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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

and

OHIO LABOR HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

ANTOINETTE PODOJIL

Textile Workers' Union of America

by

Lydia Kleiner

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

VITAE

TONY PODOJIL

Tony Podojil was born on October 9, 1911, in Braddock, Pennsylvania. In 1920, her family moved to Cleveland. It was there that she began working at the age of sixteen in the Cleveland Worsted Mills, as a "lint eater". She was then apprenticed as a weaver.

Although in a supervisory capacity and unable to vote in the union election, Podojil helped to organize a union in the Cleveland Worsted Mills, signing people up and acting as a challenger during the union vote. Podojil went on to become extremely active in the Textile Workers Union of America [TWUA].

Aside from her activites as an organizer for the International union in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois, Podojil served for ten years as president of the local she helped to organize. She also held three terms as president of the Cleveland Joint Board of the TWUA and was elected pension chairman. In fact, she was asked to continue in this capacity even after her retirement. As a result, Podojil handled the pensions for all the plants affiliated with the Cleveland Joint Board.

During the Harriet Henderson strike in the textile mills in North Carolina, Podojil chaired the Cleveland Area support effort, raising funds, and so forth.

Before her intense union involvement began, Podojil was active in the Democratic Party, especially with a group called the Cosmopolitan,which was the women's branch of the party. She also served on the executive board of the Americans for Democratic Action in Cleveland.

Presently, Podojil's main involvement is with a coalition of senior citizens groups and the Federation of Retired Workers. She spends a tremendous amount of time lobbying on behalf of senior citizens in Washington, D.C.

Oral History Interview

with

TONI PODOJIL

June/October 1976
Cleveland, Ohio

by Lydia Kleiner

INTERVIEWER: I thought maybe one of the first things I'd like to do is just try to go through a little chronology of what kinds of activities, what kinds of union work, you've been involved in, just to start off with, so that I can look through some other materials in case there is something I'd like to check up.

PODOJIL: Yes. In other words, you're interested more in starting in my union activities in the back.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe just some general questions so that I can be sure that I know exactly what kinds of things you were involved in, and then later we can go back through that with more specificity.

PODOJIL: Yes. Well, any questions that you have in mind, just ask.

INTERVIEWER: Well, maybe you could just go backwards a little bit. The main work that I know of yours has been with the textile workers.

PODOJIL: Yes. I started as what we referred to as a lint eater, and I started to eat lint when I was sixteen years old, and I started to work at Cleveland Worsted Mill, which was down on Broadway, and at that time, the late twenties, they employed about 4,000 - 5,000 people. Some of the things that I think you might be interested in--I went in as an apprentice at the age of sixteen and my first week's wages, twelve dollars, this is what I earned, and I worked from 7 o'clock in the morning until 5 o'clock in the evening, and we worked five hours on Saturday. My first week, ten dollars I had to take out of my twelve dollars, and this was not given to me,

it was given to the woman who was teaching me because I learned the fundamentals of--I happened to be a weaver and I had to learn the fundamentals--all I had to do was learn the basics that I could learn. The first ten dollars of my earnings went to the woman who was teaching me because they said that this is what it costs her in lost time and in her weaving, and stopping and explaining to me how to put the shuttles, and how to put a bobbin. Now we're talking about approximately, almost fifty years back, not with this automation. We're talking about when you put the bobbin and you put it in the shuttle by hand. You stopped your loom by hand; you put your shuttle in there, and the same thing if you had a broken peg, you took it out. So my first ten dollars had to go to the woman who was breaking me in. After that I was getting my own twelve dollars a week for working six days. You could say practically six days a week because we worked until noon on Saturdays. I was for one solid year what we call an apprentice, which meant that during the day I had to spend some time, you know, learning how to weave. I would be given only one loom. When you were an apprentice you were given one loom and you were given plain materials to weave, probably gabardine or serges, or something. Nothing with a pattern in it, you wove at that. We would have to sweep the floors; this was part of our job to be apprentices. We had to keep the floors clean in the building. Each one had her own room designated, and we'd get big brooms and we had to go through and sweep the floors once in the morning, and we always swept them just about a half hour before quitting time. There are so many things that I could say about that time because then, after about six months time, you got one loom, and then you worked on this one loom another six months, and then they figured you were good enough to get two looms. Well, when you got two looms, by then, you were able--I'll take you in the back and I'll show you a loom the girl weaves on back there, if she's still back there--but, anyhow, then you went into weaving fancy material. You would have seven shuttles, and you would have only four boxes on each side, and you had to learn how to read your pattern and your chains so that you knew if a warp end broke for you, you knew exactly how to go back and pick it up, start it up, so that you wouldn't make a smash. Some of the things that bring a lot of happy memories--I think that we took pride in our work at that time. Let's say we were grossly underpaid, you know, but we took pride in our work, something that is lacking today. And I remember that if you damaged a cloth, you paid one penny for every inch that was being mended for you, so, in other words, you were still making your twelve dollars a week, you understand, on the one loom but when

you got two looms you went on piecework, and we had to pay for our own mending, and so if you did quite a bit they would allow what you would call three strings on your salvage end. Do you know what a salvage end is? You know the end of the material, as it's being wove, is called the salvage--I'll show you out there--and on the salvage if you would have a damage of the cloth after it was taken off the loom, it would be put on a perch and they would string it, and they would put a string on the salvage, so if you had one or two, up to three, you didn't get penalized, but if you had more than three strings on the end of your salvage then you had to pay a penny for every yard, you paid for your own mending. The girl that followed through and mended your cloth, then you had to pay her for it. Years ago, it took approximately--well, the bolts of cloth were sixty-four yards at that time--that's the way we used to weave the cloth, sixty-four yard bolts, and then when you came to your sixty-four yards there would be a marker there and you'd mark it, weave it down, and you would cut it. And then, we used to unroll it by hand and if you didn't have a girl that was helping you that was working next to you, then it took you so long because you had to stand there and bolt it, and fold this cloth, lap it over and folded it, and then you had to bundle it and tie it with a string, and see that it got carried to the platform, and then you would put it up on the platform, and then the men used to come and pick it up. We did this all ourselves. If women worked next to each other and the girls got along, soon as one went to unroll her ravel the other girl would hurry up and help her unfold it so she could get started again because all this time your loom is standing, see, and you're only being paid by the yards that you produce, you're not getting anything. So when you got promoted to two looms....

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when you got promoted?

PODOJIL: I was seventeen. I got two looms. So, one week, I would take two bolts of cloth, which would be about 128 yards, off of one loom, and the next week I'd only get one bolt because it took you--you see, years ago, the loom ran at about, I would say, maybe, anywhere from seventy to eighty picks a minute, and I'll explain what picks are. A pick is an inch measure, and the way your cloth is gauged, see, this is gauged by inches, it's gauged by picks. The shuttle would only run across so many times because we're talking about almost, as I said, fifty years back, when you had the power belts and the shafts going across, all over the plant, where they used to rotate the looms and they would put two this way, and two this way, and I'll tell you why they did

that later on. So you'd make a terrific pay; you'd make about twenty seven dollars a week, and you were really excited. Otherwise, maybe, you'd make probably fourteen to eighteen dollars a week, and this was piecework running two looms, but you'd get that extra piece always, that third week. Later on, as the changes started coming in, you know, and then they started little by little putting a little automation in there, and we used to weave some beautiful cloth, you know, so actually, a woman couldn't handle anymore than two looms. And I'm talking about weaving beautiful worsteds, and I'm talking about weaving scotch plaids; I'm talking about weaving beautiful gabardines, beautiful tropicals, not what you see today; they just put one thread in and away it goes. You don't see the beautiful sharkskins that we used to weave. You don't see any of that because they don't weave that way anymore. In the forty-nine years since I was--well, I'd say, a weaver--I have seen automation from one loom to two looms, where I've seen worsteds, but not the beautiful plaids anymore, being woven and one operator could operate twelve looms. This is what became a Warner and Swasey stand, this came after the war, after the second war, where the new loom that was the big, big, drastic change in weaving took place. I think before that for probably about 150 years, I don't think there was too much change in weaving, the way it was done, you know, under the automatic system, but it got better. But it got so that shortly after the second war, in this country, they started to weave differently. The shuttle instead of being this big was only about an inch and a half, wasn't any bigger than the shuttle. You didn't put your yarn into the shuttle anymore on a spool. Your yarn then was on big cheeses,* what they called big cheeses. They would wind the yarn, and maybe it might weigh fifteen-twenty to twenty-five pounds, and all this shuttle kept on doing, it would be rotating on a belt, like on a conveyor belt, and it would come back, and there might have been maybe ten-fifteen shuttles in there, and all it would do is would just grab this thread, pull it across, go down, and the next shuttle would pick up the next thread. The same cloth that it used to take me practically four days to weave, a sixty-four yard bolt; they changed the bolts to eighty-four yards then, and we used to take one off every eight hours, sometimes every seven hours we used to take a bolt of cloth off. This is what automation has done to the textile industry; that's how much it has moved it, you know. And the thing was this, that with the automation, when it came in, you'll never see the beautiful material, and I still say, you'll

---

* Large cones carrying fifteen to thirty pounds of yarn.

never see the beautiful material that was done. The people, we found out, they started being paid by the pick. As the new looms came in, automation came in, then you were no longer paid by the yard, how much in the yard. Everytime a shuttle went across for you, and they took one pick, they had gauges on there and they gauged it, and then you were paid X amount of money for how many picks were taken across in the cloth. This was the big difference, you know, in the big changes that came during the time that I started to weave as an apprentice weaver. And it really got so that you really didn't have to be an apprentice because unless you went into a textile industry that still has the old Crompton-Knolls looms and weave patterned goods, then you still have to be an apprentice and have to spend a lot of time. But if you come into any mill now that has the Warner-Swasey, which is the new looms that came out of Switzerland--they were invented in Switzerland--then you would find that you really don't have to teach anybody because all you do is just pull a handle, and snap it down, and this is the way you go, and the ging just runs. You tie the end and you keep on locking. And, probably, if you're running silk or anything like that, you could probably run 100 or 200 looms. So this is the great change that has come about. And then, later on, as I said, we started to work for twelve dollars, and then when the Wagner Act came in, then the companies were stopped from penalizing us; it became a federal law and they were no longer allowed to penalize us for doing the mending. Because they couldn't penalize us for the mending, then the company came out with something different, they started giving us a penny a yard bonus for every yard of cloth that we would weave that was perfect, see, to get away from them paying for the mending. So then they started giving us a bonus, and this bonus used to come to us in a separate envelope, and I was of the old school--my parents, they came out of Poland--and when I made my pay I took my pay home. We got paid cash, and because we got paid twelve dollars a week, you know, then we would get a two dollar bill and we would get a ten dollar bill in our pay envelope, then when I'd take my pay home, my mother would give me two dollars a week. But then when they started giving us the penny a yard bonus for every yard that you wove that was perfect, then I got to keep that for myself (laughter), this was my spending money then, you know, that I had extra spending money. So from then on, I practically went, I would say, the whole way as far as the textile industry was concerned. I started out as a weaver, and then I went on to what we call a harness jumper, and a harness jumper is when you start up a warp starter, you start up new warps, then

you drop the harnesses--this is dropping the shaft,* we call it a harness jumper, but you drop the shaft to see that whoever dressed the warp made it correctly, and then you had to correct their errors. And then I went on from there and I learned how to be a winder, and then I wound, and then I went on into the shipping room. I worked in the shipping room, and I worked the floors, worked the docks. There wasn't a section of the textile industry, I mean, as far as that goes, somewhere down the line that I didn't learn to do. As I said, I learned to wind; I learn to comb; I learned to work out on the jog; I learned to be an inspector in the shipping room. I finished being what in the textile industry is a second hand to the supervisor, and you're in between being the floor lady and assistant to a supervisor. They call it first hand and second hand, and I finished up being a second hand to a supervisor.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

PODOJIL: Oh, Lord, so many years. I would say about twenty-five-thirty years ago.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go back to what started you getting to work in the first place, and some biographical information. When were you born?

PODOJIL: I was born October 9, 1911, and I was born in Braddock, Pennsylvania. Then, we went on, and I was about two years old when my mom and dad moved into Ambridge, Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER: Is that a small town?

PODOJIL: Small town, yes, Ambridge, Pennsylvania, and then I was about nine years old when my mom and dad moved to Cleveland, and I've been here since then. I would say since about 1920, we've been in Cleveland.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have brothers and sisters?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes. I have one sister and three brothers.

INTERVIEWER: Where are you in....

PODOJIL: I am the eldest, and my sister, and then I have three younger brothers.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember much about Ambridge?

---

* This process assures that threads are in the correct position.

PODOJIL: Oh, yes. Not too much about Braddock, though we used to go back visiting. Braddock is just on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, right across the river. Ambridge, I would say, is about forty-some miles from there, and we used to go back visiting the family. My dad used to go back visiting his brothers.

INTERVIEWER: What is it like there?

PODOJIL: Down there today?

INTERVIEWER: When you were growing up there.

PODOJIL: Oh, well, it's just a small town and, I think, was country living, you know, real background living. I remember that my mother had the only sewing machine in town. The Polish people started coming--the first settlers actually, I think in Ambridge, were the German people, and there was a sect of some kind, some religion, but I think they had a German background. I think, if I can find it, and if you ever read about Baden and Conway* you'll find out this is a religious, some kind of a religion group, and I faintly remember them, that they had their own work area down there. But it was happy living down there because I remember as a youngster we had a lot of geese out there, and the neighbor next door had a cow, and somebody else had a few pigs. And so my job used to be taking care of the geese. We had a spring coming down which the fathers had banked up the lower top section for the geese, and then we had a section at the first higher up where the kids used to jump in and wade around, and then for the ducks and the geese to float around, and I used to have to go out and take the geese out then. One incident--I couldn't have been no more than probably about six or seven years old--that stands out so vividly; we had a gander, and he hated my brother, and as soon as my brother came out the gander went after him. He chased him all over (laughter). And I remember one time that we had the goslings, you know, the babies, and I let my brother get near them, and, boy, I really got my backside paddled from my mother because I let him pick them up and he liked it so much that when he picked it up he squeezed it to death (laughter), and mother blamed me because I let him get near them. And I always felt it was so unfair, so I always made sure he got real near that gander, you know (laughter), so he'd take a nip of his backside (laughter). But, my mother, she'd do all the cutting out and we'd do all the sewing for people in the area.

---

* Railroad center for New York & Pennsylvania Central Railroad.

INTERVIEWER: The people in town?

PODOJIL: Yes, for everybody in the area; you know, it's not like now; people were neighborly. I remember all winter long, as kids, we used to go from house-to-house, and we used to strip feathers. They would save the feathers all summer long, you know, from the geese and the ducks, and then we used to strip them, and then they used to sew pillows. And always when a girl was getting married, they'd make sure they made her sets of pillows, and big comforters, you know, those old-fashioned Polish feathered quilts; they used to make them. You know, they filled them up with the feathers, not like the quilts now that they have. And then in the fall of the year, I remember, we used to cut cabbage, and we'd cut cabbage from one house to another. So, actually, my background is--though there were five of us, there was actually no hardship, you know, as far as what some people say that they were deprived of, because our mother was able to sew and we always had nice clothes.

INTERVIEWER: What did your father do?

PODOJIL: My father was a steelworker. My father, he worked for Carnegie Steel, and he worked in Rankin, and then when J&L, Jones and Loughlin, built this big plant in Aliquippa, this is why my father went out there. Then he went to work and the plant was in Aliquippa, and he brought us out with him and we moved to Ambridge, which was across the river from Aliquippa. I remember my dad going to work; in the early hours we never did see our father, just late in the evening, because he used to work about twelve hours a day. And he walked--we lived on top of the hill--my dad walked down to the river, down to the Ohio River, and he would take a ferry and on the ferry you'd go across to the plant, J&L, that's where he worked, the J&L, and then he would come back at night and he'd walk up the hill, and so, as I said, we only saw our dad on the weekend. And then those too were very happy times because on Sundays, they used to get together, and we lived always in the area--well, our people settled with their own people, from their own villages, and I had an aunt and an uncle across the street. I had an aunt a couple doors down, and then every Sunday afternoon in the summertime they would get together and somebody would play a hand accordion, somebody would play a violin, and they would just play music and us kids would have just a ball running around there. And they'd get a keg of beer, you know, and stand out there, and really enjoyed it. So I could say that actually we really had a happy childhood. Not deprived, never, at no time.

INTERVIEWER: Was your father ever out of work?

PODOJIL: No. I would never say that Dad was out of work until the great Depression started. This was later on, even then I was married, and that was when the Depression started, in the thirties. But, actually, Dad worked, and one of the reasons that we left Ambridge was because of the big--well, there were two incidents that I remember way back as a child. I happened to have some uncles that worked in the coal mines, Imperial Coal Mines. I don't know if you remember much of your history but one of the big strikes was in the Lestdahl Coal Mines, which was a little town next over. The Lestdahl Coal Mines coal used to come in on the freights across--later on where we lived--when we moved from the town to the hills and the valley, they used to come in into the coal yard across from . . . and they used to switch it off because Baden and Conway was one of the big railroad centers for Pennsylvania and New York Central, see, and this was collected by a side of Ambridge. And so I had a background of uncles working in the coal mine and I knew what the situation was, but my mother would never leave my father go into the coal mines, never, she never let him.

But one thing, as a child, I remember, and I think this is what impressed me about the unions. My father was a steelworker and he never got too involved, you know, in the steel strike. But my uncles were working in the coal mines and we were from Lestdahl Coal Mines, I would say about nine or ten miles away, and then Imperial Coal Mines we were about twenty-some miles away. My mother and dad always owned their own home and, therefore, they were never obligated to nobody, so my father didn't have to worry. And I remember as a child, the coal miners, some of the men in the coal mines were talking about organizing, coming and having their meetings in our home in the basement. And I remember one particular time that I woke up at night and there was a lot of excitement going on, and I didn't know what it was all about, and here, I guess they sent the Pinkertons. They found out that there was a meeting there, and they had sent the detectives, and then they passed the word around, so everybody was leaving it. You know, years ago you didn't have a basement like now, you know; they would dig out a hole and coal cellar and you had a trap that you went down there. So our trap to our basement was under the kitchen table, so mother would pull this great big old-fashioned square kitchen table. The men would come in; they would go down in the basement, and then Mom would pull over the kitchen table, over that, you know, and the men would be down in the basement there. So this is my first inkling of unions, and I think I must have been only about six years old when this happened.

Then, years ago, they used to run the little lunch buckets, you know, there used to be the wicker baskets, and they would put a white cloth over it; there was an aluminum pail, and I became a courier for them. If they were having a meeting or anything, then Mother would pack a lunch for my uncles, and they would put a note in the bottom of the lunch, and then I would walk the railroad tracks down there until I had gotten down; the uncle would come out, and then they would take his lunch bucket out, see. And they would pass the note in the lunch buckets, and we kids were the couriers; we carried the notes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what the notes said?

PODOJIL: Well, yes, because Mother told me then, later on, you know, what she was doing, she says, "Be sure that you don't give the lunch bucket to nobody but Uncle Phil," or my Uncle Tony. I had to give it to either whoever the lunch bucket was going to, so they'd take the lunch bucket, and they'd know when they would be having a meeting. My Uncle Phil, he was quite older when he got married, and my Aunt Helen--he married a young girl, she was about fourteen years old when they married--and my poor Uncle Phil, to this day I feel sorry for him. You know my Aunt Helen, she was fourteen and he was about twenty-four when he married her, and she'd go into the company store and everytime it would come payday my uncle would be lucky if he got fifty cents pay. My mother used to holler at her, and later on my uncle even moved two doors away from us just so that my mother would keep her from going into the company store because she would buy whatever they had, and then when it came to being payday, why, he didn't have any pay, maybe fifty cents, or maybe a dollar, or something. She was young; she'd go in the commissary and, you know, she'd look and see, and she bought whatever it was whether she needed it or not; she bought it, you know. These were the kinds of things that I remember vividly of what happened then.

Well, then, later on a flood came. There was an awful flood of the Ohio River. The American Bridge Company had a big plant; this was one of their biggest plants. U.S. Steel and American Bridge Company, in Ambridge, had their big plant where they built these big beams for the steel bridges. I think my first inkling of what a strike was--because the coal miners were more or less having these hidden meetings, and all this--but I think my first inkling of what a strike was was when U.S. Steel and American Bridge Company brought in all the Mexican people, and they built a barracks right on the Ohio River, and then they put all these Mexican people

that they had brought in to break the strike at the American Bridge Company strike. Now, this I remember, them bringing in the Mexican people, and I also remember, when a big flood came--and it was a big flood--the Ohio River overflowed, and these people were so on the edge--they built these shanties for them right on the edge--that a lot of babies drowned; the river took them down and a lot of people lost their life at that time. This started my mother to thinking then, that she just didn't want to be flooded again, because that was the year that we almost lost my older brother that's the oldest of the boys and Mother had to run down as the water was coming down the hills, you know. Mother finally got them out of the water; she pulled them out with a clothes pole, and she said to my father, "No more flooding." When we lived on top of the hill it wasn't bad, but then when we moved in the valley the flooding was bad, so she says, "No more of this," so then she said to my dad, "We're going somewhere else." One of my father's brothers and one of my mother's brothers moved to Detroit, and they went to work for Ford. At that time there was that $5 a day business, twenty-five dollars a week, eight-hour day, so my father's brother went out, and my mother's brother went out there and they got a job. So they went out there. Mother took me with her; she didn't like Detroit.

INTERVIEWER: Why not?

PODOJIL: She didn't like it because . . . she just really didn't care for it. There was something about it that even if she had a brother there, and we stayed with my mother's older brother, and we went there for ten days, she didn't like it, and she says to my father, "No," she says, "I don't like it there." So we came on back home, and then she said to my father about a month later after that--she had two brothers here in Cleveland--she says, "Let's go to Cleveland with my father," and so they took excursions on the weekend that trains used to go on, you know, where you paid about $3 and you came into Cleveland. And the net result was that when she came to Cleveland, Mother came back, and Dad was here and he went to work for Otis Steel. He got a job right away; he went to work for Otis Steel. Mother went back, sold the house.

INTERVIEWER: He stayed here while she....

PODOJIL: Yes, she sold the house. I remember we went on a milk train all night, and then we came all night on this train, we came into Cleveland, and when we came into Cleveland, and we got off the train at East 55th here and Euclid Avenue, and Mother put us on a streetcar, and for the first time we saw a lot

of Negro people. We had one colored family in the little town that we lived, a family by the name of Moore, so it wasn't that we weren't used to the colored people, but this was the first time that . . . we came in that area and the train stopped at 55th and Euclid, which at that time was strictly a whole colored neighborhood; that's a few blocks away from here.

So when Mother had gotten on the streetcar with five children . . . she came with five children and I want you to know, when my mother came here, she sold the house and she brought the money, all cash, pinned up in her bosom (laughter), all that money, tied up in a hanky, tied up in her bra. We got on the streetcar, and there we are with all these children, and we're looking, you know, and my younger brother--I guess he was about three or four year--he got to screaming, you know, he wasn't used to seeing colored people everywhere we turned around, and Mother said, "Hush, hush, be quiet." She said Polish to us, you know, she says, "You be quiet." So we waited until we got into 55th Street area down at Broadway, then it seemed like the white people, the Polish people were there, and we got down to the area what they call--in Cleveland it's called the "Little Warsaw"--and this is where we came; we went to the Little Warsaw area of Cleveland. When we got there it was the extreme opposite; everybody on the street talked Polish; the children talked Polish. Where in the small town we talked only to our uncles and our aunts, and at home we spoke Polish, but we didn't speak it on the street, because when you were on the street there were a lot of German people there. There was Russian people in Ambridge, you know, and so we spoke English there. There was no Polish church. We went to church at St. Martin's, which was an Irish parish, and we went there. And then to come over here, and then all of a sudden we--you know, what a shock it was--here we are riding the streetcar and we don't see anything for miles but colored people, and the, here we get off the streetcar and we find out everybody talks Polish, and I remember the boys were shooting craps out on the street, and they were throwing the dice; they were calling the numbers, you know, in Polish. And so this was another big change for us, and we stayed with an aunt and uncle, I remember, for about three days until our furniture finally got here. But, Mother, even before she left to come to sell her other house, she had already bought a home here. In those few days that she was here, Dad got a job and they bought a home, and everything, and we just waited until our furniture came and we had gotten settled, so we had gotten adjusted to them.

INTERVIEWER: She was a fast mover.

PODOJIL: Yes. My mother was adventurous; she was educated. My mother and my father were educated, though they were born in Poland.

INTERVIEWER: What part of Poland?

PODOJIL: They were about sixty miles out of what they call Mwava, and about a hundred and some miles out of Warsaw. The strange thing about my parents, they never learned to speak English, and yet they were citizens, they got their citizenship papers. They were proud of the fact that my brother was in the service. But because they settled in the neighborhood of that "Little Warsaw" area, in the community, and everybody spoke Polish--they went to Polish church, and everything--they never learned to speak English, though they understood what we said. And yet my father could speak and read German, and Polish, and Russian. And my mother could write Russian, and she could read and write. My people were educated; they were not illiterate, not at all. My mother was a great reader of history; she loved history books.

INTERVIEWER: What language did she read?

PODOJIL: Polish. She read in Polish, and she could read in Russian, but mostly she read history books.

INTERVIEWER: They both went through grade school?

PODOJIL: My grandfather, which was my mother's father, was a refugee out of Poland, and he went into Brazil and the United States because he was wealthy and he was a teacher; he was teaching. So, then, the Russians were looking because they objected to them teaching them how to read and write, so my grandfather had to run away. He just got out in time because they came over, which meant that my mother had to take over the care of the farm because she was the oldest girl, and in the meantime my oldest uncle, my mother's oldest brother, was already here in this country.

INTERVIEWER: Around when was that?

PODOJIL: Actually, when my mother came here [ca. 1891] and my mother's brothers, when they all came into this country they came into Passaic, New Jersey, and then from there--because they had cousins there--and they all came down where the steel mills were, down around Pittsburgh, in that area. Actually, from Passaic they all went to Pittsburgh and then they got jobs all around, Carnegie Steel, and in Rankin, and all those [steel mills] up in that area; they got jobs.

INTERVIEWER: How did your parents manage to get an education in Poland?

PODOJIL: Well, because my grandfather was a school teacher, see, because he taught them. And both my father's people and my mother's people, they were not poor people; they weren't aristocrats, but they were wealthier people. They owned their own farms, and my mother said that during harvest season that on her father's farm they used to have anywhere from 100 to 120 people working at harvest time, and they also had--and my father's people were the same way--but as far as my grandfather, my mother's father, objected very much because my mother married my father, because he thought she married below her level, though my father's people were wealthy and had a big farm, but they didn't have as many people working. On my grandfather's farm, there were people that even lived there. They had about six or seven families that lived there and that worked the farm all the time, because my grandfather was strictly an aristocrat. My mother's father was an aristocrat. He didn't know what it was to dirty his hands. My mother's sister, he sent her to Paris; she was a trained dressmaker; she beaded, and she studied how to be a dressmaker in Paris. And my mother was sent to school to Warsaw, but she wasn't sent to Paris, and that's why my mother knew how to sew. My mother could cut a pattern out herself. And my grandfather sent my mother to Warsaw because he always told her that her mother was dead and she would have to take care of the farm. So my mother could look at a pattern and just cut it out and sew. So, as I say, we never hurt because for the simple reason that years ago, we had chickens and, you know, we had scratch feed bags, and Mother used to bleach that all out, and cut our panties, and the salt sacks used to be hankies. You don't remember these things, but you see I miss doing all these things, so I know what it is. And because she was raised on a farm, even when we lived in Ambridge we had our own chickens, our own geese, and our own dog. And, then, Mother used to also slaughter the hogs for the people in the area, so then always in the fall they would slaughter the hogs, and there was always the smoking of the hams, and putting stuff away, and barrels of apples for us in the basement, and all that. So, actually, as I said before, we never were, I would say, poverty stricken.

