Kim Cook, President, Local 925
Interviewed by Ann Froines
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Tell me the story of how you entered District 925, or 9to5, the Association of Working Women?

I entered the association, 9to5, as a clerical worker, relatively new out of college, and wanted to do political work, and was working as a clerical worker in a University of Washington-funded program, actually. I joined 9to5 and became an activist in 1980; it was called Seattle Working Women. And through that experience I got to do lots of 9to5 style "grinch of the year" award ceremonies, singing songs to bad bosses, and participating in meeting with EEOC on behalf of people who worked at places like SAFECO, insurance companies, and banks. So through that experience I became an activist in the Association, and it wasn't until a few years later that I learned that leaders of 9to5 were looking at unionizing, and had formed this alliance with the union, SEIU.

At that point by the time the union affiliation happened in 1982 I was no longer working as a clerical worker or an activist in Seattle Working Women, but still had connections and my heart was still there. So when 9to5 came to Seattle, one of their first campaigns was to affiliate the classified staff association at the University of Washington (UW, "U-dub") with District 925, and after they went through that process I got hired on as a temporary organizer.

Do you remember what that first meeting was like with the Association?

It was a long time ago. I remember feeling that this was really place I wanted to be, that I'd gotten out of college, gotten a clerical job. In college they had talked a lot about women's economic independence and what we needed to do to raise the status of women's economic situation, and so this was the right place for me in terms of my activism. I wanted to be an activist, and around working women's issues. The moment I remember the most from my 9to5 days was when Gloria Steinem came to town. I was a rank and file leader, and they asked me to accompany here around town, and I got to introduce her at an event. And I was so scared, just like shaking all day, because I couldn't talk to her, and I was afraid to introduce her in public. The early days were learning to find your confidence to do things like this. It was a very big step, a big deal.

The other thing I remember about my 9to5 days that I often tell people is that the association organizers told those of us that knew that word "union" that we should never say that word. Other office workers would be turned off if we talked about unions. In fact, they were cutting it out of my speeches—I would make speeches for the association—they actually were looking at unionizing.

Had you had any earlier experiences as an organizer? You said you wanted to be an activist which suggests that you had some experience. . .

Yeah, in college, actually. I had gone to college in the late seventies, and my activism came about through getting involved in the women's movement in college. It was the days of women's consciousness-raising groups, and I was in CR groups, and I had learned to redefine myself in college. I had come from a pretty traditional working class background, so it was all very radical for me to be thinking about. . . On the other hand, I had a mother who was divorced, single, and raised three kids on her own, so I had a good role model around women's independence, and figuring out how to take care of ourselves economically.

So you did have positive feelings about the women's movement, and had participated in organizing in the women's movement?

Yes, besides the CR groups I had an internship in Illinois, where I was in college, with Illinois ERA-NOW. Those were the days we were trying to pass the Equal Rights Amendment. I had done door-to-door door-knocking about the Equal Rights Amendment when I was in college. Lots of rallies, lots of women's organizing around that, specifically. I hadn't had any specific union experience, it was more around women's rights issues. My first job out of college I worked for something called the Midwest Women's Center in Chicago, which was a women's social service agency that did lots of different social service programs for women—job counseling, that kind of stuff.

So you considered yourself a feminist when you entered 9to5?

Oh yeah, absolutely.

Do you remember the content of discussions about feminism and the women's movement in relation to organizing office workers in those early days in 9to5, because there were some issues. . .

For me it was about being too union. The belief was that women didn't relate to unions and so you couldn't talk about unionizing. You had to do soft organizing in the association, you had to do "grinch of the year" awards, and you had to do funny, light-hearted things, rights and respect, raises and roses stuff, as opposed to hard-hitting. . . God knows, you would never talk about going on strike, or marching on the boss, those kinds of things. We were afraid they would scare people off of the association and the work we were doing. I definitely considered myself a feminist, and I believed that justice for women had to do with economics and with our ability earn a decent living, to take care of ourselves financially, and not be dependent on men. That was where by CR analysis came in from the CR days, I knew that raising women's economic status was what I needed to be doing, and that9to5 was the place to do it.

Did you have experiences as an office worker that illustrated the need for clerical workers to organize?

I did some temp office work at a college in which I . . .the stories I remember was mainly just being harassed, and asked out by men in the office. My clerical job when I became an activist

with Working Women was actually in a women's organization, so I was surrounded by women. It's interesting because now, as a result of that work, and working with 9to5, I have been in women's organizations my entire life. So I haven't had to deal much in my organizational life—except with the labor movement in general—with sexism and control. With men being in positions of decision-making and control. And so now I am willing to share it (laughs).

You mentioned that growing up you did have knowledge and opinions about the labor unions and workplace struggles. Can you describe that more?

Yeah, although very little of it at the time seemed to have anything to do with me personally. . . My mother worked in a plant, a Western Electric factory, in (Millard?) Nebraska, and she raised the three of us on her own. She was a member of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). This is a factory that must have had one half women working in it, but I can remember the union was all men. And her union meetings—I sometimes would go with her—were mostly all men. I have memories of picket lines with my mother when I was a kid. The union Christmas parties had a significant impact on me; I loved the Christmas parties.

As I got older, about high school age, my mom decided to run for Executive Board, and she was the first woman to run for the Executive Board of her local union.
I remember being very proud of her, even though it didn't mean a lot to me, until I got to college and started doing the academic thinking about history and unions and women and economics, and started putting it together in my own mind. I definitely had a positive union experience as a kid growing up.

