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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

ANNA SULLIVAN

Textile Workers' Union of America

by

Brigid O'Farrell

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

VITAE

ANNA SULLIVAN

Anna Sullivan was born in Chicopee, Massachusetts on October 18, 1903. She was introduced to unionism at an early age by her father, who organized a loom-fixers' union. She distinctly remembers checking his clothing for five different union labels before he left home to attend secret union meetings--for that was the only way he was allowed in.

Sullivan began working at the age of 14 at the American Thread Company in Massachusetts. She then moved to another textile company called Skinner's, where she worked as a loom girl. Sullivan was active in organizing the workers into the Textile Workers' Union of America and became the first secretary of Local 512.

In 1939 Emil Rieve, then President of the TWUA, asked Sullivan to join the union's national staff. She was a paid organizer for the New England area and was active in numerous contract negotiations.

Sullivan has been secretary of the Massachusetts AFL-CIO Council since 1941.

Aside from her union activities, Sullivan has also been very involved politically. An active member of both the local and statewide Democratic Party, she ran for Congress in 1950 and was defeated. Sullivan also served on the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination for seven years, from 1963-1970.

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INTERVIEWER: What I'd like to do is start with some of your family background. I'll ask you questions as we go along. Feel free to interject anything you want anywhere along the line.

SULLIVAN: You can always erase it off.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. That's always true. Okay, let's start with your grandparents. Can you just give me some background on . . .

SULLIVAN: My grandparents? I never knew my grandparents too well. My grandfather came from Germany. My mother's father, came from Germany. Her mother was Irish--from this country. And my mother was born in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts. And my father's parents were Irish, came from Ireland, and my father was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvannia, where he became a very active trade unionist in Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia.

INTERVIEWER: What did his father do?

SULLIVAN: Frankly, I never knew. He was the youngest of fourteen. And we never met, only his sister, his brother were the only ones we ever met on my father's side. My mother had a step-mother. Her mother died when she was very young and my grandfather married over again and she had two step-sisters and a step-brother, plus her own two sisters and brother. Those we knew very well, but as far as my father's side, we knew very little of his family.

INTERVIEWER: And what did her father and mother do?

SULLIVAN: My mother went to work in a textile mill in Chicopee with her father who was a weaver when she was nine years old.

INTERVIEWER: So she started out in the textile . . .

SULLIVAN: She started out in textile, worked until she got married, in the textile mills. She was about twenty-two, I think, when she got married.

INTERVIEWER: And then did she stop work?

SULLIVAN: Oh, yes. She stopped. My father was in the insurance business at that time and they built their house. Her father had given them the land, and they were doing very well, till my father took ill. And he lost the house and then he went back into the textile mill.

INTERVIEWER: So he actually was out of the textile . . .

SULLIVAN: For a good while, he was in the insurance business but the insurance companies don't have any use for you once you got ill. And they didn't hold his job and, at that time, things were pretty, pretty tough, so he went back to the loom fixing business and fixed textile looms. And he came to Holyoke. You see, he worked in woolen mills so that he was a loom fixer in woolen shops and Farr-Alpaco is one of the biggest woolen mills in the country. And this is why he went there to work.

INTERVIEWER: So he had started back in textiles in Philadelphia and then moved up . . .

SULLIVAN: Right, right.

INTERVIEWER: How old was he when he moved up here?

SULLIVAN: Well, he must have been very young when he moved up here because, well, twenty-one, twenty-two, at most. But I think they had a lot of trouble in Pennsylvannia with strikes and in those days, when unions were taboo situation, when you mentioned strikes....a very serious problem. I remember newspapers that he had with the horses trampling them down in the textile industry.

INTERVIEWER: In Philadelphia?

SULLIVAN: In Philadelphia.

INTERVIEWER: Did he talk much about his boyhood, or....?

SULLIVAN: No. Now, my father and mother, we were always very close in talking all kinds of problems. Of course, I was very young, I was only fourteen when my father died. But, I mean, both my father and mother were very active, progressive people. Took part, my father took part in political activities and was very active in trying to form unions.

INTERVIEWER: And your mother at this time?

SULLIVAN: Was a housewife.

INTERVIEWER: Was a housewife.

SULLIVAN: Yes. She had seven children.

INTERVIEWER: And you were....you said you had an older sister?

SULLIVAN: An older sister and an older brother.

INTERVIEWER: And then yourself and then a younger....?

SULLIVAN: There were four younger.

INTERVIEWER: Four younger.

SULLIVAN: There were three boys and one girl younger than me.

INTERVIEWER: And could you talk a little more about your father's union activity?

SULLIVAN: Oh, my father was always coming home with his tools, you know, those were the days when they talked union, you only had to talk it and you were let out. There was no protection. And forming unions especially in textile mills was very difficult. First, they had long hours, very poor pay. I think at that time, he made about nine dollars a week. Of course, I don't know what nine dollars would be equivalent to as of today. It might have been a fair salary but I don't think it was that fair. But, Farr-Alpaco was supposed to be one of the best. It paid much more that the cottom mills, which was a much lower rank. And then I went to work in 1918 when my father died, at fourteen years of age, in the cotton textile mills. And was given a job in the card room which was all cotton and . . .

INTERVIEWER: You said your father was only in his forties?

SULLIVAN: He was only about forty-one, forty-two when he died. And that was in the epidemic of the flu in 1918. Most everybody was losing somebody in the area we lived in. You waited in line at the church for a funeral. It was a horrible thing to go through.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to union meetings with him when you were a child?

SULLIVAN: No. They had to meet secretly. And they used to meet in cellars. There was a printing press company, the Alden Press, he was a very liberal man and they used to meet in his cellar. And they used to have talks. They'd get somebody from the colleges that used to come in, and they had raps. But in order for him to go to a meeting, or to get into a meeting, he had to

SULLIVAN: have five union labels on his clothing. And that was looked at in order for you to attend the meeting, the shoes, the hat, suit, the underwear, and the shirt. And this was one of our jobs. We had to be sure that he didn't leave without those.

INTERVIEWER: So the kids would check him before he went out.

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, we had to check him out.

INTERVIEWER: So he was trying to organize . . .

SULLIVAN: Matter of fact, he did organize a loom fixers union in the Farr-Alpaco and got his first contract about two weeks before he died.

INTERVIEWER: What was the size then of the group that he worked with?

SULLIVAN: Oh, there must have been about three thousand people in that plant.

INTERVIEWER: What was the name of the union that he organized?

SULLIVAN: Oh, that was UTW. [Loomfixers United Textile Workers]

INTERVIEWER: UTW.

SULLIVAN: And Samuel Gompers was the President; he went to the convention when Gompers was elected President of the Union. For all of the unions of AFL locals.

INTERVIEWER: You can remember on and off to those kinds of....?

SULLIVAN: Um.

INTERVIEWER: Did your father have much schooling?

SULLIVAN: I think to about eighth grade.

INTERVIEWER: You also said that he was interested in politics.

SULLIVAN: Very interested, he took very active positions in it, local politics. He always talked about election returns. The president elections, always hearing, always discussions we had, both my mother and he. Our dinner table was always a political rally.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of hours did he work? Did he get off early?

SULLIVAN: Six in the morning to six at night.

INTERVIEWER: That's a long day. And was where he worked close by?

SULLIVAN: He had about a twenty-five minute walk. There was no such thing as cars or no trolley cars available in them days around those places.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live in town or....?

SULLIVAN: We lived in Holyoke, yes, we lived in Holyoke.

INTERVIEWER: Did he talk with you and your brothers about what he wanted you to do?

SULLIVAN: Well, he was very anxious for us to have education. He was always drilling this into us. He wanted the children to have an education--and my sister, who was always very ill, was very, very bright. She did high school in two years, four years of high school in two years time. And she had the best education of any of us. Because after that....none of my brothers got through high school. And I only got to the ninth grade and I had to quit.

INTERVIEWER: To help your mother.

SULLIVAN: Yes, right.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother go back to work then?

SULLIVAN: No. No, as a matter of fact, she had four small children; my sister was only three and my brother was only five. They were all small, she had....five of them to take care of, the oldest of the young ones was nine.

INTERVIEWER: And the two of you old enough to go off to work....

SULLIVAN: Well, my brother was in France.

INTERVIEWER: He was already in the service?

SULLIVAN: In the service and didn't get home until a long time after the war ended....

INTERVIEWER: And you said that you didn't know for a long time whether he was alive?

SULLIVAN: We didn't know, we never knew, we couldn't find out....we had all kinds of questions going out but nobody found out. He was in the hospital.

INTERVIEWER: So you were really the only one there to . . .

SULLIVAN: That was working.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember most about your mother?

SULLIVAN: She had the most marvelous disposition. Nobody ever knew if she had a lot of money or she had no money. She could make you feel that she was giving you a huge banquet out of bread and milk. I don't know of anybody who had a disposition like she had.

INTERVIEWER: You mean she was able to keep it up no matter . . .

SULLIVAN: No matter what. She never had a cross word or nobody ever knew how hard up she was or what she needed. Nobody.

INTERVIEWER: Did she talk with you about the things she wanted you to do?

SULLIVAN: Well, she didn't like the idea when I had to go to work. And, of course, I was very short and very small at the time. I'm not very tall now! Only wider. She didn't like the idea of me going into a mill. But that was the only thing you could get into. You see, Holyoke, Chicopee, all our areas, East Hampton, were all large textile sanctuaries and this was all you really had to do, outside of the paper mills and most of them employed just men, very few women worked in the paper mills. And about the only thing you could get into was the textile mills. We had thousands of workers in Holyoke alone in the textile mills.

INTERVIEWER: There were lots of women in those?

SULLIVAN: Oh, Skinners employed about three thousand, there was a pack of us, way over three thousand. American Thread was a big company, had about five thousand people, the Lyman Mills which were cotton mills, had about the same amount as American Thread. And then there were a lot of little plants. And of course, outside, East Hampton had West Boylston Mills, United Elastic back in them days was just an elastic mill. And these were all big, huge, mostly employing women. Most of the towns were owned and operated by the textile mills. It was back in the days when the fire department, the school department, police department belonged to the companies.

INTERVIEWER: The company town.

SULLIVAN: The company town. And the police department. And in East Hampton law never changed until 1944 when Roosevelt....after that we could pass out leaflets and not be hampered, because they used to try to throw me in jail. Every time I went over there I got run out of town.

INTERVIEWER: And you couldn't argue with the police because they were . . .

SULLIVAN: No, you had nothing....you just had to leave. Because there was nothing you could do.

INTERVIEWER: Did you feel closer to one parent or the other?

SULLIVAN: Well, of course, we were close to my mother but I think we always missed my father very badly. Because they were very close together. No, I wouldn't say that, we had her longer.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live in the same house for the whole time you were growing up?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes. We lived in an apartment. We didn't live in a house. We lived in a block town where all the poor Puerto Ricans are living now and burning up these apartments.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the Irish community?

SULLIVAN: That was the Irish community. Ward 1.

INTERVIEWER: And what was your name?

SULLIVAN: Burns.

INTERVIEWER: Burns. And so you lived there until you married?

SULLIVAN: Well, no, before I married and my brothers came along and were working, two of my brothers, Tom and Bill, and then we moved uptown where our little section was called Little Lace Irish. But it was still a block. It wasn't in a house. We didn't get into a house until about in the '30's.

INTERVIEWER: And that was still in Holyoke?

SULLIVAN: Yes. I'm still there.

INTERVIEWER: You live in . . .

SULLIVAN: No, not the same house, no.

INTERVIEWER: Who were your companions as a kid, who did you play with? Were there lots of kids in the . . .

SULLIVAN: Oh, slews of them! Everybody had huge families. These were the days, you know. Those women were marvelous. They never went to hospitals, you know, never went to a hospital for a baby. But they all helped one another, always. If Mrs. Murphy was having a baby, why, everybody done something. Either a pot of soup went one day or somebody else brought a loaf of bread and clothes, they always got together and made and shared, they used to get together. Also they used to get together to make clothes for the kiddos at Brightside. These women had time, they were always busy. Of course, we never had anything from the bakery. And doctors were few and far between and very seldom....you never got to a doctor unless you were dying. You didn't have the money.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Probably weren't that many around.

SULLIVAN: No, there weren't. There were not.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any sort of special friends as a child that you were particularly close to?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, I had a Scots girl, we were friends, still are friends, all our lives. She lived two doors up from me and we were always together. Then later on, her sister, who was a little older than us, she joined in....where we went, the others went. And this was a lifetime friendship.

INTERVIEWER: And you both still live in Holyoke and are friends today?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, very much.

INTERVIEWER: That's really nice. Did you have certain chores that you had to do as a child?

SULLIVAN: In the house? Well, this is one thing my father was very strict on. My mother did the baking on Saturday. He worked from twelve o'clock 'till noon on Saturday. When he came home, he did the rugs and we had to do our chores. We dusted and cleaned for Sunday. That was very important in those days. And....but he always made us....we had to do our share.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel there were chores that girls had or boys had?

SULLIVAN: No, as a matter of fact, our boys did the same as we did. There was no difference. There was never no difference. I mean, if it was one girl that had to wash the dishes, the boy dried them. If he had to wash, the girl dried them. There was never no difference. Oh, he made no difference in those things. You had to do your job and that was it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that was different from other people?

SULLIVAN: I don't think it was. I don't think it hurt us one bit. No, I think other families in the area were that way, too, because they had big families.

INTERVIEWER: And everyone just . . .

SULLIVAN: Right. Pitched in. My word, it used to take us all day to do our washing. From early morning, the boiler went on the stove, I hated to go home on Monday from school, the steam, the smell of steam, I can still smell it!