And my mother, I guess I inherited some of this from her because she was like a neighborhood counselor. If anybody was having marriage problems, or somebody was having a baby, it just seemed like everybody came to her and she was always resolving problems for people. And also some of the things that I remember years back, and when I see this paperwork

that I have now with Medicare papers, and everything, and I remember people coming to the house and asking Mother and Dad to loan them money, you know, to buy a house, and they didn't think nothing of it. Of course, then homes were three or four thousand dollars; they thought nothing of it, loaning somebody four or five hundred dollars. People didn't sign no notes or anything, and they would struggle and they would pay it back. Or they would send a card, you know, for somebody, transportation for somebody that they would get a letter from Europe and somebody wanted to come here, and they'd go out and buy one of these what they called the ship card, ship cards they used to call them.

INTERVIEWER: What were they?

PODOJIL: Well, the transportation. They would send them the tickets to come over on the boat, but they used to call them ship cards; that I remember. And they would go down to the travel agency and buy one and send it over, and when a person came back they'd stay with them; they'd get a job, and they'd pay back this money, you know, whatever they paid to transport them. And then today you see all this paperwork, all this red tape, and then you have to go garnishee people's wages to get your money back because they don't realize--I mean the responsibility, the honor of your word.

I try and tell this to my children, and to my grandchildren. I try and pass this on so that they remember a lot of the stuff that everything doesn't come on a silver platter. It doesn't. These are the things that are struggling. A fine example, a few years ago one of my sons got a job in a brewery for the Teamsters; I called a friend of mine and he got him a job. He had to pay fifty dollars initiation fee, and this was also a few years back. Their initiation fees are much higher, and he complained to me. He came and he thought it was terrible that he had to pay. I'm not very fond of the Teamsters--believe me, they leave much to be desired as far as I'm concerned--but still, a union is better than no union. I told my son, "Look what you're starting to work for. You know when I married your father, you father was making twenty five dollars a week. Look how much money you're making." My son was an apprentice electrician over at Carling's Brewery and he was making one hundred and seventy five dollars a week. Look, the difference, and he was complaining, and I really gave it to him because I told him, "Pay the fifty dollars; you have a good job. Look at what you're earning." I said, "Where are you going to get a job where you're going to earn $5.75 an hour, an apprentice? Being an apprentice electrician."

I'm continually talking union. I guess I get so discouraged sometimes what I see happening today, and I do get discouraged, but still I always think, well, there's always a good side to everything, and sometimes some of these things that do happen today, maybe it's better that they do happen because a lot of things come out in the open. One thing I'm proud about the textile workers: we've had two internal disputes that I've been involved with, fruitfully involved in as far as our union is concerned, and we managed to overcome them. We never had any real scandal that our officers were overpaid, like they have in the Teamsters [Union] that they have abused the pension fund, or anything. During the investigation of pension funds, we in the Textile Workers [Union] we had gotten a compliment from the congressman at the hearing, that our pension program was so well set up, and I think especially the dyer's pension, which under the dyer's position our pension was terrific. I mean especially in this area where I negotiated it for our people. It's the best for anybody in the dyer's pension. I've even beat those guys out in the fight for . . . which are the masters of the dyers, you know. If you read our pension report you will find out that the plant that I represented and where I worked, it's way at the top as far as the pension program is concerned; we have such a very good pension program.

INTERVIEWER: Have you done a lot of negotiations work?

PODOJIL: Yes, I've done a lot of negotiations. I've done a lot of organizing. I organized for our union. I organized in Rochelle, Illinois. I tried to knock the Caron Brothers, and kind of hard to do. Old man Caron is a real holy terror on wheels. When we went out to organize, boy, I'm telling you, he put up a seven foot fence around his building and filled it up with big German police dogs, when we were out there organizing.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

PODOJIL: I would say about twenty years ago. Then I organized in Altoona, Pennsylvania. I did our organizing down there, and we worked on the Puritan Knitting Mills, organizing down there.

I could go on and tell you some of the funniest incidents that ever happened to me in organizing. I think one cute one that I have to tell you, when I was younger, when I got involved with the Union and I would hire into a plant, and I would get into the plant long enough so that I would find the key gripers, you have to find the key gripers. You know,

in leadership you have three different kinds of group of people that you have. You have the loudmouths that are the speakers, and then you have the one leadership that are real good with doing books, you know, and stuff, and then there's the ones that just sit quietly back. So we always used to go into a plant and look for the worst bitcher in the plant. So I went into Morgan Dying and Bleaching Company, which at that time came into Cleveland and started a plant over up on Clinton. I was assigned to work with a woman by the name of Clara, and I mean this woman really bitched. She complained about everything. So, I just worked with her; it took me three days to get to her. Then I made it my business to stop at Woolworths with her and we would have an apple cobbler, you know, and a cup of coffee, and I'd get on her. And about the third day she says to me, "You'd better come home and help me with Freddie." And I says to her, "Help you with Freddie?" "Yes, you come home and help me with Freddie." "Okay, I'll help you with Freddie." I didn't know what she was talking about. The three days I was working with her she was always talking about a parakeet, so I thought maybe something happened to her parakeet, or maybe he got loose from her and she couldn't catch him. She lived about a block away from the plant. So when I got over to her place, and she called me into the dining room and--oh, she told me she dumped Freddie, that's what it was. She said, "I dumped Freddie." I thought maybe the parakeet, she dropped him or something. So I get over to her house and she says, "He's laying on the table." So I go in there and I look on the table, the dining room table, and I don't see anything. And she says, "Well, that's Freddie laying there." And here, she had a brown box; it was ashes; it was her husband. He had died and she'd had him cremated. She didn't go with him when she had him cremated. She had a friend of hers carry these ashes in her car for about three days, and finally that one night she'd brought them over, and when she opened the box up all the bones weren't burned and there was splinters of bones, and he had gangrene because he was diabetic, and some of the bone was green. And she had tipped it over on this--and I know she's neurotic, you know, so what'll I do--so I says, "Okay, Clara, don't worry, don't worry, I'll take care of Freddie." And she says, "Well, his aunt said if I take Freddie over to her house, that she will take him and bury him in Elyria, Ohio, and they'll make a hole in his mother's grave and put this box in there, but," she says, "I'll be damned if I'm going to pick that son of a bitch up," she says, "he was so mean to me." So what do I do? I go over there and I put these ashes in this little box, and I tape this box for her, and

I said, "Well, come on Clara, I'll go with you on the bus so you can take these ashes out to Fairview Park to this aunt and uncle." I know we didn't eat because we came right from work and I says, "Clara, come on, we're going to stop and I'm going to get you something to ear. You and I are going to get a bowl of soup."

And do you know, I got into this restaurant with her, and I'm carrying this box--she won't carry it--and I get into this restaurant. It's a little restaurant on the corner of 25th and Loring, and as I get into it, and have the box here, and I ordered a hamburger with a cup of soup, and as I go to pick this hamburger up and put it in my mouth I realized that I didn't wash my hands. So what am I going to do? If I quit eating I know she's going to quit because the woman is a total wreck, and so I ate that sandwich, and I thought to myself, "Well, what the hell harm can it do me now because it's gone through fire, and if anything's gone it's been burned out, so I might just as well eat some of the guff from his ashes too." So I ate the sandwich, and I waited outside until the bus came, and I had put her on the bus, and I says to her, "Here's his ashes, go on your way." And she hesitated, but she finally took the ashes and she went on the bus. I had taken the bus to go on home and I had no more than gotten home, I got a call from her and she says to me, "My husband's aunt says that he wasn't good to his mother and her husband said he wasn't going to go out there, and he wasn't going to take these damn ashes and he wasn't going to put them in a hole in his mother's grave." So she comes back home with those ashes, and she's hysterical. So I said to my husband, "Dad, you drive me over to the west side; I've got to go over by Clara's." She says, "You'd better come over, Toni," she says, "because I'm going to dump Freddie out the window on the sidewalk and let everybody in the world walk all over him on the sidewalk." I said to her, "No, Clara, you don't want to do that." So, lo and behold, my husband drove me up there, and I says, "Clara, come on, let's take these ashes," and I said, "don't do what you're doing, you're working yourself up and it's useless," I said, "come on." So we went down, and my husband, he drove us down to the lake down around Loop Avenue, and I just said a prayer and I threw the ashes into the lake. So, I mean, this was one of my strange experiences, you know, that I've had.

And, really, in organizing, when you go organizing, you'd be surprised what you find. I remember being out in Illinois and I had to make a house call, and they told me to make a right hand turn, and told me to go down the road, down about

a mile and make a right hand turn, and then make a left hand turn until I come to a little red schoolhouse, and from there. So I went out to make this house call with a girl that worked the third shift and I couldn't convince her that, you know, the union was good for her; she had to talk it over with her husband. So, God, I went down this road and there was corn as high as an elephant's ear, and I'm on this dirt road and I'm going mile after mile, and I was just a wreck, you know, and I get to an end and it looks to me like over here, my G-d, it looks like a pasture over here, but the dirt road makes a swing to the left, so I make a swing to the left and I'm going down again, and there I am with corn as high . . . I can't see a soul. If another car was coming, I don't know where I would have gone, and after I made a left hand turn, and sure enough, I come on out there and there was a little red schoolhouse, so I knew all I had to do was go into the yard across the way. And I went out there and this gal comes out, and I would say she was no more than about twenty years old. And I mean she was an attractive girl, really attractive, but I doubt whether she had the mentality of a six or seven year old, she couldn't have had. And then comes out her husband, a wheezy old man, real old fossil, dried out Hoosier, you know, he comes on out there. And here she is; she worked all night in the plant, and she was out home, and no sleep yet, and had about six little youngsters running around there, not properly dressed or anything, you know, out there, and running around over there. But she came out and she sat there, and I had to talk to him, you know. And she didn't sleep, and she worked. She was feeding the damned chickens out there, and that old man didn't work, he just took care of the farm. She went into town every night and she worked the third shift. She worked at Morgan Dying and Bleaching; she worked in the spinning room, this girl did. And beautiful! I could never get over what a beautiful girl. I mean, she was the kind of a girl that probably could have won a beauty contest, this is how beautiful. She had the prettiest complexion and she had dark hair, and married to this old man. I swear to God, he must have been seventy if he was a day, and had all those little children, and she had them running around; I couldn't get over it. No, he says, they're real good to him. They let his wife work over there on the nightshift and he just wasn't going to have her vote for a union. He did like he told it.

INTERVIEWER: He never....

PODOJIL: No, no, no she never did. Most of my organizing out in Rochelle, it was a beautiful park out in front of it. Caron

Dying and Rochelle Dying and Bleaching were next door to each other. Well, when we came in and we threw our first leaflets, Caron's, the ones that put this great big fence up and put the dogs back there, but Morgan Dying and Bleaching didn't do it. Mr. Iva Roth, he wouldn't do it. He was the president of the company, and I had good conversations back and forth with him because he recognized me from coming into his plant here in Cleveland and organizing. See, I followed him back to their main plant and so, of course, the supervision they had over there they recognized me from here, and so he knew that I was out there.

So I used to sit in front of the park there and as these people used to come in to work, they used to leave their children. And I used to babysit for them; they'd leave the children with me. And while the mother or the father or the husband or the grandmother came out of the plant--and in Rochelle we had to stand--they finally started to come in at 4 o'clock in the morning; it'd be so cold out there. Were you ever in Illinois or around Wisconsin, that part of the country, in November and December when it's so cold? We had to put long johns on out there and stand out there, and those farmers coming in, I'm telling you, at 4 o'clock in the morning. Rochelle also, I think, is a railroad town because Del Monte Company cans there; in fact, I used to go there and watch the farmers when I didn't have anything to do. I used to sit and watch the farmers coming in with the corn, with the pumpkin, with the tomatoes. And I used to watch them back in the back there where the canning plant was where the stuff used to go up on the conveyor. That would just be my pastime. I'd go up there and watch them over there on the conveyor. And then I used to spend most of my time in the laundromat, and sitting out there in the park, and early in the morning visiting with the people that are coming in, talking. Now, in Altoona, it was a little different when we organized down there. We went to organize Puritan Knitting Mills and, you know, Puritan Knitting Mills was family owned, and they were demonstrating in that area.

INTERVIEWER: When did you first go down there?

PODOJIL: When I finished in Rochelle. I guess I about got through in Rochelle around in December. I think I came back from Rochelle about the fifteenth or sixteenth of December.

INTERVIEWER: What year?

PODOJIL: I would say about twenty years ago. Then I was sent to Altoona, Pennsylvania, and at that time we were organizing

the Puritan Knitting Mills. There, it was a little different. We set up an office right across the street from the plant and next door to a bank. And so lots of people were cashing their checks, you know; they were stopping, and all the gossip that went on in the plant we found out.

INTERVIEWER: Was it an open office?

PODOJIL: Yes, oh, yes, because see, in Altoona, Pennsylvania, they make the Butterick patterns. We had them organized; we had one of Puritan's plants organized down there. We had the smaller plant, so we went for the mother plant, to organize the mother plant, we had one of the . . . plants organized, and so we went to get the mother plant. This was about the time that we were having one of the internal disputes in our union. Some of the officers--our vice-presidents--kind of split down in the center; some had different ideas.

INTERVIEWER: What was it about?

PODOJIL: Well, you know, all of these things are all politically motivated. They are all politically motivated. Men that came up from the rank and file and became members of the board, vice-presidents of the board, and they would get in like a little power struggle. Some would want to stay the old ways, and some would want to progress and move forward, and some wanted to stand still and protect what they had. I remember that we did a terrific job of organizing there. I think in approximately about a month's time. There were about 1,100 people working; we signed 700 people in the union.

INTERVIEWER: How many of you were down there doing the organizing?

PODOJIL: I was the only woman. We had two from the United Steelworkers [Union] helping us to organize. I would say approximately there was about ten of us all together.

INTERVIEWER: You were the only woman.

PODOJIL: I was the only woman, yes. I was always the mother hen. So we had 669 cards out of a possible 1,100 signed up, and we petitioned for an election, and something that we tried to tell the people down there, that they were not aware of, was the fact that Puritans were selling out, the owner of Puritan was selling out to Warners of California. And we tried to convince the people that a lot of the fringe benefits that they had was stuff that he had given them,

you know, that these would be taken away from them if they didn't have a union to protect their rights, because once Warners took it over it would become a part of the monopoly.

So when we were ready to have our election, the New York Times came out with the internal dispute that our union had between themselves. In as much as that you cannot.... How can they expect to organize you when they themselves are disorganized? The next time you come down, I will give you a copy out of the back rooms. There are some copies of the speech then, that I made to the [Textile Union] convention and that I told all these vice-presidents and everybody what I thought of them because I had never seen anything. So then they [the company] took this New York Times and they must have bought thousands of issues, and now, you see, big business doesn't care about the unions. They don't care if they violate the laws. The union has to obey the laws and it says twenty-four hours there shall be no campaigning, there shall be no literature on the walls the way the people go down to the election booth. The companies disregard this; they absolutely disregard these things.

So on every floor in that building, every hallway, and they had a captive audience, and all blessed night long over the loudspeaker they were blasting at us, and telling the people to read the New York Times, and so and so, you know, [the] last night [before the election] they had a flyer in, put it in there and, Lord, came the day of the election and we took a shellacking. Those 600, almost 700 people that signed cards, we lost that election and we lost it bad. I think we got about three hundred and thirty-some votes and the rest went against us. And they said we told them lies that wasn't true, that they were talking merger with Warners from California, which was a big knitting mill, and all this and that, so the net result was that we lost the election. And if you ever wanted to see organizers sit and cry. I was the only one that wasn't crying, not that my heart wasn't breaking, you know, because we worked so hard and we thought we had this election won, but the idea that they were allowed--what were you going to do? Sure, you filed charges with the NLRB Board, it takes two-three years before these charges come up. But this complete disregard of the people, you know what I mean, and this propaganda, captive audience, and this is something that we don't have a right to, a captive audience. They [the company] have it until the very last moment.

And going back to organizing, as I told you earlier when we talked, when I worked myself up from apprentice, I learned many other jobs in the plant, and I became a second hand. And when the union made an attempt in 1954 to come in and organize the plant that I was working for, Cleveland Worsted, this was their third attempt; they attempted previously on two different occasions to organize the textile workers. They came in the third time, and I was a supervisor, more or less, and I wouldn't ever have been entitled to vote even if I would have been, and I had personally, absolutely nothing to gain by joining the union, being in a supervisory capacity, but as the people were organizing and they were having their meetings, our company president, Mr. Poss, had captive audience speeches too.

And one of the things that everytime there was a union meeting, they used to hold them at the Alliance for Poles. You know Cleveland Worsted Mills was strictly, I would say, all Polish people working there; in fact, any notice that was ever put on the bulletin board was put on first in Polish, then in Bohemian, and then in English. Any changes during the work period that you had to do, if you had to change yarn or your lots or anything, was strictly in [these languages], that was the way it was listed on the board for you. So they used to have their meetings--one Sunday they would have their meeting at the Polish Women Alliance Pole's Hall, and maybe the next time they would have it at Our Lady of Lourdes Hall, which was a Bohemian parish, and anytime they had a meeting, Mr. Poss would call all the supervisors, all the superintendents, and at that time I think we had about 2,800 people working in the plant. You know, modernization came in and there were less people working there and putting out the same amount of work that was being put out before. And then they would go through a list and he would have the list, and he would say, "Now you, in your department, so-and-so was at this meeting, I want you to put the pressure down on this person. Look for an excuse to fire them," and he'd go down the list of names. So the first meeting I attended that he called me in, I said to him, I looked over at him and I said, "Mr. Poss, I says, "you always vote Republican," I told him right in front of all the superintendents, supervisors, and everybody. I says, "You always vote Republican. Boy, you wear that Republican tie." It was just before election time. I says, "I vote Democratic. I never try to convince you, to tell you what to do, how to vote, and you can't convince me because I make up my mind." And I said, "Mr. Poss, what does these people going to a meeting on a Sunday on their own time

have to do with their working? I don't see no reason for it. You're trying to control these people and saying they can't attend the union meetings."

And he gave me a list of three girls' names. One of the girls lived across the street from me, and these girls worked for me and they were terrific workers; I mean, girls that he never had any problem with, and made the top dollar for him and always made good money and were not the type of kids that you have that spend their time in the washroom or looking for a drink of water by the water fountain, and they mind their p's and q's. And I said I couldn't see this. So he and I get into a hassle for weeks at a time. So then a couple weeks later, he again called me and he asked me to go and attend one of their meetings. And I says to him, "No, Mr. Poss, I have no reason to be there, and I'm not about to attend their meetings. Another thing, it's the people's business; let them go attend the meeting." Well, then, I was really at it; I really was at it. Where he used to call the others only once a week and always on a Monday, I always was called down too, and I had to sit while the lists were handed out, and he kept on calling me. So it got so that everyday when I came into work, I had to go in there, into the superintendent's office, and he would sit there for two hours. I wouldn't be even on the floor, and I had a great big responsibility on the floor. I had about a hundred and some girls that were working. It was my job to check that they were all in; I took care of the absenteeism. As I told you, that after awhile we counted the picks so that the girls on the changing of the shift, we'd have to take the pick readings. If we put another girl on that job, on the meter reading, I'd have to turn the meter reader for the girl, and I would be there sometimes they were going to lunch and I was still sitting there and I was being brainwashed, you know, from the company. And I just took the position that I was not going to go out and spy on the people.

INTERVIEWER: What did he say to you in all that time?

PODOJIL: Oh, he used to tell me how good he was to the people, which he was, I have to admit it. I can't deny that he wasn't good because during the wartime if any of the kids were getting married there, or there was a shortage of gas, or if there was a death in the family, Mr. Poss would always see that the company sent two cars out, you know. But by the same token, the people were working for him, and you know the wages were frozen during the war and they were at a low level, and people were going out to the industries

where they were working on war material and making three times as much money. "Well," he says, "you remember when this one died, I let them have two cars. Remember when so-and-so got married, I let them have a car so they could go to church and let them have a reception up in the cafeteria because no space was available." And it was true, I never denied it. In a lot of ways he did a lot of nice things, but by the same token, the people did a lot for him too. They stayed with him; they worked overtime.

I remember during the war we were responsible to the quartermaster in Philadelphia for producing khaki clothes, you know, for coats and everything, and Mr. Poss wasn't that honest either. He loaded his warehouse with wool, and he tried to weave as much civilian goods as he could; he didn't want to take his quota from the quartermaster from Philadelphia, until they made him do it. They came in and they padlocked his warehouse for him. When they padlocked his warehouse for him then he had to take half of that yarn, whatever they appropriated for him, and he had to make that much khaki material, and navy for the navy material, and the blue for the air force; we had to weave all that material. It was nothing for us to work fourteen and sixteen hours a day. We worked fourteen and sixteen hours a day, which is true. We went to the cafeteria and we didn't pay for our supper, and he saw that when we worked that we got a good meal. He saw that we got meat when meat was scarce, and that was good. But by the same token, we were putting out the material for him, so he wasn't as innocent as he put on. Then when the war ended, then he took the attitude that he was going to hire people a dime a dozen. He made this remark, "Oh," he says, "when the war ends I'm going to have the people coming back into my plant a dime a dozen." I told him, I said, "Mr. Poss, dime a dozen days are over." I says, "It's not like I worked for twelve dollars, dime a dozen days are over. You'll never get it, not when these fellows come back. They're going to demand something better than what they've had before."

So then he went ahead and he started going from one department to another, and he took one department and cut their wages 15 percent, fifteen cents on an hour, and then he went to another, and this is when the people got riled up and they said, "Now we're going for the union." So they really went out, and I think it was a committee of about ten, they got in touch with the textile workers and says, "Come on, this time we're going to organize the plant and we're going to get it." So, as I said, I got involved in not because of necessity, because I was a supervisor, would

not have been entitled to vote or anything, but because of the idea that he was putting the pressure on the people.

I would never stand to discharge anybody in the plant unfairly, because that was one of the things they thought was so unjust. We all got called one Monday, and we found out that he had discharged one of the women from one of the departments my daughter worked in; this was one of his favorite people. Her husband worked there and all her children, but she was union. In fact, she hadn't even signed the card to join the union, but she and her husband happened to know one of the organizers that was standing out there; he was a neighbor. So as she came out of the plant, she stopped and she talked to Bill Denver; she talked to this man, and he [Mr. Poss] told her not to talk to him. She says, "Well, Mr. Poss, I talk to you, why can't I talk to him? I grew up with him, I went to school with him." And she says, "Everybody's entitled to do their job whatever they're qualified for." Well, he put her on the list and she was discharged. So my daughter came upstairs to me and she says to me, "Mom, they fired Vivian." I knew it because I knew she was on the list. And then they fired one of the fellows from the fifth floor who was a terrific worker. They let him go and they let another girl go. All of this was instructions given from him on a Monday. So I said to her, "You go down and tell Vivian, 'you've got a friend'." And I said, "I'll get in touch with the union." So I sat down there and then I wrote a letter to Morris Reiger who is a big wig in Washington in Manpower now. He's up there, and I don't know exactly, some big executive position for the government in the labor manpower division. I wrote him a letter and I said, "Look, I'm on my way to Florida; I'm on my way to a vacation, but when I come back I want you to send somebody and I want to give you an affidavit." So they didn't wait for me to get to Florida; in fact, we had our suitcases, we were ready to leave, and they came, and I said, "Look, I wrote you a letter to come back. When I say that I'm going to give you an affidavit, I'm going to give you an affidavit." So when I came back from Florida, and I went down--when the girl's hearing came up, they protested, NLRB board, and I went down and I testified for her, and I told them exactly what had happened; that every Monday, that after every meeting, that all the supervision was called and that we were briefed anywhere from an hour to two hours, and we were told who we were to discharge because they were seen in the union meetings, or that they had made a house call, or tried to convince somebody in joining with the union. So then I became a very nasty individual. I had free way access in the plant to

every floor, so when I came back from Florida and the case came up, we won the case. He had to reinstate Vivian and had to pay her about $1,700 worth of back wages, and he paid her, and he had to take her back to work. And then the people got relaxed then.

But, from then, I got it. Everyday I was brainwashed for two hours; he didn't discharge me, didn't fire me, but everyday called me for an hour or two and he sat down telling me his side of the story, and I kept on sticking to my side of the story. I felt that he was so unjust, and by that time I also became a member of Americans for Democratic Action, ADA, and became a member of their executive board in the Cleveland branch of the ADA. And he'd tell me his side of the story and I would tell him my side of the story, and we kept on hassling back and forth.

So, as I would go to lunch, or when I would go down from one floor to another and make my rounds, check on my people, as I went down I did something which was illegal, but, heck, he was doing everything illegal, so I would go down and leave cards all the way down the line for them to take home and sign up. So when I'd be coming back from my lunch or making my rounds, and doing my checking up, I would come back and I would pick up the cards (laughter), and I was signing up the people for the union then, and I thought, well, you're doing everything in the book that you possibly can, and I think that they're allowed the same opportunity, so this is what I did. And yet, I had had great admiration for Mr. Poss because he was a terrific business man, but the almighty dollar was mightier than the people, as far as he was concerned because in the end--that's what we always said to the people--and we did win the election.

Our people were frightened, and the day of the election where you have to have the observers and all that, some of our people that first started becoming active in the union backed out towards the end. We couldn't even get enough people to sit there and watch them as they were voting, so I volunteered, I volunteered and I watched the election and challenged the vote, you know, because no one better than I knew who the supervisors were, and second hands, so I challenged the votes, and we won the election, won it big. I think we took it three to one, that big plant, we took it three to one. So, Mr. Poss said, "I'm the boss," and so he closed the plant.

He went out on strike and we were out from about the 22nd of August to the 18th of January; he closed the plant,

liquidated it, and the people in the plant, we offered to buy the plant from him. In a week's time we raised $7,000,000 through the banks in the area, Polish banks, through the different lodges, organizations. We raised $7,000,000 and we offered to buy the plant from Mr. Poss; he absolutely refused to sell it. He controlled 80 percent of the stock of the company under different names, under his grandchildren's names, his daughters' names, his own name spelled backwards, he controlled it. So during the strike, when the shares dropped to forty dollars and he was going to some of the people that owned the stock and he bought it back from them, and he's telling them, "Oh, it's going to go down to twenty dollars." This frightened them and he bought it for forty dollars. He liquidated it. He had $7,000,000 in reserve when he liquidated. The New York Stock Exchange had it that he was getting $175 a share, had $7,000,000 in reserve. But he didn't care because he owned a paint factory; he owned White Provisions, and he owned a big market down here, the central market down here. As I said, he had his name, he'd spell it backwards with four letters, or he'd take the first two letters of his name and that was the last two letters, and he made corporation, then he bought stock, all that stock back.

So, you see, I saw the seamy side of what management does in order to stop the people from organizing for the simple reason that the people don't realize that one person as an individual has nothing to say. Did you ever see a chart that we ever used in organizing, what we tell the people? This is a line--my hand--and this is management here--they're organized--and down here, we're at the bottom, and these here are individuals in the plant. This is the chart that I always used in organizing. So he tells the people they're organized here, and so they have research here, and their interest in here, they're interested in profits and costs. That's the way I show a chart to my people. Our people have nothing over here; they have no meat. These people--this is the line here, we're down here on the bottom--so I tell our people, as individuals, each one these people. So what we do, we draw line and we get organized. One person can't do anything, so then we become a group--organized group--this becomes our group here. We're never 100 percent right, and this is one of the things in the textile industry that we try and stress, that because we're the union doesn't mean that we're always right; we're wrong too. So, we draw a line here; we make another line, so what we try and do, because we're a group we have the opportunity for research right here; we have the power for the research. One person can't do it and can't touch it, so

we as a group have the power for research. We're not going to get anywhere without research. . . .