Can you describe in detail one campaign or struggle that was important to you in your work in 9to5, and in 925? Since you have a 20 year history, I know that is going to be hard. Maybe one with the association early on, then one of the significant ones with 925.

Unfortunately, the association stuff is just too far away for me to remember anything significant. My early days of union organizing, the campaign I worked mainly on was at Washington, the campaign here. Then I went back to Ohio, and worked on some public sector stuff, _____ Catholic Community College, the library system there. All of them are stories in and of themselves,

The story that was the most significant and exciting for me—you know it was the early days and we were trying to think strategically. We started to organize Blue Cross and Blue Shield nationwide. When 9to5 first started they tried to organize Equitable Life Insurance. I don't know if anyone has told you about that. Those are some awesome stories. Those of us who got into the association, and then into the union, we wanted to organize the ghettos of women's employment, the insurance and banking clerical workers. I am sure you have heard stories from Debbie Schneider. She went into offices as a plant to organize. . .I didn't do that. But we wanted to change the world by raising the status of women in these pink collar ghettos, and that was office workers in insurance and banking. And partially because insurance and banking were the big, wealthy, what-s-wrong-with-capitalist America industries, right? So we wanted to change

those. It wasn't until 9to5, SEIU, and a few other unions put their heads together and said, how are we going to organize the insurance industry?

There was actually some strategic thinking. Five unions came together in the AFL-CIO, and we decided we were going to take on one big company nation-wide, and it was going to be Blue Cross/Blue Shield. And that was because they were already organized in a number of places. It was the one insurance company that was organized.
Because of all the union connections to Blue Cross and Blue Shield in a number of states, that were high density union states, we would have some leverage, some influence over those companies.

So there were these big strategy sessions, and my union was involved. I wasn't –I was an organizer—but the higher level 9to5 leaders and John Sweeney were very active in planning this out. They targeted and split up about ten different states. And my union—SEIU—got Ohio to organize and Washington, D. C. Those were the targets we had, and so I was really excited, because in my life we were finally going to organize who I wanted to organize, the industries I wanted to organize.

We started in Cleveland and Toledo, and I started in Washington, D.C, on the campaign, I was by myself, and I did house visits every night in the neighborhoods of Washington, D.C. I got a real lesson in poverty. . .

That was the tactic you were using, get the names of workers and go see them in their homes?

We'd go see them in their homes, we'd do house visiting. I did this for quite a while, I was the only person in D.C. We couldn't get an organizing committee going, and so they ended up moving me back to Cleveland, where we did have a staff of six organizers in Cleveland and Toledo. What we did for a year was house visiting every night.

How was the reception?

Well. . .

Did you telephone ahead of time?

No, you would just do cold calls. Cold calls was definitely the labor movement approach to organizing. We got mixed reactions at the doors. What was amazing to me about that campaign was some. . .you know, Ohio was what we thought and the Cleveland area was a high union density region. . .and so we thought there would be generally positive attitudes about unions. We'd find people who had union experience at the doors, who had husbands with union experience. And this was in the 1980's. It was also a time of major backtracking and decline for unions. These were the days of lots and lots of giveaways at the table, where we were just trying to fight cutbacks and that sort of thing. And so the unions in Ohio weren't doing very well, in general, and so what we found at the doors was a mixed reactions. Even from people who had

husbands in unions. It was, well, "the unions really aren't strong anymore." Unions hadn't been able to fight off the layoffs in the steel plants that had closed down in Ohio.

So the amazing thing in that Blue Cross campaign, I remember this very clearly, is that somehow John Sweeney and Jackie Ruff, who was head of 9to5 at the time, because of our contacts with the company, had gotten the CEO of that company to give us the list of all the workers and their home addresses. Normally, you go through dumpsters and do everything you can to find the names and addresses of workers. In Ohio, the CEO gave us the list. Big, big secret, you can't tell anyone where you got the list. This was top secret stuff. So we got the list, which is why we were able to do house visit for a year, because we had those names and addresses of workers.

And we were able put together a campaign, which means we had enough support to put together an organizing committee, have organizing committee meetings, and those workers were trained how to go out and talk to their co-workers about the union and sign up more workers on cards. It was a traditional campaign in that sense, in that we were just trying to sign cards, and move the workers without a lot of pressure on the employer. Because here was an employer who had actually given us the list, right?

But I think the internal attitudes were generally anti-union, and there wasn't enough. . . Either workers didn't believe in the union, they were quote unquote happy enough in their workplace, or they were fearful of what would happen if they joined the union. So we managed to move this campaign forward over a year, but we never got the critical mass we needed. And in those days we said, we will not file for an election until we have 60% on cards. Because we know if we actually had an election we would lose some of those people. So we never got to 60% on that campaign, and we decided to close it down because we couldn't get there. And I assume that was after we had talked to almost every single worker, and assessed them.

At the time it was an incredibly exciting campaign. There were unions doing this all over the country organizing Blue Cross Blue Shields. It felt like a national movement to organize the insurance industry.

Did any of the states have the ability to get a union at Blue Cross?

My memory of it is that we did not win in any of these places. But I could be wrong, there might have been one. Another union might have picked up one place. But I'd say, in general, it was not successful. It was this sort of thing where you look back and say, it was smart, it was big, we had resources, why can't we get these women to join a union? The campaign itself was exciting, because we were doing what I wanted to be doing in the labor movement, but it was also discouraging. To figure out, what will it take to move this group of workers to unionization?

Did you say that Equitable Insurance did get organized?

