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

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

LUCILLE THORNBURGH

Textile Workers' Union of America

by

June Rostan

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

VITAE

LUCILLE THORNBURGH

Lucille Thornburgh was born on September 8, 1909, in Jefferson County, Tennessee. She was raised in a small rural town with virtually no knowledge of the labor movement until she began working at the Cherokee Spinning Company after graduation from high school.

In 1934 Thornburgh assisted the United Textile Workers in their effort to organize the Cherokee Spinning Company. Once organized, the UTW struck against Cherokee as part of the national textile workers strike. The union at Cherokee lost and Thornburgh was blacklisted.

She then worked for the Tennessee Valley Authority as a typist,where she belonged to the American Federation of Government Employees [AFGE] and served as that union's delegate to the Central Labor Council. During this period in her career, Thornburgh was a volunteer organizer for a number of different unions in the Tennessee area.

During World War II, Thornburgh served as the National Representative of the Labor League for Human Rights, which was the relief arm of the American Federation of Labor. After working as the national representative for four years, Thornburgh was awarded a scholarship by the AF of L to study at the Ruskin Labor College in England for one year. She calls this experience one of the highlights of her life.

Upon returning to the United States, Thornburgh became associate editor of the East Tennessee Labor News. She worked as associate editor and then editor of the ETLN until her retirement.

Thornburgh is currently active with the National Council of Senior Citizens, and serves as director of their Senior-Aides Program for Knoxville, Tennessee.

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INTERVIEWER: Where were you born, Lucille?

THORNBURGH: In Jefferson County, in a little section. It was not even a village or a town, but a little section of Jefferson County called Rolling Hills, two miles east of Strawberry Plains.

INTERVIEWER: And what day and what year were you born?

THORNBURGH: I was born September 18, 1909.

INTERVIEWER: Were your grandparents from this part of the country?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. They all lived in Jefferson County.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember them?

THORNBURGH: I remember my grandmother on my mother's side and my grandfather on my father's side, but I don't remember my grandmother Thornburgh or my grandfather Swaggerty.

INTERVIEWER: What did your grandparents do? Were they farmers?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes, they were farmers. But my father wasn't. He owned a little general store there at Rolling Hills. It was the only store around.

INTERVIEWER: And as long as you can remember, he ran a store?

THORNBURGH: He ran the store up there as long as we lived there. And he was also very politically minded.

INTERVIEWER: Was he Democrat or Republican?

THORNBURGH: Oh, he was a Republican. Jefferson County was then and still is today, a Republican County. He was the Justice of the Peace for thirty-five years up there. The only thing that I can remember of any real importance that he did, he was always performing marriage ceremonies. He would perform them anywhere. You know, people would come to the store. They would come to our house. He even married one couple who were eloping while they were running down the railroad tracks. He never cared. He never asked them any questions. He had a lot of shotgun marriages. You know what those are?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

THORNBURGH: He performed those. He didn't care. He never charged a penny for any of them.

INTERVIEWER: He never charged anybody?

THORNBURGH: No, he never charged at all. That's why he did so much of the marriage business. He didn't charge anybody. So he did that for thirty-five years.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember anything outstanding about your grandparents?

THORNBURGH: No, not particularly, because they seemed to me to be so old. I remember my grandfather Thornburgh, he hickory-smoked hams. And every year he brought us ham and he also brought us honey. This jar, right here, was his honey jar. He brought that jar full of honey to us every year.

INTERVIEWER: He kept hives of bees?

THORNBURGH: He kept hives of bees, and smoked hams. He made his living off his bees, hams, and the hard work of farming, plowing, and all that.

INTERVIEWER: Did he grow tobacco?

THORNBURGH: No, he grew truck crops, but actually, I don't think he sold anything out of the garden. He just raised what the family would eat. Then he made his money on his hogs and bees.

INTERVIEWER: And your grandmother Swaggerty you said you knew, do you remember anything about her?

THORNBURGH: I don't remember anything about her except she used to quilt all the time--just one right after the other.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have some of those quilts?

THORNBURGH: I did have, but I don't now. Most of them are worn out. She pieced quilts all of the time.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother and father come from big families?

THORNBURGH: My mother did. She was one of nine children. But in my father's family, there was only four.

INTERVIEWER: So on your mother's side, you had a lot of cousins.

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How many children were in your family?

THORNBURGH: Five girls and one boy.

INTERVIEWER: Are you the youngest?

THORNBURGH: No, I have two sisters older than I am, and my brother was older than I am, and then there was me and two younger sisters.

INTERVIEWER: So you were in the middle. You were smack-dab in the middle.

THORNBURGH: Right. I was. And it was hard, too, when my two older sisters got a little older they wanted to go out with boys, they didn't want me to go with them. And my two younger sisters were still playing with dolls and they didn't want to play with me. So, I was really in the middle.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that helped you develop a lot of independence?

THORNBURGH: I think it did because I had to. I had to go out and make my own friends because they were playing together and courting together and they didn't want me around.

INTERVIEWER: What did your mother do? She kept house?

THORNBURGH: Just kept house, that's all.

INTERVIEWER: Did you help her around the house much?

THORNBURGH: No, I didn't like housework. I preferred milking to washing dishes and making beds. So I learned to milk. Oh, I was milking a cow when I was seven years old. And I continued to do that as long as we lived in the country because I would rather milk and feed the cow than wash the dishes or make the beds. I got my way with that.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do that in the mornings before you went to school?

THORNBURGH: I sure did. Every morning and every afternoon. You milk a cow twice a day.

INTERVIEWER: So you got up early in the morning . . .

THORNBURGH: Got up early to milk the cow.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what kinds of games you used to play around the house?

THORNBURGH: My younger sisters and I were not interested in sports. I don't care anything about sports today. Paper dolls was our big deal. Do you know where we got our paper dolls? We cut them out of the Sears-Roebuck catalog.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's right. I've heard people talk about that. And the clothes, too.

THORNBURGH: The clothes, too. We cut everything out of the catalog. We would have rows and rows of those dolls. And I can remember when the Sears-Roebuck catalog did not have any colored pages in it. It was all black and white. When the first colored pages came out, we fought over who was going to get the dolls. Because all we had had was black and white.

INTERVIEWER: You probably didn't have any real dolls either, did you, or probably very few?

THORNBURGH: We had very few. But we didn't like them. We liked the paper dolls. We could make them do more things. We preferred that. Of course, we did play some ball. We pitched horseshoes. But other than that, we just preferred our paper dolls. And then, of course, like all other kids, we played school. We educated every doll in the Sears and Roebuck catalog. You see, I started school when I was four years old.

INTERVIEWER: Four?

THORNBURGH: I don't know whether they ever did this in other parts of the country or not. But this little school that we went to was a one-room school, you saw the picture in the scrapbook there. It was the thing to do for older children to take their little sister or brother to school one day. They took me one day, and that was it. I went from then on.

INTERVIEWER: The teacher let you stay?

THORNBURGH: The teacher let me stay; he didn't seem to mind. He was nothing more than a baby-sitter for my mother. Because I was just four years old and I would go to sleep in class. But he didn't mind me staying. The school wasn't filled anyway.

INTERVIEWER: But you did start to learn things?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: You would just pick it up by sitting there?

THORNBURGH: I would pick it up just being in that room with all the other students. And then, another thing, of course, you saw the picture of the house that we lived in at Rolling Hill. It was a small house, and I would hear my mother at night teaching my two older sisters and my brother their lessons. So actually, I was bored in school up until about the fifth grade because I had learned it all.

THORNBURGH: I had heard it in that one-room school and I had heard it at home. So, I was bored up until the fifth grade. In the fifth grade arithmetic became a challenge. But I was actually bored up until that time. We subscribed to the old Knoxville Journal and Tribune and it came by mail. We would usually get it about two days late. The people around there were mostly farmers but many of the black men worked at the Mascot Zinc Mines and on the railroad as "section hands". We were one of a very few white families in the immediate neighborhood. All the men would gather at the store and when the newspaper came I would read it to them.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you?

THORNBURGH: I was six years old. I would pull jokes on them. At that time World War I was in progress, and I remember distinctly a picture in the paper of a big ship. My Daddy told me to turn the paper upside down and tell those people that the ship had sunk, and I did. I never did know whether they really believed it or if they were just humoring a little girl. I read the story like the ship had really sunk.

INTERVIEWER: How far was your house from the store?

THORNBURGH: About a city block.

INTERVIEWER: The store, I assume, was probably the center of the community as well as being a store.

THORNBURGH: All of the people in the surrounding area there got their mail at the store. The mailman--we did not call him postman--delivered the mail with a horse and buggy and he could not get off the pike as the roads were very bad, so the mail was left at the store and the people picked it up there.

INTERVIEWER: And probably a lot of people came to the store to socialize.

THORNBURGH: Oh, sure they did. Particularly during the winter. They would come in and sit around that pot-bellied stove and spit tobacco juice everywhere. They would tell big tales, and I would sit there and listen until I would go to sleep. I particularly liked scary tales. After they would tell those big tales of things that happened all around there. I would have to stay until the store closed so I could go home with my daddy because I was afraid to go by myself.

INTERVIEWER: So you spent a lot of your spare time at the store?

THORNBURGH: I sure did. All of us kids worked at the store. If my daddy was gone anywhere to work out on the farm or anything, we kept the store. Any one of us kids could do that.

INTERVIEWER: Did your mother work at the store too?

THORNBURGH: Some, but with six kids, she didn't have much time to.

INTERVIEWER: Did she sew most of your clothes?

THORNBURGH: She made all of them. She did everything. And something I have wondered about, with six children there, she made all of our clothes, and she canned in the summer, and she pieced quilts in the winter, but she still had time to visit neighbors. And I can't understand that. Now, people don't have any time to visit. She had plenty of time.

INTERVIEWER: People worked at a faster pace or something. They didn't have so many side things to draw their attention. There was no television, I don't guess.

THORNBURGH: No, of course not. Nor radio either.

INTERVIEWER: So a lot of time people today spend watching TV was probably spent visiting neighbors.

THORNBURGH: We had a lot of visitors. We liked them, and it didn't disturb my mother one bit. I remember distinctly one old couple that used to visit us. And when they would come, they had walked so far, that they would spend the night. It didn't bother her. They didn't say two or three days in advance that they were coming. We didn't know they were coming.

INTERVIEWER: You just made do.

THORNBURGH: You made do. You didn't mind. You were glad to see them. I wonder, what do people do with their time now? Maybe it's television or radio.

INTERVIEWER: Or movies, or whatever, but there is not that much time spent visiting or with people, I don't think.

THORNBURGH: I don't have a friend, a close enough friend now, that I would just go over at ten o'clock in the morning and go to spend the day without calling in advance. But we did that all the time.

INTERVIEWER: I grew up in a small town and we did that. At night, sometimes, we would say, well, let's go see Aunt So-and-so, and we just went. We didn't call them ahead of time.

THORNBURGH: You just went. They had no telephone. We couldn't have called. In the morning, if any of us kids decided that we wanted to visit kids who lived three-four miles away, we just did, and we'd spend the day. Their parents were glad to see us. We didn't make any arrangements. We just visited.

INTERVIEWER: Did you all have a big garden?

THORNBURGH: We had a big garden, and everybody worked in the garden. Everybody helped with the canning, too.

INTERVIEWER: Did you enjoy that?

THORNBURGH: I liked outside work. I didn't care much for housework. But I would rather stay at the store, and milk and work in the garden as anything else. And that made it pretty nice because my sisters would do the other things.

INTERVIEWER: So from an early age, you were probably the one who enjoyed being around people the most.

THORNBURGH: Yeah, I would think so. I liked that congregating at the store. I'm certain that I wasn't religiously motivated, but I went to church every time the door was open.

INTERVIEWER: Was your family pretty active in the church?

THORNBURGH: My mother was, and I think she would have been more active in the church, but in either direction, we had to walk two miles to church. It was two miles to Strawberry Plains or two miles to Piney Grove. Piney Grove Church is still there. It is just a few miles from Highlander now. We went to that church.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a Baptist Church?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Everything was Baptist.

THORNBURGH: Everything was Baptist in Jefferson County. There was a little Methodist church and, I think, one Presbyterian in Strawberry Plains.

INTERVIEWER: So, did you all kind of switch back and forth from one church to the other? From Strawberry Plains to Piney Grove?

THORNBURGH: Yes, because my two older sisters were the ones that I had to go to church with. They went where the boys were! If there were more boys in Strawberry Plains, we went there. If they thought there were boys at Piney Grove, we went there.

INTERVIEWER: Where did your mother go? Did she go to either of them?

THORNBURGH: She went to the Strawberry Plains Church. Although she was a member of Paw Paw Hollow Baptist Church at Kodak, Tennessee.

INTERVIEWER: Was your father active in the church?

THORNBURGH: No, he was not. His family, and I, I don't know how far back or anything, but his family were Quakers. And there was no Quaker church up there. But his family, when they did go to church, went to Piney Grove Church.

INTERVIEWER: But they must have come in from some other part of the country and settled here.

THORNBURGH: They surely did. There was no Quaker Church up there that I ever knew about.

INTERVIEWER: You don't here of too many Quakers who have lived in East Tennessee.

THORNBURGH: No, so that had to come from somewhere else.

INTERVIEWER: That's very interesting.

THORNBURGH: My father wasn't religious at all.

INTERVIEWER: Well, he would probably have found the Baptist religion kind of strange.

THORNBURGH: He would have.

INTERVIEWER: And he was raised in that part of Jefferson County, but had come from a Quaker family.

THORNBURGH: Some time, I am going to find out if there ever was a Quaker Church up there. Because I have a, oh, I don't even know if he is a relative, in Chicago, who is writing a history of the Thornburgh family, and everything he ever sends me shows that they were all Quakers. So I don't know where it started. And I am certain they were the only Quaker family in Jefferson County. I have never heard of any up there before or since.

INTERVIEWER: Did his brothers and sisters live in Jefferson County?

THORNBURGH: Yes, they all lived about three miles beyond where I lived there. Near Piedmont. You know where Piedmont is?

INTERVIEWER: What was it like being the only white family in a more or less all black community there?

THORNBURGH: We had never heard of segregation or integration or anything else. Our playmates were those black kids up there. We visited them the same as we did anybody else. We never even thought about it. However, the black school was within two city blocks of where we lived. But we had to walk two miles to go to the white school. We would pass the black kids walking two miles down to their school, and we were walking two miles in the other direction to get to the white school. Very foolish!

INTERVIEWER: Were the churches segregated?

THORNBURGH: Definitely.

INTERVIEWER: The Baptist churches up there were segregated?

THORNBURGH: Yes, definitely. Sometime I wish you would go up there with me to that little neighborhood where I lived. Because the black church is still there. The house where I was born in still there. That black school there has now been turned into a community center.

THORNBURGH: The black church and the black school were all right across the road from one another. They were within two city blocks from us but we didn't go there, we had to go to the white church.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, so the church was pretty much segregated?

THORNBURGH: Oh, definitely, they were segregated.

INTERVIEWER: I thought maybe they were integrated?

THORNBURGH: No, the children in the neighborhood were integrated, but not the church and the school. We would play with them all day, but you mustn't go to school with them.

INTERVIEWER: The social institutions were not. Did you all ever eat in the black homes and vice-versa?

THORNBURGH: Oh, sure we did. If we happened to be in a black family's home at lunch time, we ate with them. And if the black kids were over playing with us, they ate with us. We didn't think anything about it. But the only time we would ever go to the black church would be to a funeral. And when we went, we sat on the back seat, and when they went to our church, they sat on the back seat.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you when your family left Rolling Hills?

THORNBURGH: Fourteen.

INTERVIEWER: You were fourteen. So you spent most all of your younger life in Rolling Hills.

THORNBURGH: That's right. We moved from there to Dayton, Tennessee.

INTERVIEWER: So, you had finished high school by then?

THORNBURGH: No, I finished high school in Dayton. I finished down there just one year before the Scopes trial. I wish I had been there for that.

INTERVIEWER: So you went like the first eight years of school in this one-room school in Rolling Hills where you started at age four. What age were you when you finished the eighth grade?

THORNBURGH: Fourteen, the year we left Rolling Hill. I could have finished a long time before because I had already learned everything.

INTERVIEWER: So you weren't too interested in school then, because you were bored.

THORNBURGH: Yes, I was bored. I wasn't really enthusiastic until I went to high school.

INTERVIEWER: So you started high school in Dayton? At the age of fifteen?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I was almost fifteen. And I finished just a little bit before I was seventeen. I doubled up and finished high school in three years.

INTERVIEWER: Why did your family move from Rolling Hills to Dayton?

THORNBURGH: It was the biggest mistake that any married couple or any family ever made. My mother and father both thought that living way up there in the country there were no educational opportunities for their children. So, my father sold the farm and store and bought a meat market in Dayton, Tennessee. It was a mistake. He was a country boy and he didn't know how to cope in even a small town like Dayton. We left Dayton and moved back here to Knoxville. And of course, the Depression was setting in then.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of education had your mother and father had?

THORNBURGH: My mother went to the fifth grade, and my father had finished the eighth.

INTERVIEWER: And they were concerned about the education of their children?

THORNBURGH: That's right. That's why they wanted to move to Dayton. They thought we didn't have any educational opportunities. Looking back on it, we would have had even better opportunities because we became very poor after we moved to Knoxville. There was a high school at Dandridge and also one at Trentville and we could have been bussed.

INTERVIEWER: Besides, living on a farm during the Depression would have been better.

THORNBURGH: Moving was a mistake. They both said so later.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel at that age about leaving Rolling Hills to live in Dayton?

THORNBURGH: Oh, I thought it was going to be a great improvement. That I was going to move to a city. Of course, there were about two blocks of sidewalks in Dayton at that time. I was really enthusiastic about moving.

INTERVIEWER: Your sisters were too?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes, we all wanted to go.

INTERVIEWER: Your father opened up a meat market in Dayton. But that business didn't thrive as well as the grocery business?

THORNBURGH: No, he wasn't a butcher. He didn't know anything about operating a meat market. Then we moved to Knoxville.

INTERVIEWER: You finished high school in Dayton, you said, in three years. Do you remember what things in high school you particularly enjoyed? What subject?

THORNBURGH: Well, I never liked math. I particularly liked history. That was the one subject I really liked. I liked English literature. I didn't particularly like what we call "Language", the Low Language book. Did you ever see it?

INTERVIEWER: The grammar stuff?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I didn't particularly like that, but I liked the English literature. Reading, Shakespeare, outlining books and things like that. But history was the one I liked most of all, and naturally I made better grades in it.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of social events did you all go to in Dayton when you were in high school. Was there much occasion for that?

THORNBURGH: Not too much. Dayton was a very conservative little town. We went to church, and they had ice cream socials. Most everything there, at that time, was built around the church.

INTERVIEWER: It probably still is today.

THORNBURGH: It probably still is.

INTERVIEWER: It's still, I think, a very strongly church influenced town. The William Jennings Bryant College there is a conservative college.

THORNBURGH: During the Scopes trial, William Jennings Bryant and Clarence Darrow were the lawyers.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any of the Scopes trial? Had you already left Dayton then?

THORNBURGH: We had left there, but we read every word of it. And I read books about it, too.

INTERVIEWER: From an early age you read the newspaper.

THORNBURGH: That's right. I've always read the newspaper. And today, I still take both papers. A lot of people say they don't like the Journal, but I have to have that morning news.

INTERVIEWER: As bad as it is.

THORNBURGH: As bad as it is. You do get some news, you know, if something dramatic happens.

INTERVIEWER: So you have always been interested in current events.

THORNBURGH: And we never got too poor even during the Depression, not to take both papers.

INTERVIEWER: In high school, did you court any?

THORNBURGH: Oh, some. I wasn't particularly interested in that. I had two or three things that I wanted to do. One of them was, a childish-like thing, I saw a postcard somebody had sent back from New York of the Woolworth Building. At that time it was the tallest building in the world. And I said, "Oh, I want to work in New York City. Someday, I'm going to work in New York City." I didn't know what I was going to be doing, but I wanted to work there. I could always see that big old tall building and say to myself, someday I'm going to work in New York City. And it was a strange thing, when I did work in New York City for the labor movement from 1942 to 1946, my desk was right by a window where I could see the Woolworth Building. And I would always think of that. That's one dream come true!

