

Shlebah: This is Sura Shlebah with Esther Ingber.

Ingber: Ingber.

Shlebah: Ingber at Oak Park in the Royal Oak Library on April 5, 2013. This interview is part of the Detroit News Paper Strike Oral History Project at Wayne State University. Esther thank you for being here today.

Ingber: I'm glad to be here.

Shlebah: You were born in Detroit, did you also grow up here?

Ingber: Yes I did.

Shlebah: And did you study and go to school here?

Ingber: I graduated from Henry Ford High School, Detroit and Wayne State University. I have a four-year degree in journalism, so that's been my home.

Shlebah: You were part of the union, as I understand, did you come out from a union family background?

Ingber: No I didn't. I joined the Detroit Newspaper Guild when I started a Detroit Free Press in 1983. My mother is a homemaker and my father had a gas station with his brother, so they were not union people.

Shlebah: So your first exposure to the union was when you began working at the newspaper?

Ingber: That's right, that's right.

Shlebah: The strike occurs at one of the most unionized regions in the country, how involved were you with the union?

Ingber: I went to meetings. And it seems to me that I went to some of the leadership meetings for the Free Press too. I got to know some of the union's, union stewards. So I was, I would say a little more involved than the average member but not one of the top leaders.

Shlebah: The strike began in 1995, at what point during the strike did you join?

Ingber: The first day I walked out, July thirteenth. And I remember we just went outside, it was strange it was summer. We went outside and just started chanting and I don't know if we had any signs yet. But, uh, you know you walk out your not thinking it's going to be a long strike as it turned out to be. But it just seemed like it was time, we were hearing rumors. I, I can't remember how we knew exactly to go outside, but word came and we did.

Shlebah: Word came from who?

Ingber: From, I guess our leaders, our stewards. Lou Mleczeko was head of the office of the News Paper Guild. But, I mean the Internet wasn't as big then as it is now, so I don't think I got an email. I remember, how did we know? Or did it just people around me told me.

Shlebah: So, word to mouth?

Ingber: Maybe it was word to mouth, that word came from higher up to other people and spread. And everybody just left their stuff and went outside.

Shlebah: The strike changed the labor sphere, but it also had a great impact on the community. What effects did the strike have on the city? Do you perceive?

Ingber: A lot of people were very supportive of the strike, and they had signs like this is one "No News or Free Press Wanted Here" I know some people still have those signs to this day, lawn signs. And they put them out on their lawns and canceled the paper and some of them never came back. So drastically it changed feelings and at the time of we went we were told that we were in a very good position. That, probably would be settled in our favor. But it did not prove to be the case. I mean Edwin Meese was attorney general and I mean our leaders assured us that, possibly the owners to treat us this way and keep the people from getting their you know, I mean rates were reduced, shifts were reduced and some of the union's jobs were going to be eliminated like the typographers. So we were you know, we were more professional than the other unions, but we felt an obligation to help the others. And we really got into the swing of things, cause I know some of the people I was with at the Free Press have remained and union organizers to this day. But you have people like Emily Everett, I don't know if you know names of people yet.

Shlebah: Some.

Ingber: Audrey McKenna, she ended up getting married to someone she met through the strike. There are a few marriages that came about through that. And there is a Facebook page for people who were in the strike and we have occasional get togethers. So it really changed people's lives, as far as far as the community though. Well, I mean I had a couple friendships that broke up over that too. Some people said that this was stupid and you know I would just be very indignant someone would not be supportive if not of the strike than of me. So one girlfriend and I, just, our friendship just ended over that.

Shlebah: So would you say it changed dynamics within relationships, families?

Ingber: I think so, yeah.

Shlebah: How did it influence your family?

Ingber: Well, I was married. My first husband and I had two daughters. So one was five, one well maybe six, and the other one was thirteen. And I luckily had a working husband, it was tight financially but we were ok and we did get strike pay and we did get occasional bonuses from the UAW at the holiday time and they gave presents, Christmas presents, to our kids. But my husband was very supportive and my immediate family was very supportive and felt that it was the right thing to do to be out there.

Shlebah: Did you feel like it influenced your daughters also?

Ingber: Yes.

Shlebah: Your involvement with the strike?

