Anne Hill
Interviewed by Ann Froines
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Anne, tell me how you first entered 925, or 9to5.

I was working here in Cleveland for 9to5, the Association, and I was the first Midwest organizer for the Association, when it started as a national organization. I had moved from Pittsburgh to Cleveland, and wanted to take that job after meeting Karen Nussbaum in Pittsburgh, and working on a clerical organizing campaign with her there. So I was on staff with 9to5 the association, and that was from 1978-1981, and then in 1981 when we chartered District 925 with SEIU, I moved over essentially and became an organizer for District 925.

Do you remember the very first encounter you had with 9to5, with Karen, or how that connection was made?

Well, I got to know Karen through this clerical organizing drive at the University of Pittsburgh. And we weren't officially affiliated or associated with 9to5, the association, or with the District, which had not yet been formed at that point. But Karen had worked out an arrangement with SEIU to fund this organizing drive that I was working on, and so I got to know her through that (laughs) very unsuccessful drive to organize, I think it was 2800 clerical workers at the University of Pittsburgh. I mean, it was a huge bargaining unit. There were very few of us working on it, and we really didn't know what we were doing, and so we lost badly. But the good thing that came out of it was that I met Karen, and she invited me to be on the staff of 9to5, the association, in Cleveland, and so I moved in August of 1978 to do that. And then the association staff, throughout the years that we were working to build 9to5, the association, at that time, was Working Women, the National Association of Office Workers. We had talked about the importance of unionizing women office workers, and so at some point, we started, through Karen really, discussing with different unions the possibility of chartering a new local that would be run by women and would be associated with 9to5.

To go back to that first organizing campaign that you were involved in at the University of Pittsburgh, what led you and the other women decide to do that? Did you all get jobs at the university?

Right, we actually . . . there was a group of us that were part of New American Movement, a socialist organization in Pittsburgh, and not all of us, but some of us were part of the women's movement, and had come out of both the anti-war movement and the women's movement. And so we were, well, the war was winding down, and our work in the anti-war movement, my work, I should say, was tapering off, and we were looking for other important political work to do. And we knew these office worker organizations around the country. Dayton had a group of women office workers, there was Chicago, and Cleveland Women Working, and we knew of those. In fact, I think there was a

Pittsburgh Working Women for a little while. It didn't really flourish like some of the others. We basically decided to take jobs at the University of Pittsburgh, and try to build a campaign. It was basically "salting," though I don't recall us calling it that at the time.

Salting means when you deliberately go into a workplace to organize it, take jobs to be on the job, and get to know the other workers. That is what, maybe, five of us did. But it wasn't enough, and we weren't there long enough, and I became the administrative assistant of the Department of Economics at the University of Pittsburgh. I was the office manager and there were three other clerical staff, all of whom, I think, voted for the union. (Laughs.) But , you know, in the end we were very unsuccessful, we got smashed, and so that was the end of that drive. And it never revived; it was never done again.

Can you say a little bit about your earlier experience as an activist in other social movements?

My main activities in the 70's were in the anti-war movement. I was active initially with the Quakers. . .

Do you mean the American Friends Service Committee?

I worked with the American Friends Service Committee one summer, the summer of 1972, in Philadelphia. I was active with the Peace and Justice Coalition, the People's Coalition for Peace and Justice. I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in April, 1971, and I immediately went for the Mayday, the first of May activities in Washington, D.C. That was my immersion—even though in college I had done antiwar work—that was my first real national work. I worked on the people's blockade against the war, in New Jersey and Philadelphia. And then in Pittsburgh, I got involved in the Indochina Peace Campaign. I knew that Karen was involved in that at some point to, but I didn't really know her at that point. So then I worked on that, then coming back from Philadelphia, I got involved in the New American Movement. And we did a variety of community forums, utility rate work, different kinds of community political activity; we did things around Latin America. I was very immersed in politics and that's what I was doing when we decided to do the University of Pittsburgh, in 1976.

How did you feel about the women's movement? Had you participated in women's groups?

In about 1974 I got involved in a women's group. I wasn't as involved in the women's movement as a lot of women were, but I did participate in a women's discussion group—they were flourishing at the time—and I certainly identified as a feminist. But I was never involved in other women's organizations in terms of active political work. It was always the anti-war movement, and the New American Movement, in terms of organizational affiliations.

Did the New American Movement have a separate women's caucus?

Yes, they did, and there was a lot of women's leadership of the New American Movement in Pittsburgh, and nationally, and feminism was very much a part of their politics, the politics of that organization. That is probably where I developed most of my ideas and feelings and commitment around feminism.

You may be the first person I've interviewed that was involved in N.A.M. Could say a bit more about the New American Movement?

