

**Rene DeVine**  
**Interviewed by Ann Froines**  
Seattle, Washington  
May 10, 2005

**This is at the Local 925/SEIU Office in Seattle, Washington, May 10, 2005. OK, we'll start with a question about how you entered 925. What made you go to that first discussion, that first meeting?**

It was actually me who made the phone call to the union office. We had had a particularly bad boss for a number of months and years. My phone call was actually made as a result of a move she made that moved a long-term employee from our lab to another to another employee based on a whistle blower action that this employee had done. She had called and asked a couple of questions about this managers actions and upon the return of the manager from a trip she had taken that employee was moved – she didn't lose her job – but she moved to another area within the hospital. She had worked in our lab for 12-15 years. Many, many people looked to her as the cornerstone of that lab and so without her we were, kind of, adrift. We were at a social gathering outside of the hospital - a number of employees, kind of, in support of her. I had a conversation with a friend of hers who worked in another area of the hospital and she said, "You know, the union we belong to has always wanted to organize the technologists." I said, "Oh, really, give me the name and the number and I'll call him." So, the next day I called Kim and said, this is who I am, we had an action that occurred in our area, we were all feeling particularly vulnerable and just would like to set up a discussion. That was what spurred my first contact with the union. I organized two meetings with Kim and at the time Joan Weiss, who was I believe the rep for the hospital area. We had 100% - I can't think of anybody that was in the lab then who didn't turn up for one of those two discussions. Then, when it came to asking to be accredited into a union, we had 100% agreement with that decision.

**You mean all the technologists voted for it?**

All the technologists said, "Yes, we want this."

**What is your own job, Renee?**

I'm a cardiac technologist and was a cardiac technologist at the time. There were a number of issues going on in the lab, not just this one. The manager had created an antagonistic work environment where we all felt at some point or another targeted and very vulnerable within our jobs. It seemed as though that that was very intentional in that we worked fairly well together but just enough so that we, kind of, did our best to stay out of her line of sight. As long as you could get her line of sight directed at somebody else, you knew you were safe for a while. So, there was cooperation but to the extent that we could keep ourselves out of trouble. It was not a good nurturing work environment at all.

**How long did that campaign take to add you to the union? It sounds like it was fairly quick.**

We were accreted into the union but then it was kind of a larger process in that we were in a smaller group under the district at that time under the Seattle division, which we called the WPRB unit. So, we were part of the union and we paid dues and we had some pieces of the contract but we didn't have the valuable pieces of the contract. We didn't have the additional pay, we didn't have the additional protections, we didn't have the additional vacation, and we didn't have the full grievance process. So, really the parts that were the real contract, we didn't have access to.

**Why was that?**

It was because we came in later and we were a little bit different than the rest of the workers. We called ourselves WPRB, Washington Personnel Resources Board, I think. It was more the civil service rules at that time. How the law dictated that employers must treat their employees was really our contract at the time. (It) didn't require the university to go the additional step to make the working conditions better. That was really the campaign. That we came into the union and we were put under that portion of the contract but the real campaign, for me, and my real action and activist role was getting those WPRB workers, which we were 600-900 strong, under the rest of the real meaty contract.

**Maybe you should just tell me about that campaign as you remember it. It sounds like it's a little bit different than the rest of the story.**

It feels so long ago.

**Are we talking about 2000?**

Oh, before that. How long ago was that? 2002, so, it would have been the campaign that ended in '99 or 2000 that we finally were brought in under the larger single contract. So, that campaign would have last a year and a half to two years prior. That's when I came in was a year and a half to two years prior to that. It had been going on. I kind of came in towards the end of that whole process. Like I said, there were 600-900 workers, primarily tech workers, so there was group of technical workers in the hospital. There were some other technical workers around the hospital, instructional techs. They were through our campus, I should say. Maybe some data analysts, computer support people that were in this technical component. There had been a number of campaigns to get them included in the larger contract. I came in on the last couple of years and was successful in that. Of course, it was phase in over time once we finally did, but that was a big win, not only for the workers that we represented but for the union as a whole to bring that larger group under...

**You had to do it in the classic way by getting them to sign to be in it and have elections?**

Yes. It was a tough group. If I remember in signing my group up we were ten of the six hundred and there were about 10%, 60 of us paying dues. We were a sixth of that group so the lab felt some real ownership, I think, in paying those dues and being active. When we did actions, I did get quite a bit of participation in the group. So, that was good. I always felt good.