INTERVIEWER: What were your other dreams you had?

THORNBURGH: Another one, I was going abroad. I didn't know how. We called it going abroad then. We didn't say tours or overseas, we said, "going abroad". And I was determined that at some point or other, I was going abroad. I didn't know how I was going to get there, or what I was going to do when I got there. So I got that opportunity when I was awarded a scholarship to Ruskin College, Oxford University.

INTERVIEWER: So you have more or less made your own dreams come true, haven't you?

THORNBURGH: I made it come true, particularly on that scholarship because people say I won a scholarship. I did not win it, it was awarded. And they wanted a person to go out of the labor movement who would be ready to go in two weeks time. I told them I could go over the weekend, I wanted to go so bad. I didn't have attachments.

INTERVIEWER: And you had had that dream for a long time.

THORNBURGH: For a long time. I got my name on that list right quick.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have another dream other than wanting to work in New York City and going abroad?

THORNBURGH: Well, I thought about all the different things I was going to have to do to get to New York City. But I didn't think at that time it would be in the labor movement.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't dream you would get involved with the labor movement?

THORNBURGH: I didn't know anything about the labor movement. But my father had to come to Knoxville twice a year to buy things for the store, and he would bring one or two kids with him, whose ever time it was to come. So, when it was my time to come I would see women sitting at the typewriter. There wasn't many women doing this, but I thought that must be the most glamorous job in the world.

INTERVIEWER: So, from a young child, you wanted to go into secretarial work?

THORNBURGH: Yes. It was the means to an end. I could maybe get a job in New York, and that would be a step toward going abroad.

INTERVIEWER: Back in those days, that probably was a real glamorous type job.

THORNBURGH: Oh, it was. And while I never liked math, I admired the women bookkeepers. While daddy was buying his stuff, I'd look back in the offices and they would have big books out. I knew I could never do that because I never was very good at math. But typing on those big, clumsy-looking typewriters looked very glamorous.

INTERVIEWER: When you were in high school, did you take typing?

THORNBURGH: Oh, lands no. They didn't have any.

INTERVIEWER: Back then, I guess you had to go to secretarial school.

THORNBURGH: No, I went to night school.

INTERVIEWER: When you finished high school, you went to night school?

THORNBURGH: Yes, when we moved here I started in night school right away to learn typing.

INTERVIEWER: So, when you were eighteen your family moved from Dayton to Knoxville.

THORNBURGH: It was a little before I was eighteen, I'm a little confused on those dates and I have forgotten what the year was when we moved here. But I wasn't quite eighteen because I had finished high school before I was eighteen. And I started to work at Cherokee Spinning Company.

INTERVIEWER: I think maybe under the picture in this scrapbook there is a 1925.... that's what this says.

THORNBURGH: Is that when it was?

INTERVIEWER: Your first house was at 225 Ailor Avenue. And it says, "We moved here from Dayton, Tennessee in 1925."

THORNBURGH: Well, that's right then.

INTERVIEWER: Why did your family move from Dayton to Knoxville?

THORNBURGH: My father couldn't make a living in that meat market. So, we moved here and then we all started working in the mills. We didn't have training enough to do anything else.

INTERVIEWER: So, did he open up another business when he came here?

THORNBURGH: Yes, over on Ailor Avenue right across the street from where we lived.

INTERVIEWER: And it was a grocery store this time.

THORNBURGH: Yes and he stayed in that until the Depression hit in 1929.

INTERVIEWER: Did your sisters and brothers also work?

THORNBURGH: There were my two older sisters and my brother and I. We all started to work in the mills. We couldn't get a job anywhere else. I started working at the Cherokee Spinning Company on the night shift.

INTERVIEWER: What time would you go in to work?

THORNBURGH: Five o'clock in the afternoon.

INTERVIEWER: And work until when?

THORNBURGH: I would work until, let's see, what would make ten hours? We worked until four a.m..

INTERVIEWER: In the morning?

THORNBURGH: Yes. I never will forget that first night in the cotton mill. It was something I'll never forget as long as I live. We started to work at five o'clock. A woman was showing me how to run the winding maching. I thought, oh gee, it's soon going to be time to go home. I know it is. She was showing me and hum of that machine and all made me sleepy and I thought well it would soon be time to go home. And I went back to the water fountain and looked at the clock and it was just eight-thirty. I thought, oh, can I make it? I don't think I can make it! I hadn't been there but three and one-half hours.

INTERVIEWER: Had you ever been in a cotton mill before?

THORNBURGH: No.

INTERVIEWER: When you moved to Knoxville, you just applied at Cherokee Spinning?

THORNBURGH: That's right. I learned to use that machine, and it wasn't such hard work, but the standing there ten hours....all night! I would get so sleepy and tired. You see, we didn't have eight hours until the NRA. Roosevelt, you know.

INTERVIEWER: You were working ten hours a night. And you were running the spinning machine.

THORNBURGH: No, the winding machine.

INTERVIEWER: What does that do?

THORNBURGH: I was winding thread from a cone to a spool.

INTERVIEWER: I see, you put the cone at the top and it winds down.

THORNBURGH: Yes, onto the spool. Mine was a Universal winder. It would thread on little spools. What we were winding it onto was to be taken into the weave shop.

INTERVIEWER: Did they do weaving there at Cherokee?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: They did everything. They took the raw cotton . . .

THORNBURGH: The raw cotton went to the card room, and then from the card room it went to the spinning room, and from the spinning room, to the winders, and from the winders to the weave shop, so they took it all the way through.

INTERVIEWER: You were the third process?

THORNBURGH: I was the third process.

INTERVIEWER: How many years did you work at Cherokee?

THORNBURGH: That time, I just worked there about a year. Because there was a magazine crew where they get these girls—at that time it was all girls—to go across the country selling magazines. There was a man and his wife. They had three girls. They had two with them when they came to Knoxville selling magazines. They put an ad in the paper that they wanted a young girl, unencumbered who could travel. They made it look like a very glamorous job, so I joined with them and went all the way to California.

INTERVIEWER: My heavens. What were you making at Cherokee when you quit?

THORNBURGH: About eight dollars a week.

INTERVIEWER: Eight dollars. And most of that, you took home and gave to your mother.

THORNBURGH: Yes, we had to. Everybody did to keep the family going.

INTERVIEWER: This was right before the Depression hit, wasn't it?

THORNBURGH: Yes. Then when I went to California with the magazine crew, I came back as far as Denver, Colorado. I stopped off there and got a job in a restaurant and an upholstery shop and whatever I could find, and went to night school there.

INTERVIEWER: So this was the trip. There is one article in the scrapbook that talks about your trip to California.

THORNBURGH: Yes, that's it.

INTERVIEWER: It sounds like you picked up and went by yourself.

THORNBURGH: I didn't.

INTERVIEWER: You went selling magazines.

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was that like?

THORNBURGH: Well, we went from door to door but it wasn't so bad. This man and his wife headed the crew. They were very nice people. We would check into a town and live in a hotel and then he would take us out into the neighborhoods or business district. I always took the business districts.

INTERVIEWER: It was all young women working.

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been unusual to have all young women working as sales people then.

THORNBURGH: It was.

INTERVIEWER: Because then most of the sales people were men.

THORNBURGH: Yes, most of our crew were girls like me that just wanted to go somewhere.

INTERVIEWER: Was the pay adequate?

THORNBURGH: Fair. It was strictly commission. If you sold some of us would make real good. I didn't work real hard at it. I'm not a sales person. When they would tell me no, they didn't want the magazine, I wouldn't argue with them.

INTERVIEWER: And you always picked business districts.

THORNBURGH: I would rather sell magazines to men as to housewives. So I would pick the business districts. Later, then, a woman in the Denver YWCA was going to Detroit. I thought, oh, Detroit! That must be a really glamorous place to work. By that time I had learned typing. I had gone to night school in Colorado.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you stay in Colorado?

THORNBURGH: I think I was just there a year. Then, when I came to Detroit, I started working as a typist for two Public Accountants, and then the Depression really hit in 1929. My job was abolished overnight. I got a bus for Knoxville the next day, and then went back to the Cherokee Spinning Company.

INTERVIEWER: Because the cotton mills, at least in the South, pretty much operated during the Depression?

THORNBURGH: That's right. They were operating. I tried everywhere to find a job as a typist and there just wasn't any. Typing at that time, was all I could do. I didn't have any other office experience.

INTERVIEWER: So you went back to Cherokee.

THORNBURGH: I went back to Cherokee. I was an experienced hand.

INTERVIEWER: Were you working in the winding room again?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What was your pay at that time?

THORNBURGH: Oh, I think we made about nine dollars a week. I'm sure it was under ten dollars. But, we weren't getting to work regular. You see, that was the beginning of the Depression. The Wall Street Crash was in 1929.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go live with your parents?

THORNBURGH: Oh yeah, I came back here to live.

INTERVIEWER: And were any of your brothers and sisters living here?

THORNBURGH: In the meantime my oldest sister had married and moved to Toledo, Ohio. And another sister had left here and gone to Cleveland, Ohio, to work for a railroad company. My brother was here, and my two younger sisters. So there was four of us at home, and we were all working at the mill.

INTERVIEWER: So your family was able to kind of scrimp by then?

THORNBURGH: Scrimping by was right. My two younger sisters worked at the Glove factory. My brother and I worked at Cherokee. We didn't get to work all week. Sometimes we would bring home four dollars, sometimes you would bring home six dollars.

INTERVIEWER: When did the union first come into Cherokee?

THORNBURGH: In 1934.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in the organizing drive to get them to sign cards?

THORNBURGH: Yes, that whole bit. Because I was so disgusted with four dollars a week and all that.

INTERVIEWER: And were there bad working conditions, too? I'm sure all cotton mills were bad.

THORNBURGH: Oh sure, lands yes. You had no sick leave, no vacation, and no kind of leave. You worked strictly on piece work.

INTERVIEWER: Were you working ten hours a day then, or had the National Recovery Act . . .

THORNBURGH: We were working ten hours a day until the National Recovery Act came in. Roosevelt was elected in '32, wasn't he? Yeah, he was elected in '32, he took office in '33. And then, it was 1934 before we got the NRA.

INTERVIEWER: Well, unions had already begun to push for the eight-hour day then, hadn't they?

THORNBURGH: Yes. Unions had been pushing for an eight-hour day since 1900, but railroad unions were the only ones getting it. From the time Samuel Gompers started the labor movement, the eight-hour day was a major goal. There was a semblance of a labor movement in America before then, but actually in 1889 was when the labor movement really started, and the eight-hour day was one of the things they were working for.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of people not in unions don't realize that the labor movement brought the eight-hour day.

THORNBURGH: They brought the eight-hour day. That is right. When we formed our union at Cherokee, we didn't think of any fringe benefit, we were thinking of house, wages and working conditions. We never thought about any hospitalization or paid holidays. We didn't think anything like that would ever come around. You see, all those years in the mill, they thought they were doing us a big favor to give us the Fourth of July off, but we weren't paid for it. So, when we drew up our first contract, we wanted to improve working conditions.

INTERVIEWER: What specifically?

THORNBURGH: Well, one thing, we wanted decent restrooms. We wanted more water fountains. We had the stretch out system, running more machines than you could possibly do. So, we wanted to abolish that.

INTERVIEWER: Were they working you all on production at that time?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes, you better believe they were.

INTERVIEWER: But stretch out meant working more machines than you were really able to do . . .

INTERVIEWER: That is right. And we wanted to get rid of that, and we wanted a seniority clause, where, the longer you were there, the more you could make. We asked for it, but we didn't get it.

INTERVIEWER: And you asked for a reduction from ten hours a day to eight hours a day?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anything in your contract, in your bargaining, to head off layoffs and that type of thing?

THORNBURGH: We considered that under working conditions. That the last one hired should be the first one fired and that tied in with the seniority clause, but we didn't get it.

INTERVIEWER: Who came in to help organize the mills, was it United Textile Workers?

THORNBURGH: Yes, there was a general organizer for the A.F.of L. It was not the AFL-CIO. He was a boilermaker. His name was Sam Godfrey. He came in to organize textile workers. He didn't know anything about textile workers or their conditions or anything. All he talked to us about were the things we wanted: shorter hours, better working conditions and the seniority clause.

INTERVIEWER: And he was working with the A.F.of L. and wasn't working necessarily for the Textile Workers.

THORNBURGH: No. He was what they called a General Organizer.

INTERVIEWER: Kind of like the IUD now does to help on some of the textile drives.

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And so, he came into contact with some of the people in the plant, or did you all contact him?

THORNBURGH: No, he contacted us. They always thought that in organizing a mill they should get the weavers first. They were the high class mill-workers. They were the higher paid. The loomfixers and the weavers. They always thought that if they could get them, they could get the rest of us. So he got in touch with one of the weavers. A preacher! So this preacher came back and spread the word to the rest of us. And we began holding little meetings around in somebody's home.

INTERVIEWER: You were tight-lipped then?

THORNBURGH: You better believe we were tight-lipped. We didn't say a word about it, and we wouldn't sign any cards at the mill. We would meet the Organizer down the road somewhere because we had been told to be very careful because they didn't want the leaders to be fired. So we were very careful.

INTERVIEWER: About not letting the company know who the leaders were?

THORNBURGH: Oh, we didn't dare let the company know. Then we started having meetings on Saturday morning on Gay Street at the Moose Hall, and it was no time at all until we had everybody in that mill signed up.

INTERVIEWER: How many people worked there?

THORNBURGH: Six hundred. It might have waivered three or four one way or the other, but six hundred worked there and we had six hundred signed up.

INTERVIEWER: This was 1934?

THORNBURGH: Yes. Because a nationwide strike was called in May 1934. That was all we knew to tell them. We didn't know anything about the labor movement or any of its ideals or anything like that. We would just tell them that if you join this union we will all work together for higher wages and shorter hours. That was all you had to tell them and they would sign.

INTERVIEWER: Probably most of those people had never been in the union before?

THORNBURGH: No, none of us had.

INTERVIEWER: Was there a type of anti-union sentiment that there is today?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes, definitely there was.

INTERVIEWER: But pay and working conditions were so bad they were willing to join?

THORNBURGH: They were looking for a way out and this looked like it. We had a lot of members who didn't dare let their own family know they joined. They came to meetings in secret.

INTERVIEWER: You mean even after you were organized?

THORNBURGH: Even after we were organized, because we didn't want anyone to know. A lot of them didn't want their preacher to know. We had to be so careful and not let anybody know we had joined.

INTERVIEWER: They would just say they were going downtown shopping or something?

THORNBURGH: Yes. We would hold our meetings at ten o'clock on Saturday mornings because people then went to town on Saturday mornings. Working those long hours, there was no other time to go to town so everybody went on Saturday morning.

INTERVIEWER: When did you all hold the election? How many months did you all work in organizing?

THORNBURGH: We didn't hold any election. You didn't have to then.

INTERVIEWER: Ah, you just got cards signed.

THORNBURGH: When you got seven people you could get a charter.

INTERVIEWER: Then did that mean that the company had to recognize you?

THORNBURGH: Oh, no. It did not. When we got our seven people--I was one of the seven--the weavers and loom fixers were the others, we met very secretively. Now, we had our seven and ordered our Charter. The Charter cost seven dollars. We put in a dollar each. When we got our charter, we started signing up all the others. Then, after we got them all signed up, we drew up a contract and presented it to the company. They told us to begin with what the company was willing to give. But there wasn't any majority to it, we had it

THORNBURGH: unanimously. They looked over our contract, and wouldn't go with the seniority clause. In the meantime, the NRA had come in, and we got the eight-hour day, but they wouldn't go with the seniority clause at all. We were in the negotiating stages when the nationwide strike was called.

INTERVIEWER: You were negotiating with the company at that time?

THORNBURGH: Yes, and we should not have been called out. We didn't know how to strike. We didn't know anything about the labor movement, so, some of us so-called leaders at that time tried to get them to let us stay on in the mill and they said no, it had to be a nationwide strike. And of course, it was lost nationwide. It was a mistake. Because we all came out, and some started drifting back because we had no time to teach them unity or what they were going to gain. Of course, all of us who were in the forefront couldn't drift back. We were blacklisted throughout the industry. I couldn't have gone to work in a mill nowhere in the United States, because I was blacklisted.

INTERVIEWER: How long was it between the time you got your local organized and the time that the national strike was called?

THORNBURGH: Just about six months. We had no time to educate our people at all.

INTERVIEWER: And the company hadn't really come around to the conditions either.

THORNBURGH: No, we were in the negotiating stages. And we might have made it. And even if we hadn't got our contract signed, we would have still had our union. Save for a better day. We could come back. But the way it was with that nationwide strike, there was no coming back.

INTERVIEWER: When did your local union first get the word that there was going to be a national strike?

THORNBURGH: Oh, about a month before it was called.

INTERVIEWER: Somebody from the international union came down to tell you about it? Or did they send you a letter?

THORNBURGH: No, they came down and told us that we had to go out on strike or they wouldn't recognize our union, they would take our charter.

INTERVIEWER: There was no choice then.

THORNBURGH: No, we had no choice.

INTERVIEWER: Where was the union headquarters? New York?

THORNBURGH: No, it was Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Washington, D.C. Textile Workers, was that the only Textile Workers union in the country at that time?

THORNBURGH: There was a National Textile Workers Union, but it was considered a communist union. And frankly, I think it was. United Textile Workers was the accepted union.

INTERVIEWER: Were any textile mills in Knoxville organized at that time?

THORNBURGH: No.

INTERVIEWER: Cherokee was the only one.

THORNBURGH: And I think we would have had an opportunity to organize others because a person working at Cherokee would have a relative in Appalachian, Appalachian would have one at Brookside. And all that. The families were intermingled that way. We might have been able to organize all the mills in Knoxville, had it not been for the strike.

INTERVIEWER: You think you could have branched out and helped the others?

THORNBURGH: I think we could.

INTERVIEWER: Did many people in your local come out on strike?

THORNBURGH: They all came out on strike. We closed the mill.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you had taken a vote, people had voted in a meeting not to strike.

THORNBURGH: That's right. But they would strike. And I don't know how accurate the newspaper clippings you read were, but <u>everything</u> was against us. After we received our charter, we appointed delegates to the Central Labor Council here, and I was one of them. I was the only woman over there.

INTERVIEWER: You were the only woman officer in your local, too, weren't you?

THORNBURGH: Yes. I was the only one. When we came out on strike even the Central Labor Council, with it's old time conservative unionists were against us. So, we didn't have any allies. The neighborhoods were against us, the churches were against us, the newspapers were against us and the people were against us. So there was no way that strike could be won.

INTERVIEWER: I think one of the newspaper clippings said the local took a strike vote and voted it down, and the local officers, and you were one of those, resigned.

THORNBURGH: Yes, we had a meeting because we had been told by our international representative that we would not have a charter. So I thought we would just break up the whole thing. Because we wouldn't have a charter if we didn't strike. And we voted not to strike. The people didn't know whether to strike or not. They were that uneducated, and I was one of the most uneducated.

INTERVIEWER: So you were against the strike, too?

THORNBURGH: I was against the strike, but then, I saw that there was no way out. We had been told to strike or we would lose our charter and have no union anyway. That was a sad commentary on the whole labor movement. It just never should have happened.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think the strike would have worked in other parts of the country, but where there were newly organized locals, it shouldn't have been done?

THORNBURGH: It didn't work where they were organized. Because, a lot of our blacklisted people here went into North Carolina and scabbed on the people over there. They didn't know any better. And their wives and families were needling them to get a job.

INTERVIEWER: It was during the Depression and people were starving.

THORNBURGH: It sure was.

INTERVIEWER: Even though there was a no-strike vote, you said that the workers in the Cherokee plant still went out. For how long?

THORNBURGH: For about two weeks we had a good strike.

INTERVIEWER: And how were you able to pull that off?