It was a small, nation-wide democratic socialist organization, and I think that it was different than Democratic Socialist of America, D. S. A., that was a very prominent socialist organization at the time. We considered ourselves to the left of that organization, in terms of our foreign policy politics, and in terms of our feminism.

And so we very much prided ourselves on an emphasis on democracy, that the organization had. It was a fledging organization, but in Pittsburgh, actually, it was a large, active chapter. And a lot of the national leadership came out of the Pittsburgh chapter, and it was very influential in my early political development. It emphasized political action, activity, work, as opposed to just study or theory.

Were most of the members college graduates?

I would say that most of the leadership was college graduates; there were working class kids involved in the Pittsburgh. Chapters were different around the country, but in Pittsburgh, there were definitely working class kids who were involved. Though they were probably in college, too, now that I think about it, as well.

You said you considered yourself a feminist when you were involved in 9to5. Do you remember any discussions in 9to5 about the feminist movement and office workers?

Yes, I do. Our critique of the feminist movement was that it did not focus enough on workers, and what was happening to women workers on the job. And that it was too oriented towards college-educated, middle class women, so we wanted to express our feminism through a more . . . through the labor movement really. And we wanted to merge the strengths of the labor movement with what we saw were important tenets of feminism, and help to build working class women's leadership, that would tackle the issues of economic security for women. What was happening to women in their economic lives, on the job. And, at the time, women office workers were the largest occupation in the country—secretaries, and all the varieties of office workers there were at the time—and we had not yet embarked on the electronic and computer revolution that came afterwards. And so we got a lot of traction in the media because of that, because it was such a large occupation, and it was basically untapped in terms of union organizing. And in terms of a focus on economic security and family issues that we tried to focus on.

When you were growing up, did you have any knowledge of labor unions, workplace struggles? Was that part of your background?

No it was part of my family at all.

How would you describe your family background?

When I was in elementary school, my father was a minister. So it was very much oriented toward a Christian approach to life. And then when I was going into seventh grade, we moved to Pennsylvania, and he became a college professor. He continued to be a part-time minister, because he had six kids and a lot of expenses, and he wasn't making that much money! And so he always had two or three jobs. My mother didn't work when we were young. But we were always very involved in the church. And to my parents' credit, their theology and their application of their Christianity to their everyday lives, was something that (pauses, in emotion). . . my parents lived their Christianity, although my father was never an activist. My mother was much more of an organization person, organizationally involved in the church. But he definitely taught us very fundamental Christian values, like equality and so we were very aware of the civil rights movement. Although we were living in a small town in northern Pennsylvania, and there were no African-Americans in that town, so it didn't really touch us in a direct way. But it was something that was discussed. And the same thing with the war; he was an early opponent of the war, and I remember he took me to my first demonstration in Washington, D. C. On that level, we were taught really important values, that I think, instructed me, in terms of my political activity, for the rest of my life. But also on the level of just, you know, ministering unto poor people, and caring about everybody. I think that was a big part of my parent's Christianity. And it had a big impression on all of us kids. I remember them taking people into the house, who were traveling through the town and had no place to stay, and were obviously very poor. It was our house that they ended up staying at, and that happened more than once. Quite often, he would bring people home to give them a safe, secure place. That had a major influence on my life, but there was no recognition in my family about the union movement. In fact, later the faculty unionized at my father's college, and he was opposed to it, because he thought the faculty were more privileged than most people in the community, and thought they didn't need a union for that reason. And so used to have arguments about that, because by that time I was a believer in the union movement, for all workers, even faculty. (Laughs.)

Let's go back to your career in 9to5 and District 925. Can you describe one campaign or struggle that was most important to you, where you had your most exhilarating experiences?

To me that's easy. It wasn't the first bargaining unit that I organized, because the first bargaining unit that I organized was a group of fifty workers at the city of East Cleveland. We actually won recognition from the city mayor, so I did that all by myself, and I was proud of that. But it was a small bargaining unit. The really, really important one, and the exhilarating experience was organizing the support staff at the local community college. It is the largest community college in the state, Cuyahoga Community College, and it has three campuses. The downtown campus is very African-American, in terms of both students and staff. Then there is a campus in Parma, which is a very white, working-class community, the second largest community in Cleveland, the county, and