**What types of actions and activities did you organize?**

Signing petitions, making phone calls to legislators. We got very good participation in the one day strike, that was mentioned.

**So, there was a legislature that had to make this change?**

Yes. I mean, the university had to agree to it, which they hadn't in the past, and then the legislature had to agree to, I believe, change the law as far as how this group of workers was represented.

**What was the one-day strike about?**

What was it about? It was about our contract.

**You were trying to influence the state, too, I believe, and the legislators.**

Yes.

**It was happening, I think, in other – Kim said there were rolling actions I think is how she put it, in other employee sites. So other unions were also working on this campaign.**

It was, I believe, about wages and cost of living, because the proposal from the state was significantly under funded. I think we were requesting 3% and they came up with a figure that was much lower than that, it was less than 2%, I think. I can't remember the numbers. It all feels like so long ago.

**Yes, I know.**

So, we organized a one-day strike. It was particularly difficult for hospital workers because it's not just us, its patients that we affect. We're a procedural area and some of what we do is elective but the procedures that we do also tend to be urgent and emergent. I had worked a number of days ahead of time with my boss to say "I'm going out, I know these workers are going out. I know it leaves you short." She worked with me, we rescheduled a number of elective procedures, but I told her, "At any time, you page me, and I will mobilize a team to be in this lab within 10 minutes." I didn't think that we were

doing anything unsafe. In talking to the employees that were going out it was like you me asked to leave this action and return to work because in my mind our patients, and their health and their safety was always first. But I didn't feel like we could continue to compromise what we were being compensated either. You know, as state employees, we accept certain conditions of our employment. We, most of the time, recognize that we're not going to be paid what we're going to be paid in the private sector. We're not going to maybe even have the same benefits or some of the other perks of private employment. But that can only go so far. You have to, at least, feel like you're being compensated somewhere in the range. And we were really beginning to fall behind. So that's what that action was. Most of us, as state employees, don't consider our employer down in Olympia but that is where they are. Those are the people who make the decisions about our working conditions, our benefits, our raises, our wages. This one-day strike was never about our employer.

**Your supervisor?**

Yes, it was never about that person we reported to work for every day. It was an action against the legislature.

**So, it sounds like you had some cooperation from the management in the hospital or, at least, they weren't threatening to fire you over this. Wasn't it a gray area going out on strikes?**

It was very gray. Particularly myself, since I wasn't under the regular contract. It was definitely under the WPRB rules and even our contract had some very ambiguous language about, you know, the employer and the employee agree not to strike. But our interpretation was this is an action against the legislature and we need to be able to exercise that right to express ourselves and our need for compensation. I worked with my employer and I don't think that other people who went up had as much cooperation. It was only afterwards that there was some selective discipline against employees who did go out.

**For example?**

They selected only hospital workers to discipline at a formal counseling level about their unscheduled day off.

**Did they dock their pay?**

We didn't get paid. We knew it was leave without pay, because it was unscheduled leave. So everybody, before going out, knew it was leave without pay and accepted that as conditions of the day out. What happened then was a letter of formal counseling went into all of our personnel files, went into the central files. For a number of people that was really upsetting, they'd had, you know, pristine employment records. Because they chose to exercise their voice, they received this disciplinary action that they felt was unduly harsh. A number of the people who went out were not involved in direct patient care. I

mean my area definitely was direct patient care, but we had cooperation with our supervisor to make sure that we weren't leaving any patients unsafe and that any emergencies that did come up would be covered.

**Was the union able to get these letters taken out of the file or was there any campaign to try and rectify that?**

There were many campaigns around that. We eventually did get them removed but it wasn't until the next contract cycle. So we got them removed. There's an addendum article in the back of that contract that we negotiated. Some of the actions we did as a result of that disciplinary action I believe that there were petitions signed. We delivered those petitions to the CEO's office, had a private meeting with the CEO, private, unannounced meeting with the CEO, which I led. We had about 30 employees show up for that action delivering I think around 1000-1500 signatures saying these need to be removed. She did agree to speak with, I believe, four of us in her office around that. They didn't get removed then.

You had the opportunity to write a rebuttal to anything that's placed in your personnel file... so I wrote a letter and requested that it be added to my personnel file. Then that was made available as, kind of, a template to anybody else that chose to write a letter to be placed in their file to exist there as long as that letter of discipline stayed there. That was another action and we kept it alive and presented it as part of the bargaining the next cycle.