INTERVIEWER: From the . . .

SULLIVAN: Oh, your clothes had to be boiled, and then, we didn't have no washing machines. Tubs in the center of the kitchen.

INTERVIEWER: Monday was wash day?

SULLIVAN: Monday was wash day. It was the worst day of the week. And we always got soup.

INTERVIEWER: There are only so many things you can put on top of the stove at the same time.

SULLIVAN: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And Saturday was baking day?

SULLIVAN: Saturday she baked, oh, she had to bake more than once a week, this is when she'd do cakes and pies and bread for us. Once, when my sister Alice was born, I wasn't ten years old, I used to mix the bread at night and my sister used to bake in the morning. As I remember....well, I don't suppose we could ever afford to buy it, we used to buy flour by the barrel. I don't know if anybody ever sees a barrel now.

INTERVIEWER: I doubt it.

SULLIVAN: I doubt it! You don't even see the big sacks that they used to have. It's usually a five or ten pound at the most today that they have.

INTERVIEWER: Well, when you were little, what did you think about being when you grew up. Did you ever think about it?

SULLIVAN: I don't think I ever thought about it too much. I think I thought about it when it happened, when things happened. And what I felt I had to do.

INTERVIEWER: Like going . . .

SULLIVAN: Like going to work. That was....I don't think I ever thought of what I'd like to be or what not to be.

INTERVIEWER: You said that you got the house cleaned up for Sunday.

SULLIVAN: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Religion was a . . .

SULLIVAN: Religion was a very big thing. My mother and father were both very religious people.

INTERVIEWER: Catholic, I assume.

SULLIVAN: Catholic. I guess I can't say I am that good.

INTERVIEWER: But that played an important part in your family life?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Sunday was a very traditional . . .

SULLIVAN: We were very active church people. They worked for the church. They worked in getting the school. We went to parochial school. Much to my sorrow.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the education was not as good or....?

SULLIVAN: No, it was not as good. And, that was one of the things in later life, I could talk to my mother about. But you know, if you came home from school and if you did something wrong, you didn't tell them at home because you got walloped back. What I felt that I....I think nuns were very difficult to get in those days, and they didn't have good educations. You know, they would take them as they could get them. And the one I had, the same one in the second grade through the seventh grade with me, which was one of the worst things that could have been done.

INTERVIEWER: You had her for a whole . . .

SULLIVAN: All that time. And I don't think my father and mother realized what that meant. She always said, often said afterwards, you know, when we would talk about it, later on in years, "Didn't you ever stop to think when . . ."

INTERVIEWER: They never questioned.

SULLIVAN: They never questioned, you never questioned a priest, you never questioned a nun.

INTERVIEWER: What order nuns . . .?

SULLIVAN: St. Joseph's. You see, my sister went to Catholic High.

INTERVIEWER: That was your older sister?

SULLIVAN: My older sister. She went to Catholic High and she got highest in exams and won the prizes and all that. I had to follow in her footsteps and I never was as high.

INTERVIEWER: Did you also sort of rebel a little more against the nuns?

SULLIVAN: Well, I think so. I really think so, because it was a, "You're not like your sister, you'll never be like her". We had a wonderful librarian, she'd always say, "You know, Tom," (this was my brother Tom), "I know you will pass everything, the only thing I am afraid is, they'll never be able to make out your writing." But she really encouraged him and all of us. I mean, gee, the librarian sent to London for books for him, really did.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any arguments in your family?

SULLIVAN: With four boys? Are you kidding? My oldest brother when he was home would wreck the place. He was a tease. And everybody had to go along with him. Oh sure, our family . . .

INTERVIEWER: Just regular family arguments.

SULLIVAN: Oh sure, just kid stuff. Always, clowning, always. And then he'd get someone, you know, somebody started to cry and then my mother took over, put the end to that. (sound of a stick)

INTERVIEWER: Any major sort of disagreements you remember between your parents?

SULLIVAN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Did they agree on politics?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, oh yes. Very much. Of course, they were solid democrats. Well, my mother had a brother that worked for Al Smith in New York. He died in the time of the big storm; he was very young. And he used to be a ward leader; he used to buy the shoes for poor people in New York, in the areas. And he was getting very much lined up in the politics when he got pneumonia and died. And they, Al Smith and ten other men came to Chicopee Falls to his funeral. They were all snowed in, they couldn't leave.

INTERVIEWER: So they all had to stay over?

SULLIVAN: In a little bit of a house and they often told us that story. My grandfather's house was built one room and the second room downstairs. And the next room and that was about the size of a house, one room upstairs that he built later. At the end of the house was the outhouse.

INTERVIEWER: So you had to go through . . .

SULLIVAN: That must have been something in that snowstorm.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, really something to have Al Smith come. So you grew up with aunts and uncles around?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes. And my mother's brother was very much union. He was the head of the machinists union in Holyoke. He was the president of the machinists. His name was John Blasius. And he was the president of the machinists union in the Farr Alpaco. And he belonged to this club that my father belonged to....he was also active in politics, was an Alderman.

INTERVIEWER: The secret . . .

SULLIVAN: In Mr. Alden's press downstairs. Dynamite Club, I think is what they called it. They were all union minded and trying to organize unions. But this is how they had to meet, secretly.

INTERVIEWER: So your mother's brother was very active then in this . . .

SULLIVAN: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Were any of her other brothers and sisters active?

SULLIVAN: No. She only had the one other brother and he went into service, in the army, when he was very young and, no, the others were never really active.

INTERVIEWER: Did any of them live with you or share your . . .?

SULLIVAN: No, no. As a matter of fact, none of them lived in Holyoke. My uncle, Jack Blasius, he lived in Elmuread and he had a house. He was one of the real swanky ones to me.

INTERVIEWER: But whether or not any of the other members of the family lived with you....

SULLIVAN: No, my uncle Jack was the only one that lived in Holyoke, my grandmother and two stepsisters and step brother lived in Chicopee Falls in the little house, which is still there, by the way. People have it. Still a little house.

INTERVIEWER: That's probably quite valuable right now, pretty old.

SULLIVAN: Well, it had a lot of land, but, well, at the time it was sold, it didn't mean anything, but now it's a whole big development there. There was never any money in it for him.

INTERVIEWER: What did your grandfather do? Was he a farmer?

SULLIVAN: He worked a farm but he worked in the mills. He was a weaver.

INTERVIEWER: Right. And then your mother as well, went with him, until she married. But he also had a farm.

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, he had a big farm. I'd say most of their food came from the farm. And they had a cow, I never saw it, but I know they had it.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go back to school a little. Did you have any subjects that you particularly liked?

SULLIVAN: I don't think I was good at anything. (break in tape)

INTERVIEWER: We were talking about school. Were there any subjects that your particularly liked, regardless of how you did?

SULLIVAN: No, I think we had cathechism drilled into us too much to ever like anything. I think history used to sort of be the thing I liked to read most. Of course, I loved to read anything. Well, as far as the other subjects, I think, I don't know what I was good in because I don't think I was good in any of them.

INTERVIEWER: All your brothers and sisters then went through eight years of school at least?

SULLIVAN: Well, it used to be nine, we all went to the ninth grade. And my sister, Alice, went to high school which was in Holyoke High and left. That was her own fault because we wanted her to graduate but she didn't want to.

INTERVIEWER: Really?

SULLIVAN: Yes, I mean, she went to work in the telephone company.

INTERVIEWER: Was she active in union . . .?

SULLIVAN: Not until later years, while she was in the telephone company, until when they woke up without jobs, the new system went into effect. And all the operators were thrown out of a job. And then after that she went to work in Skinner's textile mill in Holyoke. And then later on in life, I mean after she was married, she worked in the textile mill. She was active but not to the extent of getting into it. She had a disability and she was home for a good many years and then she went back to work. The war years.

INTERVIEWER: And what happened to your other brothers and sisters?

SULLIVAN: Well, my brother, Tom, in 1933 he was married. He was only about eighteen when he got married. He was working in the Fisk Tire Company in Chicopee. It was known as the Fisk Tire, it's now U.S. Rubber, and during the Depression it was one of the worst places in the world to work in. Because there was so little work. Then he became active in '33, when Roosevelt was elected, and supposed to be coming out of the Depression and they started to form unions. Westinghouse, this, all of the companies like that. And they were in the process....that was, rubber workers became big in Akron, and they formed into a national union. And then they [AFL] decided that they should all be broken up into separate unions. And each department and each craft would be in separate unions. They didn't want one whole plant, industrial plants, so Tom became the International Vice President of the rubber workers' union and was living in Akron, Ohio. And he became very active with Sidney Hillman and John L. Lewis. They were interested in forming the CIO. And he was with the CIO up until the war years. And Sidney Hillman became head of the War production group. He became his assistant. And he was with Sidney Hillman then, political national action job that Al Barken has, he had with CIO. And he was with that until Sidney Hillman died.

INTERVIEWER: So he went off to Washington then?

SULLIVAN: Went to Washington during the War Years, then were in New York. After the War he felt that it was time he took care of his family. He had moved then from pillar to post, wasn't very fair. So he went to Philadelphia and he became a manager of a small rubber company and was there until he died. He died when he was about fifty-two years old.

INTERVIEWER: Fifty-two?

SULLIVAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So he went into management.

SULLIVAN: Yes, went into management. That was because he had been away from the unions so long, you know, and he felt he had done as much as he could in political action at that time. Because it was political action, it wasn't C.O.P.E or anything like that. And he felt that, you know, he had started it, he had grown with it, and it was time that he left. Plus, his children had suffered. He had three girls and their schooling was hurt by the moves. So he decided that it was time he stayed in one place.

INTERVIEWER: But they had a pretty sympathetic manager in the industry then?

SULLIVAN: Well, it was a fabric thing that he went into. It wasn't anything that he had been into when he was union. But he did form a union in it. My brother, Bob, my oldest brother who had been in service, went out to California to live and died out there. My brother Bill and my brother Charles are still in the area. My mainstays.

INTERVIEWER: But only one of them became active in the union?

SULLIVAN: Oh, my brother Bill did. He was in a different type of union. He was one of the ones that formed the Labor Workers Guild. That was when they started laying the pipelines. He became active in organizing the workmen in the area here, not Springfield, Springfield was Italian.

INTERVIEWER: How about your sisters?

SULLIVAN: My older sister married, she died four years ago. And my sister, Alice, the youngest of us all, she's up in the country, living in the town of Goshen, the Berkshires. She's not very well. She's got diabetes very bad. She went for tests today. I'm hoping they'll be better anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Do you get to see her?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, don't miss a night that I don't talk to her. No, it's only eighteen miles.

INTERVIEWER: After you were out of parochial school, were you ever involved in any other kinds of educational classes, at the Y or the union of....?

SULLIVAN: No, actually, no, the twenties were bad. Jobs were hard to get. And you hung on and hung on and I got married in 1926. I went back to work in 1927. My husband went to the Veterans hospital after two years. And I have one son. So I didn't change jobs too quickly or anything like that. I worked at Skinners, I organized Skinners in '35 when the CIO was formed.

INTERVIEWER: So you started to work then when you were fourteen which was about 1918, then you married in 1926. So how old were you when you were married then?

SULLIVAN: Twenty-three.

INTERVIEWER: Then you were just out of work for a year?

SULLIVAN: Not quite a year. I worked up until....I was married in October, I worked until then, I went back to work in January, 1928.

INTERVIEWER: That wasn't long at all.

SULLIVAN: No, couldn't. Got to live.

INTERVIEWER: And your husband went into the hospital? Was he older than you?

SULLIVAN: Three years older.

INTERVIEWER: And had he been in the war?

SULLIVAN: He had been in service, in the submarine service and something happened that they never found out, didn't show up until then, later on in life.

INTERVIEWER: So then, we were talking about your husband. After he came back, did he work in the . . .?

SULLIVAN: No, no. He worked in a market, in the meat department; it was a big market. That is where he worked. There was something, it was awfully hard to find out what happened. He went into the shell....wouldn't talk. And he had a fear, a terrible fear of water. We went to the beach on Labor Day and you would never know him. He just shook and stood and shook and shook and shook. And I couldn't understand. From that time on, got real bad, just went into a shell. Wouldn't talk.

INTERVIEWER: And it was connected to the . . .?

SULLIVAN: We never knew what it was because they never had no way of knowing.

INTERVIEWER: Was he able to work after that, though?

SULLIVAN: No. Never. First they put him in a state hospital. And finally he was put into a veterans hospital. And he was in a veterans hospital when he lost his mind. Never knew nobody.

INTERVIEWER: And they weren't able to . . .

SULLIVAN: No, never were able to do anything with him.

INTERVIEWER: So your boy then . . .

SULLIVAN: Never knew his father. And the funny thing is, he never asked. He never asked. When he died about only two years ago, I called him and I told him, and he said, "It doesn't mean anything to me." Because my grandchildren never knew him.

INTERVIEWER: He just didn't know anyone?

SULLIVAN: No.

INTERVIEWER: And they never knew exactly what it was, what caused it?

SULLIVAN: No, the only thing they said was something about water that he had a terrible fear of. So whether he was on some boat and something happened to him. We have no history.

INTERVIEWER: Was his family from around here?

SULLIVAN: His family was from Springfield. He only had one sister. And his father died, we were married about three weeks late. His father was dead, heart attack. That I think brought a lot of it on, too. That was kind of....he was the only boy. But, this is life.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. We talked a little bit about when you got married but then I guess now I would like to go back and pick up when you started to work and exactly your first job, what kind of job that you had.

