, I guess there were three people on the office staff, something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Was the union at that time....was this the CIO union . . .

NEAL: Hm . . .

INTERVIEWER: Was it CIO or . . .

NEAL: It was AFL.

INTERVIEWER: And your first election was in what year?

NEAL: Uh, I don't....it wasn't until, I don't know, what was in the fifties.... it was '52 or something like that.

INTERVIEWER: There seems to be a division of labor between what you did and what Bailey did.

NEAL: Uh-huh.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever want to do any....I mean, was that all your choice?

NEAL: Uh-huh. Well, you know, actually even when I sort of felt forced to come in here in '73, it wasn't by choice. I've never, I've never, I never had the ambition really to be president. I liked doing other things but it was just a question of the right thing to do. Now like when we merged with Local 536, of course, I was on leave of absence working for the AFL-CIO and I just knew that I



NEAL: could not continue to donate my services as secretary-treasurer because I did those things in all kind of odd hours at night: three and four o'clock in the morning I was up doing books, and all that was on a volunteer basis for that time for the union. I knew that there was no way that I was gonna be able to do that with the merged organization, and we were trying to put together a merger agreement where at least both unions would have sort of equal footing as far as officer representation. And that's when Bailey became secretary-treasurer of 82, and I accepted the vice-president slot. But I really had no....and if I had my, oh, what would we say in West Virginia, if I had my druthers, I would druther be doing some other things right now. Except that I find myself having to do those as well as these others. No, I just think that the other services that you give to a membership of a local union are just as important as the bread and butter issues. Somebody needs to do those things, and you need the kinds of things that pull people together to some feeling of grouped thing. People feel closeness to lodges and they feel a closeness to clubs and churches, but by and large you only have just a handful of people who feel that same kind of commitment to a union. And I think having that is really part of a life blood of a union.

INTERVIEWER: And you seem to have felt that from the very beginning. What made you feel that way, intuition that was right or did you have any models to go by?

NEAL: No. But I talked to people and when you start feeling the needs people had....you know, there were many, many lonely people who came to the union office and they start telling you about their problems and they just know that there's something else that you have to do for them....We have had times during the years when we've had to make the funeral arrangements for members and there's nobody to do those kinds of things, and all the kinds of personal things that, you know, absolutely are out of the normal realm of what a union has to do, but you do them. Not because of a public relations kind of thing, but I guess you get more, do more, public relations-wise by doing them than you do when getting a contract that's got a decent wage in it, because it's, those are the kinds of things that people seem to remember.

INTERVIEWER: Is this more important for a union that's got a large percentage of women, like your union, or do you think it's basically kind of guidelines for any, the way things should be done, with any union?

NEAL: I think that we've had to do as many things for men as we have for women. But, I am sure that's because a lot of women are quite self-reliant and a lot of men aren't. And they look out for, reach out from someplace sometimes beyond home for one reason or another for added help or for strength or something. So I think that our services are, you know, may be even more important to men than women. Sort of crazy . . .

INTERVIEWER: But what I was almost thinking of, it's just really almost that, like a union like Steelworkers or something that really have their priorities.



NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Or along....I mean, it seems that the directions that you might go into in two different kinds of unions . . .

NEAL: Well, it could be. It could be this type or could be maybe not just exclusively service employees, but maybe more service if you start thinking about some of the unions that are almost service, like hotel people. I think it would be hard to operate unions such as ours where traditionally pay is low and all other conditions are marginal, I think you have to do more for people there than you might in higher income brackets. And maybe that might be more the difference than the fact that they're male or female. It's what the economic thing bears.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel in the work that you did, that you weren't able to do a job that you were faced with?

NEAL: I feel that way everyday, what do you mean? [laughing] Every day. You know, sometimes the something comes down the road you almost get panicky, "I'll never be able to do it." I don't think those things will ever change.

INTERVIEWER: But overall you have the self-confidence that you can handle it?