I was telling you about bringing the girls into Cleveland to some of the banquets we had.

INTERVIEWER: We were talking about different ways of organizing.

PODOJIL: Yes, but mainly by a firm standing at the plant, and getting acquainted with the people, you get to know them; they'd be in and out of the plant.

INTERVIEWER: They came in and out?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes. Always in organizing you have to stand by the plant gates; you have to stand there and be counted, and the people know that you're there. And when the pressure starts, when the company starts putting the pressure on, and when they go out there and they see the organizer standing out there, rain or shine, cold weather, with long johns on and socks, like I said, way out there in Illinois in wintertime, and we would be standing there, and we always let them know where we were staying, and that they were free to call us, you know, and we would talk to them at all hours of the night. And then we used to group up in making house calls, and we always made sure--and this was not only to protect the organizer--but we always made sure that never a single organizer went out on house calls. Now, you know, there's a policy that the unions have that never one person goes to a home for organizing, usually you go in pairs. That protects you because you run into a lot of oddball things, you know, and sometimes people open the door and invite you in, and some people might want to shove you off the steps.

INTERVIEWER: Was the policy for going in pairs all the time when you were organizing?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes, we always went in pairs, always in pairs. And, more or less, when they would go into organizing a plant, and if there were all men assigned to it, they would find one or two key leaders in the plant that were like key people and they would ask these people to go partly on what they call part-time organizers, and making the house call jointly with the organizer. You have to protect the organizers too, you know, so we always made sure that there would be no criticism, or anything like that.

INTERVIEWER: Would it be two men that would go?

PODOJIL: Yes, two men sometimes; sometimes it would be some of the early people that contacted the union that felt that they wanted to work with the union closely. Then we would take the key people, men or women, and we would visit homes, would start visiting homes, first, people that we were sure of and that we knew that we would get a nice warm reception, and we'd ask them to have two or three other people there.

One of the things I did, as I told you about meeting Clara and handling her, shortly after, when I was in Morgan Dying and Bleaching, Clara had a birthday, and so I talked with Mr. Reiger [Morris Reiger] who was the regional director then, and I said, "I'd like to throw a party for Clara, a birthday party, and invite everybody from the plant." So I threw a birthday party for her and everybody from the plant came out there. So while we were there, I signed up everybody to be union (laughter); there was only two people I didn't sign up, so I signed everybody up to the union. Everybody had a good time, everybody signed.

INTERVIEWER: What was Mr. Reiger's position then?

PODOJIL: He was Regional Director for Ohio, and he was an assistant to Sol Stetin who was, until yesterday, the president of the Textile Workers Union of America, but with the merger and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers having more members than we have at the present time, I think the president came out of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and Mr. Sol Stetin is second in command. Mr. DuChessy who was our secretary-treasurer, I think, remains in the same position in the merger. I'm not sure, but I think this was one of the agreements of the merger. I have great admiration for Poppa [Emil] Rieve who was the founder of our union, who came from the hosiery workers. He, down the line--sometimes older people would get carried away, and I remember at a convention in New York City about ten years ago where he was president-emeritus then, he stepped down for Bill Pollack who became our international president, and we had gotten into, as I told you, another internal dispute that we had gotten into. I've gone through two of them. Poppa Rieve who was, I think, one of the outstanding and the most honest labor leaders, and he got up at the convention, where he could have been the elderly statesman, took sides, which I felt was wrong, and then of course the opposition won, and so they eliminated the president-emeritus, and it just about broke his heart. He was really an outstanding person. Then when Sol Stetin became a president of our International Union--I have great admiration for him too--he tried to bury the wounds, and so at the last convention,

which was in Miami, Florida, he had asked for Poppa Rieve, invited him to the convention, and recognized him again as the founder of this union, and I think it buried a lot of old wounds, you know, and I was really happy because shortly after that Poppa Rieve got a heart attack and he had passed away. And so I was glad because when Sol did this I wrote him a letter and I told him that he displayed the statesmanship that I felt that Poppa Rieve had failed in. You see, sometimes you need one cool head in these things. If one can be a statesman and bring these people together, but they become politically motivated just like in anything else but never--as I said before--it was for power and the way they wanted to move the union, and some wanted to stay status quo. You cannot stay status quo today.

And, I think that somewhere down the line--Lydia, I want to say this to you--that I've always felt in all the years that I've been so active, in the last twenty-some years, and really being a key worker in the labor movement, I've always felt that we failed in bringing labor education to the children. And I mean not getting to them in the high schools or the colleges, like when I spoke to the students at Notre Dame, but we failed them on the level that we have not been teaching them the labor movement from the third-fourth-fifth grades when they were studying their American history. We have failed all the way down the line by not having teachers going in and picking up classes and telling these young people, "Look, this is what labor is; all this good social legislation that you've got is because of the labor movement. The forty-hour week, your vacation pay, time-and-a-half after eight hours, time-and-a-half after forty hours, and none of this child labor." We have never taught this to the children, and we have failed them, and so they think that everything they got--they think they walk in the plant today. I have got two grandsons that are graduating out of high school coming next Monday. Now, both of these kids are fortunate; they don't have to look for a job; their father has a small business of their own. These kids are walking out of high school; they're going to work for their father; he's starting them off at $3.50 an hour--$3.50 an hour! And if they work overtime they get paid time-and-a-half from their father, and he pays them time-and-a-half for Saturdays. How are children going to appreciate what we went through?

When my husband and my father.... During the big steel strike, my brother was in the National Guard and my brother was assigned to stand against my father and my husband at American Steel and Wire Company, U.S. Steel, and my brother

had to go to his commanding officer and say to him, "Please move me from there, and move me on Clark Bridge because that's Republic Steel over there. I only have friends and buddies working there, but I have a father, brother, and two brothers-in-law working in this plant; if we have to shoot them, am I going to shoot my own father?" You see, this is what I've lived through, so I know what these things are.

During the first steel strike, you know, when they started to organize the steel mills, my brother was a national guardsman, got called out. We have to tell that we failed because we don't tell the people that we did this. My husband was on a strike for three months. He had little children; we didn't have no strike benefits; we didn't have no strike fund; we didn't have nothing, and we struggled through it and we gave it. Today, United Auto Workers has a strike fund, Steelworkers have, even we in the textile workers, we have a strike fund, so that if our people go out on a strike, a week after they get their last pay, they at least know that they're going to have so much money coming into them, and we go out and raise the money. We haven't told this, we haven't told this to our people. Our people don't realize that workmen's compensation . . . our children don't realize, our young people don't realize, they don't even know where workmen's compensation started. They think big business gave it to them. Do you know where workmen's compensation started? Out of the [1911] Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire when those girls burned to death in that loft, and that's when New York first came out with the workmen's compensation. And do you know what, we have beautiful film on it, with Arlene Francis playing in it.

INTERVIEWER: Which film is that?

PODOJIL: The film on the Triangle fire. Arlene Francis is the heroine; she plays the key star in that film. You've never seen that film? We'll have to try and get for you. I'll get you the number for it for you to show to them.

So, you see, all the way down the line we haven't been teaching the children. They say we have a right-to-work, and some states have right-to-work; sure, you have a right-to-work, but they don't tell the people that the doctors are organized; the lawyers are organized; all the way down the line; a marriage is a union--everything is a union. And why do you organize to make a group? Because you have an opportunity to ask for something that you don't have as one person. As a group you have an opportunity for research;

you have the opportunity; you have the power to go and ask. And this is where we have failed; we're very negligent in that part..

INTERVIEWER: Have you felt that it's been harder recently to explain this to people?

PODOJIL: You know, I'm going to tell you something. You know that I find that it's harder to organize people. You'd be surprised today at the people who are afraid of union. It is harder to organize them because, first, for one thing, the recession or depression, whatever you want to call it, people are afraid.

Let's cite one example of a plant right here in Cleveland that we've had our goal set and a few times we attempted and we've gotten people to work in there, and I'm talking about Entenna Rota. And so what happens? Entenna Rota employees about 400 and some people, and I would say 65 percent are black, and then another 15 percent are handicapped people, so here you have a plant with tremendous profits, and getting all kinds of awards because they hire a minority and they hire the handicapped, and tremendous profits. Every quarter when you read their financial report on the stock page, their profits are increasing, but the wages are so thin above what the minimum law desires, maybe five or ten cents above what the minimum wage law is, and so how do you go in and how do you organize this type of a group of people? How do you get to them when they're handicapped, you know, and, as I say, they are the minority because the company hires mostly blacks, because they are a little harder to organize.

INTERVIEWER: They are harder to organize?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do whites usually go in to organize blacks?

PODOJIL: You have kind of a rebel crowd, and the crowd that isn't a rebel. As I said, you have to look for the thing, but you find fear. At this time and age, because we were lax in educating the young people, you'll find fear, a great amount of fear.

INTERVIEWER: Fear of losing....

PODOJIL: Their jobs, losing your job. And this is what shocks me; I mean, it seems that during the early twenties when we

were organizing in the steel mills, and knowing that we were creating the hardships that there were because there weren't all these fringe benefits, that the union had the strike funds, and all that, we had to have soup kitchens, you know, during the steel strike. I remember they would put up tents and we women used to go in and help the men, and we would cook big pots of soup, and the kids used to come down; everybody used to eat, you know. And now, this isn't necessary.

And this is one of the other things that I did want to say to you, that when we do organizing we also find the nearest restaurant, a small little restaurant where the people usually stop to eat going in and out of the plant. We get acquainted and we sit there making out this list to go there and eat all the time too, and we're in there at lunchtime when they're coming in. Just another way that we get to meet the people, by sitting in the restaurant. The boys used to like to go to the bar, but I never did care to go. You know, they'd go over to a bar. Everytime I went on the road I used to put on the weight; you wouldn't believe that twenty years ago I weighed ninety-nine pounds; now I hit the scale at 184. Going out there in Rochelle, that good farm country cooking, you know (laughter). We stayed at a motel that was next to a little restaurant and they used to bake custard and lemon meringue pies, and about 3 o'clock in the afternoon they used to come. So, when you got up at 4 o'clock in the morning to go stand out there to visit with your people, coming back we'd have breakfast, and then we'd lay down for a couple hours and get some sleep, then we'd go back out there at lunch time, then we'd always come back over there and have some--and when I came back from there I gained thirty four pounds and I had to buy all new clothes to fit into them. But it really is true. You'd be surprised that in this day and age, it is hard to organize; it is definitely hard to organize. The people are afraid; they really are afraid. There wasn't this great tremendous fear in the middle twenties as there is right now in organizing.

INTERVIEWER: Any idea why people weren't as afraid then?

PODOJIL: Well, I think that people had gotten to the point of no return because they were going through the great crisis, you know, of the Depression, and they lived so much through it because they had no security in the plant, so if they liked you they called you. I worked in the textile mill, and during the Depression I remember up in through there through Maine, where the biggest mills, the biggest textile

industry was, when the mills were closing down there was no work there. And, you know, you wouldn't believe this, but the railroad tracks ran behind the plant. These young fellows used to come in and they would jump off these trains, off these boxcars, and they would stand in the Cleveland Worsted Mills, they would stand by the door, and these were experienced weavers, warp dressers; they were people that knew their trade, and they would stand there and they would wait for the supervisor to come back--what we called the top hand--he would come by and he would take them and put them on a job if somebody didn't show up. And this same thing went for the steel industry, so if the boss liked you, you got to work that day or two, if there was two days a week. Or maybe you gave him a couple dollars, he worked you. And so the people then got to the point where they says, "Look, we're going to have a union. We that have the jobs here, we want our seniority; we want our rights protected." And there used to be some real hungry guys used to get off them trains, and first thing you know they'd get a job, then they'd be working there, and little by little they would bring their wife and their children back.

I remember one boy particularly one night, he didn't have a pair of shoes; he was barefooted, and in textile mills, not like in other mills, you find wooden floors because all the lint and everything, the waste is always picked up and bagged, and all that, so it stays cleaner on the floors. And this boy ran a sliver, he didn't work but an hour and he ran a sliver--oh, Lord, he ran a sliver, and he was big, tall--and we had to take him into the hospital. That kid, he didn't have any shoes. So when we came back, the bunch of us, we pitched in and we went and we bought him a pair of house slippers and we cut that toe out for him so that he could work.

These are the kinds of things, and you see, you don't see these no more. But during the Depression, they used to jump off the boxcars and they would stand over there, and they would be waiting for the supervisor, and if there was a machine that wasn't covered, he'd come back, and he'd let these guys look first, then he'd put them in there. They used to come with their families. When they started migrating from the south then, they'd come with their families and they'd be all in a car and you'd see cartons of milk and babies sleeping, and everything. Oh, Lord, and while the father was in the plant working all day, the kids would be in the car. This is what I saw, and this is what I lived through.

The same thing in Harriet Henderson Mills, when that strike was in Harriet Henderson, down in Henderson, North Carolina, and I was appointed to see that these people didn't--in the Cleveland area, to see that there was no hardship for these people. We wanted to see that they were treated right. So I picked out a committee, and we went to all the locals, and we collected money for these people, and for the whole time that they were out there on the strike, and that was a terrible strike down there. That's a right-to-work state down in North Carolina. And these people didn't ask for very much. All they were asking actually, not as far as wages; they actually went out for seniority protection. That guy wanted to get rid of the union, making talk while Governor Hodges--heck, they can have their Governor Hodges, he wasn't anything. So, we at Christmas time sent truckload after truckload down there. We used to send truckload after truckload of clothing down there. We sent children's toys; we knew the age of every child. If there was a new baby coming down there, we sent layettes down there--complete, nothing new. We sent everything, and if we sent older clothes, we made sure it was all dry-cleaned. I used to get after the trucking companies and get them to haul for half price for us down there.

Then we brought some of them people up here, and got them jobs over here, people that really had to work and they were under such pressure, they were being evicted out of the company homes. That's a bad thing, those company homes down there, controlled them. I went down there to go on their picket line; you couldn't get near their picket line. They had the national guard; they had the whole national guard out there. So, I came on there, and I had a little jeep and I had Ohio plates on it. You know, I got stopped, and he says, "Where you from?" I said, "You see my license plates, I'm from Ohio." He says, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'm down here to help my friends." My husband says, "What do you want to do, get us killed?" I says, "No, I don't want to get us killed. We have a right here; these are our people. They have a right to their union."

We would follow the [company] buses. They would go thirty and forty miles outside of town and they would load the buses with scab farmers, and they would bring them in, and all that, and have the national guard come down with ten-fifteen jeeps, drive these people into the plant, and then just kept all the townspeople out of there, and then they put the pressure on the people, those that were living in company homes. They were evicting them, and they were buying in the company store. They cut their credit off, and we had to make sure that these people didn't starve.

I've got friends to this day down there. A few years back I was going down and I stopped there, and I'm telling you, if I wanted to stay there a year from one house to another, I could have stayed there a year. Everybody was mad because I couldn't visit everybody. These were the kinds of things that we had. Bill Castevens, who is the regional director for the United Auto Workers, and watch for that name because Bill may challenge at the next convention; he may challenge Woodcock. He may be one of those who will be challenging him; he'll probably be running. Bill Castevens comes out of North Carolina, and he's the regional director for the auto workers for Ohio and, I think, he's got a section of Pennsylvania. He worked quite a bit with us on the Harriet Henderson strike. I do have a lot of pictures of when we worked, the way we used to pack the stuff, and pictures of us sending out our trucks with our big signs down that way.

INTERVIEWER: Who organized the effort to help at the Harriet Henderson strike?

PODOJIL: In Cleveland? I was the chairman, yes. Yes, I chaired the whole thing over here, visited all the unions. We had a lot of active people. We went down to visit them, yes. I don't know why I always get involved in these things. All the time get involved in these things.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think you do?

PODOJIL: Well, I don't know. You know, when I went to high school I always loved civics, and I think I was in the ninth grade when we had to build for one of our work problems we had to work what you called the model city, and I won the prize for building a model city, you know, for laying out a plan for a model city. And I think I was always kind of motivated and, as I say, my mother was a great reader, and one of the things my mother used to do, which I never did because I worked, but one of the things that my mother always used to do, she used to, when she ironed, and you know years ago when they ironed with that hand iron and that coal stove, and Mother would be ironing, and I remember we used to sit in there in a circle and mother always used to tell us stories. She was a great story teller because, as I said, she loved to read books, oh, every spare minute, my mother ever got, and I liked to read, I always did love to read. In fact, if you asked me when was the last time I watched television, I couldn't even tell you. If you asked me the last time I went to a movie, I'd tell you ten years ago, because every chance I get I am reading, I'm cutting

clippings out; I'm marking off what I want, so that when I go before one of my groups I can say, "Well, look right here."

I was an intervenor a couple of weeks ago against the Cleveland Illuminating Company. I presented my facts; I read my clippings out of the paper. My father's people--not my mother's people--my father's people were all politically inclined. My father, one of his brothers was a squire. Do you know what a squire is? A squire in Pennsylvania is like you would call a corner prosecutor, you know, where you would call a prosecutor and you go into prosecutor's court and just handles this little squabble between neighbors, and you go down to the squire's office and you pay your vote tax, a $1.80, or whatever. So my uncle, my father's one brother was a squire; his other brother was a policeman, and most of his sons were policemen, Don and Braddock; in fact, my uncle was killed while a policeman, and he was killed in the line of duty. So, I guess, on my father's side is the political side; my mother's was the story telling, and being the housewife and the leader. My father never let my mother work outside the home.

INTERVIEWER: Did she want to?

PODOJIL: He wouldn't let her. I remember my dad got hurt in the plant, and at that time there was no workmen's compensation, and this is one of the reasons that I went to work, and he got hurt, and my mother went out and she worked one week.

INTERVIEWER: What did she do?

PODOJIL: She went to work in a restaurant, like an assistant to a cook, and a very exclusive restaurant down here on Superior in a very fancy area, and my father says, "No. Children come first." He says, "We always find enough with the garden and all of that." And so it was one week that I know that my mother ever worked, and my father fussed and feuded from the time she went until the time she came back. He wouldn't let her work.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what she thought about working?

PODOJIL: Well, like I said, she was sort of a leader in her own way, in the extent that all the neighbors came to her with their problems, and she'd loan out money to people that wanted to buy a home, and like a counselor, you know. And she was quite active in the organizations like my dad belonged to, the Alliance of Poles, you know, and they always used to go

to dances, and one thing about my father and mother I have to tell you. My mother was an awfully tall woman. She was six feet one in her stocking feet; three of my brothers are all six footers. My dad was the short one. And as I got older, sometimes I think that my father loved my mother more than she loved him. You know, as you get older you kind of notice these things. My father, he was real attractive, Mother was a very attractive woman, but I remember going to dances, which our folks took us to dances, and the first dance was always my mother and father, and then after that my father danced with me, then he danced with my sister, and then after that they would go to the last dance, then my father and mother, the last dance they used to dance together. We used to go to quite a bit of dances. As I said, my childhood was a happy childhood; it wasn't one of these that we were deprived.

INTERVIEWER: She danced with other people?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes, but I noticed my father, later on as they got older, I realized that Dad was a little jealous of Mother, you know, and Mother used to like to dress herself real pretty, wore real pretty clothes, always wore earrings. And I'll never forget when she got the haircut--oohee! Oh, she had real long hair and used to wear it real pretty; never wore it real tight in a bun, she always had it done real pretty, and she insisted on getting her hair cut, and he said, "No," he wasn't going to let her cut her hair. And so he went to work and she went and had her hair cut. Oh, boy, you couldn't come in the house for about a week, you know, my dad wouldn't talk to her because she had her hair cut. And also I remember when my father--during the First World War there were three of us, my sister and I, one brother, and Mother was expecting another, and my father went and he enlisted in the army--the fourth baby on the way. There were three of us and my father went and enlisted, and he was so proud he enlisted in the army. God, my mother tramped right down there and she says, "You're not enlisting; you're not leaving me with all these children." But he went and he enlisted, he really went and he enlisted in the army.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think he did it?

PODOJIL: Patriotic, I guess, you know, he just felt that--well, you know, they were showing pictures of the Kaiser killing all the children, and all that. You didn't see these pictures, see; I remember these posters, you know, standing there with the bayonet, bayonetting these babies. So he came home this one day and he told my mother he left work early

and he enlisted. She went down there and she got him unenlisted (laughter). All in all, like I said, we had the political background from my father, my mother loving to read, and I used to read, keep my nose all the time in a book. Even now, I don't have no time. All my friends have been calling me up that I've been on three or four different channels in the last week, you know, speaking as an intervenor on behalf of our people, and I haven't even seen myself. They tell me, "Well, watch 11 o'clock news." Well, by 10 o'clock I'm sleeping because my day starts at 5 o'clock in the morning.

INTERVIEWER: Five?

PODOJIL: Oh, I start at five; I have so many things to do that I really don't know which way to head. Now, I've got four reports, two intervenor reports, and then I'm going to be on the panel, I've got to do research work, now, next week, when I'll be in Washington. And then I'm going to make sure I visit some of our congressmen and senators and raise a little hell with them because we've got to start moving in a different direction now, with the senior citizens, you know. Pretty soon, another ten years, there's going to be more senior citizens than there's going to be you juniors.

INTERVIEWER: When you said that you first started to work partly because your father....

PODOJIL: Yes, this was the time that Dad got hurt, and for a long time he had his leg broken in about four places, and at that time there was no workmen's compensation to the extent where it could take care of a family, you know that. This is when I left school and I went to work in the textile mill; I was sixteen years old.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever think of trying to get back?

PODOJIL: I will tell you, Lydia, you would be surprised if I would show you the certificates that I've had. In the number of years, even though I left school, I have what you have on credit, certificates, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Education courses?

PODOJIL: I've taken courses in community services; I have taken courses at St. John's College; I've gone back to high school evening classes learning to tic-tac-toe a little bit on the typewriter, the fundamentals of a typewriter, so I could do my finger typing myself. And I've gone, as recently as

two years ago, it was down in Athens College and taken refresher courses. I've done a lot of lobbying work in Washington, D.C., legislative classes. So anytime I felt that there was a class that I was interested in, away I'd go, and I do attend quite a bit of work classes, and I'm always learning group organizing, the new methods that we have to have to attract people, and doing research work and reaching a younger group of people. Sometimes I feel that we've lost them and then all of a sudden you get into a class, like I got into that class at Notre Dame last fall, and here's an uncredited class and thirty-six students attending it, and about six of them I would say were anti-union, but the thirty were really interested. My class went over and I asked him if he wanted me to stop, forty-five minutes I went over, and then when I walked into the hall all these young people came out and I was quite impressed with them. So then there are the times like that that I feel some of the kids are real good, so you can't judge them all by that, but believe me when I tell you that it is getting harder to organize now.

You take J. P. Stevens Company--I'll see that you get a lot of literature on J. P. Stevens--they have simply defied the law; I mean, you go in and the people organize and they vote for a plant and this company says, "We will not recognize you," NLRB board, these cases drag on for two and three and four years, these people have to be reinstated. J. P. Stevens [Company] has paid in back wages over a million dollars in the last year that they've had to reinstate people and pay back wages, and they still will not recognize them. This is one of the reasons why we had merged because we feel that with the merger that we're going to have more people, and another thing they are facing, Amalgamated Clothing Workers [Union] is facing the same problem that we are because a lot of the sewing industry, did you notice, is going into Florida, into the south? The beautiful garment workers, you go into Florida and you see sewing plants all over the place, making suits and woolen clothing and all this. So we have no choice if we're split, which we are a splinter from them originally. About two years ago the hosiery workers merged with the textile workers, and they too, because they have all the hosiery coming from overseas. We in the textile industry lost all the glove-knitting industries, all the industries we had around Amsterdam, New York, we're losing the rug industries, all this thing is being imported. So, we merged [with Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union], we're going to be a little stronger and we'll be able to tackle J. P. Stevens. We're going to ask you to look for J. P. Stevens in the near future when we start distributing leaflets.

Well, I think we shall overcome, I believe it. You know, with the merger, we shall overcome. And I think the people in the south, so many have migrated to the north and seen the better working conditions and wages, and everything and now, even if they are going back they've got used to a little better thing. And the same thing these kids that went to Korea, these kids that were in Viet Nam, they're not going to be satisfied with nothing, they're going to want something. And it should be; they deserve it. My firstmost feeling was . . . I wasn't a dove, but I've always been under the impression we had no business being there. We absolutely cannot police the world when we can't take care of our.... We're supposed to be the richest country in the world and we can't feed our own poor; we don't take care of our own black people, and yet we get involved with countries so far away. Sure, the world is small; it's shrinking, because we can get across anywhere--eight-ten-twelve hours you're in Europe. But still, I don't think we should stick our nose in their affairs. We live different than they do. We don't understand their standards; they don't understand ours, and I think it's so unjust that so many young people lost their lives over there, and when you get down to it, who was first in there, and who had their first two cents that our people went back? Only a union-minded person will remember that big business went in there and they built big plants.

You take the oil companies, what did they do? They went in the Asiatic countries and they went over around Egypt, Gulf Oil and all those. They invested all that money in those oil wells, and everything; then they want us to go back and fight for it, send our boys to protect their property. You take Taiwan; you take South Korea; you'd be surprised how much of the textile industry has gone into South Korea. All the businesses are closing here; they're taking it there. They get the cheap labor there. Fifteen cents an hour in comparison to $3.60 an hour here. It pays for them to import it. But when they're losing their property over there, their investments over there, big business has got the money, controls the politics and, therefore, the poor boy goes over there to protect their big business interests. That has always been my feeling because I've seen some of the lace industry that was up around New Jersey, up in through that area, I've seen them and I've seen all that go into Taiwan. I've seen women's clothing. I've seen the glove industry out of Amsterdam, New York, out of Boston, all in through there, this was all glove industry, that is all gone, into Hong Kong. All the northern mills in the textile industry have moved to the south because of

the right-to-work there and they knew they could get rid of the union. I can see this all the time, and if I'd be watching the television I wouldn't know this, but reading books and doing the research work all the time, and so then, therefore, I know just exactly what is what.

Talking about politics, I was the youngest precinct committee woman in the 13th ward for the Democratic party. I was elected in the primaries in September [1933] and I wasn't twenty-one until October, and I became a precinct committee woman. And since I was twenty-one years old, and I'm going to be sixty-five years old, I have never missed a primary, or I have never missed an election. If I knew I was going to be out of town, or if I was in the hospital, I voted by absentee ballot, and I'm very proud of it. And I also am, I would say, a liberal because in the primaries I declare myself as a Democrat, but I vote for the man when it comes to vote for him, and I study a man's background, and being active in the Democratic ADA, so we always, more or less, study the background of the man and I vote for the man, and sometimes split my ticket.

I saw Mr. Carter a couple weeks ago and I talked to Mr. Carter, and I'm not impressed with him. I'm strictly Hubert Humphrey; I am strictly Hubert Humphrey, and I think he would make one of the greatest presidents, and he would be another Roosevelt. I was active in the Democratic party; I belonged to the women's--the Cosmopolitan, the women's Democratic party.* This was before I got involved with the union. I had tea with Mrs. Roosevelt; I attended the tea party where I was the hostess with Mrs. Roosevelt, and I also talked with Mrs. Roosevelt in Washington. I've also met John Kennedy personally, and spent the whole afternoon with him. I was in Altoona, Pennsylvania. We were going to have a dance the night that Jack was killed, and we had the first memorial service that was held in the United States, the textile workers had the first memorial service. I do have some pictures of it. We had the first services that were held for Jack Kennedy and instead of our having a dance that night, we called everything off and we had a memorial service. We were the first organization in the country that had memorial services for him. Oh, I'll never forget that day. I know Shriver better than I did the Kennedy boys because I've been on a few escort committees with Shriver, and I've spent quite some time with Senator Muskie. When he was running for president I was on his hit campaign committee, when they send a man out from Maine over here,

* A women's Democratic club.