SULLIVAN: First job that I had, when I was fourteen, was in a card room of American Thread Company. Now a card room is a room where the cotton comes in and flows through a machine and then we had to put a twist into it. And the machines were huge and then, when your bobbins filled up, we had to doff them and put them into a truck. And the truck was as big as me. And

SULLIVAN: the boss used to....evidently was watching me one day, he came by and he said, "I can't let you work on this job anymore." He said, "I'm afraid you're going to be in the bottom of the truck." Well, I said, "I have to work. I've got to have a job." Well, he said, "I got you a job up in the front mill where you'll do packing and you'll just put spools in boxes and you won't ever need....you won't have trucks to get into."

INTERVIEWER: To fall into.

SULLIVAN: To fall into. So I was there until they closed that department down which was probably in 1921, 1922. They moved it to Canada. Of course, that's difficult....textiles are always doing this . . .

INTERVIEWER: How many worked in that first job....how many other people were there doing the same job that you were?

SULLIVAN: Oh, this was a huge room. I'm trying to think of how to measure. Perhaps from here up until the light would be one room. That would be one room. You maybe had to go through three or four rooms like that. They had floors....oh, I wouldn't know how many machines they had in that department. That time there was a lot....most of the people I worked with were immigrants, mostly Polish, . . .

INTERVIEWER: Mostly women?

SULLIVAN: Mostly women. Oh yes, we only had one man that fixed the machines. We didn't have no men doing these jobs. Just mostly all women that did it.

INTERVIEWER: And they were mostly immigrants from around?

SULLIVAN: Mostly they'd come in from Poland, they wouldn't speak much English.

INTERVIEWER: So you were just describing then, a large room and several hundren people then might . . .

SULLIVAN: I really wouldn't know how many people worked in the department. I don't think we ever got to know, didn't have time.

INTERVIEWER: What time did you start in the morning?

SULLIVAN: A quarter of seven 'til five-thirty at night. We couldn't work the full six to six . . .

INTERVIEWER: But the others?

SULLIVAN: They had to work six to six.

INTERVIEWER: Were there other kids your age?

SULLIVAN: No, not in that department. I don't think many kids went for this work. You came out looking like Santa Claus. Your hair was covered with cotton, your clothes with cotton, you ate cotton. It was, you know, all cotton.

INTERVIEWER: And it just sort of filled the . . .?

SULLIVAN: The whole room, yes. They didn't have such things as vents or anything like that in those days. Believe me, you just swallowed the cotton.

INTERVIEWER: And it must have been pretty warm in the summer.

SULLIVAN: I wasn't there in the summer though. They didn't leave me long enough on the job for the summer, which was good. So I couldn't tell you. But it was, always was a bad job.

INTERVIEWER: How did you get that first job?

SULLIVAN: I just went over and talked to....as a matter of fact, I talked to the man who was my boss, Johnson, and I just told him I needed a job and had to work and he was very sympathetic and very nice and he gave me the job.

INTERVIEWER: And how much did you get paid then?

SULLIVAN: Two dollars and seventy-five cents a week.

INTERVIEWER: And of course there wasn't any union.

SULLIVAN: They'd never heard of a union. No. No unions.

INTERVIEWER: So then you moved to the packing job after a couple of months. And what was the packing job like?

SULLIVAN: Oh, the packing job was a clean job. It was what they called darning cotton for darning socks. For darning, and you had to put so many, it was on a tube, and you had to put twelve in a box and they had to pack it a certain way. It was a piece-work job. But in this department mostly we packed the darning cotton. We got pretty good at the packing job. Then you had to bundle . . .

INTERVIEWER: The boxes after you . . .

SULLIVAN: So many into a bundle. You had to bundle them up in the afternoon. And that was all put in and shipped out. And you got paid by what you did. On that I was able to make about twelve dollars, which was fairly good pay.

INTERVIEWER: So that was a big difference.

SULLIVAN: It was a big difference for me. And it was a big difference for my mother. And as I said, I was there when they decided to close up the department, the work was getting slack all around, too. But then I went over to Skinners and applied that I'd like to learn weaving. Well, of course they gave me a run-around about height and all this stuff. I said, "Yeah, but I know weavers who have platforms." So the boss said he'd take me and try me out and see if I could learn to be a weaver. So I stayed there until I got married, which was in 1926. I learned weaving, and I learned to be a loom girl, which is putting the salvages....Skinners always had their name on their material which was in the salvage; I learned to do that. And then I learned how to draw the reeds. So I got pretty functional in the weaver mill. I could do most of the jobs. And . . .

INTERVIEWER: But you weren't actually a weaver? You learned . . .

SULLIVAN: Oh yeah, I ran looms, went from weaving to loom girl which was a day job, you didn't have to wait for three weeks, four weeks before you got paid. And drawing the reeds was a day paid job. And I was there until I got married and them moved to Springfield and then after....before my son was born, I went back to work. And worked there until September. And he was born in October. And then I went back afterwards. By this time, 1928, we were on a very short time, we worked one week and then you were one week out. This was the whole climate. We got lots of vacations but no pay. Then it got very bad. In about '29 and '30, sometimes working just ten days a month.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do with your little boy? When you went back to work?

SULLIVAN: Well, of course my mother took care of him. Well, I was helping her and she was helping me. And she was always there to take care of him. She died in 1934. This became a little bit different. It was quite hard when my mother died. And . . .

INTERVIEWER: How old was she when she died, Ann?

SULLIVAN: Sixty-two.

INTERVIEWER: And so your little boy would only have been . . .

SULLIVAN: About seven. Six or seven. But then they changed. We got a change in hours, forty-eight hours. We didn't have to work those....first we went to forty-eight hours a week and then gradually that was, we got out earlier in the afternoons. I used to leave his breakfast ready for him. Set the alarm. He never missed a day in school. He knew he had to do it. We had a little apartment. My sister was with me at first but then

SULLIVAN: she got married and I'd leave his things all ready. But then in '34 things got very bad. So my brother said, "It's time, Annie, you'd better come live with us." Which was what I did. They had no children. They'd been married seven or eight years and they had no children and we went to live with them. He, Bill, had his room and I had my room. And they were awfully good to us.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been very nice for them, too.

SULLIVAN: Well, they were very good to him, but what always bothered me, it was rather funny, Billy would come and knock at the door and say, "Can I bring this one in?" It was never his home. So it wasn't until 1937 we got our own apartment and were on our own. And then he used to get up himself. School lunches came into being at that time and he used to go home rather than have a school lunch. He used to go home and have soup and a sandwich. But I always knew. I never had to worry. I always knew that he'd be there when I got home from work. He somehow or another understood that this was what he had to do. He was a quiet.... a little too quiet. But he loved working, making airplane models. You know, they used to make the models that you had to cut all up into little pieces of balsam wood and I always tried to see that he had enough of those on hand.

INTERVIEWER: To work on.

SULLIVAN: When we got our apartment, he had a room up in the attic. We got a little four room apartment in a house and....well, what happened....in that we were able to get that was that I got veteran's bonuses. And the veteran's bonuses came out and they let us buy the kitchenware and the extra furniture. And he always....we were in that apartment until, oh, until my son had three children. Before we moved out, he couldn't get an apartment, by then I moved into the house with my brother, I had my own apartment there. And it was....when in the heck was that? Because he built his own home. That was another thing I drilled him . . .

INTERVIEWER: Billy did?

SULLIVAN: Yes. He built his own home and Paula was about three months old when they moved into it.

INTERVIEWER: That was nice. So you say you stayed in that one apartment for quite . . .

SULLIVAN: Yes, I stayed in there not long after Billy left. And then the old couple that lived in the house with my brother died. He was right across the street.

INTERVIEWER: So you were still close?

SULLIVAN: I took the downstairs. Oh yes, always were close. I took the downstairs apartment and I was there until they sold the house. Fifteen years, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: How many grandchildren do you have?

SULLIVAN: Seven. Two are married. Three were going to college at one time. Two of them are married. They have no children. And the youngest was ten, so they're all, you know, grown up.

INTERVIEWER: Well, pretty much.

SULLIVAN: No, he had five girls and two boys.

INTERVIEWER: And what does your son do?

SULLIVAN: Purchasing agent. He worked for Package Machinery for eighteen years. He went to junior college. Graduated. He went to Monson and then to junior college in Holyoke. I think he was in one of the first classes that graduated here in Holyoke. Of course, when....one of the things I used to drill was education. But about fourteen he didn't want to go to school. He wasn't doing too well. He was kind of in a shell. My brother Charles once asked him to come for vacation time in the summer. Once he went with them they never got rid of him. This was where he spent holidays or vacations until he finished school.

INTERVIEWER: Because he'd be off school then?

SULLIVAN: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And where did they live?

SULLIVAN: They lived in East Hampton. And he loved the woods. But they never had any problem with him. He minded and loved my sister, in fact. He got, kind of....he wasn't talking to people too much and so forth and I was worried. He was sort of in a shell. And my brother Charles was very friendly with one of the fellows that's in Worcester now but was running the Wilston Academy at that time. So he took Bill for a holiday and he said what he thought he needed was some good men teachers. He felt he needed to be away and into this. And it seemed to me that this was what was needed. This was when he was in eighth grade. Then he finished his high school at Monson.

INTERVIEWER: And that's a boy's....

SULLIVAN: Oh, it was a small school. And he had a lot of attention. Phil Sweeney, who is now one of the principals in Springfield, started teaching at Monson. And he and his wife sort of took Bill under their wing. He used to talk to them and they didn't

SULLIVAN: let him get away with anything, but they were very good to him. And it made quite a difference. Then I found out I'd have to burn down the school to get him out.

INTERVIEWER: But again he was close enough so that you still saw him?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes. And when he first went, they didn't think it was a good idea to have him come home too often. But it was all, you know, weekend and of course, by this time I'd started working for the union and....in '38. And first thing I had to buy was a car for my work. How am I going to buy a car, you know, school and bills, and this was a worry. So Charles had bought a brand new Chevy which was $805.00. There was a Dodge. He said, "I'll take the Dodge and you take the Chevy." That was....to give me the Dodge was more money, over a thousand dollars. But I paid for it somehow or another. We came out of it and had it all during the war. I don't know how many thousands of miles went on that car.

INTERVIEWER: But it stood up?

SULLIVAN: It was a good car. It stood up.

INTERVIEWER: When did you start getting active in thinking about unions?

SULLIVAN: Well, see, in '36 when the CIO was formed, I was still working in Skinners. But I had been in the textile strike in '34. We came out on strike at the Skinner mills, the American Thread Company....everything in Holyoke came out. And then we were like sheep. The South all came out on strike. Everyone said it was too bad afterwards because it was the one time the South came out. But there was really no leadership in it. We couldn't take care of it. We didn't know how. Sure, the companies I think were very glad to have a strike at the time because there wasn't any work. And, after four weeks of it, when everybody said let's go back, so we went back, went back, trickled back with no contracts, no nothing, you know, you were left at the mercy of the company and I really thought that we'd never be able to get a union again. You know, to get the people to form a union of this sort. But when they talked about the industrial organization, we were one of the first ones to sign up. I used to go around and talk to the loom fixers and the weavers and so forth and they said, "Well, we really and truly need it." So that this was what they wanted. Workers signed up cards, and the company recognized us by check off. We had so many signed up that they recognized us by the card checkoff.

INTERVIEWER: Just the card checkoff. Could you talk a little bit more about what led up to the strike in '34? Were you active in....did the people come from someplace else, or just how did it happen?

SULLIVAN: Well, actually they had, you know, they used to have one union. Loom fixers maybe had one. Skinners didn't have much in that line. But loom fixers in other places and in the American Thread, a number of unions, what the heck was that job, it went completely out of existence after....the mule spinners. The mule spinners were the big trade union in the industry. And they were about the biggest in the union and it's hard to say, we must have had about fifteen to twenty in one shop, maybe even more that that. Of unions, each one was a craft union. So nobody could ever get anywhere with it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, were women in those unions?

SULLIVAN: No, no.

INTERVIEWER: Just the male craft workers.

SULLIVAN: Just the male crafters in that. But when it came to weavers, there was just an many women weaving as there were men, especially in the silk mill. In the cotton mills for a good while they had kept about as many as men because when we went to organize, when the CIO was formed, we went to organize Chicopee Manufacturing Company and Johnson and Johnson Company. Of course, they had done so much to the people and the hours of work and changing of shifts of work that these were the things that people wanted something changed because of their hours. I think I explained to you how they had split shifts....

INTERVIEWER: No, I don't think you did.

SULLIVAN: Oh, Chicopee decided that it would have a night shift. This was a seven day week. Workers had to take a day off during the week. If you were on the night shift, you couldn't get off. No matter what. They wanted all men, of course; men were the only ones who could work nights. But you never could go to a day shift or a second shift. They were running three shifts. Then they started this plan of starting you....you'd go in at six a.m. and you worked till ten a.m. then second shift started ten a.m. until two p.m. They changed their work loads. This was one of the things that was happening all the time in the textile....also they were changing work loads. I don't think the people could have stood up much more that four hours at a time. But then you had to come back and work. You went in at six and you worked till ten a.m. Then another shift came in at ten, and worked till two and that first shift had to go back at two p.m. and work till six at night. The first shift came back at six to ten p.m., which was an ungodly day. So that when CIO was formed, these were the things that were very predominant in so many of the textile mills, what was happening to the people and their hours of work and their conditions of work. Of course, during the Depression days and in some of the plants the conditions were very bad....

SULLIVAN: you were never supposed to go near a toilet, and things like this. You know, they could fire you on the spot. But we had no real problem of organizing in Skinners and we went down.... and because of the change in the workloads, Chicopee people all walked out on strike. So from that we got a contract and it wasn't the best in the world by any means, but we did, and we did get them the recognition and seniority. To get the seniority set up in the plant took a long time....one of the things that was so difficult and that most of them that came in from foreign countries went under a brother or a sister's name who were older, for them to get the jobs and getting back and straightening out the names and the ages. '38, actually, when social security came into being, must have taken us a good two years to get the names straightened out.