**Was the one-day action a success?**

Yes it was. I think 400-500 employees turn out for that action. We did get more money written into that budget. Again, I can't remember how much. We did get some pretty good press. We were on the local evening news as well as the front page of the paper the next day. And, again, I think because of the cooperation between the unions and the number of actions that rolled out across the State through that period of time I think the public did acknowledge these employees do valuable work and if we want to continue to have access to quality services, we need to fairly compensate the employees.

**Were you an official leader? What would it be called... a steward?**

I was a steward, yes, and at that time, I believe, I was vice president of the chapter. And I moved up. I was steward, upon entry into the union, which I didn't realize what I was undertaking with that (laughing). I was a work site leader so I got information out to my immediate worksite and generated participation in the various activities that we had going on. I was part of the CCN, contract communications network, getting information out to the employees. I became a trustee for a while. And then, I think, from there, moved into the vice president role because our president then moved into a staff position, vice president move up and then I moved into the vice presidency at that time. So, I think, I was vice president then.

**And now, are you an official?**

No, I am not. I am an associate member now. At the end of the last contract, that would have been in the end of '03--no, '02 was the last contract, I took a position in management. Actually, that bad boss we got rid of. I'm in her role now... in her seat. We had a supervisor in between. We actually were successful in getting her out of our lab. She still works at the university but she does not work in the cath lab any longer. We had another supervisor for about 3 years and then when she left to take a position in Spokane, she asked that I fill her role until a permanent supervisor/manager was found. When that position became available, I was asked to take the permanent position, so, I did.

**But the union lets you be an associate member even though...(unclear)**

They actually do, yes!

**Does that involve paying any dues?**

Yes, it's nominal, like \$30 a year or something like that.

**So, it's like saying, "I'm a manager but I support the union"?**

Yes.

**Are there a fair number of associate members at U.W.?**

I don't know what the associate membership is.

**It (sounds like) something they created for Renee Devine.**

It wasn't, no, it was already out there. (Laughing)

**Had you participated in any other kinds of organizing or action as a young women or employee before this?**

None at all. Not that I can think of. Prior to this action, I would never have considered myself an activist, just always been a part of whatever was going on. I'm just a worker. I'm here to do the work and never would have considered myself a leader. So this was really a unique opportunity and I believe opened many doors for me. I truly believe that I never would have been offered the position that I'm in without having done the work that I did in the union. I think somebody somewhere saw some leadership qualities that I didn't see in myself and never would have probably worked too hard on without having been a part of the union and that whole piece.

**Growing up did you have any knowledge or opinions about workplace organizing, union struggles, you or your family?**

Not really, I grew up on a farm in Iowa, about as independent of a worker as you can imagine. However, my mom's dad was very much of a union employee. He was a carpenter and was proud to be a member of the carpenter's union. The only request when he died was that he be buried with his apprentice pin and his 60-year pin. He was very proud of union association. But he didn't talk a whole lot about it. Just that he was proud of that, he was a union member, and I guess that's all I knew about unions. My dad's family was all farmers.

**Your mom was a farmer, too... living on the farm, worked on the farm.**

I remember my parents talking about the UPS strike. Was that in the '70's, the '80s somewhere around there. I think it was around the '80's. It was not a real hit.

**It affected them.**

It affected them and it was like, they're paid well, why should they be wanting anything more? I probably got more negative feedback on unions in my own household than positive, even with my grandfather's experience.

**How did you end up coming out to Seattle?**

Oddly enough, I came because we were commuting too far in Iowa. I lived in Davenport and worked in Iowa City, which is a 60-mile commute. I did that for about 3 years and just decided that that much time on the road was... you drove, you worked, you ate, you slept, and that was about it for weekday activities.

**Were you working in health care?**

Yes, so same sort of work. I worked in the cath lab there and then took a job here in the cath lab.

**So your main sort of work in 925 where you were working with 925 tactics was this particular strike that you were telling me about and the lobbying you did with the state legislature.**

Yes.