NEAL: No. I don't have that kind of confidence, I wish I did. You know, it's sort of difficult because I think I come through to most people in a different way. Essentially I'm not a social creature, but there's certain things that I know that you have to do, and I try to do those things, things just as simple as even going to dinners and things like that. Now there's nothing in the world that I hate more than going out, and I used to actually become physically sick, sometimes to keep from going. When I realized that was why this was happening and that this is something you have to do, you have to go, you have to shake hands, you have to speak to people and you have to smile; so you go and you shake hands and you smile and, you know, you do it. So it's not as hard now as it used to be to do these things. There are negotiations that are, I just think, well, I'll never live through 'em, I just can't possibly live through them. And after you twist and turn and stay awake most of the night you grab up your little bag in the morning and you go and you sit down. You make it through. But everyday, you know, you feel inadequate for the job. Everyday, when I look around me and, you know, maybe if I were a little more organized or maybe if I could, you know, knew how to carve out my time better, I'd get to these things. But I'll leave here and never will have gotten to them. That's why I say that even if I'd leave 'em, if I don't see any way out, I might run again if my health would let me and naturally I'd have to live to do it. But I would much rather give this job now to someone else when it's time for the next election and stay on with the local maybe pulling together committees and groups and outreach. I would enjoy doing that, but I don't want the buck to keep stopping. Maybe I'm just



NEAL: lazy that way, but I don't want it to....but if I have to do it, I'll do it. But, as I think a lot of people think of me as being an extrovert and very much involved with everything, but when I really examine myself, I'm more of an introvert than an extrovert. You just do what you have to do. I don't....and that's really, I guess, the reason that I don't feel the exhilaration over being the president of a local, that maybe some other women think that I should feel. Now, I just feel there's a job to do and you do it, and I don't feel that, you know, it's maybe if I had had competition for the job and that kind of challenge....there have been members who have come to me for years, and suggested that I run against Bailey for president. The international union proposed that to me, that we switch jobs here and said because Bailey just didn't have enough rapport with the people, and that's what they wanted me to do and I flatly refused to do it. Now....and so when they were going to remove Bailey, I said, you put in too many years, you know, I'm just not about to, you know, that way. And they threatened they would, you know, they knew they didn't have any reason to put a trustee over us, but they suggested that maybe they would put an overseer, this was before the prior president that left. And you know, you have to do whatever you have to do, but I don't have to stay there, and so I guess this, with my having given them that ultimatum, they decided they'd let us alone.

INTERVIEWER: So under what circumstances did you finally become president?

NEAL: When....well, only because I came in when Tucker walked out, as a first vice-president, to see what I could pull together to hold the organization together until something else could happen. Then I was with HRDI and they gave me a month's leave to come in, then I asked for an extension on that, and this was, what, July 1973, I guess and that was an election year. So, when October came, there was still, didn't appear any way out, and my leave that had been granted was about to go out the window. And so I decided well, I'll just stay on, so then I ran for president in '73, and was elected.

INTERVIEWER: So at that time you ran because you felt that that's what you had to do.

NEAL: I had to do it. You know, Lyn, I saw so many years, you know, the most productive years of my life in this organization, and you know, how are you going to say, well, you know, that's not my bag? I was doing better with the AFL-CIO than I was, you know, here as far as money and other personal benefits were concerned, and even not.... oh, wasn't nearly as much work, but you just don't see things go down. Now I know this, that had I not been around, somebody would have picked up something, but at that time there just didn't seem to be....You know, at this time there doesn't seem to be and that's why I've tried to be heavy on training and education. I know that