then there is an eastern campus, which is more integrated. There was a real challenge around building an integrated organizing committee, in which the individuals were committed to each other. They didn't know each other; they were brought together from the three campuses by the union. I was the key organizer on that campaign. I had a lot of help from Bonnie Laden, who was District 925's organizing director at the time, but she didn't live in Cleveland. She would fly in and out to teach me how to do this, because this was really my first full-fledged difficult organizing campaign, and I loved it!
I loved it because our approach to organizing at that time was to really get to know the workers, to give the workers a real voice in the campaign, to build a committee that was as broad-based as we could possibly make it, both racially, and across classifications and departments. So the union would have a broad and deep reach into the bargaining unit. We did that. We collected the cards to get an election. In those days, you could actually hold an election in a reasonable amount time. And the state employment relations board, which was relatively new, because the public collective bargaining law in Ohio, had been created under Governor Dick Celeste, who was a Democrat, in 1982. And this was in 1984, so it was relatively new. And so they actually conducted the elections as they were supposed to, in a reasonable time period, and, at the very last minute, prior to the deadline of getting on the ballot, AFSCME intervened and got themselves on the ballot. They literally ran their campaign by accusing me, personally, of racism. It was very painful, a very painful experience. It was something that came out of the blue, I didn't expect it.

Luckily, because we had built this very integrated organization, that was broad-based and strong, we were able to creditably defend ourselves, and defend me, against those accusations. We had a lot of African-American leadership on the organizing committee, and so it was kind of an ugly experience, but, in the end, it did not hurt the campaign, and we won handily. AFSCME looked really bad; you know, it was the particular individuals involved that made that happen, which was unfortunate. But I learned a lot of things from that experience.
I will never forget the night we counted the votes and had the victory party, and people were so excited and so happy. And we had this great party.

So they got themselves on the ballot. . .?

Right, they got a few votes but they didn't get many, and they ended up not being any real threat, in terms of taking away our support, but they were something we had to deal with, you know, when it should have been positive all the way to the vote. But it ended up getting ugly and negative. And we tried not to let it distract us, but of course, something like that <u>does.</u> But in the end it was great, we built a strong committee, and a strong bargaining committee that came out of the organizing committee, we went into negotiations, negotiated a great contract, and that bargaining unit exists today, and has been strong through the years. That, I would say, was one of my proudest moments in organizing.

Can you remember some of the tactics you used to create this broad and deep organizing committee you're describing?

A lot of one-on-one lunch meetings, after-work meetings by me, and then by other committee people as they joined the committee. That was their responsibility to talk to people one-on-one and give people an understanding what the union would do. . .

What were some of the workers' grievances in that setting? What were the issues facing them?

Let me see, what were they? I have to really think back about this. I think that as I recall, certainly pay and health benefits were issues back then. It was also a role in the running of their jobs, and the college. It was a voice for the support staff. They had had a staff association, and one of the things, in terms of tactics, that we did right, was we immediately went to the staff association leadership, who were very competent folks.

They realized that they had not been able to accomplish what they wanted to accomplish through the staff association, and they just didn't have enough power, they didn't get enough attention and respect from the college administration, and they wanted more of a voice. The faculty got all of the attention, right? So they pretty quickly became open to the union. I know I developed a very good working relationship with several key people in that staff association. It really helped when they embraced the idea of unionization; it made it so much easier for other support staff to do the same, because they trusted these people that had been around forever. So I think it was very important that it was the approach that we took. If we had ignored the staff association, and tried to build something without them, not embraced their leadership, I think we would have had a much more difficult time on our hands. So, to their credit, they were very open, and I think they trusted me a lot. I think it made a big difference that there was an organizer on campus, who was there a lot. I spent a lot of time on campuses, (was someone) who they trusted, you know, didn't have all the answers to their problems, but was willing to help work them through, and how the union could be helpful in accomplishing what they wanted to accomplish. I think respect, and having a voice on the job was a big part of it, it was not that they were terribly paid. There were issues around inequities, and so forth, and we tackled that in those first few contracts. But the respect. . .and I think that was something that District 925 always was very cognizant of, respect on the job, and it was partly because we were women. And we knew that women on the job lacked that respect, very, very often. And so that was something we talked about.. . So I think that being very explicit, it being one of the major issues we talked about, that unionization could bring more respect to workers, was an important part of our approach.

You mentioned that Bonnie Ladin from 925 came through from time to time, and taught you things about 925's approach to organizing, that would be one of them. Are there other specific things you remember about District 925's approach?

I think building good relationships. . . not personal relationships, it not like we socialized with people—I didn't—that was never part of my approach. But building good working relationships where people trusted us as individuals, was very much . . . not being hierarchical, we were not a hierarchical organization. We weren't completely flat, but you know, both in the association and the district, Karen, I think to her great credit, built

a team. And I think that we, the organizers, took that approach into organizing in the workplace. We were building a team and we did not see ourselves in any way, the managers, or separated from the organizing committee in any way. We very much approached it on an equal basis. I think people sensed that, knew that, and appreciated that. For women who are put down in the office or workplace, on a regular basis, to be able to come into an organization and feel an equal, feel respected and feel like that their voice really did matter. . . I think it attracted a lot of people to the organization, I really do. And I think that was part of our success.