Ingber: My younger daughter I think has been much more concerned for union rights and for people being treated fairly and she is a real Detroit booster. She's trying for a Challenge Detroit fellowship right now, to live and work in Detroit. There'll be 33 people chosen so she's in the, down to the phase three of 150 people she's competing against. And she left New England where she went to school and where she's working and she came back here and now she wants her friends to come here from her Ivy League New England friends. Cause she's very, feels very strongly about Detroit and I think that she, she got that from me and from the formative years of experience that she had with me being in the strike and her father is also a Wayne State graduate Detroiter.

Shlebah: The Strike covered a total of approximately two thousand five-hundred employees, it lasted 583 days, making it larger than ninety-seven percent and longer than ninety-nine of all

private sector strikes from 1984 to 2002. What does it mean to you to be involved in such a profound movement in labor history?

Ingber: I feel very proud to have been a part of this. Again, personal basis it didn't really help me but I think others, others did benefit from the strike and I worked part time at the Free Press and they did not offer my job back to me as a part timer. I did see other friends of mine go back to work after the strike was over. But I think that you do things sometimes that are just for yourself and I just didn't like the way people were treated in the other unions.

Shlebah: What was the treatment like?

Ingber: Well they were going to eliminate some of the unions, some of the positions, and they were cutting their pays and I think the mailers were especially being affected. They were going to have their pay cut maybe by half or by a third. And I got to know a lot of the mailers. They're good solid people, people supporting their families and they needed those jobs, they needed those wages. Gannet and Knight-Ridder were the two owners and were not very nice people. I got to learn about Gannet, Gannet's business practices, how they would come into a community that might have two papers, they'd buy one of the papers start undercutting the ad prices so that the other paper would fail and then they would raise their rates. And this whole strike you know they were saying that, well going back a little to the joint-operating agreement that put the two business operations together. They said that that they couldn't afford to have two papers without doing this agreement, when actually they could have raised the price of the paper and they were than happy to do that later. So it was an artificial argument that they had to have this joint operating agreement. And it really changed, I started in 1983, which was the best time to have been there. And it later changed a lot. It was when the Dave Lawrence was the editor of the Free

Press and it wasn't as a warm family feeling like they had it in the old days. Once the JOA came in and then there was the JOA started, what year, like eighty-five maybe. Something like that, and then it was another thirteen years another ten years till the strike. So that ten-year period was, I remember there were signs, it was supposed to be a hundred-year agreement. So it would say ninety-nine years till it's over. Nobody liked it, they just put up with it. And during the strike some of the main leaders of the Knight-Ridder were targeted sometime. Some of the stuff was fun in a way. So they go to somebody's house and jet ski, and I forget some of the names, a lot of them lived in Grosse Pointe and there would be picketers near their homes. It was just, you know in a way, I mean I would be considered, sort of a baby-bomber you know at that age period. So I remember at college we did some anti-war rallies and some ways it kind of continued that feeling, you kind of felt, you just felt kind of younger being involved in some this. I mean I do at least. And it was kind of fun, you got to know some people and look forward to seeing certain people on the picket line and this feeling of us against them, that was sort of an exciting feeling sometimes. I mean I hope I'm not being too light of things.

Shlebah: What were some of the things that you guys did, like the activities?

Ingber: Well I remember, they'd get fires and the fire barrels and when it was cold we would warm out hands and I'd learn about, I bought those hand warmer things that you put in your pockets. And just the people that you get to know, and you walk, you know go back and forth walking. I've never been so cold in my life some nights. But you do it and you make friends so you kind of look forward to it. I went, I was out at the Sterling Heights, printing plant the night that, early in the strike when they beat Benny Solomon, I think it was. I guess the night he was injured. And there were some, some ugly things like that. But then there were people you knew who crossed the line and you know you yell at them sometimes "scab". I never heard the word