There was a great Equitable story. It was before my time, in 1979-80. They organized that whole office of Equitable Insurance in Syracuse, NY, I think. As soon as they organized it, they closed the office down, and moved all the jobs somewhere else.

That sector was really determined not to have unions then?

Yes, absolutely. This is why we thought it (Blue Cross) was smarter. It was strategic, it was big, they couldn't move it somewhere else because we were organizing there, too.

So did the discussions begin then in 925 about the difficulties of organizing the private sector?

Yeah, absolutely. And I also think that what we didn't understand or have the words for. . .when we started organizing we were idealistic and excited about organizing women in the labor movement in the 1980's, coming off of the women's movement. Gee, women are rising up and organizing, and we thought the labor movement was the place to go. But we joined the labor movement at the time when the unions were in massive decline, and we didn't really get that context. Unions were fighting cutbacks, losing members, and nobody was really organizing on any kind of massive scale. So while we thought, why can't we organize these particular workers? It wasn't just these workers, it was the entire country. The whole labor movement we were trying to swim upstream. . .

And then there were technological changes. . .

Yeah, all the changes in technology. We love to sit around and talk about why it is hard to organize women workers, why clerical workers identified with their bosses, identified with their bosses, they, we were all victims of women's lack of confidence and self-esteem. And these women workers more than any others because of societal attitudes about clerical work, right? You're just a secretary, you don't have skills, you're not smart, you can't do anything better. We had all those conversations about how that plays into why we were having trouble trying to organize clerical workers in the private sector. But we didn't have a historical sense that we were in a time of just decline in the labor movement, in general. And there was nothing we were going to do to turn that around in our little organizing.

What would say was different about 9to5's approach to organizing in the labor movement, or any kind of organizing that you were familiar with?

We definitely believed that we needed to be women to organize women. We would be more successful that way. I definitely agree with the theory that when organizing women we are more successful if we do it on a relationship basis, right?
You build relationships with people, and it's personal, and it's about winning trust and respect, and being able to work with people you trust and respect, right? As opposed to—and I've had this debate many times with men who've worked for 925. They think organizing isn't about you personally, or relationships with people. It's about the issues that move people to organize. It is issues that move people to organize, but I actually think that people will take risks and do more if they feel support and respect from someone they feel close to. That's why I think relationship organizing is more effective, particularly when you are trying to organize women. That what we did in 925, we were much more how are you feeling about what you are doing, and you could get

people to do things because of your relationships with them, as opposed to the issues that moved people.

Were there certain values that you were trying to impart about building organizations?

I think the values that motivated me personally all the years in 925 was the value of empowering women, and for me the most exciting part of this work is moving a women who is very traditional, afraid to say what she thought, to stand up for herself...
The thing that I say about organizing, you go door to door, and I can't tell you how many women still say that they can't talk to a union organizer without their husband's permission, or they have to ask their husband what they think about organizing at the workplace. All of which just used to make me crazy, right? But the most exciting part for me was watching women gain confidence, stand up for themselves, and take on what was right And so the values that I think the organizing was about changing women's consciousness and women's ability to be leaders in the world. And all of this, broader values of the labor movement about social justice and economic justice, are the reason I keep doing this. But what keeps me going are the stories, you know, to watch one woman just change her life dramatically through the union experience. It is just so exciting. The child care workers now are a great example of how that can keep you going.

In campaigning for union representation in the past, what did it feel like to ask women to put their jobs at risk? Can you remember any stories where people had to be really courageous?

I think that the work I have done in the public sector, I was never completely convinced that people put their jobs at risk, because it is just a different story than in the private sector. But women often personally believed they put their jobs at risk, and certainly they suffered the wrath of their bosses even if it wasn't that they were going to lose their job. Their bosses didn't like what they were doing and they had to stand up against that. I've had bosses not want unions, but it's not like in the private sector where bosses would fire you the second they heard you were organizing a union. In the public sector they are much more careful. They are much more careful about not firing workers for a union organizing effort. Blue Cross and Blue Shield was probably the place where people were extremely fearful and we always would just say, we would encourage people to be a public as possible. We thought that was a better tactic than being secret and worrying about your job. I can't think of any specific examples...

Can you think of examples where women did courageous things? Perhaps courageous is too high-faluting a word...

I've seen them change, and feel like they can make decisions. Standing up in public and speaking, that's probably the place I've seen it the most. I've watched women, you know, Dely, whose English is challenging, the confidence she has.

End of Tape 1, Side A
Start of Tape 1, Side B

It used to be she didn't have the confidence because of her English [she is a ESL speaker]. She is not afraid to say what she thinks even if it is hard for her to put the words together. There are lots of stories of watching women's lives change just by their ability to speak up in a crowd.

As a union leader you've probably been involved in lots of trainings for others in the union, but do you remember receiving training yourself at different stages of your work with 925?

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. A lot of the training I remember is the time we took to reflect on what we were doing, with other people doing the same thing. That was really important. The other thing I learned about training I learned from my two favorite organizers in the whole world, Bonnie and Cheryl. What Bonnie taught me early on, whenever I came to Bonnie with a problem she would first say to me, so what do you think you should do. She always made me try to answer the question first, rather than offering me advice, which is very hard for us, as supervisors, to do, and I catch myself, and I think of Bonnie, when I am having these conversations with staff. I tend to want to just say, here, do this and do that, but she taught me to force people to have to think for themselves, even if you want to try to move them in a different direction.