Were you ever involved in a union campaign where women's jobs were at risk?

In the organizing that I did that wasn't really. . .there were times like when Cheryl Schaffer organizer in Syracuse, at an insurance company, where that was a bigger issue. But because we were organizing public employees in Cleveland, and there was a new public employee collective bargaining law that protected them, we were pretty confident that these public employers were not going to go to that length. It was not something that we didn't have to talk to people about, but I was never scared that I was going to cost someone their job because I convinced them to support the union. That made it easier, for sure.

Can you the kinds of formal training you received to be an organizer, or was it mostly on the job training. . .?

It was mostly on the job, let's see (laughs). . .

Maybe "formal" is the wrong word. How would describe what the organization did for you?

Well, Bonnie Ladin trained me as an organizer. I understood organizing, and I had done a lot of organizing in the anti-war movement, and then with the Association of Working Women. There were definitely certain techniques that Bonnie taught me, but it was through on the job training. It wasn't like I went to some classes and learned it. It was her mentoring, and guiding me through the particulars of organizing a union, as opposed to other people, for something else.

So, for example, if you had a big problem, you would call her up and ask her for help with it?

Yes, and she came in regularly, and she helped me figure out how to map out, for instance, the workplace, and you know, when you organize you need to know where everybody is located, where there offices are located. You need to know who has working relationships with whom, you need to know the networks of friendships. All that stuff, Bonnie taught me, really, and she was great to work with. I had a tremendous amount of confidence in her. I did what she said, and it worked!

Do you have anything more to say about the leadership of 925 as you encountered them, and then became one of them?

Yeah, well, I would say that both with the association and with the district, we developed a team of very confident women leaders that worked well together and that felt. . .you know, had the same goals, essentially the same politics, that we were very dedicated to what we were doing. I think Karen's leadership and way that she approached things, meant that everybody found their place in the organization. It's not that there weren't tensions at times, or disagreements, there were, but in general, the way that these things go, we had very good working relationships in both organizations.

Do you remember any specific issues that did cause tensions?

When we moved to. . .when Jackie Ruff moved to Washington, D.C., and was our representative inside SEIU, that structural change created difficulties, because Karen was the president in Cleveland, and Jackie was the executive director in Washington, D.C., and the SEIU administration started wanting to have its hand in on a lot of things, and directing certain things, and Jackie was caught between the original group of 9to5 women, and the SEIU administration. I think that caused tension between Karen and Jackie, especially. You know, it was two very strong leaders, and Jackie was inside SEIU, in a way that Karen wasn't, even though Karen traveled there all the time. She developed a different relationship. And she had pressures on her as well. So that was a structure they maybe didn't work for us in an easy way.

Do you remember any specific discussions about women's leadership, about women as leaders in 925? You mentioned, briefly, how important it was to develop women's leadership, as a way of countering the lack of confidence from being told that clerical work wasn't really <u>work.</u>

Wasn't that important work. . .uh hum. Well, I know we talked about women's leadership a lot. And we always had recognition. We spent a lot of time in the association, and I think we did carry that over into the district, developing women's ability to do public speaking. In the association, we used to be really amazed what good public speakers would emerge out of the group of women, that weren't fulltime, like we were, but volunteered to be leaders in the organization. We worked with them on giving speeches, and they would end up writing these great, unbelievable speeches (laughs) and giving them in a really very sophisticated way. I remember that we were quite proud of the public speaking ability of our members and our member leaders. And we did some of that in the district, too, although we didn't put as much emphasis on it as in the association. Part of it was because of what people needed to do; there wasn't as much public speaking opportunity in the union as there was in the association. Because of the kinds of activities that the association engaged in, and conferences, and so forth; the annual meetings.

When you were organizing with the district, were you also involved with the association?

Not really, although in Cleveland, the association and the district had our offices in the same suite. Karen was the president of both, and so it was a very close relationship in those early days.

Were there certain campaigns that they worked on together? How did they relate to each other?

Not really. I would say that was probably one of our failings, we couldn't keep the two groups integrated in our work. The association was still doing things like pay equity, and the union didn't really. . .well, we talked about pay equity, but we were organizing bargaining units here in Cleveland, and they didn't just have women in them. And so our approach to issues around pay, was less around pay equity, than it was about getting a raise for everybody.

Then how would you describe the strategy of trying to keep both organizations going, because that was a conscious effort, right?