Denny Blais* came out and Denny and I set up Senator Muskie's visit into Cleveland when he was running for Senate. We met him at the airport and I took him to meet all the big-wigs here in the city. Then, lobbying in Washington more than once, and had real good debates with Senator Young on the Korean war. I argued with him on the plane all the way from Cleveland into Washington. So I knew my way around. Congressman Vaneck, a personal friend; Howard Metzenbaum, I knew him. I campaigned for Howard Metzenbaum, Charlie Vaneck. I campaigned for Howard Metzenbaum when he was just running for city council. And these were the people that I knew when they were kids down in the neighborhood. Mayor Ralph Perk of Cleveland; I don't know if you ever hear about him. He's a neighborhood boy; he used to bring ice to my house. He used to be an iceman; he used to bring ice to my house. His wife is as old as one of my daughters; they went to school together. So I know my politicians, and I know how to get around.

INTERVIEWER: One of the areas I'd like to get into the next time we talk is really what effect being a woman had on your union work.

PODOJIL: . . . he would walk through the plant, and he had a big banner, see, and then we were allowed . . . and he would walk and see which department was the cleanest. You wouldn't believe it; we used to lick-spit and polish the looms, how clean they would be. You know, we would just clean every-thing. The floors . . . you could lay down on the floor in a white dress. A bride could walk in there and that's how clean our floors and looms were. And then he'd take the banner off and then he'd take it in that room that was the cleanest, and he'd hang it up, and then we'd all get a nickel, and we were allowed to go down and get a Dixie Cup [ice cream] from the stand downstairs, and we'd all go downstairs. If we got the banner, everybody'd get a nickel and you'd go downstairs and you'd get a Dixie Cup and then we were allowed to come upstairs and eat that Dixie Cup. This is the kind of things . . . you wouldn't tell that to anybody today, but these are the things that we done, and these are the things that we took pride in our work, and we felt dedicated to management, you know.

But, Lydia, I'm going to tell you, years ago in the textile industry--and this is the things that the unions done away--the supervisors in the mills used to be seated, they used to have offices up above. They would have a platform up above, and when he looked down, he saw everybody that was

---

* Officer of Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers union.

working, and we used to refer to them as the "new English barons," they were called the "new English barons." Then, as the unions started coming in, they had to take the overhead offices down; it was no longer permitted. And then they used to walk the floors, you know. But years ago, that's all they would do; they would sit up there and he'd look down there on the floor. As I told you, at that time it was all pulley belts and the looms were offset, this way and this way, so that the girl when she went across, around this side, wouldn't get hurt. Well, the reason they were offset is that when a shuttle flew out and you were running seven shuttles, and you only had eight boxes, and you were running seven shuttles, this meant that you had four boxes on each side. When the shuttle flew out they went one, two, three, four, five, all seven shuttles flew out like that, and if a girl was standing in the next alley way, if she got hit with one of those pointed shuttles, that was it. I saw a girl killed; I saw girls lose their fingers, and so the machines were offset so when the shuttles flew they flew on the backside.

If you went in the back and you wanted to tie an end on your warp because in your warp one of your threads broke, you had to walk between these pulleys, and the belt would be coming down, down in here. And I saw one gal working right beside me and, honest to goodness, she walked by there and the wind blew--the windows were open--and it caught her with the strap and in a split second she stood stark naked; it took all her clothes. And I saw one of the girls, she walked back, and there was long hair, they wore long hair. This girl was very vain about her hair; she was, in a way, kind of responsible too, and you were supposed to wear a net over it, them old-fashioned net caps we used to use with a rubber band over, and she wouldn't. She always had her hair in locks, and she went back and one of her locks flipped back and the first thing you know she's standing there screaming with half of her scalp hanging. You wouldn't dare walk in a mill with your hair down like that; you wouldn't dare walk in a mill because you would have got caught so fast.

But it was a lot of fun and a lot of things happened, and when I look back, and I still say that we were proud of our work, not like today. Everything today is automation. And even like towards the end now, I worked in inspecting; I worked in dock work and everything, and still they want quotas and quotas and quotas. In the companies, they're looking for the almighty dollar and they, even themselves, are not taking the kind of an interest that they should

in the product which they're putting out. They're not. I've seen it happen right along. All they want is the most. They want a lot out for a little, and this is what is happening. Where before, sure, my father went to work and he worked twelve hours a day, but I carried my father's lunch pail over there and he sat there and he ate a nice meal, you know. My uncles were the same way; they relaxed nice, but I don't think they were under half of the pressure that we are with this automation today and everything in a hurry. So they give you a three weeks' vacation; so you're rushing on the three weeks' vacation. You're worse off than before you went. And the beautiful material, you'll never see it, unless here and there--they say it's a circle, and unless it comes back, and I hope that there's still some old weavers that know how to weave when it comes back because we'll never find weavers like they did before.

I made a goodwill tour for Cleveland Worsted and they sent me through North Adams, Massachusetts, I went through Amsterdam, through Amsgate, I went through Shasheen Village; if you read Through the Windmills in Shasheen Village. I went into the Abbott Mills in New Hampshire, and when the war ended, the company that I worked for, Cleveland Worsted, loaned me out to Warner and Swasey's when they bought the American rights for what they called the Swasey's weaving machines, and I worked for them and then I did a lot of research work. I did it for Mr. Turner of Dunning Mills. They would send their work in; I did a lot of work for them, which they'd come in and they would be very well satisfied, and I got to meet a lot of presidents of a lot of the big southern mills. I think if I went down there and tried to organize their mills, they'd be ready to shoot me today (laughter). I was quite a bit younger then, you know. And, of course, working for this company--and I've got no reason to complain, I was treated well--but I just felt it was so unjust to pick on these people as to where they went. I didn't care where they went. If I wanted to go to an ADA meeting, I went to an ADA meeting. If I wanted to go to Spook's Hall for the meetings,* it was my right to go wherever I wanted, I still felt it was a free country.

You know, every company, soon as they hear--and I've found in every plant that I went to organize--as soon as they feel that they have one person in the plant that may be union-minded, you'll see how fast they'll get rid of them. That person can be the best worker in the world, but they'll

---

* Nickname for the Alliance of Poles, group #9.

find a reason to let that person go, and this is the way they operate. By golly, when I was younger I went in and got hired at the plants to see what the situation was, and find out what was what. Joe Glazer. Did you ever hear of folk songs by Joe Glazer?

INTERVIEWER: Joe is educational director with--

PODOJIL: Yes. I don't know where he's at now. The last time I heard from Joe he was in South America, and they have a theme song when I come in, and anytime Joe would see me they'd have to play the one song, his song, "When the Mills Are Made Of Marble, And The Looms Are Made Of Gold," and anywhere I came in, and when Joe saw I came in--yes, I got real good educational training under Joe, and Tommy Cosgrove--now, I know Tommy is teaching, the last I knew Tommy, Tommy was teaching somewhere outside of Chicago.

Have you ever met Barkan, our C.O.P.E. director for the AFL-CIO? He was an educational director for.... You know, some of the most famous people in the world, in the labor movement today, came out of the textile industry. Have you ever heard of Evelyn Dubrow, the lobbyist; now, isn't she dynamic? Where do you think she came from? You know she used to be an organizer for our union before she went to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers?

INTERVIEWER: No, I didn't know that.

PODOJIL: Evelyn Dubrow came out of the textile workers. Sol Barken, who is in Paris in one of the labor departments. Sol Barken, he came from the textile workers, one of our research directors. Yes, some of the most famous people that are out in the world today came out of our union. That's why I say that I'm proud of our union. I've gone through two internal disputes, but they were politically motivated. There was one faction that wanted to move the organization, the other wanted to stay status quo.

INTERVIEWER: I would like to hear more details about what exactly those were about. I don't know if you want to now or next time.

PODOJIL: Well, next time. Let me gather you some of the speeches and some of the hell that I've raised with these guys because I raised hell with them. You know they always tell me that we're very democratic in our union, see, and at the convention we vote for our offices, and I always used to argue with them that we were not a democratic--for the simple reason that I tell them that in our convention, when

we vote for our officers if you don't vote for twenty your ballot's no good. So I would always tell them that I felt that I had the right to drop some people I wasn't in favor of, and because I wanted to drop and I always used to argue with them that "You're rubber stamping me, making me vote a rubber stamp ballot. I don't like to vote a rubber stamp ballot," which is very true in our union and this is one of the criticisms that I had because sometimes we felt that some of our vice-presidents had some shortcomings, and we felt that we had a right, even if we had to elect twenty, if we wanted to show the international union that we were opposed and we weren't going to vote for twenty, we wanted to vote for sixteen or seventeen, well, then, our ballot was thrown out anyhow, so you had to vote for twenty. But still in all, it's pretty democratic.

But now it's going to be a little different, you see, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers have a referendum vote. Now, these people were elected at the convention, but they still were nominated at an election because of the merger, but come three years from now, when their first convention will be, it's going to be referendum. These people are going to be nominated at the convention, and the ballot is going to go out to every member and they're going to vote. See, where ours, the delegates at the convention elect the officers, but this is going to be changed. It's going to go into a referendum vote where....

INTERVIEWER: What offices have you held?

PODOJIL: In the union? Well, let's see, I would say that I served about ten years as the president of my own local, a plant that I organized and I served as its president for about ten years. I served as its recording secretary, and I served also as the treasurer for it, and prior to retirement I became pension chairman. Then after becoming the pension chairman, when I retired, my people insisted that I stay on as their pension chairman, and as a result of it I handled pensions for all the plants affiliated with the Cleveland Joint Board. I served as the president of the Cleveland Joint Board for about three terms.

INTERVIEWER: How long is the term?

PODOJIL: Two years. I also served as the financial secretary for the Cleveland Joint Board for about four years. Upon retirement I became the chairman of the retirees of the Joint Board, and also became their delegate to the federation of retired workers. You know what a joint board is? A joint board, it consists of all the locals within a fifty-mile

radius, have to belong to a central body; it's like a central body. The auto workers call it a district. I think the coal miners call it a district, but we call them joint boards. Amalgamated Clothing Workers also calls it a joint board. I have served on so many committees, and I chaired so many committees that I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Were you still active while you were raising your family?

PODOJIL: Yes, and I'll tell you, as the children were growing up, I became more active because I made up my mind a long time ago that I was not going to be an interfering mother-in-law (laughter). I've seen too many marriages go under, and I just made up my mind that once my children grew up and they got the kind of education they wanted, then they have, and I made up my mind that I was not going to be a burden and as long as I could I was going to be active in everything I possibly could because when they were small I was then, more or less, politically--a lot of political meetings and stuff like that, and active with helping my husband and father when they were in the steel strike. But, I worked, and most of the time I tried to work nights. I remember many a day I would come home and my girls would go off to school, and my boy, I would put him in the playpen in the middle of the dining room, and throw a blanket on the floor and sleep a few hours, you know, and if he whimpered or cried, I was right there next to him. But, I'm glad, all my children are all . . . they're not college graduates, not because I didn't want them to go to college, but they had other plans for themselves. My girls all went to Catholic high schools, which you know are very expensive; my son I sent to a military school in Manassas, Virginia. So, I tried to give my kids a good education.

INTERVIEWER: How many children do you have?

PODOJIL: Five; twenty two grandchildren. And my grandson I helped him; my oldest grandson I gave him a helping hand. You know, eight years he went to school; well, in the first twelve years that he went to school, the first day that he missed school was the day that his grandfather, his father's father, was buried. That was the only day that he missed school of twelve years. My grandson went to John Carroll University on scholarship and he graduated magna cum laude, and he made Who's Who graduating in American Colleges, and I told him when he went to college, "I don't want you to protest, Frankie, and anything extra that you can't earn your money for, Grandma will help you." He thought he wanted to major in journalism, so I bought him a Presidential

typewriter, then he felt that he couldn't study with six little brothers and sisters at home, and he thought he'd like to go into an apartment house and I scrounged around and got him enough secondhand furniture to furnish him and his buddy a three-room apartment so he would be near John Carroll's you know, so he'd have time to study, and he did work all the time in the summertime. I'm very proud of my grandson because, just as I say, sometimes you get discouraged. I told him when he was home the last time, I says, "Frankie, I think you've done enough of volunteer work, and I think it's time that you start getting a little grass roots." My grandson has volunteered most of the three-four years he's been out of college, and he's been working with exceptional children and he's been down in the Appalachian valleys working with them. So he said he's coming home, and right now he's in Tacoma, Washington; he's been teaching a Catholic high school out there. For the summer he's going into San Diego--what is Project 50? They call it Project 50 in California; they work with these children during the summer months; they teach them. He's done a lot of research work with retarded children; I think he loves retarded children. He's done a lot of work. He's been in Appalachia, all over doing this type of work.

So, basically, I'm starting to feel that I think my grandson is going to make a decision this fall and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he's going to be a Jesuit brother. I really think so. I think he's heading for that direction, but I think in a way he's been kind of searching himself. He went on a grant; the grant was given by a family here in Cleveland. Their son was an officer; he was a lieutenant in the air force; they were very wealthy, and when he graduated magna cum laude, he was allowed four seats, and so he sent these people the two tickets. He had his father and mother, and he sent the two tickets for these people, and they told him that they were so happy that he brought so much prestige to that grant which they had given to him. So he felt that he didn't know what this boy would have done with his life, so he felt that he owed this boy four years of his life for his parents giving him an opportunity to go to college, you know. So this is the four years that he more or less dedicated to pay this boy.

INTERVIEWER: Sounds like a remarkable person.

PODOJIL: Yes. And I told him, and I always told this to all my children, "No protesting." I believe they were so wrong . . . when years ago when I read in Stanford University all those students they were coming back and they were protesting,

and they had lice in their hair, and everything, you know. It was so hard to believe. And what did they do to deserve this right, and I told my grandson when he went to college, I says, "Frank, go to college and learn; take advantage of your education." I says, "You have no right to protest; your father, yes. Your father was in the navy, and your uncles have a right; they served their country. They have a right to bitch, they have a right to complain. You have a right to an education; take advantage of it. When the time comes that you're going to be voting and you go out to vote, then you have a right if you're oppressed. You can say to somebody that's criticizing, say, 'no criticism,' did you vote?" This is what I say to people now, even now, if I hear anybody criticizing the government. I criticize it, definitely, but I feel I have a right because I go out and I feel my vote count. But if I hear anybody, the first thing I ask them, "Did you vote?" "No." "Well, shut your mouth. What are you criticizing? Your vote might have made the difference. Maybe what you want, if you had went to vote you would have had it." That's the way I talk to people. And you know another amazing thing? They lower the age of voting to eighteen, for children. How many are taking advantage of it? They're not taking advantage of it, and yet the world belongs to them; it belongs to them.

INTERVIEWER: It's hard to believe that it makes a difference sometimes for people.

October 1976

INTERVIEWER: Let's start with you showing me some of the materials you found about the union activities that you were involved with.

PODOJIL: One of the things that you and I talked about was my involvement when we had the discord and the international dispute in the union, so I have here part of a speech that I made as part of my report and proceedings, and I'm going to give you this so you can have it for your own references. In the same token, I think I have another one here. I also mentioned to you that in this particular convention I received a story and I happen to have a copy in the Worker, which is a Communist's newspaper, and because of the dispute at this convention, they were out there and they had written a story in here, gave a story of the textile convention.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what date are we talking about?

PODOJIL: We're talking about the internal dispute which we had in 1964 in the International Union. At this time, I was on the staff of the union. I was working as an organizer for the union. They ran this story, the Worker, and this kind of tickled everybody because of the fact that though I was the one that hit the floor on two different occasions and made the statements that were made in the Worker paper, they identified me as two different characters; I was the same individual in both. I'll leave this with you and you can read it through and you can get an idea of how I felt about it, and about what happened at the convention at that point.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that the article quotes you correctly?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes, they quoted me. The only thing is they referred to me as two different times. Once I was the woman from the midwest and then I was someone else in the midwest. Everyone was going out there and they were picking up a copy of this here because they were standing out there at the convention, and because of the great discord that we had at that time and, of course, you know, the commies were trying to infiltrate the union too. But, anyhow, they referred to me in the article that they wrote, and it says, "I am ashamed for all of us that one southern woman--", see, and I'm not. It Says, "Southern woman delegate in sharp words against the leaders of both sides. Not one of you wants to sacrifice for the good of this union. You fight like alley cats to stay at the top of the ladder. She charged that the real purpose of the union, to serve the workers, is forgotten in this struggle." Then it goes on, it says, "Another woman delegate--", which was myself again, "from the west coast quoted from a letter that an employer sent to employees in which he notes that union leaders fighting among themselves were not fit to represent workers. She said that the letter aided the employers in disrupting an organizing drive in an area affecting about a thousand workers." And then went on and said, "By the end of the third day of the convention hardly any of the policy resolutions were taken up. It had taken for granted that until elections are over no serious attention could be given to such problems as political action, organization of unorganized, the thirty-five hour work week, international affairs, social legislation, and some serious steps towards the merger with the smaller United Textile Workers." So they emphasized in the newspaper that it was two different people, but it was myself that spoke because the first time I spoke was in the seating of the delegates at one of the locals that we had some problems. This was a heartbreaking thing because

in this political fight we had lost some great potential leaders. Like in any struggle that goes on, you always lose a lot of good leadership. But I was the same woman. This is the Worker, the weekend edition, and this was the communistic newspaper.

INTERVIEWER: What was their point of view?

PODOJIL: I'll leave this with you so you'll have an idea. Well, you know, with any internal dispute like this, especially when you're becoming communistic infiltrated, you know, to me, it was like an indication that we were not satisfied with our union. We were satisfied, but we were just discouraged with our leadership because at that point they weren't interested in the welfare of the members; they were more or less interested in their political fighting and gaining the top seats.

Also in the forefront, I always felt that our International Union was really wrong in the effect that they had about twenty vice-presidents. In all the years that I served, even as being a staff member and an organizer out on the road, we never had anybody, actually, a woman, that was one of the vice-presidents. It was just recently, with all my complaining and carrying on, that they appointed one of the women from out of Painesville and she's been elected vice-president; I think, this is the third time. Now, even with the merger, she was elected a vice-president. Dorothy Congos is her name. Up to that point, and in fact, she is only, as far as I know, the only woman vice-president out of twenty vice-presidents, even to this time. And yet, our industry, as I indicated to you before, Lydia, our industry, 80 percent of the textile industry is women, and here we were. We have all these men vice-presidents and presidents. I think there for awhile they had a girl somewhere out of Maine, and she was quite a dynamic young gal, and they had her on the board of trustees. So they first appeased us when we'd go to the convention. Not that we didn't run any delegates; believe me, we always got some woman to get up there and run, you know, but we just couldn't get the vote, get a woman elected. So the only thing we did, we did make a breakthrough that the first time on the board of trustees that we got a woman elected, and that result ended.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get Dorothy Congos?

PODOJIL: Well, because we went to convention after convention, and we raised hell, and we told them if they had one or two women sitting on the board, maybe they wouldn't have the

disputes that they were having between themselves. And they were making it harder for us to organize when we were out organizing because, you know, this was something that management--as I indicated in one of my speeches, and it should be in there in that directory for that special convention--and this, by the way, was a special convention because of the terrific friction, and this was a special convention that they called to resolve some of the problems in the union. But, never, even to this day, Dorothy is the only woman. Now with the merger, I understand that the Amalgamated Clothing Workers does have women in the key positions in their union and, hopefully, that it will happen that they will put more--gradually, in time--they will put more women on the board, but the unions are very, very slow. The International Union is very slow in putting women in the key positions.

INTERVIEWER: You said that you argued, saying that maybe there wouldn't be that much friction if one or two women were on the board.

PODOJIL: Yes, if there were women. We also felt that women, as such, were not represented on the board seeing that most of our industry consisted of women workers, and we always felt that they discriminated against us because of the fact that though we were 80 percent of the membership, they had all men on the board: the vice-presidents, secretary treasurer, all the vice-presidents. As a result of this friction, then the following convention they had a problem again. So what did they do then instead of resolving it? It used to be fifteen vice-presidents, and seventeen people were members of the executive board. So then, after this convention in New York, then we had a little problem with the next convention, and there was still a little of that backlash from the previous convention, so we went to a convention in Florida. So what they did, they expanded the vice-presidents, and they expanded them to twenty. So they put five more vice-presidents on, but they didn't put any women on it, see. So they too discriminated. The union discriminated against the women, so it's left that 80 percent of the textile workers were women.

INTERVIEWER: What did they say in response when you....

PODOJIL: Oh, you know men always have some kind of an excuse, you know, that we didn't have the qualifications, and we didn't have this and we didn't have that, it was a hard row to hoe. We knew it was a hard row to hoe. We made more sacrifices than they did because any time there was a strike, it was the women that suffered the most, you know. They really

suffered, especially where there were the families where you had to struggle, wondering where the next slice of bread was going to come in for your kids. And, really, to this day, I find that now they're so proud and they make such a big issue of it when they add a woman to their staff.

And another thing they discriminated in--I'm so interested in social justice, you know, and I think there's such injustice all the way around--in our union we had a lot of Puerto Rican people, the Chicanos, and we discriminated because we never had them on the staff as organizers. And we'd go in the area and you try and organize people that were Spanish-speaking. They come from Mexico, from Texas, you know, and these people were coming in from Puerto Rico and we never had anybody Spanish-speaking in our organization. We had people that spoke French. We had a terrific group of French people because we had the Canadians in our union, and we had them from up around Quebec and up in through there, so we had French people. We had a lot of Italian people, we had a lot of Slovaks, the Bohemians, a lot of those type of people, a lot of Jewish people. And Italians, we had a lot of Italian people, and quite a few Polish organizers, but we never had any Spanish-speaking until, I think, about maybe four or five years ago that they first started taking a little different outlook and they realized then how many Puerto Rican people there were here, how many people that were here from Cuba, that they finally decided that they were going to put on their organizing staff some of the boys that could speak Spanish.

I remember we had a little young fellow here out of Cleveland they were trying to groom for this position and he was quite active locally, but he was one of these that he wanted to stay close, you know, and when you work for the union there's no such thing that you're going to be home at a set time, that you're going to eat at a set time, because when you work for a union your time is not your own. You have to work twenty-four hours around the clock. Problems come up morning, noon and night. And if you're organizing, it never fails that when you're organizing and you live in Ohio, they'll send you down south. Now, see, I lived in Cleveland when I worked as organizer. I organized very little in Cleveland when I worked as organizer. I organized very little in Cleveland, but I was sent to Rochelle, Illinois. We spent many, many months out there working on a campaign. Well, you go on one campaign it takes you twelve-fourteen, sometimes a year-and-a-half to work on one campaign. Sometimes it's a matter of maybe fifty or sixty people, and you have to have two or three organizers there

working two or three--you know, you've got to work fourteen-fifteen-sixteen months on a campaign before you even get it where you can probably just go up and petition for an election. So we had this problem, and the same thing when I worked in Altoona, Pennsylvania, on a campaign there. So, actually, I was involved in smaller campaigns in this area, in distributing leaflets, and that I could actually say in organizing smaller plants, but the time that I worked on the staff I spent most of my time in Illinois and in Pennsylvania.

INTERVIEWER: Did you help influence the union to get organizers who were Spanish, or did you make your opinions known about that?

PODOJIL: Yes, I did. In fact, there have been very few women organizers, and then this was when I was more or less in my forties when I went on the staff, and they had realized that there was a kind of a backlash when the organizers would be making house calls where there were women at home by themselves, a lot of the husbands resented....the union organizers would come to the house. So there was a kind of a backlash on this thing. This backlash might have happened about twenty years ago, maybe fifteen to eighteen years back that this backlash was, so then after we started, the men would never go out, the men organizers would never go out alone. Always a woman arranged where we were organizing, where we had headquarters. We always made sure that a woman organizer was available there. So, in one way, you protected the man too, you know, because you know how some people are. Husband say, "Some strange man comes; well, he pushed his way." But with a woman being around it was much easier. We found out too that with the women organizers--like I told you, I think before--just sitting at the laundromat, we'd meet the women coming and going out, and then especially like in Rochelle, being a small town, the husbands and wives worked, and they had to park right across the street from Caron Spinning, and Morgan Dying and Bleaching, and we were working on the two plants, and I would sit there, out there in the park and as these women were coming in, or the mothers, grandmothers were leaving, they would leave the children with me out there, and they'd sit and visit and come in purposely earlier, and they would stop and talk and be more interested than just having some strange man coming during the day rapping on the door of the house.

INTERVIEWER: So you developed new techniques, really.

PODOJIL: Yes, yes. See, when I worked in Altoona, Pennsylvania, we had . . . when we set up our headquarters we always had

coffee there, and they'd run in from the plants at lunch time, on their breaks, and tell us the latest scuttlebutt, whatever was happening in the plant, and what kind of new posters management put up. So down in Altoona, Pennsylvania, they established something a little different. We'd have like a cake baking contest. Everybody would bake a cake and see who baked the best cake, you know, and brought it in, to go with our coffee, and then everybody would run in at lunch time and have a piece of cake, and we'd invite them to come in the evening, and I found out that when we invited them in the evening, tell them to come with the children, and have balloons and stuff like this for the children, we'd hand out suckers to the kids. So, you find out that the people were a little closer and a little warmer, you know. They were more apt to come down, and they trusted you more.

Then, I think, not so much in Rochelle, but I found that in Altoona, Pennsylvania, I worked quite a bit with younger girls in the plant, and this was quite interesting because I got to be real friendly with a lot of them, and even after I left for a long time, I received a lot of beautiful letters. You know, the kids used to come and tell me their problems: their mothers wouldn't do this . . . you couldn't go with this one . . . you couldn't do that. And, at that time, smoking wasn't as common as it is now, so they'd come in and say, well, her mother caught her with a pack of cigarettes, or something like that, and tell me all their problems. And I'd tell them I never smoked a cigarette, and I thought it wasn't good for them. But these are the kind of things . . .

John,* would you give Dorothy Congos right spelling of her name? C-o-n-g-o-s, wasn't it? Dorothy Congos, she was the first woman vice-president in our International Union.

JOHN: That's a good way to spell it.

PODOJIL: Is that right, C-o-n-g-o-s? Is that the way you spell Dorothy's name, Congos?

JOHN: C-o-n-g-o-s.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what year?

PODOJIL: She got elected about four conventions back, wasn't it?

---

* John Whitely, Cleveland Joint Board Manager, who came into room while Podojil was being interviewed.

JOHN: No, she was elected at the last convention. She was appointed before that.

PODOJIL: Oh, yes, someone died and they appointed her, that's right. And she was really elected at the last convention.

JOHN: No, she was reelected.

PODOJIL: Reelected.

JOHN: That's right, two--four, make it five years ago.

PODOJIL: Yes, because she was appointed after a death of someone.

JOHN: She was appointed in 1973, was it? I think '73. When did I come here?

PODOJIL: About that time.

JOHN: When was our last convention, this is '76?

PODOJIL: Yes.

JOHN: '74, all right. She was appointed in '74, early '74, before June.

INTERVIEWER: But she's never been elected?

JOHN: Been elected twice. She was appointed prior to the '74 convention. Then she was elected at the '74 convention, and reelected at the '76 convention.

PODOJIL: Yes, reelected in '76.

INTERVIEWER: You were talking about helping the young girls with their problems. About how old were you then, when you were organizing?

PODOJIL: When I started to work as an organizer for the union, I was in my forties already.