Also role-modeling, watching women who are leaders in the union just be really amazing role models, from Karen Nussbaum's list-keeping—she would keep these long lists of things to do—to watching Debbie Schneider give a speech. She was the best, and Karen, too, actually, the best story-tellers, that were so wonderful. And I would say, Karen, how do you do this, and she said, I really work at it, I write down stories every time I hear them, and then I practice them and practice them. So I think it has been a combination of role modeling and just good training. Women who respect each other and value each other try to help each other succeed. In the local unions that are run by men I think the problem is that they have this sort of attitude, you either sink or swim, right?

And it is not about let's help you succeed, I feel responsible for helping you succeed or being nurturing. You get that a lot in 925.

Was there conscious discussion about leadership development in 925?

Yeah, there's been lots and lots of discussion about leadership development, and about how you encourage leaders to take on more. It's always challenging in any movement to say "leadership development" and to put leaders forward, but then not take the extra step and let them learn the skills of strategic thinking, like coming up with a campaign plan and figuring out how to implement it, as opposed to just doing what the staff tell them to do. We always talked about it, and we come up with concrete programs of how you reward people.

For example?

I think when Karen was around I think we had, I can't remember what she called the program, but she actually had a leadership development plan that had different levels of leadership and she called them different things. If you were a leader who could sign up your co-workers to join a union you were a Level A leader and if you got to B it was because you took on chapter

leadership, an office, and you could lead meetings, and there were all these different levels, right? At the end of each year, we had to rate where people were at, and who had moved up. And you as an organizer were judged on whether you were able to help people move up this ladder. People got awards at the end of each year, based on where they had gotten in the leadership chart.

Did that work, was that a meaningful experience for you?

What it mainly did was it forced us constantly to be thinking about and be aware of what skills we were trying to get folks to pick up, and move forward, as opposed to just doing it. It was a way of recording it and tracking it, that kind of thing. It was like accountability for organizers more than anything. We do that now, it is a system of public awards for people who have taken on a lot. Public recognition.

What can you say about your own development as a leader?

I do think about that a lot. I often think, how did I get here. I am the president of a local of 12,000 members, and we are about to be 24,000 family child care providers.
It is interesting because you never. . .this is actually very true of women—we've had this conversation many times—as a woman no matter how much we try to work to have self-confidence—you never feel like you can actually take on anything bigger or more challenging with more responsibility. It's "oh, I'm not really ready for that," whereas men would say, "oh absolutely, I am ready to be president of this local!" After two years the young men think that they are ready to run for office.

Debbie and I have talked about this many times. When she became the president of District 925, she was like, "oh, I really can't do that, I don't have the skills, I'm not prepared for it," when Karen left. And she had to be convinced that she did. And of course she did. She just had to step up. I think most of it is just convincing ourselves that OK, even though I don't feel I can do that I am ready to do that. And I still feel that in some ways, even in my job. When I got to be president of this local in 2001, I was the staff director for District 925, the Seattle office, this seemed like a huge step up for me.

How do I know what to do? I don't know if I can do that. So you step into the job and you just sort of realize it is about confidence, and about teamwork, that is something I learned in 9t05, it is about relying on the collective wisdom of the group. This is not true of a lot of other presidents, especially men, I think, and even some women. They feel like as a president they have to know everything, the buck stops here, everything is their responsibility. That isn't how we operated in 925; it was much more of a group responsibility, group decision-making, a collective process. And it really is, I think, in most organizations.

So I've been able to run this local I think very differently than other presidents that I see around because that is my inclination given my experience in 925.

Is it mainly the Executive Board you share this responsibility with?

Executive Board and staff, I think. We have about 30 staff in our local and about 28 people on the Executive Board.

Tell me about the one-day strike that I've heard about, and how that expanded your collective bargaining rights. It sounds like a very interesting political history of your union.

Right. We went through three different phases of collective bargaining here in Washington state. When we first affiliated in 1983, Washington state had really limited collective bargaining rights for state employees. You could sit down and bargain but you couldn't bargain over anything economic. Most all the rules that had to do with working conditions were determined by the state civil service. I wasn't around then, but I am sure that Pam and Karen could tell you stories of what they bargained over when they first affiliated. There are great stories about how in the University of Washington one of our big campaigns was to get tampon machines in all of the women's restrooms. There was a campaign organized over that. Because you couldn't bargain over money, right?

So in 1993 we elected a Democratic controlled House, Senate, and governor for the first time in a long time. And we decided that now is the change to get expanded collective bargaining rights. We were actually amazingly successful in doing that given that the other unions_____(unintelligible words) didn't want expanded bargaining rights, or didn't want the kind that we wanted, so we were fighting each other in Olympia. But we got them. And those rights also gave us, like some economics, like local money, local wage adjustments. We couldn't bargain over the cost of living adjustments or benefits—those were the two things we couldn't bargain over.

How did you convince the state legislature to make those changes? Did you have a classic lobbying campaign?

We did have a classic lobbying campaign, although I will say that we actually convinced the university it was in their interest to support this as well, so it was us and the university lobbying together to change the law to give us the right to bargain locally.
So we got the law passed, we got our first contract, we actually won some economic changes, we got lots more vacation, all these great things we wanted. And we won a fair share contract, which meant that everyone who was covered by the contract had to pay their fair share of the university dues.

And there is a long history, Pam, Rhonda Roberts, Neal Culver could tell you that before we won that collective bargaining law, you could not have a fair share contract where everybody had to pay. When I first came back to this local, let's see, my daughter was 3, so it was 1992, they had an open shop, and they were at 25% membership in the union, and the membership was dropping. It was a mess, it was falling apart, it was like the labor movement, what's happening in the labor movement right now. So that was why we felt we had to change the law, to win fair share, and to be able to bargain over economics, because then people would feel like the union was valuable.

