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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

and

THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

ELIZABETH NORD

Textile Workers' Union of America

by

Professor James Findlay

Gary Julik

Christian Simmons

Judy Smith

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

VITAE

ELIZABETH NORD

Born in 1902 in Lancashire, England, Elizabeth Nord came to Rhode Island at the age of ten, and four years later went to work in a Pawtuckett, Rhode Island textile mill. Her pro-labor family--her father had been a coal miner in Britain and her mother a weaver--were strong influences in her early life. One of her most vivid memories is the reaction of her British aunt to the presence of non-union workers in Rhode Island mills; in England all workers were unionized. She learned to weave from her mother--a common practice in the mill--and in the early thirties worked a 49-hour week, six nights a week.

Nord was active in the YWCA industrial clubs in Rhode Island. She attended many weekend conferences for young women workers, and through that program spent the summers of 1923 and 1924 at the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, and, in the following summer, at the Barnard School for Women Workers and Vineyard Shore School for Women Workers (one year course, 1930). In 1928 she joined the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) and six years later went to work as a full-time organizer. During her long years as a member of the TWUA, Nord has served as joint board manager and was elected as an Executive Board Member of the national union. She has only recently retired.

This interview, which focuses on Nord's early years, reveals what it was like for a working family to live in New England during the first decades of the 20th century. Nord also talks about her experiences organizing in Virginia in 1935 where she encountered hostile communities and employers.

Nord feels a great pride in her accomplishments as a union member, as a working woman, and as a weaver. She believes that belonging to the trade union movement allows one to develop a firm philosophy and principles about the labor movement and to better one's understanding of people's characters.

Oral History Interview

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November 12, 1975
Providence, Rhode Island

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NORD: When I first began working in the mills, I was fourteen years old. We were in Pawtucket, and my first job was the Royal Weaving Company as a quiller.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell us what a quiller is?

NORD: A quiller is, a quilling machine is the machine that fills the bobbins that are used in the shuttles on the loom. I worked there until I was fifteen years old. Because at that time the law, I think, didn't provide for children to work more than eight hours a day. Now I'm not very clear on that. I couldn't go to learn to weave with my mother, I think, until I could work longer hours. Which meant that I could go and "stand-in", as we called it, with her and learn to weave. And my mother was working at the Lorraine Mill.

INTERVIEWER: So there were other members of your family who were also working at the mill at the same time?

NORD: My mother was working in the mill, yes. I had a brother who was working in the Royal Weaving Company, and he was learning to do mule spinning which was a rather skilled type of work. Well, I learned to weave. My mother's mother also was a weaver in England. Of course, I was born in England. And so how many generations we were weavers beyond that I don't know. Probably because I came from the cotton mill district in Lancaster.

So then I learned to weave at fifteen at the Lorraine Mill. And I can't remember how long I stayed there-- perhaps a year or more. Then my mother thought it would be better for me to go and learn

NORD: to weave, to be a silk weaver.

INTERVIEWER: Now, why was that?

NORD: Cleaner work. Silk weavers earned more money. And, I guess she had the foresight to see that in the long run, this was a better kind of work. So I was very fortunate. I went to work in a mill in Central Falls, and there I learned silk weaving. The standards there were very high. So this was really excellent; this was very good training. After I left this shop-- once you had worked at this particular plant, Salembier and Clay, there was never any problem about getting another job. Because the employers in the city knew . . . oh there were many silk mills in the city at that time back in Central Falls . . . knew that any one coming from Salembier and Clay would really . . .

INTERVIEWER: What was different about them?

NORD: They wove a good quality silk fabric. And their quality standards were very high. This, and that you could let--as we used to say--very few imperfections go. As we used to say "go". That means pass.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Another thing, too. You said that there was a difference between weaving in silk and in cotton. I suppose it was cotton . . .

NORD: Wool.

INTERVIEWER: Woolen? Is that what you came from?

NORD: Wool. At the Lorraine Mill.

INTERVIEWER: What is the distinction? What is the difference?

NORD: Well,I guess it would seem to be obvious. Wool is a heavier fabric. If you have more imperfections in wool, they're not so likely to show up in, you know, in the finished process as they are in silk. Silk is very fine, some of it almost as fine as a hair. And in that time we used to manufacture really fine, very beautiful kinds of silk. But today you just . . .

INTERVIEWER: Can't find it.

NORD: "Can't hardly find any more," as some people say (laughter). So then I stayed in silk weaving, oh, until 1934. Now, because I had joined the union in 1928.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

NORD: You were interested in that.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I am. How did you get interested in the union?

NORD: Well, first of all, with my English background . . . you see, my father was a coal miner. And my mother, of course, was a weaver. And in those days, those early days . . . You see, when my mother learned her trade, and she would go into the factory--she might have been even younger than twelve years old--but even then you worked half-time . . . but I think you had to have your union card to even work half-time.

INTERIVEWER: In other words, you're saying that unions were already strong in England at the time your parents were working there.

NORD: Oh, yes. And the half-time meant that the youngster spent half a day learning his trade, and the other half a day going to school. Now, I don't know how long that went on, probably at least a year. But an aunt emigrating to this country -- I stopped in to see her -- I'd been off at summer school . But I stopped in to see her on the way home because I hadn't seen her since I was a child. And we talked about the work I was doing and the fact that some people didn't belong to the union in the factory, maybe half of them wouldn't. And she remarked, "Do you work with people who don't belong to the union?" She was really surprised at, you know, this kind of [thing] that long ago. "Do you work with people who don't belong to the union?"

So I worked until 1934 when the United Textile Workers asked me if I would become, if I would go to work for the union. They said they couldn't guarantee anything because--[as] I've explained to you earlier--they were [in] very poor circumstances. And they couldn't guarantee that I would have a permanent, well-paying job. I've forgotten how much they paid me when I first started, but I remember by 1935 I was getting twenty-five dollars a week. And at one point the union was pretty nearly broke. I was working in Maryland; Cumberland, Maryland. They asked me would I work two weeks on and one week off. Where am I gonna go on my week off from Maryland when I have no money? I can't go home to Rhode Island. The entire staff of the union was put on this lay-off basis.

Well, so it was pretty rough going for the union in those years, in my experience. From 1928 to 1934 and beyond, until I'd say 19....37, things were really pretty rough financially for the organization.

Well, prior to 1934-- I had joined the union in 1928 and . . .

INTERVIEWER: Can I ask you one question there? In 1928 was the union in the plant where you were working?

NORD: No.

INTERVIEWER: Well, how did you get interested in the union, then?

NORD: There had been a suggestion, later carried out, that the loom load per weaver be increased in the factory.

INTERVIEWER: Sort of a stretch-out type thing.

NORD: Then someone must have gotten [in] touch with the United Textile Workers, and a vice president of the organization, who was a very effective organizer, came down from New Hampshire -- Horace Revere. And he -- I'll never, never forget going out of the mill the night he appeared I worked the second shift. I was working then six nights a week. We worked Saturday night.

INTERVIEWER: What time did you start? The second shift?

NORD: Starting three o'clock. Three o'clock until eleven. But on Saturday night you worked until twelve o'clock, . . . because the eleven o'clock shift couldn't come in. So you made up the extra hour, so that was what? That was forty-nine hours in a week. Right up the road here on Roosevelt Avenue. Well, this was a very stormy night. I don't remember the time of year, a very stormy night, and the wind was blowing and the rain was coming down and there stood Horace Revere -- and I didn't know him -- handing out leaflets. And I thought, "My, my. . ." As I recall my thought was, "My, he means it! It really takes .... Gotta mean it, to be standing out in this kind of weather." I didn't realize then that years later I'd be doing the same thing myself.

Well, so then I was very impressed, and I joined the union. But that was not effective at all. I don't recall any activity or anything permanent developing as a result of this attempt.

INTERVIEWER: Why wasn't it effective?

NORD: Except that I joined the union. I don't recall, I don't know, but people weren't . . . I think it was the set-up. I think that what happened was that the trick that's used in many, and when I say trick [I mean] methods used, in many situations by employers: just close down the plant. And when they're good and ready, they'll open it. So that you're out of work for two, three, four or more months and, you know, there's no organization, and you

NORD: haven't had an organization, an effective organization. So this is, as I recall, what happened. So then you go back to work, amd your're on six looms instead of four. I had a little piece that I wrote about that particular time and what it meant to have your work load increased by fifty percent. I mean the physical strain.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do with that piece of material that you wrote? Was that to be used as a part of the literature that the union distributed to people?

NORD: No. This was something someone asked me to do some time later for some, I think it was the Women's Bureau.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

NORD: Perhaps I could make copy and send it to you if I find that I have it.

INTERVIEWER: Could I ask you this question? 1934 was the time you became a full-time organizer for the union? Is this true?

NORD: 1934.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do in the union? What was the role you palyed in the union between '28 and '34?

NORD: Well, I had joined the union then, and of course, for me it seemed a natural thing to do , regardless of whether the union was effective or it wasn't, or was growing or not growing. This, as I recall, didn't seem to be the important thing. The important thing for me was here was a union and I should belong to it. I suppose because it seemed. . . . I can remember my father being on strike as a coal miner. Then there was this always, never critical attitude in our home about unions. And I can remember the union used to have a man who'd go about collecting the dues. This was the old English system, where a man actually goes to the homes of the members and collects the union dues. Well, this man came to our house for years, I recall, and collected my dues. I went to meetings and, of course, these are some of the kinds of things sometimes you say. You sort of don't want to say seemingly critical sorts of things. But I can remember going to the union headquarters up here on Broad Street and sitiing on the stairs at the meeting time and waiting for somebody to come, and some nights nobody would come. I'd just be sitting there all by my little self.

NORD: And then I participated in the things that the union did. There would be a monthly meeting of the Rhode Island Textile Council--where there were groups, loom-fixers were organized, wool sorters were organized. I considered weaving a skilled occupation. But the weavers never effectively organized, or the other trades. One or two other trades, I think the slasher-tenders, the ones who prepare the warps for the mill, and the twisters who twisted the warps into the looms. there were, here and there, units of these occupations.

And so there would be an interesting meeting. And the vice president, Francis Gorman, would come into the meetings. So this was sort of education, so to speak, as to what was going on.

INTERVIEWER: Would he give you information about other parts of the country? Or would it be mostly just in New England?

NORD: The whole organization, and trade unionism in general. The loom-fixers, of course, had an effective organization. I don't know how far back that went. They were fairly effective.

INTERVIEWER: They were a separate union. Is that true?

NORD: They were a craft union, but within the United Textile Workers.

INTERVIEWER: I see. I see.

NORD: Part of them.

INTERVIEWER: Were the United Textile Workers connected with the AFL?

NORD: Yes. It was the old AF of L union. And I suppose you just hope someday that... [we thought] the loom-fixers were effective, and some of these other trades, and did bargain with the employer--there were no written union contracts; they'd bargain with the employer -- that perhaps this could extend itself to other crafts as well. So I participated in those things. Occasionally there were other kinds of mass meetings. Of course, they were the Depression years, and there would be mass meetings about various things. Oh, I remember a mass meeting about Mooney and Billings. Remember this Sacramento, or San Francisco affair? And I helped with the collection. Well, the collection, the money came in nickels and dimes, and I had to count the money. And I counted some of the nickels as dimes, and I reported the contribution amounted to such and such a thing, and it was only half that much. Oh, I was so embarrassed. I never forgot that.

NORD: Another interesting thing during that time, too. I'd been selected as secretary to some group or other that was doing something. I can't remember what.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the time of this, approximately?

NORD: Well, this is prior to, this is during the Depression years, you see, 1930, '31, '32.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Before Roosevelt comes into office.

NORD: Yes. Right. And I had been selected secretary to something or other- I can't remember what it was . . . But I arrived early at the Carpenter's Hall, which was a dumpy little place in Providence. And there, the business agent who was in and he was really a fine person, held in really high regard as long as he lived, and it's not too long ago that he died. "What you doin' with this thing?" he said. He says, "Why don't ya get out?" He says, "Ya know what's gonna happen to you." He says, "They'll knock the pins right out from under you." I suppose being a woman . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I want to ask you if there were any other women organizers.

NORD: No. But I never forgot that. And I said, "They're not gonna knock the pins out from under me." I mean, this was my attitude, and I don't think they ever did. But I thought that was really something.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a threat on his part? Or do you think he was being sympathetic to you?

NORD: Oh, no. No! He was sympathetic. And they all, I think if nothing else, they treated me just fine, all these old craft union gents. But I never forgot that. "They'll knock the pins right out from under you." And I thought to myself, "Nobody's gonna knock the pins out from under me." But I suppose I didn't know what he was talking about at the time.

INTERVIEWER: Did you learn what he meant later?

NORD: Yes. I think there's no question. Except that I think there will be very few times when actually this sort of thing happened to me in the movement.

INTERVIEWER: You don't feel there was much prejudice against you?

NORD: I think if you want to do something and are interested, you can just do it. This has always been my experience.

INTERVIEWER: 1934 . . .

NORD: Then '33, of course, there was a general strike in the silk, in my own industry.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting, because I've really concentrated on that strike of '34 and didn't realize there was that much activity the year before.

NORD: Well, '34 was pretty general all throughout the country.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

NORD: . . . '33 was the time when the Communists were most effective. Because, you see, this was toward the end of the Depression years, and they really worked hard in this area under the leadership of what's her name? You know her name -- Christina?

INTERVIEWER: Ann Berlak.

NORD: Ann Berlak. Very effective.

INTERVIEWER: Where were the Communist unions? Where were they located primarily, as far as the industries were concerned? Did they concentrate in particular areas? In what kinds of unions were they?

NORD: I'd say in the places where there was the most effective organization. Of course, New York City had; we had [them] here in New Jersey, in the silk industry.

INTERVIEWER: Right, right. Paterson and places of this sort.

NORD: Right. Before they were effective here. I think perhaps here in the Blackstone Valley was the area of greatest activity.

INTERVIEWER: In all of New England?

NORD: Yes. Because, you know, we were a terribly important textile center. Oh, I can't remember how many silk mills there were in this area.... Well, of course you know that textiles used to be our major manufacturing industry.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

NORD: And silk was very important.

INTERVIEWER: Very important. What made the Communist unions so effective?

NORD: Well . . . they had effective leadership, and Berlak was really a very effective person. She could pick up the complaints and the stories of the conditions in the mill and effectively . . .

INTERVIEWER: Articulate them.

NORD: Articulate. Right. So that the people just in droves followed her. I can remember right up here on High Street, Pawtucket-- not on High Street, Fountain Street, Pawtucket -- there used to be a great block of houses there, at least three stories high brick houses and [there] were two or three or more rows built around a sort of courtyard. And I remember one night going there to hear Ann Berlak speak. And this was really something. People hanging out of their windows, and that square within the blocks of houses was packed. And this was it. This was what the situation needed. I mean, from the point of view of the workers, and this was the kind of thing that needed to be done. Somebody should have been raising hell about it. And my union was most ineffective.

INTERVIEWER: More concerned with the ideological conflict than whether they were good organizers or not.

NORD: Right!

INTERVIEWER: And you did give some consideration, at least personally, of going with the Communist union for a while?