INTERVIEWER: You were married at the time?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes, honey. I've been married fifty years next year. Next June 6th, I'll be married fifty years.

INTERVIEWER: How did that work out with....

PODOJIL: Well, it worked out. I'll tell you why. Like I told you before, that I was always so active, you know, then when I had the chance, my husband, he said, "Well,"--my children were married; I only had one boy at home yet and he was sixteen years old. These young people, when I was in Altoona, Pennsylvania, a lot of these young girls with me, and maybe two or three, had a carload everytime because there was always something doing here in Cleveland on the weekend. I wanted them to see what kind of a participation they would be involved in, and I would bring them over here over the weekend, and get home myself over the weekend. Then weekends I couldn't get home, see, fortunately, I have family within twenty miles of Altoona, Pennsylvania, and because I had the family there I could go spend the weekend with my cousins on a Sunday afternoon, which was only maybe about a twenty-minute drive for me because, as I told you, I originally come from around the Pittsburgh area.

But when I got stuck in Rochelle, Illinois, it wasn't that easy because, actually, organizers, when they put you out on the road, you're supposed to come home about every third week. And I got out in Rochelle, Illinois. I was out there for about six weeks, and all I do is just call home on weekends, you know, and write letters to my son; of course, he was in high school already. And I'd call on weekends and talk to my family. Like I said, we had a very tough campaign going there, so one time I called up Saul Stanton, and I said, "Hey, you guys realize I haven't been home in six weeks; you know, I still have a home." I said, "You know what I'm doing? I'm driving and I'm going to take about a half a week off," and they said, "Oh, no, you're not driving." So they sent one of the organizers, one of the staff people out of Chicago, and drove my car into Chicago and put me on a plane and let me come home because they were afraid that I wouldn't go back.

But this is what happens when you're on the road. If you get in a campaign, forget about it, because sometimes things are happening so fast that you can't leave a campaign sometimes for twenty-four hours. So, I think then, after that, they made it their business to see that they gave me a credit card for the airlines, and they made it their business to see that I got home every other weekend after that, you know, so they didn't hold me up as late.

INTERVIEWER: Did you try to get other women interested in becoming organizers?

PODOJIL: Yes, there is a great interest. I find that a lot of the younger girls, especially in the local, the plant I organized, and I became the president of this local and I was president for ten years. We have a pretty nice young gal out there now, and I think she would be a very effective organizer. But our unions are just like all the other unions. They're losing membership, especially in the textile industry. They're losing members, and so they're cutting down on the staff, and I doubt whether there would be that much chance of any woman permanently becoming organizers as such. They are putting them in the capacity of working with senior citizens, or legislation, or something like that, in organizing different legislation for senior citizen's groups, but no, actually, in hitting what we call the old way "hitting the bricks." When you got up at 2 and 3 o'clock in the morning and you stood up at a plant because the people out there started to work at 5 o'clock, and so you got up about 3 o'clock in the morning; you took a shower, and you put long johns on, and don't think it don't get cold up there--oh, Lordy, does it get cold up there. And these Hoosiers are coming in, you know, to work at 4-5 o'clock. They're coming in at 5 o'clock in the morning so they can get out of there. And then, you have to put long johns on, and sheeplined boots and jackets on, and stand out there. You have to meet the people and talk to them every morning, handing out leaflets, you know. Then you go back to bed and you get a couple hours of sleep, and then you're out there waiting for another group, another shift coming in, and so sometimes you're out there four times a day, in front of a plant, depends on how the people leave the plant. Now if you're lucky you're organizing a plant that's only got one shift; you've got gravy. But if you've got one that's got maybe three shifts, and then probably alternating shifts where some groups start at 4 o'clock, one group starts at 5 o'clock, then forget about it. It's one of those round-the-clock jobs; you don't sleep. You have to be dedicated; if you're not dedicated you might just as well forget about it because it has a lot of heartbreaks because sometimes, like I told you, you think that you have a campaign and then the company comes out with the kind of literature, and they look for everything that they possibly can to get on the organizers. And they'll draw pictures of you, especially the men organizers, they'll draw pictures of them, great big fat guys with diamond rings, and their hats, smoking five dollars--you know, they always kick back to when the president of the coal miners union, you remember, when he lit up his cigar with a $5 bill. For some reason he did this and they all the time bring that old leaflet in and they make

something out of it, and they keep bringing that same cartoon up. Someway they changed the picture a little bit, but they bring up the cartoon plenty of times. But a lot of people have wrong impressions of the union too, and I find this everytime I pick up a paper, and they have a wrong impression of the union. They don't realize that the union is the people themselves. It's the people themselves and they say, "Well, these guys up in Washington, these guys with headquarters in Pittsburgh, these guys with headquarters in New York, these are the guys that tell people to strike." These are not the people that strike.

Now, if you would have been here Sunday, you would have had a fine illustration of what happened. Now, Mr. Whitely had just gotten through negotiating a contract. Negotiation committee did a terrific job. They brought in a package worth about $1.55. For today's time, $1.55 package. During the process of when they talked about negotiating their contract, they had called many meetings and asking their people to come out and tell them what changes they wanted in the contract, and they must have had at least five meetings on Sundays. They never had anymore than seven or eight people come to these meetings, asking what their demands were. But last Sunday, after the committee negotiated what they thought was a very, very good contract--good increase in pension fund--there was a ratification vote to accept the contract or not. This place was so crowded that I think that every--and this is a small plant, part of Kimberly Clark. There was, I think, every person that worked in that plant came here, and a few of them were pretty high, and then they got so that they got to criticizing the negotiating committee, "Why didn't you get us this, why didn't you get us this?" "This is a deadline, your contract expires at midnight; go out on strike at midnight." And yet, for six weeks prior to negotiating with the company, they were calling the membership meetings for the purpose of what changes they wanted in the contract. There was only six or seven people coming out, and then all of a sudden they come in, and there was husbands here, and some of the women brought their children out here.

And I really felt so sorry for Mr. Whitely because I thought I was going to have to give him a bucket for those tears that were going to be coming because he did really negotiate a terrific contract, and so here these people come--deadline 12 o'clock--and they're demanding decisions in the contract, "Why doesn't the committee get this, why doesn't it...." They don't care to come to the union meetings; they're

critical of the officers. They refer to them as cliques. In order to be a part of a clique you have to be willing to work, can then those people that are willing to work are called a clique. And do you know that in any organization, you find a group--six, seven or eight people--these are the apostles. These are the people that come out and work, see, and no matter what tasks you assign to them, they're willing to come out and take another task on top of the one they've had, and they're always referred to as the clique. But they never get the support of those who are criticizing them. So, I want you to know that with seventy-some people, all the meetings that this committee had, the local officers, they never had no more than seven or eight members attending this meeting. This is including the five top officers, only three other people came to these meetings. And when it came to ratification and a strike at midnight, then they come here and they're demanding all these changes.

And do you know what the vote came out to? The contract was accepted by only three votes! By three votes! By three votes the contract was adopted, and they could have went out and hit the bricks at midnight, and they weren't anymore prepared for a strike--and if you know you're not getting, you're not negotiating and getting the type of a contract that you want to get--what you do, you prepare ahead of time. You prepare for your headquarters, where you're going to establish headquarters, where you're going to establish, are you going to need a john out there for your people, are they going to use toilet facilities, do we have our posters ready? So, here, at 3 o'clock, and they want to go out at midnight, and nothing prepared, nothing ready. I mean, this is what is happening.

Sometimes I think that, I kind of believe that something should be used like in the Teamsters Union, because I believe that anytime they have a strike vote, you know--well, they do call their strikes--they have the opposite effect. If you notice, when they call for a strike vote, they'll get some hot heads at their local meetings and they'll have these guys just carry on and vote for a strike, but when it comes to accepting a contract, the Teamsters use a different philosophy. They have the acceptance votes sent directly to the members' homes because they're afraid that some of these hotheads will reject the contract. Did you notice this? Notice in the Teamsters that when they go to take a strike vote, they'll have it on the local levels, and it'll get the strike vote. But then when it comes to ratification and accepting a contract, then they send it all out of Washington, and then the people accept or decline. Well, you

know if a man's going to go home and he's going to get a ballot at home to accept or strike, his wife's going to say, "Well, how long do you think we're going to be sitting out here? Vote to accept the contract; go back to work." This is the kind of a philosophy that they have. And I'm beginning to think that it would be a good philosophy to the extent in ratification meetings because the people don't really turn out the way they should. And then when it's a few hours before the deadline, and then you'll pick up an editorial page, or you'll read an article somebody's criticizing, says, "Them big union bosses up there, they're calling out the strike," you know. But they're not the ones that are calling the strikes; it's the people right there in that plant that are doing it because they're the ones that are going to decide whether they're going to hit the bricks or not. Mr. Whitely's like I am, and we try to discourage strikes because we find out that after a few days that those that were the hottest for the strike are the ones that are the coolest and they're the first ones that you have to help. And this is really true from past experience. I've seen it in some terribly big strikes, and they're really the ones. One of the strikes that I felt was real well coordinated in our union, where the people were really dedicated, was the Harriet Henderson Mills strike down in Henderson, North Carolina. I have some stuff for you on that. But this strike I felt was one of the strikes where I had never seen such unity, like I saw in the Harriet Henderson strike.

INTERVIEWER: Were you ever involved in a wildcat strike?

PODOJIL: Yes, I was involved in a wildcat strike, and if you don't think I didn't sweat that one out, I did. You had a wildcat strike and it was the most uncalled strike that you'd ever want to see. The company charter and the contract with the union called for pay to be on a Friday. In between the time that all shifts would be paid on a Friday--so inbetween we went in and we had talked to the company and we told them it created a kind of a hardship, the third shift getting their pay on a Friday night and the second shift getting their pay Friday afternoon and the banks were closed on Saturdays and a lot of women were complaining their husbands went to the bars to cash their checks. So we talked the company into giving their checks--they would give them to the second and third shifts--they would give the second shift Thursday and the third shift also when they reported to work Thursday so they'd have Friday to cash their checks; there was no problem as far as the day shift was concerned. The company says to us, "Yes, we'll

do this on one condition, providing the absenteeism isn't too high on Friday." And I said, "When the absenteeism gets real high on Friday, we're going to discontinue it just like this."

So we went on it for awhile, and we had no problems, and then all of a sudden one week we get a letter from the company and I get called in the office, and I get a report of the Friday absenteeism. Not only did the absenteeism carry over from Friday, but it carried over to Saturday, when you're in the peak industry because in the textile industry you worked on two peaks all the time, then in between you slowed down. It had gotten so that the supervisors would have to cover up the machines and get out and get the work in order for them to meet their commitments for the company. So I called a special meeting and I told them, I said, "Look, we got you a good thing; now it's going to be taken away from you; there's no way we can control it. There's no way because the contract calls for pay on Friday and they're chartered to operate in the state of Ohio. It clearly states that the payroll will be met every Friday, and this is what's going to happen."

So, I had a walk out. So they didn't get their pay that one night, that Thursday night, and they walked out. And they left yarn in the dyeing kettles, and everything. So, I want you to know, it was about 3 o'clock in the morning, I was out in the plant. I drove all the way from East 53rd to West 150, about two hundred and some blocks, trying to get those hotheads back to work, so finally had to get a hold of the business agent; I couldn't get a hold of him; it was about 6 o'clock in the morning before we got him. And this wildcat walk out was not by elderly people, or the elderly men, but by young kids, they were about nineteen-twenty-twenty-one years old. They didn't give a darn that we could have been sued, that didn't make any difference, "Hell, the union's got a lot of money. They can sue you; let the company sue you." (laughter) This is the attitude they take. Mr. Whitely almost had one yesterday.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yes. When was this one that you were talking about?

PODOJIL: Oh, the one that I had, I'd say about eight or nine years ago that I had this one.

INTERVIEWER: What happened yesterday?

PODOJIL: See, it's a funny thing in the textile industry. I would say that 80 percent of the locals have women presidents.

We do; we have women presidents. I don't think that we have in the Cleveland area, I don't think that we have one man president. I think every one of our locals in the Cleveland area has a woman president, and this is normal. The only place where you'll find where you have a man president is mostly like the big dye houses down in Rockhill, North Carolina, or something like that, but in this area we find down in through Pennsylvania most of the presidents are all women of the locals, see.

So, unfortunately, this girls' husband, he's with the auto workers, and their contracts are so different. Their product sells for much more than, you know, what our product sells for. If you're buying yarn; you're dyeing sweaters; you're making yarn; you're paying maybe $1.50-$2.00 a pound for it, in comparison to paying six, seven, eight thousand for a car. It's a different type of wages and a different kind of work. So this gal all of a sudden decides that's she's going to have.... Their contract calls, I think, for X amount of stewards in a department, and now she's gotten . . . they had a little expansion there, and she felt that even if there's four or five people in a department, you should have a steward, and this is a costly item to little companies because most of our contracts call that if you have a grievance then they hear your grievance on company time; you're excused from your job. That means if you have five or six people gone in a meeting with management, that's five or six people that they're paying and getting no production from, see. You know, a lot of our younger people don't see it that way. Where, we, the old pros, we see two sides of the story. That if it's a small plant, and you're having a complaint and then you pull off.... You employ maybe seventy people, or a hundred people in the plant, and you're going to pull out five or six officers plus a couple stewards to go and sit on the grievance and drag it out for four or five hours. It's a loss in production to them and it's a cost item to them.

So, finally, I don't know, he was real happy when I came in he said he had resolved it, so I guess they . . . but the contract--every contract usually spells out how many stewards you can have--but she's under the impression that in this little plant that she's working in that the president should be paid for full-time just like they are--you know, the presidents of locals in the auto workers, the big steel workers. They're paid by the union; the union pays them. Some of their chief stewards are also paid, and an office place is provided for them in the plant, but you can't do the same in a small plant.

INTERVIEWER: Two questions, one which you've raised about the local presidents. You were a president of your local.

PODOJIL: Oh, yes. I was a president for about, I would say, ten or twelve years. In fact, I helped to organize that local and then I stayed there, became my home base, and that's where I retired from, though at various times I left the plant, you know, to work for the union. Got leave of absence, seven-eight months at a time to go on different campaigns throughout different areas to help to organize. And sometimes, I'll tell you, we helped to organize our company's competitors (laughter). Sometimes, this is what happened, we'd go out and organize our company's competitors because when we'd go to negotiation our company would say, "Well, look, he's our competitor and we have to beat his prices." And we did have an incident that happened right here in Cleveland, where we had three dye houses at that time, with Morgan Dyeing and Bleaching, we had Phoenix Dye, and we had Erie Dyeing and Bleaching. It was a big order. It meant a lot of work for our people, and one of these companies underbid us by five cents a pound. When you're bidding on fifty cents a pound on an item, and then somebody bids for forty five cents, so when we did meet with management they really told us that this company's going to go out of business because they're not going to be able to really meet that price, that forty five cent price, what they bid.

And this is what happened. I mean, Mr. Jones was right in predicting what he said, he told us that they figured it one percent of the cost on this bid--this was a government bid--and he said they bid one percent above cost just in order to get this work into the plants so that when the slack season came, this would take up the slack season and there wouldn't be no need of a lay off from work. So this company [Erie Dye] goes ahead and underbids us by five cents a pound and, believe me, they finished bankrupt. In fact, the federal government closed them down because they finally went to the Teamsters, got a loan from the Teamsters and they couldn't meet the loan, and there was some hanky-panky involved in it, where they got this loan, and then they kickbacked so much to the Teamster leaders. In fact, some of the people are still in prison because of this particular incident. So then the government just came, foreclosed on this plant, and they threw about 140 people out of work. So we do help sometimes, our people, you know, when they have competition from other places.

Many a time we would get a call from the International Ladies' Garment Workers. I worked quite closely with Bernadine [Soffle, business agent with ACWA] over here, and many a time we'd get a call from the sweater mills that were trying to organize somewhere out on the east coast, and say, "Look, do you do business with this company?" We'd say, "Yes, we did too." And, believe me, my boss, if he'd ever know, you know. I worked quite a bit out of the shipping room towards the end and I'd get down there in the shipping room and we'd have all these stands, as the trucks were picking up labeling, where this stuff would go in there, and I'd just go in there and get all the information that I needed, you know, just exactly where these sweater mills were, whether they were organized or not organized. When we'd be closing up the cartons here and there, we'd sneak a union flyer in, "Do you know that this is union work coming to your shop? Are you a scab?" and stuff like that. We did that quite often.

INTERVIEWER: Ever get caught?

PODOJIL: No. One time I got a little reprimand, but he got a big kick out of it, got a little reprimand, you know. He knew, on two occasions, when he complained about his competitors that we made sure that we went out there and we distributed leaflets and really tried to organize the plant.

But, you know, the hardest place--I think even now, you'd be surprised how people are fearful of unions. I don't know if it's because of the recession or a lot of people being out of work, or what, but we--just recently, Mr. Whitely and I--we went out to look at a plant, which we knew paid substandard wages, and we really went out to this plant and we had taken a look at it; in our industry because we cover also plastics, you know, and we read so much, and we had a few people call here asking, but they're afraid to give their name. You'd be surprised the people call here and they want to talk about a union, but they're afraid to give their name. But Mr. Whitely and I went out there and did a little survey of the plant, and the wages are just above the minimum wage; this is a big plant, employs about a thousand people, but one drawback, handicapped people they employ, and because they're the minority and the handicapped people, no matter if you have four or five strong leaders in this plant there is no way, because this company about every six months--oh, gets a big write up that they hire handicapped people, and all this and that. But, if you would read the financial reports of this company, then you could see why they are hiring handicapped people. For the simple reason that their

profits are tremendous, because they're not paying them the type of wage that they would if they had a person that wasn't handicapped there, and they do, and so they're all the time being given testimonials and being given plaques because they hire [handicapped]. But you see what they're doing? They're just using these people for profit, and not because they're actually dedicated to hiring handicapped people. They're doing it because of the tremendous profits they can have. And handicapped people are real good workers because they know it's hard for them to get a job. And you'd be surprised, the absenteeism is very low in handicapped people. Very, very low in handicapped people. So they have good turnout; they have very low absenteeism. And the people that are handicapped, they're afraid there will be nowhere else for them to get a job, and you just can't organize them with a big plant like that. Even telling them that the same people doing the same type of work they are, in the same industry they are, are probably being paid anywhere from maybe two dollars an hour more.

So we made this survey, just early this year. We went out there and we went around and visited all these places. So it's hard; it's really hard. It's getting harder to organize, too, because people are critical and they always say, "Them big union bosses," all the time, and also critical of the wages that are being paid to the auto workers. But if you stand in one place, and you do one job, day in and day out, you know how monotonous it can be, and you have only so much time to do it in. If you just sneeze, you don't have time to tighten that wrench or tighten that bolt; that piece goes down that assembly line. So I feel sorry for some of those people that work on those assembly lines because I think that you have to go back to where you do more than just one job, and you don't stand there and drill one hole continually all day long. You know, you're either drilling a hole or you're putting the same damn nut on, or you're putting a bolt in, and turning that wrench either right-handed or left-handed. You do this all day long. You know how bored you get with this kind of a job and it's monotonous. And you have to stand, and on an assembly line you don't leave an assembly line until such time that you get a relief person come to relief you. So if you're sick, or you sneeze, or something happens to you, well, there goes the machine down the line. Then they say that the cars that are coming off the assembly lines are shoddy, but it's not because of the worker himself. It's because of the time-study people that are down there and continually telling you, "Well, you put fifty screws in today, tomorrow you can put sixty screws in," and if you sneeze in the meantime

you've lost two screws. So, here, two cars went down with two screws missing, see. So this is really what it is, you know. It boils down to that. Where years ago, Lydia, that was not true.

You know, I, as a youngster in the textile mill, remember I told you, I was a rookie for one whole year. I had to sweep the floor and I had to help the girls and I had to learn how to do this and I had to do that. And then we didn't do the same work over and over again because, maybe, one week you were running gabardine, the next week you were maybe weaving a beautiful plaid, and the third week you were probably putting some kind of a stripe thing through, and then you were probably running a tropical yarn. There was this continual change. And then you had to put your bobbins and your shuttles in, and so it wasn't as monotonous as, I imagine, just standing in one position and just drilling one hole, or putting one screw in or putting a bolt or a nut in. I can sympathize with the people in the auto workers' union, you know, because it's standing in one place.

For many years we were making an effort to try and organize Richmond Brothers, and in time the original Richmond Brothers died out, the original Richmond family, and finally Richmonds was really owned by Woolworth Company now and, of course, they make suits there. And I had just talked to a young girl last week, I think it was last Saturday night, and she's working at Richmond's and she said that she just can't stand the job. She got laid off where she worked before and there was an opening there, and she says, "Oh, Mrs. Podojil, I don't think I can stand it. To sit there and do one thing, the same thing day in and day out, and you've got to work because they throw a bundle...." And I think she said she was sewing on pockets for men's trousers, and she said, "You're just sewing this thing, and sewing, and they throw one bundle after another." She says, "Things have deteriorated at Richmond's, you dare not leave the sewing machines anymore." This is something new; I was never aware of the fact. She says, "This is a new policy." They're not allowed to leave their sewing machines until a relief girl comes and sits there because the next girl is waiting for that bundle to get down to her. So if this girl goes to the john, that means this next gal back of her has to wait until she gets back because she's already sewed hers on it. I was really shocked because I knew it never was that way under the Richmond's, but now under Woolworths it is. And then, she says, "You have to wait for the relief person to come, and then they issue you a pass so that you can go over to the hea." They issue you a pass. This is how bad it's deteriorated.

As soon as we get over to the other building* I'm going to talk to Max Amdur about it, and I think that we ought to take another crack at that plant there [Zenith Plastic plant]. And right now they have just the type of people that will rebel, because they have the Hungarian Freedom Fighters there, they have this type of people in our.... Hungarian Freedom Fighters are in there, and these are the types that are going to rebel. But, today, nobody likes to stand in one place doing one thing. I know even in this office work, and I don't know how many Sundays, you know, and I get so tired of filing. We're trying to file stuff and I get so tired of filing, then working something else, and I'll drop whatever I'm doing and go putter around for a little while then come back to these things.

INTERVIEWER: Let me just get back talking a little bit about when you were a president of your local. Around when was the first time you became president?

PODOJIL: About twenty years ago, about twenty two years ago.

INTERVIEWER: And you said it was interesting that a lot of women were presidents of locals, but then stopped at that point.

PODOJIL: Yes, they stopped at that point. I think that I was really . . . out of Ohio, I think I was the only woman out of Ohio that was ever, at anytime, an organizer for our International Union.

INTERVIEWER: What were your duties as president of the local? What kinds of things did you do?

PODOJIL: Well, I would say a hundred-fold duties because, for one thing, when I was the president I spent an extra hour earlier getting into the plant so I could visit with the people, knowing what their problems were, and I'd find out that a lot of times people didn't actually have a grievance, or didn't want to file a grievance and sign a grievance, all they were interested in was pitching a bitch, so I listened to their bitches. And I found a lot of times that I could resolve a lot of problems before they had gotten too big.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of things?

PODOJIL: Well, you know, the boss looked at me cross-eyed yesterday. You know how women are, and I tried to teach this to all our supervisors. One of the things I used to talk to a

---

* The Cleveland Joint Board moved its offices after the TWUA & ACWA merged to become the ACTWUA.

foreman about, I'd say to them . . . well, one foreman I had in particular, I'd say, "Boss, remember one day you can come and tell one woman to go to hell and she'll spit in your face; the next day you can come back to the same woman and just look at her cross-eyed and she'll bust out in tears." These are the kinds of problems women have at home. Really, in all my experiences in being an officer of the union, I found that a lot of people, women too, carried their home problems into the plant, so one of the things we always believed in was a very good educational program.

And I'm proud to say that this is one of the things that I also taught to the International Union, that in all the years that I was a president, once a year we made it our business that we had an affair that all the children of all our members were invited. We would give a prize to the youngest baby there, to the oldest there, and we gave beautiful prizes. I'd try and have a magician run cartoons so that the children would know why it was important for their mothers to come to a meeting. For all the years that I was the president, it was an annual affair, and it finally grew to be such a big thing that even the company co-sponsored it. The last few years that I was the president, our company, we turned it around into a kind of a family picnic affair, which the company then started picking up the tab for the whole affair. We would have 1,200 to 1,400 children out there.

I have some terrific pictures. One of these days we'll get into having pictures of the youngest babies there because I believe that unions have to be taught that if we're going to do anything, unionism has to be taught from home because you're not going to teach them after they get into the plants; it's too hard. But this is the type of program, and I've been proud because I've gotten more compliments, and a lot of our retirees, you know, they're in touch with me and I work with the retirees now, and they all tell me. Even a lot of children, you know, teenagers that are nineteen-twenty years old, and they'll come to me and they'll tell me, "Gee, I am so happy; I'll never forget what a good time I had at your family affair." But we did; we started it out when we were small and then the thing got so big that it was nothing for us, and we made sure that every child got something. We had a prize for the youngest one there.

One occasion I remember, I have a picture of a baby that was only two weeks old, at one of our family affairs we had. Then we made sure that every child got a bag, regardless, every child got a bag. I would have a committee of forty or fifty people, and we would be working in my house for three weeks before, and we would line up these shopping bags in a row, and then we went out and bought wholesale the candy, and all the novelty candy, and everything. Then we also put in a toy so that every child had Christmas in June or July with our union. This is one of the things we did.

We did send a lot of people . . . we trained a lot in union counseling. As I said before, they carry their problems to work with them. So if a woman had a husband that was a drunkard--and I can tell you occasions where I had a whole family working there.... I had a husband and a wife and a couple teenage boys working there and John was one of the most wonderful people when he was sober but he was one of these men when he got drunk. He wasn't like some drunks, nasty or noisy; he just beat her up. So one day I went after him. It happened and she'd come in and I'd say, "Well, Peggy, what happened to you?" "Oh, a can dropped on me." You know, she was ashamed, and I said, "Listen, Peggy, something's wrong over there." And then all of a sudden--they still had two younger boys at home--and all of a sudden she had disappeared. She was gone for a few days, and he drank so bad they finally put him in a hospital. So some of our other members said, "Toni, we have an idea where she's at. We think she went to Florida by her mother's. Call down in Florida." So I called over there and I said, "Well, Peggy, John's in the hospital; you come on back up home. You come on back up and I'll see what I can do with you." So the net result of it, that when she came on back, I called them together and I said, "Look, John, maybe Peggy doesn't have the money, but I have the ten dollars and the next time you put your hand on her the ten dollar warrant is going to be there, and anytime you hit her, you're going to be cooling it off in jail." So, you know, I would say it's about fourteen or fifteen years, I don't think he's struck her yet. And, now, he is a very sick man from this drinking. And that girl should have really left him; if it would have been me I would have left him a long time ago, but she didn't leave him, and she's living through another hell now with him because he's sick, and he's really bedridden. She just called me a couple weeks ago and asked me if I thought we could have him put in the veterans hospital.

As I said, a lot of these experiences they bring in, and I had another very unusual case. This one we had was.... and this was a drinking problem, and the most terrific person. He worked with United Auto Workers, and when he didn't drink he didn't drink. He was one of these guys who went on temporary binges, and then when he went on a binge, he'd go on a binge for maybe two weeks, get lost. And we tried to help him as much as we could. I finally told her, I said, "Well, Ann, if we can't get him to join Alcoholics Anonymous you're going to have to do something drastic with him." She says, "Well, the kids are growing up; I only have the one, why do I have to take this. I think I'm going to divorce him." I said, "It's going to be up to you." So she finally filed for divorce, and one month after the divorce was granted, he died. He got spinal meningitis. He got drunk somewhere and he was just laying in one of these flophouses.