THORNBURGH: We told them, let's strike! And if we can't win, we can always go back to work. Gee, I didn't know anything about a blacklist. We thought that if the strike doesn't work, we will just go back to work. So then they saw that the strike wasn't working, they started drifting back.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have picket lines?

THORNBURGH: Yes, we had picket lines.

INTERVIEWER: That was the first time most of you had been on picket lines.

THORNBURGH: That's right. That was the first time we had ever been on strike. We had the support of one or two unions here in Knoxville. The railroad workers helped us, and the motion picture operators.

INTERVIEWER: They came down and stood on the picket lines?

THORNBURGH: Yes, they stood on the picket lines and they gave us some ideas. We did several things that were strictly illegal. But we had to get those ideas from them. We didn't know what to do.

INTERVIEWER: Once you got your picket lines organized, people just showed up?

THORNBURGH: People just showed up. We had hand-made signs. We made our signs at home. But there was too much against us.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have pickets for all the shift changes?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. We picketed each shift. We were losing badly. You see, the whole town was against us.

INTERVIEWER: So for two weeks, you essentially had Cherokee Mills shut down.

THORNBURGH: Yes, we did.

INTERVIEWER: Then people started going back.

THORNBURGH: They didn't know any better. But that strike was a bad thing and had long lasting bad results. Because for years here all the other mills pointed to it and said see what they tried at Cherokee. Do you want to get blacklisted? They couldn't win that strike and you couldn't win a strike. Many of the people who were at Cherokee at that time, now have retired but a lot of those people still there say, "No, we tried it. We don't want to fool with the union."

INTERVIEWER: So after that strike was over, there was no local there?

THORNBURGH: No.

INTERVIEWER: So, you essentially lost the local.

THORNBURGH: We lost the local, we lost the strike, we lost everything.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go back to work at Cherokee then?

THORNBURGH: Oh no, I was blacklisted. I started working at TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority] as a typist then.

INTERVIEWER: So your union leaders at Cherokee were blacklisted and not able to get back into the plant, so your leadership for the local was gone.

THORNBURGH: That's right. Completely gone. All of the leaders who were more skilled, like the weavers and the loom fixers, went other places and got jobs. Just luckily I had had some office training and I got a job at TVA.

INTERVIEWER: So you were out of work for several months?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes, I sure was.

INTERVIEWER: Cherokee Mills today is no longer organized.

THORNBURGH: No, the only needle trades and textile plants organized in Knoxville now are Palm Beach [Amalgamated] and Levi Strauss.

INTERVIEWER: And Leyi's is a sweetheart union.

THORNBURGH: Oh, definitely. They are in the United Garment Workers Union.

INTERVIEWER: It's ACTWU now, but it was textile.

THORNBURGH: They've merged now.

INTERVIEWER: So you went to work at TVA as a typist. They were willing to take you even though you were blacklisted?

THORNBURGH: I wasn't that good a typist. I thing they took me because I was blacklisted. TVA was very liberal at that time. I don't think it is all that liberal now.

INTERVIEWER: TVA from the beginning had a workers union, didn't they? An office employees union?

THORNBURGH: Yes, they had an office workers union. Old American Federation of Government Employees. They had that and then their construction workers were union. So they were used to dealing with unions.

INTERVIEWER: Did you work in a stenographers pool or something at TVA?

THORNBURGH: No, I worked in the filing room, typing filing cards.

INTERVIEWER: And how long did you work there?

THORNBURGH: I worked there in the filing department from late 1934 until 1939; and then I was transferred to Wilson Dam as supervisor of the filing section down there.

INTERVIEWER: Wilson Dam?

THORNBURGH: In Sheffield, Alabama. And I worked there from '39 until '41.

INTERVIEWER: What was your wage when you started at TVA?

THORNBURGH: $1,260.00. We used to laugh about that for people thought it was $12.60 a week but we made $1,260.00 a year. That was $105.00 a month.

INTERVIEWER: Which was a pretty good wage.

THORNBURGH: A darned good wage! Pardon me, but this was too much money to be termed "wages" so at TVA we called it "salary". I was very ambitious and worked very hard to get up to $1,620.00 a year. All this time that I worked for TVA, from '34 until '39, I was very active in the labor movement.

INTERVIEWER: You were a member of the American Federation of Government Employees [AFGE]?

THORNBURGH: Yes, and I was their delegate to the Central Labor Council. And I worked as a volunteer organizer. So I worked all the time for the union, even though I was working for TVA.

INTERVIEWER: At the same time you were working at TVA, you were working as a volunteer organizer? Were you helping them organize other office workers?

THORNBURGH: No, I thought TVA could take care of itself. I was more interested in other workers. We had a general organizing committee from the Central Labor Council, and I thought that was a very good thing and I'm sorry that they don't have it anymore. We were volunteers, we would go out at night in cars to somebody's home and visit in the homes. At the time I was working on that, we were interested in bakery workers and laundry workers. Those were low-paid workers. I didn't dare go out into the mills. I was blacklisted, and they would say, "Well, you lost your job." But I worked with the laundry workers. A volunteer organizing committee I thought was good. We weren't paid a penny. We were doing it because we wanted to. There was a group of railroad men and the motion picture operators, and myself who visited in homes. We would find out where a laundry-worker lived and go visit him. And we organized a laundryworkers union here. I thought that was a good thing. In 1939, I went to Sheffield, Alabama, and stayed there about eighteen months. In the meantime, a friend of mine from Knoxville had gone to work for the Army Engineers at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He asked if I wouldn't like to come up there and run the filing section. He said it would be $1.800.00 a year. I said, boy that's for me. So I went to Fort Belvoir. I didn't stay up there very long. I couldn't stand that. I never did really like that government work.

INTERVIEWER: Were you considered a government employee?

THORNBURGH: I just didn't like that at all. Even though my salary there went up to $2,600.00.

INTERVIEWER: Why didn't you like it?

THORNBURGH: I didn't like that routine. You see, I was working for the Army Engineers, very conservative and all that, you know. So I left up there and came back to Knoxville, in late 1941, and started working for the labor movement then--full-time.

INTERVIEWER: So you just stayed a few months in Washington?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I didn't like it at all. At that time they needed experienced government employees, particularly as supervisors, and they were offering me $3,000.00 a year to stay. I knew at that time that everything was getting better and I could get a job. So I went back into the labor movement on the Southern Organizing staff.

INTERVIEWER: You joined the southern organizing staff of the CIO?

THORNBURGH: No, we hadn't had the merger, it was A.F.of L.. I stayed with the A.F.of L. because all of the unions that I belonged to stayed with the A.F.of L. Then I came back here and worked just a little while with the southern organizing staff. Then, I had my chance to go to New York with the Labor League for Human Rights. It was an organization that was the liason between the labor and the charitable organizations, such as the Red Cross, Community Chest, and all these. The war was on then. I became their national representative. Then sent me to get union people to cooperate with the Red Cross, Community Chest, etc.

INTERVIEWER: You were the national representative for the . . .?

THORNBURGH: The Labor League for Human Rights. It was the relief arm of the A.F.of L. I stayed with them from '42 to '46. Then they disbanded when the war was over. That was all of that. And I came back South then and went to work on the A.F.L. Southern Organizing staff again.

INTERVIEWER: What was your work like during the war years with the Labor League for Human Rights?

THORNBURGH: They would send me to different cities to attend union meetings to get the people to give more to Red Cross and community services.

INTERVIEWER: You traveled all over the country?

THORNBURGH: I went to the southwest, southern, and mid-west states. Houston, Galveston and up through Oklahoma. I liked the traveling part and I was getting good cooperation, too. It was a nice job.

INTERVIEWER: And so, you got to live in New York . . .

THORNBURGH: I got to live in New York.

INTERVIEWER: And you worked out of the A.F.of L. Community Services central office?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Were you the only woman in that type position?

THORNBURGH: Yeah, I was the only national representative. They had women clerks though.

INTERVIEWER: Did more women move into those positions of leadership within the unions as the men went off to fight the war, as the labor leaders went off to fight the war?

THORNBURGH: The labor leaders didn't go off enough to give the women any opportunities. They never have been really fair to women.

INTERVIEWER: But at that time, a lot of women moved into industry and into trades . . .

THORNBURGH: Yes, they did but they could still just be secretaries in their union, not presidents.

INTERVIEWER: Even though women were entering things like welding and heavy construction and stuff, the leadership of the locals still stayed in the hands of the few men who were still there?

THORNBURGH: That is right. The men ran the union. Just like they do today, generally. But it is not as bad today as it was then.

INTERVIEWER: So when you were working in New York, you were working in a pretty much male environment.

THORNBURGH: I had the highest job for a woman. I pushed for it. I was ambitious!

INTERVIEWER: How did you get that job?

THORNBURGH: When I came back here from Washington I was looking for a job in the labor movement and this Labor League for Human Rights had regional offices. They had a director here. Let's see, there was one here, one in Atlanta, and one in Raleigh, the director here was a motion picture operator who was a long-time friend of mine. He hired me as the secretary in his office. And as soon as I got in that office, I found out that there was a New York office and said I want to go to New York.

INTERVIEWER: So somehow, you went from being a secretary and an office worker in the local Labor League for Human Rights office to New York. How did you get that accomplished?

THORNBURGH: When these representatives came down here, they were the one group I think that really recognized my experience and training in the labor movement. So, one representative said, "Hell, you know more about this labor movement than I do. Why don't you go to New York?" And I said, "Why, don't I!" And so . . .

INTERVIEWER: This was before you were sent to England, right?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So, he offered you that job, and you went.

THORNBURGH: I went that night.

INTERVIEWER: You went that night?

THORNBURGH: I left that night for New York.

INTERVIEWER: How did your family feel about your moving to New York to work?

THORNBURGH: I think they knew I was terribly ambitious. And I think they thought to resist wouldn't have done any good anyway. And they had other kids at home. They didn't care.

INTERVIEWER: And so you moved to New York right away and started your job?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. When I first went to New York, this representative told me, "We've got an opening for office manager." I thought well, that's a step. I don't want to be office manager, but that's a step. So I went up there and worked about three months as the office manager. And then, one of the national representatives was an old man, and he retired. I applied for his job right then and got it.

INTERVIEWER: So there was more than one national rep?

THORNBURGH: Yes, they had them for different sections. I think we had three. We had one for the West Coast, the Midwest, and the East Coast. I had the whole East Coast.

INTERVIEWER: How did you like living in New York City after Knoxville?

THORNBURGH: I loved it. Of course, I was living under the very best of conditions. I was on an expense account, and my hotel bill was paid.

INTERVIEWER: You lived in a hotel?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes, I loved it. I lived right down in the theatrical district. Working four years in New York was really an exciting time in my life. Our organization was given tickets to the Broadway shows because we were a charitable agency. Others working there didn't want the ticket (it was usually just one) because they lived too far out; husband couldn't go without his wife and "I can't get over from Brooklyn, etc." I was always standing by to say, "I live right off Broadway, I'll take the ticket." I saw all the good plays while I was there, while others waited for weeks to get a ticket.

INTERVIEWER: So you got to go a lot of places.

THORNBURGH: I went very many interesting places because of the "one ticket" deal. I went to a dinner at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel honoring the Premier of France and Charles Boyer was the emcee. An exciting event for an East Tennessee ridge-runner, right? I said a little prayer of thanks all along for not having a husband, for then I couldn't have gotten the "one ticket". Compensation enough for being an "Old Maid".

INTERVIEWER: You got a lot of these opportunities because you were willing to stand up and be ambitious.

THORNBURGH: That's right. But all the time I was working in New York I was planning on how I was going to get overseas. I never dropped that "going abroad" idea. I've got to go abroad, somehow! Naturally, working in this organization I became acquainted with all the top people in the A.F.of L. So, I put the word out in Washington that

THORNBURGH: anytime they wanted a representative to go abroad for anything I could be ready in twenty-four hours. Oh, I had my bait out! But I did not expect to get a bite in the way of a scholarship. When I learned the scholarship was available I applied for it. They were looking for labor leaders who could be away from home for a whole year of study. That's not as simple as you might think it is. Married men couldn't go, with their families to support; married women couldn't leave their husbands and homes. I was neither supporting a family, thinking about a husband, nor taking care of children, so I was the perfect one to go. I did, too!

INTERVIEWER: Was this in New York when this opportunity arose?

THORNBURGH: No, my job in New York was over and I had come back South and joined the Southern Organizing staff again. It was in a small town in South Carolina that I read about the scholarship in a Labor magazine. I applied immediately. There was some discussion about me with the Scholarship Awarding Board because the scholarship was to be given to a person between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five and I was thirty-seven. It took a bit of manipulating and politikin' but with the help of all my friends in the A.F.of L. I sailed for England in September 1947. Another childhood dream coming true!

INTERVIEWER: What types of things were you doing when you came back and rejoined the Southern Organizing staff?

THORNBURGH: They had me organizing....they wouldn't let a woman organize men and I never did like that. I couldn't see that segregation. Why couldn't you organize people? But they sent me to glove factories where it was ninety per cent women.

INTERVIEWER: That was the A.F.of L?

THORNBURGH: Yeah, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: Was that in factories around here, in Knoxville, or in other southern states?

THORNBURGH: No, it was in other states. My last job before I got the scholarship was in Rome, Georgia, organizing a glove factory. We lost the election. Not bad, but we lost.

INTERVIEWER: So most of your work after you came back from New York was in organizing factories.

THORNBURGH: That's right. And I just had about a year of that until I got the scholarship.

INTERVIEWER: And most of that organizing involved staying away from home for long periods of time and living in rented motels, and . . .

THORNBURGH: Yes. It would have been a terrible job for a person who didn't like to travel, but I did.

INTERVIEWER: Were there very many women organizers at that time?

THORNBURGH: I didn't run into any.

INTERVIEWER: So, everybody else on the Southern Organizing staff of the A.F.of L. were men?

THORNBURGH: That's right. I was the only woman.

INTERVIEWER: They always sent you to organize the plants that employed women?

THORNBURGH: And the hard places to organize. And I never could see why you couldn't organize people, men and women. But I think it's still that way. I don't know of a woman organizer anywhere now on the AFL-CIO staff. The Amalgamated organizers are working with women.

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

THORNBURGH: If the AFL-CIO, on their general staff, has a woman organizer, I don't know who she is or where. Isn't that something?

INTERVIEWER: It really hasn't changed that much.

THORNBURGH: It hasn't changed that much.

INTERVIEWER: How did your family feel about your being involved in the labor movement and going out and doing this type of work? Organizing, still, I think for a woman, is considered a kind of a strange job. I think traveling and that type of thing is still pretty much considered men's work.

THORNBURGH: Sure it is. Well, my mother and father were pretty broadminded. They didn't know anything about the labor movement when I joined it, any more than I did. But in the meantime, my older sister who worked at the glove factory here, was first a business agent, and then an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. And my brother was working at the Brookside Mill, and he was a shop steward, and officer and finally a delegate, and all that stuff. So, they were hearing unionism all the time. At the time the CIO was organized, my oldest sister was with the Amalgamated, and she was CIO, and I was at the A.F.of L. We used to keep secrets from each other! When I was organizing a group around here, talking to a group, I wouldn't let her know it because she was an opponent.

INTERVIEWER: Were your sympathies pretty much with the A.F.of L. or pretty much that you were working for them?

THORNBURGH: I was just working for them. I was so glad when we had the merger.

INTERVIEWER: So your sister was working as an organizer for the CIO?

THORNBURGH: And I was working as an organizer for the A.F.of L.

INTERVIEWER: How many years did she work as an organizer?

THORNBURGH: Oh, about twelve. Maybe fifteen.

INTERVIEWER: Is she still around?

THORNBURGH: No, she died. She died before the merger.

INTERVIEWER: Was she also single?

THORNBURGH: No, she was Ben's mother--this nephew of mine who lives with me--her husband died when Ben was seven.

INTERVIEWER: Then, when you finished the Rome, Georgia, drive, you applied for the scholarship? [at Ruskin College, Oxford, England]

THORNBURGH: Yes, and I stayed over there about fourteen months. I stayed a little longer when my term was over.

INTERVIEWER: How did you go over? On a boat?

THORNBURGH: On a boat. The Marine Tiger--a re-converted troop ship.

INTERVIEWER: And there were three other people from the A.F.of L. who went?

THORNBURGH: Uh-huh. There was an office worker from Kentucky, and a steel worker from Detroit, and a teacher.

INTERVIEWER: Were they all single?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And you went to Ruskin College?

THORNBURGH: At Oxford. It's part of the university there. Settling down to study was really hard.

INTERVIEWER: What did you study?

THORNBURGH: I studied political science, economics, English history--because I wanted to--and British trade unionism.

INTERVIEWER: And that was actually a course?

THORNBURGH: That was actually a course.

INTERVIEWER: And the A.F.of L. paid your scholarship or were they given by Ruskin College?

THORNBURGH: The A.F.of L. paid it. That included living expenses and everything. We were given four pounds each quarter for books. I've forgotten what that amounted to in American money. I borrowed my books out of the library and used my four pounds for other things.

INTERVIEWER: That was smart.

THORNBURGH: I never did spend any of my money for books. I borrowed the books and used my money to go to Holland.

INTERVIEWER: Were any of the other three people women?

THORNBURGH: One. Just one.

INTERVIEWER: Two women and two men.

THORNBURGH: Actually there were three men. I forgot about Jerry Redding. He was from the Farmers Union out West.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh. And was Ruskin College a predominately male college?

THORNBURGH: No, there were other women there.

INTERVIEWER: And you were in classes with other students?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes. Sure we were. We were in dormitories with the other students.

INTERVIEWER: Were the other students from pretty well-to-do backgrounds?

THORNBURGH: No. Ruskin College is a Labor College.

INTERVIEWER: So most of them had come out of the labor movement?

THORNBURGH: All of the students were on scholarships from their unions. We were all union people.

INTERVIEWER: Fantastic. So there was a lot to be learned in the classroom and outside the classroom.

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes. I thought more outside the classroom.

INTERVIEWER: So you made good contacts.

THORNBURGH: I finished the course with a "B" and I didn't try any harder than that. Because that would have meant simply studying all the time, and I wanted the other contacts. That was good enough. Studying British history has never been of any value to me except for my own satisfaction. I enjoyed studying it. Economics was hard.

INTERVIEWER: So what did you spend your spare time doing?

THORNBURGH: All of these students were very serious students. There was very little playing around. Once in a while, not very often, we would go to a pub and shoot darts and sing. Most of our social life was taken up with speeches. We would have members of Parliament come out and talk to us and things like that. It was very serious. We had very little of what you would call social activities.

INTERVIEWER: Your evenings were even spent going to meetings and lectures?

THORNBURGH: Yes. But that was a good year. Then, while I was there, I got a scholarship, while on a scholarship, to go to Blaricum, Holland, to study for two weeks. And I really didn't get very much out of that because of the languaguage.

INTERVIEWER: It was in Dutch?

THORNBURGH: Yes. So through the interpreter, you just lose something.

INTERVIEWER: What was that school?

THORNBURGH: That was a school mostly on the Netherlands economics, which I wasn't particularly interested in. I just wanted to go to Holland. But I attended all the classes and listened. But because of the language, it was difficult. I didn't get a whole lot out of it. But I did have a good time with those Dutch girls. They are the cleanest people in the world. It was so cold while we were over there! Of course, we went to Amsterdam for a little holiday. The canals were frozen over. Out at Blaricum we stayed in a youth hostel that had one small gas heater. I slept in a sweater and wool socks to try to keep warm. And those little Dutch girls! We did not have a bathroom inside, but there was a place outside that was like a watering trough. There was one for the girls and one for the boys. Remember, this was outside. Those little Dutch girls would go out there and strip down to the waist in that cold weather and wash and wash. The other girls and I did not have a bath for the two weeks we were there, I'll guarantee you. We would say, "We will change our underclothes because we are sleeping in them." But it was so cold, we didn't get cleaned up. We didn't even wash our face. But when we got to Amsterdam, we cleaned up a little. Amsterdam is a lovely city.

INTERVIEWER: What sticks in your mind as the most valuable experience you had during your stay at Ruskin College?