NORD: Of course, because here, you see, I was young. I recognized what they were doing. These things were true. I don't suppose at the time that I personally would.... I certainly learned through that experience what the Communists thought that it was all about; that this was a superficial sort of activity on their part --to capitalize on the poor conditions in the factories. And the wages, of course, were awfully poor.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: I remember as a weaver earning something like fifteen, sixteen dollars a week. But later, in '35 when the NRA came in, you remember that the minimum wage was set at thirteen dollars a week, and this applied to skilled workers in many parts of the country at the time.

INTERVIEWER: So did that reduce their wages over what it had been?

NORD: No. The minimum wage was set at $13 for the South and $12 for the.... $13 for the North and $12 for the South.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you at that time?

NORD: In 1930.... Well, I was born in 1902, so where does that bring to in 1933?

INTERVIEWER: You'd be 31 years old then.

NORD: Right. Well, now where were we? Oh, we were in 1933. And textile workers, silk workers, velvet workers, were on strike. I think this was a pretty general strike throughout New Jersey, in the silk centers, which meant New Jersey and the Blackstone Valley.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

NORD: I think we got a slight increase in wages. I can't remember what the other grievances might have been then, except of course there was still the business of increasing work load. Then there [were] general things throughout the textile industry all over the United States of increasing work loads, and this was the cause of the strike in 1934.

INTERVIEWER: I know there was a big dispute over that question of wages and working conditions both . . .

NORD: Yes, it was in the main, it was -- what do they call it?--the stretch-out system.

INTERVIEWER: Right, right.

NORD: That was the reason.

INTERVIEWER: And you were involved with the strike then in '34 also?

NORD: Yes, I think I went to work for the union in the spring of '34. In the meantime, of course, the union was fairly effectively organized between '33 and '34 here. We had a weaver's local union of about 3,000 members.

INTERVIEWER: Just in the Blackstone Valley?

NORD: I'd say 3,000. I'd say there were 3,000 weavers. I'm not sure that we had a union of 3,000 members. Speaking of the Communists--again I can't remember the specific time-- they actually were able to break the weavers union. And I went through that experience in this area.

INTERVIEWER: What do you mean, they were able to break it?

NORD: Well, you see, we went through the '33 strike. . . One of the interesting things for people who lived through this experience --such as myself--we had to do our own work. We had to do our own

NORD: organizing. We had to do our own negotiating. We were the leaders. And we would go off, I remember--I worked on the day shift--we'd get through at 3:00, worked from 7:00 to 3:00 with no time off for lunch, and three or four of us would go off. I had a car at the time, and we'd go off to places around, and went anywhere anybody wanted to organize, and we'd organize. The union just didn't have the money, it didn't have the people. We went out and did this sort of thing. But this was a marvelous experience, you see, and then having to be responsible for helping to bring strikes to a proper conclusion or some sort of conclusion. It was real, absolutely marvelous education and training. Then, of course, since . . . I remember in 1933 . . .

INTERVIEWER: These activities that you just described are all things that you did before you became a full-time employee in the union.

NORD: Right.

INTERVIEWER: You did your full-time job plus all the organizing, plus all the negotiating over contracts and this sort of thing.

NORD: Right. And I remember when I said the only woman.... in '34, this was still while I was in the factory--the union had this big strile. They had to go to Washington, the executive board--there were four or five members on the executive board of the national union. And I had to go to Washington. Well, they needed a woman. You know, so many women worked in that textile industry, how could four men go to Washington and talk about conditions in the textile industry which so many women worked [in]? Well, Elizabeth was asked to go along. And this was . . . Of course, they wanted me there. But here again, you see, to go through the process of being part of the strike settlement and to learn to know these men and their approach to the job and the work and the union, was really an education.

INTERVIEWER: And they didn't hold anything back. They just brought you right in. You didn't feel as though you were . . .

NORD: Right.

INTERVIEWER: . . . being discriminated against in any way.

NORD: Not at all. Later what they had asked me to do, something we tried to do, as a result of the strike of '34, [it] was disastrous. And that was in '34 while I was still in the shop. We had conceived the idea that perhaps if we had some sort of industrial union it might be more successful.

INTERVIEWER: That's where the idea at first begins to take hold?

NORD: No.

INTERVIEWER: No.

NORD: No. We thought if we had some form of industrial union within our own unit here in Rhode Island -- didn't know what was going on any place else; there was enough going on here.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

NORD: Well, some of us conceived the idea: perhaps if we became an adjunct or a part of the loom-fixers . . .

INTERVIEWER: The problem is you didn't have any formal organization by which you could do that. Is that true? The loom-fixers was a . . .

NORD: No, sir. So we worked this out, but in working this out, I recall when you say that the officers didn't hold anything back. They took me into their confidence, or accepted me as an equal and part of the group. I suppose they felt that confident based on my experience and my . . .

INTERVIEWER: Your willingness to do the hard jobs.

NORD: . . . The jobs I had been doing. I remember the president, the then-president Mr. Tom McMann, telling me about . . . And I told him I had gone to New Bedford to talk with the loom-fixer's man there. I got no place, I got no place fast with this plan. Oh, and the loom-fixer's man in New Bedford telling me, "No way. Nothing's going to happen." And telling me about an agreement he had with the president of the union that if he would pay per capita tax on only so many members -- which meant that he could keep his membership at 200 or 300 and they even had 400 -- he didn't have to pay per capita tax on the additional members. And he had a written agreement with the president of the union. Well this--I suppose the union had been in such a bad way that the international president had no choice but to accept this kind of agreement in this situation, with a man who is a very strong leader.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you pick the loom-fixers as the group you were going to try and build an industrial union on that base?

NORD: Because they were the most . . .

INTERVIEWER: They were the most, they were the strongest?

NORD: They were established. They were the most effective. They were doing very well. They negotiated -- hey were seldom . . . I think there was, in my memory, only one strike of the loom-fixers that I recall.

INTERVIEWER: Were they open to this idea?

NORD: We did it for a while. And part of the plan was that the loom-fixers, who of course are responsible for repairing looms in a given section --they had their section of looms --would collect the union dues from the weavers, you see.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

NORD: Well, we tried that for a while. I remember the president of the union, Mr.McMahon saying to me, "Well, the thing that you worked out, Elizabeth, we'll just have to call it off." And he said that it won't work. And he said, "I think you know the reason why. And so you just have to forget it." Well, I insisted that I wasn't going to forget it. But,of course,as things worked out, there was no question that he was right.

INTERVIEWER: Now, why wouldn't it work?

NORD: Well, the loom-fixers were-- I don't know about individuals-- seemed to be sympathetic to our idea of helping the weavers to organize. But . . .

INTERVIEWER: They had their own direction that they were . . .

NORD: And they had a business agent who worked full-time for them, paid by out of the funds that they contributed to the union. The business agent was just going to have no part of this kind of an arrangement. I suppose he saw this was really a major . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes, a potential conflict, really-- wasn't it? Or departure.

NORD: Not necessarily conflict. Conflict as far as he was concerned-- surely he didn't want any part of it. But he also saw that this was a pretty big job. Well, let me see, for if you had three thousand weavers in the city, you could divide that by something like 24 and you'd have the number of-- 24, 26, 30 --and you'd have

NORD: the number of loom-fixers there were. But no, it represented a big job, far beyond, I suppose, my scope to understand the . . .

INTERVIEWER: Implications of it all.

NORD: Implications and the involvement at the time.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Sure, I see that. You say that you really got involved full time with the union in 1934. Does the National Industrial Recovery Act have any effect upon sort of a growing militancy among the laboring people?

NORD: Oh, yes. There's no question . . .

INTERVIEWER: Do you see a change in the workers' attitudes once that comes in? Does that accelerate the process of militancy?

NORD: Yes, yes. First of all, just the whole idea of the National Recovery Act itself was terribly important, something that workers in general needed. I recall that -- this is part true of the whole country -- that with the establishment of the National Recovery Act, and I don't know what particular day, but I think there were parades simultaneously around the whole country. We had one big, grand parade down, right down here downtown. I remember that. It just seemed as though everybody, the whole city turned out, and was walking in the streets with this wonderful thing that was happening after the years of the Depression. Because [in regard to] the members in my family, nobody had worked for more than a period of three or six months, and so everybody was very happy. This was a whole new thing. And then of course, certainly within the unions--because a part of that was the declared policy of the United States. . .

INTERVIEWER: Right, for collective bargaining.

NORD: . . . to protect working men's rights.

And of course, it really formed the basis upon which grew these great organizations of today. The steel workers, the automobile workers, and of course, re-establishing the textile workers. So that was -- oh, yes, no question -- that was the really great thing as far as the unions were concerned, and I think that at the time, economically, as far as the country was concerned.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do then, once you went full time with the union? What was the job that you did?

NORD: As I recall, let me see, that was before the 1934 strike; must have been in the spring. Did you mention the date of the '34 strike?

INTERVIEWER: It's in September, early September.

NORD: So that by September I was a full-fledged organizer. And that was really something. That was really a bad time for the union. It was a terrific strike. It was nation-wide. I've forgotten what proportion of the industry was out on strike.

INTERVIEWER: I think it affected both the North and South. All areas were involved.

NORD: Right. Because in the South . . . Actually, there were so many people arrested on picket lines that they had to put them in camps behind barbed wire. This was really a pretty bad sort of thing. And hundreds, thousands of workers were fired, I think -- never got their jobs back. I worked in Rhode Island for the first two weeks of that strike. And it was really funny. I've forgotten whether I did anything around here in Pawtucket or not, in this area. But I recall working out in the valley down along across into South county where, you know, there were mills here and there. And I remember once, gosh, on my way to Westerly and somebody said to stop at some place along the route-- route 3, I've forgot; I pass the spot sometimes now and remember it-- where the employer was out in the middle of the road with this agreement that he would not break the strike. It was really funny. He was frightened. Oh, there were sort of roaming pickets who went around, and I forget . . .

INTERVIEWER: Ah, ha. Flying squadrons.

NORD: Flying squadrons. Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Frank Sgambato was involved with some of those.

NORD: He thought the flying squadron had come along, so he was out in the middle of the road waving his agreement. He . . .

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see. He was worried about the flying squadron.

NORD: Sure. Right. Yes, well, there probably were more people besides myself. There was a fairly effective agreement ending that strike, but from the point of view of the workers who had expected more, it really was a sad ending to this marvelous, extensive show of

NORD: strength. Well, it was more than sort of a showing of strength; there wasn't that aspect to it. Work loads had really been increased tremendously so that jobs became pretty difficult in many places. I recall, I think it was one of the Knight mills down in River Point-- you know, that great big stone mill right across from the high school on the hill here? A tremendous, tremendous mill. And that mill was not allowed to reopen after the strike because they had extended . . . They said they could reopen only if they were granted permission to extend the work load more than they had done. But a work assignment board set up for the cotton textile industry decided that they had gone just about as far as they could go, and wouldn't allow them any further increases in work loads. So this place closed down and never reopened.

INTERVIEWER: Never reopened.

NORD: But then any further requests for further extension of work loads was to be made to these boards and they were to grant or not grant. . .

INTERVIEWER: So it really gave some kind of control at the national level of the thing.

NORD: Yes. But, of course, the people were already working under work loads they thought to be . . .

INTERVIEWER: Right.

NORD: . . . excessive. There were a lot of other conditions, too. Then there was the machinery set up for handling the discharges.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

NORD: And a very effective person was selected to head up that procedure. I worked two weeks in Rhode Island, between here and Westerly, and then I went into Washington. They needed a woman textile worker in Washington with all the negotiations that were going on to settle the strike. So off I went to Washington. That was interesting to see this procedure. And somewhere along the way I remember Sidney Hillman in a position--and you know who Sidney Hillman was--and it seems to me that he became part of the NRA administration.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, the NRA.

NORD: Oh yes, '33.

INTERVIEWER: That's '33.

NORD: Right. So he was in on the settlement of this . . .

INTERVIEWER: Strike of 1934.

NORD: . . . strike. I always remember him saying, "Elizabeth, come here. I want to talk to you." He meant as a textile worker rather than, because he knew better than I knew what had happened to my union and he knew the leadership. And, "What do you think about this thing?" Well, you know, going through this sort of experience and meeting with people such as this was really great.

INTERVIEWER: Very stimulating to you.

NORD: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after '34 in the union here in Rhode Island?

NORD: 1934. Well, first of all, by mentioning this machinery set up to handle the discharges, and I say that was really a sad time. When I left Washington and the strike was over and the directive had been issued, the Vice-President of the union, Francis G. Gorman, asked me, would I, on returning home--I had my car with me--would I go take a round-about route and go through these places in Pennsylvania that had been on strike; . . . do this and let him know what I had found. By the time I got home, I want[ed] no part of any of this thing any more. There was so many people who had lost their jobs, and hundreds of people in various situations who had lost their jobs.

way out, knowing the ineffectiveness of my own union, even in spite of the fact that the union was growing. I couldn't see that this thing would ever be resolved, and these people would ever get back to work. Because, you see, this had happened in places where there had been little or no union. And workers had joined this movement in the strike.

INTERVIEWER: Had no protection.

NORD: And I just called Mr. Gorman when I got home, and I said, "Mr. Gorman, I'm through. I'm not coming back. I can't take any more." And, as a matter of fact, I don't recall if that was the time that I left the union. Oh, no, I don't think it was. No, it wasn't. I didn't leave. He convinced me to stay on. And so we muddled through. And then, of course, in '35 the movement of the CIO started. Well, they went first into the big industries. I think they went first into steel . . .

INTERVIEWER: Steel.

NORD: . . . and then into autos.

INTERVIEWER: Automobiles.

NORD: And so we had to wait. So I knew that this help was coming. And I knew pretty much what would happen: that we would get new leaders, and we would have effective leadership, and we would have help.

INTERVIEWER: And when did that come?

NORD: It didn't come until --I've forgotten, was it somewhere in 1937?

INTERVIEWER: I see. In 1937.

NORD: But I had quit early that year because my union was still ineffective, and I just couldn't take anymore . . .

INTERVIEWER: What did you do when you quit? Did you go back to the mill? Or did you join another union?

NORD: No. You see, I knew that C.I.O. was coming in, and there would be a clean sweep. And I knew pretty much that [that was] what was going to happen. But I couldn't take anymore. These are the kind of things that brought on the sort of things that you don't want to say.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: I went to work in--oh, I had a period in Virginia that really was something. The exciting things that happen to you as an organizer along in Virginia is really something.

INTERVIEWER: When was that? When was this?

NORD: That was in 1935. Because I had some experience in Washington. I was assigned to be a legislative agent in Washington for the union, and then the whole state of Virginia was mine.

INTERVIEWER: This was for the United Textile Workers?

NORD: . . . all of it. I could do whatever [I] liked in the whole state of Virginia. So what I wanted to do and what the employers wanted to do were two quite different things. That really was something. That was some experience. But then the union had, in '35, they had an inquiry from Cumberland, Maryland, the great Celanese Corporation. I don't know how many . . .

INTERVIEWER: That is a long ways west.

NORD: Oh, oh, for me,yes. It was halfway across the country. And then, you know, we didn't have freeways.

INTERVIEWER: No, I know. That's up in the mountains, too, isn't it?