But I've had many problems with people that I've found that if we went back and resolved their family problems, that when they did come back into work that they were happier and did a better job. Especially you have to look for a problem like this where you have absenteeism in a woman, because women are usually pretty good in coming into work, and you look for this kind of a problem with women. They have problems with the children. Children get picked up, you know, dope addicts. I've gone through all of this, and getting assistance for them. Oh, if I ever recollect some of the stories. You know, I started digging through some stuff, and I had been interviewed by the Channel 3 the other day, and yesterday I met with a reporter from the Cleveland Plain Dealer because I'm so active in social reform activities. And this corruption in the Medicaid program, and I'm working with a coalition of senior citizens, and there isn't a day that the phone doesn't ring that somebody wants me to come out. And I started talking, and I started remembering a lot of other things, and I referred to how aggravated I was because just recently, a few weeks ago, we were having a meeting with the senior citizens, Federation of Retired Workers, and where we had our meeting room they kind of cramped us, about thirty of us, in a room like this. And I said, "Why can't we have our regular meeting room?" And they said, "Well, we're setting up headquarters for strike benefits." I said, "What are you talking about 'for strike benefits'?" And I said, "You know in my day when we went on a strike, we suffered, we really suffered. We really sacrificed." And I said, "These people have just gone out on a strike." They went out on a strike Monday and they were already setting up accommodations for

them to apply for their food stamps to fill in to get their strike benefits. They were setting up headquarters; they still had a pay coming, one more pay coming. When we went on strike there was no such thing as strike benefits. We used to stand in front of the plant when we were on strike, and we would stand in front of the plant and we used to have these old little buckets. Remember these little old metal buckets we used to have? We would have these metal buckets, rain or shine, we would stand out in front of the plant where we knew they had a union, and we would be waiting for the men and the women as they were going and coming out of work, and getting contributions. And we would pinch those pennies, these contributions that we got to see that if any family was going to have their gas shut off; there was no thing like telephones like everybody has, but at that time it was your gas, your electric, and we'd buy coal and we'd give it to the people. In the wintertime we'd give it to them by the bucket. I mean we'd have a couple tons of coal dumped over there, and then we'd let them come with their buckets and take a bucket of coal so they would have it for the next day.

Today, they go on strike, they vote to go on a strike, and on a Monday they're already standing there getting strike benefits; they're applying for food stamps. We used to go to the bake shop and get their day-old bread from them and pass it on. And we used to have kitchens; we'd have headquarters and we'd have a kitchen. And when the strikes would last a long time, we'd have these great big soup kitchens, you know, and they'd come in there and everybody had something. They would bring whatever they had. We'd make big pots of soup, and we'd bring this day-old pastry, and the bread we would get and we'd make sandwiches for the people. The kids would come there, and we used to sit around, huddled around these great big coal stoves. I'd put up a big coal stove up there and huddle around these coal stoves. It's nothing like it was, and you take the auto workers. They go on strike and they get about fifty or sixty dollars a week benefits. Our International Union starts sending in strike fund benefits, not as large as those; they can't compete with them, but, anyhow, our people get around twenty five dollars a week, you know. At least it's something. But we didn't have this before. And then if anybody had any clothes we would pass them on, somebody's kids needed a pair of shoes. We used to go scrounge around and see if we could find clothes for the kids, and stuff like that. They don't do these things anymore. It's altogether different. Everybody's me, and me and myself and I, and before it was different. When we struck, we struck because we all knew we struggled.

But going back, we were talking about some of the things to the reporter because I remembered his grandmother very well, and we talked about the kind of strikes that we had when you struck a plant, and you had the horses drive on top of you, and they came with the billy clubs, and we had long hair, remember? After that the rage came in and we all had our hair cut, but we still had long hair at that time, and they would grab you, [the policeman] be sitting on a horse, and he'd grab you and be pulling you, and probably whack you over the head with a billy club once or twice. These are the kind of things, kind of memories that were coming back in the last few days, the things that we had to sacrifice; you don't see those kind of strikes anymore. Even, I think, the Harriet Henderson strike was a fine example, and this strike took place about early 1960 and '61. During this strike, this was the opposite. The company--it was proven later on--it was the company that was going around and bombing, setting bombs in different places. And they set the bomb in such an area that it didn't do too much damage to their plant, but maybe pulled up a rail and everything, and blamed the union for it, and then they railroaded the people into prison. Then it came out that these people were paid by the company to do these things, and then blamed the union people for it.

But years ago when you were involved in a strike, you got blackballed, and you never got a job in that area. So you had only one thing to do. You just had to pull up and you had to go somewhere else if you wanted to work in the same industry and find a job, or either change your name, misspell it or something like that, use a different spelling of a name. A lot of the men went into different areas to work because they were blackballed in the textile industry, the same as in the coal mining industry. If you were a coal miner and you struck a plant, you didn't go back to work anywhere in that state for a coal mine because you were blackballed. You had to go further, and then you either changed--if you were John, you changed to Joe, or something, and say "that was my brother," or "that was my uncle," or somebody, you know, "that wasn't me that was involved in it."

INTERVIEWER: Even if you were just a participant?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes. As long as they knew that you were a leader, or they used to discriminate against you even if you went to the union meetings during the process of organizing. If you went to a union meeting, and they'd send somebody over--they always had someone--they'd send somebody over in there

and they would come back in. Like I told you before, Lydia, they'd have this great big list of names of everybody that was there, and then the supervisors would be told, "Now, look, so-and-so was at a meeting, look to see if that person does anything wrong. That's it. If they do anything wrong you have my authority to fire them." And this was the kind of thing. Where, today, they don't do it because they know it's getting so if they do discharge them it takes a long time, two or three years sometimes to get a person their job back, that you can do it and get their jobs back. So you really have to have a dedicated leadership. If you're not a dedicated leadership, if you're not a part of the clique that's willing to do the work, or, like I say, be an apostle, you know. So, then, your heart's not in it; don't get involved in it.

Too many labor leaders today, and also the younger labor leaders today, are failing in supporting this group that actually built the union. This is one of our great criticisms of the retired labor people. We have just recently, Mr. Herman Snyder, Mr. Ralph Delaney, and myself, sent word to Mr. Meany in Washington that we feel that we were the group that made the most sacrifices for the labor movement. And we feel that today labor is not doing for us what it should be doing in supporting our programs in getting the type of legislation through. Like getting national health programs for us, you know, and everytime we get a 5 or 6 percent increase in our Social Security benefits, they come and increase everything else. Everytime we get an increase, they increase our Medicare payment, and everything's increased so they absorb everything that they've given us, plus they take twenty and thirty and forty dollars away from us. They are really not supporting us; they want us out there and they know we're there. You know 60 percent of the senior citizens are the ones that vote in this country; it's not the young people that vote; it's the senior citizens, the retirees. And we realize that there is a great demand in good social legislation because of the corruption that's going on in the Medicaid-Medicare programs. I just recently appeared and testified when Governor Rhodes tried to cut the Medicaid program down. I pointed out, I came out with a stack of clippings out of various newspapers across the country on Senator Moss's investigation, where I pointed out that it wasn't the elderly, it wasn't the sick that was abusing the Medicaid program. It was the nursing homes that were stealing; it was the doctors that were stealing and hospitals, which were overcharging and fast becoming profit-making organizations. So these are the kind of things that we have that this labor movement has actually gotten to it where they've become really aristocratic.

INTERVIEWER: When do you think that change occurred?

PODOJIL: Well, I would say I think the change was gradually coming, but because I was active in the union as such, I didn't see it until in the last three years, since I became a retiree, and then started working with retirees and finding the terrific problems that are facing them today. It is nothing if you come in here, and I have out there at the present time, options that the doctors are giving a retiree. If we're on Medicaid or Medicare, they don't want to fill out our forms for us, and they say, "Look, you pay us first and after you pay us, then we will go ahead and we will fill out your Medicaid or Medicare forms, give you the proper information that you do need so that you can be reimbursed for Medicare." So then when you do pay these, you do pay the bill, you find out that it'll lay in the doctor's office for two or three months; he has his money, he doesn't care about you. So as a result of that, we have filed some charges against some of the doctors about two months ago with the academy of medicine, and we presented some of the programs that we have. Another thing, the doctors are overcharging. So even if Medicaid or Blue Shield or Blue Cross are supplements that a lot of us have, we find we're still paying anywhere from 35 to 40 percent of our own bills even having Blue Cross, Blue Shield, and Medicaid, we find, because of the unfair pricing of the doctors. But you're a senior citizen, and if you're working and you know that you're going to have seven or eight or nine hundred, or a thousand dollars coming in every month, and you go to a doctor and he says to you, "twenty dollars," you don't think twenty dollars is very much. But here's somebody that probably is a diabetic, or something, or has a heart condition, or arthritis, rheumatism, and they go to a doctor and they have to pay eighteen or twenty dollars, and make three trips, and they're getting a Social Security check of two hundred dollars, they have to pay rent of a hundred and some dollars, where are they going to cut down? They're going to cut down either on the medical care; they're going to cut down on their food. So then when you cut down on the food, you have a person that's sicker than ever.

So there's a lot of problems. I've got a hotline into Washington already, I worked myself into it. I had one particular case where the man needed surgery on his eyes, and the surgeon took $875. Medicare papers were filled out by the doctor, and they sent to Medicare Nationwide; they came back, and it said that this person had cosmetic surgery. Now did you ever hear of a man seventy-four-years-old having cosmetic surgery? The doctor reappealed, sent the papers back,

therefore says, "I am not a cosmetic surgeon; I'm an eye specialist. I can practice anywhere in the country. England. I am a licensed woman doctor." Terrific. She says, "I can practice in Bombay, India, can practice in England. Any state in the United States." Does terrific work with the laser beam on cataracts, all new phases of surgery. These were growths under the eyelids. The man couldn't close his eyes because the growth was getting bigger. It was like a sponge, or like a cyst, or something growing in there. So after she sent in and appealed, lo and behold, they sent a check for eighty dollars. On the $875 bill they sent a check, so they recognized $850. An eighty dollar check they sent to her. So I said to her, "Well, Dr. Aggravol, I listened to you, we did it your way; we're going to do it my way." So two letters to Washington. That's all it took, two letters. One to a congressman, and one to a senator. I want you to know that five days later I had gotten a call from Nationwide with a check for $550 for these people, and the previous check for $80, which made it $630. Then I sent the difference for the people to Blue Shield; they sent a check for $175 and, therefore, the people only had to pay $50. You know why? Because down there everything has a code number; everything is a number. So she looks over there, and they can't read the medical report; they just look by numbers and she puts it in the computer, see. So this visual operation comes and marked off in that computer and given a number, that's all. These people that process the papers, that's all they do over there. They look and they number it. Well, what kind of a surgery was it? We're going to allow you fifty dollars; we'll allow you forty or thirty dollars and they don't take into consideration what kind of surgery, what it employs. She read that report and it came closest to that number that she thought was what they call visual surgery of some kind, and so then she allowed the eighty dollars on the appeal. And this is what they do; they number all these things now.

INTERVIEWER: Have you gotten an answer yet from Meany, to your letter? What did he say?

PODOJIL: He says we should look for a great change sometime in the early spring, right after the election. He's going to give it his immediate attention after the election and everything cools down. And he's very well aware of the fact that they are not using the senior power as well as they could use it in helping to get social legislation passed. And do not be a bit surprised to see me parading in a visual demonstration and being one of the leaders, which I am in the process

of organizing sometime in Washington, as soon as congress reconvenes and we get the new president in there. We are in the process of planning, with the National Council of Senior Citizens, an official demonstration of senior power. What we're going to get for us, we're going to pass to our children. We are going to pass because what they have now is what we fought for them thirty and forty years ago. Minimum wage, they didn't get; child labor, they didn't get because management, they give it to them. I know what child labor is. I've gone through that period of child labor. You see, what happened! And like I told you, we used to work twelve hours a day for nine dollars a week, for ten dollars a week we worked nine hours a day; we were kids, we were fourteen-fifteen years old, and you went out and worked. I've seen kids in the coal mines that were only ten and twelve years old. They were not actually in the coal mine where I lived, they were out on the heaps, going over the slag heaps, you know. They'd be going up on these slag heaps and picking out the goods, pieces of iron, and when they would make the coke they would be going up there and picking out the metal klinkers putting it in the bucket. The kids, they'd go up there and they'd work all day long on the slag pile and pulling out the metal when they were making coke. Sometimes they would come out with klinkers of iron in the bottom, and they'd go up and they'd be filling up buckets. They'd be up there six-seven-eight hours for a quarter.

You know it's hard; they don't understand these things. They can't even visualize it. "Oh," they say, "Well, that happened twenty-thirty-forty years ago." Because that did happen that long; we made it a better tomorrow; they don't appreciate what we give them today. They think all of this came on a gold platter--the companies were so good to them. They gave them the minimum wage; they gave them the eight-hour day; they gave them three weeks vacation; they gave them paid hospitalization. But, blood and sweat and tears, that's how we got it! And being hungry too! Boy, I remember manys a time where we had to feed whole families. But like I've told, Lydia, before, we were more fortunate, you know, we always had a big garden, and stuff like that, where it always helped.

INTERVIEWER: I'd like to go back a little bit to what we started talking about when you were president of your local, some of the things you did.

PODOJIL: Dealing with many family problems. For example, one woman had a serious mental problem. She was separated from her

husband, and the boy set about three or four churches afire. She was so desperate because she was separated from her husband, wasn't getting the kind of money that she should be getting for the support, and trying to work, and the child needed a lot of attention. She was very fearful that they would put him into one of these mental hospitals. In this particular case, through knowing people in the proper channels, and through the community services, we were able to get the boy put into one of the special schools out of the state. But that boy had set four churches afire, so, you see, there was terrific resentment there of some kind, and we assisted her, and we saw that the courts were aware of the fact that she couldn't afford psychiatrists for the boy, and that she was making an effort and that she would be willing to pay whatever. So we did make arrangements for them to put this youngster into a special school, and because he was put in a special school, then we arranged for her to pay so much out of her pay weekly, and it was so far away that she couldn't go to see him, so we also made arrangements that if somebody was going out that way that they would let her go out at least every six weeks to see the boy.

But there were so many things, I mean, in my experience as a union president. It was nothing for me to get called at 2-3 o'clock in the morning and one of my members would be in jail for maybe speeding, and things like that, and these were so common. But this is, I think, one of the most important duties of the president in having ears and her heart open to her people, any president, ears and heart open because people come to you and complain, and how many times they came to me and borrowed money. I'll tell you, that was another thing. I think I was the clearance house from payday to payday for some, and many of them that couldn't manage their money we used to assist them and help them with their budget, and everything.

But going back and talking about experiences, I think in years back, I would say about ten to twenty years ago, we had a convention in Florida. One of our presidents of one of our locals was a colored girl, and then we had another girl from another plant who was becoming quite active in the union; she also was selected as a delegate to go to the convention in Florida. When we got into Florida, of course, you know when you register your delegates, we got into Florida and we got into the Seagull Hotel, and they took one look and they saw that we had colored delegates, and they refused to give them a room. So we stood there; we just told them we were going to pull our whole delegation

out of that hotel. We told them, "Look, we either get them a room or...." They said they wouldn't, so they stood pat. They weren't going to give them the room. So what we done, we took both of these colored girls. I took one in my room, we switched partners and we registered the room under my room for two and one colored girl came with me, and the other colored girl went with one of the girls. And not only that, but we arranged that we were all on the same floor, and some of our men delegates were on the outer ends of the same hall, so that we wouldn't have anybody coming at night to annoy us because we had the colored delegates with us.

INTERVIEWER: When was this?

PODOJIL: This was about twenty years ago, and this happened to us in Miami, Florida. Another time I remember also, I was going to Macon, Georgia, and I was sitting on a bus, and there was a young colored girl on the bus with a baby, a newborn baby, and she was sitting in the back of me, and when we had gotten past the Mason-Dixon line--well, in fact, about half way down into really the southern part of the country, we stopped the other side of Lexington, Kentucky, into a restaurant, and this girl walked up and she wanted to get a bottle of milk for the baby. And she stood there, and she stood there, and they ignored her, and the baby was crying. So I got real angry. I told her, I walked up to her and I said to her, "Honey, you take your baby in the washroom, change that baby's diaper because it's whimpering. You give me that bottle and I'll get you some milk." So I stood there and I made them give me some milk for the baby, and I looked around, and at that time at the same restaurant there was a group of orientals, and they were being waited on and being given prime treatment, and there was this Negro girl of ours, see, standing down there and they wouldn't even give her a bottle of milk, so then I got the milk for the baby. Then when we got down, I think it was around in Alabama, we got into Alabama, and he said to her that she was going to get into the back of the bus, and I said, "Honey, you're not moving out of that seat. You sit right where you're at, I'm sitting right here and if necessary...." I was keeping an eye on another youngster for a couple that was going into Macon, Georgia, and I said, "I'll keep an eye on you, don't you move until you're ready to go. If your husband's good enough to fight for this country, you're good enough to get a bottle of milk for your baby." So I kept an eye on this gal, this little colored girl, all the way going down there. She was going to her husband at one of the camps down into Georgia.

Another experience I had, during the Harriet Henderson strike, we tried to relocate these people, and I had about twenty-some families brought up to Cleveland, about twenty five families, and got them furnished apartments, got them kettles, got them furniture, you know, for all these families. The union paid their transportation up here; we got them settled. When we got them up here we had a job for every one of them. Do you know what? In a month we didn't have a single one of these twenty five people that we had relocated. We didn't have a single one; they were all homesick and they went back. As bad as things were, and as long as they were on the strike, they all went back. We spent thousands of dollars on bringing them up here; they all paid their own way back, and later on sent checks and reimbursed us for transportation for being brought up here, but all that we went through to relocate. You know when people have roots, it's hard to relocate them, and everyone of them went back; we didn't even get to keep not even one of those twenty-five that we brought up here. There I was for about two weeks looking around for furniture, and everything, for these people.

Well, I've pulled some shady deals in my time: we had a young couple by the name of June and Bob Allen, and he was involved in a car accident and he was so badly injured. His hip was broken, a-l in pins and everything. These kids were living in furnished rooms, and so he was in the hospital in a cast up to his neck. Had two little girls and they wouldn't let them come into the hospital. He wasn't doing well, and she was expecting another baby, and he wasn't doing well. He was thinking about her and the children. She got so that she couldn't work anymore. So I went down to--it was called Metropolitan Hospital; it was a city hospital at that time--and I raised holy hell. I said, "Look, he's going to improve; she's going to feel better; the children are going to feel better. How about you letting us leave those little gals come in to see their daddy." So I don't know how many strings I pulled over at the hospital until I finally got permission where they had wheeled him out, and then they let the little girls come, and oh, I'm telling you, I think I cried for a week. These little kids, they were just hugging their father, and the nurse then picked them up, you know, when they saw the effect, so then they picked them up and put them--he was in a cast up to here--and they put the little girls on his chest.

So about two days after we got them to visit the hospital, one of the girls comes and she says, "You know Shirley and

the kids haven't had nothing to eat for about a day." I said, "You must be kidding." She said, "No." So I went to the president of my company and I said, "You know J.J., I was just told Shirley hasn't had any food in the house, what are we going to do? And I understand she's going to be evicted." And he's already used up his major medical as far as that, in the hospital, used up major medical that he had, all the insurance. The insurance company wasn't going to pay anymore money. He had major medical up to $5,000, and it was all used up already. So I talked to J. J., Mr. Joseph Jones, and he said, "Okay, I want you to leave the plant right now, get down there and see what's needed. Call me up, let me know what's needed." So I got down and sure enough, no food in the house, no milk, nothing in the house. The two little girls didn't have nothing to eat all that day. So we went up to an A&P store around the corner and got some food, and she's going to be evicted the next day. I called Mr. Jones back up, and I said, "Well, J. J., they're going to put her out on the street." He said, "She's behind with her rent, how much?" I said, "Well, we'll need at least fifty dollars to keep them from putting her out on the street." He said, "Okay, in the morning you come on up and pick up the check. Now I want you to go ahead and I want you to get a milk dairy to come there and leave milk, leave cream, leave whatever she needs everyday, have it billed to the plant." I said, "You know the baby's due in a couple weeks. We've got to get her out of here; it's cold, and everything." He said, "You don't have to come into work tomorrow; do whatever you feel has to be done." So next day, the first thing in the morning I'm down here around the corner, one of these housing projects, and I told them, "Look, I've got to get this woman in the housing project. She's being evicted; here husband's been in the hospital for about seven months already, and I've got to get her...," giving them such a big hard luck, and I'm telling them I'm not going to move until they give me rooms for her in one of these housing projects. So this woman goes down this list over here, she says, "Does she have furniture?" She didn't have a stick of furniture because she was in a furnished apartment. She said, "Well, I have four rooms over here available." So I said we had four rooms of furniture.

Well, I want you to know we had four rooms of furniture. We did. We got the company to give us a truck; I came in the plant and I told every woman in the plant that I wanted something. And I want you to know that that girl, in her whole life, is never going to have the stuff that we had. So the next day the company gave us a truck, and we went

from house-to-house, and we picked up a beautiful bedroom set in one house, in another house we picked up a washing machine. We were all over the city. By the end of that day we had that girl moved into that house; she never in her life had such beautiful drapes, never had such beautiful bedspreads, and never had such linen in her life like she did, and when her husband got out of the hospital those kids had a terrific start.

This is the kind of work I did when I was a local president. I was always in touch with my people with all their problems. I was like a mother confessor, I guess. And I'd always get so angry when I'd see hardships created, you know, like that. People needed blood, we got it. If there was a death in the family, if there was even a death out of town, we would make sure that these people were aware of the fact. If they had a death in the family, down in Tennessee, Georgia, anywhere, we'd arrange for a caterer, someone from that area to come in there and bring forty or fifty dollars worth of trays of food, and this is the kind of things we done.

And this is what my people miss, when they call me up and they say to me, "Oh, Toni, it's not like when you were there." Even management tells me, "Tell me anytime you want to come back to work," but I'm heading the other way. I'm going to fight for real social justice and reform for the elderly. I'm going to fight for a national health program. We need it--from the cradle to the grave--we really need it. This is my goal--to fight utility companies, fighting atomic energy plants being built. You know Ohio already has four atomic energy plants being built, and they have six on the planning board. Six on the planning boards, when countries like England and countries like Denmark are stopping them from building, even Japan is stopping them from building atomic energy plants. Are you aware of the fact that we have four energy plants in Ohio, and let me tell you, we have one within a fifty-mile radius of east side of Cleveland. Within a fifty-mile radius, two atomic energy plants, and just imagine what's going to happen. I've seen so many things happen while I was president of my local. I've seen some of our women--in fact, the girl that is the president of our local now--some of the babies that were born deformed, you know, and this girl a lot of times I was very critical of her, this young lady, very critical of her a lot of times with some of the things she did because she was one of these that never stopped to think, but I always gave her credit that she took good care of her baby. You know, I've seen babies

that were born to some of the girls that worked for me that were really pathetic cases, and what do you do? How do you explain to some of these young girls, you know, when they have a baby like that? You have to tell them, "Look, God gives everybody a cross, and he only gives a cross for you that you can carry. Nobody else can carry your own cross. You have to learn to carry your own cross." That's the only thing you can say to them, and then hope and pray with them that the Lord would come and take this baby, and this happened in a few cases. I've seen some badly deformed babies.

INTERVIEWER: You think there is any work-related reason?

PODOJIL: I don't know what the thing is but, in fact, the girl that I just mentioned now, this one girl, her baby lived to twelve years, and it was critical, she used to carry him, and she did have a nervous breakdown because towards the end I told her, "You know, Jeannie, it's gotten to the point where you have two other children, and they're sacrificing their youth for this baby," and it had gotten to the point I said, "Jeannie, it would be best for you to put this baby away." Oh, he was about twelve years old, you could carry him in the hand on a pillow. His head would just wobble; he was just a vegetable, you know, but she took care of him, and you know her husband left her because of that baby. He left her, and she really struggled. He left her, and he blamed that baby on her.

But I've had a lot of experiences, you know, being an officer. My husband always used to say to me, he said, "Don't you ever sleep?" If I got a phone call 2-3 o'clock in the morning I was up and going. I didn't wait until the next morning. I guess I'm still that way. I'm not sleeping but three-four hours a day now. All these calls are coming; somebody's always involved in something all the way. But, like I say, it brings a lot of memories, and if I had it all to live over again, Lydia, I think I'd do it all the same way. I would do it all the same. I don't think I would do it any different because my philosophy, and some day I'll show you the prayer, I have a prayer that every morning when I get up, and it says in this prayer, this was given to me when I worked for retarded children: "I pass on this journey of life but once, and if there's any kindness or anything that I can do, let me do it now, not pass up until tomorrow because I may never pass this way again." That's my prayer. Every morning I look at that up in there, and no matter how I get discouraged during the day I find it. And I've been told I'm the only

individual in this city that can be in ninety places at one time. And to this day, any problems come up, I'm on the go, Mr. Whitely will tell you. I don't care what it is, whether it's somebody having a problem with a child, or whether somebody's having a child, somebody has a deformed baby, somebody has a heart attack. This is the dedication of the true union people that we've had, and this is not the kind of dedication that you'll find today because they are looking for grant money. You know grant money is available for everything today. Am I not right, Lydia?

INTERVIEWER: It's getting worse.

PODOJIL: Is it? And yet, just recently, in the city of Cleveland, there was grant money sent here to keep these high school kids off the street, like a work project. They spent $150,000 of this money, Lydia, doing a survey as to what the kids could be doing. $150,000! They took $20,000 of this money and they bought T-shirts with the mayor's name on the back of these T-shirts. $170,000! They didn't have to pay me but one penny, and I would have put every kid to work in the nursing homes, going over to where there are elderly people, cutting their grass, sweeping up the sidewalk, going to the parks, picking up the litter at the parks. The kids would have had money; the kids could have been working until July. What happened? They ran out of money for these kids in the early part of July, see, and this money could have lasted these kids until the end of July.

They get grant money for a purpose, and they spend so much money making surveys, you know, that by the time they get down to the actual project there's not even a third of the funds left for the actual project that you're involved in. Am I not right? This is one of the things that I'm real angry about, real angry about because recently there was $16,000,000 appropriated to HUD money in the Cleveland area, and some of this money was supposed to go to senior citizens. This was to repair their homes. Some of it was supposed to be direct grant money to senior citizens that wanted to stay in their own homes, and stuff, and we have been trying to find out what happened to the $16,000,000. I happened to be on this committee. We want a breakdown, and how much money the senior citizens really get. How much money did the health centers get out of this appropriation. How much money did the ADC mothers get out of this. But you know what they tried to do with a million dollars? From a millionaire they tried to buy an arena down the

street. And I'll have to send you the literature; we put up a terrific fight. What you could do with a million dollars! To buy an arena that was standing empty for two years, the man owes about $50,000 worth of taxes on the thing, and he built that great big colosseum out there, just a few blocks from here, and they were going to buy an old obsolete building, and they said they weren't buying the building, they were buying the land. An obsolete building, a million dollars. And then you see kids going to school, just around the corner here, no shoes on, no stockings. More than once that I have stopped and seen a kid going to school with torn tennis shoes, and picked up the youngster and later found out who he belonged to and made sure that that youngster had gotten clothes.

Just last winter I was going down on West 65th Street and I saw a youngster going to school and she had a little old raggedy coat on and jeans, and I was going to the hairdressers just a block away from there, and had a tennis shoe flapping, little stockings, anklets, and it must have been about seven above zero. I stopped at the beauty shop, and I said to Mrs. Makecus--her and I work with the retarded children--and I said, "Find out who that youngster belongs to so I can send some clothes over there." So she found out who the family was, and we found out that there was a great need for clothes over there. The mother was on ADC. You know on ADC they only allow you five dollars a year for clothing for children. I don't know how it is up in Michigan where you're at, but in Ohio ADC mother gets five dollars a year clothing allowance for a child. This is what I'm fighting for, this kind of a social legislation.