- NEAL: a lot of people feel, well, you know, if all these people find out all there is to find out, there goes my job. But I can't do all this unless somebody can help me, unless I can get somebody ready to step in my shoes, you know, then I'm still strapped in here. I don't want it. You know, I'm committed to doing the best job that I'm capable of doing, you know, while I'm doing it, but it's not from a real matter of choice.
- INTERVIEWER: I want to get back to one thing that you said before about a lot of women in D.C. really I guess feeling that you're single in your position as . . .
- NEAL: Well you know, a lot of people express, you know, "oh my goodness." You know, you're one of the few people, but I've been one of the few people all along so I don't feel any great difference, you know. I've been a symbol sort of out here for the labor movement. During the time that there were very few women who were really active and there were certainly very few black women that you could really count that was really involved in labor. In so many places that, in so many things that I've served on representing labor, I stood or sat alone both as representative or from all three as a representative of labor, as a woman, and as black, and so this is just, you know, just one more. So maybe I don't feel that same kind of thing that some people expect, seem to expect me to feel. I've been through the whole spectrum of . . . [laughing]
- INTERVIEWER: Then you felt that something you've been able to offer younger people in the way that you've either been a symbol or a model for what young people can do, have you ever felt that?
- NEAL: I don't know, but I have now. This is what I said to people, and maybe only women incidentally, but with a lot of black kids or Spanish kids coming up in some programs, you know, like [tape interference] or IC ,...that coming into the labor movement, and getting a card isn't enough. You know, until you are in policy-making positions and until you work where the action is, you really aren't getting anywhere. And you've just got to be there where the policy is made and where the decisions are made, and you've got to learn to come up through there. I've tried to put a lot of emphasis on that with, you know, A.Phillip Randolph and all around, and I really believe that. And I think unless women are just not placid, and they're going to get in there, but there is some emergence now, and that's very gratifying. Not enough and I'm not totally an activist because I guess I've just not been, it's hard for me to explain, I guess I just have not been that thinking all along, I'm a woman doing this, and so because I'm a woman I've got to push this. I've always been so much more concerned on what the issue is and getting that issue done than thinking about what I am.



INTERVIEWER: Isn't that partially because you haven't had that much resistance or been, not been discriminated against in that manner from what you tried to do?

NEAL: Well, I guess the most resistance that I have really been able to feel or discern in my whole life in the labor movement might have been when I was being proposed to be the executive director or secretary or something of the central labor council and that got to be a very sticky situation. I was able to feel the animosities and that was funny too, because I really would have, I wouldn't now, but there was a time when I think that if I had my choice of where I would have liked to have worked, it would have been for the central labor council because I really believe in the strength of unions, and the program that they can put on to be a power in the city. I still believe that, but it really didn't matter to me whether I was that person enough and I don't think they really understood that. I kept proposing that that's what the council needed, and because nobody like a president had time to do all of the things that need to be done for the gathering of information: research, the contact with other organizations, or anything, you know, it's just impossible. But somewhere along the line my name got proposed and it got proposed when I was out in Chicago at an HRDI meeting and by the time I got back in town, you know, the whole labor movement was now talking like crazy.

INTERVIEWER: If you had been around would you have declined?

NEAL: No. I wouldn't have declined, in fact, I came back before the vote was taken. But I think that it was real funny. You see, the officers were fighting it, and I think that they thought the way the thing was proposed that I was gonna be a threat to Modden Bonn and his job as a COPE [Committee on Political Education] director. It wasn't designed that way at all, but that was one of the great fears that they had. I think I spent more time laughing at them than anything else. But I think that was the great thing that I felt, that here's really a fine going on . . .

INTERVIEWER: Do you think part of the resistance towards you at that point was because you were a woman?

NEAL: I think so. I think it was, but I think that anybody who had been proposed by the person who proposed it, 'cause Phil Doraty had proposed....I don't know whether you know Phil or not. Phil was very close to J.C. Turner and there was animosities between he and the leadership. He was called the leadership, we were all part of the leadership, I guess it's funny way to say it, but you know, the president and all, said that. So, maybe anyone who had been proposed would have experienced some animosity because they would have felt that person, too, would have been a threat and so it was partly part of it. But I could pick out different people that I could tell where they were coming from. I sort of knew those who were doing it because I was black. I sort of knew those who were doing it, if any woman had come up, and those who were doing it not on