So we won the law, and then in our first contract we got the fair share clause and that was so huge in this local—that is the story that Neal needs to tell—it was huge to be able to solidify our strength and to win, to have the ability to know the union was going to survive. That's what that was.

Was there any backlash from the members that suddenly had to pay dues?

Some, but we did really good organizing, we went out and talked to everybody, members, nonmembers, and when we voted on that contract, we let members and nonmembers vote, so they voted on whether they wanted their raise knowing that they were also voting on fair share. So there was some backlash, but mainly we overwhelmingly won that vote amongst members and nonmembers. So that was a huge moment, and I remember being in our office, down where the organizers are, and having the vote count. The state agency perc (?) was in the room, it was a very, very big deal the vote count, and all of us just crying and cheering and popping champagne bottles that we won, because it had been a very long fight, a really long, hard campaign.

But what happened was, we won that first campaign then we would go back to the table every couple of years, and we couldn't win any economic gains. So we decided to target in 2001 the state legislature for a wage increase. Because they were the ones that decided the cost of living increases. And we had gone without an increase for a number of years, from the state. So we said, this is the year, people are angry, we are going to organize, we have got to have a raise. And we're gonna organize our first strike. And that was a really big deal. We actually did it jointly with the other state employee unions, which was big.

The started a one-day rolling strike where they were doing one day rolling strikes all over the state, and we said we're going to do one at the "U" (Univ of Washington).
And you know, it is a big deal, because you know that folks had never struck before, ever, had never been asked to strike, had never talked about striking, and they believed they couldn't, it was illegal. There is all kinds of gray area about whether you have the right to strike or not as a public employee. So what we decided was it had to be mainly about getting enough people out on that day that it would shake up the university, and have a big huge presence on the street. So we had this great rally over on Fifteenth next to the university. Really, we only had about 500 people out, but it had a huge impact. We took over the streets. We were trying to message this thing right, it wasn't about our wages, it was about the quality of education in the state. We were talking about workers' struggles, not about what the workers wanted, but about the impact on the community.

So we started to get the right messaging, and we did this really great event that got tons of press, and the pictures in the press looked like massive marches. It made people feel really, really good. And the more amazing thing is that we won the raise that we were after from the legislature that year. All state employees got this raise.

We've always said it would be very difficult to get people to go on strike here. It was our first effort to get people to think in terms of their power to impact through marching. . .we had done lots of marches and rallies, but never had people felt powerful.

What do you think really convinced the state legislature, was it the strike. . .?

Yeah, if it was just us here at the "U" doing a one-day strike, I don't think it would have mattered, but we coordinated with the state employees and there were a whole series of one-day strikes all over the state. So we kept getting press, threatening to turn the heat up more, and longer strikes. So it really helped that the two biggest unions were working collaboratively on that effort.

So what is the status now of your collective bargaining rights on economic issues?

After that, we actually again with the other state employee union AFSCME, in the 2003 legislature, even with a Republicans in control of the Senate, together we were able to support and pass full collective bargaining for state employees. Which meant that all state employees could now bargain over health benefits and all terms of conditions of employment. So 2003 we got that bill passed. Now we already had our bill passed that gave us (university employees) some rights to bargain over wages, but we decided that we would be more powerful if we were all in the same boat and all bargaining at the same time and the same table. So we supported that bill in 2003 and in 2004 we went to the table and we won our first full step collective bargaining contract here. At the same time we organized two new groups, the medical-technical workers at the university hospital, and we organized 300 research techs. So this new contracts brings in another 700 to 900 workers in our union. So we are now in full scale bargaining and we'll see where we go from here. And we've organized pretty much the entire university ; now we are looking at those groups at the U who don't have a legal right to organize like the professional staff and faculty, and we're thinking about how to move a political program to get them the right to organize, and to get them the right to bargain collectively. So that's our next step at the U.

How did 925 in its training, meetings, and organizing deal with issues of diversity in the workplace—differences among workers according to race and ethnicity? Did issues come up in organizing either in Ohio or here in Seattle?

I think in Ohio more so, it's a much more diverse workforce. Seattle has always been challenging because the workforce, numerically, is just so much whiter than in Ohio. And so our leadership is much whiter, and we've had a harder time reaching and developing leaders of color in Seattle specifically. In Ohio we always had great African-American leaders in our union, in the community college libraries they were the leaders in the place because of the large number of African-Americans.

We've talked about this a lot. Why do we have trouble in Seattle finding and getting people of color into our leadership, into our union. Debbie Schneider always used to say: the only thing that will make a difference is to have staff of color. That is really what you have to do. I don't care what you say, you're a white organizer but you can organize anybody, you're a person of

color that can organize white workers, all that stuff. The bottom line is your union is not going to be attractive to and keep people of color until you have people of color on staff, a constant connection for them to see people like themselves. Only then will they feel comfortable, feel this is a place they would like to be. And it's still true, and we still struggle with that in this particular local. It's easier to just hire staff who look like me, who organize and think like me. Because that's what most of us do, consciously or unconsciously. So our leadership are not as diverse as they should be. I would say that over the years we have constantly talked about this, struggled with this. In this local we've done a lot of, OK, what's our diversity plan? And we would do the training for our staff and our leaders and try to figure out what we can do differently. And we would reach out to people of color and specifically do ethnic dinners where we thought we bring people together and get them talking to us about their interests and concerns, members and nonmembers. We think about this a lot, struggle with this a lot, we don't do it very well. It will be interesting to see what Deborah and Dely think.