Yeah, it was a conscious effort, but it was done by different boards, and Karen was really the link. I think if there was one criticism that I would make—well, there are other criticisms, too—but I think one of our failings was we didn't figure out how to integrate those efforts in any way, really, except for Karen at the top. We had separate everything. I think that was a problem or a weakness.

Did members of the association sometimes come forward and say, well, we are ready to unionize?

I mean that was the thing we didn't do enough of. We didn't do enough of that. In the Cleveland area, the association membership was mostly private sector, and the district membership was mostly public sector. And it was so difficult. I mean we had association members that belonged to banks and insurance companies, that kind of thing, that was a focus here in Cleveland. There was a big suit against one of the banks around pay equity. We weren't going to unionize those places. The major failing of the district was that we were never really able to break into the private sector and organize private sector office workers, which was our mail goal! That was the original goal, the original vision. We created goal, that vision, on the cusp of the Reagan revolution, and the firing of the air traffic controllers. They were not going to let us get a foothold into the private sector for office work occupations. In Boston, Syracuse, we would have a small insurance company, small private companies, but nothing big.
In Cleveland, we decided we would try to build a base in the public sector, and that would give us a membership, and then go on to the private sector. But we never got to that next step of going on to the private sector.

What did you observe about the roles and experiences of men in 925?

I would say, I was very careful not to exclude them. In fact, in the Cuyahoga Community College organizing campaign, which was the second bargaining unit that we created—I mean we were nothing, we had no membership. So the city of East Cleveland was a first, it was small, it was men and women in that group. And then in Cuyohoga Community College, one of the main leaders of the staff association was a man, and he was very supportive. He had a lot of credibility, and he was my entrée to a lot of people. He was one of the key people on the metropolitan campus. So we embraced them, but I would say that when I looked for leaders I did not look for men. This guy was an obvious one, because he was involved in the association. But I think I very deliberately looked for women leaders. There were men leaders in a number of the bargaining units that I can think of, but I would say, that I very deliberately looked for women leaders, and spent my time developing leadership with women.

And that was partly, I assume, that the great majority of the employees were women?

Right, exactly, yeah, you didn't want to build an organization led by men of women office workers.

After years of organizing experience, is there anything you would like to add about the strategies and tactics of 925?

SEIU is doing a totally different model of organizing at this point. And they have been very successful at organizing faster and larger groups. Our model of organizing was a workplace at a time. And there are advantages and disadvantages to both models. I think the advantage of our model is that we really built strong committees. Building strong committees was essential to winning the campaign, and then taking us into the negotiating process. And so there was a lot of membership involvement, and a lot of ownership on the part of the members, in the organization they built. I don't think that is as much the case in the new SEIU organizing model. They are much more staff driven; they're bigger staffs. The member leaders. . . there is not as much involvement in decision-making and being real leadership. And so I think that is the disadvantage of the new model. But with the new model the obvious advantage is that they are organizing many more workers faster. And we do need to do that. It is kind of an unfortunate trade-off, and I guess the question is. . .and I haven't been in the organizing for many years, so my critique of what is currently going on. . . I am not in a position to really make a good judgment. So I guess the question in my mind would be, is how much leadership <u>is</u> being built, how are leaders being developed out of the membership as opposed to staff who have been hired out of college, or wherever, other organizations, providing the leadership.

Did 925 in its meetings or trainings explicitly deal with racial and ethnic diversity in the workplace?

The association had been very deliberate about dealing with discrimination on the job, so that was very much in our minds, and we always negotiated anti-discrimination clauses in the contracts. But I would say the more prevalent thing was we wanted to build an

integrated organization with an integrated leadership. We were successful generally, in doing that in our bargaining units where there was a significant number of African-American members. We were unsuccessful at bringing it to the top of the organization.

And we never. . .the top leadership of the organization was always middle class white women. Our member leaders. . . we had integrated leadership among our members, but in terms of the senior staff of the organization we failed at doing that. And so I think we would all be self-critical about doing that.

Have you a sense of the reasons that was especially difficult, since you were conscious of it?

Part of it was the places we ended up having solid organizations, Boston, Seattle, very white cities. Cleveland, we had black member leaders, but I don't know, I think in Cincinnati we had black member leaders, but there never emerged somebody who rose to the top of the organization. To some extent, we were a white middle class organization; that's who we were. Our African-American counterparts were not going into union organizing. They were going into professional jobs, so that was part of the problem.

So it's like a cultural issue almost. . .

Right, right.

Do you consider 925 a family-friendly organization?

Yes, we were family friendly, and I think that came out of the association. I remember Helen Williams bringing her baby to the office, the office where both the district and the association were housed. And there was a playpen in the office for a few weeks if not a few months. I think we had flexibility for the staff in terms of all of us building our families. . .

What were some of the challenges for you? When your children were young were you still doing organizing?