- NEAL: the basis of either of those things, but on the fact of who had introduced it. It was an interesting thing, but that's the time, you know, they got my tires and everything. [laughing]
- INTERVIEWER: What happened?
- NEAL: Oh dear. They even did my tires and....so you know, it had gotten that intense, but I saw them come with their Robert's Rules of Order and sit there in the meeting with them out so that if anything got in they'd be able to undo that. It was real interesting.
- INTERVIEWER: In one of the other interviews with you, you mentioned that in the times that you've lived, and the changes that you've seen during these years, that you were glad that you were born both a woman and a black. You just kind of stated it then, can you expand on it a little bit?
- NEAL: Well, you know how I've always gotten involved in everything, and I just don't feel that I would have had the same kind of appreciation for the changes that took place. You know, I think this has been one of the most....there've been bloodier ones, but I don't think there's ever been such a revolution in people's thinking and actions and anything, at least in our country's history. I just think it's been an exciting time to have lived in, and I think that, I guess everybody sort wishes for youth because that seems to be where the action is. Once you've reached a certain age that you don't have as much to look forward to as the road you've already traveled. I just can't imagine having had the sort of depth or appreciation of all that has gone on had I not been black to have really understood what they're talking about, and being able to see somewhat from both sides of the fence, you know? I've lived enough in a white world to have some appreciation for that thinking, and of course, totally [laughs], you know, in the black world to know I have might have had all the experiences that some have had to lead them to their way of thinking. So I think I've sort of been....you know, while I'm active as but somewhat of a realist, and certainly to have seen the whole emergence of women and their acceptance in the world as human beings. I just think it's been a very exciting time, but I just keep....I think one time I'm going to get The Inheritance and really learn that movie a little bit more, because it's one of the things that I quote an awful lot, about freedom and how each generation has to fight for it and win it for itself. I can see the things that I got involved with, that everyone thought was way out. And then you go through that period in the sixties and then you see where we are now, and I really believe we've got to put a mixture of some of it back together again or we're really lost. I firmly believe that one of the missing ingredients in this whole thing is love. I think it's family love that's really missing, and I don't care, I've just went through a period where I just felt so sorry for young people, I don't know what to do. Because it just seemed as though they had nothing to lean on, and it wasn't a racial thing, I mean I felt just so sorry for those kids that became the flower kids and everything, because they just really hadn't....



NEAL:

everything became so materialistic, and people were so busy doing those things that they just didn't have time to, or take time, or thought it was something to really put their arms around, or tell a child "I love you." So, you know, as long as you've got a car or as long as you got anything that anybody else had, you know that was supposed to satisfy you. And I just think that there's got to be some kind of mixture or the wheel has to go back around and interweave again. But it's been, it's been exciting and I feel the same way about the labor movement. The many things that had I not become involved with this, I would never have experienced or would have never been given an opportunity to experience. I just can't think of any other field where I would have had as much opportunity or the satisfaction of having done something. You take your....sometimes the things that I guess people think that you ought to be satisfied with, or you ought to feel exhilarated about, may not come, but sometimes you take your things in little victories....that sort of build up, that make it worthwhile. Like, we got that Baltimore-Washington Airport dumped in our laps, and we had no idea how we were going to come out of it, you know, the people or anything. When we were able to save those people's seniority and get some other things back, that was a satisfaction. 'Cause you know, you've saved something for fifty people that they would never have had had you not been in the picture at the time.

If I had more time I would spend more time at the theater, I love the theater. I like to sew, and I like to....I can do not so much....but I crochet a lot, I like crossword puzzles, I like to read. I used to be quite active in church, but I sacrifice a lot of that, too. I said I'm doing my missionary work on the side. So I'm not that involved in that. About all the other time that I can squeeze in any place I squeeze in with my little niece and she'll take up every weekend that she can take up. So that's really where most of my free time goes now.

INTERVIEWER:

Have you ever felt any conflict between your outside activity like your labor committees from the union, I mean you've been involved in a lot of different kinds of organizations. Have you felt pulled in conflicts between that and the union work?

NEAL:

No, because most of the things that I have been involved with are things that I have gone into because of my union activity.

INTERVIEWER:

[tape interference] I know that, and it's local that Theresa's the only woman organizer in. Do you think having mostly men in these roles produces any different dynamics with the membership ratings?

NEAL:

No.

INTERVIEWER:

No difference at all.

NEAL:

No. She is as effective as any of the male business agents are and in most instances, more effective. I guess when you talk about



NEAL: detail, perhaps she pays more attention to detail things and in union work, especially the legal aspects. That's as important as some of the other things that you do, because more and more that's what you see on the bottom line, what the legal thing turns out to be.

INTERVIEWER: Would you want to have more women in those positions?