**You said it opened doors for you. Can you describe some of the things you actually learned from the experience, you think?**

I learned how to speak in front of people and I learned to have a confidence that I don't think I had before experience in the union. I was terrified of speaking in front of people. In fact, I remember going to one action and we were walking. It was outside of the employment office. I think it might have been a bargaining kickoff or something. So we were, kind of, sending the bargaining team off on a good note and I was asked to say a

few words about my experience in the workplace, or you know whatever, and was joking with a couple workers saying, just imagine me with a bull horn. We're all laughing and joking and 5 minutes later I had a bullhorn in my hand and my knees were knocking and my voice was shaking and I remember being so scared. And then at almost every action was asked to say something and I remember my first time meeting the president of the university at that time. I had my notes and was standing there and I couldn't find where I was because my paper was shaking so bad. I walked away from there thinking he must have thought I was really green and just no experience whatever, and then a couple of years later meeting him and calling him to task because he'd received the Jobs for Justice Grinch Award. I stood up there and I remember recalling after that action, I wonder if he knows that I was the one with the paper shaking, because it was a totally different person up there saying when I'm wearing my letter of discipline as a badge of honor and I'm waiting to see how you will treat this award. Then I remember talking to somebody else about, you know, we had talked about Kim and her ease in front of crowd. She would stand on the podium with one arm up and her legs crossed and just kind of... it was a conversation that she seemed to have. I was talking, I think it might have been with Debra and saying, "That's where I want to be. If I ever get there, I will have made it." At one of my last opportunities to speak in front of a group of people, I came back and she said, "You were there, you hit it." I was like I made it finally! I would say that the offices that I held and the experiences I had in the union really brought a confidence to my ability to speak, and stand in front of a group of people and relay an idea and inspire in them action that I never would have thought was possible before in myself, I guess.

**Did you participate in any trainings, too, to get some of these skills or did you just learn on the job?**

I think it was more on the job, just doing it again and again, I found, for me, what worked the most was that if I said something that made people laugh right at the onset I calmed down. So I usually tried for something and usually I tried to be a little self-deprecating ...you know, "Here I am again, with the bullhorn..." and I (put) myself at ease much more. But I don't remember any trainings, you know, "if you do this and you do this you'll be a successful public speaker." (Laughing)

**I know that 925 had, and maybe this was some of the leadership, had summer institutes for organizers and weekend things like that.**

Yes, they did and I didn't get an opportunity to do those. My son was really young at the time so to be able to free up that amount of time and be away from him, it just didn't work. For me it was just repeated exposure I think.

**Trial by fire?**

Yes. (Laughing)

**What do think was different about 925's approach to organizing, now that you are more aware of union activity and that kind of thing? Do you have a sense of that?**



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**START of tape 1, side B**

... both can only have authenticity if you participate and you are a voice. I didn't see that so much in some of the other unions that we worked with. There was a core leadership and they ... I remember doing a class with a leader in another union at the time. He was president of his union and I was president of this union at the time, this chapter at the time. He was saying, "Every member has access to my phone number and they can call me and I'll fix that problem for them" and I'm like, "I don't want 5,000 people having my phone number." I want them to realize that the solutions to any problems begins and ends with them. Really empowering the workers is something that SEIU has got down and does really, really well. How do you deal with worker apathy? I don't know. But they're getting it and better, I think, than any other union.

**So, a worker would turn to the grievance officer or somebody, an employee who's active, for solving a problem.**

Right. It's not a staff person that administers your grievance. It's another employee. When you've got a problem in the worksite, it's your group of workers that stands up, your co-workers that stand up and say, "This is wrong." It's not somebody who comes in from the office and says, "You guys are doing it wrong." It's your cohesive group.

**You sort of casually mentioned there that you were president at the time. You forgot to mention that when I asked you about your various leadership roles. (Both laughing) Just explain briefly, you were president of all of the local?**

The chapter.

**The technological workers?**

Yeah.

**I know it's been reorganized several times.**

I think, prior to my presidency it was the chapter under the district. And then when I was president we had become the local and so I was president of the UW chapter, so the higher education workers, so a portion of the local so we were higher ed K-12, private sector.

**But thousands of people?**

Yes, 5,000 people. We were half of the local.

**And how long was your term?**

I was president for about a year and a half and then I left before the end of my term. It would have been another six months when the election would have occurred for that seat.

**Now when you're president do you take a leave from your regular job?**

No.

**You don't get any reduced time?**

No. So, I worked my full time job and I was at a meeting a week and sometimes two or three meetings after work.

**And at that time was your child older?**

He was a little older but he attended a lot of meetings. In fact, we still drive by here and he says, "I want to stop there. They have good food. (Laughing) I want to go there. That was fun." Let's see, when I was active he would have been between four and six years old. So, he would come to meetings, he came to a couple of actions. He went to the teacher's strike, an action in Olympia, so he did a number of things with me.