INTERVIEWER: I see you have a few other things. Are these related?

PODOJIL: No, these are some of the things that I'm giving to you. This is a story of J. P. Stevens. This I'm giving to you. These are some of our problems. I had another one here. These are some of the booklets I take with me when I go. This is a little bit of our history here. These are some of the people I've talked to you earlier about. This is some of our history. That's all for you. I was hoping there would be a little better copy of this. That's for you. You can read this, and I'm giving you that one there too, to take with you.

INTERVIEWER: Are those photos?

PODOJIL: I have some of the photos. Oh, I'm going to give you something. I'm going to give you the Henderson story on tape.

INTERVIEWER: Your version?

PODOJIL: No, it's the story told on tape. You should see some very common people there, take a look. Recognize him, don't you? He worked very close with the Kennedys. Some very prominent people in the labor movement. Here, there's Dorothy Colmain there, there's Dorothy, the only person on our executive committee. Now, this is some of our work in here. This is on our Harriet Henderson strike. This is the old times when we went and we begged; we ran raffles. There's one person here I want to point him out to you. You'll be reading about him quite a bit. Watch his star. I predict that one of these days he is going to be the president of the United Auto Workers Union.

INTERVIEWER: What is his name?

PODOJIL: Bill Castevens. Watch his star. This was when Kennedy was killed. The first memorial services held in the country for Jack Kennedy was held by the Textile Workers Union. It was in Altoona, Pennsylvania. That day, when we heard he was killed, I was out buying corsages for the girls. We were going to have a big blow-out, you know, pre-Thanksgiving, a blow-out. And when we came back from the hairdressers, all the girls, we were told that he was assassinated. So that night, this is what we had, the first memorial services. Big stories in the papers. We were the first union in the country to have memorial services for Kennedy. Here's how I started out with my family, when we first started out with our little family up there.

INTERVIEWER: In the local.

PODOJIL: Yes, and when we first started out, and then it grew to where we had--the last one we had, we had about 1,400 children. We ran a film on unions for the children. We talked about why it was important to belong to a union, and what a union was, and we would have a magician illustrating little things, had a little puppet show, because, you know, you can't just run a film for children. So we'd have a puppet show and film for children, telling them what a union was. This is the family that I spoke about. These were the boys. And that's the one that used to beat her up. I never saw a man beat a woman up. How could he say that he loved a woman and then turn around.... Oh, another thing, this is Warren Smith, by the way, this is before he even became the secretary of the Ohio AFL-CIO. I have some other pictures here. But we used to go out and raise money, I'll tell you, we really raised it. See, how we gathered stuff; we used to go down and beg stuff, ship it, and send it out to our people.

INTERVIEWER: This woman appears in a lot of the pictures. Who is she?

PODOJIL: Oh, that's my partner; that's my buddy. We've always worked together. She used to be a vice-president.

INTERVIEWER: What is her name?

PODOJIL: Helen Stone. This gal's quite active in the Communication Workers. This was Florence Graham; she was known all over the world. She was really dynamic, and she was a Communication Workers' girl. She just passed away recently with cancer. Walt Davis, working out of Washington, educational director.

INTERVIEWER: Mr. Whitely?

PODOJIL: Yes, that's Mr. Whitely. Paul Corey, you've probably read of him, he was the president of the Teacher's Union for many, many years. Remember Paul Corey, did you ever hear of him? That's Paul Corey there. Then he quit teaching, and then he went on to becoming--now these are people, and you're going to read about this man in the book, this one here, in that book, Nine Lives For Labor, you'll read about him, that's John Chupka. He's gone; he's dead. We used to have children writing essays, and we used to grant awards to them, bonds, to the children; this was another program that we had. There's one of the vice-presidents of the International Union. I was looking for my pictures, but I don't know where they've gotten in the shuffle because everytime my kids would be having school projects, they'd be coming out and dragging out the pictures that they would be taking. I had pictures of myself with Mrs. Roosevelt, and pictures of myself with Hubert Humphrey and with his wife. There's some of my legislative work that I've been doing with our groups here. This is visiting the embassies, the different textile embassies down in South America....

INTERVIEWER: And what was happening here?

PODOJIL: Right in here, this is one of the conventions.

INTERVIEWER: You were speaking.

PODOJIL: Yes. Recognize any prominent people there? Washington. Congress Vaneck, the senior congressman on your finance committee. A lot of these people are in government positions.

INTERVIEWER: Was Shriver a keynote speaker?

PODOJIL: Yes, we were his escort committee for the whole day. I was on the escort committee for Hubert Humphrey for a whole day, and we went out and had supper with them, and lunch with them. I had a picture somewhere down the line, and it got lost, with Mrs. Roosevelt when she was here. I was the hostess for the tea party that we had for her. But everytime my children had a school project, you know, civics or anything, well, it got so even my grandchildren come in and carting out all my stuff out of here, so Lord knows where half of this stuff is in here. Now, this one, this was a terrific convention, this was the merger convention, the AFL-CIO merger.

INTERVIEWER: That was '58?

PODOJIL: Yes, the AFL-CIO merged; they first merged on the national level. Then they had to go on a local level, and so we had differences of opinion. The CIO, we were on one side, and the AFL was on the other side of the auditorium, and then we were supposed to meet in the center when the merger was voted upon, and we had gotten into . . . and I had an umbrella that particular day in my hand and I whacked a guy over the head with my umbrella. [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember specifically what it was about, why he deserved it?

PODOJIL: I don't remember exactly, but they still remind me out of Washington. They remember when I hit him over the head with the umbrella. This is one of my newspapers. For a long time I was editing a newspaper, a legislative newspaper.

INTERVIEWER: '68. How long did you edit this newspaper?

PODOJIL: Oh, I edited the newspaper for a few years.

INTERVIEWER: This was out of COPE? [Committee on Political Education AFL-CIO]

PODOJIL: Yes. You'll enjoy that one.

INTERVIEWER: You're still active with the Cleveland Joint Board?

PODOJIL: I'm here all the time.

INTERVIEWER: Are you working mainly on the retirees, senior citizen's issues?

PODOJIL: Yes, I have many hats that I wear. Everytime the phone rings I change my hat. I have a different title.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever repeated this March 24, 1968 visit to Washington, for a week, to visit the congressman and senators?

PODOJIL: I appeared on the panel of Georgetown University this summer.

INTERVIEWER: Does this happen often, now, going for an entire week?

PODOJIL: Yes. I have a leaflet out there that I'll give you, just got back from our congressman. Yes, I have been just recently in Washington, and raising hell with some of the congressmen down there. I had a picture taken with Congressman Stokes. They know me when I come down there. When they see me they know I'm coming.

INTERVIEWER: What I'm wondering about is, here eighty people came. Do large groups still go?

PODOJIL: Every year.

INTERVIEWER: Textiles?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes, every year. In fact, our textile workers were the originators of the COPE-legislative clash, and our people go every year, and not only that, but we have one class that is held in Washington, and then we have one class that is held in Cleveland at Kenyon College. Now, I didn't attend any of them this year because I went, in behalf of the coalition of senior citizens, to Washington in June, and last year I appeared at Kenyon College.

INTERVIEWER: These are good records to keep. It would be good to give them to an archive sometime.

PODOJIL: If you had been here a half hour sooner you'd met Dr. Jeffrey. He was just telling me now that he wants to write up a story. I'm going to give you this.

INTERVIEWER: Now, there are some people from Cornell that we're interviewing and one, for instance, on our advisory board....

PODOJIL: Well, one of the young directors, Margie Kanife.... I was hoping, if you had got in early, that we would have went down to St. John's College and we would have had lunch there with her. She was so anxious to meet you. She said that she knew somebody who met you from Cornell.

INTERVIEWER: Well, probably Alice Cook.

PODOJIL: [A reporter] from the Cleveland Plain Dealer took Marge and myself out to lunch, and we spent three hours over at the

Colony just talking about old times. He's going to run a feature story.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know when it's going to run?

PODOJIL: He's planning on writing a feature story on redlining, insurance redlining, of different areas, and going to bring ethnic background in the background of the story; communities, how they deteriorate, and how the elderly like to stay in their homes. One thing we do object to, and one of the things we're raising cain about is the government spending high-rise money for senior citizens. This is one of the things when I was in Georgetown University that I was so bitter against. In my statements there I said that we do not want to be put in high-rise apartments, and as long as we can possibly stay in own little old grass shacks, you know. The only problem in our little old grass shacks is, is in getting repairs done because if we need repairs done, and you're on a fixed income, labor is high today, and it's hard to go to a bank, and I've been shopping around. I wanted to get some siding on my house, and I've been shopping around for a loan, with a good credit rating, and mine, fortunately, is not a poverty income, you know, pension, because my husband is living, and he gets a pension from the steel mills. I get a pension from the textile workers and we both get Social Security checks. So with our four checks we have a living where some people don't have, you know, an income that some people don't have with four or five children. But to go out and to get what we need, the type of repairs on our house, which runs into thousands of dollars, you have to get a bank loan to get this kind of a thing. I've found out, I shopped around for a bank loan to get some of the work done, and I found out that they wanted 12.5 percent interest in one of the banks, and 12.7 percent, so if you're going to get a loan of three or four thousand and you're going to spend pretty much of that four or five hundred paying interest over a period of three years. On a fixed income that really hurts. So one of the things that we are talking, that when this HUD money, grant money comes through to the senior citizens, that we should be permitted to make outright grants. I don't want anything for nothing. I've worked for everything all my life, and I intend to pay for everything until the day I die. I'd like to repair my house so it would look just the way I'd like it to look, so it doesn't get run down, so it helps to run down the community. So we feel that we should be given loans 3 or 4 percent interest by the government. As long as they got the doggone black bags that they run around--Kissinger runs around all over the world with. Did you see the latest one?

$89,000,000 loan to Egypt, and $11,000,000 grant. This was in the paper last week, and guess how much notice it got in the paper? Two lines above an obituary column. Real nice to bury it so that they can't see, you see.

[I'm] not about to see our grandchildren going over being involved in any wars in Africa. If you think for one minute that if they don't start a war somewhere in Africa, and they're going to try and involve our grandchildren in it, you're going to see demonstrations like you never saw before. We are not going to permit this kind of stuff no more.

INTERVIEWER: Looking back on your own struggles, which ones do you think were the most successful? In terms of union, social justice, all of the areas that you worked for.

PODOJIL: Which were the most successful? Well, I don't know which was more successful because I'm one of these individuals that I always try to finish any project that I start, and I always feel that when I finish it with a satisfaction that I've done the right job, then I'm really satisfied. But what I think that I'm really proud of is of the fact that what I did with my own people as far as being their officer. Now that I'm gone out of the plant and retired, that when I stop anywhere, people recognize me because we had such terrific turnovers, because they recognize me and say to you, "Well, we never had it so good when you were there. You took care of, not only our personal problems, our financial problems, but we had good relationship with management." And, to me, I feel very proud when the company tells me, after I'm gone out of the plants for three years, "Come on, on back, and get back and start to work with us so that we can resolve some of the problems." And, to me, it's a sense of accomplishment.

And I'm happy about the fact that during this while period I was able to raise a family, and very happy about all my grandchildren, and I told you I have twenty two of them. And by the way, since you were around I've had two married already; two got married since I saw you last. And I'm really proud of my grandchildren because I have one who is--the one I told you--graduated magna cum laude. He's followed in my footsteps and he's crusading all the time. By the way, he came back; he's not going to teach. He taught two years out there; he worked on that project HOPE. All summer long, he worked Project 50, government project in San Diego, California. He decided to come back to Ohio. He says he thinks now he's going to be looking for a job, a permanent job, but same kind of work as his grandmother, so I'm kind of proud too that I have passed this on to my children.

I just got a call from my daughter in North Carolina. My son-in-law is out of the Marine Corps, be two years, he just came out of the Marine Corps. He enlisted in college, and my daughter says, "We're going to stay; we're not going to come back to Ohio. We just bought our home, we're going to stay here. The children grew up, they have their friends here." "Mother," she says, "I'm being involved in all kinds of civic things down here, and everybody's asking me where did I get it, and I said, you've got to know my mother." And I'm proud of the fact that my oldest daughter's like I am. She takes care of everybody in the neighborhood out there. If anybody dies, if anybody has to go to the hospital, or anything happens, she's right out there.

INTERVIEWER: She lives in Cleveland?

PODOJIL: Yes. And then my other daughter out in Bedford is real civic-minded. I'm really proud of that. I told my grandchildren--I was sixty five years old last Saturday, and I told my grandchildren what I wanted for a birthday present from everyone of them that was eighteen years old, to go on and register to vote, and I said that's all I wanted for my birthday present. So everyone of my grandchildren says, "You got it, Grandma; you got it Grandma." So I'm going to see when the registration list comes out next week, I'm going to make sure to see that they registered to vote, because if they're not I'm going to be standing up there and waiting for them to see that they do. But I'm real happy, just like yesterday, I stopped to pay a gas bill for Mr. Whitely, and I had a colored girl come up to me, and she looked at me, and she says to me, "Aren't you Toni Podojil?" I said, "Yes. Where do you know me?" She says, "Do you mean to tell me that you don't remember?" I said, "No." "Well," she says, "you know you helped me out. When I didn't have any money when I started to work, I didn't have any pay before payday, you remember you loaned me twenty dollars?" You know I had forgotten. I loaned so many money. You know, only one person disappointed me. In all the years that I worked in the plant, and before people would get their first pay they wouldn't have any money, how many people that I banked on, that I gave them money to get a room, or to get furnished rooms, or something, until they got their first pay. Here I am standing in a line to pay a gas bill, and she keeps looking at me and I wondered why she kept on looking at me and, of course, I wore my coalition power button, you know, and she says, "Aren't you the president of Phoenix Dye." I says, "Yes." This must have been at least fifteen years ago, and when you don't see anybody for so long, you know, we all change. She says, "I'll never forget you."

But, really, the people, and they come, they call me with their problems, and they tell me they never had it so good when I was their president. And I think Dr. Jessie, others, who nominated me, you know, to your group, that I should get this type of recognition, I think, to me, this is a sense of accomplishment, to realize that there are people out in the world--I understand there were a few letters came, one out of Washington, New York, and Dr. Jessie wrote the letter, so I realize that my methods have gone beyond just the little circle of Cleveland where I am very well known.

By the way, you know what my title is? I am the Protest Queen. I've been given the title of the Protest Queen because anything that happens, whether it's ADC, cut for Medicare, generic drugs, whatever it is. The only ones I do not get involved with is abortion, for the simple reason I'm of the old school, that I believe firmly that there are so many preventives today in this world, that if they don't want to have children that they should use the preventives. And the only time that I would believe in abortion is if a girl would be raped, or if the mother would have to die, then I believe in it, but not for it to be as it is today. I think it's wrong for them morally to make an issue against either of the candidates, though Carter is my candidate, for them, anybody, to get up there and use abortion as an issue, because they're distracting from what the real issues are today. But I am firmly against abortion because I believe there are preventives. And they can take the birth control pill; they can take this, and they can take anything they want. Because I have twenty two grandchildren and, believe me, when everyone was born I was up there to look at them, and I was just as happy with everyone. If I had twenty two more I would be just as happy with them, and I had six children of my own and, believe me, when I had my third girl, I had three girls in a row, and when I had my third girl I cried because I wanted a boy for my husband. But, lo and behold, a couple years later I had a little girl that was born six-and-a-half months, premature, a miscarriage, and I cried so hard for that little girl and, I mean, I wanted a boy real bad, and yet I cried for the simple fact that I carried that baby almost seven months, if I'd been able to carry her for two more months--so that's the way I feel about this.

JOHN: If I go before you're done, lock up.

PODOJIL: Yes, you know I'll lock up.

INTERVIEWER: Nice meeting you.

JOHN: Nice to have met both of you ladies.

INTERVIEWER: Good luck with the move.

. . .

INTERVIEWER: Do you have another few minutes?

PODOJIL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: We were talking a little bit about accomplishment. What was the hardest part of all your union work?

PODOJIL: Losing an election by nine votes. When we lost the Altoona campaign--and this was lost because the internal fight; as I told you, in the International Union. This was really heartbreaking. There I was, the only woman organizer, and all these men, and we had them from all different unions because in the final breakdown they come on down to help us. They like to see accomplishments just like we do, especially when we go for a big change, like Puritan Knitting Mills. And to see all of these after you work nine-ten months, and you get all these people enthused and signed up to join the union, then come election day, because of an internal dispute, lose an election. So, I think, that was one of my most heartbreaking, and being a woman, I think, I accepted it a little bit more because I saw the trend in the people changing, say about twenty four hours prior to the election. I saw it in my little women's activities that I had going for me there, and I noticed a little bit of the coolness of the people that were continually dropping into headquarters. So I think this was one of my--and to see all of these men cry like babies.

Then one other time, which was a hard campaign, and this was a campaign that we thought we had and, unfortunately, we lost this one on my birthday, we lost that one by fifteen votes. It was so close, and this too because it had been getting so near Christmas time, and they had a sort of a bonus program that they had there where at the end of the year they would pay them out like profit sharing, or whatever, but they would pay it out to them at Christmas time. This was the one in Rochelle.

So I think these were the two disappointments to me. The biggest disappointment was the one in Altoona, Pennsylvania.

In a way, with all the activities and anticipation in the Harriet Henderson strike, I wasn't too badly affected by that one as much, for the simple reason that I knew we were working in an area that no matter how dramatic it was, and what it was, but it was really kind of a tough battle in the south. And I'm told that sometime in the future that we would be able to come back. But I think my biggest disappointment in Altoona was because I felt this involved about 1,400 people, and when you have 1,400 people, and you sign up about 1,029 people in the union, you know you feel you have a sure victory. And then because of the--this is what I always felt--because of the internal dispute that we had losses.

Some of my happy moments that I remember was when I retired, when I was given a plaque by some of the people that opposed me over the many years that I was the president, and came out, and really surprised me because I made up my mind that I was just going to drop out of everything and take things easy, and I was asked to come down to attend a meeting, and I came, and I was presented with one of the most beautiful plaques. And I was really surprised; they had gotten a beautiful gift. I was told by the people that I was absolutely not to going to drop out of anything, that they had appointed me a chairman. They read a letter to me that I was appointed chairman of the retirees, and that I was to work with the people at the plant as their pension chairman because I knew more about pensions than anybody here, even Mr. Whitely, questions on our pension, you know. So those were the happy moments. Sometimes it compensates for a lot of the nights I didn't sleep.

I recently had a surprise guest over here, a man that just retired. And he came on up here, and he thanked me, that he had gotten discharged from work. About 11:30 at night, he had had a fracas with the foreman, and that I had gotten out of bed and went out to the plant and asked the foreman before I got out to the plant if he would hold his cool until I got out there and I could see if I could resolve it. And this is what makes me happy. To me when people come up and say, "I remember you did this for me," or somebody will call me and say, "Well, so-and-so said I should get to you and that you will help me with my problem." These things, you know you would never.... You know, I was a little bit bitter when I was retiring. There was some disappointment, you know, and I felt a little bit hurt, and so, I think, that when I was invited to come up to that meeting, and I had gotten that plaque, that award and all that, it paid me back for some of the little bitterness that I had. I was

disappointed a lot of times because I tried to get the best for the people without putting them on the street because I knew what strikes were. And I think I accomplished a lot while I was there.

INTERVIEWER: What part were you bitter about?

PODOJIL: Well, I'm going to tell you what happened. We had been told, to the unions, that a few years back that the communistic group would, through some of their colleges, be infiltrating our local union, and we should be on the alert of this, and my group was infiltrated by this group, by a group. I'm a firm believer in young people, and I knew by this boy's background, he had to be infiltrated by a communistic organization, you know, that it was, it was a proven fact. So I notified our union that I was sure that this was a problem because this boy was the leader in this wildcat strike, because they didn't get their pay that Friday night, and a few of the other things. There were so many incidents that were happening so fast. This youngster, he was involved in so many things, and I alerted them to the fact that I felt that this was the problem, that this was what was happening there in my local union. I had about 600 members. And they kind of ignored it and they catered to this boy. And everything that I predicted in the end came true.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of things?

PODOJIL: Well, this boy was an agitator. He was planted in there, and it turned out that I was right. He was an agitator; he was causing turmoil. Then, of course, he got himself elected president. I did not run. He got himself elected president, but I supported another young fella that ran who, I thought, would have done a terrific job, and I supported him. I went out and I campaigned to see him. I thought, well, let the younger people come in because younger people were coming into the plant and they felt they needed younger leadership. And so everything was a proven fact. So, then, when it all boiled down in the end, my local, who had had a clean record up to that time, had to be finally put under an administratorship; in fact, because of this activity, all of the locals in this area were put under administratorship.

INTERVIEWER: What does that mean exactly?

PODOJIL: That means the International Union comes and takes over the control of all the locals. All the officers are suspended, and everybody is suspended. At that time I was not an officer

so I wasn't dumped. So he carried this fight of his, this disruption from one local to another, because, see, we have the joint board; we all meet; each local is entitled to send so many delegates, and we have a kind of a thing that once you're a lint eater you're a lint eater all your life, you know, so you leave one textile factory and you move over to another one because it happens that maybe one might be wool, and one might be synthetic yarns. As the business picks up in one, the other one slows down. You find that our people between the plants, they would go from one plant to another. Say, for instance, they closed one plastic place--we've got four-five big plants here--our people went to the plastic place. So our people are more or less related with each other. And so through this young boy, the whole problem came that what I predicted to the International, and I alerted them to the fact, and I was very angry about the fact that they pointed out that this particular year they were aware of it, the SEI [Service Employees International Union] was aware of it that the unions were going to be infiltrated by a group of these young . . . they were supposed to be some kind of a youth communistic organization.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know what year it was?

PODOJIL: About six years ago. So, you see, I was right in my predictions. So when the International Union came in, they just thought this was terrific. Well, this boy never served his two years out as president because by that time the whole thing was in a turmoil, the whole area, and I was really glad. And at that point I resigned out of everything. I didn't take no active part in anything because I could see the walls crumbling. And then after, of course, when they came in with the administrator and they removed this boy, then they had to come in and they had to take the manager out of here. By the way, it was a woman manager, and they took her out of here, and they sent John [Whitely] in. John was put in here as an administrator. And then after the administrators were all lifted, they had to remove practically everybody, you know. So then I came back in here, and then I got active again in the local, in my own plant again, and I retired and came back down here and started to work down here again.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember some of the things that he was specifically doing?

PODOJIL: Well, he was actually agitating; he was an agitator. There was so much of this stuff. He was one of these that everytime he had a meeting, had pictures taken of him, and had

two flags, and he'd be sitting in between the two flags, and then we finally found out . . . in the end we found out that this boy had gotten a dishonorable discharge out of the Marine Corps. We never did get the real background on him, but there was an FBI investigation of some kind.

INTERVIEWER: I was wondering what he actually did though that was touchy.

PODOJIL: It had something to do with disruptions in the plants, in the union, it was all tied in with this type of disruption. We were notified . . . in fact, we were in Washington when we were notified that this kind of a thing was going to happen, about six years ago. And they said be on the alert if you feel you have somebody in this category coming into your plant, and be on the alert. So I let the International Union know that I felt that this boy was one, because I could see what he was doing. He was agitating for a walk-out strike. Every other day they would have had a walk-out strike with him. And they did have a strike with him, and had some hard feelings, and had some shooting.

INTERVIEWER: Who was shooting?

PODOJIL: Well, he pulled out a strike, and he had given guns to some of the boys, young kids, some of these seventeen-eighteen year old kids and, of course, they went after some of the truck drivers. They tangled with the police, and they got to shooting people's homes up, and stuff like that. This happened about six year ago--about five years ago, because Jeannie's [Owens] serving her second term [as president of Toni Podojil's Local 1448].

INTERVIEWER: Did the International Union come in to remove, suspend people who might also have been sympathizers?

PODOJIL: No, you see, by then there were so many locals here that it involved pretty close to about 3,000 people, and we had turmoil in every plant then, and every local union was having their problems. You know, they got into internal problems, because some of us were aware of the fact and we were trying to fight this effect, and this control of taking over. The only thing, I'm proud of the fact that I did alert them, knew what was happening and that in the end I was proven right. Then when the FBI came in here to investigate him, and then our International Union come in here because of the problem, they put every local union under administratorship. They removed everybody out of the joint board because the joint board is the one that, you know, they were supporting him. Whatever he wanted, why, they'd

be doing. He never did get to serve his term out. I don't know; I never did get the whole background behind it because at that time we just stayed clear out of it because I felt that I was trying to tell them something, something that they had told us to be on the alert, and they weren't listening to me, and I sat in here, had meetings with them, talked with them, and it was just like bouncing, and I said, "Okay, here you are. Here's my resignation from everything. I'm resigning. The day's going to come where you people are going to ask me to come back." And the day did come when they asked me to come back and start putting the whole thing together again.

So I've been working with John real closely since I retired because he really is the one that works hard to put the whole thing together. But they had to take the manager out of here, and everything. Communist infiltration, you know, and disruption in the plant, disruption in the union, and calling for violence, and this sort of stuff, and pulling a strike that wasn't necessary. And then he pulled out the strike and had the boys on the picketline, gave them all guns, and they were shooting up people's homes. So there's one strike that I was not involved in, and I was working at that time, and I didn't even go near the plant. I had no part of it. Absolutely none. So the day came when I was proven right. When I retired, I came in here and was given a plaque, given a letter that whether I like it or not, I'm the chairman of the retirees, and I am this, and I am that.

INTERVIEWER: What happened to all the people who were suspended from the joint board, or the management?

PODOJIL: They're all gone. This boy, the last I heard of him, he was somewhere down in Florida, but he was involved in a lot of trouble after that. He was picked up by the police two or three times.

INTERVIEWER: But besides the boy, everyone who was on the joint board was suspended after that.

PODOJIL: I don't know whether they forced him to resign. They told him the suspension wouldn't be lifted until . . . but I know they eliminated the manager. They got rid of her, and there was a change over in the different local unions, and then one of the locals they just returned them. And then they sent John in here to start rebuilding it again, and this is then when I came back in to start helping rebuild the organization. By then there was such discord between the union and the management that when John would walk in the management's

office, they had no respect for him, absolutely none, and if he asked for a simple thing he couldn't get it done because every plant was in a turmoil. They'd take the position, you know, in our industry we have peak seasons, just like in the canning season, or anything, and we'd have the peak seasons and the contract would call that you had to work a reasonable amount of overtime, and he'd tell the people, "You don't have to work overtime." And for every little thing he wanted wildcat strikes, calling wildcat strikes all the time. I don't know how many times he was pulling out people out of the plant over there. He pulled them out a few times and this is when the International Union really took a real good look, when they saw that they could be sued for about a million dollars. They took a real good look and came on back in here, and then they cleaned house. In fact, they had two administrators in here, and John came in on the tail end after all the hearings were held. But whatever happened with the boy, I can't tell you. We knew there was an FBI investigation of him, and then whatever happened, they made him resign, or what, because the first thing you know the vice-president became the president, and it was near election time. I think it was about August then. We have our elections bi-annually in the even years. All the hearings ended about in August, and he was already gone. The last I heard he's floating around somewhere down in Florida, so what he's doing down in Florida, I don't know. But that's the last I heard of him; he's somewhere down in Florida.

INTERVIEWER: When we were looking through the pictures, Chris asked the name of a woman and you said that was your buddy. What was her name again?

PODOJIL: Helen Stone.

INTERVIEWER: Helen Stone. She was somebody you worked with closely?