NORD: Yes, sure is. So we had an inquiry. Some workers wanted to join a union, and this place, 8,500 people working there. So I remember Mr,McMahon and Mr. Gorman coming to me and saying, "You know, we have this thing with western Maryland, and it sounds interesting." So they send me to Maryland accompanied by an old trade unionist-- I've forgotten what her name was-- but this was so I would be introduced properly to the trade unionists in Cumberland, Maryland. So that was fine. She got me established, all right. Then she left town, and I remember going out into the country to find this place. (laughter) So I drive out into the country and I come to the top of the hill, and down there in the valley -- my God! about the Celanese Corporation, and I'll never forget just stopping my car on that hill and looking down on it. Elizabeth Nord and the sixty million dollar Celanese Corporation. And it's true, you know. Now they're probably worth six . . .

INTERVIEWER: Hundreds of millions. Right.

NORD: Six hundred million, a billion dollars. But Elizabeth Nord and the sixty million dollar Celanese . . .

INTERVIEWER: Were you able to have any effect on the situation?

NORD: Oh, that was a marvelous, that was a marvelous situation! Oh, absolutely! It was an organizer's dream! Here was a railroad center, here was a mining center. And there were miners in that mill. And there were union railroad men in that factory. And this was absolutely wonderful.

Well, the conditions were pretty, pretty bad. My union had gone through . . . New Jersey, there was-- what was the other big rayon company at the time? I think they're still in existence-- Well. However, there's another large one there. And the union, in spite of the fact C.I.O. had not come in, had been able to do a marvelous job on the hazardous conditions in the preparatory department, so that the other rayon mill.... But the employers wouldn't accept the fact that.... In Europe, you know, they had been producing rayon for a long time, and the kinds of chemicals used, carbon disulfide was one of the basic ingredients. And this was really a poisonous substance, you know, and there had been terrific hazards. And men working in those departments had gotten awfully sick, really, some where irreparable damage was done physically. It can still happen today, you know, where there are accidents. But the industry in New Jersey wouldn't accept the fact. You must know Dr. Alice Hamilton.

INTERVIEWER: I haven't met her.

NORD: . . . who was the industrial medicine specialist at Harvard University until.... I don't know if she's still living, or died a couple of years ago. Well, she worked.

NORD: A couple of people who were really marvelous and directed the work of the union there got Dr. Hamilton to come in and went into the final meeting when the contract was worked out after the organizing drive, and the company announced proudly that they were going to spend a million dollars, and . . .

INTERVIEWER: Eliminate some of those hazards.

NORD: And what do you call the equipment that takes off the fumes?

INTERVIEWER: Exhaust.

NORD: . . . a million dollars. And they thought this was the end-all of their problems. And she said, "Well, you've made a very good start."

Well, so in Cumberland, this was a real problem. And the preparatory division--they were the first group to organize. And we didn't get very far at first with the other department, but as the organization drive became effective, then of course, within a year the whole plant was organized. It was absolutely wonderful. But with the help of.... But you see, there was a strike. And when I say this was an organizer's dream--on the first night of the strike I had stayed in Cumberland because the union was calling, [saying] "You can't do this." And they were meeting with the company in New York and discussing possible settlements, and they didn't know a damn thing about it because nobody had ever been out, you know; they didn't know what I was doing over there in western Maryland.

Well, I remember I finally got out to the picket line. This was something to see. Here were these men who were used to picket lines, you know. They had this great area all set up, just as neatly and nice as you could be. They had fires going in places they had dug down into the ground. They had boilers set on the grates over the fires with soup . . .

INTERVIEWER: Really?

NORD: . . . already cooking. And oh, you didn't have to do anything, just wait around and watch things happen. It was really great. The strike was very effective, and the mine workers assisted in that. The company, of course, put all sorts of obstacles in their way, but that song says, "We'll roll it over them." And certainly those workers rolled it right over the company. This was just . . . Once they got this thing going it was something. And from then on they've had a very effective union, although today there aren't that many people who work there. The company, of course,is a big company.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

NORD: And they have numerous plants about the country, all of which, I think, are organized today. But that was something to see. One experience I had--you may be interested in--I'll never forget. One thing that made it a little difficult was the shifts alternated.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

NORD: You work one week days, one week nights . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: . . . one week afternoons. So that it was difficult to arrange meetings and know which group was going to be at the meetings. However, these men were very interested. So there would always be somebody at [the] meetings. And then one night, no one came. And I sat in the meeting hall. It was very strange; it's awfully strange. Nobody came and nobody came, so I went down--I was on the third floor--and I went down to the doorway. There, staring at me, were two: the chief and his assistant of the police force in the plant. [gesturing] Right there. And I knew them by reputation. Of course, I'd seen them before. At the plant they dressed in beautiful light blue uniforms. This is really something. And here is McGraw and his assistant. And I looked up the street and there the men are walking off down the road, so I walked and followed them. I said, "They have no business doing this. This is a basis for a complaint." And I said, "Don't let it bother you." They said, "It doesn't bother us." They said, "They'll go away and we'll be back up." They came eventually back. There was a hotel across the street, and I don't know whether these two men . . . Yes, they went over and sat in the window of the hotel. However, the men finally came up. When I was through with the meeting, I happened to meet some of my miners organizer friends. They had headquarters in the city for that area. And one man--I always remember his name was Jip Dolphin--said, "When are you having your next meeting?" "Well, it's a week from tonight." And the next meeting night, the week following, I couldn't get into the hall. The sidewalk was filled with miners. There must have been at least a hundred. And then I think the company police did show up. They went across the street, and that night they did sit in the window [of the hotel]. And then when we got safely into the hall, the miners went over to the hotel and formed a picket line. And they went in; in the door this way, came out the back door, and around and around. And paraded until these guys just got up and went away.

So where you have an effective miner's organization, of course, you just . . .

INTERVIEWER: . . . really supportive.

NORD: . . . I just, I was alone.

Oral History Interview

with

ELIZABETH NORD

July 12, 1976
Providence, Rhode Island

by

Christina Simmons
Judy Smith

INTERVIEWER: This is Judy Smith and Christina Simmons on July 12, 1976 interviewing Elizabeth Nord of Providence, Rhode Island with the project on Twentieth Century Trade Union Women.

If you were living your life over again, what would you do different?

NORD: Who knows? You know, you could ask this of anyone. Would you rather be doing something else than you're doing now? Why ask it of a worker, for instance? You know, why ask it in this particular context? I know that however you treat this it will be a complex question. I was. . . at the time that I was working, I went to high school one year--mornings--when I was working nights. I loved biology. Had biology, literature, I remember. I went as a special student to the school of design while I was working in my job as manager of the joint board. And this was a real grind but I loved that. Mathematics. I just would, you know, all Sunday afternoon I would be at [it]. I would have mainly homework. I just loved that. . . I wasn't aiming toward anything other than what I was doing. It was part of the, you know, I did this for my work in the union. In the textile calculations, you know, it was just one of the rudiments of actually manufacturing a piece of cloth. How many yards of yarn in a particular size does it take to make a yard of cloth, and this sort of thing. That [was] the mechanics. But still I think this is....But I think it's perhaps logical for people, [it's] just a sort of a question we ask out of our experience. For instance, I notice you have a New York Times. If you have the book review of yesterday, here again is a chap [who] has done research--I've forgotten what the industry is--about attitudes of workers on the job. And again, you know, there was a big deal thing not so long ago, a study of this sort, about attitudes

NORD: of workers and taking their gripes as a real, proper indication of the fact that they are not happy or satisfied. And this is not true, I don't think. Never was true with me. I loved my weaving and knock-int the old looms around! I never expected to leave it.

INTERVIEWER: You notice that there's a lot of that stuff done, like on automobiles, or like in heavy industry. In these jobs, like on a line, welding over your head, or something like that. Working at that kind of pace. I figure that might be different.

NORD: Somebody's got to do the work.

INTERVIEWER: Right. I do think [though] it's really hard and really wearing.

NORD: Anything's hard. Weaving is hard work. When you come out of a weaving room--well, I remember when I was fifteen years old and I wanted to learn to play tennis, and I went to the YWCA. I couldn't hold a racquet after eight hours steady in the weave room. Some people think that because some tasks are menial, if you're doing a menial task, you don't have the integrity to ask yourself that question, or to want to go anywhere else. But you would have a semi-skilled or a skilled job and you've got something. You spend a lot of time learning to weave. You've got to spend a lot of time doing sort of apprenticeships in your own work. You don't have to stay there if you don't want to. However, you know, this question gets my goat.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: I don't have much patience with it. Well, do you want to talk some more about that? Or, it really isn't relevant.

INTERVIEWER: Why don't we start in the family background part [referring to guideline questions].

NORD: Why do you do this? I mean, why do you--what's this got to do with this? Is this trying to analyze why I did what I did?

INTERVIEWER: I think it's trying to fill in, it's a different way of thinking about history. I've taught family history. What I think of it as, as a college course, is a way that I get students to understant that their own lives are history, and the pressures that happen to their own family and the way that their family, the way that they grew up are rooted in the world in some way; that they are affected by forces that other people aren't. You know, that history doesn't just happen to great men and great women, but that it's something about daily life. And I think that this stuff is really historically interesting, just trying to recreate. It's not any psychological reductionism, at all. It's just trying to sort of recreate what it was like, I think. The only childhoods we know about are like of president's wives or people that are really famous who thought their childhoods were really worth telling about. We want to know about the way the other people grew up.

NORD: Well, let's see what you've got there [looking at guideline questions]. Do you remember your grandparents? No, I don't remember my mother talking about her parents. Her mother died quite young. And her father, my grandfather, lived to--oh, I really don't remember because we came away from England in 1912. He was still living then, and probably lived at least six or eight years beyond that. No, I don't remember my mother talking about her parents. My father, his mother died quite young, too. He was a little boy, he said, "in petticoats." Little boys in England used to wear petticoats and dresses until they were three or four years old. And he said he was a little boy in petticoats. He remembers one time in his later years and it's not too very long ago. He said, "You know," he said, "I don't think my mother ever loved me." Now what he meant by that was "cuddled" him. This is what the English mean. You know, "let me love you" means "to cuddle." He said, "You know, I don't remember my mother ever loving me."

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: That, perhaps, because he was too young. And he talked about seeing his father going off to sea. His father was in the what they call the Merchant Service in England. Going off to sea in his oil slickers and with his--what do you call that big bag they carry there on their back?

INTERVIEWER: A duffle bag?

NORD: Duffle bag over his shoulder, and would pick him up on the sidewalk in the docks, you know, saying goodbye. And he talked about teachers; he loved his school. And he went to what they call an industrial school which actually was an orphanage. And he talked a lot about that.

INTERVIEWER: Is that where he lived?

NORD: Well, the father--the mother died while the father was off at sea--and the father's work, then, they used to go off six months or more of the year. So the children had to be cared for and they were sent to the industrial home. But the practice then was when the children got old enough--I think from eleven, twelve, and thirteen--they were farmed out to places to work: in the mines and the textile mills. I don't think he remembered exactly how old he was when he went off, and he talked about this, going out of school. But he loved his school. And he was in the choir: he had a good voice. He loved it, and he remembered his teachers. And one in particular wore a long, voluminous skirt and a long pocket. And she would put her hand in the pocket and pull out a stick of rhubarb. And he remembered that for years; he talked of it all his life, I think. Talking about his teacher who kept this stick of rhubarb for her lunch in her skirt pocket, that sort of thing. I often wish I'd kept a notebook, you know, a journal of these things because I think they're

NORD: a little....Those times were interesting. Oh, they talked about going to--I don't know when this would be; I rather think it would be before he started to work, when he was young. But I can't see him going out of an orphanage and doing this--going to the places, the stables where the horses were kept, and stealing turnips. The horses were fed turnips, but they like to, you know, take turnips.

INTERVIEWER: How did he get from textiles to the mines?

NORD: Oh, well, the mines and the textile mills were in the mining district. And he went into the mines. And, you see, the girls would be put to working in the textile mills, and the boys were put to work in the mines in that area. This was Liverpool where he lived, he was born, you see. So they were sent out to the manufacturing towns of....My uncle, his brother was a couple of years older, at least. He had more sense. I think I told you this story before. He ran off to sea and sailed on those beautiful ships, such as the Indefatigable. I wrote to the New Yorker magazine last week because I remembered a story they wrote there--I don't know, it was one or two sections; it must be about twenty years ago--about the English training ships. They were famous names like the Indefatigable and the Trafalgar. And my father said, "Your uncle Charlie trained and sailed on these ships." And as a matter of fact, in the First World War, he went back to training cadets on the sailing ships. And I don't know why they did this in the war effort, but he did. And he finally became a pilot on the Mersey if you know what that means. It means bringing the ocean liners into port in Liverpool. So this was a sort of very happy ending, so to speak, to his escapade. I wrote them asking if they had reprints of that because my nephews now who would be my--what would they be?--my grand nephews, you know, the one particularly who is interested in sailing.

INTERVIEWER: Well, when did your father start working in the mines?

NORD: I'd say he probably was twelve years old. He was born in Liverpool and then was brought to....And I don't think they were kept together as families. Certainly he was not kept together with his sisters. He was placed with, with a family, and the family was given the wages. And then they provided for the boy as thought he were their own. And sometimes it was a very happy situation, sometimes it was not. He talked about that, too; about places where he had to work very hard at home after work.

INTERVIEWER: Did he live in different families?

NORD: Yes, and I don't know why that would happen. There were, during his time until he got married, as I recall, something like three families, perhaps. But one--oh, one family--I guess they must have had a very nice garden because he went to, on his half-day off on Saturday, he had to take the cart and horse and with plants and flowers [go] to the market. And he learned a great deal about flowers and growing things, you know. So this was very nice. The thing that distressed him was that he never had the brains to take a penny or two from the money that he got for selling the flowers to buy his lunch. And then it would be late when he got home and the people would be busy. I think those people also had a pub, some sort of pub. Because they would be so busy that he wouldn't get any supper. And this, perhaps, was not probably accurate, but this was the things that he remembered: that he was very faithful and did his job and didn't get proper treatment. Then there was another family he lived with whom I remember, and they must have been younger people because the man wasn't very much older than my father. But he liked [them] very much. And he was. . .

INTERVIEWER: And you knew them?

NORD: Slightly, yes, I knew who they were. And he was happy there.

INTERVIEWER: Where was his town?

NORD: This was in a place called Churchkirk, Lancashire.

INTERVIEWER: Right. That's where you were born?

NORD: I say Church for short. Yes, that's where I was born.

INTERVIEWER: Is that where he met your mother? Did she live there?

NORD: Right. Now, and then the sisters were put with another family and they didn't talk much about that. One sister died quite young--consumption. And they both learned to be textile workers. They were put in there. Now this was my father's family.

INTERVIEWER: Right. Now your mother, did she start in the textile mills young also?

NORD: The only thing I know about that is my mother's mother died quite young. Her father lived probably until 1920 or longer.

INTERVIEWER: Who took care of her when her mother died?

NORD: Well, she probably--when I say the mother died quite young, I would think the girls probably, by that time, [were] working. And there were three other sisters, and older ones.

INTERVIEWER: So they stayed together in the home?

NORD: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: With her father?

NORD: With the father.

INTERVIEWER: What did he do?