INTERVIEWER: Just to get them straightened out. You just ended up spending a lot of time trying to figure out the records.

SULLIVAN: Oh, really, it really took a long time but we finally got it. I mean, anyone who wanted to go to the first shift, had the right to go to it. If they had the seniority. So the men, some of them who had been trying for years and years to get off night shift, finally got off and were able to work either the first or the second shift.

INTERVIEWER: Through the seniority.

SULLIVAN: Through the seniority. But as I say, that was not done in a day. We were not too bad in the Skinner mills because until the war, the women couldn't work the night shift. The War Labor Board set up hours and conditions that women could work all three shifts.

INTERVIEWER: Was that a company rule?

SULLIVAN: No, that was a state rule. As a matter of fact, in this state, this six to six law was still in existence until the NRA was set up and that set up that they could work till ten o'clock at night. Two shifts in. Well, this two shift business was always a headache. Because the one who worked in the second shift had to come and work on Saturday mornings to make up their hours. This was first shift working eight hours and second had to stop at ten p.m. And that was something that never went over very good. Then there was one time that the legislation tried to pass and go back to the six to six and we had quite some battles over that. That was with the legislation. Finally we got that straightened out. I don't think we got that straightened out until about '44. Where you got your eight hours in one day, in one shift, they used to go from six to two, two to ten and ten to six, in the cotton textiles. Most of the others were seven to three, three to eleven and eleven to seven but the right to have lunch, go sit

SULLIVAN: down and have lunch. Anyone who was on the other shifts had to work that sixth day to make up the forty hours. And finally we got that through the legislation, so all could have their forty hours on all shifts. Of course, I mean, even working out provisions we've put in for restrictions on women, that they couldn't be put out in the street after eleven p.m. If they became ill, they had to see that they were taken home. Many other provisions: place set up for them to have rest periods, coffee and lunches.

INTERVIEWER: Back in the early thirties then, you were working when there was work available . . .

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, we lived on it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, but some weeks there wouldn't be any work.

SULLIVAN: No, we were....it seemed that though, when any holiday came up they'd take ten days off. Well, the ten days made for a weaver and the help that went with the weaver. That they possibly didn't get back, well, for a good twelve or thirteen days. But that was something that....and they were trying to start it when the union came into being. And Christmas, ten days off, no pay, you'd always feel so bad. Men with families, you know, and women like me, got hit. Imagine trying to plan for two weeks out. Oil, they didn't buy coal. It was oil then that they used to heat....and your rent and your food. When you don't have enough money for one week, you never get back on your feet, always in debt, always behind. And I still was working in the mill when Superintendent Hubbard came up to me just before Christmas. I don't know whether I should tell you this story. You can take it out again.

INTERVIEWER: If you want it taken out, we will. But go ahead.

SULLIVAN: Let me just say the superintendent came up to me and said, "Well, we're all set. We're shutting down for ten days." And I said, "This place? This is the worst thing that in the winter time you can do to the people." I said, "In the summer time, we manage. In winter they can't manage. They never get on their feet." I said, "You know, I don't think anyone of them could buy a ten cent toy for their kids at Christmas. You talk about Christmas," I said, "There's no charity in you people. All you think of...." and, you know, all of a sudden I said an awful lot of things I maybe shouldn't have said, but I did say. All of a sudden, he walked away. And in the afternoon he came back and said, "I never realized this. I never realized what was happening." We never had ten days shut down again. But then of course we got contracts that put in the work rate and the vacation days and all this stuff. But we had no holidays with pay or no nothing in those days. We did not get those things until we went to the War Labor Board later. And

SULLIVAN: because we couldn't get wage increases, our first increase, we were in a skilled weave at fifty cents an hour. And they couldn't move from jobs. They were frozen on their jobs. They couldn't take another job because they were needed in this industry. Of course, you had to go before a war production court before you could change a job. And the kids were coming out, and the women who never worked in their lives were going into these shops making fortunes. And these poor devils were still....they were working very hard six and seven days and the cost of living had started going up, although it never went like what we got now. Only four percent. Just the whole war period, the increase in the cost of living went up only four percent in all that time.

INTERVIEWER: But the weavers were really needed in that skilled job?

SULLIVAN: Yes, I mean, they were on skilled jobs, and they were making.... it was in government NYN, they were making parachute material which was very badly needed. They had no parachutes. They had nothing, of course, when this all started. They used to work six and seven days. In defense factories, they'd come home with a couple of hundred bucks a week in the other plants. They got cost plus pay for seven days. Of course, it was in our contract, the forty hours. The forty hour law did not go in until 1942. But in '39, we had forty hour week written in our contract. And then American Thread at the time.... we organized them, they were working on a seven day schedule and having to take days off during the week. So that when.... we organized them, they were just anxious to get organization. Because we went to the forty hour week. But they couldn't give us money, they gave us holidays, they gave us one week's vacation with pay. That was really a big deal.

INTERVIEWER: Back to your statement about the superintendent, do you think that he just really had not thought about what was happening to these . . .

SULLIVAN: I don't know. See, foremen were on salary. They would get time off. They used to go home. They'd have no work to do. I don't know really what it was. But I don't suppose he ever did think of it, maybe never had to, you know. He didn't know what it was to be without anything. And just that morning, it just hit home. It was going to be damn hard for me. And I just could't take it. And, of course, he used to come to me.... but he was so happy, you know, I took all his happiness away.

INTERVIEWER: Sort of like, isn't it nice everyone will have ten days off at Christmas time?

SULLIVAN: Oh yeah, so nice, you know, to....but what I meant is, do you think they could buy turkeys or anything like that? They were lucky if they could buy some hamburger!

INTERVIEWER: So you told him about it.

SULLIVAN: I got it off my chest good that day in no uncertain terms. Well, he just walked away from me. Two o'clock he came back and he said, "There'll be no ten days." And after that, our contract was such that we never had another one. And he went along, too, because we used to have to negotiate with him.

INTERVIEWER: Was he the foreman or the....just the head of the . . .

SULLIVAN: No. No, actually he was Bill Skinner's nephew who was head of the business in Holyoke and the New York office. But he was always kind of....everybody felt he was a bear and they couldn't, you know, talk to him in any which way. But he'd come in to me and say how things were going, because I was the head of the union for the shop. And so this day he came in very chipper and he just happened to say the wrong thing. Or the right thing.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, I think he said the right thing.

SULLIVAN: No other plant had it like they had. Well, I mean, Chicopee Manufacturing they couldn't get days off. But that was an entirely different operation. American Thread, too. It was just really Skinner's that did this.

INTERVIEWER: And they were primarily cottons?

SULLIVAN: Silk, at Skinner's. Of course, they had to change over to the synthetics when the war period started. They made mostly the nylon for parachutes then.

INTERVIEWER: When did you sort of first start talking about a union or meeting with people about organizing in Skinner's or whether or not you'd go out?

SULLIVAN: Of course, after '34, I mean, well, I would be helped.... all we were doing was pulling people out. We were on strike and we went to the other places and closed them up. Of course we had talked but you could talk only with certain ones at that time because you didn't know what you were up against.

INTERVIEWER: Could you just go back a minute because I think I lost some of the tape there, I just want to remind myself that we were talking about the fact that your brother was with the CIO and had come into the area and that you talked to him a lot about the union and organizing but that essentially you were . . .

SULLIVAN: The people themselves were....there was a lot of news going around about it, you know, they were organizing all over the country. And the rubber industry became very big, the coal miners....that was their first real win. Of course, John L. Lewis became first chairman of the CIO.

INTERVIEWER: So the first real organizing you did was within your own group at Skinner?

SULLIVAN: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And you got a contract then?

SULLIVAN: We got one of the first contracts then that was ever signed in textile at the time.

INTERVIEWER: And that was in '36?

SULLIVAN: That was in '36.

INTERVIEWER: And at that time did you have regular union meetings?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, lots of meetings. They held meetings by shifts, by departments. Because we couldn't always attend; those that worked the second shift couldn't attend on Saturday. And we got so that we held them on Saturday afternoons and then we got to Sunday afternoons so that everybody could attend.

INTERVIEWER: And how many people would you have at the local meeting?

SULLIVAN: Well, it was amazing. If there was anything of importance, you always got a tremendous crowd. But if it was a dull....if there was nothing to tell them, only the routine thing....but I would say always most of our people as a whole attended meetings fairly regularly. And the shift ones were very good. Because you held them before their shifts.

INTERVIEWER: So you held them somewhere....it was nearby?

SULLIVAN: Oh, we had our office central, they could come in from the Berkshire Spinning, American Thread, MacIntosh, Skinner's, East Hampton....I'd go to East Hampton, Westfield, Chicopee, into those towns. But we always held our meetings so that it would be convenient for the workers and if they had a problem they certainly were there.

INTERVIEWER: Did women and men come?

SULLIVAN: Oh, our women were wonderful. The women in textile, they made the best stewards, the best officers . . .

INTERVIEWER: How did they handle children and families and, I mean, you know, even wartime . . .

SULLIVAN: Well, I was one of the ones that worked for day-care centers. There was Margaret McFadden at Mr. Holyoke College who came into Holyoke to help set up day-care centers; this was very serious. We used to have these, what we called "the kids with the key", the doorstep kids, father working, the mother working,

SULLIVAN: the father maybe in service, the mother maybe working nights, all nights or something, and we were able to get some marvelous kindergartens and things set up. And you know, after the war, we went before the legislation and we had some good people helping us get legislation. But what happened is that the people themselves lost interest. And somehow that got way out of hand. Because you have to keep up on anything like that. Community Chest, which was what it was known then, it wasn't United Funds, it was Community Chest, different people, good people got together. Well, it took them a lot of time but we had almost in every school that the kids could go in after school until the mother would come and pick them up. That was the one thing though we were never able to get that they could be taken home, because there was no such thing. The mother had to pick them up. And, but if it wasn't for those ungodly hours at night, and of course you couldn't take in babies. We really had some good programs . . .

INTERVIEWER: And the union was very active?

SULLIVAN: Oh, we were very, very active. Maria Hazen and her husband, he owned a paper mill. She was the most marvelous person. They always used to list her as head of the Community Chest. And Alice Lucey. I mean, we worked tirelessly in those and we got a lot of help from the men in getting it through. We were able to form some senators that got into a corner, and worked pretty good to keep these up after the war, some of these laws went through.

INTERVIEWER: Did women sometimes bring their children to the union meetings?

SULLIVAN: Oh yeah. Oh yes. It was not uncommon. Well, we'd get them pencils and color books to keep them quiet. But some of them would just sit very quietly and that was one thing we always said....of course the elections, we used to have to get baby-sitters.

INTERVIEWER: So what was your first local then, after you signed your contract you became . . .

SULLIVAN: The first local was Warren Thread Company Local 73 in Westfield, who got the contract in and then Skinner's was Local 113, Chicopee Local 144 was held number two and Skinner's was held number three. And....but we got our charter, it was the contract, Skinner's got the first contract signed.

INTERVIEWER: So you got your charters a little ahead.

SULLIVAN: A little ahead. American Thread. When we won American Thread, it was Local 512, so it was up to a number of locals. And I had East Hampton. We organized East Hampton after many years of being run out of town.

INTERVIEWER: Did you hold an office in that first local?

SULLIVAN: Oh, I was the first secretary they ever had. Did I have a heck of a time getting out of it! I was there until I said, "You got to get another secretary!"

INTERVIEWER: Is that an elected office?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, it was an elected office. And I went on the national staff afterwards. These locals formed to go into a joint board so that they could help one another--and that was done in 1954--and I became the first manager, the first woman. They weren't too anxious to put a woman manager in, but they sent a man in, that was going to take over. The people just didn't take to him so I was the first manager of the elected joint board and the Berkshire Joint Board and the Western Massachusetts Joint Board. That was, I was elected manager. All our contracts had grievance as a first step was with foremen. Second step was with the company who then set up committee and I always went to second step. Third step was arbitration. All contracts had to conform with national union.

INTERVIEWER: So they had no trouble having a woman . . .

SULLIVAN: I was the first woman to get to be Joint Board Manager in the textiles. Douglas Brown from MIT was a permanent arbitrator in cotton. After the war, we went to the National Arbitration Board.

INTERVIEWER: More than half your time was spent on grievances.

SULLIVAN: Two business agents might go on first step but not second. They would also sit in on negotiations.

INTERVIEWER: What were your responsibilities as secretary in that first local?

SULLIVAN: You had to keep the minutes and see that the notices were sent out, settled all grievances and see that the contracts were lived up to, the dues were paid. All money came to the Joint Board Office. I had a lot of work. As Joint Board Manager I attended all local meetings. There were about eighteen locals so every Sunday was taken. Some met in the evening. Some meetings were held between shifts. Joint Board meetings were on Thursday night in Holyoke, Friday night in Berkshire. Locals had regular Sunday for meeting, but then any department meetings would be their own grievances and we would meet whatever time was necessary. For that, well, department meetings could be called at any time. Business agents do local organizing except during major campaigns when national would send people in. Reelected to the Joint Board every two years. For awhile I was the only woman, then two or three more developed, eventually there were five women. They thought I would fall on my face, but I worked twice as hard and showed we could do it. Men never really liked it, the other Joint Board managers.

INTERVIEWER: Were all the other officers men?