NEAL: I would. You know, it really wouldn't make any difference to me whether they were men or women. I wish some of the current staff would put some of it into it that Theresa puts in. Now Theresa doesn't know all the answers, you know, she's fairly new at it, too, but there is an intensity there that some of the others don't have. But if they had some of that or somebody else had, I really wouldn't care. I don't think that....you know, it wouldn't really matter.

INTERVIEWER: And it doesn't really make a difference on the membership?

NEAL: Doesn't appear to.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. I know that in something like the labor movement, that there's like special camaraderie developed by activists who've been around a long time. Who would you say are people you have been especially close to and who haven't, you know, maintained good relations with?

NEAL: Well, I might have already told you this. Half the time I don't remember what I've said.

INTERVIEWER: I'm keeping tabs.

NEAL: [laughing] But I think that the person who would have the greatest influence on me without a doubt has been J.C. Turner and we still maintain that kind of relationship even though he's now the person at the International and on the executive board and the AFL and all that. But there are a number of people that, you know, I still feel pretty close to, and they're from different organizations. I've met them sometimes under different circumstances, like Markley Roberts, who's at the AF of L-CIO. I first knew Mark pretty well when we were in Democratic Central Committee politics, and it was just sort of incidental that we were coming out of the labor movement, knowing, of course, when we were sitting down at the Mayor's office yesterday when Gene Hubbard who is with the Teamster's Union came in. It was like old hometown week again, and the fact that all that goes down, there's still so many people there that are good friends. There are also a lot of new people who are on the scene now, and some of them you find yourself making up alliances and closeness to. But there are a number of them from the old days that you do, you just keep feeling....especially when you know when one of them dies along the way that you've really lost part of the circle. But people that I haven't....you know, I'm wondering where are they? Do you know Lee Stanley?



INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NEAL: You know, I don't see Lee. I don't know what's happened to her. I don't know, sometimes, I think that you always have to have an oldtimer's get-together or something. [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: You know, I've noticed that people I've met in different areas, especially people involved in labor education, everyday I meet, everybody knows who you do involve, good friends, and work closely together, you know . . .

NEAL: Yeah. Something.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. When I asked about the labor movement and women and what you feel, if you thought the labor movement has responded to women....and what you think is needed . . .

NEAL: Well, there I go again . . . [tapping the desk]

INTERVIEWER: You've been pretty good through this conversation. [both laughing]

NEAL: Have I? There seems to be two groups of women in their relationship with unions, and they're entirely different. When you start talking about people who are staff people, who work for unions, I think they get kicked around by and large as much as women do in any industry going. And they seem to be the people who are most frustrated. If you take the people who are rank and filers, I guess, if you want to call them that, I believe that some of them could make more strides than they make, but they don't want to get involved in politics in their unions. I think we got, we really have two problems. Now I don't know really how you solve the employer-employee relationship as far as women in unions are concerned. But I know that most labor men that have reached that level, like an International level, to have women move or any number of women move into those power positions, you know, would be worse than a dose of castor oil to them. They don't have any real political moves that they can make to change that situation.

INTERVIEWER: They, meaning who?

NEAL: Women.

INTERVIEWER: Women.

NEAL: They have a little better chance if they're still on, say, like on the clerical line where they can fight as a unit. Once they have to go, once they have moved to a sort of semi-administrative level, then the war is on. And they're out of the unit and they've got something that they've got to play or they just don't get any further. And I think they've got real problems. And I don't know how far they will get mixing their problems with the problems of people who come out of local unions who are members of those unions, and have some other mechanisms if they would organize to



NEAL: move up. I think, and I really should not criticize, and I really shouldn't speak as though I know because I just have not had the time to get that involved with the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), but offhand I think that that's one of the problems that they have. They're mixing these two sets of women together, and their problems aren't the same. Somehow or other they've got to be separated, to really make it. Now the people who are members of unions, they really have to, they need to use some real political strategies. And it would do well for them to get involved in politics to know it's played, in order to get in some of those positions. But they don't seem to want to do that. You can almost, you can't even force 'em, you know, to really push, that's rare. They do have an opportunity to move up. But I don't think that, except where it relates to other people, I don't think the philosophies of men in the labor movement really differ from the philosophies of men in other lines of work or any other businesses. You might find a rare creature here and there and in any of 'em but, a lot of it, you know, is just lip service in my way of thinking.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that it should be different especially in something like the labor movement because, I mean the labor movement . . .