NORD: He was a blacksmith. I think in a, probably in a textile mill. I meant to bring you a picture of him. Standing with several other blacksmiths, a big sledge hammer in his hand. I've got it. He was a blacksmith, or worked in the blacksmith shop. And on the back of the picture it says such-and-such a family--don't know whether they were all members of one family or not. Now, [referring to guideline questions] mother--where was she born? She was born in Churchkirk. No, this is wrong. I don't know that this is important to the narrative. She was born in a place called Oswaldtwistle, (chuckles) which is next, the next town to Church. How do you spell "Twistle"? [Referring to questions] Did she work outside of the home as a child? Does that mean . . .

INTERVIEWER: Did she work in the mills?

NORD: Yes, of course! As a young woman, sure, she worked until I was sixteen years old. She worked until she taught me to weave. I could not weave until I was fifteen, because I couldn't work forty-eight hours until I was fifteen.
hildren under fifteen could only work forty hours a week. How about that? [Referring to questions] What chores did she do around the house as a child? Now that--somebody had to do it; I suppose they did.

INTERVIEWER: Were there all girls in her family?

NORD: Yes. No boys.

INTERVIEWER: Now, how did she meet your father?

NORD: Well, I don't know. It was a small town, and I suppose, oh, the big things, the big things then were church and Sunday School. And unions. I remember I--did I tell you the story about an aunt who came to this country much later than we? And I had been to, you know, summer schools and learned some radical songs, and I've forgotten what. Oh Aunt used to love. . . [to] sing. And [once] I sang the--oh I've forgotten what the words were--to a hymn, a tune: the Internationale. I sang out.

NORD: [in voice mimicking her aunt] "Oh," she said, "we used to sing that in Socialist Sunday School." I thought I might shock her with the new words to the hymn. [laughter]

[mimicking aunt] "Oh, we used to sing that in Socialist Sunday School," said she.

So this is why I'm in the labor movement! But that was really funny; I never forgot that. [Referring to questions] What did you like to do with your mother? What did you do with your mother except do your chores at home and go to work? What do you like to do with your father? The same thing. . . They had to learn how to do the laundry, and washing, and make the bread. You couldn't go out to the store and buy a loaf of bread. You had to, somebody had to make the bread.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father do any of those chores or. . .

NORD: Oh, yes. Yes, he was a cook. I never had to cook as long as my mother and my father lived.

INTERVIEWER: He cooked as well as she?

NORD: Oh, he was a marvelous cook. He was really good.

INTERVIEWER: Did he cook. . .

NORD: He cooked pies, and roasted the meat on Sunday, and custards and head cheese, and pie crusts, and he cooked, period.

INTERVIEWER: Did he ever do the laundry?

NORD: Well, no; never was necessary as long as we....In England, when we were children, of course. But not in this country.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you--did you take it out in this country?

NORD: I suppose. . . Of course what happened was you sent your laundry to the wet wash. And you had a big bag of laundry. I can remember at fourteen I used to have to run home from the mill at noon 'cause my mother--my father worked quite some distance away; my mother worked quite some distance away. And I ran home from the Royal Weaving Company in Pawtucket to hang out the laundry at noontime, so it would be ready at night to be ironed.

INTERVIEWER: What was the wet wash?

NORD: Your laundry!

NORD: Your bag of laundry would be sent to the laundry and it would come back and it was wet, ready to hang. You hang it on the line. [It was] washed, you know; but it wasn't dry.

INTERVIEWER: Right. I see.

NORD: The wet wash, yes. Just like today you can go, you can go to a coin laundry. Well, that was a wet wash, but it was delivered--picked up and delivered.

INTERVIEWER: Picked up and delivered?

NORD: Yes, and it probably didn't cost very much. I remember somewhere about fifty cents, but a big bag of laundry.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever bring your father or your mother their lunch at work? Or their dinner at work before you worked in the mills?

NORD: It was too far away. I used to carry it in, as they said, to the machine shop before I started to work.

INTERVIEWER: As a job?

NORD: You go from school. You would have a little cart, and the mother would put up six or eight and in one of those little buckets was coffee or tea,with hot dinner, and pie in the top and the cover on, and you'd trundle them all the way to the.... I've forgotten. You probably got twenty-five cents a week.

INTERVIEWER: Was it people you knew?

NORD: They would be people you know. You see, it's--for instance, if today you want someone to do an errand for you, you get some child of someone you know, and you'd probably get,
try to make a quarter. It only cost a nickel to go to the movies then.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to the movies a lot?

NORD: I don't recall it. The big deal thing for us, when we were young, on Saturday afternoon, everybody
would be dressed in their best clothes, and we would go down-town Pawtucket to a movie. And with my mother and father we would walk home--and there was a marvelous store on the corner of Roosevelt Avenue and the street that runs down by the armory into Pawtucket-- carrying these ice cream cones. This was wonderful stuff, carrying these chocolate bits home and

NORD: strawberry ice cream cones, and we would all walk up the hill and we lived off Broadway in Pawtucket then. But then my Dad would stop in a bar room and have a beer. Then, he caught up with us. And it was a big thing, it was a big thing.

INTERVIEWER: The whole family went together?

NORD: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Every Saturday night?

NORD: The afternoon. Now, where are we now?

INTERVIEWER: Well, what did your mother do?

NORD: What did she do? Well, what does anyone do, you work forty-eight hours and part of the time, fifty-four hours a week and you have to come home, and you have to do your shopping and take care of a family. She did this until she was, let me see, until I was sixteen years old.

INTERVIEWER: Now she was also a weaver, is that right?

NORD: Right. And I was a weaver. Her mother taught her to weave, and she taught me to weave; and how far back that goes, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Miss Nord, how many children were there in your family?

NORD: I had two brothers, no sisters. One older brother and a younger brother. Now you know, [referring to guideline questions] these are here again such stupid questions. Was she working at any time when you were growing up? To ask somebody who was in the labor movement or somebody who worked in the factory, ask where your mother was. Well, your mother worked in the factory. You know, it was a working class family. Unless you were most unusual. Then if you were most unusual, you didn't. Then what were you doing there?

INTERVIEWER: But do you think that there were any people where mothers didn't work even after they had children? Women didn't work, but maybe they worked up until they had children or something? I think that may be what they're getting at. Or in your experience, did all mothers work?

NORD: No doubt there were some. Perhaps in textiles. You see, you're talking about a particular field, too. Textiles is a place where these women continued to work. As long as I had any association with textiles, married women worked, you know, and stayed at their jobs in the textile mills.

INTERVIEWER: They would leave when their children were born, and then come back?

NORD: Well, I was--perhaps. I don't know. I can't recall so much in later years, but I was practically born in the weave room. My mother talked about . . . I mean, she'd probably leave off about one or two weeks before her children were born, [then] she'd be back a couple of weeks after. You know, this is what happened in those days. Now within the recent past, thirty years, we've been getting in our union contracts--maternity leave.

As much as six months, and extend it if there's a need to. But one of the big factories we organized in Olneyville, a very large factory, the Atlantic Woolen mill, the women were required to, when they had children they were required to leave the job; [then] they lost their jobs. And this is one of the reasons the women really got very angry. They had a union, but this particular union didn't think it important, I think, to give the women protection under those circumstances.

INTERVIEWER: When was this?

NORD: And this was in 1940--'42! And they lost their job when they left because, you know, they were having children. Then if they went back, they went back as a new employee. And this was a real gripe, and it was one of the things which made the union workers turn over from the union they had then in the shop to our union. And this really was, this was a pretty bad condition.

INTERVIEWER: But then, in your experience, it was the same in England and in the U.S.--the fact that mothers worked?

NORD: Oh, I think there's no question in England, sure. My aunt, I don't know how long my aunt--my aunt and her daughters who lived in England--I can't remember the year, as they came quite a time after we came to this country.

INTERVIEWER: And you came in what year?

NORD: I, we came in 1912. Aunt probably came ten or more years later. And she had three daughters and a son--all worked in textiles and as far as I know, she had to continue to work, too.

INTERVIEWER: Ms. Nord, how did they take care of small infants? How did your mother take care of you?

NORD: Oh, we had babies classes. You went to baby school. Sure, they had better child care then, I think. Well, they had to have two things. There was baby school, which, you know, which was kindergarten, sort of.

INTERVIEWER: Nursery school?

NORD: Nursery school, part of kindergarten. And then you had, women in the neighborhood nursed, they call it, children . . .

INTERVIEWER: They took in?

NORD: Took in children, yes. Just as there's a lot of talk today about having this kind of arrangement--have women in the neighborhood take care of children while mothers are working. This was done. And that's an interesting thing, too. My mother, and my father particularly, would talk about a couple of people who nursed us as children. You know, "Mrs. so-and-so who nursed you, would do thus and so". . . said she'd give me a cold bath every morning. I said she would give my brother the cold bath, too. But she was a nurse. But they would talk about these women who took care of children, because this must have been a great source of contentment to have people who loved your children, and who took care of them. And then such women also would sometimes do baking for a working family, too; bake the bread.

INTERVIEWER: Did anyone ever bake, did you have your bread baked, or did you do it yourself?

NORD: I don't really know, but I expect that my family did.

INTERVIEWER: Did it yourselves?

NORD: They would have someone bake the bread, do the baking. I love to go on about all those things. But that's not relevant to this.

INTERVIEWER: What is it?

NORD: Things that you would eat, the things that you're eating on baking day. You had cheese and onions for yourself or with those big English muffins, not the kind you buy in the store today. Love to talk about that.

INTERVIEWER: Say it!

NORD: On wash days, you would have a broth. A broth would be like a, it is in a great big kettle of like a beef stew, except that it would have all sorts of things in it. It would have red cabbage and it would have curly cabbage--you know, the lovely savoy cabbage--and dumplings with raisins. And this could all be cooking, you know, while the washing was being done.

INTERVIEWER: In other words, it went by what kind of work had to be done that day so what was easy to cook along with that?

NORD: Right. And then the next day was baking day. I don't know whether it was Tuesday or Wednesday, but that was the day you had cheese and onions. You boil up the, you mince the onions, and then you pour off most of the gravy. Then you put in milk and butter and cheese and bake it in the oven. And then you have with it, you see, you'd use bread dough and make muffins about this big [gesture]. And then you made lovely crusty thins, and that was your dinner on baking night. And that was really great. And the aroma . . . of it.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds great!

NORD: The cheese and onions is just. My mother used to occasionally do those things when I was working. Sometimes I would get off the streetcar, and run all the way home, you know, in anticipation of what I was going to have for supper. [This was] when she was no longer working. And this was, I remember, from our early years in England. [Looking at guideline questions] Well, we're not getting very far.

INTERVIEWER: All right. What did your mother hope that you would be? She wanted you to be a weaver. Is that true, or did she have any other idea?

NORD: There was no question. I suppose this was an English holdover. You know.

INTERVIEWER: I remember you told us that she thought you should be trained as a silk weaver.

NORD: Right.

INTERVIEWER: And that that was her way of. . .

NORD: . . . improving. . . cleaner work, and where the wages were a little higher.

INTERVIEWER: And who taught you to be a silk weaver--was it someone you knew?

NORD: Yes, someone who I think, an acquaintance of the cousins who had also gone into this, made this change-over, yes. This is the way you helped out. Then later on someone would ask you, would you teach her daughter or her sister or . . . Then you would take [her] on.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever do that?

NORD: Yes, I think everyone somewhere along the way in our trade would do this.

INTERVIEWER: How much school did your mother have?

NORD: Well, as much as you can get in. I think she must have left school when she was eleven or twelve and not any older than twelve. And the system then--I think I explained to you earlier--was that these young ones would go to work a half a day. They would work half time, and go to school half a day. The half time meant that they were learning their trade. And they were in training, you see, as weavers. [referring to guideline questions] Did she take an interest in community? In politics? What were her views? Well, this is interesting. You know, in England, I don't know if they still do it today; I think they do. If you're a Tory or a liberal, you wear your colors! I suppose it's where you get the phrase "showing your colors," you know. Well, the Tory colors were yellow and orange. And liberal colors were red and green. Oh, I was a Tory because I thought the yellow and orange were absolutely beautiful. You would wear a thick rosette, you know. And also you put a flag out your window. There was no question about what you were, you see. So I can remember the flag out the window. . . It couldn't have been orange and yellow--orange and blue. I think we probably would have been liberal. This I recall, but I don't remember any talk or conversations. This pretty rosette was the thing that I remember and, I don't know, I have a vague recollection of wearing this orange and blue rosette.

INTERVIEWER: Was your mother in the union?

NORD: Oh, of course! My aunt, when she came to this country--I think I've told you that story, too--about trying to get a group of workers in the factory into the union who didn't belong. The workers, half were in and half out. "Do you work with people who don't belong to the unions," said she. She's been in America a week and so you feel like you're a hundred years behind already. "Work with people who don't belong to the unions?"

INTERVIEWER: Besides belonging, did your mother do anything active in the organization?

NORD: No, not that I know of.

INTERVIEWER: She'd weave in both England and the United States?

NORD: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a need? She could have done it?

NORD: I don't think in the sense that . . . [It was] quite a different sort of situation than you had in England, even today. You've really got to work awful hard to build the union and get people into the union, you know. I don't know if this is still true. I don't think it was too long ago that in England, there was a joint commission of union people, I think, appointed by the government and employers. I'm not sure what the set up was, whether it was government sponsored or employer sponsored; a commission of union people and employers, whose work it was to try to educate employers and workers who are not unionized to the benefits of unionization. Saying, you know, that you have less industrial strife, that you had a better understanding of common problems. This is an interesting sort of thing for--I can't think of the thing that was government sponsored--but very interesting. There's nothing like this today where you had the right to work committee. And what were they doing last week? Well they never shut up. It's the Manufacturer's Association raising bloody murder about unions. There's a constant struggle. I mean, so many people make you think that all these unions are organized for the purpose of something detrimental to you rather than, than beneficial. So there's a completely different atmosphere. But no, my parents, no, they were not and that's a long, long time ago and they were not in politics. And of course,you had a different situation in politics I think in England [than] you have today. You ask sometimes what somebody might have done. I sometimes think: I think I might have been happier in England with the attitudes what they are about unions and about politics than, than I am in this country. You know, your constant fight to be accepted, so to speak.

INTERVIEWER: It's just a really hard struggle here. . . .

NORD: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: All the time.

NORD: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father work in textiles also in America?

NORD: No, he didn't. We moved from this little place; he worked in the mines from the time he was twelve years old until we moved. We moved to a place where I could, my mother thought she could get a better job in a--It was ten or twelve or fifteen miles away from Churchkirk. And my father then went to work in the textile mills up in the maintenance department. And then when we came to this country, he went to work in machine shops. And then he also worked for the Pawtucket water department. And that's probably why he lived so long, you know, heaving the shovel and the pick ax. And I think he really loved to

NORD: do it. Speaking of people's attitudes about their work, you know, he loved to talk about it. Driving around Pawtucket and he would say [mimicking] "I remember the job on this street, I remember the job on that street, I remem. . ." And in winter, you know, in the middle of the night there'd be a pipeburst and: [mimicking] "Here was where the pipe burst in December." And then he would talk about how he would talk about how he would prepare his work. He would say, you know, "Some of the new guys," he said, "[they] would get down in the hole and start shoveling!" He said, "I would stand and survey the situation, see which way the sun was shining, and where it was going to be shining in the afternoon." And he'd select his place to work. But you know, this is real scientific stuff; this was very interesting. I thought that was something.

INTERVIEWER: How did your family make the decision to come to America?