SULLIVAN: No, no. We had a girl president in Westfield. And until the end of time I think she was the best person they ever had. The girls in American Thread were all officers, we had one fellow was president there, the rest were all girls, the officers. Chicopee Manufacturing, the girls were the president and secretary, Ludlow, same way. As you go around, I mean, Hampton Mills, East Hampton were very few women workers. It was a dye shop. That was mostly men. But we had no problem with the men. They were all men officers, didn't have any women officers. Joint Board President was a man.

INTERVIEWER: So the makeup of the local was very much determined by what kind of textile . . .

SULLIVAN: By what kind of work. Contracts would expire at the same time for different industries. Cotton, woolens, synthetics. There were directors for each; cotton - Mary Anno Bishop, dyes - Herbert Paine, woolens - John Chupka. Joint Board managers and district officers would all meet together. Then contracts were approved by the national president.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember particular kinds of grievances that some of the major problems then were, the hours . . .

SULLIVAN: Once, of course, that we got our hours, getting a contract, there wasn't that much of a scramble over it because you set what the hours were and they could not be changed during the length of the contract. No, most of our grievances, then, after that, would come with what happened on the jobs, changes such as work load changes, bad material, all of these things which would mean the pay would go down, and you constantly had that sort of a thing popping up. Also we had in our contracts, that there was no discrimination. Well, I mean, we never even mentioned the word, the job classification, whether man or woman worked on it....this was it. The pay was such for this or that. Once in a while you'd get a boss balking, he wasn't going to put a woman on it. But during the war years they were darned glad to put any woman on it. They ran the slashing machines, they ran everything. So they lost out on that argument completely.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so then in '36, after the contract was signed, you were secretary of the local, and then did you also hold a position in the shop, I mean . . .

SULLIVAN: I worked.

INTERVIEWER: No, I mean, yeah, I know that you were working, but . . .

SULLIVAN: No, I was just, I was what they called a drawing in girl at that time. Drawing through reeds for the weavers. I worked like heck. You couldn't lay down on the job....until I went on to the national staff. I've done most all of the jobs in weaving.

INTERVIEWER: Then you went onto the national staff in '39?

SULLIVAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you, in '36, when the first contract got signed, the charter and everything, did you think that you would stay? Did you think then about taking a full time job with the union? Did you think you'd stay in . . .?

SULLIVAN: No, I never thought of a full time job, I mean, but I used to go to all the other places to help, you know. Then Val Burati was in our area, was supposed to be handling our area, he came from the Springfield newspaper, and then he left to go to the New York office to write the Textile Labor. So that I used to take care of the meetings for him. I was never staff or anything but I'd go to the meetings in Westfield, the meetings in Chicopee, all local meetings where or when they were.

INTERVIEWER: These are the CIO meetings?

SULLIVAN: This was in our textile mills, just in the textile mills. Because really it wasn't until '40 that we formed a council which took all the unions.

INTERVIEWER: What was your first....the staff position with the union then was as an organizer?

SULLIVAN: Organizer.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any special things, ways you would do things to organize the women differently from the men?

SULLIVAN: No.

INTERVIEWER: And there was a great deal of interest . . .

SULLIVAN: Most of it you had to do by contact. Contact at the plant. Steve asked me that the other day. When I first went on, I wanted to work at American Thread, I had known one or two people in there. They were people that I didn't think I could talk to but I knew that conditions were bad. By this time I'd gotten the office and I got a girl in the office as secretary and she was an unusual kid, just came out of school. You'd call her and say, "Monica, Kitty and I got to get a leaflet made up and this is what I got to have in it," and when you came back, it would be all ready. And somehow she had the tact and

SULLIVAN: the knack of knowing just how to put in the needed things. So you'd get down and hand out leaflets. You'd do it on the shifts, all alone. East Hampton, you know, every time I went to pass out leaflets, the cops would come down and put me out of town. The police would just run me right out of town. Ludlow, same thing. Police would run me out. As soon as they know.... and they knew it as soon as you came over the bridge in Ludlow. In East Hampton, you had to go over the mountain.

INTERVIEWER: They knew when you got . . .

SULLIVAN: One step, Roosevelt made the law that we had the right to pass out leaflets. We had the right. At the East Hampton plant the leaflets had to be in Polish. We had them in Polish, French and in English. I'd hold the English ones in my hand and the others were on the ground. I'd say what's Polish, what's French and what's English. When they came out of the mill, they'd take them themselves. We organized that place within a few days. NLRB election, had to hold it within thirty days in those days, not stalling like you get today. At American Thread and East Hampton we held elections within thirty days, and contracts signed within a short period after that. The mills were bought and sold several times. J.P. Stevens was in East Hampton but then closed.

INTERVIEWER: Who first talked to you about a staff job as an organizer?

SULLIVAN: Oh, President Emil Rieve. He was the president of the Textile. He used to call me and say, "Annie," (he spoke with a Polish accent), "When are you going to get on the job?" I'd say, "I can't leave my son." And he'd say, "You got enough there to take care, you don't need to worry about leaving." So he kept pushing, you know, "you got to be there, you can't be in a mill, you can't go do twenty hours work and then go home." So one day, he wrote me a letter and he said, "I want to see you in the New York office." I went to the New York office and he said, "Made up your mind?" That's the way he talked. "No," I said, "I haven't made up my mind, I really don't know what to do." He said, "What else can you do? We need you, you need it, you've got to come." I said, "Let me think it over." He said, "Two minutes." And he gave me a big line and finally I said okay because I knew then, like, I never had to worry about Billy, if I had to go away, Helen and Charles, by brother Bill, my sister....he was never left alone.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you first meet Rieve?

SULLIVAN: Oh, I was at the first convention that we had in Philadelphia, the first, it was the organizing committee. And I was active in, what was it called, I can't think of it, it was the other arm, we had political action committee and electing congressman

SULLIVAN: and senators and so forth. And in the late thirties we were trying to get Lend Lease through. England and the communists were opposing it and I was part of the state committee on it. And through these things, it wasn't just the organizing things, it was all the other things as well.

INTERVIEWER: You were also involved in politics and . . .?

SULLIVAN: Right. I was on the democratic committee and we were active in getting these things done and, well, politically you had to be....I never cared too much about getting elected to things because there you got real troubles. But this state was controlled by Republicans until really in the fifties. Before that the house and senate was controlled by the Republicans. And we needed legislation for our workers.

INTERVIEWER: When was the first national convention then?

SULLIVAN: 1938.

INTERVIEWER: '38. And that's for the UTW?

SULLIVAN: No, Textile Workers Organizing Committee, CIO.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any other women who . . .?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, there were a lot of women. Wanda Pilot. Doris Markoney. Towards the end, Pollock never appointed too many women. He did appoint Betty in Connecticut, just, you know, within the last ten years. But he wasn't much for women. He never changed either.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any other women at the first convention? Were there women . . .?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes. There were a lot of women at that first convention because they were delegates from the locals from all over. Yes. You know, when we had to go to that convention, twenty-five dollars for the week, that paid board and room. Hotel bill and your meals and your transportation.

INTERVIEWER: Marvelous. That covered the whole thing, huh?

SULLIVAN: It covered the whole thing.

INTERVIEWER: Did you take the train?

SULLIVAN: No, I got a ride from a Northhampton Hosiery Worker. If I hadn't I guess I wouldn't have eaten for a few days. Of course that was nothing new for organizers, that were on our staff, I mean. Poor devils used to come in, many a time they didn't have any money for eating. There wasn't much money. When I first got on, you know, see, Sidney Hillman had loaned the money for staff, we ran out of money, I don't know how many weeks we had

SULLIVAN: to go on half pay.

INTERVIEWER: Put you right back with the textile . . .

SULLIVAN: Sure.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. I think we were talking last about your having gone to the convention, the first convention in Philadelphia, and then you talked with the president about becoming a full time employee which you then did. Did you work in this area with other women from other unions? Were there other women organizers or . . .?

SULLIVAN: No, never really had....Amalgamated [Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America] one time once had a couple to organize Amalgamated and clothing shops but never stayed here, never did much work. No, I worked mostly with all men. Well, because I worked with Herman Greenberg who was the president of this council for years, you know, and Jack Albano. I used to work very close with a fellow who was from the miners. He worked under Catherine Lewis under District Fifty. And he was alone in the area. There weren't too many full time employees in the area. We used to try to get together to help one another out because sometimes I would have four or five gates to leaflet.

INTERVIEWER: Couldn't do them all.

SULLIVAN: No, because you had to do it at certain times. Herman and Jack were very good at helping out in strike situations. We always went to one another and helped, until we got our own committees in our shops built up that they would come and help. Well, I had two girls at Skinner's that were very helpful at any time I needed them. One Gloria Palazina and Irene Rainvill and up until their plants closed, they were still as active and always helpful. You could always rely, they'd go house to house, they'd do whatever was needed. They were very, very good. In Westfield, a girl by the name of Jenny Sink was the president of the Warren Thread Company. She was an unusually good person. A lot of good people that I had; in Chicopee Manufacturing there was Betty Ornsby and Doris Luko and, of course, there were a number of women in the shops that would help you. There were a great number of woman stewards.

INTERVIEWER: Were you ever discouraged by any of the men from union organizing?

SULLIVAN: You know, the funny thing about that was, the shops where I had all men and very few women, I never had a problem. And as I say with the men here, I don't think they accepted me any different from a woman as they did the men. No. They were always courteous. Of course, Herman was a very courteous person anyway and I think the other fellows that we worked with, and we worked with all the presidents in the areas, we formed

SULLIVAN: the first council in '36 but that fell through. And then when Roosevelt was elected in '40, we formed the council that became this council. And Herman became the president, he was the president until he died. Changes came, changes went, but he was always the president.

INTERVIEWER: Was he from a textile . . .?

SULLIVAN: Amalgamated. Of course we were always closely aligned with them anyway. Now they're merged.

INTERVIEWER: Kind of come full cycle now.

SULLIVAN: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: When you think back to your local, were there women who were very active and then would drop out or . . .?

SULLIVAN: Most of them would....remained and stayed active. Well, anyone that started with the union were good in the shop because they were looked up to all the time, you know. As long as they took care of the things that were necessary, to be taken care of. We gave the people the attention that they needed, that they were a union that was there, not a fly-by-night....no, we had no problem with that. To this day, I'm friendly with.... just talked to Doris Luko this morning and she's going to go to lunch with me. She'd help for a good ten years or more. But they'll call all the time.

INTERVIEWER: But there must have been some young women who'd come in and maybe be active and then quit work or....

SULLIVAN: Gloria was a very young person when she first came with me and her sister. But no, they stayed right through until the end.

INTERVIEWER: Those who were active stayed.

SULLIVAN: Yes, stayed right through. Catherine O'Neill came from Skinner's, I get a call from her once a week, I'm wondering if something's gone wrong. Of course, one of the things, you couldn't make yourself too friendly with anyone, you had to keep that much because if you did, sometimes they'd think it was gangs or so forth like that. But as far as with the men, we never had no problem.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have any problem travelling with the men or....?

SULLIVAN: No, I have to say this much, only I travelled the length of this country and back again with Herman Greenberg. I think that anyone that knew him knows that he was never anything but a gentle person and always very respectful of women. Always.

SULLIVAN: In language sometimes, you know, once in a while they'd slip up and excuse themselves. Because time after time I was the only woman in the group. And they'd forget themselves but never once that they didn't excuse themselves, said they were sorry. Or I sometimes said harsh words and then said I was sorry.

INTERVIEWER: Every once in a while! Was it ever, you know, when you go.... not necessarily with the union men themselves but in hotels and things, did anyone ever give you . . .

SULLIVAN: I had one problem in Pennsylvannia. Well, one thing. Rieve always told us we were never to go to cheap hotels. Well, this was one thing he always said, "Well, if you go to cheap hotels you're going to be up against cheap people." I was sent out to Hazeltown, Pennsylvannia, to Du Pont's plant to see about work that was being done in Skinner's and something there, I forget the whole story. But it just so happened that my brother-in-law was out of work and my sister and I took Billy and my brother-in-law and sister with me. So this one fellow from Skinner's came with us, Joe Barizard. And we went to the union office. This is a mining town. And it was a bleak, dismal mining town. We didn't know anything about the place. So, they had called from the New York Office to say I was going and the manager met me and he said he made arrangements for us at this hotel. So we went to the hotel and we put the three boys in one room and Alice and I in another room. Because Billy was young enough that they could put him on a cot. And at two o'clock in the morning we were awful tired because I think we drove about seven hundred and some miles that day and I had to get up at six o'clock to be at the gates at six o'clock that next morning. Now I must have, which is unusual, I must have fallen into a deep sleep. I woke up and there's my sister standing up with her shoe and this awful noise and this awful language is coming through the next room, and they were going to break into our room. And I hadn't heard the conversation before, so of course it was kind of frightening and she is standing up with the heel of her shoe! So we took our bureau and moved it to the door. We were afraid to call the desk, because we didn't know what kind of a place this was. And she was trying to whisper to me about the language that had been going on. She was in one bed and I was in the other bed. So we sat there most of the night in agony. In the morning I went to the desk and I complained about what had happened and they said, "Oh, this was just some group that had been in." But when I went to the union office, they said that this was a group of miners. That there was one fellow that kept them from breaking down the door. So they knew the two of us were in there alone. That's why I was afraid to call the desk.

INTERVIEWER: Someone had let it out.

SULLIVAN: Yes, but that's the only occassion I can ever say we ever had any trouble in any hotel. Most of the time I was alone.

INTERVIEWER: And that was because of your union activity and not harrassment because you were a woman.