THORNBURGH: Well, I think the greatest thing about being over there was my association with the English people. And of course, I could tie that right in with studying the British trade union movement. I learned so much about how....you could organize so much easier in England than you could here. Because you had union members there who came from a four or five generation union family. Here I've heard so many union men say, "I don't want my children to do what I had to do." But back in the old guild days in England, and that is what our labor movement is based upon, if the father was a tailor, the son was a tailor, if the father was a carpenter,

THORNBURGH: the son was a carpenter. And they were brought up in that trade union atmosphere. They didn't have what we had here in 1934. Here, there were no union parents to tell their children about the labor movement. And over there when they had a strike, they never thought about scabs like we do. Nobody scabbed. Everybody just came out. They took it for granted, that's the way it was.

INTERVIEWER: The British labor movement has always been fairly progressive.

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. It's very progressive.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved very closely with any of those unions while you were in England?

THORNBURGH: Nothing more than going to their conventions and going to their lectures. And I talked to some of the local unions over there and told them about the American labor movement. But that's all. I wasn't really involved in any of their activities.

INTERVIEWER: But you did explain that there were some differences between the American labor movement and the British labor movement.

THORNBURGH: Oh yeah, they were way ahead of us. So far as I know they never had a law in England that prohibited people from organizing.

INTERVIEWER: From having closed shops?

THORNBURGH: From having closed shops. And see, we had to have a law! We had to have the Wagner Act in 1934 before we even had the right to organize. And it was the Wagner Act that gave us the right to organize. England never had a law because the old Guilds were hundreds of years old.

INTERVIEWER: How did that experience in England make you think about what you had been involved in in the U.S., in trade union activism?

THORNBURGH: Well, I learned a lot from them, and I came back from over there more militant. I felt that if they could do those things, that we could, too. Although I have not got to put it to use yet.

INTERVIEWER: Did it create in you a bigger interest in the history of American labor?

THORNBURGH: Yes, it definitely did. It certainly did. Because you see, our first president, Samuel Gompers, a Jewish cigar maker, came from England. And he was more militant than the leaders we have today.

INTERVIEWER: So you came back in 1948?

THORNBURGH: September of '48.

INTERVIEWER: While you were gone, you father died.

THORNBURGH: Yes, he died in May of '48 and I came back in September.

INTERVIEWER: And he had been very strong about wanting you to go to England?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. I didn't think at the time that he would be alive when I came back, but he and my mother were both very much in favor of me going. Because even at the time I was trying to decide if I should go, if I could afford to go, or whether I should go or not, they spread the word all over this neighborhood that I was going.

INTERVIEWER: And before you went, you were working for the Central Labor Council?

THORNBURGH: That's right. As a secretary.

INTERVIEWER: This was before you had begun as associate editor of the . . .

THORNBURGH: I was actually working for the Central Labor Council on the East Tennessee Labor News, but I was not the editor.

INTERVIEWER: And you had been with them how long before you left?

THORNBURGH: Just about a year, because I had been in New York City.

INTERVIEWER: And had they guaranteed you your job when you came back?

THORNBURGH: No.

INTERVIEWER: You took a risk . . .

THORNBURGH: I sure did.

INTERVIEWER: So, when you came back to the U.S., what did you do?

THORNBURGH: I went right back to that same job, became Associate Editor of the East Tennessee Labor News and later, Editor.

INTERVIEWER: How long had the Labor News been around?

THORNBURGH: Since 1932. A group of railroad workers started it. It was the Knoxville Labor News then and it wasn't much of a paper!

INTERVIEWER: Were they unionized workers? And they kind of started on their own?

THORNBURGH: Yes. On their own. And they published it when they could get the money to publish it. Then as the unions started to grow, we made it a weekly and changed it to the East Tennessee Labor News.

INTERVIEWER: And the A.F.of L. Central Labor Council took that over?

THORNBURGH: That's right. But mostly though, and that's something I never did like about that paper, it was supported by advertising.

THORNBURGH: I didn't like that part of it. But printing was so expensive, there was just no way we could operate a paper without it. It was a very expensive venture. But I didn't like that idea of taking money for advertising from the very people that we were trying to organize. But we had to do it that way.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that having to take advertising from the people whom you regarded as your enemies in the labor movement influenced the nature of the news that was carried in the newspaper?

THORNBURGH: To a certain extent, it did.

INTERVIEWER: In other words, the newspaper was less militant?

THORNBURGH: Yes, it was.

INTERVIEWER: Lucille, how much influence did you have over what went into the newspaper and what types of articles were written?

THORNBURGH: Well, I had almost complete control over what went into the paper, but I could just go so far. I knew when to stop.

INTERVIEWER: Now, what does that mean?

THORNBURGH: Well, that means that I could just be militant up to a certain point. I couldn't lambast some of the companies that I would liked to have.

INTERVIEWER: Was that because they were buying ads or because the Central Labor Council was not as militant and progressive as you felt it should be?

THORNBURGH: Both. See, we had the building trade unions which are very conservative. If some company here that they had a contract with really did something wrong, I wouldn't dare report it. Because they would say, "We have a contract with them."

INTERVIEWER: And they didn't want things the company was doing wrong reported?

THORNBURGH: No, they didn't want me to make any waves. And I didn't. Because they were strong and powerful unions. You know, there is something else there, too. I wonder if a lot of people realize this is what can happen: I remember one time we wanted to organize a chain of grocery stores here, the clerks and the butchers. We wanted to organize the people on the inside. But the building tradesmen wouldn't let us do that because they had a contract to do their construction work. And I even talked with one of our international representatives about that. The only answer he gave me was that this has been a problem. If the building tradesmen put up a building they consider that a union outfitter or a union store in spite of the fact that the butchers and the clerks and the truck drivers and all those people are not organized. If the actual construction work is done by union building tradesmen, they consider it a union store or plant.

INTERVIEWER: So, everybody went along with the general feeling of the building tradesmen?

THORNBURGH: That's right. They almost had to.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any other areas where you felt political pressure not to write about things in a more militant fashion other than from the building trades unions?

THORNBURGH: Yes, there were a lot of things. For one thing, I've always been in sympathy with Highlander School. But many of our members, I would say, most of them in those conservative unions, were just like the general community, they considered Highlander a "red" communist school. And I wanted us to participate more in Highlander because I thought there was a real good opportunity there to train leaders. But even the top leaders in the A.F. of L. at that time, and even since it has been the AFL-CIO, have never endorsed Highlander. Now some of the international unions hold seminars there.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think the A.F.of L. felt that way? Do you think possibly it was because Highlander worked more with the CIO organizing drives in the thirties?

THORNBURGH: I think so, and I think the reason Highlander did work more with the CIO, was because the A.F.of L. didn't cooperate with them. They didn't participate in their activities. It wasn't Highlander's fault. It was the A.F.of L.'s fault that they didn't. But still some of the unions and the State Labor Council's did cooperate with Highlander. But overall the A.F.of L. was opposed to Highlander.

INTERVIEWER: And not just particularly in this area, but, say, some of the international unions . . .

THORNBURGH: That's right. Some of the more conservative ones.

INTERVIEWER: How long had you been associated with Highlander? When did you first know about it?

THORNBURGH: I knew about Highlander before it was even organized at Monteagle, Tennessee. I knew Myles Horton and his wife, then Zylphia. I knew them before they even set up that school at Monteagle, Tennessee.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you meet them?

THORNBURGH: I met them here during our textile strike.

INTERVIEWER: That was what....let's see....Highlander celebrated its fortieth anniversary when?....two years ago? Wasn't it in 1936 or something like that? Maybe 1935.*

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*Highlander Folk School was started in 1932.

THORNBURGH: I think more like '35.

INTERVIEWER: So you met Myles and Zylphia . . .

THORNBURGH: In '34. I knew them then.

INTERVIEWER: They came in . . .

THORNBURGH: To help with the textile strike. Myles tried to set up some classes in trade unionism and labor economics. He didn't have very many students, but I was one of them. Highlander has been a great help to me.

INTERVIEWER: So all through the years when it was not, well, when it was almost a hindrance to be associated with Highlander as far as people in some unions were concerned, you still stuck with it?

THORNBURGH: Oh, it was definitely a hindrance. Very much so.

INTERVIEWER: Did you try to keep that secret, or did you just . . .?

THORNBURGH: I kept it secret to a certain extent for this reason: I felt that if I was going to be effective in the labor movement, that I had to keep it a secret, at least until I could educate the people where they wouldn't feel that way. I had to. You know what I think the major grievance against Highlander was from the very first? Highlander was integrated. That was the big thing. And I think now that we have integration there is nothing to fight Highlander on. But Highlander started out integrated and that was the big thing. We would hear people, even our union members say, "Why they've even got niggers down there. We don't want to go anywhere they've got niggers."

INTERVIEWER: And of course, the building union trades at that time were completely and totally white.

THORNBURGH: Oh, absolutely, absolutely. And other than the Laborer's International Union--they used to call it the Common Laborers and Hod Carriers Union--they were the only union that had any blacks.

INTERVIEWER: Did your association with Highlander serve as a way for you to be actively involved and work out some of the militant feelings you had?

THORNBURGH: Yes, it certainly did. I think Highlander has just been a great institution. And I still think that it is too bad that the labor movement here doesn't take advantage of all of those workshops and all of the experienced people they have there. It would be of great help to them.

INTERVIEWER: Were you the only person in the Knoxville area with organized labor who was associated with Highlander?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I think I was.* In the early days of Highlander, I have forgotten some of their names, but there were several people who were in sympathy with Highlander and associated with them to a certain extent. But they couldn't take the heat, and dropped out.

INTERVIEWER: So when you were associate editor of the newspaper there was somebody else who was editor of the paper?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Who was that?

THORNBURGH: John Essary. He was a bus driver.

INTERVIEWER: And what was his function and role in the paper?

THORNBURGH: Mostly his was taking care of the advertising. I did the editorial work and he did the advertising.

INTERVIEWER: So, in essence, you were the editor.

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And he would have, like in a normal newspaper, been called business manager or advertising manager or something like that?

THORNBURGH: Yes, but see, there again he had to be the editor because the editor was paid more and it had to be a man. You couldn't pay a woman as much as you paid the man. So he had to have the title of editor so he could make more money than I did.

INTERVIEWER: Equal pay for equal work . . .

THORNBURGH: . . .was not a by-word at the labor temple.

INTERVIEWER: So you were really paid a secretary's salary while you were doing an editor's work?

THORNBURGH: That's right. Because actually I was the editor when I won that union secretary contest.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever become editor of the newspaper?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. John Essary left to take a job with the city, and I became editor then.

INTERVIEWER: How many years had you been working at the newspaper then?

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*Lucille was the only leader in Knoxville area labor movement associated with Highlander. There was at least one rank and file member of Knoxville area labor movement associated with Highlander.

THORNBURGH: From '42 to '62.

INTERVIEWER: Twenty years as associate editor! And had the same person been editor for those twenty years?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

THORNBURGH: He was editor. His salary was more than mine. He got an expense account and I didn't.

INTERVIEWER: How did it feel to work at the labor temple, probably the only female employee and, for a long time, the only woman on the Central Labor Council? How did it feel? I would imagine that it probably felt kind of lonely sometimes being the only woman with these men.

THORNBURGH: Well, it was. I don't think the loneliness disturbed me as much as they wouldn't put me on an equal basis in any way.

INTERVIEWER: They never took you seriously?

THORNBURGH: They never took me seriously. They didn't think that I had near as much intelligence as they had. Therefore, my salary shouldn't be anything like as high as theirs.

INTERVIEWER: And while you worked for the Central Labor Council you remained in the office workers employees union?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I still am.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever try to get the local union to support you in pay raises and that kind of thing?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes, and they tried too. And once in a while, we would be successful in getting a little five dollar increase.

INTERVIEWER: It is certainly a strange situation to be working for a labor organization, the Central Labor Council, and to go in and kind of lobby for your own rights.

THORNBURGH: Yes, but we had to do that.

INTERVIEWER: And probably the opposition was surprised that you did this.

THORNBURGH: Absolutely. But these unions had grown large enough to really negotiate now. You see, painters, and laborers, and sheetmetal workers, all have offices. And of course, the electricians have their own building, as do the plumbers, carpenters, etc., and they all have secretaries, and they all belong to the Office Workers Union. And sometimes negotiating with the local unions is harder than negotiating with the company.

INTERVIEWER: Did you do your own negotiating with the Central Labor Council?

THORNBURGH: No, I had a committee from the Office Workers Union to negotiate for me. And we would stay for days just to get a little increase.

INTERVIEWER: Just a couple of years ago I read about the CWA [Communications Workers of America] office workers in Atlanta going out on strike. And then the officials at the CWA were faced with the prospects of having to cross that picket line. Most of them didn't. But still, it creates a kind of funny situation.

THORNBURGH: I have forgotten the year, and I think you will find it in one of those scrapbooks, we have a picture where we picketed the Carpenters Union.

INTERVIEWER: How have you seen the Central Labor Council change over the years that you have been a member of it?

THORNBURGH: I don't think it has changed a great deal except when I was first a delegate there in 1934, the majority of the delegates were from the building trades unions and the railroad unions. And now, I don't think there is a single railroad union active here since there are no more railroads here. I think the influx of the industrial workers coming in has changed the face of it to a certain extent. Because at the time that I was first a delegate, there was no such thing as say, the Plasti-Line Company because they didn't manufacture plastics yet. We didn't have places like Rohm and Haas and Electro-Mangenese and places like that. Over the years, I think these industrial workers brought in new ideas to the Central Labor Council.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of new ideas?

THORNBURGH: Well, certainly they haven't been militant enough, but with the industrial unions you could work more easily because they all work under one roof. Where in your building trades, they were like the Teamsters, scattered all over the country, and it was harder to organize them and harder to set up any kind of a program with them because they weren't together like the industrial workers were.

INTERVIEWER: Did you continue through the years to have a close relationship with the textile workers union?

THORNBURGH: Well, for a long time here, we didn't have a Textile Workers Union.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, but like after 1934, you were involved with United Textile Workers which was an A.F.of L. union.

THORNBURGH: That union, of course, as I told you before, went out of business. And we didn't have a textile workers union here. Yes, we did. No, it was not really a textile workers union, it was a hosiery workers union and was different from the textile workers union. That was the only semblance of a textile union that we had here. We didn't

THORNBURGH: have United Textile Workers Union at all here.

INTERVIEWER: You say that in Knoxville the United Textile Workers, after the general strike in 1934, disappeared here in Knoxville, not as a national union.

THORNBURGH: So far as I know. I may not be completely correct on this but I don't believe we had a textile workers union here until just the recent years when the seatbelt company came here and was organized under the textile workers.

INTERVIEWER: You know, that's a different union from the United Textile Workers. It's a CIO union.

THORNBURGH: Yes. There was a CIO union. You see, we were not merged at that time. There was not an A.F.of L. textile union here. There was a CIO textile union here at Brookside Mills. But my union, the United Textile Workers, did not have a local here. They were A.F.of L.

INTERVIEWER: They are no longer in existence, are they?

THORNBURGH: No. And the Textile Workers have merged with the Amalgamated now. Which should have been done a long time ago.

INTERVIEWER: So you feel that the entrance of the industrial workers in the Central Labor Council did kind of push it. How influential were those industrial unions?

THORNBURGH: I think they were rather influential. They had more interest for one thing. And something else it certainly did do, it brought some women in. It brought the women into the labor movement. The hosiery workers union has always been a good union. And we had women from the hosiery workers and women from the Amalgamated, and then, of course, later, the Communication Workers. After the merger, we started getting a lot more women in.

INTERVIEWER: As delegates to the Central Labor Council?

THORNBURGH: As delegates to the Council and in some offices. They could be secretaries. They couldn't be president or vice-president, but we did elect them as secretary or treasurer.

INTERVIEWER: Would it be fair to say that during the time you were with the Central Labor Council that the building trades continued to dominate?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned, I think, in another conversation that while you were associate editor of the East Tennessee Labor News, you were also involved in an organizing drive at Standard Knitting Mills.

THORNBURGH: That's right. That was when the International Ladies Garment Workers Union that was trying to organize that mill. They put on a massive organizing drive, but the election was lost.

INTERVIEWER: What year was that?

THORNBURGH: I believe that was 1958. And we really put on an organizing drive.

INTERVIEWER: Did they have the backing of the Central Labor Council?

THORNBURGH: Yeah, they did have. They had the support of the Central Labor Council and a lot of the other unions here supported them. The Standard Knitting Mill was such an old building that we didn't have to think that it was built with union labor because nobody knows when it was built. At the time we were trying to organize it, they had 2,200 employees there. But we lost the election.

INTERVIEWER: What was your role in that organizing drive?

THORNBURGH: I just helped the organizers. Each week, we put on a television program. We held mock elections on TV and we sang union songs.

INTERVIEWER: That really surprises me that you were able to get that kind of coverage on television.

THORNBURGH: We bought it. You better believe we bought it. We bought a 30-minute slot. I believe we had it at prime time, from six to six-thirty. Do you know Geneva Sneed with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

THORNBURGH: She led our singing.

INTERVIEWER: And you also wrote some columns about the situation?

THORNBURGH: While that campaign was on, I wrote a column every week in the East Tennessee Labor News.

INTERVIEWER: But at one time, didn't you also write for one of the newspapers here in Knoxville?

THORNBURGH: No.

INTERVIEWER: Those columns I saw were out of the East Tennessee Labor News?

THORNBURGH: Yes. They would pick up things that I had written in the East Tennessee Labor News, but I never did write for them, as a full-fledged writer or anything.

INTERVIEWER: So your job as associate editor involved gathering the news and doing an editorial or column and were you involved in the lay-out also?

THORNBURGH: To a certain extent. But we had a very good union printer here. In fact, we won a prize one year for our lay-out.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of topics did you like to write about in your column?

THORNBURGH: Well, other than being involved in an organizing campaign like Standard, I liked to write political columns. Because I have always been interested in politics. Urging the members to vote and to support our endorsed candidates. I like that better than any part of it. We used to get all our benefits from negotiations and picket lines but now, we are forced to get our benefits through the legislative halls. Picket line and negotiation can't do it any more because we have too many labor laws and we have to get so much through legislation.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of changing labor laws . . .

THORNBURGH: Which I'm against. I'm against any labor law. I don't think we should have any labor laws. Good or bad. Well, perhaps those things that affect the entire community like child labor laws and free education. I think we need laws on those. But so far as laws like the Taft-Hartley Act I don't think we need at all. I think that if the government would leave it up to labor and management we would work out our own problems.

INTERVIEWER: And you don't think it is necessary to have any laws to protect the workers during strikes? Or organizing?

THORNBURGH: I really think that we could take care of that ourselves if we weren't hampered with all these laws.

INTERVIEWER: It really does bog things down in the courts . . .

THORNBURGH: Oh absolutely, and I don't like this idea of when you go into negotiations having someone other than the workers themselves doing the negotiating.

INTERVIEWER: The lawyers.

THORNBURGH: The lawyers. The union has a lawyer and the company has a lawyer. And the lawyers are negotiating between themselves.

INTERVIEWER: Well, in fact, you could hypothesize that one of the reasons we have all the labor laws is to give a lot of lawyers a job.

THORNBURGH: That is right.

INTERVIEWER: Now that I think about it, maybe you are right. Because if a union local were strong and militant, then by the nature of their sticking together, and that kind of thing, even if the workers were arrested or blacklisted or whatever, if they build a good, strong, local union, then you can fight those things.

THORNBURGH: I think the union should be the workers' protection, not legislation.

INTERVIEWER: Because now so many of those things get tied up in the courts and, my God! It can be two years before the National Labor Relations Board hears your case and what are you to do?

THORNBURGH: Nothing, just sit around and waste time waiting for a decision.

INTERVIEWER: And so many of the strikes now are governed by court injunctions.

THORNBURGH: I like that old phrase, "The least governed is the best governed," we would get along better if labor and management were left to work it out together. But you have attorneys on each side working and then you go into a long civil court case and then federal cases and everything just gets bogged down. I liked it when you had a negotiating committee and management had a negotiating committee and you worked it out.

INTERVIEWER: In some places, they still do that.

THORNBURGH: I hope so.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, they do.