Let me think about this... yes, I was. Claire was born in 1983, and '82 was when we organized Tri-C, and after I organized Tri-C I continued to do some organizing, but I was also responsible for representing them. I helped negotiate the contract with the attorney, and I was responsible for representing them. So my job immediately changed and I became the regional director responsible for representation and organizing. So I didn't do all the organizing from then on; we hired organizers, and I was involved to some extent, but not the sole organizer like I had been on that campaign. We had a number of different organizers over the years, and then at some point, as we added bargaining units, I got out of organizing altogether because I needed to devote all my time to representation. So in terms of the challenges . . .

How did you do the travel, for example?

Well, I didn't do organizing all over the state. I was in Cuyahoga County, and when we did organizing in Cincinnati, we hired other staff. Debbie Schneider came on, and did the big university organizing down there with Sam_____. So I didn't do a lot of travel; it was Karen, really, that did the travel. She could better describe how she managed that! It will forever be a mystery for me.

One person I interviewed so far said she found working in a labor organization and having small children was just too hard for her, so she shifted her focus.

It was hard, yeah, I remember taking the kids to meetings and demonstrations, and so forth. Although I didn't do a lot of it, I did some of it. Their father was very good—we divorced in 1988—so most of the '80s we were together. And he was very good at taking responsibility for them, and didn't do a lot of evening meetings, which I did. So he had them a lot in the evening.

I think that is the issue for some women. The job is way more than 40 hours a week, and a lot of it in the evening.

Right, and we used to talk about that a lot. How do we make it possible for the members to be involved, when they have a family. So we did try to work around that a lot. There were times we experimented with child care for events.

Do have a comment on some of the other kinds of activism that was going on in this community in the years you were, and are, active in SEIU.

We started the district in 1981, and in the '80s Citizen Action was a very prominent organization in town, and did a lot of work around utility rates and environmental issues. Hmmm. . .other organizations that were active in the '80s. That was an organization that was relevant. Both Karen's husband and my husband were involved in Citizen Action, so that was the other organization that really. . . and I don't remember us relating to a lot of other organizations, except for the labor movement, which we got involved with, and the rest of SEIU. We were the new kids on the block in SEIU and so there was a lot of dealing with the hierarchy and the local SEIU folks, that I had to deal with then.

Did you go to the national meetings of SEIU every year?

For SEIU the big convention every four years we went to. District 925 had an annual meeting each year, and obviously I went to those.

And when you went to those, your kids were with their dad?

Yeah, yeah.

Tape 2

Do you think the aims of 925 were realized?

No, I don't. I think we built a good local that was important, and positively impacted the lives of those members. You know, I am glad today that we still have a 925 in Seattle that is a very good local, and is run by Kim Cook, who is one of our best. And I think that we created a lot of women's leadership, and opened up a role for women in the labor movement, or helped to do that—certainly not all by ourselves. And I think that is one of the most important part of our legacy. We did not do what our original goal was, and that was to organize women office workers in the private sector. We completely failed at doing that, not totally our fault or responsibility, but the historic circumstances we faced were not going to allow us to do it. Although I suppose you could argue that if we had done things drastically different maybe we would have had more of a chance. But I don't know. . .even today, nobody has figured out how to organize the banks and the insurance companies. We were trying to do something that was extremely difficult to do, more difficult than we realized at the time. So I think we ended up doing some important things, but not fulfilling our original mission.

Do think the SEIU leadership thinks about taking on organizing workers in insurance companies?

No, that is not one of our industry focuses right now. And I don't know who is thinking about that right now, I don't know if anybody is thinking about that. That is not the work force that people are focused on. You've got CWA (Communication Workers of America) that is trying to organize electronic workers, of course, the public sector work force, that would include office workers, is still being organized. Certainly there is a lot of that to do in the south and west.

Is that a focus of SEIU, to expand into other states?

Right, but not support staff necessarily.

What else would you like to say about the legacy of 925, then. You mentioned developing women's leadership, having an impact on SEIU. . .

SEIU, and I think the whole labor movement was impacted by the ideas we put forth, and the insistence on women's leadership that we put forth. There were efforts made by other women in other organizations, I know there were. But I think we were ground-breaking in that way, and it is to John Sweeney's credit and to SEIU's credit, that they made space for us. You know, some of it we had to do pushing and screaming and all that, and on the local level it was harder than the national level in some ways. The old guard leadership that was around at that time, was not really interested in us being around. But because John Sweeney was the new president, and we were one of his different, new, unique projects, right? They kind of went along with it, grudgingly. So I think that was important for the rest of the labor movement, you know? Maybe not the trades, but a lot of organizations in the labor movement saw this happening, and I think it helped encourage women in other organizations.