NEAL: It ought to be different.

INTERVIEWER: I mean more than anything else. The commitment for its workers should be passed along.

NEAL: Your workers, not my workers. That's what they say, you know, or your workers ought to be different and you ought to give them a chance, and they'll fight for it and they're obligated to fight for it. They're unions where women are involved...well, even if they're not involved to any degree, they're supposed to use affirmative action programs to see that they get into those unions. They might fight for that, but when it comes down to their own administration, I really don't think that it differs too much from the philosophy of men anywhere. I hope I'm judging them wrong.

INTERVIEWER: So you think things would have changed if a lot more women got into what you said, policy-making positions in the union?

NEAL: Oh yes. I do. I do. I feel, but of course, women were going through the same kind of things that blacks went through. You're still going to have...you don't hear of the black caucuses at the conventions and things as much as you used to, you're still talking about your women's caucuses. But until you reach the point where you either have, oh, and I'm not against caucuses, but whether they're regional caucuses or something like that, and all creatures are part of that, you've still got a problem. You know, as long as they're thinking that, here they come, we've got a different set of problems. But we ought to get those problems worked on and be organized and come in with them and know where we're going.



NEAL: In enough time, you come in united. I don't think we're, I don't think we've done it, and it's what I hear of a lot of unions. The same problem is all over. They've got few here on executive boards, but just like blacks, they need someone to sit on the board by the door, to show, you know, yeah, here she is. But it's known. They put you way around the corner some place where you don't really, you do your job, but you don't really get involved with all the rest of the stuff that's going on, you know, once you get there. I think that the full integration of women might even be more difficult than the full integration of blacks, even though both of 'em are invisible, sometimes you're not so sure. [laughing] There's some psychological hangups that men and women have on the role of women, that are going to be hard to overcome. I mean, when you've got so many women themselves, just look at some of the stuff that's going on with the ERA now, and, you know, especially the Mormon group, and all those people, how anti-women persons they are . . .

INTERVIEWER: Had you always been in favor of the ERA?

NEAL: Have I always been in favor. Yeah. I've never really had problems even though they've posed some naughty things as far as, you know, down on the bargaining level as far as shifts are concerned and overtime. In that area especially, there've been problems. I've never experienced a lot of problems as far as bargaining for equal pay. I haven't had that, and we've, you know, we are right jammed up about what women ought to do and what their jobs really ought to be in this industry, but I don't have any hangups with the ERA, never have had.

INTERVIEWER: I know for a long time the labor movement was opposed to . . .

NEAL: I'm not. I've never had any hangups with it.

INTERVIEWER: If you had your ideal of what you would like specifically done for women in the union, you know, either in what your ideal contract situation would be...or what would be...do you have any visions of...the maximum rights, like, you know, maternity leave or things like that. Do you have any thoughts on that?

NEAL: Well, I have advocated not signing 'em, except when I have to, straight maternity clauses for years. I guess going back into the forties, in our contracts with George Washington University, it said that if any female person becomes pregnant she shall be granted, and I said this is discriminatory, been saying that twenty years. My position is if anybody becomes pregnant they ought to have, be entitled to those benefits. I think that maternity is a disabling period for the productivity of work, and so is having a heart attack, so is having your leg broken, or anything like that. The same kind of disability provisions ought to be included whether you're male or female. Maternity is just one of those disabling things. My basic argument on maternity rights is if you are due any benefits after a certain period of



NEAL: time, I don't say that you....but you should be accruing anything past a certain time. I think it's unfair to an employer to say, you've got to keep this person on a payroll. But certainly they ought to be able to return to work after having used whatever benefits are there for sickness, that they come back with full seniority and things like that. But I really, don't sign just straight maternity if I can help it. I prefer whenever I can get it in there to talk about it being disability.

INTERVIEWER: What about issues like more personal or sick leave being used for family.