THORNBURGH: Well, I don't like lawyers doing it.

INTERVIEWER: But in a lot of places the union and the companies will not sit down at the same table together to have a public hearing or anything unless their lawyers are there.

What other tasks or duties did you have on your job with the Central Labor Council?

THORNBURGH: I assisted the smaller local unions in whatever needed to be done. I helped all of the different groups.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever help any of them on membership drives or anything like that?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes, I helped them on that. I would always pass out leaflets for them, type up contracts, notarize papers, etc.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go out on picket lines and do leafletting and things like that?

THORNBURGH: Oh, I did that. During an election, we would always handbill the plant gates, you know. And I liked to do that. After we had endorsed the candidates we would leaflet the plant gates.

INTERVIEWER: So you never really lost your strong connections and ties with the grassroots (rank and file) labor movement.

THORNBURGH: No, I never did.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of influence do you feel like you had on the Council in Knoxville?

THORNBURGH: Well, I think I brought a degree, a small degree, of militancy to them. I think that I did that. I worked so hard, and was ambitious in the labor movement in organizing. I really feel I brought a little enthusiasm to them. Made them take a little more enthusiastic approach toward things. I think in a way I proved to some of them that women did have a little bit of sense, that we were fairly intelligent, you know. There were some things that we could do.

INTERVIEWER: But even though you probably were as intelligent if not more intelligent than a lot of those men who held leadership positions in the union, you still were not able to get to those leadership positions.

THORNBURGH: I never made it because I was a woman. I was just another woman working over there. Women just didn't do those things. Women just didn't have sense enough to do the jobs that men could do, they thought.

INTERVIEWER: How did you react to that at that time?

THORNBURGH: I didn't like it, but I just made myself become accustomed to it because that's the way it was.

INTERVIEWER: And you looked for ways that you could get into leadership positions, didn't you?

THORNBURGH: That's right. I think a lot of our women too took the attitude, and I did try to get them out of that attitude, of just accepting it. This is a man's job and there is no point to us trying to be president or anything. They just took it for granted that the women were going to be the underdogs in the labor movement. And I don't think that has changed enough yet.

INTERVIEWER: So, do you feel like you got support from the other women who were on the Labor Council?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I did.

INTERVIEWER: But some of them were not willing to buck the attitudes.

THORNBURGH: No. They just didn't feel it was worthwhile.

INTERVIEWER: Have you seen any major changes in terms of women's roles in unions, say, from the thirties until the 1970's?

THORNBURGH: Yes, because there had been a few women who had been aggressive enough to force themselves into top offices. For instance in the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, they have four women vice presidents.

THORNBURGH: And as far as I know, there is still a woman president of the local hosiery workers union. So they have, through their own aggressiveness, come a little ways. But not near far enough.*

INTERVIEWER: I read the clipping about the state labor board meeting you attended in 1934, while you were still caught up with the United Textile Workers. You were one of two women delegates to that convention.

THORNBURGH: That's right. There was just two of us.

INTERVIEWER: And they quoted you as saying that the union was as important to you as any man.

THORNBURGH: Oh, that corny thing. I've forgotten what the reporter asked me. Something terribly corny. Something like that I would rather be a union organizer than a housewife. I've forgotten what it was.

INTERVIEWER: The whole attitude of the news coverage in things you were involved in was to make you out as, "well, here is this beautiful young woman, this pretty young woman." And they emphasized that more than your aggressiveness.

THORNBURGH: They paid no attention to my ability whatever. I was a young woman in the labor movement, and as they termed me, I was a pretty, young woman in the labor movement and that was it. If you'll notice in the clippings, my ability or what I was doing was never mentioned.

INTERVIEWER: Once in a while they would talk about how you had been a leader in the general textile strike here in Knoxville and how you were popular with the trade union movement. They never used the words respected, determined, aggressive, or independent. They were trying to play up your attractiveness as a young woman.

THORNBURGH: Oh, I've been on picket lines when men would pass by and say, "Why are you here? Why aren't you at home with your family?" Just all sorts of insults like that. They wouldn't say that to a man, "Why aren't you at home looking after your family?" But they'd say it to me.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have the feeling that in the thirties in some ways women were more active in some of the strikes and the picket lines than they were in the fifties?

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes. The labor movement was new in the thirties. These women took every opportunity they had to be militant. But they could not get into a position of leadership. If they could have gotten into a position of leadership I think you would have seen a better labor movement in Knoxville. You'd certainly see a <u>different</u> one.

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*Mae Smith, with Amalgamated, is Chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Council now. In my day over there, a woman could be on the Trustee Board but she could not be the Chairman.

NTERVIEWER: In some ways, the women were more militant but the thing that hasn't changed is that it's still very difficult for women to get into leadership positions.

THORNBURGH: It certainly is. They wanted to be aggressive. They were aggressive but they could never get up to the leadership positions.

INTERVIEWER: One of the clippings, accused women on picket lines at Cherokee and Brookside of having thrown rocks.

THORNBURGH: They did.

INTERVIEWER: I was interested to read about the militant nature of the picket lines during those strikes. People were involved in putting tacks and nails . . .

THORNBURGH: Roofing nails were the best things!

INTERVIEWER: The newspaper articles talked about how they tried to get a court injunction against you to stop using such slanderous terms as "yellow dogs" and "scabs". How do you think the tactics of the labor movement have changed since the thirties til now?

HORNBURGH: Well, frankly I don't think they're as aggressive now as they were then. Of course they've come a long ways in their hours, wages, and working conditions. Do you know now that it is not unusual when the building trades have a strike, to hire pickets?

INTERVIEWER: They hire pickets?

THORNBURGH: They hire people to be their pickets. For instance the plumbers, carpenters, sheetmetalworkers who make much higher wages than the common laborers will hire a laborer to do their picketing.

INTERVIEWER: So you feel like the labor movement today is much less militant and much less informed?

THORNBURGH: Well, I think they are because in the early stages in the thirties and early forties we were in the learning state. We were just learning what the labor movement was all about. If you read labor history back in the early days, the very early days, they were very militant. You remember, I'm sure you've read about the Sacco and Vanzetti case, that was in 1928. Of course, there were no unions around here to be militant, that amounted to anything, but in other places the unions took up that cause. And then in the big Haymarket Riot in Chicago the unions were very militant. And I'm just afraid that the unions now depend too much on labor laws instead of just going out and doing things.

INTERVIEWER: They are very concerned about the law.

THORNBURGH: The law. They're very concerned about it. I still wish we didn't have any labor laws at all. If you could just do as you please.

NTERVIEWER: Do you think there is a tendency in the labor movement to be much more cautious about how they do things and wanting to have a respectable image, than there was in the thirties?

THORNBURGH: For instance yesterday morning on the TV show we talked about labor history....and the labor movement has become so respectable now that you can see labor leaders sitting right here in Knoxville on a TV program. We weren't all that respectable in the thirties.

INTERVIEWER: Some of the clippings called you a radical.

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes, I was a terrible radical.

INTERVIEWER: People back then had to put more of themselves on the line. It separated the sheep from the goats.

THORNBURGH: It certainly did. Back in the early 1900's you had no legislation to depend upon. Banding together and supporting and protecting each other was all you had. So we built good unions. I don't like all the protective legislation.

INTERVIEWER: In some ways unions today represent benefits....which are gained sometimes without rank and file members having any say in those decisions.

HORNBURGH: I know. It's not good. When I first joined the union we were just interested in three things: hours, wages, working conditions. Now I think of all of the medical benefits and other fringe benefits and things that they have and I think they are all good. But it is just something that is given to you. They don't have to go out and work for it.

INTERVIEWER: It's not the local members or the rank and file members . . .

THORNBURGH: No, it's the International unions that are negotiating for them. And something that is given to you that way and not having to work for it so hard, you don't appreciate it as much. Where you have to go on strike and walk the picket line, or sit in negotiations for days on end to get something, then you really appreciate it. You know how hard it was to come by. When you have an international representative come in with his lawyer and the company with their lawyer, negotiate it, you don't appreciate it as much. And, too, I think it weakens your union. We used to think, and I think that it is right, that the best unions are the ones that come off the picket line. If you have to go out there and walk, and believe me, being on a picket line is no fun, you appreciate your union.

NTERVIEWER: That's right. I've been on them before.

HORNBURGH: Now it may look romantic and dramatic to some people, but walking a picket line is no fun.

INTERVIEWER: Neither is getting up at five o'clock in the morning to be there when the shift changes.

THORNBURGH: That's right. And you walk up and down carrying a heavy sign. My ankles have been frostbitten walking a picket line. It's no fun at all. But you do get your benefits that way.

INTERVIEWER: Sometimes it's my feeling, I know, for instance at Alcoa, the local there within the last five or six years has voted to strike several times and they have to wait for word from the international before they can do it. By the time they even get the word back, which is usually, "No. You can't strike,". . .

THORNBURGH: They've changed their minds.

INTERVIEWER: That's right. They've gotten discouraged. Seems like some of the internationals are not encouraging strikes at local levels or otherwise.

THORNBURGH: No, they're not. When it comes right down to it, and this is a rule that never has changed and I don't think it ever will change, the only real weapon a worker has is a strike. That's all. Our work is the only weapon that we have and when we withdraw that, then we've got no weapon. I wouldn't give you a split nickle for any contract that has a "no strike" clause in it. And you know, an awful lot of the unions now have that.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think is responsible for that position by the international unions? You've been in the labor movement for a long time and you've seen it progress through different stages.

THORNBURGH: I think it is the labor laws. I think it is all these laws that we are hampered with. Possibly the international unions are thinking right. If we let these people come out on strike, they are going to slap an unjunction on us and we're likely to lose the union. And there are just so many laws against them that they can't do it.

INTERVIEWER: But I remember reading that when you were in the Cherokee Mills strike, you were slapped with a subpeona and sent to court. And there was a long list of other people who did that. But yet you had the courage or guts to go ahead and work on that strike regardless.

THORNBURGH: We didn't pay any attention to the injunction. We just went right ahead. You see, they won't do that now.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think they won't do that?

THORNBURGH: I think they are afraid of going to jail, you know, violating an injunction is a serious matter. And I think they are afraid of it and we weren't afraid.

INTERVIEWER: You weren't afraid of going to jail?

THORNBURGH: No, we weren't afraid of going to jail. None of the people were back then. In fact, if you remember, the old IWW's (Industrial Workers of the World) considered it an honor to go to jail. And the early railroad men considered it an honor to go to jail. But, now, my goodness, can you imagine one of these dressed up business agents, or an international representative, going to jail?

INTERVIEWER: We've come a long way, but some of the things have changed for the bad.

THORNBURGH: We have regressed in some ways.

INTERVIEWER: In terms of the militancy?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Do you see any hope for regaining some of that militancy?

THORNBURGH: I think there is going to be a change in the labor movement. I think there is going to be a movement from the rank and file. I think that things are going to change.

INTERVIEWER: That things have progressed to the point now that there has to be some resistance?

THORNBURGH: Every organization just goes on so long and they have to have a change. And I think it's time for one. And I hope it happens in my lifetime.

INTERVIEWER: You'd like to be here to see it wouldn't you?

THORNBURGH: And to help do it.

INTERVIEWER: To be on the picket line.

THORNBURGH: To be on the picket line and to help do it.

INTERVIEWER: While we are talking about some of these things in general, Lucille, how do you feel about labor organizing and what is your attitude about that?

THORNBURGH: Well, I think organizing is the basis of the whole labor movement. Because if you don't organize the people and get them into your unions, you don't have a union. So the organizing has to come first. I think the organizing overshadows the community activities and even the political activities. Because it is through the organizing that you get your members, and it's the members that build the union.

INTERVIEWER: Did you always feel that way? I mean, as soon as you became an organizer, were you that convinced of the role?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I was. You can't do anything with people until they are organized. You just have an unruly mass. You don't know where

THORNBURGH: they are. And organizing is the basis.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of approaches did you use in organizing? When you were on the organizing drives, what was your beginning point?

THORNBURGH: Let's take the glove factory in Rome, Georgia. That would be a good one to start with. The first thing we did, we got the names through other union people of people who worked in the glove factory. Then we would go out to their homes at night and talk to them. And I didn't talk to them about any of the other facets of the labor movement other than the organizing. I would point out to them where they would get better hours, wages and working conditions. And then all of the other things that follow like the seniority clauses. But I didn't go into the other things because even today, those hours, wages and working conditions are what the people join the union for. And then, once you get them into the union, and educate them to that point, you can branch out to your political activities and community activities. But the organizing and getting the contract signed has to come first.

INTERVIEWER: When you met resistance say, from people who were not in favor of the union, how did you counter that?

THORNBURGH: Well, you had to work on it on an individual basis. At the time I was organizing this glove factory down there, there had been several attempts to organize it before and they all failed. And the people would tell me, well, I joined this before and nothing ever happened. And then they would point to strikes. Because the employer had told them that. That is the first thing a union does is call a strike. And you had to counteract that. And I would always tell them that the union does not call the strike. The members call the strike. That you have a meeting and the members vote whether or not they want to strike. It would be up to them. Something that these modern day organizers certainly don't run into now is that all of us organizers were accused of being communists. (The Dies Committee was investigating everybody then.... saw a communist under every bush.) I went to one home in Rome where I was met at the door by the father of the girl I wanted to talk with and he said, "We don't want any of these old Russian Reds in here." I said, "Well, you could call me Tennessee Red but you couldn't call me a Russian Red because I was born in Tennessee." But we had that to counteract. We were up against that all the time.

INTERVIEWER: And you were also somebody from Tennessee who had gone to Georgia and were an outsider.

THORNBURGH: That is right. I was told by several of the people, we don't need anybody coming from Tennessee down here to tell us what to do. And I would try to tell them that I was a worker in Tennessee like you are a worker in Georgia. We are sisters under the skin. We are all working for our living. And sometimes I could convince them and sometimes I could not. Organizing is hard work.

INTERVIEWER: What usually were the arguments that convinced people?

THORNBURGH: Their own welfare of higher wages and better working conditions.

INTERVIEWER: Self interest.

THORNBURGH: Self interest, that is right. Because we all have that, and that is what they wanted. That was the most convincing argument that we could have. And we could even point to Rome, look at the carpenters over here. Compare the union carpenters with the non-union carpenters and the same with the electricians. And we would use the organized places. At that time, the Knoxville Glove Company was organized and I had all of those figures with me and I could tell them a glove worker in Knoxville running this thumbing machine gets fifteen or twenty cents more on the hour than you do down here and wouldn't you like to have it? Yes, they would like to have that. So that was a good selling point to have your facts and figures from another similar plant. That was always good.

INTERVIEWER: Did people ever come up with some of the arguments you hear today about union leadership being corrupt? Did you have that type of criticism to face?

THORNBURGH: We had that. At that time, there was not as much of it. And these people, I'm still talking about Rome, hadn't heard enough about the union that even what they would read in newspapers hadn't paid much attention to. But we did have some of that. Of course, we would always use the argument that was good then and it is good today, because I heard it used on television last week when Householder and those people were on, I heard them say the same thing that I said back in 1946 and '47, that you take it per capita- wise, there are not near as many thieves in the unions as there are in the banks. There are more bank thieves and embezzlers in the prisons today than there are union people. And I even hate to defend a crooked union representative because the people have put their trust in that union. And it is their dues. So when a union representative absconds with the money, he is taking his own co-workers money. And I think he is really worse than the banker is. William Green who was president of the A.F.of L. for so long, used to tell us, no matter if a bank teller embezzles a million dollars, that does not justify you to take a three cent postage stamp. Because he said that we should be above board in honesty. And we should, because the people have trusted us and it is our own co-workers dues, their hard-earned money, that is being misappropriated. And I think less of the union representative that would take that money than I would of a bank teller that would take it.

INTERVIEWER: When you went into a community, did you assume that everybody except maybe some of the textile workers would be against you?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I knew that. Now, I know that it is modern day organizing to

THORNBURGH: try to get the community with you. But I didn't even try that. I knew that the churches and the newspapers and the businessmen would all be against me and I didn't waste any time trying to convince them otherwise. I spent all my time trying to organize the people in the plant I was sent to. I never took out time for those people because they weren't for us and I wasn't going to be able to change them. So I just used my time with the workers.

INTERVIEWER: So what you had to do rather than create a buffer zone for the workers was to get the workers to have a little guts . . .

THORNBURGH: That's right. To do it on their own and not to depend on their church or the newspapers or the public or politics or anything else. To depend upon themselves and their own numerical strength. Because that's all they had.

INTERVIEWER: After you did the home visits, what was your next step?

THORNBURGH: When we could get enough of them together we would call a meeting. We would rent a motel room or something like that. You know, we didn't want to put them on the spot by meeting in their homes. And we would call a meeting and get them all together and hopefully sign them into the union. And most of the time, we did.

INTERVIEWER: Would you have to get them to sign new cards and then have an election or was it enough to just get a charter?

THORNBURGH: No, at that time, we had to get enough to get an election. You can usually get enough of the workers to sign the cards to get an election. But then between the time you called for the election and the election date, the employer really went to work. Then it's a toss-up whether you can convince them to vote for the union or the employer convinces them to vote against it. In the case of Rome, the employer was more influential than we were because he had convinced the majority of them to vote against the union.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have a cut-off percentage line on how many people in the plant who signed cards needed to have done that before you called for an election?

THORNBURGH: I never would call for an election until I had seventy-five percent.

INTERVIEWER: And a simple majority is what wins the election.

THORNBURGH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: One more than half the voters?

THORNBURGH: That's right. I like the old way. Of course, as I've told you, I don't like the labor laws. I think that if they would leave it up to labor and management, we would work it out by ourselves. I liked it better when you could get seven together and order a charter. Seven that were willing to put in their little two dollars each.

THORNBURGH: Our charters cost fourteen dollars. All seven would put in two dollars. Well, when you've got seven people putting in their two dollars to order a charter you had seven organizers.

INTERVIEWER: That's right, rather than one organizer.

THORNBURGH: That's right. You see, those people were really interested when they were putting their money into it and signing the charter. Then we would get the charter with their names on it, and I would say look, we are members. Well, that gave then a little distinction and you had seven organizers. And they would go right back into the plant helping you.

INTERVIEWER: And there was no cut off time for elections . . .

THORNBURGH: No, just a continuous thing. You had to continue right on with that. Something too that I think is interesting: at that time, William Green was president of the A.F.of L., and I was working for the A.F.of L. And he had some good ideas. Of course, he was an old man and he was conservative. And I hate to say it, but I think he had to die before we could get a merger of the AFL-CIO. But he still had some very good ideas. At the time that I considered it a failure at the glove factory in Rome, Georgia, I was at a convention and made a report on that and I said that I had failed. And he said no, that I hadn't. He said that no organizing effort was ever lost. He said that those people you convinced, even though they were not in the majority, would, as time goes on and conditions do not improve, are going to say, by golly, that woman was right. And he says our efforts are never wasted.

INTERVIEWER: I think that is true.

THORNBURGH: I think that is true, too. Because at least I had told the people what the union was, what it could do for them, and I think like he said that later they will think about it.

INTERVIEWER: After the election was held and the election was won, did you then move on to another organizing drive?

THORNBURGH: Yes. I've forgotten exactly what the law was but there was a time limit where you could call for another election. So there was no point in staying.

INTERVIEWER: But even if the election was won, the local elected its own officers and did their own negotiations for a contract?

THORNBURGH: That's right. I was not a negotiator. I stayed with them until they elected their own officers and had shown them how to conduct a meeting. But then I would call in a negotiator to help them draw up the contract and negotiate it.

INTERVIEWER: What about education type stuff? Did you teach them how, say, stay around until the local president was elected, and teach him how to do grievances?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So you were really an organizer and a union educator.

THORNBURGH: Oh yes, I helped them with grievances, told them what their rights were, and you know, the different ways to handle their union.

INTERVIEWER: They ran the business of the union after that, right?

THORNBURGH: That's right. And something we had to do then and maybe the organizers today have to do this: We had to teach a certain amount of parliamentary law. Parliamentary rules, rather. I would try to get all of them to study Roberts Rules of Order. Because if you didn't, you just had an unruly meeting. Like we had one local, they were electricians, but they were in an industrial plant here. And they didn't know how to run their union. I visited their union one time and the president made all the motions.