The other thing is, a lot of women when through District 925 on their way to other locals in SEIU. I mean there is name after name after name of women who are still leaders in SEIU, and started out in District 925. They may have had a good experience, I don't know, some of them may have had a bad experience, but they got their start and there was space for them in 925. I think in that way we helped transform the leadership in SEIU. And if they didn't come through 925, they had working relationships with us, and so I think that that's part of our legacy.

Do you remember having to do specific things here in Ohio to overcome that kind of grudging feeling you described in SEIU?

I think it was pure persistence and insistence in being at the table. And over the years developing enough knowledge and understanding of the labor movement. And we really didn't know that much about the labor movement when we got started. We had this mission and we were totally dedicated to it, but it's not like we were. . . Karen knew more than the rest of us. She understood the labor movement, certainly, a lot more than I did. And it is not something I had ever studied or was a part of. I had a lot to learn, it was a big learning curve. But by being appropriately in our place, but at the same time, just sticking around over the years, being persistent. I remember sometimes the guys made decisions about 925 that we didn't know were being made. We weren't included in the decision-making, and they didn't think anything of it. That's the way they operated.

These are local decisions?

Yeah, locally, locally. Or in Illinois. We needed to get our feet wet and work in the labor movement. We had to pay some dues in order to be able to get to a point where I our voices were really equal or made a significant difference. It takes time.

What did the experience working with 925 all these years mean in your life? Another way of asking that, is what did you learn about yourself from this work? It has obviously been an all-encompassing job, career, focus for you for several decades now. . .

Right, right. Well, I would say that obviously I was very comfortable in the organization, which was why I stayed. I was a leader in the organization. I could do a lot of learning on the job, as opposed to going back to school. I had a B.A. but I never, ever was interested in going back to graduate school. So I liked that idea. That probably says something about myself. I think that for me I found a way to do work that I thought was important in terms of changing society, which is what I was about. . . I think that the Vietnam war taught me that that was what I wanted my life to be about, changing society, improving society, improving the world. And this was a vehicle through which I could do that. I became convinced it was really an important, that labor unions are really important organizations for working people, and to create some balance in a capitalist society. And so it created a space for me to do that political work, in whatever form it

was taking in any given year, or two years. I mean I very much see my work as a mission, it's not just a job, it is a calling, a mission. It is about making the world better.

What kind of work do you do now in the statewide labor movement?

I was in 1199, when we first merged District 925 into 1199. And I had a really hard time making that decision. It was very upsetting to me, to break up the district. But at the same time, I could see the writing on the wall, I could see that District 925 wasn't growing, and you know, SEIU was changing. Andy Stern had become president, and he was going to do things a lot differently. The changes had been happening already. Debbie (Schneider) said look, we need to be in the forefront of this change. She was right about that. We kind of all knew it, but it was still very difficult to go through.

By "we" you mean the leadership of 925?

The leadership of 925. I mean we discussed it, and it really wasn't difficult to come to that conclusion, it was more difficult to figure out how to do it, and to recognize what we were going to lose from it, and so forth. And so when we merged in July of '01 in Ohio with 1199, I became a vice-president of 1199, and I was in charge of politics. And then it was in 2003, two years later, the person who we had hired to be the State Council director in Ohio—she and I actually switched jobs, for a variety of reasons. And so I think I have been more comfortable, and I like doing the state council work.

At the time 925 merged here in Ohio with 1199, what were you doing with 925?

I was the executive director, nationally, and Debbie was the president. So when we decided we were going to make all these changes, we did have to figure out what roles people were going to play, staff, you know, and what I ended up doing when we merged with 1199 in Ohio, was I became a vice-president for the organization, and focused my work on political work. They had a political director, but they didn't have an elected leader who was focused on political work. They liked that idea, I proposed that. So that's what happened.

What kind of work did you do in that capacity?

It was a lot of internal work with the members. At the time they had a political committee of the board, and trying to get the membership more active politically, lobbying, meeting with legislators on different issues. Increasing our voter registration, increasing our members voluntary contributions to C.O.P.E., to our committee on political education. So there was a lot of internal work in terms of developing the membership. And then there was work in terms of working with elected leaders, either to help specific people get elected, or working with elected leaders when we needed their help on something, a contract campaign, where we need to apply some public pressure. Or an organizing campaign where we needed some support. So it was a variety of that kind of external work, and internal work.

What came after that?

I did that for about two years. Then we had hired a state council director, and she was located in Columbus and I was located in Cleveland. For a variety of reasons, partly having to do with location, and partly having to do with. . . she was new to the organization, and the state council director needed to interact, and work with the international a lot. I knew people in the international. So for a variety of reasons, we decided to actually switch jobs. She didn't become a vice-president. She took a non-elected position with the local, became a director of government affairs. They created that position. And then I became the state council director. And I started to do the work with both locals, because the other local was also in Cleveland, and with the international. So that's what I am doing now.