PODOJIL: Yes, she's like a part of the family; we're like sisters. They used to call us in the labor movement "The Golddust Twins," because anywhere you went in the labor movement we were always together, and we worked closely together. Her and I came out of the same plant. We were in the same position. She was a supervisor for many years, and she was just like myself, a lead person, and she was one of those that when the company asked her to harass those that attended union meetings, why, she told them that it wasn't her business what people done as long as they done the job when she was responsible for it. So her and I then pretty closely working in the labor movement. She was the

president of the local for a couple years too. She was a president; she was a secretary; she was recording secretary; she was a financial secretary. And when she was the president there for a two-year term, she carried out the same policies that I did.

I started to tell you once or twice, we used to have children write essays, that belonged to our members, and we used to give the kids bonds. "Why I'm Glad To Be An American," stuff like this, and we would give them bonds when we had our family affairs. She was real active on the Henderson strike, and everywhere. We were in Washington together many a times.

INTERVIEWER: She is from Cleveland?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes, we live together in the same house.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, in the same house.

PODOJIL: Yes, she's a widow. The little house that we own, that I told you, really, her and I own it together, see. We own the house together. I told you I have this little business, and she's involved in it.

INTERVIEWER: Is that who I talked with?

PODOJIL: Yes, she's the one you talked to. So, I think there were some accomplishments, some heartaches when you lose an election, and happy moments.

INTERVIEWER: Did you consult a lot with her when you had . . . was she the main source of support when you had some problems with all your union activities? Who did you talk to?

PODOJIL: Well, I'll tell you what. I was very fortunate that I was able to have a real large working group. Real fortunate having a large working group because I believed in assigning tasks, and I found that anytime I assigned a task I always had a group that I always knew that I could work with, what we refer to as a clique. A clique is a group of people that work together and you can count on them on getting work done. So I was always fortunate. I got along real well with my officers of my local union. I never had any problems. I never made a decision that before I made it that I didn't throw it out on the floor for discussion, and ask them what their opinion was. Maybe in the end I was very determined and got my own way, and had to go in a round about way to get it.

I think that during the ten years that I was the president that I can proudly say that I had always tried to bring young people in to run as officers. And one of the little incidents, I think I told you before, that I always tried to pick out a young boy to work, run on my slate, and every one of my vice-presidents moved into management. One day I went up to Mr. Jones, after I lost about my third vice-president [who] was given a supervision job, and I says to him, "Mr. Jones, how come that you're taking all my young boys?" He says, "You train them and I take them." That's what he told me. But, you know, I can see leadership. There's one outstanding youngster right there now. He's a young boy; he's only got one very bad habit, very bad habit, and he doesn't like to work every day. But this kid would be a terrific leader if he'd only get down to the nitty-gritty of coming into work everyday. Knowing that it's important to be there every day of the week, working, because how can you resolve the problems of the person that you're working for, that you're trying to do something for, if you're not in the plant. Little bit on the flighty, immature, but he's got the quality of leadership. And, you know, I have never been disappointed in any of those that I've picked out. You've seen a picture of some of these boys. They're in top management, really top management. And when these promotions were offered to them--I'm like Mr. Whitely--one of our presidents was offered a promotion, and he told him the decision was his. He says, "You know you're going to buck heads because you're real union-minded." So I pick out the leadership. We would send them to school. I insisted that all of them go to counselling classes; we insisted that they go to labor classes so that they know when there is a bitch, and there's a violation of a grievance. We sent them to arbitration classes, so that they know when a thing makes any sense to arbitrate, because, boy, you should see some of the stuff that they want to arbitrate about. Oh, if I showed you the minutes of one of the locals, one of the real live locals over here, it's just like if you were cross examining somebody on a stand. This is the way they write the minutes, I mean, there's nobody out there to go out there and educate them. They're real militant; they're so militant that they're over-militant, you know. And this is the only group that I know that has had 2,000 grievances (laughter). 2,000 grievances in three years.

Let me tell you, the bulk of the people are Amish. They pay union dues. Let me tell you how they pay union dues. They're in the union; they're all signed up because it's a union shop, but every three months they designate to us where do

we send their money, their dues. So we send it to St. Jude's. So every three months, we keep a copy of where they designate of where we send their dues, and then it will be the Salvation Army around Christmas time, then it will be St. Jude's, then it will be Boy Scouts, it will be Girl Scouts. So every couple months they tell us, well, this three months you send our checks here, or you send our checks there, and they tell us what to do with it. We have statements here that show you that due to my religion, my religious beliefs, they sign a statement, and it's not belonging to the union, yes. And grievances, and arbitrations, they have spent every penny of their money on arbitrations. Their arbitrations go into court . . . the company takes them into court on everything, and Amish people.

But going back to this young boy that I was telling you about. This is one of the things . . . he's a little bit immature, and because of that, he came and asked me if I would support him and elect some of the people that are still in the plant, and every day meetings with them. And I tell him, I said, "Dave, you have so much there. You have this great potentiality." I've seen it in him in Washington; I've seen it in Kenyon College. I've seen that he's got it. But the thing is to harness it, and channel it in the right direction, all this good energy that he has. And so far all my proteges are really doing good. Looking at another one of my proteges, and this is Frank Belente. He's in Illinois, working out of Illinois, there somewhere now, and he got a little raw break, but I'm looking for him to make a great big comeback too, and he's with the Steelworkers [Union]. And another young fellow with real great potential, Bill Castevens, that I told you worked real closely with us in the Harriet Henderson. Bill Castevens; he's from North Carolina. Right now he's regional director for the auto workers, for the whole northern Ohio. And I'm looking for him some day sitting in Woodcock's place.

INTERVIEWER: How do you spell his name?

PODOJIL: C-a-s-t-e-v-e-n-s, Bill Castevens.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any women proteges?

PODOJIL: No, never outside of Jeannie, you know, that I told you about. But she's kind of got herself involved with a lot of personal problems, so she's kind of disappointed me. But a lot of the young fellas in the labor movement, they're proteges that we brought up. We harnessed them and bring them in, and even the boys that used to be my vice-presidents, they're

in management today, or some of the best foremen. Only one, that I have to go after him every once in awhile. I call and remind him that he got his education from the union; he doesn't know how to treat the people. But he's one of those people that are work-alcoholics. He's used to working hard and he wants everybody working hard. But all my others I'm not disappointed, even when they moved into management because they still remember the other side of the fence, and they're doing a terrific job. And they come to tell me they were offered a job, I says, "Look, if it means more money to you, for your family, you can give more to your family, if you feel you're capable of doing the job, I don't feel bad about it." That's what I told them. I said, "The decision is yours." But the job was offered to me and I didn't ever take it. I had it once, and I didn't want it. This was, you know, when I got really involved in the union, because I just felt that when somebody came to me because I was in management and said that I had to go and put the pressure on kids that worked for me, because they attended the union meetings, no, I didn't want that pressure. No more. And I was offered supervision. I could have been one of the top supervisors in the plant and worked until I was eighty, I guess. And even when I left the plant, when I gave them my three months notice that I was retiring, Mr. Jones came out on the floor and he said, "I want you to stay. If anybody's irked you here, if anybody's gotten under your hide, I want you to stay." I said, "No, Mr. Jones, I've made up my mind that there were more things in life than coming to work everyday. There are other things I want to do." And that's what I want to do, other things. . . .

She was my protege [Jeanne Owens] and I started bringing her up, but as I say, down the line, her family problems had gotten her so involved. Because of her personal family problems she couldn't do the things she really wanted to do. She came out like a house on fire when I worked to help to get her elected. She came out and worked real hard with the farm workers, and she did a real terrific job when we went to Kenyon College. Even when we went to Washington, lobbying, legislation work, did a terrific job, and got involved in a lot of these women labor organizations. But then, somewhere down the line, her personal problems had become so great that she more or less lost sight. I just had a talk with her about two weeks ago, and I said, "Jeannie," they all call me mother, I said, "Jeannie, you're making a terrible mistake." She's running for office again. I said, "You're trying to make too many decisions on your own, and you're not coming back to your board. This is the board, this is where you're going to get the support, from your

officers and your stewards. You're making too many hasty decisions, and you don't come back, and you don't consult them as to what you want done." I said, "Look, sit down, and you've got to learn to project into people. You're only a good teacher if you can put into the pupil's mind what you want them to learn." Am I not right? What you want them to learn, and if you can put it in their mind, in the long run if you let them know what you want, you'll get what you want in the end. And she has gotten so that she just feels that any decision she makes, that is the correct decision. Now that was one mistake I tried not to make. I first would say, even when I go in with management, and I never said to him, "We've got a contract; you have to do this." I would say to Mr. Jones, if we wanted something, "Do you think we could see our way clear? Could we at least try it? If it doesn't work we have no objections, and at least we'll have it on record that we tried and it didn't work." A lot of them couldn't understand why I could get so many things from management. It was because I never took the position that just because I was a union president that I could go in and kick the door and say, "Well, I've got a contract from you, you have to do this and this," because I knew it was a two-way street and if we wanted to get anywhere, we had to pull that team of horses the same direction. So this is what I tried to tell Jeannie, that this is what she would have to do with her committee, and not just do so many things. All of a sudden there'll be communications come in, and something doing somewhere, and if she wants to go, lo and behold, she just goes ahead and she'll make reservations, and she's on a plane and she's going. And these are not the things that you can do. She's just taking one of the officers with here continually, see. She's got five officers, plus her stewards, plus her chairmen of her different committees. Or a day before she calls a meeting and already two weeks her airline tickets are laying in this office. And then she calls a meeting; it supposed to be an emergency meeting, and some of her officers can't get there. Maybe out of eight people, she'll get three people to come there. Well, if you have three people there, the officers, they say, "Well, go ahead and go," you know. So this is one of the problems that's going to hurt her. Mr. Whitely and I were just talking about it this morning. This young Dale is running against him, and I don't think that Dale is ready; he's not ready. And Jeannie, if she could only overcome that, and she's got her officers fighting between themselves, and you can't do that. If you have a staff, you want a good working staff. You give them credit when credit is due; you give them hell when hell is due, and let them take it, and then you give it to all of them, and that is it, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that you had more male proteges than female?

PODOJIL: Well, I think the reason for that is that some of these boys that we have sponsored, that were my proteges, I think there was a sense of leadership and dedication in them. And I think because of this they attended the meetings, never missed meetings, were interested, got up on the floor, talked on issues, or discussed the contract, asked questions, and would ask to be invited to attend the different things. If you called for volunteers, they were right there, and you knew you could count on them. I think with women the problem is, in the past, they were more like homebodies. They went home; she had to wash clothes, and this and that. I had some very good committee women, very good committee workers with us. But we had them because we had such a big committee, and I believe in a big committee. No matter if we were called upon to do anything, I always knew that I had six-seven people that I could count on, eight people, sometimes twenty-thirty people that I could count on in coming out if I gave them enough advance notice. And I knew those that I could get on the short notices. And I found out that even when I was the president, I found that I had gotten a little better response from the elderly women because their families were grown up, they had more free time, Saturdays, and all that. Where the younger ones, they had their families. The young girls, they were interested in going with boys; they were going out dating.

So, when Jeannie came in with her group, she did come in and for two years she did a terrific job. I was so proud of her. She had brought in the young group, and she had a terrific young group working with her. I was really so proud. I'm telling you, she knew that she had fifteen-twenty of these kids, twenty-five of these kids to come on out with her. If we had to throw leaflets somewhere, Jeannie had them, and I say, "Jeannie, we're going to go out and throw a leaflet out at A&Ps, or Fishers, and boycott them." But somewhere along, Jeannie lost touch with them. And everyone of them, I've heard it from everyone of them that worked with her--right now she's only got about two that are really close with her--and they say, "Well, Jeannie wants everything her own way, and Jeannie feels that if anything is doing, Jeannie should be gone."

Now, when I was the president, it was different. I never sent the same kids down to Kenyon College. I made sure that we sent new kids to any of the schools. If we had COPE legislation, I made sure that somebody that was never in

Washington before went to Washington, because I felt that even if they left us, if they learned anything, if they learned to help themselves, we've already accomplished something because that individual can help themself, and we didn't have to. But Jeannie's gotten to the point where she goes everywhere, and it's only two or three same people over and over and over go. And this has built just a kind of resentment that it's just a very small group going all the time, and this is where she's lost the young people.

She had some terrific leaders. Oh, if I had been the president in the last couple years that she had this great opportunity, I would never have lost them kids. I would have never because I would have given them such hard tasks that it would have been a challenge for them to overcome these tasks and get so involved in these tasks that they would have really moved on forward. But Jeannie has taken it; I mean, she's the type of a girl that's gotten to the point where she doesn't get anywhere on time anymore, you know, and this is too another very bad habit that she has, she hasn't gotten on time. She doesn't believe in calling executive board meetings a week prior before her regular monthly meeting, so that when she does have her monthly meeting, the decisions, hard-core decisions, made by her executive board, and then she has right now her own group divided. She's got her financial secretary so deadly opposed to her because she gets up there, and I watched her at a meeting the other day, and I was really shocked at her parliamentary procedure. A motion on the floor, "Let's have a Christmas party," and there are two people in that local that want parties all the time. They want Christmas parties; they want picnic lunch. She doesn't realize she's got five or six arbitrations, an arbitration case today cost four to five hundred dollars, just to pay the arbitrators. You know arbitration cases run around four to four-fifty, depends on how much time is spent, so you have an arbitration case, then you're going to have people that are coming to testify during the arbitration, and you have maybe another two to three hundred dollars lost time involved, one arbitration runs you six to seven hundred dollars. You can't vote for throwing two parties a year for people and spending four or five thousand of your local money. And she'll sit there and she'll says, "Well, why not? Why can't we have it?" Or, "Can we table this until further notice?" I attended one of her meetings just recently and I said, "John, oh my God, if I had conducted a meeting like that, they would have killed me." They really would have killed me. And no discussion on the floor; "Why not?" she says, and so here's the financial secretary trying to show her that they can't have the money,

and whe brushes the financial secretary off, and she says, "Well, we'll have to have some discussion on the motion," and then they tell her, "Let's table this until the next meeting and see if we can afford to have this kind of thing, we've got three arbitration cases pending." To her, it just seems to me, all of a sudden like, she just wants to be out on the road all the time. And she's got her own board. Like I say, she has airline tickets; communications come in, she has airline tickets laying here two weeks. She's already made reservations, chosen who she's going to take with her. And then maybe she'll be leaving on a Sunday night and then she'll call an executive board meeting and say, "This is communication...." And I stay clear out of it because I know that she's already made the arrangements, and the plane tickets are laying here. This is one of the things John has talked to her seriously about; this is going to be a big drawback. But she really was a terrific gal. Oh, I had great hopes and aspirations for her. I was hoping that one of these days that if this union ever took a good look how important women are, that Jeannie could really go up the ladder.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe there will be somebody else. There was one question that occurred to me very early. When we started talking, you were telling about how there were never any women vice-presidents, and I just wondered, when you were struggling to get women as vice-presidents was there ever any male support? Were there men in the union who also thought that that would be a good idea?

PODOJIL: Oh, yes, we had caucuses and we swapped our votes, our commitments, and our votes at the conventions. Other delegates felt the same way. And the same thing at the conventions, if you had gone to the conventions you would have seen that 60 percent of the delegates at the convention were--I'd say about 55-60 percent of the delegates were women.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds as though then that the women were not supporting other women.

PODOJIL: Yes. I remember one year there was a girl, I think out of Wisconsin, running for vice-president, and I think if she had had a little bit more finesse, we probably could have got her more votes, but at that time we were campaigning for Morrie Rieger, who is an official right now in the govvernment, in Manpower or something in there. He's one of our labor people. We were trying to get him elected; we were trying to bump a slate. It's probably true; the reason she didn't get elected . . . we probably could have done

this in a Chicago convention about fourteen years ago, you know, gotten a woman elected because we really started, at that time, a breakthrough, and raising all kinds of hell from that Chicago convention. By the way, that was the convention that Jack Kennedy came in; we were the first union to endorse him when he ran for President, so that would be longer than then.

So, I think, at that point, she could have got elected if she would have went at it a little differently than she did, on the basis that she just was a woman and felt that she should have been elected. And I think she didn't sell herself to the fellow delegates, and the other delegates, you know. She was a dynamic woman in her own local union. She was president of her local union, very dynamic woman. It seemed it was a kind of a hard thing. I'll tell you why it was hard to overcome: it's very hard to overcome when your constitution calls that you must vote for fifteen vice-presidents, and if you don't vote for fifteen your ballot is voided. So there was no way that you could have a protest vote, and if you didn't make the fifteen, so it's always hard to break a slate.

You know, these guys were already in; they were entrenched in there, and they all had their own little group. So it was hard getting new faces in there. We were always fighting for new faces because remember, years ago the textile industry was originally settled, and started the unions up in Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, up in Rhode Island, up in New Jersey, up in that part. That was where the silk mills were, all the woolen mills were, lace mills were there. The dye houses around New Jersey, up in through there. So when they started electing the officers when the union started, well, the men were the key organizers, and so they all became presidents, and they all had their own groups of people, their own ethnic groups would support them, if they were Italian, if you were Jewish, or French. If you were French the people out of Vermont, out from that way, they voted for you, from New Hampshire, they'd go for the French people, you know, because there were a lot of French people. You'd be surprised, in Lawrence, Massachusetts, which was once the center of the textile industry, how many French people were there, so you would expect them to have a director from there which was French; though there were a lot of Bohemian people, a lot of Polish people up in Lawrence, Massachusetts too. But they were the first organizers and they became vice-presidents, and just like anything, when you become a president your shoes get this big, and your head gets bigger than your shoes are, see, and so they sit in power.

This is one of the things I talked to Lydia before, that I think in the labor organization, at the top level, that they didn't say that you could only be a president for two or four years, set a limited time, and if they set a limited time, it would have given new people a chance to move up to that position. So then the highest they could reach was vice-president, so they stayed vice-presidents for twenty-thirty years, and then there would be a replacement out of that same area where a vice-president died. So, that was the year that we endorsed Kennedy, that we made a breakthrough, and the first time that we had a vice-president out of Ohio. So we dropped the woman because we wanted to get a vice-president out of Ohio. The only one that the slate said they would accept was Mr. Kenny DeLong, who just passed away recently, so then when there was a death, that's the way you got on. There was a death, and then the executive board met, and they appointed another vice-president out of an area. So we didn't have any vice-presidents out of California; they had a vice-president out of Canada. They had to have one out of Canada on account of our Canadian organization, plus all our French people we had up in Vermont and that area. So, they appointed somebody, so automatically that person was appointed come next election, he was a part of the slate, you know. When you went to vote, and you had to vote for fifteen vice-presidents, and you nominated one or two off the floor and they never got enough support.

One year we finally wised up. We were in Florida. We wised up, and we decided in a caucus that we were going to hit only one person, so everybody says, "Well, I don't like this guy, this vice-president." So the people from Wisconsin said, "Well, we don't like him, so we're not going to vote for him, but we'll support your guy." But if we would have all finally realized that we all had to go to hit the one guy, but there was a difference of opinion over there, so this is really what happened.

And how did Dorothy Congos get on? Dorothy got on because of a death. One of the vice-presidents had died, so by then they were hearing so much bitching from me, from others, from a girl by the name of Frances, I can't remember her name, she was from Allentown, Pennsylvania, and they got tired of listening to us. So they finally said, "We're going to appoint Dorothy," so they appointed Dorothy. But we're still are not satisfied with Dorothy's appointment, because Dorothy, actually, was not a mill worker. Dorothy has been a secretary for Local 470. This local is such a great big local that they at one time had about 9,000 members, and they had a full staff. They had their own office;

they had a full-time staff, their president was full-time paid; their stewards were full-time paid people, and they had a full-time secretary. So Dorothy wasn't in the union, but she originally was a clerk in the plant, you know. She was a clerk, and then she came out there and she became an officer in the union. So, actually, she was not a working girl because she hadn't been in the plant working. Dorothy hasn't worked in the plant for maybe about twenty-some years, because she's been an office secretary, a union office secretary. So, actually, you can even say that we didn't get recognition there because there wasn't actually anybody that was a rank-and-file president of a local union. She was an office secretary. So this is how we got her in there.

Now we're going to see what's going to happen with the merger because gradually, as they're going to merger the two groups together, because right now they have about twenty vice-presidents; we have about twenty vice-presidents, that's forty vice-presidents. So in the merger they talked about that they were going to eliminate them. And then at that convention in Chicago is where we finally got a vice-president from Ohio, or what we would call the midwest area. Then the following convention, we came back and we got a vice-president out of Illinois. So now we got a vice-president out of California, Canada, and now we kind of made them spread out. Up to that time, every vice-president, they were either from New Jersey--New York, I think, they must have had about five or six vice-presidents out of that area, and that was because that was really the center, and that was the birth place of the textile workers' union.

INTERVIEWER: Now you have vice-presidents from different regions of the country.

PODOJIL: Yes, it's because of the region of the country. And then later on, and now, it's different, they have vice-presidents from the southern part of the country. Whoever heard of having a vice-president from there? Now they have a vice-president out of North Carolina, and I think they have one out of Georgia, because the textile industry is moving down that way, and because they're going to be organizing down there. They're going down in that area, and this is why. Believe me, if I was as young as you are, if I was in the labor movement today, I would be pitching a battle at their front door every doggone day. In fact, every time I see them I'd tell them, "Where are the women in your organization?" When I went on the staff, it was because we had run into problems, you know. Two men going, because you never allowed one person to go into homes, so this way it always looked

better. They had a few bad experiences, so they thought, well, there being an elderly woman with them, you know, more retired. If it was young, probably there would have been problems too, but knowing that I already had grandchildren, and all that, when I went on the staff, so there wasn't that much talk. It isn't like today. Nobody thinks anything of nothing today. But you take twenty years ago, if you walked down the street with a colored person, it was terrible. Not anymore. Today, you don't think anything of these things. So the times have changed. I'll tell you who does--International Ladies Garment Workers--oh, they're terrific, they use women, oh, yes. You take Evelyn Dubrow; she's the lobbyist for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers; I think she's retiring now. She came out of our union.

INTERVIEWER: She hasn't said she's retiring yet.

PODOJIL: She's not retiring?

INTERVIEWER: She didn't talk of it to us. She was in Ann Arbor.

PODOJIL: Isn't she a terrific little gal. Oh, she is terrific. She came out of our International Union. She started out with us, and she's gone over to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. She's a terrific gal. When I talked to her a couple years ago, she told me she thought she was going to throw the hat in, she was getting tired.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't sound that way this summer.

PODOJIL: Boy, isn't she a spitfire, a real spitfire when she gets started. And you ought to see her when she's on Capitol Hill and when she gets up there. You should have seen her when old Senator Dirksen was living; he was a lady's man, tall, gray-haired guy. He'd come down, and smiling, them white teeth, you know, and he was a fast walker, and as fast as he was walking, she was running after him, taking those short steps, you know, and she'd be pulling on his coat. Oh, that one time we laughed so hard because.... Oh, Dirksen, he was really a character, he really was. I'll never forget that time we were up there, and she's running after him. She's really a terrific girl. This kind of work women can do, but the men never give us credit for what we can do. But, by golly, they know when they need us, where we're at (laughter). They always knew when they needed us.

INTERVIEWER: When you were talking about the organizing work you did in Rochelle, Illinois, and you mentioned the Morgan Dying and Bleaching, and you also mentioned a spinning plant. It sounded like you said "Karen."

PODOJIL: Yes, Caron Spinning, C-a-r-o-n. You'll probably see yarn--if you'll look, you'll see Caron Spinning Mill. Caron Spinning, by the way, I have plants in Kentucky and they are strictly anti-union. When we went up to Rochelle and we threw the whole leaflet, the first time we went up there we threw a leaflet, and the second time we came back, when we threw the leaflet, and we got response. We went from Cleveland there, and we figured that people will respond knowing if they're going to send the response here to Cleveland, that it's so far away that anybody's interested in the union as soon as we got response. We got about fifteen [membership] cards in about two weeks time. So we went back the second time, and because of the first distribution when we went there, when we went back the second time, Caron Spinning had a big fence around the place. They fenced the whole place in. Morgan Dying and Bleaching did not, but I understand that Caron Spinning, now, has purchased and bought out Morgan Dying and Bleaching. And they had dogs when we went there the second time. So they were fenced in, but the Morgan Dying and Bleaching was not fenced in. They are family-owned, strictly anti-union. Caron Spinning now, I think, the second generation and third generation are running Caron Spinning Mills. Do a little research and find out. They have a plant down in Kentucky, and somewhere down in Pennsylvania. They tell their people--they have a kind of a profit-sharing thing with their people, and they also sell their people on the idea that they do a lot of work with rehabilitating their drunkards; they do. I think one of the Caron boys, I recollect a little bit, was an alcoholic and I think he worked with Alcoholics Anonymous, and they always say to them, "Look, we sponsor this organization, and contribute so much money." Another thing that Caron Spinning does, they have credit unions, and so far if any of their people have defaulted on their credit union payment, you know, where there would be a loss to the membership, or where there might be a loss to the credit union, or anything, I've been told this by the supervisors of the credit unions, that they will pick up delinquent loans and pay them off, so the credit union doesn't suffer any loss, so that their people can have that type of a service of a credit union. But old man Caron, oh, he was a vicious man, vicious.

INTERVIEWER: Some of these more positive things that they are doing, is that a result of union -

PODOJIL: Well, one of the things I talked to Lydia about, we talked about positive--you see, when the people are in the plant they become a captive audience, you know, and if you try to talk to them on the outside, and we found this was so true when we were organizing. And I think we made a mistake, we should have tried the two plants at one time, but we went after Morgan Dyeing and Bleaching. Yet, the yarn was spun; it's like a park there, and the plant was like on the north side of the street, and there was a road running in between, and the yarn that they spun, they ran it right on the dollies, right across the road and took it over to Morgan Dyeing and Bleaching and dyed it. Well, Morgan Dyeing and Bleaching was also a family-owned plant. But the man that ran that plant there, he married into the place, and then the father died; Iva Roth was his name. Talk about a good-looking man. If I'd ever wanted to have a good cheap contract, that would have been a man that I would have went to bed with. He was a handsome fellow. He had a wife that was an alcoholic; she was something to the Carons; they were all closely related out in that way. But, oh, he was really a handsome man. A lot of people thought that my boss, Mr. Jones, was handsome. Mr. Jones was one of these handsome men's men, you know, one that you see advertised wearing real beautiful clothes. But this guy was a little different. There was something about him that appealed to me and, anyway, he was really handsome, and his wife was an alcoholic. You know, they had their problems too; they had big problems over there. But, I think, if it wouldn't have been for the pressure that was put on by the Caron family, next door, that we would have won that election. And, you know, they went back there three times and have never been able to make it. I don't know if they're going to attempt it again this year or not. I think they tried it last year and they lost the election again, but I understand now that the Caron Spinning people have taken it over.

But Carons, absolutely, they're anti-union, the old man, if he's still living; if he isn't, well, I hope somebody's sticking needles into him (laughter). He was really anti-union. Imagine, we threw one leaflet out, and the next time we came out, he had a real high fence around there, and had dogs running around that place, you know, so he was really something. Real anti-union. But in the small towns, they owned the towns; people are obligated to them; 90 percent of the people lived in the company-owned homes. So if the son or the daughter wants to join the union, the father and the mother are afraid of losing their jobs, the dads are afraid they'll lose their jobs. It makes it real hard.

INTERVIEWER: I want to ask one other thing. You said that about eight or nine years ago there was a wildcat strike involving the pay for the second and third shifts. What plant was that?

PODOJIL: It was at Phoenix Dye Works.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any voice left (laughter)? This is great. Thank you very, very much. Wonderful talking to you again, and seeing you.

TONI PODOJIL INTERVIEW INDEX