**Did you receive any training when you became president? I guess you worked your way up through.**

Yeah, I mean there's really good leadership here. There's really good staff support. The leaders, the staff leaders, or I should say the workers who have identified themselves as leaders. I probably got training; I don't remember it. A lot of it was on the job just doing the work.

**It sounds like you had some informal discussions about leadership anyway. You brought up that issue about public speaking.**

I guess that was one training that I remember was around that strike. We did have somebody from the international office who came and did some training on media, interacting with the media and how do you make sure that your point gets across to the media. We developed talking points and he worked with me on the phone. I think there was a face to face meeting as well. But just how do you interface with the media and continue to drive your message home. That was pretty helpful and I've carried that forward in a lot of things that I've done since then.

**It was translatable to other things. So do you remember any discussions about women's leadership in the organization and the importance of women getting involved in leadership and trying to overcome those feelings you had?**

Not specifically. I know our primary membership was female and our leadership was primarily female and most of the activists were female. But we did have a number of

male activists as well. I guess I tend to like to look more at the conditions. What is it you're trying to fix and take gender and race and everything else out of it. To me it didn't so much matter whether it was male or female. It's what are the conditions under which you're working and how do we make those better. I'm sure there were discussions and I'm sure that I was a part of them but I don't remember specifically.

**Did you observe anything about the roles of men in a largely female dominated union? I mean were there men who were active?**

Absolutely.

**Particularly, probably in a technological area there are more men.**

Yeah, I believe there had been one male president, a number of years back, Neal.

**Yes, I'm interviewing him.**

Yeah, so he was one of the early presidents. And then Jim, when I left, filled my role as president, fulfilled my term.

**So there were men who felt comfortable working with strong women?**

Yes, yes.

**Now after all these years of organizing or being involved, I should say, with 925 as an active employee and union officer, what can you say about the values represented by 925, the strategies, that impressed you about its approach to unionizing workers?**

I really like and I think I mentioned it before, the fact that SEIU, I believe, really believes the power in the worksite is with the workers. They don't try to come in and fix the problems. They try and energize and activate the worksite to see solutions and participate in the solutions.

**How do you think they got this message across when other unions didn't or couldn't? Is it just the way they handled themselves during the meetings?**

Yes, and when they did come in they acted as facilitators as opposed to, "OK, you give me the information and I'm going to move this forward." They really did a good job of keeping the ownership in the worksite. And I don't know how they did it. But I sure always felt like it was my worksite and the only person invested in making it better... you know while they wanted to see it get better, the only person that was going to make it better was me... not me exactly but you know me as the bigger picture. So I don't know. Do they attract people like that? Are those the type of workers that come to SEIU? I don't know but they've been very successful in that respect. With the, oh, what was the campaign in 2000?

**I know there was a campaign called Fair Share. Something about extending the collective bargaining, more of the collective bargaining rights on economic issues to public employees.**

That wasn't it.

**Tell the anecdote and we can clarify the date later.**

Part of bringing groups of people together so that they're not representing themselves in tiny... that's part of how Local 925 came to be, was bringing the Strength in Unity plan. That's what I thought of...

**Yeah, I realized that.**

...was bringing those groups of people who do similar work together and creating a critical mass. We were strong at 5,000 when we were the district. But when we became a 10,000 member Local, we now had a voice in Olympia, where our true employer was. And we could make an impact and I think they're seeing the benefits of that now. When they go to the legislature, the legislators know Local 925 and they know the leaders and they know the employees. Some of them in their districts by name. And I think that's very, very effective, particularly in the public sector when, like I said, your employer really isn't the person that you report to work for. It's the people that we elected and that we elect every two and four years. Those are the ones who are our employers and those are the ones who need to know that if you're not making it right by me I remember that at the ballot box in a couple of years and I'll do something different next time if I have to. So, I think the new Strength in Unity plan was a huge step in the right direction for unions. What little I see that I have time really to assimilate about union activity now, I really think SEIU is continuing to foster that under Andrew Stern's leadership, with trying to bring different unions together who do like work.

**You mentioned a little bit about this concerning your son but do you consider 925 a family friendly organization?**

Absolutely.

**When you were active, you were able to combine that with parenting?**

Absolutely. I would bring him to meetings. We often had videotapes or VCR available. There were usually two or three, four other kids. For a while, there was an effort to have a childcare worker here to take care of the kids but there just weren't enough. So, there was the box of toys and crayons and markers and video tapes and the kids would entertain (themselves) and, like I said, my son loved the food. He really looked forward to meetings and such. Children were always welcome. I never felt like I couldn't participate in something because I was with my son. So, absolutely.