INTERVIEWER: Oh no!

THORNBURGH: Yes, he made all the motions and the recording secretary would record it as the president made the motions. I remember one of our organizers here organizing a group of marble workers, they were about the lowest paid group that you could possibly find. I was talking to him one day about drawing up a contract and he said do you realize what I am doing right now? I am teaching these people to read. Now that would really be what you would call starting from scratch. Where you had to teach them to read before they could even read their own contract.

INTERVIEWER: Reading a contract is a difficult thing to do.

THORNBURGH: It certainly is. I hope now the contracts are drawn up more in layman's language.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know. My impression is that they are drawn up pretty much in legal language. They are written up so that there could be two different interpretations of the language.

THORNBURGH: I'm telling you little funny things that just come to mind. I worked rather closely with the marble workers. Not as one of their officers or a paid employee, but just helping them out in different ways. This was over in South Knoxville. We had a grievance come up. I didn't handle the grievance. I just knew about it. But what had happened, one of the men got drunk on the job on Friday afternoon. They were paid every Friday morning. And on the lunch hour, someone would take up a little collection and go out and buy some whisky. And they would all drink it in the afternoon. One afternoon one guy got a little too much. The boss fired him. Well, they took that up as a grievance. And believe it or not, they won. Because one of those guys there had learned to read enough to where the contract said that this contract will not take away any privileges that we had here before. And he said we have always

THORNBURGH: been buying whisky on Friday at noon, and they won the grievance. He was pretty smart to pick that up. He said that that was a privilege that they had had. The employer said that he know they were getting whisky on Friday because after lunch they only worked three hours. And he said that he knew they were bringing a little beer and whisky in there when this guy got drunk. So the organizer that settled the grievance said that any person who drinks is likely to get drunk. Since the employer knew that they were drinking, that was a privilege he couldn't take away from them so they won the grievance.

INTERVIEWER: When you were an organizer for the AFL, did you work mostly with textile plants or did you help organize other . . .

THORNBURGH: No, I had to work in textiles and gloves and office workers. I helped organize a group of insurance employees into the office workers union.

INTERVIEWER: Are they still organized?

THORNBURGH: They are still organized as far as I know. And I wanted to be a general organizer and not just organize women. But that was unheard of in that day. I had to organize the women.

INTERVIEWER: So they sent you to all different places in the South?

THORNBURGH: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Georgia, Tennessee....How was it different to try to organize office workers than say textile workers?

THORNBURGH: Office workers were harder to organize. Much harder to organize. I don't know how the office workers union has come as far as it has because the employers in this insurance company that I organized told them, you are not just an average worker. You are white collar. You are above these carpenters and textile workers and these mill hands and all that. When I asked them why are you above them? You don't make as much money as they do. You don't have as good conditions as they do. So where is it that you are above them? But they liked to think that they were.

INTERVIEWER: That is one of the reasons that office workers are very difficult to organize isn't it?

THORNBURGH: That's right. Then, at that time, we had, and Lord knows, I hope that is over with now, you had the little boss's pet.

INTERVIEWER: I think that is still around.

THORNBURGH: Oh, that makes me so mad. You know, "The boss likes me. I'm pretty , I'm young," you know, "I don't need to belong to the union."

INTERVIEWER: Well, office workers are still one of the big areas of work in this country that is unorganized.

THORNBURGH: I know it. They have done reasonably well in organizing office workers in New York, Chicago, and one of the western cities. I've forgotten whether it's Denver. And I think in San Francisco they have a good union. They have done fairly well with the bank employees in New York. The banks up there would be so big that you couldn't be the boss's pet. They were able to organize them. They couldn't run to the boss with everything.

INTERVIEWER: There are also women's working organizations growing up in different cities now, like 9 to 5 in Boston and Women Employees in Chicago. And I think that the 9 to 5 in Boston really centered around women working in insurance companies. And they, in fact, I think now have become a local. And I'm not sure which union. But I think that is a move some of the women's organizations are moving toward. Which did you prefer to organize, textile workers or office workers?

THORNBURGH: Oh, the textile workers. You ran in to far more problems with the office workers. I much preferred the textile workers.

INTERVIEWER: Most of the office workers you organized were in large cities, too, weren't they?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. You couldn't do anything with office workers in a little place like, say, Rome, Georgia. There was so much nepotism. The father and daughter and cousins and all that. No, I much preferred the textile workers.

INTERVIEWER: Most textile workers you organized were in small towns?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I would much prefer organizing them because it was simpler. Because a lot of these women would say, well, my husband doesn't want me to join. I don't know whether we still have that or not. Maybe we do.

INTERVIEWER: I think that is still around too.

THORNBURGH: I have heard men say, too, when we would be trying to organize them and I would be in meetings, my wife doesn't want me to join. What that wife was afraid of is that there would be a strike and she would be deprived of a few dollars.

INTERVIEWER: Did you usually go on these organizing campaigns by yourself? Were you the only organizer?

THORNBURGH: No, you see I was what they called a general A.F.of L. organizer and usually there would be two of us. And sometimes, if I was lucky, I would have a man, because you see a lot of times the women would pay more attention to a man.

INTERVIEWER: So your organizing drive was more successful normally if there was a man?

THORNBURGH: Yes, if there was a man helping me.

INTERVIEWER: About how many hours a day would you work in organizing?

THORNBURGH: Well, the hours weren't bad because the only times I could do any organizing was after their workshift, say from about two o'clock in the afternoon until oh, say seven or eight at night. And then you had to allow for these women going home and fixing supper. Then, I'll tell you something else, that darn television has really cut into the organizing. My sister was organizing with the Amalgamated. I wasn't organizing so much after we had television, see. Mine was before television. Well, in fact, I bought my first television in 1952. Other people had them before that, but my first one was in 1952. Mary, my sister, said that it was almost impossible to go out in the evenings and visit in the homes when television first became popular. She said you would be sitting there trying to tell them about the union and they would say, "Look, his horse is riding off, he's going to jump over the fence," or something and you had to deal with the television. I heard Merle Householder mention that, too.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I heard Charlie Wilson saying that one of the reasons that unions were not strong today was that people did not go out to their local meetings. One of the factors in that was the role of television. I'm sure you grew up in a time in the labor movement when going to a union meeting was somewhat of a social event. And still should be in a lot of ways. But because people have access to other social things now, the unions are having a tougher time.

THORNBURGH: That's right. And see, when we had this little organizing committee back in the thirties for the Central Labor Council here, when we would go to visit people at night and talk to them about the union, they were glad to see us if nothing else. They didn't have anything to do. And they would sit and talk to us. And whether or not we convinced them, or whether or not they agreed with us, they would sit there and talk with us. Well, you can't do that now, if people have a special program they want to see at night. Oh, I think television has really cut into the organizing. And they won't go to union meetings if there is going to be some special program on they want to see. And that's bad. Maybe that is why television was invented.

INTERVIEWER: It might have been. What was your life like in those little towns?

THORNBURGH: Very dull.

INTERVIEWER: Not much social life?

THONRBURGH: You didn't know anybody there to socialize with except the people you were trying to organize. Mornings would just be boring while those people were working.

INTERVIEWER: Then you all didn't have offices to work out of?

THORNBURGH: No we didn't. We worked out of the motel room. You know, that is where this came from back in the old A.F.of L. days, too. They said

THORNBURGH: drinking was one of the job hazards of organizing. Because they would be so bored waiting to see the people they wanted to see. So I think that still is a hazard. You know, people away from home, with nothing to do. Of course, after you went to the meetings sometimes everybody would be drinking and that wouldn't be so bad. You would have a little social life then.

INTERVIEWER: In the union meeting?

THORNBURGH: After the union meeting.

INTERVIEWER: When you were working with the Labor Council, were a lot of those decisions made over beers in bars somewhere?

THORNBURGH: Yes, they were. They certainly were.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever feel left out of the decision-making because of that?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I did. I had to work that very slyly. After they had made a decision, just real tactfully like, I would try to point out to them where they were wrong, but I certainly had to do it tactfully because a woman didn't have intelligence enough to make a decision! So I had to do it very tactfully. And that was frustrating.

INTERVIEWER: You couldn't come out and say exactly what you meant?

THORNBURGH: No, I could not.

INTERVIEWER: You had to kind of tread lightly on their egos.

THORNBURGH: Sure did. All the time. Has that changed?

INTERVIEWER: I don't know. I think that is still a problem.

THORNBURGH: Maybe with the younger men. You see, a lot of the men I was working with were older men. I think maybe some of these younger men would have a different attitude now.

INTERVIEWER: Possibly. I think it is still a problem though for the women who work in the unions how to react to all that. In a lot of situations they are doing the work and the men are sitting around. I think that was probably the situation you were in.

THORNBURGH: Oh absolutely. I was doing the behind the scenes hard work. And I used to write the speeches for the organizers. They could go out and make the speech that I had written and they would get a big hand for it. I got nothing because I didn't dare tell anybody that I had written the speech.

INTERVIEWER: At that time, was it socially acceptable for a woman organizer to go around and have a few beers with the men organizers and be a part of the discussion and the decision-making?

THORNBURGH: It wasn't really socially acceptable, but I did it anyway.

INTERVIEWER: Because otherwise, you would have felt completely and totally out of it.

THORNBURGH: I did. I just pushed myself into those situations whether I was wanted or not. When they would all say,"Let's go down to Bill Long's and get a beer," I'd say, "Okay. Let's go." I would go with them. Whether they wanted me or not or whether they invited me. It didn't make any difference. I went anyway. And then, I think, in a way, I paved the way for some of the other women because they started doing it too. Well, if she can do it, we can too.

INTERVIEWER: So that helped some of the other women out.

THORNBURGH: Then I would go with some of the men organizers, even though that wasn't my job at the labor temple. Finally, they would ask me, "Look, help me out on this. I don't know what to tell this guy. I'm going to meet him over here at a certain beer place." I'd say, "Okay, I'll go with you." So I really think in a way I paved the way for the other women to do that.

INTERVIEWER: You worked how many years as an organizer for the A.F.of L?

THORNBURGH: Let's see. I guess I worked three years.

INTERVIEWER: But you were in somewhat the same type situation with the Labor Council?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. I never stopped organizing. As long as I was working at the Labor Temple I helped every organizing drive that was put on. I helped with all of them.

INTERVIEWER: And then you were in the same situation as far as working with men and had to know your place?

THORNBURGH: That's right. Be the secretary but never the president.

INTERVIEWER: How did they respond to your criticisms that you gave them? Very tactfully, of course.

THORNBURGH: At first, I think they resented it. But I was so aggressive and so interested in the labor movement to see that it was done right, eventually, while they, they didn't particularly care for me personally, I think they did respect the idea that I knew more about it than they did. The last several years that I was there, they started cooperating with me, or shall we say, using me, because they knew that I knew more about a lot of those situations than they did, because of my experience and training.

INTERVIEWER: Did they still continue to take the credit for it?

THORNBURGH: Oh absolutely. Certainly they did. I would write letters for them

THORNBURGH: and draw up contracts for them, and the membership would give them a big hand for what they had done.

INTERVIEWER: What was your strategy, you said that you were aggressive, but you were aggressive in an indirect way sometimes. You said if you criticized them, you criticized them very tactfully.

THORNBURGH: Very tactfully. I would say, "Well, now look. What you have done is good. But, I think it would help you if we did it this way." I always had to preface it by its going to help you. You are going to get credit for this. This is going to make you look good. Then they would accept it.

INTERVIEWER: They trusted your judgment that much?

THORNBURGH: They finally did when they found out that a woman can have a certain degree of intelligence. And they relied on me an awfully lot.

INTERVIEWER: What kind of strategy did you use to begin with to work out your ambitions?

THORNBURGH: I think just plain old hard work. And I really did work in the labor movement. When I would see a situation, whether it concerned me or not, that I knew was wrong and was going to hurt the workers in that particular place, I'd just take the bull by the horns and say, "Look, let's do something about this." I know many times those men resented that. But then I could prove to them that I was right. I always had my facts there to prove it to them.

INTERVIEWER: So it sounds like you dug in a lot behind the scenes.

THORNBURGH: I sure did and I worked awfully hard because that was my only interest. That, and politics.

INTERVIEWER: I think that is the strategy a lot of women have today--proving themselves. You don't win in the out and out open battles, it seems.

THORNBURGH: No, women not only have to be equal to men, they have to be much better. They have to prove themselves. And that's not right. Gee, you think about all the women in this country working for bosses that are so much lower in intelligence and don't have the know-how that the women have.

INTERVIEWER: I can think of lots of instances where it is the secretary that really gets the work done.

THORNBURGH: I can too. But I understand that in the majority of places that has not changed.

INTERVIEWER: At what point in your life did you first join a political organization?

THORNBURGH: In 1948. My father was politically oriented, and I had always been

THORNBURGH: interested in politics, but I didn't really become active in politics, real active, until 1948. The Estes Keefauver campaign in 1948 was my first real active campaign. Labor had endorsed Keefauver for the Senate and I worked hard for him. It was that year that I joined the Knox County Women's Democratic Club and I've been a member ever since.

INTERVIEWER: And prior to that, you had just worked out your political drives through the labor union? Or through Highlander?

THORNBURGH: That's right. My family, my father and all of his people, and mother too, were all Republicans. But I became interested in politics after the Roosevelt years. I was interested but didn't do anything very actively until 1948. Since then, I have been active in every political race that we have had. I think labor has done a pretty good job in politics, except I think they have been wrong in just becoming an appendage to the Democratic Party. I don't think that it's good because you can have bad Democrats as well as you can have bad Republicans. But labor has always thought that the philosophies of the Democratic Party are more in line with the philosophies of labor than the Republicans. But I think that is going to change because the Democrats now are using the labor movement to get elected and as soon as they are elected, they forget about us. And very good proof of that was this year when they failed to pass that common sites picketing bill.

INTERVIEWER: When you were traveling with the labor movement and especially when you were organizing and traveling and staying in motels, did that ever cause problems for you?

THORNBURGH: Yes it did. It even caused problems for me here. A lot of the men's wives were jealous of me. I think that was partly the men's fault. Because after I would meet the women and know them and let them know that I was no threat to them, I could become friends with them. But they would just hear about me being out organizing with their husbands and all, and they would be jealous of me.

INTERVIEWER: Can you think of any other problems you encountered as a result of being a woman and single?

THORNBURGH: Well, I had the usual number of passes made at me.

INTERVIEWER: But when you were traveling at conventions and stuff, did they normally put the women all on one floor or something in hotels?

THORNBURGH: They tried to. But when we went to a convention we really had a good time. They tried to segregate us.

INTERVIEWER: If you could pick out a job, say, turn the clock back for forty years, would you do the same things again?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I would. I really would. I would do the same things. Some of it where I see I made mistakes I might do it a little differently,

THORNBURGH: but I think I would do the same thing. Because I think the labor movement with all of its faults is still a good organization for working people. I think I would because with all of its faults, if you were as aggressive and as pushy as I was, you made opportunities for yourself, that I don't think I could have otherwise. See, I pointed out in that editorial I wrote, that I had met the Kennedys, I met President Eisenhower, I sat on a platform with President Truman, and I don't know of any other organization that could give those opportunities. I said, "give you the opportunities". They didn't give me the opportunity. I made the opportunity.

INTERVIEWER: So you feel that regardless how hard the labor movement was and is on women that there are opportunities there?

THORNBURGH: If the women take advantage of them. The opportunities are there. When Tommy Powell from the state labor council was here last week for a television program, we were just talking and I was telling him women ought to have a bigger role and he agreed with me. But he said, a lot of times it's their own fault. They are just not aggressive enough, and I was. When a committee was going to be present somewhere, I was ready to go. Give me two minutes and I will be with you.

INTERVIEWER: You always stuck your foot in the door.

THORNBURGH: I sure did. So I think a lot of this is up to the women to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel like women in local unions sometimes don't elect other women into offices in those unions?

THORNBURGH: Yes, I do. If they would try, they could. But too many of them don't want to buck the status quo. The president has always been a man. You elect a man. But in this part of the country, the only women's union that we have that is progressive at all is the Amalgamated.

INTERVIEWER: The CWA union is not?

THORNBURGH: They are progressive in their own jobs, but in the labor movement as a whole, they are not. They have the leadership. Goodness knows, they do enough in their own union, but not generally for the whole movement.

INTERVIEWER: They don't have a very high profile, do they?

THORNBURGH: No, they don't. They have never had a woman business agent. And they could easily elect one. So they haven't been as progressive as the Amalgamated.

INTERVIEWER: During your work with the labor movement, what kinds of issues did you push for? Did you normally push for women's issues or issues on the aged or issues on political parties?

THORNBURGH: In my organizing days, I didn't have time for that. I was still interested in getting better conditions for them. And I still think if you've got the bread and butter issues, the hours, wages and working conditions, then all of these other things follow. But you have to get those things first. There is no point to talking to a person about serving on a charitable board when his/her wages are not adequate, when they are dissatisfied with their working conditions. So, I think if you get those three things then everything else will follow.

INTERVIEWER: The community service type things are more for established unions.

THORNBURGH: That's right. During the civil rights movement I would spend as much time as I possibly could in that in the sixties. But I found out then that you can't fight on all fronts. You can't make a union member an integrationist, a community services committee man all at the same time. You just can't fight on all fronts. I always figured that my role was to promote the three basic things: hours, wages, and working conditions, and the other things will naturally follow in established unions. But those things have to come first. I think that has been one of the troubles with the union organizers. A lot of times they have been sidetracked. An organizer will be working in an organizing campaign trying to organize the people and he will get word from his international to work in political activity or community involvement, and you just can't fight on all fronts.

INTERVIEWER: What was your involvement in the civil rights movement?

THORNBURGH: Helping to integrate the Gay Street restaurants.

INTERVIEWER: How did you go about that? Was there a group of people who did that?

THORNBURGH: You want to hear a funny story?

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

THORNBURGH: Grant's store on Gay Street had a restaurant. It was a very popular restaurant. They made the best hamburger in town. And that was one of the restaurants that was not integrated. They had allowed blacks to come in, but a lot of the white people wouldn't sit by them. So my role was to go in and make certain that I sat by a black person. So I went into Grant's one morning and here was this great big, fat, black woman sitting on a stool there. She had a lot of packages around her. I went in and had her move her packages so I could sit right next to her. She ordered and I ordered. She didn't say a thing to me. And I said, "Pass the salt", to try and get a conversation started. She handed it to me. We were the only two people at the counter. I have often thought if somebody could only draw a cartoon of that! Here was this long row of stools all the way down that store and two people sitting right in the center. I was crowding that poor black woman just to sit next to her with all those empty stools on each side of us. But I sat right next to her and struck up a conversation with her and she was not interested

THORNBURGH: at all. She said, "I'm from Morristown and I just came down here shopping." She had shopping bags all around her and had to move them in order for me to sit next to her.

INTERVIEWER: How often did you do this?

THORNBURGH: Every day. On my lunch hour for about six weeks.

INTERVIEWER: Was that part of a personal strategy?

THORNBURGH: No, it was the strategy of a group, particularly of the Unitarian Church.

INTERVIEWER: What year was this?

THORNBURGH: I believe that was 1964. I know it was in the sixties.

INTERVIEWER: You would go on your lunch hour from the labor temple?

THORNBURGH: I would go on my lunch hour. I guess I gave Grant's more business than anybody. And then after we thought Grant's was fairly well taken care of, I was assigned to go to Walgreen's and sit by a black person. So that was my role. And another one was to buy a ticket at the Tennessee Theatre and give it to a black person. I could get the ticket but they wouldn't sell a ticket to a black person. So they would sell me the ticket and I would give it to a black person to go in.

INTERVIEWER: How long did this group of people work on civil rights?

THORNBURGH: They worked for about two years. Because we would get one place integrated, and then something else would need it.