NORD: I think I told you that story, too. I had an aunt . . . My mother's younger sister came to this country. And I don't know what attracted them to come here. They had had a child; they lost a child, and never had any other children. And they came to this country. One of the things that they didn't like was summertime when it was so hot, and how uncomfortable it was in the factories, you know? My uncle worked in a machine shop, my aunt went to weave in a cotton mill. But she still insisted that she thought it would be better for my mother to come to this country--I don't know whether she urged the other aunt with children or not--and that it might be a better place for all of us to grow up in.

INTERVIEWER: Did she come to Pawtucket?

NORD: She had come here previously, yes. That was in 1912. She had come to this country.

INTERVIEWER: Do you want to talk a little about the neighborhood that you were born in? How many years did you live in the house in which you were born?

NORD: How many years did you live in the house where you were born? I, until I was about three years old, I think . . . and then we moved to the town near Preston. It was a row house. You know, like the English row houses with

NORD: a little front garden. With the john down the path, as we would say. And the neighborhood, it was just . . .

INTERVIEWER: Were there all textile workers and coal miners in the neighborhood?

NORD: Right. Even today when I visit my friend on the West Coast, [she asks] "Don't you remember so-and-so who lived on such-and-such a street?" I didn't live in this particular place that long. This friend in Oregon lived there a great many years longer than my family. And I say, "Both of you forget I left there when I was three years old." But they were the nicest old associations . . . the really pleasant sorts of things you did in that day. Then of course, we moved away. But the happy times then were when we would go back to this neighborhood. Or my cousins would come to the place where we lived. Then this was the nice thing. Sometimes they would walk miles and miles and miles. And then, of course, when they would get there, we would go off and ramble into the country. This was a big thing, you know. Many pleasant things. And holiday times were pleasant--big, you know, big family get-together[s].

INTERVIEWER: It had a garden in the front?

NORD: Yes, and row houses, smaller than I envisioned them. In '68 I went back to the place near Preston. And oh, it seemed large, you know? There was a kitchen, and a front room and two bedrooms upstairs, and that was four rooms. And, of course, in my child's mind's eye it was a big house. But it was rather small.

INTERVIEWER: How did it compare with the neighborhood you lived in, in Pawtucket?

NORD: Oh, Pawtucket. The first house we lived in was a little cottage. I don't know whether it was because [it was] the only thing my family could first afford.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a single family?

NORD: A little cottage. A very small cottage, and then we later moved to a five-room house. And then a six-room house, then later bought what I thought was a very nice house, a cottage, toward the end of Benefit Street in Pawtucket. You know that area. Toward the end of Benefit in Pawtucket, near the Massachusetts line. Not far from Baker's Corner. You know where Baker's Corner is. But this was very nice, and it was then partly country.

INTERVIEWER: Did the neighborhoods you lived in, in Pawtucket, also have friends nearby?

NORD: Friends? You mean . . .

INTERVIEWER: Family.

NORD: Well, then you were farther away from, for instance, my cousins and my aunt . . .

INTERVIEWER: You didn't . . .

NORD: That's family. We weren't that close but we were often together.

INTERVIEWER: You mean Sundays.

NORD: Right. Oh, yes, and my aunt just . . . every Sunday afternoon at my house she came to play dominoes! Did you ever play dominoes?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: And she used to carry a couple of extra dominoes in her handbag in her lap--she'd cheat. [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: I thought you were going to say in case, you know, the kids lost them.

NORD: Oh, no . . . I don't know where she got the rest of the dominoes, but she was . . . that was very funny. She had lost her husband . . . I think he was only 33 years old, he was a miner. I think he got black lung disease. She had a pretty hard time bringing up four children . . . in that day and age. But, no, family get-togethers continued but you weren't, you know, quite as close to all of your friends.

INTERVIEWER: Did you still have a garden?

NORD: Not so much, no. In the first little house we had in this country, there was a very nice garden . . . oh, to grow tomatoes in the backyard! It was wonderful. The English used to have a little pole frame or a little greenhouse where you grew your tomatoes. But to have your tomato plants in your backyard--this was something! Absolutely wonderful! But not until later [when] there was just my father and I and we . . . had to let the house go, you know, it had been the family house, we got a little house in Warwick. Then it had a garden, and then he spent most of his time outdoors, really such a nice little garden. And, it's nice, you know, the English feeling for a garden.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any people living with you besides parents and children? Or like grandparents?

NORD: No.

INTERVIEWER: Boarders . . .

NORD: Well, all families I guess do this sort of thing. One year a man who came to this country, who was I guess what the English used to call a "fitter." They were experts at setting up textile machinery. And he came to this country to do that until he got married, and he lived with us. If there's anything I remember about him was, my mother used to make "sad cake" they call it. A currant cake, you know what those are--very English, confectionary. But sad cake is pie crust dough and you roll it out in a flat cake and then paint it with egg. . . you know, a beaten egg. And then bake it in the oven. Or then you made one of those with currants, not raisins, currants. And, put currants in the middle and fold it together and roll it out and paste it with egg--a beaten egg--and bake that. And this is what Roland wanted before he went to bed at night. So my mother would make this sad cake and currant cake for Roland. However, then my cousin wanted to come to this country and for a very complicated reason couldn't be included in the quota. His wife didn't pass the health test, so they went to Canada. And his wife died there. And then he finally got through to this country and brought his little daughter who was my second cousin. And she was only five years old, and she came to live at my house, and he went to live at his mother's house where they had a larger family. So that, until people got settled, you did this sort of thing, with individuals, you know.

INTERVIEWER: How long did the little girl stay with you all?

NORD: Oh, probably a year or so. . . and that was. . .much later because I think I was away most of that time when I used to work hard, working for the union. But I remember that she used to go off to school in the morning. She took an onion for lunch. Not for lunch, but for a snack. Raw onions. . .

INTERVIEWER: How long did Roland stay?

NORD: I can't remember.

INTERVIEWER: Did your family know him in any way? What were the family's connection. . .

NORD: He was close to, he had been the boyfriend of one of my cousins, and so they knew him very well. And I don't know whether or not my mother knew his parents in England. But this sort of thing. It wasn't just someone you. . .pick up, like a homeless waif. . .I don't know if we even considered them boarders. Certainly not with the little child.

INTERVIEWER: Did they give your family money to help with their room?

NORD: I . . . rather think the man would. But certainly not the child.

INTERVIEWER: Not the child.

NORD: No.

INTERVIEWER: Did you think that your brothers were treated pretty much the same?

NORD: You mean by my parents?

INTERVIEWER: Within the family.

NORD: Oh, I used to say that they, no, the boys could do whatever they like, but I couldn't. I didn't like that.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of restrictions did you have?

NORD: Oh, I don't recall. And my brothers would sort of order me about, you know. And about boyfriends, they didn't like this one or that one and they would say whom I could see and whom I couldn't see. And then I would say, you know, "Thanks. They can do whatever they like." And they would tell me the girls they saw and I would know about it one way or another, and perhaps didn't like some of the girls. I wouldn't like the girls anyway. I didn't want any girl taking my brothers away from me. But I didn't like that. They could do whatever they like, but I couldn't.

INTERVIEWER: Did your parents support that? Or did they give them a little bit more freedom?

NORD: I don't think so. I think this was just my own emotion. I don't recall that they treated us any differently. They would do things that were sort of the natural thing to me that I didn't like. I suppose it's because I had two brothers and no sisters. But one Christmas, I don't know whether it was the first Christmas or second Christmas we were in this country, they got flexible flyers for Christmas.

INTERVIEWER: What were those?

NORD: Don't you know what a flexible flyer is?

INTERVIEWER: It flies, doesn't it?

NORD: Oh, one of those wonderful sleds where you go belly flappers, and you hold it, and you steer it! And then they bought me, you know, the little girly sled. You know, it's about this high [gesturing] and you sit on it and somebody pulls you. My heart was broken. I didn't want this thing. I tried to go belly flappers on it and landed in the snowbank. That's probably

NORD: the basis of some of my independence, you know. I wanted these things, and I would make a noise about it. And I didn't quite get it, you know.

But that's what happens. I think that's a natural sort of reaction. It says [referring to guideline questions], "To whom were you closest?" I was closest to my youngest brother. I don't know why but I was closer to the younger one. Perhaps because in growing up, his interest in things that he did, I could maybe take part in, more so than in the older brother. But then the older brother went away when he was about, I think he must have been about 21, because he was an apprentice machinist. And when he had finished his apprenticeship, he decided that he couldn't do any more than, proceed any further or higher than he had done then you know, just becoming a . . . what do you call it? A full-fledged machinist. He wanted to do more than that. So he went away, to work. And he worked away from then on and then married, and moved into New York state. And the other brother stayed here. So that this is perhaps another reason, but this of course was in later years.

INTERVIEWER: What did your younger brother do?

NORD: He worked for awhile in a factory. I think his first work was in a textile finishing factory. Because his dearest friend [he] worked with, his father was the boss. And I told you that story, too. Worked in the plant up on the Ten Mile River, where all the dye from the shop goes pouring into the river. But they could go out in the afternoon, on a hot afternoon and jump into the river and have a swim and then go back to work. So that's where he started to work. Now he also went to work in the machine shop, and didn't want to do that kind of work. He stayed in the machine shop for quite some time, if I remember. And then he went to work in a textile mill. And then got very much interested in textile processes, and went to [school], as a matter of fact, for five years--nights. And was a graduate of the textile calculations . . . division, that's not the name for it. . . But then also, [he] took textile design, but wasn't very successful because that's when textile mills started to close hereabouts. The problem, of course, often times in that sort of situation is that a person doesn't want to move, you know, away from your family. It's difficult to make that decision to move away.

INTERVIEWER: How about religion?

NORD: I beg your pardon?

INTERVIEWER: Was church important to your family?

NORD: I think so. Except that my parents didn't attend church much after we came to this country, until perhaps their later years. Yes, we were Episcopalian. The Church of England. And then, as long as we were in England, we went to church school. I don't know how many schools were still operated by the church then. But the public schools--they called them county counsel schools--I remember were new. But we all went to church school as long as we were in England. The big thing then, of course, in everybody's life was church. You know, you walked in . . . oh, there were all sorts of festivals, and things that happened. [I] have some of the nicest memories about . . . some of those things. There's a thing they call Harvest Home in the fall. And the altar is stacked with wheat and loaves of bread and the wonderful vegetables. And then there is this Thanksgiving service, not as we have Thanksgiving in this country, with a lot of food on the table and this sort of thing. It was just a religious ceremony. But that picture [which] stays with me is, you know, marvelous. To me, it is a beautiful thing, flowers and . . . Listen, England is really something with the flowers. In '68 I was in the south of England. And I don't recall this happening in the north. But the friend with whom I was staying, said, "I have to go to church today and take some flowers." And it was Pentecost Sunday. This is the Sunday when the Christians believe that the dove came down from heaven and this symbolizes Spirit, you know, the Holy Spirit--God. And the colors for that day are red and white in Church. You never saw such a magnificent display of red and white flowers in all your life that were brought to that church that day. It was really lovely, and the florist doesn't bring them, people bring them from their gardens-- white lilac and red roses and white daisies and red daisies and . . . it was just red and white. It was the loveliest thing and the decorations are grand. And there are little boxes, metal boxes, made for every possible place that will hold a box. There will be three boxes for this window here, made to exact proportions of the window sill. And flowers arranged, three similar arrangements for the three windows here. For the pulpit, with the little steps up, there were little tiny boxes made for each step. And the care . . . and everybody had an assignment. They let me do one window! But this was something. We don't [in this country] do this sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER: How do you think it was different in the U.S., and why do you think your parents didn't go to church as much?

NORD: Christmas--so you send ten, fifteen bucks to the church so they can buy a couple plants, you know? And dress up the church and it looks beautiful. But this thing of bringing from your own garden, having just the right things--white roses and red roses and white daisies and red daisies--this was magnificent. And

NORD: a hundred women brought flowers! And the care and the detail. And it's just not a big sloppy thing. You'd better know how to arrange flowers, too! Of course, this is one of the characteristics of their life and living, you know. A little bit different than we do.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that your parents had any, did they go to church at first when they came here and then decided against it later?

NORD: They would occasionally go to church. But, you know, when you work 54, 48 hours a week, and you've got a family to take care of, and then on Sunday ....Now, of course, there's a difference. The church isn't around the corner, too, you see. You've got to have some way to get to church. One in Pawtucket would have been a mile away from where we lived. had no car. We managed to get there. I must have been in this country before I was confirmed in the Episcopal Church and then, you know, becoming a member, and getting all dressed up in white and. . .

INTERVIEWER: Did you stop going to church also when you started to work?

NORD: Not really. I don't think I ever stopped going, because I think with the kind of upbringing you had, for instance in the Anglican church and church school, church was sort of a part of [your life]. There's some things I don't like about my particular denomination now, except that I do like the atmosphere, you know, the buildings and things that I remember, and it's a natural sort of environment that you're sort of brought up in. And it's ingrained, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think your family was different from the neighbors in your community?

NORD: In this country? I don't think so, they're working class,

INTERVIEWER: Were there many English people in your community? Your immediate neighborhood?

NORD: Not in my immediate neighborhood, but in Pawtucket, in the Darlington section. Oh, yes. . , a lot of people. There was an English fish and chip shop, and an English bakery--my cousins owned the English bakery. And there were English communities elsewhere, of course. Graystone was a very English community. People worked in that woolen mill there, and in the blanket factory. But in our neighborhood, there weren't any others like our family. You know, you found a house for your family, you had to go wherever, but it wasn't so far away from relatives--a couple of miles.

INTERVIEWER: People of what other backgrounds were in your neighborhood?

NORD: Well, next door were French, across the street were French, the other side was a cranky old Yankee and there was French all around us. But in the back of us was another nice Yankee family. [And] Irish . . . were our immediate neighbors.

INTERVIEWER: Were you friends with a lot of the children that were your same age?

NORD: Well when we first came to this country when I was ten, we lived in a little cottage with a French family next door. And there was a girl who was a year or so older than me and I was friends with that family. I think they were probably my closest friends then. I don't remember any . . . there never were any others. There weren't many in my immediate neighborhood, [I was friends] with that family 'cause they had a baby. And, you know, when you have a little girl ten years old and she can take care of your baby, then you've got something there. I was close to that family.

INTERVIEWER: And they immigrated from Quebec?

NORD: I don't recall, I don't think so.... They used to let me play the piano.

INTERVIEWER: Play on a piano?

NORD: Yes. Well I think it was quite a different family than ours. The mother didn't work because she was sickly. I would love to go to that house. I played that piano and played with that baby! Well, that was before I was fourteen years old. Then when you were fourteen, you know, when you go to work, the whole thing changes. We had friends that worked, but then you work and you.... I went to school for years and years and years at night. I left school at sixth grade. And I went to school evenings, when I was fifteen, and I finished seventh and eighth grade with the help of a teacher in one year. Then I went to high school. I went to high school for years, doing all kinds of nothing (and I liked to go to school). And they didn't teach anything except business courses then. So I would take a couple of business courses one year, and the next year, another couple of business courses. There was nothing consecutive, sort of, and nobody to help you with. And I didn't want this sort of thing, you know, it was just business English, typing, arithmetic . . .

INTERVIEWER: What would you have liked to take?