Are there significant numbers of employees at UW who are people of color?

I have the numbers actually, because we are looking at them again to try to figure out . . . It is something like 6% of the workforce at the U who are African-American, and 13% are Asian, a variety of Asians. Filipinos are probably the largest group, but there are lots of Chinese and other Asian nationalities. That's 20% of the workforce that are people of color, and you won't find 20% in our leadership. So we do look at it, struggle with it, try to figure out how to do it right, but it is not central enough to what we do, to actually make sure that we have a diverse union.

And I would say now that we've done the merger from the old 925 to the new local it is even harder to do, because the consciousness and commitment to be a diverse organization isn't there with a lot of the new people we've brought into the union. So we are trying to re-develop it. In fact, at our next staff meeting we are doing a whole cultural awareness training with a trainer that we are bringing in.

What is the profile of the private daycare providers that you are organizing? That must be a pretty diverse group. . .

It is pretty diverse, again, it depends on where. If you look in South Seattle, Kent, one part of the King County area that is incredibly diverse, you probably have a very large number of African-American women, but if you go to Spokane or Bellingham or Everett or Vancouver you see mostly white women. If you go to Yakima, it is all Latinas. It is going to be more diverse than our current membership is. It's going to be good. It is going to change our union dramatically to bring that group of workers in. It is going to make things very, very different here.

And they are almost all women, too.

Oh yeah, very few men in that workforce.

End of Tape 1, Side B

Start of Tape 2, Side A

We've been thinking about how you should structure your organizing to have powerful workers. We really believe—and this is part of the fight at the AFL-CIO right now, that SEIU is leading—that we need to organize by industry. That what we really want is density in a particular industry to drive up standards in that industry, as opposed to just organizing anybody anywhere, and just have numbers. You actually have to really focus on an industry, to understand an industry to drive up standards and have numbers.

But in the old days of 925 when we all came into it, it was just about organizing and occupation, which was clerical work, right? Women clerical workers. And even though some of us wanted to take on the insurance industry or the banking industry, what we saw in the early days of 925 was that we organized any woman clerical worker in a private sector job. We organized law offices and we organized libraries, you name it. And we didn't think about industry power, we thought about occupational power. And it is still a raging debate in the AFL-CIO about whether to organize by industry or occupation.

We really believe now that you organize by industry and not by occupation.

That must put the Teamsters in kind of a quandary, aren't they everywhere?

Everywhere, and, it's interesting, they do a little bit of both. Predominantly they organize and represent truck drivers, but again truck drivers are across all different kinds of industries. If they really want to be powerful, we would say, if you are going to organize truck drives for Safeway, what you really need is to organize all the workers at Safeway into one union, and not organize Safeway by occupation. That you have truck drivers in one union and the clericals in another—you don't have power that way, you're just divided. All the unions are in a quandary over this including our own, SEIU. We used to do things one way and now we think we should do it differently. Can you tear it all down and build something new based on a new way of thinking about it.

Are there any other new initiatives you are doing here in Seattle besides the child care providers?

I think the child care is really the biggest thing that is new. SEIU did home care here a couple of years ago, but it wasn't 925, it was a different local.

Do you consider 925 a family-friendly organization?

There is no question in my mind that 925 is the most family-friendly union. In SEIU at least. We try to combine a need to be parents and have families in our lives with what we believe is a calling in our work. It shouldn't be about a 40 hour a week job, it should be about what you do with your life. And so I don't believe you create a 40 hour a week job for organizers in SEIU so you can have kids. I think you have to figure out a way to stretch the limits on both of those things. I did watch the women I worked with over the years, like Karen and Debbie and Anne. . .

as we were young organizers devote our entire lives, and every waking moment to being at the job, on the job, And then I watched each of us have children, and then try to balance those two things, right? Each of us do it differently, each of us have different standards around how much time we want to be with our kids. How many things can you drag your kids to until they decide they're not coming any more. My 15-year old will not come to anything I do in the union any more. I just have one daughter, and when she was little, she loved it. She loved the rallies, the marches, she particularly loved it when she got on TV.

So all of us raised kids, we balanced connecting our kids into our work lives, as well as just making time to be with our kids. I think we probably do that better in 925 than any other SEIU local, try to give people space and time. But I also expect that people get it, that you also have to sacrifice . . . it isn't a 40-hour a week job, and you aren't going to be with your kids every night. It's a lot more than 40 hours, and sometimes you have to make trade-offs. You will not be home with your kids, and that is just the way the work is. And if people don't see it as a calling, and can't make those kind of choices in their lives, it isn't the right kind of work for them to be in.

In my local people are allowed to work part-time when they have kids, we've had job-sharing arrangements to encourage people to stay after they have kids. But there are still plenty of people who decided to leave because they wanted every night at home with their children. And that is how they wanted their lives to be. That is a reasonable choice, it's not one you can do and be a union organizer at the same time. I think anybody will probably say to you that the union that does the best job of being a family-friendly union is 925.

Now the "legacy" questions. Do you think the aims of 925 were realized?

Clearly what we failed to do was organizing the insurance and banking industries. We failed at that. But we did create, I think, a union that is predominantly women, that is run by women, and has done an amazing job of creating women leaders, developing women leaders in the labor movement and otherwise. Debbie and I are always talking about how if you look at the international executive board of SEIU, which is about 60 of the top leaders in the country, at least five of the women on that board came through 925. And that is pretty remarkable. Out of the 60, 40% are women, so that's about 25, something like that. This local, 925, is like a little local in SEIU. 12,000 members is small, these days in SEIU. You need to be 20,000 or above to be a local, almost. Because we've restructured so much. SEIU just merged all these little locals into industry-based locals. So ours is still pretty small compared to others.