NEAL: Yeah. Well, no, I have been trying to say for years that the labor movement is going to have to take and they are somewhat now, a whole new look at fringe benefits. It's more, and it's very pertinent in our industry, people only have limited time off and where its largely a part-time industry, they ought to be able to take a day with a day that they get on another job. So, I keep leaning toward lumping together leave whether it be sick or annual, holidays, personal days, birthday, whatever, and let it be used more on demand. I don't think it would be any added, real added expense, perhaps it will be less expense to an employer because normally if a person is out somebody else picks up that work or it's there for person to pick up when they back. A lot of times they just detail somebody to do it, where if you have days that are specifically cut out, that employer, you've got to build that in your budget. I would think that it would be a sort of boon to an employer to use it the other way. I'm definitely in favor of flexi-hours for women, well for anybody, but especially for women. I know that that's what I would really....the kind of thing that I would really prefer. See, I'm sort of....now I can get up and I can go, if I have to be somewhere at five o'clock in the morning, you know I'll wake up in time to get up and go at five o'clock in the morning. Or you take any hour, but normally I'm a slow starter in the morning, and I've just gotta read something and look at something and pick at something, do something and by the time I do all those things then my energy has come, and I'm able to go to work. I don't care if I do work late, and I guess people who have, you know, obligations and times to fit in, if they didn't have to worry about not being able to meet those things, they probably be more productive workers from the time they're on the job. I don't think that employers are ready to make a lot of concessions for women yet. It's sort of a thing if we don't do this, then we'll keep them home where they belong, kind of mentality.

INTERVIEWER: It's hard to believe that they still have those attitudes.

NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: One other thing about issues like that, in your union, has there ever been the issue of transportation or women being sexually harassed by, you know, either the foreman or . . .



NEAL: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: In transportation, particularly at nighttime . . .

NEAL: This is one reason that a lot of women spend much more of their income for transportation than they would normally have to, because of the fear they feel getting out in the streets at night. They have been attacked. There used to be a shift, I guess in going back to the part of an earlier conversation, there was a shift that changed from the eleven to seven, to one that went something like five o'clock in the evening, till one or two o'clock in the morning. I know our union fought that strenuously and it didn't stay around too long because that was throwing people, women out in the street primarily when the normal transportation had stopped and they had to arrange for something else or just be stuck out there. That was in the early sixties, that was, and fifties, too. That was a shift that was pretty prevalent, where women were taking cabs from Southeast Washington, you know, and to inner city and on jobs where it takes an hour of their work on just to pay for that cab fare one way. You know, it's a little ridiculous. If they have cars where they can drive, most of them go to work before the day workers really leave buildings and they can park there. And it's too early for them to park on the street, you know, and transportation is something else.

Now in New York, 32J has given a special wearing gear to women who are cleaners in the buildings so that they can be easily identified at night by policemen and other people who are there looking out for them, and the cab drivers are supposed to be making a special effort if they get hailed to pick them up so they have felt a little safer from the muggings and things like that. Now we haven't really reached that proportion here. What happens with a lot of women, they have someone who comes and picks them up at night and maybe take two or three people like that, but there is a disproportionate....I think that's my greatest thing, some of them have been....we've had rapes and both in the street and in the buildings and we've had all these Elizabeth Ray cases and everything. We've had to have supervisors removed, and you know, it still goes on and some of it is hard to really tell how much has been started by the woman in the beginning by way of easier assignments and things like that in which things have initiated from men. Sometimes the testimony gets pretty fuzzy but we know we have some of these....companies have supervisors on that if anybody rebuffs their advances they're in deep trouble. It's just one other thing we sort have to keep telling the women that you don't have to go through this in order to do your work. So often they won't tell us that these things happen. They say, "Yeah, well, I'll just turn 'em off, you know." You don't hear about some of the things that's happening till you come down to a termination of employment and then they start pouring it all out, and then sometimes that's too late because they will say this is just a retaliatory action, and these things should have been reported early in the game. It's just another one of the delicate areas you're constantly faced with.