NORD: I don't think I would have known at that stage. You know, here you finish grammar school, there's no such thing as guidance counselors. You want to go to school, so, "We have this

NORD: and this and this and this," and you take a couple of courses. I didn't take any consecutive sort of thing leading from year to year. I took typing, and business English, and another year I took arithmetic and then, oh, just related subjects to business. You know, business, business, business. 'Cause I guess they thought, "What a girl would like to do is become a secretary or some such thing," you know?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: No, I had absolutely no interest in this sort of thing. I just wanted to go to school.

INTERVIEWER: Why?

NORD: Oh, I loved school. Just like today, I was reading . . . Did you read the little piece they had in the Sunday paper about Florence Murray? I know her very well. She's Judge Murray, Superior Court. She is a very nice person. She said--they asked her the sort of things she did--she said, "Well," she says, "I read a lot." She says, "I'll read anything." And I thought to myself, "That's me," I'll read anything! You know, you have to. So I'll read anything. . . Well, who knows? What kid knows at fourteen what you want to do?

INTERVIEWER: I guess I was asking, were there fewer choices in the evening school than in the day school?

NORD: Of course. A boy could take . . . I was helped by the example [of] my older brother, too. He went to school for years--evenings--and he took drafting and draftsman work. And his drawings, they were just beautiful. Just absolutely grand, so meticulous and lovely; and just to be able to do this sort of thing, you know . . . I didn't want to do <u>that</u>, but the fact that you could <u>learn</u> things and do such nice things.
But nothing except this. I suppose they were geared to what the need was in a particular industry.

INTERVIEWER: You never thought of stopping work in the mills and getting a job in an office?

NORD: It didn't interest me at all. No, it just didn't ever occur to me. I don't know whether it would have been wise or . . . No idea. No, it would have been sort of--I was going to say--alien to my background, the atmosphere [in] which I lived.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any friends who did go to office work, or....?

NORD: Oh, later, yes. Of course, I joined the YWCA when I went to work. I had a lot of friends there. I was very active in the YWCA.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of activities were there?

NORD: Oh, there were special groups. That was really their heyday, in the YWCA. And they had secretaries--they called them Industrial Secretaries--and [they] were trained to work with Industry groups. They would go into the factories at noontime, and have half-hour gymnasium classes in the dining room, or the lunch room, or some place. And recruit. But I went because, day school, these girls--rich kids, you know--would come to school in their jersey bloomers and their midi (?) blouses. And they would be absolutely beautiful. Just to have bloomers and a midi (?) blouse and look like that! My mother said, "You can go when you start to work, we can't afford it now." So, I became one of the girls when I started to work. And that was a wonderful experience, really a great experience. They would have a special night on which they would serve supper. My dad would say, (it's something now you remember all these things as you get older) "Do you remember when you used to ask me to kill a chicken to take to the YWCA supper?" (laugh) He had a few chickens, I said, "Can I have a chicken on Thursday night, Dad?" There was a woman who would make supper for the club. And then there would be supper. And then--I don't know how we managed this after working all day--listen, I tried to learn to play tennis; I couldn't hold a tennis racket, I was so tired. But then, I don't know [at] what point, you would have an assembly. And then gymnasium. And then basketball. By that time you'd be half-dead. And then swimming.

INTERVIEWER: All these in sequence?

NORD: Yes, one right after the other. And this would go from six o'clock until nine or nine-thirty. And that was really geared to this Industrial Group. This was just fine. And they had some marvelous people, really great people in their programs; you know, directors and Industrial Secretaries (they called them). And they would have speakers about child labor and these things, you know, that we were interested in. It was a great thing in that day. So those in your group became your friends, you know, group of friends with the same interests and age group. And then they would have conferences, weekend conferences. And I remember I was the leader of one of the conferences somewhere along the way. I don't know how I managed that, but I was active in that.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you active in the Y?

NORD: Oh, a long time. I served on the Board--not after I started work in the Union, because I was away so much--but for a long time. And I recall in '33 . . . I must have still been active. We had a terrific strike in '33 and again in '34. '33 was a general strike. The wives of some of the textile manufacturers were on the Board. I remember once, one of them saying--and I was vice-president of my union then; we had 3,000 weavers and it was difficult--

NORD: If Elizabeth is involved, "There must be something good about this." So they invited me to come to a Board meeting to explain the strike. And you know, these women usually would not meet at night. Their husbands wouldn't allow them to go out at night. They had to be home at night. . .They invited me to speak and tell them about the strike. A fine group of women, and very dedicated, you know, to the Y. And one of them--as a matter of fact, her brother was superintendant of one of the mills that we could not organize, but we were trying to close it down by picketing. She had arranged a meeting with him, to have me speak to him, to explain to him . . . You know, she thought maybe if I could persuade him about my point of view, that perhaps I might be able to persuade him that what we were doing was all right. And I did go talk with him, but didn't have any luck. But it was a great day in the YWCA in those days. It was very good. It was very effective work amongst industry girls. Of course, not only there, [but] around the world they were doing effective work. And they really knew what they were doing in industries, you know, international politics and domestic politics. So, that was a very good experience.

INTERVIEWER: Did you learn things about politics from often hearing the speakers, is that what you mean?

NORD: No, not there. No, I think I began having some interest in some questions, some legislation, in the Y: child labor . . . what else was I interested in?

INTERVIEWER: I was just going to ask you, you've talked about the school you went to and about the Y, but perhaps you'd like to say something about the Bryn Mawr Summer School.

NORD: That's a whole other subject.

INTERVIEWER: What is the name of the other labor school you went to?

NORD: Well, the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers in Industry. And I went to the summer school at Barnard College which would be for women workers in industry, too. And the Vineyard Shore Labor School, which was an eight-month school.

INTERVIEWER: Vineyard Shore, where was that?

NORD: This was--do you know where Highland is? On the Hudson River? You know, Kingston?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: Below Kingston. This was the home of Hilda Smith, who was the Director of the school. The school operated for four years.

INTERVIEWER: What were the years you went to each of those places?

NORD: Vineyard Shore was '29. Well, I was there in '29 and '30. Yes, we were in school when the "crash" came. And I had been before that, to Bryn Mawr Summer School, two summers. And one summer at Barnard.

INTERVIEWER: And what years were those?

NORD: Bryn Mawr Summer School was '23 and '24, I think. And I don't remember, but Barnard was between '24 and '29.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember most about those schools? What did you like? What did you learn?

NORD: Well, it was all very good. The directors and all the people interested have written a great deal about them. Some of the women in here were women who taught there at those schools. The Bryn Mawr College then had a marvelous president and I don't know how she happened to team up with this wonderful group of trade union women in New York City, from the Women's Trade Union League, that you said you were familiar with. People like Rose Schneiderman, Mabel Leslie, Agnes Nestor, Mrs. Roosevelt was part of that group--what was the labor director's name--Frances Perkins. Well, this group had been quite an influence in New York City and, actually they were, they were a great influence on Franklin Roosevelt. And that's a whole story in itself which is absolutely amazing. And, of course, in the labor movement--I don't think that there's ever been anything written that really does give them the credit that they deserve. They really knuckled down, this group of women, to helping the International Ladies Garment Workers to get their union started after the Triangle Fire; and all these, some of these women came out of that movement. And so they were an established, a really absolutely marvelous bunch of go-getters. I can't recall how this idea about using . . . I know M. Carey Thomas had an idea that it's too bad that these magnificent places shouldn't be used, just shut up in the summer time and not used. And, however, they together planned this project and brought in some great teachers. And the system was set up on the, I think, what they call the honor system, and the tutorial system--tutors worked with you, you had lecturers and then you had tutors that worked with you and small groups. Absolutely marvelous, and the curriculum, of course, was not strictly geared to working in the trade union movement although that was the purpose . The point was not so much training you for just, from the point of view of getting yourself educated; rather you see, they had a phrase that was coined by someone there, "To Give Workers a Voice in the Pen," which was a very nice phrase. But you had social science, in addition to labor legislation, economics and some psychology and literature. And they had marvelous people.

INTERVIEWER: And when you were working your mother stopped working, so your wages . . ?

NORD: Yes. I always say at sixteen so it must be so because it stays with me. When I learned to weave--and you know it takes some time to learn a trade--weaving is skilled work. And I guess there were some young girls then who would go into it and would perhaps find it too difficult; they didn't want to work on these dirty machines and knock themselves out. They didn't stay at it.

INTERVIEWER: Did she ever go back to work again after that?

NORD: No.

INTERVIEWER: And did your father stay working for . . .

NORD: Oh, he stayed, he worked until he was 72 years old.

INTERVIEWER: And your brother, did his wages go to the family?

NORD: My younger brother?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

NORD: Yes, and again, I don't remember when. None of this stays with me so there must have, whatever the arrangement was must have been satisfactory to us and we had no problems. Never had any problems of that sort. I think that we, well we liked our home and this is what you did. And I remember that it was up to '52 that I kept the family home and then all of a sudden I thought to myself, "What am I doing, I'm just out of my mind!" because it's costing me. I had no money, you know. I had a nice home but no money. I spent the last $500 I had to have the porch fixed and then wanted the house painted--where I was going to get the money I don't know--but still keeping the home, this is important.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after that, did you leave?

NORD: We sold the house.

INTERVIEWER: And your brothers?

NORD: No, my brothers lived in New York State then.

INTERVIEWER: So you and your father, was this?

NORD: Yes, we were still in the home that they had bought in 1918, which was a fairly large house, cottage.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think your parents expected you to get married or wanted you to get married?

NORD: I would think so. But I think, you know, of all the kinds of experience you have. The only explanation I can have is you sort of grow away from your own group, and there aren't many people let's say in my grouping, who would do what I have done. And so that there weren't many men, boys, who had my interest, you see, and wouldn't have gone as . . . [There were men] who were, you know, very nice, but wouldn't have gone as far in activities and thinking and education that I have and [therefore] just don't suit you. I think then, of course, you get involved--and you sure are involved--and you just don't know. Well then there are sort of other compensatory things . . .

INTERVIEWER: You mean with the Union?

NORD: Yes. I mean there are a lot of satisfying, nice and happy and important things about it, so it has its compensation. And of course you're so busy. For instance, the first real regret I have had, I have felt this past year when I've been retired. It would be awfully nice to have somebody close to you in the family, I mean your own. I have three nephews and a niece but they are, they're far-removed and I seldom see them. But you know, for instance, you go down to--this probably isn't relevant, you needn't bother--but you go down and have a vacation down in Florida and it's the cutest thing. You see this old couple walking along the beach and holding hands and they're so comfortable and contented and happy and you know (laughter) it really is nice. But having that feeling of . . . I think it's maybe wanting somebody to do something for, you know, rather than somebody do something for you.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live alone after your father died?

NORD: Yes, but he's been dead only three years. He lived to be almost 100 years old--97 1/2. Three years this past April he died He was in the nursing home for ten years. You see, when I say I have this feeling only recently, is, you know, since I've had time. Because I had that responsibility and it kept me busy and [I] didn't mind it. Had things to do about it and just had to work to pay the bills, but, you know, it's.... And I suppose, well you know this thing about boys. I don't remember my parents so much, but with my brothers.
I remember this feeling, you know, that somehow I had to have their approval. And they could go out with whom they damned well pleased but I had to be pretty careful, you know, that I selected the right person. Well,but with my parents, whatever I wanted to do was all right by them.

INTERVIEWER: They were very happy with your union work.

NORD: They were happy with me period. (laughter)
You know, no problem. Whatever I had wanted to do.

INTERVIEWER: When you first started working did you think that you would quit when you got married or did you think that you would always work?

NORD: I don't know, how do you know unless . . . Oh, it depends who you marry, where you go. I think that in our environment most women went to work. My youngest sister-in-law went to work, my oldest sister-in-law did not. She didn't work at all. My youngest sister-in-law worked for seven years. I don't know, [I] never thought about it . . . When you go to work so young it's in your system so to speak, so that one of the strangest experiences for me now is not having this routine. And when I was weaving, I loved my weaving, I never expected to leave weaving, even though the union, they asked me to come to work for the union. Even going to labor schools--I had never anticipated . . . And I've had some responsibility in the union when I was working and this was all right. I worked for almost sixty years. You should have heard me say this before. My father would say to me, "How would you like to be weaving [now] Elizabeth?" "Dad, I'd drop dead if I had to weave today." You know, in later years, since I've been at the last work I had. Oh, you know, it was difficult. But in your younger days, this was really something. This is why it sort of provokes me about this question of workers being apathetic about their work and complaining. Complaining is part of anybody's personality and character. But I think my father was a good workman and enjoyed his work. I loved to knock those looms around! If I hadn't gone to work for the union, I probably would have been a weaver as long as I could; and then I would have had to give up because I would have been probably physically exhausted. But I loved weaving.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it might be different for people who didn't have skilled jobs, though, as you did?

NORD: No, I don't think so. Because I think people who didn't have skilled jobs, a lot of them wouldn't have--perhaps this isn't the way to put it--[the] capacity to wonder whether or not what they're doing . . . they're glad to have a job and be making a living, and contributing and doing and interested. And you get interested in your work, you're part of an organization. You're important whatever you're doing. You're important to the structure. Somebody's got to sweep the floors, clean the toilets, and if you keep on cleaning you get a pat on the back for it so . . . right?

INTERVIEWER: Did you have friends at work or were your friends mostly from the Y?

NORD: I had friends at work that you might see occasionally away from work, but in the main, no. Because at work there wouldn't be so many people, especially in my work--in weaving--there weren't

NORD: many people in my age group with the same interests. A lot of married women. Men, you'd see a lot of men. Men and women.

INTERVIEWER: Did you always work in a mixed room . . .

NORD: Oh, always. In the weave room, yes.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think the best job you ever had was?

NORD: Well I only had three. I was a weaver, and then I was an organizer, and then I was this member of the Board of Review. The best job: when I was weaving, I liked it; when I was organizing, I liked it; when I had this job . . . Of course, this job was very nice for me in my later years because I couldn't have gone on weaving in the kind of work that's gone on in the factories in the later years. I doubt if I could have physically done it for as long as I would need to work. I always enjoyed what I was doing.

INTERVIEWER: That's terrific.

NORD: And I had a very interesting, marvelous experience in the union. Well in the process of organizing, you meet some absolutely marvelous people and people are so appreciative. They're convinced that what you're doing is for their good--you want to help them. It's really wonderful some of the experiences you have. Although often times it isn't so much that they come up and shake your hand and say "Thank you," because sometimes you could get $100-a-week increase for somebody that wouldn't say thank you. For instance, by the fact that I worked as long as I did in what I did, I was elected to my position. The fact that they elect you without any question, you know. You know that it isn't that they're doing it for any other reason than that they trust you, and so this is good. And to be elected. Now also, to hold the last position I held, I couldn't hold this on my own. I was a representative of the labor movement. The labor movement supported me in that position. So this is a good feeling.

INTERVIEWER: You were elected as . . ?

NORD: As an organizer for the national union, no, I was appointed; But when I was Joint Board manager, I was elected to that position.

INTERVIEWER: And how long were you that?

NORD: Oh my! From . . . how many years? I can't remember exactly. I was away from the union in '45, I was in the Labor Department in '45 and '46. So '46 and '47, then I went back, was an assistant again. Then I was acting manager during the war period and then I left the union in '46 and '47 to go to the

NORD: Labor Department and then I came back to the union. I didn't like that work. And then I left in '56, oh, for a number of years, no-no, not that long as manager. I'd say a period of five or six years as manager at least. And then each year you'd have to be reelected to your position.