I think we realized our goal of creating a different kind of local union with women leadership that is committed to finding and developing women in the labor movement. I think we realized that goal, and we did a really good job. We weren't able to organize the particular work force or industries that we initially set out to do.

This local is the most coherent continuation of 925—I think I'm right about this. By the leadership, by the name. I interviewed a couple of people back east who felt like when 925 got merged into some other SEIU local, they lost that great representation they had. There

was a sense of loss. What is your sense of that around the country, with the disbanding of 925?

I know that in Ohio people really feel like they lost. They lost a union that had women leaders, they lost a sense a sense of family and community in that union, and it operated, you know, the way that we operate. But they went into a union that was as opposite as one could get. They got merged into 1199 Ohio. You know, it's a union that is really sort of the male version of SEIU. It's run by an egotistical male leader who doesn't operate collectively or collaboratively at all, with his top leaders, with his member leaders, with his staff. So it is just the opposite, right? So I think they really suffered the most in Ohio in the restructuring in terms of losing what we thought we had in 925.

What I had heard from the Boston folks is that they were pretty happy with the new local they went into. It was run by a woman actually. And the things we wanted to do with this restructuring, which was bring together all the people in one geography that had similar jobs, refocus resources, have more resources, and so on, seemed to work positively there. What I had heard then was people in Boston were pretty happy with the restructuring, people in Ohio had not been. And people here I think have been, then the leadership didn't change much. And people who knew 925 knew me, and I'm president of the local, so it hasn't changed dramatically. I will be interesting to see what Deborah and Dely say, I think they will say it was the right move, it was a good thing for us here to do. And there were practical reasons for it. . .

We had this discussion the other day in our staff meeting—and we never had this problem in 925, ever, we always had 80-90% women on the executive board, and your staff and leadership were almost all women, right? In my union now, 70% of the members of this local are women. The actual numbers on the executive board are more women, like 60% to 40%, but if you were at a meeting you wouldn't know it. The men on the board dominate the meetings, they talk all the time, you can't get them to stop. It is hard to get the women to contribute, and I get mad at myself. I know these things, and I am leading this meeting, I need to try to change how these meetings operate. But you know, you get lazy, and you just run a meeting, and you let the people talk who want to talk. And I do plenty of talking so I don't notice that women aren't talking. But is the kind of thing I am acutely aware of when I remind myself of it. Even in this local now we have to work hard to change those things, and it takes effort, finesse, to make those things not true.

Even though it is a female-led union and we've had the women's movement, it's still the same pattern.

It's true in the staff meetings as well.

And when 925 had these few men in leadership positions on the executive boards, what was their role in that situation? Did you, as women leaders, have to make room for them? Were they quite assertive?

I'm trying to think about the men that were on that board. First of all, it had to be a bit of an unusual man to be comfortable in that situation, right? You'll find out with Neal. He is not like a new age soft guy, but he is quirky enough, and he always had something very fun and funny to say. He was president of the chapter for a long time.

So he was pretty comfortable in that situation, and people were welcoming of him being in that situation. I think we had a couple of men on that executive board who were just typical, traditional men who wanted to talk all the time, were obnoxious, and Debbie always did a pretty good job of figuring out how to get this guy to shut up. They didn't know when to shut up. There were a few of them. Men who went from Seattle were always pretty non-traditional in their approach.

Is there anything you would like to add about the impact 925 had on SEIU?

I wish we had had a bigger impact in terms of our style of leadership. I really do believe that my style of leadership is a leader who is more collaborative, a lot less egotistical is because of my 925 experience. And I wish there were more leaders in SEIU who had learned from that, who were like that. I think we were never really big enough to have a broader impact on challenging people to think about their leadership style.

So, for example, did some of the ways of training people that 925 was famous for, did they get adapted or brought into SEIU?

I love SEIU, I think that we are bold, we are smart, and we do great work, but I also think we have this sort of arrogance that makes us not be able to be leaders in the labor movement. People don't follow us because they think we are a bunch of arrogant (pause) whatevers.

By people, who do you mean?

Other unions. Other unions often hate us because they think we are full of ourselves. Some of that is for good reasons. We have smart leaders and we actually are organizing and winning, but some of it is just—I love Andy but his style is arrogant. And as a result of his style, many more leaders in the union, mainly men, but some women, believe that is how they have to behave as well. They have to emulate the SEIU arrogance. They're not a tiny bit apologetic about it, they are just obnoxious about it, and I think that is unfortunate.

Do you think it will be harmful to the union in the long run, undermine your work?

Yeah, I think it does undermine our work. Here we are in the AFL-CIO not trying to get unions to follow us and to collaborate in the changes we are trying to promote in the AFL-CIO, and we can't get a majority to go there, because we are unwilling to be conciliatory or unwilling to be collaborative. Our approach is almost always, we're right, you're wrong, you know, you're stupid. (Laughs) All that may be true. Again, maybe it is about my organizing style, you don't get people to follow you unless you can develop relationships, win trust and respect from people.

And I think many of the leaders in SEIU don't buy that. That certainly is not what they strive for.

Do you think there is a danger the labor movement will be weakened if there is a split in AFL-CIO?