SULLIVAN: I don't know what it was all about because Alice said they were swearing and bawling. She was scared silly. And of course after I came to I was, too. So that somehow or another something happened that someone came up to them and told them to be quiet so there must have been somebody else in the hotel that heard them. But when I complained they apologized. But it was a dirty old hotel. But I don't think there was anything in that town any better. It was just a very bleak, dismal.... Mannchug had a cave which was right in the middle of the street. And this is one time I was awfully upset about John L. Lewis. I said he was so close to Roosevelt and he never done a single thing in the houses. Those houses were the most decrepit, bleak, dreary....there was nothing that could be cheerful about it. But that's all the hotels I stayed at, I never had a problem.

INTERVIEWER: And you did a fair amount of travelling.

SULLIVAN: Oh yes! Because if they needed a woman up in Brunswick, Maine, Lewiston, Maine, when they started getting elections, it was pretty hard to break in and they couldn't get anyone from the shops to be a teller for the NLBR elections. But for Lewiston, New Bedford, I used to go up and do that. But I wouldn't be away from home too long. Maybe three or four days. It wasn't that I had to stay there. It was just to be the teller where they couldn't get people. In Lewiston hardly anybody spoke English, it was all French. I was asked by the union to go to Du Pont plant in Pennsylvannia.

INTERVIEWER: But did they often use you then if it was a plant with a lot of women? That you might be....they might listen to you more?

SULLIVAN: In New Jersey I had a few things like that. But afterwards, girls around in their own area were coming up so that, this was mostly in the beginning, the drives and things that would get put into that sort of thing. But mostly I was in the whole western Massachusetts area.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any other women organizers in the textile workers at that time?

SULLIVAN: Yes. Elizabeth Nord was in and she was from Rhode Island. And Doris Markoney was from Fall River. But Doris again did mostly educational work. She didn't really do the actual organizational work. Those were the two, then there was one who was out in California, where I seldom, very seldom got to see her. And she did come from around our area. I got to know her afterwards but then she was out at the shops in California.

INTERVIEWER: Did you try to encourage other women to take more active leadership?

SULLIVAN: Oh sure, we were always trying to. Because I think more women should have taken more part and become a part. But by the time our women were getting really into the thing, they started to close our mills, especially after the war. See, the war years you were frozen in your job. Then '46 came and Taft-Hartley was enacted and then companies like the American Wool, which made Lawrence a ghost town because they made their money during the war and in the woolen mills and decided to close them and there were twenty-eight thousand people out of work, over night.

INTERVIEWER: As more women came into the plants during the war....but you couldn't organize them then. Your labor activities were pretty much at a stand still.

SULLIVAN: Oh no, we organized them in the war. American Thread was in 1943. Ludlow, East Hampton, Holyoke, Berkshire....all in the war years. MacIntosh....no one would go to MacIntosh. They owed others money.

INTERVIEWER: But it was just that you weren't negotiating bigger pay increases or things....

SULLIVAN: Well, we were able to negotiate the hours of work because the company had them on a seven day week, then take a day off in between and things like that. Of course they came under the War Labor Board, we could immediately change those things. And there were a lot of little things like that that companies could do to them, so that, you see, we got forty cents an hour, didn't become a federal minimum until 1942. And we had fifty cents in our contracts. Big deal. Look, it sounds terrible but it was much better than what we ever had.

INTERVIEWER: Sure, I mean it was a big deal.

SULLIVAN: And of course, then through the War Labor Board, we were able to negotiate when we got our first vacation with pay. We got holidays with pay, see these were all cost items and insurance. Now our insurance when we started, I think it was four dollars a day in the hospital, twelve dollars a week benefit. But this was so important to the workers.

INTERVIEWER: And unheard of.

SULLIVAN: And a five-hundred dollar death benefit. You know, when our mills closed here we had full Blue Cross-Blue Shield, paid for by the company.

INTERVIEWER: When did the plants actually close?

SULLIVAN: Start closing? Well, what happened, as I say, right after the war, '47, '48, when the woolen mills closed....and this sent us into a tail spin. Lawrence became a real ghost town. Then it started into big companies. First there was talk of moving them. American Thread was one of the first in Holyoke, that was back in '52, '53, they decided that they were going to move part of their plant to the South and they took the one division of finishing, for a period of up to about '56 when they closed everything. East Hampton and Holyoke and the Holyoke plant was where they had the finishing division. And that's still in operation in Willamater, Connecticut, where Betty Tiante worked. She worked at the American Thread there. That was the start of movement. In plant after plant that wasn't organized was going. And it did seem by '64 it had boomeranged. We had very, very little left, it was five-thousand thrown out up in the North. The woolen mills, Berkshire Woolen, Wyandotte Woolen, all closed up in that area. Don't think we have many woolen mills in the whole country left. I don't know how many, I would doubt that there's much more than four. See, of course, then you had these companies bringing in all the materials and finished goods from other countries.

INTERVIEWER: ....again, because I'm afraid we didn't pick it up on the....

SULLIVAN: Back to where the set ups were . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

SULLIVAN: In the textile they had made the divisions. Marion Bishop was the cotton director, Tony Engel was the woolen director, Bill Gordon was the dyers' federation, and Herb Payne was in the synthetics. Now when we met and there were agreements--contracts were expiring--on what the increases should be, what should be in a contract. And we would negotiate because they were all over the country, you know. You had to do your own negotiations. But you could not sign any contract until the director signed it. And they had to be up to par. Now there perhaps would be little things that were in a certain section that didn't hurt anything but even if that....they wanted to be sure. And that was one of the things that I think helped to build our unions because we were able to have contracts in comparison with the industries.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have any difficulty with the companies in terms of being a woman and negotiating....do you think that made a difference?

SULLIVAN: Well, there were a lot of difficulties with companies. I don't know if it was because I was a woman or not . . .

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get any special comments about, you know, being a woman, or . . .

SULLIVAN: I really don't think they ever said that to my face. I don't know what they said behind my back....but maybe thought I was a very stubborn person. But no, I couldn't say that I would know about it. There might have been a....but I was always accepted, they knew that I was.... Of course, you always notify a company, you have to do it under the laws within thirty and sixty days and I mean you had to be negotiating and notify the boards and so forth of how you're doing it for the first thirty days so that in the negotiations of contracts....now sometimes on grievances and arbitrations there'd be heated arguments, but they never to my face said anything about a woman.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any special training or did you just sort of learn by . . .

SULLIVAN: No, it was a, what do you call it, it was just by pure knowing what it was and what it meant. The school of hard knocks.

INTERVIEWER: You said that that was an elected position?

SULLIVAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: When did you decide to do that? Did you . . .

SULLIVAN: Well, I was still on the national payroll as far as that was concerned. You had to be elected to be on it. I mean, it still was on the national payroll.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have to run a campaign and . . .

SULLIVAN: No, it wasn't that bad. No, as a matter of fact, you got nominated and....in so many days, you had to nominate, you sent out the cards, the elections had to take place within thirty days and then you're elected by the body.

INTERVIEWER: Was there someone who ran against you in that election?

SULLIVAN: No, I never had anybody.

INTERVIEWER: No opponents.

SULLIVAN: No, I never had anybody run against me.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a group of supporters who nominated you that . . .

SULLIVAN: No, because people changed, you know. The officers changed. I mean, one year you had this group and another year you had a different group. But I never played favorites or had to do anything like that. I just kept it on the merits of trade unionists and the contracts and carrying out the contract facilities.

INTERVIEWER: What would a sort of typical day have been for you when you had the position?

SULLIVAN: Maybe twenty-four hours. (laughter) My brother used to tell me, "I don't think you get twenty-five cents an hour."

INTERVIEWER: You needed a good union.

SULLIVAN: You became dedicated. You really do. Even now I work. I couldn't sit within four walls.

INTERVIEWER: But when you were heading the council then, were you, I mean, would you start your day at six or seven or . . .?

SULLIVAN: Sometimes four, four-thirty. If they had trouble. It would depend on where you had to go and what was happening. But now and then maybe it would be eleven, twelve, before you got home. Specially when I had to come in from North Adams. Around here it wouldn't take that long. But when you were travelling....and I always came home. A little bit nutty on the subject, but I always came home. I don't know, well, my son was there....I never wanted to leave him alone but then even after he was at school, I used to....so it wasn't just him.

INTERVIEWER: You said at one point that you'd tried not to do too much travelling when your son was small but you would have done more for the national . . .?

SULLIVAN: If I was needed. If I was needed. There was always someone who would take care of him. But I never wanted to make it a point that I was going to leave him, that he was going to be in someone's care. I always felt, at least, he needed one parent to take care of him, you know.

INTERVIEWER: But had you not had a small child, you would have probably done even more . . .

SULLIVAN: Probably. Would have been freer in doing a good bit....that was my first thought.

INTERVIEWER: Then how long were you....did you hold that position?

SULLIVAN: Up until 1967. We went down mill after mill....closed. And we had exactly about 225 people left. From ten-thousand. Then I became ill, got a ruptured esophagus.

INTERVIEWER: So you essentially just closed the . . .?

SULLIVAN: That's a horrible thing to go through. You had girls who had worked all their lives in these plants. Usually the oldest of the family who had stayed with the mother and father, the mother and father had passed on, then they are maybe fifty-nine

SULLIVAN: or fifty-eight, not able to collect social security. Some thirty years in a plant. What do you do? About the only jobs they could get, there was very little in jobs that they could do, go to....was hospital work. Cleaning, sweepings. These were about the only jobs that they could get to tide them over at least until they got to sixty-two. And of course they got to sixty-two, they have to go on a low, a much lower rate of social security. But there were hundreds of plants and if you don't think that takes something out of you....

INTERVIEWER: At the peak of your organizing and the peak of the union activity here, how many of the workers in the textile plants would you say were organized?

SULLIVAN: Well, we had ten-thousand.

INTERVIEWER: Ten-thousand. Is that about . . .?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, that was really....we had one plant in Indian Orchard that we were never able to organize. It was not a very big plant but it was a headache. The name of it was Alamac, it's no longer in existence. They used to call and wanted to organize this company, "come, we need you" and all this and that and as soon as we would start, the company would start entertaining them and....and it was a plant that people never stayed long on the job, came and went.

INTERVIEWER: Large turn-over.

SULLIVAN: Never stabilized and so forth. And that we could not move. Some very bad days with that plant. But outside of that, that was the most stubborn of anything around here.

INTERVIEWER: But the majority of the workers in textile plants were organized here?

SULLIVAN: Oh yeah, we had most all of the plants here organized, the textile industry.

INTERVIEWER: And then did you ever think in that period of running for, say, national office in the union or . . .?

SULLIVAN: No, I ran for Congress.

INTERVIEWER: When did you have time to do that?

SULLIVAN: Well, it was like this. No, I never had no ambition to go higher in the national union. Anyway, they were a little bit.... they weren't too set on girls getting on the national board either....we were going to meet with the representative from the first district, on minimum wages. And we had an appointment with the congressman who lived in Greenfield and about ten of us

SULLIVAN: went up to meet with him and he never showed up. It happened I was the only one in the district that lived in the district and Chakin, he was president of the ILG, he says, "You're it." I said, "Why....what do you mean, 'I'm it'?" He said, "You're running." So I laughed it off and then he got Foster Furkilo, he was former governor and had a newspaper here and between the two of them they got this thing going. And this guy was a district attorney; he was a lawyer, but he'd been in Congress a long time and he'd never answered to anybody. And so in the primaries we had opposition from the Democratic party. And I won. I don't know how! But I won. He was a lawyer, too. I had at one time....Margaret Sanger came into Holyoke to speak at a church, and she was scheduled to speak in the Congregational church on family planning. I knew nothing about it. And I'm at the office, it's about six o'clock and I get a call from Civil Liberties. And they said, "We have an awful situation." Margaret Sanger was scheduled to speak in the church. I didn't know who Margaret Sanger was. You know, I heard the name in passing, but I'd never paid that much attention to it. She's been turned down by the Board of the Church. They had then gone all over, they had tried to get any hall, and they finally had to tell her that they couldn't rent it. This is the day that she is to speak. And then she was turned down by the police for getting a permit to speak on a street corner. So Val Burati was writing our Textile Labor and the fellow knew him and he wanted to talk to Val. I said, "Val is in New York and I can't tell you where you can reach him." So he started to tell me the story. I said, "We got a hall, we hold meetings, we can fit people in, you want to use it?" He said, "Are you kidding?" I said, "No, I mean it." I said, "You know, these are things that we're up against in the South, in trying to get places to hold meetings for unions and so forth. Look, it's yours if you want it." By seven o'clock that place was packed, jammed. Now, the Catholic church was very upset. And they started to condemn me, you know, because the paper came out and said that we let her have....I let her have the place. Of course, they made sure it was me that had said it.

INTERVIEWER: And her whole main issue was family planning.

SULLIVAN: Family planning. Family planning. Well, and the people that came to the meeting didn't need to know about family planning. They were all the ones who were interested in family planning for poor people. First he called me back, he said, "You may have repurcussions." I said, "I get repurcussions in everything I do." Anyway, we did it. So after the primaries, Hessleton challenged me to a debate. I sat with this professor from Smith College who went over things all day long, wouldn't let me talk to anybody else, and I'm going up and I'm saying, "You're crazy. Get out of this car, go home where you belong." And suddenly, all of a sudden, I got mad and I said, "You're no better that I am. I mean, I'm doing the best I can." It was a two hour debate on radio.

INTERVIEWER: This is the Republican who was going to run against you?

SULLIVAN: Well, he was a Republican and in office for some years.

INTERVIEWER: This was an incumbent.

SULLIVAN: Yes, and what we talked about was getting his goat, when I talked about food on the table and milk for the kids and this sort of thing, he was very upset, went into a frazzle. The next morning the word went through the diocese that I was for birth control and I was to be cut completely off. But no Democrat has ever won in this district yet. Has never been a Democrat in it as yet. And it's made up out of sixty-eight little bits of towns that are real Yankee....they didn't need the Catholic church....we knew we weren't going to win anyway. We got swamped. But we made the fight.