You have some marvelous and interesting experiences. . . A situation comes to mind. . . I was asked to go into a little place in Connecticut, the girls wanted some help there. They had a union and they weren't very active, but I was sent over to help them work in the sweater factory. And their husbands worked in a factory where they made ax heads or some such thing in Connecticut. You know, they do a lot of that iron work or that sort of thing in Connecticut. Their husbands had a vacation on, I think, the first or second week of July and these girls didn't have any vacation, no paid vacation. They wanted a vacation. So I went in. And I didn't know these girls. I was just sent in to help them through this situation because they were going to stop work, you know, if they didn't get what they wanted. And they weren't very sophisticated about it, they were just going to stop work, period. Anyway, we'd go in and just get [so many] questions. . . Absolutely didn't know where to go, didn't know what to do. . . So finally we'd just sit, and sit, and you sit. And finally we said to the owner, "If you think that we're going to go up there in the work room and tell those girls that they can't have a vacation on the first and second week in August," we said, "you're out of your mind! We're not gonna do it!" And it worked....

INTERVIEWER: Did you have to travel a lot once you became full-time in the union?

NORD: When I was a representative of the union, yes. I did, I travelled quite a bit. One year, I think I told you about, I was in Washington for a year and in addition to Washington, the whole state of Virginia was mine. I (laughter) won't talk about that. Oh, that was a terrible experience, that was awful. That was before you were born, 1935, when things were rough, rough, rough.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about the travelling and how did it affect your. . .

NORD: I was young then and had a car and things were exciting. We tried to organize down in Virginia. The workers wanted to organize, you'd meet out in the cornfields and as long as they were, you know, really working at it you really tried your damnedest. And things worked and it was often an imperative kind of thing. [of course, then] in '35, you know, the [NRA was abrogated] or some sections of it, and so in the South they immediately put the workers on 48-hour weeks. You know, the NRA provided for time-and-a-half after forty hours. They

NORD: immediately put workers on 48-hour weeks without any increase in wages at all, let alone no overtime. And they were making twelve and thirteen dollars a week. Weavers were making only twelve dollars a week down in the South. So this was an awful situation we tried to, you know, get involved in and local bankers and businessmen were threatening to ride us out of town on a rail. So you drove into town and gave them a chance, you know? [laughter] It was really quite exciting and interesting.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any kind of people in the community who you went to that you could count on?

NORD: Never, not down there. Nobody, absolutely nobody! If they got the chance they'd really run you out of town on a rail. One day a young man who was the leader of this group--I was due to go down there--[said] "Don't come down," he said. "They're gonna ride you out of town on a rail." And I went right down there, [and gave them] a chance. [laughter] The bosses from the shop would be assigned to come follow me around in a car. If I'd been a man I probably would have gotten in a fight. Oh, you know, there were such things happening then, men who lost their lives in the South, and to this day have never been found.

INTERVIEWER: You mean labor organizers . . .

NORD: Right! Oh, they'd tell me to go on back to Russia in that town. This was Orange [?], Virginia, and this was a Northern manufacturer who was operating there.

INTERVIEWER: Were you frightened sometimes?

NORD: No, I never was frightened. It was a sort of . . . Well, I hate that word when people say that it's a challenge , you know, when getting a new job or something, it's got to be a challenge, you know. They don't know what the hell a challenge is! But it was just gonna come out of my mouth that it was . . . you were challenged. But I think that it's a different thing than saying something new is going to be a challenge. How do you know until you do it? No, it never bothered me. As a matter of fact, I think that was, for whatever reasons this compelled me I think this was probably the thing that made me do it or gave me this ability. No. This man, this Northern manufacturer--it was so flagrant, the thing that he did--was so positively awful. You'd have to do things which . . . I mean you'd have to put your action where your mouth is so to speak, if you're going to say to workers, you know, "You should do this," and so on, "this, that and the other should happen." You have to show your willingness to try to make it happen. So, he got out of his car in front of the factory and along one side, and I was there so I'd hurry up when he is going to come to the steps and, "Mr. So-and-so, can I speak to you?" He looked at me as

NORD: though I just weren't there and ran up into the office. It was typical of the South and very different to working.... And the union, my union until not many years ago would not send good people into the South because it was, you see, they would say it was not yet ready. It was impossible [to organize with] the kind of situation you would have . . . And this was, of course, my experience before the days of CIO: a waste of talent to work in some places in the South. It was just impossible. This whole town was up in arms against me. This was in the place where that awful thing is happening with that new chemical--is it Kepone--in Hopewell, Virginia? Oh God, that was another terrible experience! Positively awful. The whole community there was against the workers in this factory. One person who was very, very successful in the South worked for my union for awhile and she was, I'm quite sure she came from a family of aristocrats --Lucy Mason--a lovely lady. And she was quite effective with a lot of the Southern people, you know, manufacturers and employers. She was just great.

INTERVIEWER: Are you saying that because of her background?

NORD: Yes,[take]me, I'm an organizer, a Northerner. All they have to do is hear me open my mouth and they're "agin me" you know? Lucy Randolph Mason (1959 she died), she was born in the Episcopal Rectory in Clarence, Virginia, daughter of a minister. She worked for the Young Women's Christian Association, was elected [to] Richmond Equal Suffrage League and Richmond League of Women Voters, chairman of the Committee on Women and Industry and National Advisory Commission of Virginia. Samuel Gompers appointed her to something. She joined the Union of Labor Leagues, succeeded Florence Kelly, in the National Consumers League. [She was] Southern director for Textiles and Clothing Organizations in '37 and worked for the Southern Congress in addition to organizations for the election committee. She was a great lady and she has a number of books that she wrote. But she would meet them, she would be more than their equal, I mean you know, a lady of the first order. Just absolutely great. She was no little Northern textile worker that they would tell to go back to Russia. [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: Let's ask a couple of questions and then try to quit. How about this one: Thinking back to women in your local who were active and then dropped out, why did they, and why did you remain?

NORD: Who said they dropped out? [laughter] In my local, well, you see, I don't think in terms of women. Oh, my local was men and women, weavers, we were equal numbers of men and women. It wasn't a matter of men or women. It was workers. I never thought in terms of women. I guess because of my work experience. Women were less likely to be active, and there was so very few. ...

NORD: But there were probably, here and there, some active and loyal union members.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that was?

NORD: Well I think women don't lend themselves to . . . of course it may be different in my union than in some others....And in the textile industry, I think I could have become a national officer of my union had I deigned to want it or put the effort in. But I don't think that I was quite aggressive enough to do that. If it had interested me, I think I could have accomplished that in my union. Not just because it was me, but I think the situation would have allowed me to do it. Because at the time that we formed our new organization, the thinking was that they'd like to have a woman in the leadership of the union. There aren't as many women in textiles as ordinarily is thought to be--50 per cent or fewer--because there are many textile processes that aren't done by women.

INTERVIEWER: Did you mean that a lot of women aren't aggressive enough?

NORD: Not interested. And being an organizer means you have to be away from home, and a lot of women--[that] just goes against the grain of these women, [they] don't want no part of that. You'd have to have that experience. When I say you have to have that experience . . . well I know we had a manager in Holyoke who was a very effective person. She never became a member of the executive board of the union. I was a member of the executive board of the International Union for a great many years. She never became a member, she didn't want to. She was very effective in her work, as long as she's general manager of the union in the Holyoke area.

INTERVIEWER: Have you seen any difference between single and married women?

NORD: In the union? I don't think it's a matter of single. I think perhaps that it's been sort of my experience--if you have the kind of experience I've had--it might lend itself to your not being married. But there are married women who have been very effective. For instance, the woman I'm talking about is Mrs. Sullivan, Anna Sullivan. Another very effective girl in Kentucky was a very handsome girl who has just retired. Some worked in the South....Incidentally, my union has just merged with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, you've seen that. Which is good.

INTERVIEWER: It's terrific.

NORD: You see, a good deal [of] what I say about my experience in my union wouldn't be typical of some others. I think the Amalgamated has been a little bit more actually rough or restrictive with regard to women. Although I shouldn't

NORD: say that because I, it's just my feeling because I can't back it up with anything. I can only remember one girl who . . . I used to know. I thought she was a very nice person, a married girl. She had a young baby and she had been assigned to a new place. And then they were going to restrict her going home for once every two weeks, and this I thought was pretty rough on the [girl]....

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel that there was an informal power structure that you were left out of or that there was informal caucusing or decision-making over beers and bars that you weren't part of or anything like that?

NORD: No, no. What could happen . . . I was usually in -- charge of the situation. I was organizing. I was in charge of the situation with the joint board or I was assistant manager in charge; what could happen that I needn't be part of?

INTERVIEWER: Well you could feel like the union wasn't supporting you,or they weren't backing you with resources, that you were sort of making a set of decisions and . . .

NORD: Oh, those kind of things can happen I guess. There's no question. But I never had this kind of thing happen to me. And it wouldn't necessarily be because I was a woman. If that would have happened to me it would be because what I did, the policy was wrong or not successful or my personality was . . . no, never that kind of thing.

INTERVIEWER: At what periods of your life was union responsibility the heaviest and how'd you juggle the rest of your life at those times, did you have any?

NORD: Well there's just no rest of your life [laughter]. That's it. There's just no rest of your life. The only time you'd have a Sunday off would be in June, July, and August, and you'd work Saturday morning. One group of women who had a local union over on East Providence, they'd meet on Sunday night and they were all married women. The only night they'd have free was Sunday night. Actually it was only once a month. But, you see, they'd have meetings evenings. And then you'd have as many as 40 local unions or more. Well there's forty meetings a month. And it doesn't mean that you have to attend forty meetings, because your business agents were assigned to do things, but this is an awful lot of stuff going on. And then if there were something exciting [going on], sometimes what you'd have to have [is] if there were three shifts in a factory or two shifts, you'd have to have a meeting in the morning and a meeting in the afternoon. You know, for third shift and second shift would meet in the morning, and all kinds of things like this.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel like you made sacrifices in order to be active?

NORD: I don't think so, I chose to do this. Well, what alternative am I going to . . . I think the first thing that you might think of as a woman: would you have gotten married, left work, have a family? Is that the alternative? Of course, it needn't be; because a lot of people have, there's been lots of women who've been married and [have been] active. Some absolutely great women. One that comes to my mind is Esther Peterson was absolutely something. You know Peterson who was in Johnson's Cabinet. What was she, Consumer Secretary for Consumer Affairs. And then she was Secretary of Labor, was she labor or labor standards? But oh, Esther Peterson and her husband, they're just too great, they're just too absolutely perfect. They both worked and worked with dedication, a great deal. [They are] a couple of Swedes. And now she's not in the labor movement. She was Washington Representative for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers for years. And she now is consumer advisor for the Giant Supermarkets in Washington and she has been absolutely great. She has four children and they're all married, but they have been great in labor. And she had taught in the summer schools and at Bryn Mawr and she visited at Hudson Shore. Lots of women have been married and done great jobs. But there seem to have been sort of teams, two people; you know, [for example] Alice Cook, who seems to be the moving force in this project, she and her husband, they were divorced, but she and her husband for years were a marvelous couple.

INTERVIEWER: Are you saying that the couples were teams, working in . . .

NORD: Yes, they're sympathetic and, yes, they worked as teams. They [Alice Cook and her husband] worked with my union in the early days. They did great work. They taught in the summer school. They did this great job in the synthetic yarn industry that was absolutely a marvelous thing.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a special kind of camaraderie that developed among union activists, was it expecially strong during certain time periods?

NORD: I think there is, yes, especially with staff. It's a natural and logical thing and, of course . . . it's a point of view and principals and philosophy that you find in very few other people and very few other places. So that this is a logical kind of situation, in which you're happy. You talk the same language. You have the same attitudes about people who don't [laughter] quite see your way. But this is good, this is part of the whole thing, a very important part of the whole thing. And I have said often that, I don't know of any other situation . . . that the trade union movement is one place where you can very quickly learn to know the character of people. You really, you have got to measure up in most situations. As a

NORD: matter of fact, you have got to be interested or you won't stay. But you've got to measure up. There's opportunities sometimes for doing certain sorts of things that you. . . I remember when one judge in Rhode Island--not judge, a lawyer--who one of our business agents used to go to for advice about workers' compensation cases. He [the lawyer] wanted to sort of make a deal, you know, that this business agent would bring all his cases to him. And then at Christmas time came a moment I supply of liquor for everybody [came], and he was just ordered by the then-business manager to just take that right back. And I remember another situation, a wonderful friend. . . of mine who worked with me--Seth Gifford--who's now a lawyer in the city--worked with us for years. He is a Quaker. And he came to work with us....He was absolutely wonderful as a business agent. And one year the company, the Crown Manufacturing Company was giving turkeys to all its employees, so the man who took care of the labor affairs--what did they call them in the plant--said, "Seth, I have a package for you," and brings out a turkey in front of the committee.

Also we're committed and knowledgeable about the labor movement. You see, to come into a group of trade unionists you'd have to have pretty smart people, because here are people who are, you know, workers who are experienced in the trade union movement and in industry. This doesn't mean they're a bunch of dummies and know-nothings. Because if you've had. . . some training in the trade union movement then you know a little bit more than the instructor knows about some particular things and [that worker] is just going to tell you, "Look, this just isn't so." So most all of the instructors I would say would have to be sympathetic and knowledgeable about this trade union movement; have to understand what was going on in the trade union movement. And they came from all over the country; Chicago, the West Coast, not just recruited locally around Philadelphia. Probably there was nobody from Philadelphia, one or two people perhaps from Bryn Mawr College because they had a really, they had a pretty good sociology department at that time. And this is perhaps another reason why the school was so successful, why it lasted. They had very good people. Well, so the whole thing was just. . .Really if you wanted to go to school this was a made-to-order kind of wonderful thing.

INTERVIEWER: How were you chosen to go?

NORD: You had to, well I read the notice at the YWCA. I don't know if I would have seen it any other place. But the notice was posted about the summer school.

NORD: I was not yet 21. The lowest age was 21, I was not yet 21, but they . . . Then you had to fill out an application, then [you] went to other classes that were set up around the city during that winter. (I don't know whether that was required or whether I just did it). And I was accepted. There were later three other young women who went from Pawtucket.

INTERIVEWER: They said in the program that they would try to get people to come in two's, so they wouldn't be isolated. Did you go with anybody else from textiles in Pawtucket?

NORD: No. I didn't know anything about the school then. I later was the student representative on the board which was an interesting procedure . . . you know, the board that operated the school.... However, this was really a grand experience, and this was the pattern at Barnard. And in Barnard [with regard]to the labor movement,you've got all shades of political opinion, from the most radical Communist, you know, to the--I was going to say to the ultra-conservative . . . you wouldn't get ultra-conservative in New York City. So this was a really marvelous experience. The Hudson Shore school was set up the same way and then there was .... I don't recall any oral testing or any sort of testing at the summer schools. But at Vineyard Shore you were to choose a subject in economics, or let's say,in the field of economics or sociology, then you were given two days to present the result of your study in class at the end of the school term, which was very interesting. And you know that was really something to do. That really was, I remember . . . Oh, and I loved it! Well, I took something like--I can't recall exactly--something like History of Textiles. Then it was interesting to me, not knowing anything about the early processes of textiles. And [there were] a couple of girls from the shoe industry in Brockton who did [this also] and you know this was really, really fun. Really great.