Hmmm. It will definitely be weakened at some level if there is a split. On the other hand, we are pretty damn weak together. I actually believe that SEIU needs to shake up the AFL-CIO, and this is what it will take to shake it up. We may or may not in the long run dramatically change the labor movement. In the short run we have been trying to change the labor movement and have been unsuccessful, and so if that doesn't work, let's try something else, right? I actually believe we should leave the AFL-CIO if we don't get the changes we are trying to get, but I don't think it necessarily means we should be out forever. Or that that act in itself is going to make a huge difference. I don't think it is. We got to call the question and follow through.

Do you have anything you want to add about what working in 925 as an organizer all these years means in your life? You referred to it as a calling. . .

It's a calling, it's a personal identity, it's the lens through which I look at everything. My personal life, my family life, international relations, sometimes I think that I am not well-rounded enough (laughs) because I have this very narrow perspective on how I think about the world. I feel incredibly luck that I have had this calling that is the way I make my living and the way I live my life. As much I as I love to find other things to do, like hiking and biking and travel, I would feel really, really small if that is what I measured my life on. I like to measure my life on my ability to help move forward working people's agendas. I feel really lucky that I have been able to do that. Really, really lucky. Sometimes it feels like a job, but mostly it feels like I am really lucky to be able to do this.

Final question: do you feel optimistic about the organizing work you are doing now? What keeps you going as an organizer?

Probably because of the child care work, I feel incredibly optimistic. Again in SEIU, I hate to say this because this is a sort of girl thing to say, I don't even feel responsible for it. I feel like I am part of this big machine of really smart people who are figuring out new ways to think about how to change the industry. We've been trying to organize in child care for a decade now, and we tried about ten years ago to organize center workers, to do a bunch of centers all at one time and have a contract for all of them. It worked, but it was still small, ten centers and one contract.

And it wasn't until now that we thought, let's not follow the old traditional ways of thinking about employer and employee. Think outside of the box and create new institutions and ways of organizing that create powerful workers. So we had to look a little differently at the child care industry. And SEIU is really the only union that is coming up with new, big, creative ways to think outside the box around organizing. And it is so exciting to be at this cutting edge of child care organizing.

It is not just happening in Washington state, then?

It happened in Illinois first. Illinois was the first state to win. And there are about ten states that we are moving this in, all at one time. It is sort of like where we were ten years ago in home care organizing. It took us ten years to figure out how to help home care workers to organize into unions, how to create a model for that organizing. We did that in Los Angeles. We won the largest union election in 50 years, 4000 home care workers in L. A. and then we moved that around the country. We've organized most of the home care workers in the country as a result. So now child care is just where we were ten years ago with home care work. I'm so excited that I helped make this happen before I retire. (Laughs) It really will be a huge big deal.

I noticed the award in the office—500,000 in six years. So what are those groups, home health care? What are the places SEIU has made inroads in the last decade?

In the last decade, SEIU has made huge inroads in, well, it started with janitors over a century ago. We organized in traditional ways. Over the last 20 years, those numbers have dwindled and dwindled because they organized traditionally. So then they started the justice for janitors campaign where they thought very differently and creatively about pressure on—it wasn't just about organizing workers, sign them up, then have an election—but to put pressure on building owners who really control these companies that bring in the janitors. They did massive campaigns state by state, and they did massive planning, and they turned around the building service industry over the last 20 years in SEIU. Then ten years ago they started with home care workers, and have organized, I don't know 300,000 home care workers in the nation. And now we are doing the same thing in child care. So those are the three industries that we've changed just dramatically. And we've changed the lives for those workers dramatically. When I came into SEIU I don't think the justice for janitors stuff had started. It was probably 15 years that the janitors work turned around. And the organizing happened.

So clerical workers in the public sector are pretty much all organized now?

Pretty much. The are some places like the South, where they don't have the right to organize. And that is the other thing we have made a huge commitment to. . .last year at our convention, we now put millions of dollars into a few targeted southern states to organize. So the clerical workers in the public sector in those states are organizing now with huge resources. We get locals like big locals in California that have been organized for years and years, and have 20,000 to 30,000 members, and nobody else in the public sector to organize, those locals now send their money to the South, to organize public sectors in the South. Because the members get that there is connection between the ability to win the White House and the fact that states in the South aren't organized, right? So that is another huge piece of what we are doing now that makes a whole lot of sense. We can continue to have union strength only in those states where there have traditionally been unions. We have to expand our union organizing to states where there haven't been unions. So that is very exciting and a big part of what we are doing. It's great, but I am going to retire in five years.

And then what?

I don't know what I am going to do then. I keep saying I am going to go do something completely different. But what I probably will do is retire from this job, and go to the southwest and organize. That is probably what I will end up doing. In my job now as president of the local I don't actually get to do organizing. I have to supervise all these staff, and I have to do the political work, and I have to bargain contracts, all of which is not nearly as fun as new organizing. I think that is way more fun. So I am thinking when I quit this I will go back to organizing.

How does SEIU train these new organizers that they are sending out to different places?

They have a program now they call the wave (?) program where they bring in 100 young people a year, and they first couple of weeks are classroom training, and then they send them out to different campaigns to work under organizers. And we've had organizers sent to us that work under my organizing director. She puts them on a campaign and trains them on a daily basis. After they have had that experience, like child care in Washington for a month, then they send them to a hospital in California where they are organizing hospital workers. So they get all these different kinds of organizing experiences over the course of a year, and at the end of that year, they graduate and can go work for a local as an organizer. It's a great training program. I think the best way to train organizers is in the field. That's the best way to train organizers. So probably if I go to the South, my guess is that I will be training organizers, as the director of a campaign. That way you actually get out into the field and talk to workers, too.