INTERVIEWER: When was that?

SULLIVAN: 1950.

INTERVIEWER: 1950. And in fact it was Sol Chakin who had originally kind of....

SULLIVAN: Yes, Sol Chakin was the guy that....you know, Sol, he really was the one who done the damage and Foster went right along with him. And they had this paper and every week the papers came out, you know, "you're nuts, you're really nuts. I'm not going to get into this." And my brother Tom didn't like the idea, and he said, "You know you can't win in that district," and I said, "I tell them that. You tell them that." You couldn't. You couldn't. And then there was a lot of double talk and....

INTERVIEWER: But it was a good fight.

SULLIVAN: It was a lot of double-crossing of the head of the IUE, very close to the Congressman in the Pittsfield area. And we had one organizer, Callahan, very Catholic, never had a child in his life, still hasn't to this day. And you know, to this day, I still get hit with that I was for birth control.

INTERVIEWER: Do you want to turn it off?

SULLIVAN: Well, I think we don't want that on.

INTERVIEWER: Well, the next question I was going to ask you was about women's issues. And if there were particular issues that . . .

SULLIVAN: Legalized abortion I was for. Because I saw too much. And I can't understand what's happening, I mean, the Catholic Church right now is putting on the worst campaign against Senator Kennedy. Now, they never got a single thing in this state from Senator Brooks, no legislation of any sort. Never fights for

SULLIVAN: legislation for workers because the law or something....

INTERVIEWER: Yes, once it's . . .

SULLIVAN: And yet they're all ready to condemn Kennedy and trying to kill him.

INTERVIEWER: Over the abortion issue.

SULLIVAN: We had nomination papers and I was amazed. And I understand that they had postal cards in all the churches. They got one doctor, Dr. Driscoll, to speak and I can't understand why. Because aren't they all under law to be protected? Isn't a woman got right to say what she should do with her own body or not? If she can afford it? If she wants children? Good heavens, we're talking about all these others who bring them in and don't take care of them, because they are receiving money....just means more money to them on welfare. This, these are the things that bother me tremendously today. But nobody wants to take the issue up.

INTERVIEWER: And the Church is just immovable.

SULLIVAN: South Boston and the Church. I don't know. This is a new day. It's a bad day. But this is the Supreme Court's ruling, Kennedy hasn't gone against it. He upholds what is in the law. You can make an issue and bat it all around. You can make it so bad and this is what they're doing right now.

INTERVIEWER: Were there other particular women's issues that came up in your organizing, your negotiating, that you were very strong for? Like, we were talking about child care and . . .

SULLIVAN: Well, we pioneered in the....tuberculosis X-ray, when everybody was scared silly to go get a tuberculosis X-ray or find out if anything was wrong. We had a mass group of two-hundred that took six months to sign up. With the help of Dr. Cox, who was one of the best doctors going and because our workers were so fearful that the company would know if they had anything. And we had to assure them that it would be confidential between the doctor and themselves. And you know from the first group, we had nine findings out of two-hundred. Then we got into it. It grew stronger, brought all the people in, the mobile units came and within the hald hour, you did five-hundred and the shops were all done in a short period.

INTERVIEWER: This was testing for . . .

SULLIVAN: Tuberculosis. Because people in the Depression, they hadn't been eating right. God knows how some of them ate. And they were run down and they didn't have proper nourishment. Also the worry of the times.

INTERVIEWER: And then the conditions in the plant . . .

SULLIVAN: The conditions in the plants were terrible. Well, cancer, I think that was one of the first ones....we had movies for the women....breast cancer especially, and always got good attendance to these things. A doctor was always there. They liked them. It was educational....told you what to do. But, well, of course the cancer clinics are keeping it up, but not the tuberculosis ones.

INTERVIEWER: The cancer ones are, I think, much wider right now....

SULLIVAN: Well, the cancer ones, the doctors took hold of that after a while. You know, the doctors never helped you too much. Dr. Cox, if he hadn't helped me to get people signed up, I never would have done it. Because they were scared. But then he took care of them. I never knew who they were, but he took care of them. So that they didn't have to stay out of work. He had them go on the right diets, they'd get their rest. Every month he'd send them to the Westfield State Hospital for X-rays, constantly watched them until they were cured. Because none of them could have afforded to stay out of work.

INTERVIEWER: And then the companies would have to . . .

SULLIVAN: No, the companies never knew anything about this.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember much about the woman's suffrage movement?

SULLIVAN: No, I don't think so....well, my mother talked about it and when women's voting rights....she was pretty active in it but I think at my age, that was the least of my troubles.

INTERVIEWER: But your mother was . . .?

SULLIVAN: Yes, my mother was very active in women's votes. She worked the polls on election days, contacted voters before elections.

INTERVIEWER: Were you ever involved in women's Trade Union Leagues? Were they ever helpful to you?

SULLIVAN: No, for a very definite reason. Around here it was the Communist Party that were the leaders. The organizer of UE [United Electrical Workers], he left here to go to Chicago to become the Secretary of the Communist Party and his wife was the most active person around here in the....that movement. And I knew it. And I always kept out of it.

INTERVIEWER: Stayed away from it since 1945. You said that you were also active then and in the Democratic State committees....

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, always been on that. On the Democratic committee, state, I'm on the Holyoke Democratic Committee now. I just don't want to get involved too much in anything but we were very involved in 1948. I've been to most of the national conventions.

INTERVIEWER: When did you start to be really active in the Democratic Party? Was that in the thirties also or . . .?

SULLIVAN: No, I think that was in the forties when CIO had political action committee, after Taft-Hartley was enacted. Then we got very, very active in the CIO council in Boston. Plus we had referendums that were going to hurt the unions in the area and state and that's the year that Truman was elected, when everybody said he wouldn't be elected. But we....Bill Belanger was the president of the CIO, was also head of Textile Union, was New England director. And we worked tirelessly in registration. We covered every post for election day. And since then I've been more or less active in all of the elections, and of course now I'm the COPE [Committee on Political Action] director.

INTERVIEWER: But that very much got started from your position in the union and....

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, oh yes. Of course, I think Al Barkan was one of our first political action committee. Al comes from my union and I think it was his work that made us all mindful of what we had to do. What intrigued me most with Al was that he used to tell us about, years ago....let me think of the man's name that controlled New Jersey and it took years to break that. Haigs....he was a real big shot in New Jersey, controlled the Democratic Party for years.

INTERVIEWER: For years and years.

SULLIVAN: Yes, this was one of things that Al used to get real upset about. But our union was very political. Politically minded. We got into, well, I don't know how many times we'd walk those streets in Washington and Boston on legislation.

INTERVIEWER: And again, were you often times the only woman in, say, a group of....

SULLIVAN: I think in political, always. Women were....there were a lot who were active and took part in that. You see a lot of them now. Much more so than before. Last time at the conference, I'd say it was a fifty-fifty proposition we had. There were as many women as there were men.

INTERVIEWER: But that must have always also just taken an enormous amount of your time.

SULLIVAN: But I loved it. I really do. It's a good fight.

INTERVIEWER: And that's also....you felt really accepted by those men and . . .

SULLIVAN: Yes, I think so.

INTERVIEWER: You're obviously very active here in the union and held a very responsible position with people supporting you for Congress and you were in fact asked to take the position by the president of the union originally. Where was the line drawn for not becoming a national officer in the union?

SULLIVAN: I never really thought about that.

INTERVIEWER: Just didn't think about it?

SULLIVAN: Never even gave it a thought. I wasn't that ambitious. I think a lot of people thought in terms, you know, of, every time you went to conventions, somebody would come up....that never bothered me. As long as we had the right people at the top, that was all that bothered me. I mean, working for the people I thought....I don't know if you knew Bill Pollock. Did you know Bill?

INTERVIEWER: No, just the name.

SULLIVAN: I had no use for Bill Pollock. Never. Never trusted him, never liked him. And well, I mean, I could not go along with him. But Rieve was a good president, John Chupka was a good person, Bill DuChessi. All those. Pollock was the last before Steten. I like Saul Steten. But Pollock . . .

INTERVIEWER: Were there any woman who ever ran for national office or that you worked with . . .

SULLIVAN: On the board? The only ones who ever got on the board were for Trustees. They put one woman on. I mean, they had nothing to do with policy, they were supposed to go in and check the books. Elizabeth Nord was on that. Norry Vaz was on that. But they increased the amount, we only had three trustees. Trustees do not take part in policy making. But I was offered to be a trustee. But I didn't want it. That was just time-consuming with nothing to it. I couldn't stand that. No.

INTERVIEWER: But you didn't see it as particularly important that women hold those positions, not trustee but the national board . . .

SULLIVAN: Well, I suppose if I ever really thought deeply into it, that I would say, a woman <u>should</u> be. We had lots of women in the industry. But it's like the ILG, how many women did they ever have on their board? And the only one I ever knew that was on the board was Bess Hillman, when Hillman died....but there was Bellanca who was a very brilliant woman who was on the Amalgamated [Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America], August Bellanca and his wife [Dorothy]. She was a very brilliant woman, so that the Amalgamated had two women on their board.

SULLIVAN: And then I think, I thought in terms of fighting. I always wanted to fight the things in the contract, the things that we could put in the contract that were right and the ones that were right whether you were a man or a woman. I had no objection. If a man is capable of doing a job but if he's someone that....I don't say I could . . .

INTERVIEWER: But had you or some other woman actively sought position . . .

SULLIVAN: No, I never sought one.

INTERVIEWER: But do you think that you might have been able to . . .

SULLIVAN: I have no idea. I have no idea. Because I was not a politician and going into that sort of thing.

INTERVIEWER: Because it's still true today. There are very few women in the national.

SULLIVAN: It's a rough job. And it's a tough job. It's no . . .

INTERVIEWER: No tougher that being a Congresswoman.

SULLIVAN: I didn't make that. They seemed to do pretty good. We don't have enough of them. I always thought a lot of the one from Detroit [Martha Griffiths]. She resigned last year. She was just on TV the other night, too. She was outstanding, was all out like the women in the other groups.

INTERVIEWER: Have you ever belonged to any, you know, groups that were particularly women's groups like . . .

SULLIVAN: Yes, I once joined the Business and Professional Women and went to two meetings. And that was the end of me. That was the real end of me. There were more fights over who was going to do what and who was going to....boy, this is a waste of time and energy. Business and Professional Women were not for me! They also don't like unions.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any other social groups that you belonged to?

SULLIVAN: I was on the board of the YWCA for years, and the Community Chest, and Red Cross.

INTERVIEWER: Do you want stop for . . .?

SULLIVAN: No, I was going to look for a hanky. I never, never had time for social activities. Look, when you get into this life, you just don't have time for much social life outside.

INTERVIEWER: But in terms of your positions in the union, you felt that you were always treated equally with the men. And had the same power and . . .

SULLIVAN: I always had the same power on any other committee.

INTERVIEWER: Although there were....weren't there some jobs in the textile industry that were predominantly male, that paid more money than some of the predominantly female jobs?

SULLIVAN: Only in the shops. I would say in the dye shop were men. In the weave shops, in the cotton shops, just as many women worked on the same jobs as men.

INTERVIEWER: So there weren't any particular jobs that you saw where women were treated unequally, that you thought . . .

SULLIVAN: Well, of course that was one of the first things we always had in the contracts. It was equal pay for equal work. No matter who went on the job.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever try to get women in the dye shops? When was that?

SULLIVAN: During the war. They did. There's a printers' union, in the print shop where they print the materials. And this is a very closed shop, I don't know if you've ever heard of it. They were not part of our union but an independent union. Some plants only had six to seven members. There are very few of them left, I understand, because machines have come in to do machine printing. I think they had the best pay. They had a guaranteed pay for year to year. I think they almost had to be related. Well, we never wanted to get our unions into that sort of nonsense. And of late, I guess they have almost died out. But no woman ever came into that. But, see we were in an industry where maybe it wasn't quite as bad as like a building trade....a girl going up the ladder and doing that sort of thing. Of course, there was then the discrimination ruling.

INTERVIEWER: You were on that?

SULLIVAN: I was on the Massachusetts Discrimination Board, for seven years, until three years ago. [1970]

INTERVIEWER: This was the Massachusetts Commission against Discrimination?

SULLIVAN: I see the girls come in that wanted to go on, you know, jobs that they felt that they could do.

INTERVIEWER: In '67, when you said that the mills pretty much....the council then dissolved. What was your next job then?

SULLIVAN: I left Textile. And then I went to the Commission against Discrimination.

INTERVIEWER: That was a full time job?

SULLIVAN: Sure was.

INTERVIEWER: So you were officially . . .

SULLIVAN: It was the same district.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. So you were officially not a union . . .

SULLIVAN: No. Not a union representative. Oh, I was still secretary to the council. Paid up dues all the way through.

INTERVIEWER: You were secretary to the AFL-CIO Council?

SULLIVAN: I'm still a union member of the textile, too, paid up for life.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, but you were secretary of the AFL-CIO Council.

SULLIVAN: Right.

INTERVIEWER: And how long have you had that position?

SULLIVAN: Since the beginning when it was....'41.

INTERVIEWER: So you've always been the secretary. That's not a paying position?

SULLIVAN: No.

INTERVIEWER: So then, were you essentially doing an investigation and . . .

SULLIVAN: Oh yes. Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: And primarily, well both women and race . . .

SULLIVAN: Color, creed, age. This is one thing a lot of people shouldn't forget. This law protects between forty and sixty-five on the job. And that's very important. Because now when a man reaches forty-five or a little older, they try to ease him out. In many cases . . .