INTERVIEWER: This was after the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. Segregation was so foolish! There was so many silly things about it. The Andrew Johnson Hotel was the main hotel here and a black person couldn't stay there. We had one black motel here, then there was some boarding houses and the black YMCA. Black organizers had to stay at those places. But I had a visitor come here that I had met in Oxford and he was from the Gold Coast of Africa. His name was Addio Moses. He was very, very black. He had the tribal tattoos on his face. I went to the Andrew Johnson Hotel and told them that he was coming here as a visitor of the labor movement and they said they would be very glad to have him. He had no trouble at all because he was from the Gold Coast. But a guy from LaFollette couldn't stay there. The whole thing was so silly. I told them what Addio was like, very black and tribal marks on his cheeks. Oh, they said they would be glad to have him.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in any of Highlander's workshops at this time? At the time when they were doing civil rights workshops?

THORNBURGH: No, I don't think I was. I knew they were doing them. They did more in this part of the country to get full integration than any other organization. You know, it was integration that got Highlander into trouble anyway. The whole thing was so silly and so corny, like in 1932 when they said Highlander was burning a flag. Now, why would anybody want to take a flag out in the yard and set fire to it?

INTERVIEWER: That was at Monteagle?

THORNBURGH: That was at Monteagle. Now why would those intelligent people at Monteagle want to burn a flag? The whole thing was so silly. During the civil rights struggle, I'm sure you have read about this: there were two black men from New York who tied diapers around their heads and made turbins to go in a hotel in the South and, because they were taken for foreigners, got a room.

INTERVIEWER: To move back to some of your general experiences with the labor movement, Lucille, at what point during your life was your union responsibility the heaviest?

THORNBURGH: I think that would have been when I came back from England in 1948 and started to work at the labor temple. At that time most of the unions did not have offices. Of course, the larger unions like the building trades union, did have offices, but the smaller unions did not have. And I undertook to work for all of them--writing their contracts, writing their letters--it was just plain physical labor.

INTERVIEWER: You helped them write their contracts?

THORNBURGH: Yes. I didn't help negotiate them, but I helped in writing them. Then, after they had negotiated the contract, I typed it for them. At that time we didn't have copying machines, so I had to type like up to a hundred copies. It was just real hard physical labor. I was a Notary Public for about twenty years, and I notarized papers for all the people in the labor movement. It was very hard work, just plain hard, physical work.

INTERVIEWER: Did they normally come to you at your office at the labor temple?

THORNBURGH: Yes. They felt that because the paper was owned by the Central Labor Council and that they paid per capita taxes to that Council, that the Council should furnish them stenographic help. And I was it. There wasn't anybody else.

INTERVIEWER: What were your days like at that time?

THORNBURGH: I worked from eight until five.

INTERVIEWER: But then, did you bring the work home with you?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes, I sure did. I had to.

INTERVIEWER: So you were probably working about thirteen hours a day.

THORNBURGH: I sure did. Then in addition to that, I went to many meetings at night. I was always a delegate to the Central Labor Council. I attended my own union meetings and I helped every group in their organizing.

INTERVIEWER: You were still involved in helping with volunteer organizing.

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. It really was a very strenuous time. I couldn't do that now. I wouldn't have the physical strength.

INTERVIEWER: How old were you at that time?

THORNBURGH: Well, let's see. When I came back I was thirty-eight. I was associate editor of the paper at the same time.

INTERVIEWER: So that time was the busiest time.

THORNBURGH: Yes, that was the busiest time.

INTERVIEWER: How did you juggle the rest of your life with your union work?

THORNBURGH: I didn't have any other life. It was all centered around the labor movement.

INTERVIEWER: In fact when you were living here with your mother and your sisters, did your mother do most of the housework?

THORNBURGH: Yes. I didn't do much housework because my mother was strong up until the time she died. I didn't have that problem.

INTERVIEWER: Well, otherwise, I don't think that you could have done it.

THORNBURGH: I couldn't have. Because I worked terribly hard for several years. And then, as the unions grew, they got their own offices and secretaries and it slacked off some. But gee, I used to work so hard.

INTERVIEWER: So during that period your whole work and life was the labor movement.

THORNBURGH: That is right because I didn't have time for anything else.

INTERVIEWER: As that tapered off, you began to get involved in other things. How was your union affected by national issues such as price and wage control during the war years?

THORNBURGH: Well, we were affected just like the general population, just like the entire community was.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember, during the war years, what was the labor movement's reaction, or the labor union's reaction, to the war effort?

THORNBURGH: So far as I know they were very patriotic. I don't remember any objections in the labor movement.

INTERVIEWER: What about the effect of the Roosevelt administration? You were working for TVA at that time.

THORNBURGH: Roosevelt came into office in early 1933. He was elected in 1932. No, when he actually went into office, I was working for the Cherokee Spinning Company. I didn't go to work at TVA until November 1934.

INTERVIEWER: You were very active in organizing in the textile plant that you were working in. What effect did the Depression and the New Deal and all of that have on the textile organizing?

THORNBURGH: By the time that I had learned anything about the union at all which was late '33, then we were beginning to get the NRA, and we had gone on the eight-hour day, so the Roosevelt administration really started the union movement. We had the Wagner Act which gave us the right to organize. But before that, when Roosevelt first went in, he couldn't do anything that first eight or nine months of that first year. And we, like everybody else in the country, were practically starving to death. We were making six and eight dollars a week during the Depression and that wasn't much to live on.

INTERVIEWER: In fact, that was true when you all went out on strike.

THORNBURGH: Oh, sure it was.

INTERVIEWER: How about during those times say the late thirties and forties, what type of community support did you get from such things as the National Consumers League and the YW's and YM's?

THORNBURGH: Very little. We never had any support here from the YM's and YW's that I know of. I always thought that the YWCA was very conservative in Knoxville. That is not true of the YW everywhere. When I worked in New York City I thought the YWCA was a very liberal organization. But it wasn't in Knoxville, and so far as I know, still isn't.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever go to the National Consumers League?

THORNBURGH: Not here. I did in New York City. And that was a good thing, too. I hope President Carter's consumer protection law is passed.

INTERVIEWER: As I understand, the National Consumers League was somewhat involved in supporting union organizing.

THORNBURGH: Oh yes, it did.

INTERVIEWER: Which is something different from the consumer movement today. Some times they swing too much to the right or to blaming workers for increased prices instead of blaming the companies.

THORNBURGH: They couldn't at that time. The wages were so low they couldn't blame the workers for anything. The wages were so low they didn't affect anything.

INTERVIEWER: So you felt that the YW and Consumers League in other parts of the country were helpful to the labor movement.

THORNBURGH: Yes, they weren't helpful here at all. In fact, they didn't even support the labor movement. They certainly didn't actively support it.

INTERVIEWER: It's true here today that the YW doesn't have any controversial, interesting programs.

THORNBURGH: Yes, that is true. I don't think the YWCA's in many places even serve the purpose for which they were set up. You know, they were supposed to be the poor, working girl's home away from home. But I don't know of any welfare people or the real poor people who patronize YWCA.

INTERVIEWER: In some areas, I think there are possibly YW's and YM's that have good youth programs for poor and working class children. But in a lot of instances they are geared to middle-class.

THORNBURGH: That's right. If you will notice the YWCA board is usually made up of women from the upper middle-class.

INTERVIEWER: When you were organizing women in glove factories and office workers and that type thing, did you notice any differences in life-style between yours and theirs, difference in interests and hobbies? But you didn't have any hobbies.

THORNBURGH: No, I didn't have time for hobbies. I think that the only difference that I can see there is that I was always interested in better educating myself and so many of them felt hopeless or simply didn't have that interest. I think they could have done better. I think women today and most people could do better if they tried, don't you? If they were really ambitious and tried harder. But you have to be pushy because that's the kind of world we live in, but our life-style as far as the material things were concerned were just the same. We were all poor.

INTERVIEWER: Most of them were probably married with children.

THORNBURGH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get any kind of wonder or amazement from them of the type of life that you led and your involvement with the labor movement?

THORNBURGH: Yes. They wondered why I worked so hard in the labor movement when I could be married with six kids and leading a life of leisure. With six kids! No, they didn't understand it. At that time girls were

THORNBURGH: taught that possibly they would go through High School, possibly not. That was not very important but they MUST get married and have children. Any woman thirty years old and unmarried was an Old Maid. There again, I defied the social thinking in my area and remained unmarried. I think the feminist movement is doing much to do away with this type of attitude and I support it wholeheartedly.

INTERVIEWER: So you felt like other than that, your standard of living and life-style was pretty much like that of the women you were working with?

THORNBURGH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And probably there was some of them also who did not marry. And who lived at home with their parents. Every once in a while I run into one like that who worked in cotton mills all their lives.

THORNBURGH: Oh, yes. They could see how hard life was for these girls in the mill who married boys in the mill, with the low wages and long hours. Just a few blocks from Cherokee was a marble mill and it was the "thing to do" for mill girls to court marble mill boys....then later marry them. Wages in the marble mill were somewhat higher than in the mill so a girl who got a marble worker was considered to have made a good catch!

INTERVIEWER: Because there weren't many men working at Cherokee?

THORNBURGH: That's right. There were not as many men as women at Cherokee but all the men got married. So, girls had to look to the marble mill for boy-friends. I courted the mill boys and the marble workers, for the simple reason that I didn't have an opportunity to meet other men.

INTERVIEWER: So most of the women at Cherokee married men who worked at the marble mill.

THORNBURGH: That's right, either marble workers or mill workers.

INTERVIEWER: Would they leave the mill then when they got married or just stay on at the mill?

THORNBURGH: They had to stay on and work. And I have seen those women working when they were pregnant up to eight and a half months. And I have known them just to be off two weeks and have a baby and go back to work. That was no life for me. I didn't want any of that.

INTERVIEWER: And then when they got home, their work just started.

THORNBURGH: That's right. Taking care of the babies. Momma took care of the baby during the day for free. And then after they had worked their ten-hour shift, they had to go home and fix their old man's supper and take care of the baby. That kind of life did not appeal to me, never.

INTERVIEWER: One of the things that strikes me now when I think about it, is that women whom I admire and respect are women who did not marry and I respect them because of what they contributed either through their writing or their activism or their work in certain groups. And I just wondered how many famous women would be remembered because they were the mother of so-and-so. There are not very many like that.

THORNBURGH: It's understandable back when I was younger. These mothers wanted little Suzie-Q here to get married and to have babies. Well, no matter how much ambition little Suzie had, what could she do about it with a quarrelsome husband and three or four little kids? There was nothing she could do about it. She was completely thwarted. And that wasn't for me.

INTERVIEWER: A lot of energy and change, etc. was probably lost because of the ideology of family and children.

THORNBURGH: I think so, too. I have known girls in the mills who I think would have made good leaders. But instead, they got married and their chances weren't there because of it.

INTERVIEWER: In fact, a lot of the women I know in the mountains after their children have gotten raised they have become active in things. In fact, there are more women from say forty-five to sixty-five or older who are the real leaders because now they've got them younguns out of the way and they don't have to be bothered with them anymore and they can take that energy that they have always had and get out of the house and they have organized everything from health clinics to childcare centers and co-ops.

THORNBURGH: Yes, I think you will find your leaders in that age category. What can a woman say, between twenty-five and thirty years old with three or four small children contribute to social issues? I read about women who combine career and raising a family. I just can't believe it. I know I couldn't do it because I have a one-track mind and if I tried it either the career or the house and children would be neglected. How could I have ever walked a picket line wondering if the baby had been fed and diapered? Perhaps, there are women who can do it. I doubt it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think though that a lot of those women are from middle-class situations where they can hire somebody to take care of the children and perhaps do the housework. I am sure a lot of these women in the Carter administration whose husbands also work, have maids and etc. Or some of them who are not at that level are married to exceptional men who have gone through the women's liberation stage in our history and do their equal share. And perhaps do jobs that are not so physical. But they feel like doing things at night.

THORNBURGH: Sure. You can see where Rosalynn Carter can go out and work for the senior citizens' benefits and other organizations because she knows that her child is being taken care of. She doesn't think about

THORNBURGH: fixing the president's supper. She doesn't have to worry if a pipe bursts in the White House. She doesn't have all those problems. But I never thought that a woman could be all those things.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe if we ever get to the point in this country where we have communalized things, like if there were people's restaurants, you know, like they have in some countries where people are hired to cook and you can go there and eat very cheaply and take your family. And it's quick and it's good food instead of the junk that you get in these fast food places. Hopefully, if we ever get to that place in this country it would free the women up. Or have laundries, you know, where everybody could send their clothes and that type of thing. And good childcare.

THORNBURGH: It would. It would free a lot of women, and it would free a lot of good minds. They would put their minds to something else. I have noticed on these different charitable and community boards that I have served on, mental health, Hillcrest, and even one time, I was on the YWCA board, and I worked with Red Cross, numerous other organizations, and I found that the women on these boards are just the women that you were talking about. They were upper middle-class income women. And they have the time to put to it and they did a good job, too. Because a lot of them don't have to do anything at all, but they do give their time to those things and I admire them for doing it. I wish more women would.

INTERVIEWER: My mother was a secretary and a bookkeeper from the time I was real small, but she was able to do that because my father worked the night shift at the bakery. And even though he wouldn't say that he was in favor of women's liberation, but because of the economic situation of our family, he did, he kept us during the day. He cooked supper and supper was ready when she got home. And he did a good amount of the housework. But it was because of economic necessity. But he did it. He would pass her going out the door as she came home from work.

THORNBURGH: I know several families that have done that. But gee, not those real old-fashioned men. I have seen this, both the man and his wife were working at the Cherokee Spinning Company on the ten-hour shift. When they went home in the afternoon, he sat out on the porch and smoked and read the paper and she cleaned up the house, took care of the kids, fixed the supper, and did all the other work. That was the pattern.

INTERVIEWER: And I am sure there were a lot of families where maybe both were working and the husband did that. Because for some strange reason my father had a lot of energy, when he was not working, he did all those things.

THORNBURGH: I've known some such men, too. A few.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sure they were exceptions to the rule.

THORNBURGH: They certainly were. And it all goes back to the male chauvinist. Because, I remember when we lived in the country, both the man and his wife would be out working in the field. They would go to work at five o'clock in the morning and then would come in at eleven o'clock. She would fix dinner while he sat on the porch and fanned. Women's liberation is a good thing. It's just one-hundred years too late.

INTERVIEWER: We still have a long way to go.

THORNBURGH: We've got a long way to go.

INTERVIEWER: I feel that the more we move toward society doing some of the things now done in the home, and it also breaks down the nuclear family type thing, and it stops it from being such an individual type thing. In other words, if I were married and my husband and I both worked, we could both go out to a place to eat cheaply, and it wouldn't be just us. It would be a service provided everybody. And it assumes a lot of those household chores delegated to women.

THORNBURGH: And I think you would cut down on the divorce rate.

INTERVIEWER: It's hard for a lot of men to change, I think, when they have been raised by women who do everything for them.

THORNBURGH: That's right. And you know, when I get real tired I'm irritable and I think everybody is. A woman working all day and worried with children and trying to keep a house is just too much to ask of any person.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know how I could work if I had children.

THORNBURGH: I couldn't make it.

INTERVIEWER: But now, it's all right if you don't. Other people have children. Shower your affection on your nieces and nephews and cousins or friends' children and that type of thing and you are just as good a person, you are just as valuable to younger people as possibly even their parents are. I can look at people who have influenced me in my life and a lot of them were people who did not have children or they were older people. They gave me ideas.

THORNBURGH: Something else that I have noticed, too. Among the truly, happy, married couples that I know. You know, there are a lot of people that you think that you know that you don't know. You don't know really how they feel. You see a couple you think is very happy now. You pick up the morning paper and see where they have sued for a divorce. But among the truly happy married couples that I have known, I can count on one hand, those who have children. Now, I don't believe it's possible to stretch human nature that far for a man and a woman coming from different lifestyles, to become married and go through all those trials and tribulations of raising four or

THORNBURGH: five kids and still be romantically in love. I just don't believe it can happen. In some cases it might. But I know my mother was a very practical person. And she used to say that when poverty comes in the front door, love goes out the window. I know that I couldn't be romantically in love with a man with four or five hungry kids, not knowing how the water bill is going to be paid, don't know whether we are going to pay the rent this month or not. I know that I couldn't, and I don't think that I am that much different from other people.

INTERVIEWER: That's possibly true. Maybe those couples who don't have children found that each other was enough and was satisfactory. And I see some young, working class couples who have children and I feel a lot of times it's because the woman is not satisfied with the relationship and wants maybe a couple of babies to shower her love on. And they think that that is going to help the marriage but it makes it worse.

THORNBURGH: I wonder how many times actually having children is a man's idea. I think an awful lot of times that's the woman's idea.

INTERVIEWER: I think in most working class couples that I see it is. He goes along with it but it is clear from the beginning that she is the one who is going to raise them and change the dirty diapers.

THORNBURGH: And we just as well face it. I think this would come from maybe even the Bible, from a Christian belief, that women generally are more unselfish than men. Perhaps it is the women who have made the men selfish.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, and the women who have made the women unselfish maybe.

THORNBURGH: That's right. I have worked among these working class people enough years to know them. Generally those men do not want to give up their poker game and their beer drinking sessions to spend that money on a baby and have to stay home with that baby. Now, women will do that. Now when it is in the upper and even lower middle income groups where it doesn't cut into their pocketbook so much, why I think the men are more amicable to having children.

INTERVIEWER: But they still pretty much leave the rearing up to the mother.

THORNBURGH: Oh absolutely. My father, he knew he had six children, but so far as any discipline was concerned or anything that we would ask him about, he always said, "Ask your mother."

INTERVIEWER: That's right. Those who go ahead and have children do that because they don't have any interest or anything to keep them occupied while their husbands are out hunting or fishing or whatever. And rather than learn those things and perhaps do them with their husbands or get involved in some type community type issue with other women and stuff, they have a child.

THORNBURGH: I think that all goes back to the fact that all of nature hates a vacuum. And where a woman doesn't have anything to do, she is going to find something to do. She will either have a baby or she will get involved in community activities or she will have herself a little affair with some other man. And that happens very often.

INTERVIEWER: During all those years that you weren't having children and all the people around you were, did you ever worry about who was going to look after you when you got old? That is one of the lines a lot of people use when they have children.

THORNBURGH: No, I didn't really worry about that. Because going back to the old mill days anyway, I saw women there in their senior citizen years, their golden years, that were destitute. Of course, I think Social Security is the greatest thing that has ever happened. That is the great thing in this country. If Roosevelt hadn't done anything else when he gave us Social Security, that was it. See, at that stage we had Social Security. It started in 1936. And I just always had confidence enough in myself that somehow I could make it. Because I had seen these women whose children, regardless of how well-intentioned they were, they didn't have any financial aid to contribute to their parents.

INTERVIEWER: And you can see some today where people who really could afford to, don't give a damn.

THORNBURGH: They don't. They don't care about their parents. Then, when they have families of their own many times they can't afford it. And you know, it was a real revelation to me that a child has no obligation to its parents. No legal obligation whatever. Now, the parent has an obligation to the child, the child maybe has a moral obligation to its parents, but they have no legal obligation to their parents. So I never really worried much about that. I thought, too, that I would rather take my chances on the poorhouse rather than all that hell you go through with trying to raise a family and putting up with a quarrelsome husband. Then have him get sick on you when he gets old, because you know that it's what happens. Just look how many widows we have. So, now, I think I am just as well off as any woman that I know of, probably better, because they are all widows. They talk about companionship. I've got as much companionship as they have.

INTERVIEWER: Normally the two reasons people give for getting married and having children is: number one, I'll have somebody to grow old with and be a companion with when I am old, and number two, if I have children I will have somebody to take care of me when I get old. But sometimes that works in reverse. Sometimes you could be strapped to somebody that you really do not enjoy their company. And then sometimes children don't care if you are old or not.

THORNBURGH: I know so many women, and I suppose that is their obligation, just in their late fifties that are taking care of sick husbands. And you know, we are becoming a nation of single women because we have so many widows.

INTERVIEWER: Right, and so many young women who are not married.