INTERIVEWER: How'd your family do without your wages for the summer when you were in summer school? Was that a hardship?

NORD: Well, let me see. My oldest brother was married but my youngest brother was not, and my father was working. And I remember my father saying he didn't think I ought to do this. Although my family [has] never . . . These things I wanted to do [they let me do] and I guess, with regard to the union, basically they understood what this meant. And these things I wanted to do, they were interested [in], ALWAYS interested in people and things. Because you would have your friends come to the house, and people come to the house you were working with; YW people who really became your friends.

NORD: And a lot of these people were happy to have someplace to come to, like YW secretaries and people like this, happy to have a home to go to so to speak. So your family knows these folks, so this was something that they approved of; as a matter of fact, they were really fond of some of these people.

INTERVIEWER: Why, in regards to the summer school, did he say he thought you shouldn't go?

NORD: I don't know. My family was still paying for their home and I suppose that these . . . And of course in the kind of atmosphere we grew up in,this business of home, well it's just for everybody, it's terrifically important to . . . Then my father was also a great homebody you know. He talked about . . . "Didn't I used to keep my house warm in winter?" And we had a great big furnace and he would manage that furnace. A great homebody. I don't suppose that he looked much beyond.... From their point of view maybe there was success in, you know, you had been through these difficult times of uprooting your family. And from where they stood then, this was really an accomplishment. How much farther do you need to go, you know? But he said, no, he didn't think I should do it THEN. Maybe he just hoped I'd get married and get out of his way or something, I don't know! (laughter) I really don't know. And then I guess maybe always in the back of your mind you have:how long are you going to work, things are going to happen that you can't work anymore, you know, all those things. Well, however, that was not the way I looked at it. So off I went.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't they have an alumni reunion meeting of the Bryn Mawr summer staff? Did you go?

NORD: Yes, but you know I never went to one of those. I think they were off in Phillie or someplace.

INTERVIEWER: Or New York (?)

NORD: I couldn't . . . They didn't have them in Pawtucket!

INTERVIEWER: Did you know anyone who went there or who taught there?

NORD: I just read a lot about it. Oh, but you know, Fania Cohen, who taught at the affiliated school in New York City,used to have classes. And she was very highly thought of and loved. And she was very devoted. That was her life,you know, working with labor education. Well it was a great movement and it was a well-directed and educationally sound movement. Very good.

NORD: You see we had 14 students at Vineyard Shore Labor School and you had all shades of opinion there. Dyed-in-the-wool--if that's the phrase to use with Communists--Communists.... At the time--'cause you see this was a time of great Communist activity in the country--half those students were either Communist or sympathetic. And so there'd be great discussions. And various sharp, and good thinking [students] because those girls were, well, everyone there I say, with one or two exceptions, were STUDENTS, you know in the true sense of the word. They wanted to go to school. And they were in the labor movement . . . This was the labor school.

INTERVIEWER: Were you already in the union at the time that you went to the first summer school?

NORD: Not the first summer school, not the summer schools. No, when I went to Hudson Shore Labor School.

INTERVIEWER: But why, because you weren't in the union until 1928?

NORD: 1928.

INTERVIEWER: 1928. And the Bryn Mawr came in '20, '21?

NORD: 1923 and 1924. I was 20 in 1923. I remember I wasn't 21 the first year I went there.

INTERVIEWER: Then you went before you were in the union then?

NORD: To Bryn Mawr, yes. But Vineyard Shore was the most sophisticated and these were people who had been to the other schools. You didn't go fresh into Vineyard Shore.

INTERVIEWER: Was that one just for women also?

NORD: Right.

INTERVIEWER: They're all for women?

NORD: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Did things that you learned there contribute very directly to your later activities in the union, the organizing abilities ....

NORD: Oh, I think so. Plus it gave you a basic education that you needed for your work in the union. We had public speaking, which was very important. I had a difficult time with writing, I never developed any great facility for writing. That always

NORD: gave me a bad time. No doubt [the school] was helpful. And of course, labor law. Oh we had natural science too, that was when we had a delightful instructor. Wonderful, wonderful woman who came from Dana Hall at Wellesley. These teachers came from the most remarkable places. Our director of Hudson Shore was dean of Bryn Mawr College, left that position in the College to .... And I'm seeing her this week, I'm going to Washington on Thursday. And you know, to be dean then of Bryn Mawr College was really something. An absolutely marvelous woman who's really given her last penny (laughter) and she'd give her last piece of clothes too. She just lived for . . . An absolutely wonderful person, Hilda Smith.

INTERVIEWER: And this is who you're going to see?

NORD: I will see her. The person I'm going to stay with, my friend there, was secretary in the school, who now works in the Labor Department in Washington. She was secretary of the school and general jack-of-all trades. She was absolutely wonderful. She had just graduated from Wheaton College that first year. The economics instructor left Wheaton--she was head of the economics department--left Wheaton to go to Vineyard Shore school. And these wonderful people who were just so interested and had such convictions about this . . . they were just great.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think it would have been different if there had been men there?

NORD: Well, when you asked the question about women, I think my ready answer was going to be that it was difficult enough to get, to get a school together for women let alone getting one for men and women. But you know, there was the Brookwood Labor School which was very successful. We went over to visit there a couple of times and I had a friend who went there. But she didn't work in the labor movement before she went, and she didn't work in the labor movement after she went. Although she was an awfully nice person and interested in community affairs. But it presents a whole new business. You have to have more money, you have to have more buildings. It's awfully difficult raising money for these projects. The labor movement wasn't willing to get involved, generally speaking. There were some people in the labor movement who were interested. But at this point they had enough to do without getting involved in this sort of thing. They'd make contributions, my union would make contributions. But I think this was the reason. It's a matter of not being able to get an organization together to conduct--that kind of affair was a pretty big thing, and presented a great many other sort of problems. And maybe for a new venture this was as far as people would want to go. Brookwood got involved in all sorts of ideological differences and discussions.

INTERVIEWER: Does that relate to the fact that there were men and women there?

NORD: No, I think because it was a larger school and you had more people . . .

INTERVIEWER: I see . . .

NORD: who represented more . . . points of view. And different organizations, and coming from many different facets of the labor movement and political lines. It was considered, I think, pretty good. Basically and educationally [it] was considered good.

[Referring to guideline questions] Well, what subjects did you like? Did you have any favorite teachers? They were all favorite teachers. They were absolutely marvelous. I mean you just, the person who headed English for us at the Hudson Shore Labor School was Helen Lockwood who was head of the English Department at Vassar. And she was . . . Oh, you'd better do your best for her.

INTERVIEWER: You know we were just at Bryn Mawr, did Chris tell you that?

NORD: No.

INTERVIEWER: And we thought a lot about the summer school. We were at a women's history conference there. And we kept thinking, "Here it is!" Because we'd never been there before.

NORD: A lot of those lovely buildings. There are probably a lot of new buildings now.

INTERVIEWER: I was thinking of back in your neighborhood, in your family . . . were there a lot of other people involved in unions or in other kinds of . . .

NORD: In my family?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, but in your neighborhood also, Pawtucket, in your different neighborhoods?

NORD: No, it's isolated just as it is today. You don't know whether the man next door to you belongs to the electrical worker's union or the Socialist Party or he might very well have . . . you don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any kind of community activities in the neighborhood that would bring people together so that you would know someone there? Or was it just by chance?

NORD: No. What you would do,you'd decide. For instance, if you wanted to go to church. I was a member of St. Paul's Church

NORD: down in Pawtucket, I could take the bus down to church. And I didn't go to church activities, except church service. I had no association with anybody in church. Of course, then my big social thing for years was YW things, and YW people, where I'd either be with them at the YW or they'd be at my house, or whatever we did. No. Today, what do [you do] with anybody in the community? No different than that . . .

INTERVIEWER: Well what was the first political group you ever joined?

NORD: The Socialist Party.

INTERVIEWER: And when was that?

NORD: Oh dear I don't remember.

INTERVIEWER: Twenties or Thirties?

NORD: It must have been when times were pretty bad, because the only time I think . . . And then I was run out of the party because I voted against the general strike (laughter). That was embarrassing. that was an episode I just wouldn't, you know--actually there was no importance except that it must have been in the Depression years. And there was an old man, he used to live in Pawtucket, I've forgotten his name. He was [a] much-quoted and admired Socialist. He was a real Socialist of the old school and was always talking about some such things. He was a nice old gent.

INTERVIEWER: Not Jim Reed?

NORD: No, no, there was a dentist, was he Jim Reed?

INTERVIEWER: No, he was one of the local legislators.

NORD: No, this other man--if you knew Jim Reed you would know this other man. He was a lame man and a friendly old chap. And he would never hesitate to speak his point of view. He was often quoted in newspapers and I think respected in the city, in Providence. I don't know that he had anything to do with this thing in Pawtucket at all or whether it was just a Socialist sort of branching out at a time when things were very bad. And there, of course, was a ready situation and there weren't many people involved. And I don't recall any of the meetings other than the first meeting. And I don't remember when it was and they must have sent me down as a member. It must have been the early 30's because I don't remember when we had the general strike whether . . . There were two strikes: the big silk strike and the big general strike. Silk strike was '33, and the general strike was '34, and they were all over the country. And in the 1933 convention I voted against the general strike because we had a very poor union, very, very small membership. And there were a million-and-a-half workers in the textile industry and it seemed sort of a stupid kind of a thing to be voting for a general strike when we couldn't manage it.

NORD: But the socialists. . . I don't know how I got that report. . . but they drummed me out of the Party. That was the only political party I ever joined. I'm a Democrat but I'm not signed up as a member. I'm committed because I vote in the primaries. And I'm a Democrat as a result of my trade union experience because the Republicans treated me pretty rough. They gave me a bad time. Every place you go. Sure. Especially in those days. Sure, even today. We won't talk about that....

[Teachers at] Vineyard Shore School....They're marvelous .... But if you tried to figure out what your teacher was, whether she was a [member of the] IWW or the Republican Party, you'd have a bad time. But you'd learn about the Republican Party and you'd learn about the IWW. And you'd learn about the Communists and you'd learn about the Socialists and the Young Democrats. I have a great time discussing [politics] with people, and I cannot understand how any worker can be a republican. It's beyond my understanding.

INTERVIEWER: From your study of all the different parties in schools, did that influence you in your decision to join the Socialist Party?

NORD: Oh no, no. My joining the Socialist Party was, well that was after. No, no, no. I think it was a result of the economic conditions because wages had gotten to be pretty low.

INTERVIEWER: And you thought. . .

NORD: When in '33. . . I'm not sure about this, it was something like this . . . it was '33, or in '34, I started to work for the union. It seems to me that I was making about $17, $18 a week. It was pretty low wages.

INTERVIEWER: Did you think the Socialist Party would be the most effective?

NORD: I don't . . . No. It was just that my union was still pretty poor, had absolutely nothing, nothing. And here were people who seemed to understand exactly what the situation was. Of course, it was all theory. The Communists, as far as I'm concerned, most of them were Communists in theory rather than a decision based on any actual experience . . . which, from my point of view is not good. I think you have to be able to. . . Well you see as a result of . . . my general attitude and approach, and . . . my experience with my union in negotiating--you've got to know what you're talkin' about. You've just got to be able to--you can't make far-out statements and get away with it. You just better be able to back up what you've said. And so that you have to have an intellectual interest, but in addition to

NORD: that, you've got to know what you're talking about. You've got to -- now this is what negotiating and organizing and unionism is all about-- you've got to understand. You're leading workers and if you want a ten-cent an hour wage increase, you better not say to them you're going to get it or you're goin' after it, unless you know pretty well that you can get it. And so that takes some doing. That takes some understanding. That takes some study. And you've got to, you just can't shoot off your mouth. You learn that pretty quick. The workers in the union have a saying: "Any damn fool can call a strike but it takes a good person to settle it."

INTERVIEWER: We talked some on the first tape about your learning how to weave, but I just want to ask you a couple questions about your first earning money. You said tonight that you earned money doing lunch pails?

NORD: Twenty-five cents a week, I think.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else that you did to earn money?

NORD: You mean . . . before?

INTERVIEWER: . . . Before you went to the mill? Did you get to keep those twenty-five cents . . . or did you give them to your mother?

NORD: Oh, it was mine, sure kept it.

INTERVIEWER: And what about your first wages that you earned in the mill?

NORD: Oh, it would always go to your family, you know, this was the working class family. I don't know what stage you begin to not turn over your whole pay . . .

INTERVIEWER: That's what I was going to ask you.

NORD: I don't remember that . . .

INTERVIEWER: When you were 20?

NORD: I would say, perhaps . . . I don't know. But I don't remember ever having any problem about money for things. Like [for the] YW, the things I needed, and the things I wanted and conferences and going away. Money was no . . . problem.

INTERVIEWER: When you got your car, how did you get your car?

NORD: There was a period when earnings were pretty good, wages were pretty good, my brothers . . . first, my older brother had a car. It was a second-hand car. And he was always off with his girlfriend and didn't leave anything for the family, and there was no other car. Then my younger brother got a Ford . . . what do you call

NORD: them . . . Tin Lizzie. And that was a second-hand car. And we had more fun with that car. But, again, it was his car. But we had learned this business of having a car; what great fun it was, you know? Oh, we just had so much fun in that little old car! There were groups of us, like his friends and my one or two friends, and we would really have fun--when they felt like taking us along. We got along very well. We had a very nice time. I remember that . . . very pleasant memories about it. But then, of course, they'd get girlfriends and then there's just no time for you and the family, nothing. So, between my mother and father and I, we managed to buy a Buick. Oh, that was something!! And, that was just beautiful.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

NORD: It must have been several years before I went to Vineyard Shore, because I had the Buick to take to Vineyard Shore. I rode it there. I had to have a way to get there and home, and my father didn't drive, so they allowed me to take the Buick. And then I rode several girls over to the school, and several of them back when we were coming home at Christmas Eve, the Holidays, so this was very nice.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother drive?

NORD: No!

INTERVIEWER: So, you would take your parents around . . .

NORD: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Who taught you to drive?

NORD: My younger brother taught me to drive. Oh yes, to this day I remember, "Watch that woman," he said, "going up the hill. Watch her, watch her, she's a stupid woman." Sure enough. Often today, even, oh, out on a hill like Division Street in Pawtucket, "Watch that woman." (laughter) It would never fail. Every woman would, you know, back down a little bit before she went forward on a hill. So, I don't back down, (laughter) on Division Street (laughter).

INTERVIEWER: Well do you remember anything else that you saved up for, you know, any special purchases?

NORD: Yes, I saved up to go to Summer School I guess. At Vineyard Shore, I paid tuition at Vineyard Shore. I don't remember about summer school . . . I guess I paid some tuition there. I saved up once to go to England with a cousin. A dear cousin came to this country and then she got a job, and then her sister came and she got a job. And they saved up money and they settled in a lovely tenement for her mother and the other sister to come to America. And so then everyone decided that Annie deserved to go back to the old country and see her friends. So we started to save up and I got up to $100! I don't remember what year this was.

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