INTERVIEWER: Well, you must have seen that, too, with the women from the textile plants that you were talking about who no longer had jobs, and then couldn't get jobs because of their age.

SULLIVAN: Well, of course, if the place closed down, there was nothing you could do about it in that way. But where you had plants that were bought out, and where they then tried to discriminate when they went to the jobs, well, this happened to a lot of men, too. Especially if they were in management. Like a boss. No union to protect him. And, well, they get to be fifty-nine, the company would say....oh, and they used to make the silliest statements. They put more on demands on the job. Sometimes for the girls, too. There were loads of kids who were suffering from that.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work in the AFL-CIO with Bill Pollard on any of those kinds of issues? Pollard, who heads the AFL-CIO Rights Division?

SULLIVAN: No, I never worked with him. I worked with the State and Jack Albano was the commissioner, and Dave Baures was the other commissioner. I worked under three commissioners, who were very bright. There was a woman commissioner, well, she's gone right now.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, she's down in Washington now . . .

SULLIVAN: I heard in a big job . . .

INTERVIEWER: Yes, she has a job with HUD.

SULLIVAN: In the cabinet. She's supposed to be a cabinet representative of some sort.

INTERVIEWER: It's not quite that high but it's, it's a pretty responsible.... she's an assistant Secretary or something like that at HUD.

SULLIVAN: I think she's a judge or . . .

INTERVIEWER: Something like that.

SULLIVAN: Her husband was head in Washington of social security. But, well, she was not the right person, wouldn't even listen. You know, we had public hearings....she hated to come to Western Massachusetts. Now why would you take a Commission job like that, head of the Commission, knowing that you got a whole state to take care of and not want to go outside of Boston? We had two public hearings and a third one scheduled. Her husband said she was grounded. She couldn't come out in the winter time.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have complaints against unions?

SULLIVAN: Yes, there were a couple. Well, as a matter of fact, we had a couple of complaints on equal pay for equal work where the companies....it was rubber workers and rubber unions....couldn't get the company to straighten out. Those are the kinds of things. We had workers put in agreements and we took care of them. We never got the complaint from the union....the worker always had to do it. You know, it's only just before I left textile [1966], that I organized a plant in Springfield. Mostly the people came from Italy. He was owner of the plant and he used to bring these different people over who knew the trade, weaving. He paid the women thirty-five cents an hour less than the men for doing the same jobs. You know, I had to strike that place to get equal pay for equal work? This was 1966-1967.

INTERVIEWER: But you did strike on that issue?

SULLIVAN: Oh, we striked all right.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any other particular examples like that that you can think of where . . .

SULLIVAN: There's maybe millions of them.

INTERVIEWER: Where it was particularly . . .

SULLIVAN: This is long time history now.

INTERVIEWER: It's fascinating though. But where there was a particular, like an equal pay issue for women or . . .

SULLIVAN: Oh, this was on discrimination. We had a lot of that equal pay for men though. For men. Well, men do the same job and then they'd still try to cheat them on their pay. Of course, if he was only forty-five, you could always get complaints on that. We had them return to work with their full pay. And these companies would send employers, lawyers from Texas, Timbuctu, it was always one thing that griped me because.... they'd spend any amount of money to defeat the workers.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, that's true. So you worked with the Commission for about seven years and then you left there, what, four years ago you said? '72?

SULLIVAN: '72. End of '72.

INTERVIEWER: Did you officially retire then?

SULLIVAN: Oh yes, '70 is when I....had to go in....and say....I mean, my heart wasn't in it. When I first went out I didn't think I would do anything, you know, I'd like. And then when I got into it, well, I just worked tirelessly at it. Well, I began to love it. And each day was a different challenge.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever consider going to a staff position at the AFL-CIO?

SULLIVAN: No, I never even thought of going....I was really doing almost the same kind of work, in the same area. And it needed to be built up here [Commission Against Discrimination]. It was going way down, it was bad. Look, I worked all my life and I'm not going to stop working. No, and then it became a real challenge. But now the closing down of it [the office] meant that it's going to take them time to get back up. But they're going in, they're still fighting the Westinghouse case on pension. There's just a back log. New commissioner that's here, I haven't met him, he's that way....going into every case and getting them out in the open. Which is true with Jack, whenever he had a case, you called him and the next day you called him he set up a hearing. And that was cleaned up there. Of course, I had Jack to work with, I had Dave Baures to work with. Dave was an attorney but everybody was entitled to a hearing.

INTERVIEWER: Did he come from the union?

SULLIVAN: No, he was....Dave came from a poor family and was with civil liberties....so he's always worked with civil liberties and so forth. And he was very good. Well, when we'd have our conferences at four o'clock when the courts closed and everything, that would be it.

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you a few, kind of general questions about what you consider the most exciting parts of your life. If you could relive any part of it, what do you think it would be?

SULLIVAN: I think the organizing. Being able to put people who never had nothing and to have the right to bargain, to talk, to feel free, and that they had guaranteed wage, hours, and conditions. And that was the most highlight of anything you can get. Because we had nothing.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anything in particular, any book you read or movie or any person that you consider dramatically affected your life and that your whole trade union history . . .

SULLIVAN: I think just my father and mother more than anything. No book ever really....I think we had it from them and as kids. I feel it was more....see your meal time was a discussion.... political, or of times of the day. You know, I wish the kids today would do it.

INTERVIEWER: They'd don't do it as much. Do your grandchildren do it?

SULLIVAN: No, they don't. As a matter of fact, they don't sit long enough to even discuss anything.

INTERVIEWER: They're up and out.

SULLIVAN: Up and out. Everyone is on the move. It's such a different day.

INTERVIEWER: What are your feelings about the Equal Rights Amendment? Is that something you've supported?

SULLIVAN: I do not support it in the way it's wrote up. Well, I think we always made sure that we had equal rights for women in our contracts and they treated everybody alike. I can't see saying to a man that you can pick up a thousand pounds, and you can't lift sixty-five. I think that he should be treated the same way, not told they need a younger person to do the job.

INTERVIEWER: So it should be extended. Protective legislation should be extended to both men and women.

SULLIVAN: To both men and women. If it's going to be protective legislation, you know, I haven't gone too much into it or studied too much into it, but I don't like what I hear, it doesn't sound right. It doesn't hit. Because I don't think any of them that talk about it even work for a living. I like Bella Abzug better than I like any of them. And I think she's more honest with them and it's not put on. She says a neighborhood was a neighborhood, you talked to the people.

INTERVIEWER: She's a street fighter.

SULLIVAN: That's right. And I think she's more sincere in what she does.

INTERVIEWER: Have you been involved with the Coalition of Labor Union Women at all? Is that active out here?

SULLIVAN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Just not much of that.

SULLIVAN: It was active but it wasn't the kind we wanted to mix into.

INTERVIEWER: They had a lot of trouble on the whole local level.

SULLIVAN: They had a lot of trouble here. This town....this woman was a fairly beautiful woman, really a stunning girl, the most stunning I've ever seen. But she was a joiner. She joined every group that she could get into.

INTERVIEWER: She didn't bring the labor union women together?

SULLIVAN: Oh, she would try.

INTERVIEWER: But it didn't work.

SULLIVAN: No, it didn't work.

INTERVIEWER: But do you think that CLUW is generally a good idea? Do you think that organized labor responds to women's needs? Sufficiently or . . .?

SULLIVAN: There may be cases where they are not on the par with what they should be, but I think it's up to the women to take hold. If they have a union contract they go and accept these contracts, you know, that's....it has to be accepted before you can sign it. And if there aren't the provisions in it to take care of....I blame them for not going to meetings on conditions in their contracts.

INTERVIEWER: They should be more active.

SULLIVAN: That's right. I mean, look, it's yours, it's going to be your job and your livelihood. And so many of the women who work have to work for a living. It's not just all hunkydory for them, you know. I really think that they are to blame for not taking more interest. It's there. They know and they could force the union to put the provisions in.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any ideas on why the women in the textile plants organized, yet secretaries in insurance companies, they just have an awful time trying to organize?

SULLIVAN: You know something, I was on a committee for women in industry for the State. I was appointed by Peabody for women in industry. Mary Fonajer was the chairman of that. That committee, every time I went in, I came home sick. And this friend used to ride down with me. The only thing she went on that committee for, was to try to wipe out overtime for secretaries. She wanted provisions made that when she needed a secretary to work till eight o'clock that night, that secretary should have to stay late. And this is the substance of what you got in that committee.

INTERVIEWER: This was a state committee on women in . . .

SULLIVAN: This was a state committee on women in industry. I think I went to about four, and it was the same thing over and over. And I said, I'm not going to be any part of this. They were willing to wipe out all kinds of things that would have made.... the hours....they were trying to do it more with unemployment. You're going to have to take whatever shifts available, whatever jobs available, regardless of pay, even dishwashing or something. And if you can't work second shift, you're going to have to or you can't get unemployment. These are all things they wanted to wipe out.

INTERVIEWER: But women secretaries have not organized.

SULLIVAN: Women secretaries, I could kick them. They think they're above the average person. And they're not. They're not. It's a white collar group. They need, and if anybody needs it, they need it.

INTERVIEWER: They do.

SULLIVAN: This thing in Washington that . . .

INTERVIEWER: Which, the . . .?

SULLIVAN: What's his name?

INTERVIEWER: Hayes.

SULLIVAN: Hayes.

INTERVIEWER: So you think it's mostly that kind of, that they've been told, or think they're above....

SULLIVAN: Well, I used to have a friend....I used to ride with Fran and she talked Mass. Mutual, Mass. Mutual, Mass. Mutual. A very good looking, nice girl married to the job because she was an attorney. And that's the only thing she could do, fight for her company to get these lousy rotten things out. That was the only thing in her mind.

INTERVIEWER: She wasn't working for things for the women.

SULLIVAN: No. By no means.

INTERVIEWER: Were you appointed to any other committee like that for women's affairs?

SULLIVAN: (laughter) Oh, I can't remember them all. That was one I didn't go to too often. That wasn't for me.

INTERVIEWER: When was that? Well, it was when Peabody was governor so it was....when was that, early sixties?

SULLIVAN: When was Peabody governor? He's made good changes in unemployment and the things that he wanted, they're trying to do away. The big insurance companies really wanted to do the job on the people.

INTERVIEWER: They've been trying, well, half-heartedly to organize for years. Well, have you followed Nine to Five at all? Does that, is that something that's around here?

SULLIVAN: Never heard of it.

INTERVIEWER: It's a very active group in Boston. Women . . .

SULLIVAN: I think Boston, you would maybe have a lot more in that line, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Not much. It's only since this Nine to Five group, they're very new and they now have official recognition, I forget which local they come under*. But they're actually beginning to get women clerical workers organized.

SULLIVAN: Oh, they need it so badly.

INTERVIEWER: But I didn't know if they were known out in this part of the state or not.

SULLIVAN: I haven't heard of them. I haven't seen anything.

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*Local 925, Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO.

INTERVIEWER: I'll send you some materials on them.

SULLIVAN: Good. Because I haven't heard a single thing on it.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, I'll send you some materials.

SULLIVAN: Because some of them work for peanuts.

INTERVIEWER: And they . . .

SULLIVAN: They bring a new kid in and start him off on more money than they're paying the girl that's been there for years, who's very capable of doing the job, too.

INTERVIEWER: What would you say was the most frustrating part of your work with the union over the years?

SULLIVAN: Oh, when you hit a strike. That's a hard shift. Frustrating, it's most frustrating. When you could get the people back and how you could get them back, what they went through during that time....it's never easy and it's the only weapon that they [unions] have and I had. In Ludlow we had two six-months in a three year time. This one that I told you about, well, it took so long, we had a strike to get women's pay. This is less than ten years ago. And they were getting thirty-five cents an hour less. And they were doing more in production than anyone now. Running the same looms, same job, same.... but strikes are always, always a bit of heartbreak, when you have to call it, when you get to a point where's there's no return. And you get stubborn, they get stubborn....As a matter of fact, I think it's the only way we made gains, with the exception of what we were able to do, to get in the NLRB. In the....under the war labor board, not the NLRB, because the National Labor Relations Board right now is a stalling tactic.

INTERVIEWER: What was the most satisfying part of your work, do you think?

SULLIVAN: You know, one day it could be down, then you got somebody back on their job, pay set, and the thing was going to work out all right. And I think always that would be....no matter how down you got, when you got a lift, it made you go really high.

INTERVIEWER: Were there ever times when you just felt it wasn't worth it? All the hours and all the . . .

SULLIVAN: I don't think I ever got that discouraged. Because if you let yourself get that discouraged, then you wouldn't go back to it, you know. You had to keep your spirit up, you had to keep going. I don't think I ever let myself get that discouraged to that extent.

INTERVIEWER: If you could be sixteen years old again, is there some way, do you think, that you would relive your life?

SULLIVAN: No.

INTERVIEWER: Would you still be involved with the unions?

SULLIVAN: I think I still would like to....the way I feel now, the way I've always felt, I think I would be involved. Maybe at times I'd like to be able to make more money but that was never, that never worried me in that sense.

INTERVIEWER: Betty Tianti said not long ago to me, she said, "We'd all like to have a little more money, it'd be nice." But . . .

SULLIVAN: It never bothered me to that extent. Of course there were days you went without money, long days, but money was never that important to me.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else in terms of your role as a woman and very active in the trade union movement that you think was particularly important or that particularly meant a lot to you?

SULLIVAN: Well, I think every day was important to me, if you could do the things that you set out to do. Each day would be different and then if you came home that you could feel that you accomplished what you set out to do, I think you felt good.

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