**Although I imagine a lot of evening meetings and raising kids isn't so easy. Several of the organizers have talked about how they couldn't imagine being an organizer on staff and having small children because of travel and all.**

Right. Right. I think that would be very difficult.

**(I guess) being an officer you had more of a regular schedule.**

Right, right. And I could say no. (Laughing)

**(interviewer unclear)**

No, I haven't unfortunately. But if I really had a family obligation, I felt I could say "no" if I had to but I don't remember that I ever did.

**To get back to some of these lessons you learned and how they applied to you in your own development and your own career development, can you say what some of the things are that you learned in 925 that you've been able to use and translate into your job as a manager?**

I think the bargaining experience was absolutely incredible. It was just trying to bring people with different interests to the table and find a resolution that met both needs. That was highly valuable. The training I got on the media exposure and staying on message, regardless of the question they asked, how you get back around. You know, they may ask you a question that's totally not what you wanted to talk about but starting off there and bringing it back home so that you always brought home the message. And then, I think, the other thing is recognizing that employees really just want to do the work. I don't think they're trying to make anybody's life miserable, whether you're a manager or their co-worker. They really just want to do the work. So, trying to find ways that are worker friendly, and again, bringing people with different ideas about how things need to be done back so that both people feel like they're winning. I keep that in mind when I work with my employees every day. Most of the time they're not there because they want to be there. They're just there because they need to make a living. They need to provide for their families. How do I meet those needs as their employer? How do I make sure that they have the time to spend with their families and yet still want to come to work and make this part of their life enjoyable.

**Do you think that because you were promoted from within that you have a certain respect and trust of them that someone else who came laterally from somewhere else...?**

Yeah, the position that I had was unique because while I worked side by side with them - I shouldn't even say side by side - I did work that depended on what they did. I was visible every single day but I didn't work with them every day in the lab. I knew what they did and I could do it. I could step in when they were short and help out, but I...

**You took it to another level?**

Yeah, I think having been a worksite leader, most of them trusted me. They knew that I'd been through the same struggles with them so I would hope that they wouldn't think that I was going to abandon them if I moved into management. That, OK, now I'm something different and I can no longer advocate for the workers because I'm management now. I do my best to keep their needs in perspective when I'm doing what I need to do as a manager.

**Have there been any rough spots in the sense of the union rep talking to you now as a manager?**

Absolutely.

**You're, kind of, on the other side.**

Yes. Yes. There have been a couple of different... one most recently. We went from an hour lunch where we took the half an hour and added the two 15 minute breaks and so made this hour lunch and broke that apart. That was really, really difficult. In fact, in my worksite right now, we've got a lot of construction going on and we've had a number of temporary barriers put up and people have graffitied the barriers and they're usually quite funny. I shouldn't even say "usually," they're always very funny and I enjoy going and seeing the new graffiti. But when we were going through this whole lunch change, the medical director and I introduced it. We waited a month for feedback before implementing it. We implemented it for a period of two months. We came back and got feedback and then said, "This is how we're going to do it." And during that period of implementation, on those boards came up, "Who's for and against 30 minute lunches?" and everybody from Gandhi to Martin Luther King, Jr. weighed in on the "Against" side.

**Were they, in effect, losing break time?**

They were not.

**They thought they were?**

It was, in their mind, a big take away. It was redefining how they looked at down time in that a lot of the time that we spend at the cath lab we're waiting for patients. And so, saying OK, instead of sitting here and chatting with my co-workers about what I did last night, I need to use that time to go get my coffee. It's still down time and it's still a break. It's just not an entire hour in the middle of the day where now I can eat my lunch. There's a little bit more planning that needs to be involved. It was really hard. And I knew it was going to be hard knowing the environment and the culture around the lunchtime had been very, in my own description, sacred. Nobody had even suggested that people consider anything less than an hour even on occasion before I took the job. And now, not only did I suggest it on occasion (when) we're incredibly busy and I don't see any way to get people out of here on time if we don't do this, but now I suggest that

we move to this on a permanent basis. It didn't go over really well. In fact, part of that display on the wall included a photocopy of the contract of the contract and they were highlighting stuff and I was like, you know there's nothing in here that says they need to be conjoined like that so I understand...