What are you doing now, and what do you expect to be doing over the next year?

I do more external work, I don't do the internal work with the membership like I used to, because that is now done by the political director and government affairs director of 1199, and also the staff that Local 3 has. So what I do is work with the leadership of the locals to coordinate the political work that both locals are working on, and I do a lot of external work, still, with elected officials, and lobbying on issues like trying to prevent cuts in Medicaid. And work with the international on that. So if there is a targeted senator or congressman in the state, so then I would organize the work that we would do to try to put pressure on them. I've done a lot of coalition work in this capacity. There was a big Medicaid coalition statewide, which was quite successful, actually. I do some coalition work in Cleveland as well, though less than I used to, probably.

I ended up in the '04 election running the Kerry Campaign in Cuyahoga County for the last two months before the election, for September and October. I had to take a leave of absence from the union to do that. In terms of what I am going to be doing, you know, winning the governor's race is number one goal of both locals and the state council. So I will be working on that race in one capacity or another for the next year. The current governor is term-limited, he can't run again, so it is going to be an open seat. For the first time in over a decade, the Democrats have a chance of winning. And they have a very good leading candidate, Congressman Ted Strickland, so we'll see, there will be a number of races, both on the statewide level and also congressional races. That will take up all my time next year.

Do you feel optimistic about the organizing you will be doing?

Yes, yes, I do! I feel that Democrats are in a position to win some big races for the first time in over a decade. One of the Republican senators, Mike Dewine (?) is vulnerable, at least according to all the poll numbers. Congressman Sherrod Brown is running for that seat. He is a great pro-labor congressman. He has run statewide before, so I think he has a shot at it. So. . . yeah, I am optimistic. I think we can win the governor's race, but you can never underestimate the Republicans. They always seem to pull out more votes than anyone thinks they are going to do. (Laughs.)

And there seems to have been possible tampering with votes. . .

I would not put it past them.

You've been doing organizing of one kind or another for what, going on three decades now. What keeps you going as an organizer?

Hmmm. Well, I believe in the organizations that I work with, I believe that they play a critical role in the state of nation, in the health of the nation, for working people. I really believe in them. So that is one thing. The jobs have always been one that demand a lot of interaction with other people. I like that, I like being with people. I don't work with the members as much as I used to, and that used to keep me going. You know, I definitely miss that, but there's a lot of good people that I work with, and that I part of it.

There has been a lot of variety on the job. When I think back over the three decades, I started out as an organizer, then I did representation and learned to negotiate, and did a lot of that for a few years. At the same time, I was the regional director, so I began supervising other staff, and training other staff. I did a lot of training and mentoring of member leaders. And then I became the Executive Director of District 925, and that had more nationwide responsibilities. And then the political work, the full-time political work over these last few years. So there has been a lot of variety, so to do something for a few years and then be able to move into something else. It sounds like....wow, I've been with the organization since 1981, but it's been a lot of different. . . and in some way that is limiting, because it has been only one organization. But SEIU has changed so much over the years, you know, it is such a dynamic organization, it is not a static organization. . . And then having the opportunity to do different things within the organization, I think that is part of what has kept me going as well.

And each of these new stages probably involved a lot of new learning, too, which is always stimulating.

Yeah, that's true. Certainly, doing fulltime political work was a big change for me when I moved into that. And I haven't been doing supervision for years, that was kind of nice, because supervision isn't always that easy, you know. So that was a nice change, to not have responsibility for a big staff, rather several staff, not a big staff.

Do you find that there are a fair number of women doing this kind of political work?

Yeah, I think there are. Although when I think about SEIU's state council directors, there are some other women, but there are a lot more men. In the Midwest, I was the only woman—for a while we were divided by regions—and I was the only woman in the Midwest region, who was a state council director. There are a couple on the west coast, I am trying to think. . . the Iowa person, she wasn't really a state council person, but she acted in that capacity because there was only one local, so she was a political staff

person. There are quite a few women doing political work now, I don't feel that I am a pioneer in that in any way. (Laughs.)

I think there are more and more women playing significant roles in political campaigns now?

Yeah, there aren't that many running them, there are some, but there aren't as many as there are men. That is still a big. . .when you get to the big campaigns, the statewide directors, most of them are men. Although, Kerry, for a while had a top person who was a woman; I forget her name.

Anything else you would like to add about the legacy? I think it was the beginning of the week when we talked about that.

No, I think we've got it all.

Thanks.