THORNBURGH: But getting back to that Social Security, I don't think many younger people realize the benefits of Social Security. Back before Social Security, I used to feel so sorry for both sides. I felt sorry for the old man or the old woman who had to move in with their children. I felt sorry for the children who had to take the old man or the old woman. It was a pitiful situation. And Social Security has certainly relieved people of that. You can go to these high rises where rent is based on the income and see widows living comfortably. And up until we had the SSI, Supplemental Security Income, I knew a woman who was living in a high rise and her Social Security was $87.00 a month. Okay, she got her apartment for $25.00 a month, and she could eke out a living with her food stamps and still maintain her freedom. She preferred that to moving in with her children.

INTERVIEWER: Most old people want to stay independent.

THORNBURGH: They do. I think Social Security is the greatest thing.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of the reasons you didn't get married?

THORNBURGH: At that time, the marriageable age was considered from about seventeen to twenty-seven or twenty-eight. And I didn't meet any men at that time with a good income and I guess I just never did want to get married. I had other things I wanted. I wanted to go to New York City and I wanted to go abroad. And I could see where a husband, even if we didn't have children, would be a drawback there. Because what man would want his wife running off to Europe for a year or two or something like that. So I just decided that there were other things in life for me that far overruled getting married. I have guarded my freedom carefully.

INTERVIEWER: Was there ever a point in your life when you were faced with making a decision about that? Where it became a difficult time?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes. And that time, let's see, I guess at that time, I can't keep my years straight, but I'd say I was thirty possibly, and I was working at Wilson Dam, Alabama. Living in the small town of Florence. And every old match-maker in that town was trying to get me married. And do you know at times, thank goodness it didn't last long, I would feel a little bit guilty because I wasn't married.

INTERVIEWER: Well, in Florence, there's not much to do anyway.

THORNBURGH: That's right. They were always trying to get me married. "Well, so-and-so is such a nice fellow. He would make a good husband." Well, to me there just wasn't any good husbands because I didn't want one of them. But you know, this is off the subject too, in a way marriages run in families. My brother didn't marry until he was forty-five. One of my sisters didn't marry until she was forty-two.

THORNBURGH: My father was thirty-five when he was married. And among my nieces and nephews, I have two nieces and four nephews, out of that six, two got married and two divorced. So, I don't think we are marriage-able people. If there are such people.

INTERVIEWER: During the time that you were working with the labor union movement, how did various strikes and organizing campaigns affect the women workers? Were there times when it was very difficult for women to participate in strikes?

THORNBURGH: Yes, it was difficult for them. And I think many times if the men were on strike, and had explained it to their wives and asked for their cooperation, they would have possibly gotten it. But with the wives not knowing anything about the labor movement, to them their husbands going on strike was just depriving them and their children of money. They didn't understand it. No, they didn't. It did affect them. At that time, the labor movement was something for men. It's all right for a woman to work, but the labor movement is no place for her.

INTERVIEWER: Like say, in the Cherokee strike, I believe you were telling me that the women were as active on the picket line as the men.

THORNBURGH: They were. Because they were women who were actually working themselves and they had a different attitude all together than the men's wives had. These women were involved. Their hours, wages and working conditions were at stake. Not their husbands.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever see a change in the labor movement or go through a period when it was not so respectable for women workers to be on a picket line? Or did women always remain active in a strike situation?

THORNBURGH: They were pretty active in the strike situations and they took the same guff that I did: Why aren't you home looking after your family instead of out here with this picket line? But they took it. They were willing to take it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that women working in the labor movement were generally as effective as men?

THORNBURGH: I think in many instances, they were more so. A militant woman is more militant than a man. When you really get women aroused you have more militancy and they were willing to work harder and give of their time and energy more so than men. I think the women are very effective.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that women like yourself who did not marry and have children gave the greater portion of their hours of the day and were more effective? Really, women were making sacrifices in order to do that or they were just having to go outside the norm. I don't think you felt like you were sacrificing anything but you did go through criticism. But the men were really not giving anything up because they had a wife who took care of the kids and the house and

INTERVIEWER: they continued to lead normal lives and yet the women still outworked them.

THORNBURGH: That's right. And the women were the ones who took all the guff.

INTERVIEWER: That's really incredible. What do you think was the most frustrating part of your work with the unions?

THORNBURGH: Well, I think, possibly a lot of people in the labor movement wouldn't agree with me, but to me the most frustrating thing was that because I was a woman I could not get into a position where I could truly use my training and experience. I had to take the backseat. I could never be president of the Council. I could never be president of the Tennessee Federation of Labor. To me, that was really frustrating, that I had to take the backseat when I knew from my training and experience that I had better ideas than these men had.

INTERVIEWER: What would you say was the most satisfying part of your experience?

THORNBURGH: Well, I suppose just working there at the labor temple and being able to help the smaller unions. That was really satisfying. Because there was nobody else to do it and I really felt like I was helping those people.

INTERVIEWER: That, in part, has been what has led you with your involvement with senior citizens now, hasn't it?

THORNBURGH: Yes, because I have to be involved in something that I think is helping people. I know I told a psychiatrist friend of mine one time when he was asking me about my work in the labor movement, "I'm certain a lot of people in the labor movement would not agree with me, but I feel that I am helping people. And I get a lot of satisfaction out of helping people." And he said, "Well, that's all that counts. If you are satisfied with it and you really feel that your life is worthwhile to help people, it doesn't matter what other people think."

INTERVIEWER: When did you get involved and how did you get involved with the senior citizens?

THORNBURGH: After I retired, I stayed retired about two months. I had joined the National Council of Senior Citizens sometime ago, mostly for the insurance. I had joined in about 1965, I believe. And it is a union-oriented senior citizens group. They were in the forefront of Medicare and all that. And after I retired, they called me from Washington and told me they wanted to put in this Senior-Aides program that we have here. And that is a program where we can hire forty persons between the ages of from fifty-five up who are living at or below poverty level, and we place them in non-profit organizations. Like Hillcrest and Head Start, the Senior Nutrition Program, Cerebral Palsy, Lakeshore Mental Hospital and places like that. They asked me to be the coordinator, and asked me to take the job of completely running the program in Knoxville. I turned it down because I don't

THORNBURGH: want to work full time. As coordinator, I had to find a sponsor here for the program. So, I went to City Hall and talked with Mayor Testerman, he thought it was a great program and we got it underway. I've been the coordinator ever since.

INTERVIEWER: Was there already a Senior Citizens Club here?

THORNBURGH: Jillions of them, but not a NCSC Club. Frank Adams, of Highlander, organized our Club. He knew of the National Council of Senior Citizens (NCSC) and told us it was an organization or working class people and was interested in legislation to help older people. NCSC is not interested in crafts and recreation. So, when Frank talked to me about organizing an NCSC Club I told him I would help if it would be meaningful and helpful but I am not going to make Indian headbands and little putty dogs. He reiterated that NCSC was interested in legislation. I should have been better acquainted with NCSC because it is supported by some of the big unions, like Steelworkers, Machinists, etc. We pay dues of $3.50 per year and that makes us Gold Card members. In this job, too, I feel like I am helping people when I go out and find some older man or woman to work four hours per day, in a job that they are comfortable in, with wages from $2.41 to $2.74 per hour. (We will go to the minimum wage in January 1978.) These wages give them an income, but most of all it gets them back into the mainstream of the work force and life. I didn't care anything about AARP (American Association of Retired Persons). I belong to it, but they are more interested in tours and insurance and things like that. We work on legislation.

INTERVIEWER: So, are you the president of the Senior Citizens Council?

THORNBURGH: No, Mrs. Fowler is the president.

INTERVIEWER: But you are still the director of the senior-aides program? And that comes down from the federal government?

THORNBURGH: It comes from the Department of Labor, the National Council of Senior Citizens is the sub-contractor and it is administered by the City of Knoxville. I think it is a good program because it is not charity or welfare. These people are earning their money. It is not being handed to them. I like that. I don't like out-and-out welfare. I think you take the people's pride away from them when you just give them something. But this is a good program. There are all sorts of Senior Citizens clubs. You find so many that make the headbands and little dogs. And they don't do anything meaningful. There is a whole lot of that at the Senior Citizens Center.

INTERVIEWER: Do you all have your meetings over there?

THORNBURGH: We meet over there. The Council on Aging is trying to get them to have some better programs. There are so many things that could be done for senior citizens. Because everybody, and I am certainly one of them, that find there is an awful lot of people who are not interested in ceramic crafts and games. They are not craft people. Like

THORNBURGH: one of my sisters said, "I never did like to play those little games when I was young, so why should I sit over there and play games because I am a senior citizen?"

INTERVIEWER: There are some of those elderly people, I guess, who enjoy that.

THORNBURGH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: But they should have options.

THORNBURGH: And that is fine. They will tell me, "Oh, how I polished this," and frankly, I think it is right pretty when they get through with it. But I don't want to do it. I said that at the senior citizens center meeting one day and a man asked me, "Well, just what is it you want to do, what do you suggest?" And I said, "Well, right off the top of my head, let me tell you something I would like to see going on over here right now. I have always been interested in history. Why couldn't we have a class in American history?" He said, "Well, we could." I found out later that we could get teachers from the University to have things like that. I would like that. But I'm not going to make the headbands!

INTERVIEWER: There are a lot of things they could do. They could get young people to come in and record their own oral history. All types of things like that. A lot of those older people have had interesting lives.

THORNBURGH: Sure they could do a lot of things. They are building onto the center, and we are hoping that they will have real programs. Right now they have the club, and Tupperware parties. I think I would kill myself if I had to go to a Tupperware party!

INTERVIEWER: I don't mind buying it. Sometimes I will send by people to buy it, but I don't want to sit through a party. And they ooh and aah over it.

THORNBURGH: And they give you a little plastic comb as a souvenir for coming to the party. No, I think I could have suicidal tendencies if I had to go to a Tupperware party.

INTERVIEWER: It's very interesting I think, too, that you and Myles Horton and Frank Adams and a lot of those people who came out of the Highlander experience, have all become interested in very concrete and political type work with senior citizens. I know Myles has done a few things, not as much as you have.

THORNBURGH: Well, he was chairman of our legislative committee this year. He is one of our members. A good member.

INTERVIEWER: And Charlie Wilson . . .

THORNBURGH: He is going to be the new president. Charlie is good. He went to Washington this year to the national conference. You know, a strange thing about this National Council, Frank Adams knew more about it when he organized our club here than I did. Because with

THORNBURGH: the larger unions putting so much money into it, I thought that it was a conservative organization. But it is far, far to the left of the AFL-CIO.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think that is?

THORNBURGH: I think that the membership itself, the senior citizens who are no longer afraid to assert themselves, have made it that way. When we have a conference or convention in Washington, we always picket the White House. And we have demonstrations of all kinds.

INTERVIEWER: Do you imagine in part it has to do with people like yourself, and people like Frank Adams and Highlander, with radical types of experience like maybe labor unions or leftist parties in this country before there was such . . .

THORNBURGH: Oh yeah. Bill Hutton is head of the Council. He came out of the Newspaper Guild and he is a very militant guy, anyway. And Nelson Crookshank, who worked with the AFL-CIO and Social Security. Oh yes, that's what made it, plus the push from the membership.

INTERVIEWER: And also I've generally found it is the middle-aged people who are the most conservative. Now, probably those conservative middle-aged people as they get older remain conservative. But older people, as a whole, have been through either the early peace movement or the labor movement or even some things like the Socialist Party in this country, they still have hung on to those ideas and are not threatened because they have jobs to protect. And they really will speak out.

THORNBURGH: That's right. Just here in local groups, I like to keep our people participating in the meeting instead of just sitting there listening to a speaker. So, on every occasion, I take paper and pencils and stamps over to the Center and have them write letters. And some of them, when we were talking about saving the Social Security Act to get increases, would write militant letters. You know, "Dear Mr. Carter, You owe us so-and-so. We have paid into this, now we want our money back." You would be surprised at the letters they write. I wish you would come to one of our meetings.

INTERVIEWER: I think I would enjoy that. I'd like to talk and make a pitch for KCLUR (Knoxville Citizens for Low Utility Rates) sometime. I have always believed that there are people who would get out if you can get them involved. Because elderly people are the ones who are hit by the high utility rates.

THORNBURGH: Dennis Brubaker, you know him? He spoke over there one time but, frankly, he made it a little bit over their heads. He didn't mean to, but I think he didn't make it interesting.

INTERVIEWER: But you could have specific things that they could do, maybe petitions. Do you support the ERA and how do you feel about that in relationship with your involvement with the labor movement?

THORNBURGH: Oh yes, I do. I don't see how any woman who has been an organizer for the labor movement could help but support ERA. I'm a strong advocate.

INTERVIEWER: Have you been pleased at the labor movement's response to that?

THORNBURGH: No, I don't think they have done near enough. In fact, I am just a little bit ignorant of what they have done, but I haven't heard of anything really outstanding that they have done. I was hoping that the women's coalition would do more.

INTERVIEWER: The Coalition of Labor Union Women? I'm sure they support it but once again it's the women that are supporting it. I guess the unions do support it, but come to think of it, I haven't heard anything specific.

THORNBURGH: I haven't either.

INTERVIEWER: To think back on your life, in addition to the two people that we talked about as having influenced your thinking, do you remember ever reading anything or seeing a movie or meeting somebody or being involved in some event that particularly influenced your life?

THORNBURGH: I can't think of anything specifically. I'm sure if I gave it a lot of thought there would be many things.

INTERVIEWER: I get the feeling that your experience in England was one of the best.

THORNBURGH: Oh, that was. That was really a highlight of my life.

INTERVIEWER: If you were giving advice to young women beginning to work in the labor union movement what kind of advice would you give based on your experience?

THORNBURGH: First I would ask her to study and to train herself for a leadership position and then make certain that she got it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any clues on how to get those leadership positions?

THORNBURGH: Well, no. I never did get one of them for myself, but I tried. But things have changed. I believe now that if a woman had the training and experience that I had and would just be pushy enough, I believe she could get into leadership. She would have to work toward it. It wouldn't be easy.

INTERVIEWER: Do you feel that you have lived long enough to see some of those women in those positions? Do you know some women who are in those positions?

THORNBURGH: Yes, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers have done well along that line. So has the International Ladies Garment Workers. They still haven't made it though. There is still not a woman president of an international union. There is not a woman on the AFL-CIO executive board.

INTERVIEWER: Is that one of the things you would like to see changed in your lifetime?

THORNBURGH: I sure would. I read in the paper just this morning where the new president of the United Steel Workers has been appointed to the AFL-CIO executive board. That was a beautiful opportunity for a woman, but one didn't get it.

INTERVIEWER: What other kinds of changed particularly affecting women would you like to see?

THORNBURGH: You mean the women working in the labor movement?

INTERVIEWER: Or the situation for women in this country.

THORNBURGH: Of course, I would like to see them get equal opportunities on jobs because even though we have this Equal Opportunity Office (EEO) and all that, they don't get equal opportunity. I read this, and I hear from the women themselves, the women in the higher brackets, higher income and higher intelligence bracket are more discriminated against than the factory worker. Because, at least in the factories and the telephone company, they do have unions that push for them. In the big industries, you rarely read where there is a woman on the board. I don't think General Motors or General Foods or any of them have a woman on the board. Women attorneys are terribly discriminated against. They are not supposed to take a case into court unless it involves a child or a family. There's not a woman criminal attorney anywhere that I know of. And I think they would make wonderful criminal attorneys.

INTERVIEWER: Come to think of it, the women attorneys that I know handle either legal services type cases or women's discrimination cases and stuff.

THORNBURGH: But they haven't got up to the really big paying jobs. The criminal attorneys are the ones who make the big money.

INTERVIEWER: I don't know of any women in labor law either. How about women in the labor movement? What kinds of things would you like to see happen?

THORNBURGH: I would like to see them as general organizers instead of organizing women only and auxiliaries. Just let them become a real part of the labor movement instead of just being an auxiliary.

INTERVIEWER: Can you think of anything else you would like to see women achieve in your lifetime?

THORNBURGH: Once you can get the equal pay for equal work and get the women up into these top policy-making bodies, I think they will take it on from there. I never was young enough to be interested in night-clubs and bridge and those frivolous things. I used to try to make myself be interested, but I wasn't. I was bored. My idea of a social evening, where I really enjoyed myself, would be sitting around drinking beer with union people. Unions and politics, that was really my only interest.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know other women who were like that?

THORNBURGH: I knew a few but most of them were away from here. In New York, (that is why I liked working up there so well), there were so many union women there who felt the same way that I did. And we would spend our evenings drinking beer and talking unionism and politics.

INTERVIEWER: And other than you and your sister, there weren't very many women organizers? But did women organizers in the South kind of have a network?

THORNBURGH: No. When we would meet together at conventions once a year, we would see each other. So politics and the labor movement was my life. I still use politics in the senior citizens group.

INTERVIEWER: Did you know from an early age that your work would be your life? Did you realize that you didn't want to get married?

THORNBURGH: I think I always knew I didn't. Oh, I did my share of the courting and had the men friends. But getting married, to me, always seemed like it would be confining, and that was the thing that turned me off. Because when I had the opportunity to go to England there was a woman in Ohio who actually deserved the trip more than I did. But she couldn't go because she had a husband and a child. And I just thought, "Oh, gee! What if I got caught like that? If I couldn't do exactly what I wanted to do?" I've always known I didn't want to get married. As I said, I like the men. I did my share of courting and all that, but marriage....no!

INTERVIEWER: I guess you ran into a lot of social pressure though, or did you feel that? You know, "Why aren't you married. When are you ever going to get married?" or "I don't guess you are ever going to get married."

THORNBURGH: Oh, every matchmaker in the country has worked on me. Absolutely. "My daughter who is two years younger than you, she is married and has four children, you know. When are you going to get married? All the good men are going to be gone." I said, "All the good men are dead anyway, so . . ." But as independent as I have always been, I would have been a sorry wife. And just to think about having to depend on some man to give me daily bread, no, I just couldn't face it.

INTERVIEWER: You might have been able to be married now since those roles have changed. But I still have questions about how much independence you have to give up.

THORNBURGH: I know it. At one time, I thought about getting married because I had been going with one man in New York the whole time I was up there. After I became the National Representative of the Labor League for Human Rights, they would send me out on trips and I would get so tired, and motel rooms would get lonesome, and I would say, "Well, I'm going back to New York and see if I can talk this guy into getting married." I would finish up my trip. I would go back to New York. I would see all my old beer-drinking buddies, and marriage would be out of my mind and I never broached him on the subject.

INTERVIEWER: How did your parents feel about that? It seems like they accepted it, didn't they?

THORNBURGH: They accepted it. I think my mother said a few years before she died that she wished I was settled down. I said, "Well, I'm as settled as I'll ever be."

INTERVIEWER: Your sister was an organizer and was married and had a child. Do you feel like she was able to balance that?

THORNBURGH: Yes, her husband died when Ben, her son, was seven years old.

INTERVIEWER: Did she take Ben with her when she went on organizing drives?

THORNBURGH: Yes she would. He is union-oriented all right. But she preferred organizing to re-marrying.

INTERVIEWER: She just happened to get married?

THORNBURGH: Yes. Here in the South there is a lot of pressure put on you to get married.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. It still is.

THORNBURGH: Is there?

INTERVIEWER: Oh yeah. I think I am probably one of the three women out of my high school class of about sixty women who are still not married. After you reach a certain age though, they start giving up on you. I think maybe I had hit the age of thirty when they gave up on me.

THORNBURGH: I have actually had women, and I'll never forget this one, who lived in a little shot-gun house across the street from the Labor Temple, extremely poor. She had a mentally-retarded child. And I put the child in school, and taught her to speak myself. I was doing something that needed to be done. And the mother told me one day, "You know, I feel so sorry for you." And I said, "Me? Why are you sorry

THORNBURGH: for me?" (This was the first time anybody has ever offered me sympathy.) She said, "Well, honey, you are not married." And I looked around her house and I said, "No, I'm not. Thank God, I'm not." But you know back when I was twenty, thirty, and up through there, you didn't have the same status if you stayed single that you did if you were married. They sort of looked at you, "Well, she's not married", with eyebrows raised.

INTERVIEWER: "Watch out for her."

THORNBURGH: Yeah. "Watch out for her."

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