**Well, this was something you initiated in your area. It wasn't something that came down from on high.**

Right. Right. It was in an effort to try and get people out of work on time. To try and say, if we work more efficiently during the day, there will be less asking you to stay late to do patient care at the end of the day. So, I believe it had some employee benefits in the end. It just wasn't comfortable while going through it.

**That's a good example. Is there anything else you'd add about the legacy of 925 that you haven't mentioned or that I haven't introduced you to?**

I didn't realize, I think, coming into this union what it really meant. You know, it was just a phone call in a bad work situation. But I feel really proud to have been a part of District 925 and to have been in, kind of, the beginning stages of Local 925. I look back on my union activity very, very fondly. It was a very good period of time in my life and very formative, I believe. I think I really came to, adulthood isn't the right word, but came to recognize I call myself as an individual during that period of time. My union activity was a big part of that.

**And how many years, just quickly, was that union activity?**

Three years. Something like that.

**Was there anything about your experience with 925 that was disappointing, just to get some balance in here, if you can remember...or difficult for you?**

The period of time I was president I was also acting supervisor/manager. (Laughing) Yeah, so that was really very, very challenging to, kind of, walk both worlds. I feel like I did OK because in the end both sides were offering me a job. It was really a very difficult choice.

**Oh, you mean, you were offered a staff job?**

I was offered a staff position and so it was really, really difficult because in my mind the jobs were the same. They were trying to make a difference in workers' lives. It came down to me as, do I go to work for the union and try to make differences in peoples lives on a big scale and very small changes at a time, or do I take the management position and affect a small group of employees in very big ways. So that was the difference in the two jobs for me. And it really came down to what you mentioned before. I saw myself becoming a single parent very quickly after that and so how can I best take care of my small family and still have time for my son. I didn't see how I could do it as an organizer

and maintain a relationship with my son because I knew the people here put in long hours and really dedicated themselves to this work. As employee leader, as worker leaders, we couldn't have done what we did without the staff commitment that we had. I didn't know if I could do it justice. I still wonder, at some point, if I'll have the opportunity and will be able to make that choice maybe in the future. I don't know. I still hope to keep it open.

**That's interesting. That's kind of an interesting dilemma. I bet it's come up for women in workplace situations before. You know, go to management, go to the union because of your own development as a leader, opening up all these doors.**

**Do you have an opinion on the impact 925 had on SEIU as a whole? As a president, did you go to national conventions?**

I went to the national convention in 2000 but I think was trustee. I didn't even have a clue where I was going to be a year later. That was a really energizing experience for me, though. I came back *really* excited about being a union member and what it meant in the larger picture.

**What was it about that convention that you think was so energizing?**

It was the size, it was the scope, it was the variety of workers that were represented by unions. I had no concept. The number or the types of workers that were represented in unions and more specifically represented by SEIU. It wasn't just techs, you know,

**It wasn't just clerical.**

It wasn't just clerical. It was physicians, it was people who worked in maintenance, it was just the sheer variety. That, too, was the year, I think, that the building trades, the Janitors for Justice or Justice for Janitors campaign was really big. And then the home care workers as well, that campaign, both of those really emotional campaigns that were just starting to come to fruition.

**The leaders of those were at the convention reporting when you were there?**

There was a big emotional component there just seeing all the workers. It was a big deal.

I used to see the big pictures they do of the SEIU conventions since I was in the national office--well I was in the AFL office and it's so impressive because it's America and it's so diverse in a way most of our organizations aren't. This is getting on my soapbox now. That's what I really noticed about those pictures.

That's when I was asked to be a delegate, at that convention, and turned it down because of so much time away from my son and I *really* had a hard time leaving. I *really* regretted my choice after having been there. I wished I could have stayed for that portion of the meeting but, you know, you make choices.



I was also a single mom in the sense of, you know, the dad was in the picture financially but you have to be there every day.

**Right. Right. Do you think 925 had an impact on SEIU?**

**END of tape 1, side B  
START of tape 2, side A**

I believe we did and the only reason I say that, my stint as an activist in the district was too short. When we were doing the work and dissolving the district and becoming a local, we took a visit to Washington, D.C. and that was where we had our final meeting as the district. Andy Stern came and we had a visit to the international office. In going through that office, a number of people asked about the district and how that was and that they were sad to see that that piece of history was changing. And so, while I didn't have any experience other than hearing those people ask and express their sadness that the district was going away and becoming a local, that would have been how I would measure the impact of District 925 on SEIU.