- INTERVIEWER: Okay. I've one last question. If you had to live your life over again, [laughing] would you've chosen to do the same things or would you've gone in the same direction?
- NEAL: I can't envision anything that I would have gotten more inner satisfaction from than this. Really, there would have been only one other area that I think I might have enjoyed and that might have been in the theater. I think I would have liked that.
- INTERVIEWER: In your early New York . . .
- NEAL: Yeah, I don't know whether I would have been any more adept at that than I am at this. I guess when you get down to it you have to have your share of playacting in the dramatics in this in order to be effective as a negotiator sometimes. [laughing] You know, I think I ought to play the whole spectrum of things from gladness to sadness. Other than that, and I've done quite a few jobs and those that I have done and I know that unless I would have been able to have gotten in some more academic work that there are a number of other jobs that I might have thought about, would have been close to me anyway. I have not felt particularly inadequate in this job because of a lack of academic training. I feel that I've held my own . . .
- INTERVIEWER: Okay, let me ask you another question. [Arline laughs] We talked earlier about the future and what you expected, what you would like to do would be step down in presidency but continue to work, is there anything else in your future plans?
- NEAL: No. I think more because of the physical handicaps that I'm now going over and I don't think my arthritic condition is going to improve to the point where I would want to do maybe some of the other things. I think that between here and [tape interference] gone through an awful lot of stuff and it's only when you pick up something and it brings back things you've even forgotten that existed. Once in a while, I haven't kept a lot of the things that I have written but sometimes I pick them up and I don't remember that I've written them and I read them over....I was involved in this and it looks like it's something that's coming out of a dream or something but just the things you've been involved with or the things that escaped from your mind for the moment until something brings it back. I guess getting ready for this anniversary thing will bring back a lot of things that have happened if we get working on the history. I don't know, I don't know how I say some things because I really feel that more women ought to be involved and I don't expect any one to feel as I feel because I'm me and somebody else is them, and everybody would be coming from some other angle. I get real frustrated when I don't see more women at conventions and other things that are going on. I wrote....the Labor Life insurance company puts out their booklet and they always do it up with pictures and I can't recall ever seeing a black in one of those pictures. I think I remember one time seeing a woman with a pad in her hand, so the last edition



NEAL: they sent, I had them write a note back on it to the effect that we were having a discussion as to whether or not any blacks had ever appeared in any of their reports and if they and if you have would you please send me a copy of the edition. [laughing]

INTERVIEWER: And you haven't seen a copy yet?

NEAL: And all of 'em laughed at me. [laughing] Certainly couldn't have been more than one, and then on next time through I'll take it through for women. But there are, there's some of these organizations and things that you just don't see 'em. And they just get ruled out, you know, strictly a man's world there. But I think that's why I get more frustrated when there is an opportunity and I can't get people to take advantage of it. We had our.... well, they had done it all behind closed doors before we went to the founding conference of our eastern conference for SEIU [Service Employees International Union] and they read the slate of officers and we have one woman and Rosemary brought in I don't know how many thousands of gas workers up in Pennsylvania. Rosemary was the only woman on the executive board and she was the secretary and I'm the only one in the whole conference that raised a question about the fact that many of us didn't know the officers that had been selected, and that we were going to elect and why was Rosemary on as the secretary. That's the only question that got asked about the whole conference, and some kind of weak stuff they came back with. But I asked Rosemary, you know, why did you accept it? But I think she's just anxious to be on the executive board, so she took it.

INTERVIEWER: And now they can say they had a woman.

NEAL: They have a woman and they have a woman with a pencil. I've been about the only woman, well, a couple of times we've had some other women but they've never stayed. I've been about the only woman that's ever been on that board, stayed on that board of all I've seen, and when the secretary wasn't there they always handed me the...."you can take the minutes." I said, "I just don't take minutes." I said, "I'll do the best I can, but I always get so involved in the discussion that I just don't take minutes." So, I wouldn't take minutes. I mean, I put some stuff down, I hope you can make it out. [laughing] These kinds of things, till they really got the message, 'cause I wasn't going to take 'em.

INTERVIEWER: I've been blessed with horrible handwriting.

NEAL: [laughing]

INTERVIEWER: No.... [laughing]

NEAL: [mumbling] I really don't mind doing anything for anyone, but you've got to stand up for causes. [laughing] You know, like I felt when I was working there at UPO, I worked much too fast, I



NEAL:

used to coalate like crazy, "got a rush job? Give it to Arline."  
I'm doing all the rush jobs. I finally realized that I was really  
doing those people I was working with an injustice, I'll take  
'em or I'd slow down. See, I've learned to do those things sometimes.



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