**You've explained already what kind of work you're doing after you left 925 as an officer. Do you just want to say, officially, what that is, just so I have it for the record.**

Absolutely. I manage operations at the Cardiac Cath lab at the University of Washington Medical Center.

**How many employees?**

I have about 15 employees and about five of them were co-workers of mine, first as just staff members and then as union activists, so a number of them I still manage.

**And how many years have you worked at this lab?**

It'll be 12 years this summer.

**And do you expect to stay there working in this capacity?**

Yes. Yes.

**You like the work?**

Most days! (Laughing) As in any job, you regret your choices a day or two out of the year or week but, yes, for the most part, I'm happy doing what I'm doing.

**And your level is not represented by any union? You're definitely management.**

Correct. But if there ever were a group of workers who needed representation I think it's middle managers because you make nobody happy in your work. You're not making your employees happy...

**Oh, wow.**

...and if you did make them happy, you're making your boss unhappy. So, it's really walking that fine line of trying to keep everybody happy. I don't think you're a good manager unless you've got both sides happy. Just my opinion.

**So, that's something you're striving for? Does the university provide any training for middle managers in coping with issues?**

They're working on various... There's Leadership Foundations, there's Strategic Leadership, that is a program for new... they put all supervisors, leaders, and managers through the initial phases and now they're putting all new leadership positions. And the Medical Center itself is looking at an initiative as well. I don't know a whole lot about it but I believe there's pretty good support. Now whether people take advantage of it or not ... then there's a lot of training and development classes as well and I try and take as much of that as I can.

**Is it good training, do you think? Do you learn things from it?**

I do, yes.

**Now middle management never finds itself on the other side of the bargaining table, does it? That's handled at the high up level, or do you think sometime you might end up bargaining a contract from the other side? (Laughing)**

I made the promise that I would never bargain the contract from the other side.

**To yourself? Or to your colleagues?**

To myself as well as to people here. It would be too hard because my heart wouldn't be on the side of the table I was sitting on. It would be on the other side.

**You'll probably never be asked that. They sense that about you.**

**My final question is, you mentioned that you hoped you hadn't closed the door to working as an organizer, possibly. Can you imagine, or do you fantasize about, what conditions might have to develop in your workplace or in your personal life to make you want to try that option?**

You know, if I get bored in my job, this would be the one I would come to and say, do you have something available. I think that and if again I found that need to make an impact on a larger group of people. To kind of see outside of myself and my own specific

conditions and say, "Now is the time I need to go out and make a bigger impact. I feel a need to work for workers as a whole."

**A change organization of some kind.**

Yes. Yes.

**I guess I asked you that in terms of your past before you got involved with 925. Have you ever been involved in community organizing or social issue campaigns?**

There was really my son that drove me to do this. We helped develop a community pea patch so on a real small level we made a difference in our neighborhood. So we helped develop a community garden and a small local park and somehow, yet again, put myself in a position of leadership there. I'm always unknowingly finding myself and I'm trying to figure out what I'm trying to learn here so I stop doing it. So I'm organizing work parties and trying to find leaders and so, again, it feel very much like union membership – trying to overcome that apathy so that people take ownership of the larger community and inspire activation and leadership within a group of people that just want to plant radishes and lettuce. (Both laughing)

**But you know it'll take something like that to keep it going.**

Yes. Yes. So I guess if you look at it that way I am involved in some activity.

**How old is your son now?**

He's eight.

**He's still pretty young.**

Yeah, yeah.

**Anything else you want to add about your experiences with 925?**

I just feel really proud to have been part of it after looking back and recognizing the skills that they gave me. I feel that I took far more away from the organization than I left it with as a part of me being a part of it. It was a really formative part of my life and I feel really proud to have been a part of it.

**OK great, thanks. (tape cuts out then resumes) Say that again.**

The question was about the one-day strike that we had on campus and whether that would ever come around again and we actually, in the last contract campaign that I was in, we talked about whether we would go on strike. At the time, I was in a dual role in that I was president of the chapter of the union but I was also sitting in a supervisory role within my job. It was pretty difficult to walk that line. In my mind, if we had gone on

strike in that campaign, I did not feel like I could take that risk and walk out of my job at that time. My family situation was tenuous. I really felt that I would be risking my job if I did. My commitment, however, to the union was that any worker that I supervised or managed I would do whatever I could that if they wanted to strike that I would make that happen for them. I felt strong enough that the employees should be able to act in a way that they felt was the right thing to do. I would do whatever it took to protect them and their jobs and make that available to them as well.