scab before that. And to this day I do not read or see, read anything by Mitch Albom. I will not buy his books, I will not go to his plays, because he was the most prominent line crosser and a lot of us felt that if he had stayed with us maybe the strike would have ended sooner. We felt he had that much influence. But he was offered Mitch Albom and he was, he didn't stick with us. But Susan Watson I was mentioning in the picture that I gave you, she was a very prominent columnist and she didn't get her job back. She worked for John Conyers for a while, Representative John Conyers. And she took a real hit financially, more than other people. I mean I had a friend on the picket line, here about good things, good things that happened but. But I'm remembering one of my best friends there. She was a single mother and she almost lost her house she, it was very, very hard for some people to stand up for their principals. But there were, I enjoyed when we're selling the subscriptions at the, there was a place on Mount I used to go to. Some of it was kind fun, you get to see people and just share shop talk. I mean this strikers bulletin we had was always as source of information. It was a very social period of my life, more than when you're sitting in an office and your nose is in work and you're on the computer screen. So it kind of got you out and I got I got to be friendly with Pat Beck at the Free Press who is a photographer, she was a unionist. She became a good friend of mine after from being in the strike. So relationships were made and relationships were ended in that period. So, did I answer the question? I mean I've been giving a lot of extra things.

Shlebah: Do you feel like you already said that you managed financially because your husband was working?

Ingber: My husband was working, he worked for the city of Detroit. And he supported me but he was kind of a 60s' person too, like me. And so, and he's a unionist, he was with a union, he was with AFSCME and his union president, David Sole, I remember came out in our actions

sometimes. So there was a lot of support from all the other unions of Detroit. And that we appreciated that.

Shlebah: There were other people that didn't manage so well financially did you, did they have part time jobs with them participating in the strike?

Ingber: Yeah, I think a lot of people needed to have another job. Where there, you know whatever it was. Like I mentioned to you my best friend was a single mother and she almost lost her house. They were living on you know very poor quality food, except when they got things from the food bank. She had a hard time. Her kids were, she had twins, they were about twelve or thirteen. But Susan Watson was working for Conyers and I know one guy was driving a cab. One of my friends was kind of fortunate she had decided that she wanted to leave journalism and be a teacher so she actually it benefited her schedule. Her classes and doing her student teaching she can work it into her striking schedule. And then by the time strike ended she was pretty much ready to be a teacher. So everybody had a different situation. Let's see was I? Yeah I was working part time for the Jewish News and actually I did get a call a few years later that I could come back to the Free Press but not at the job I had before. And I was at the Jewish News and I wanted, I just wanted to stay where I was but I said you can put me on the list. But I thought they were going to come back again after the strike was over. But they never had a part time job. I had benefits even as a part timer. My older daughter was to able get orthodontia at Midwest Clinical in Dearborn, so I'd drive from Oak Park to Dearborn but it was well worth it. But they took that, they took that away. And I know that since then benefits aren't as good, a lot of things are gone. And I'm almost surprised there is unions, it just seems like they have the upper hand now.

Shlebah: Do you feel like it's more Wall-Street controlling the papers?

Ingber: Yeah, Wall Street, and I mean corporations have grown much stronger since we went on strike. I mean if we knew then what we know now we might have not have done that. I mean the strikes of newspapers have all been pretty unsuccessful. And of course now so many papers have gone out of business or gone to online only, magazines too, like Newsweek. So in the whole business, I really wouldn't recommend a child of mine to go into this business, unless they want to, want to be a blogger. But they don't get paid as well. So the whole profession has changed so much because people go the Internet and they get their news wherever, whatever source they believe in that's where they get their news instead of having kind of like the diversity of opinion like you used to have in broadcast journalism and newspapers. So it's, it's really changed.

Shlebah: Do you believe that it was the unions that essentially failed the strike and those involved?

Ingber: Did the unions fail the strike?

Shlebah: The strikers.

Ingber: Um, well. I'm a little, a little regretful that, I mean maybe they didn't know anymore than we did. I don't know, you'd think they would. But they kept telling us that we were going to win, we'd go to court and the court would rule in our favor and consistently the rule did not rule in our favor. And then it becomes matter of well do you cut your losses, I mean the newspapers offered an amnesty in the beginning. We went on strike July thirteenth, and I think if you came back by August first then you would, you could get your job back but most of us at that point, it was very new and we didn't, we didn't do it. I mean I do know a couple who did. There was a Marty Kohn who used to write about movies and I knew his family, I knew his wife and she had MS and he wanted to stay out but she said no you have to go back because we need the benefits.

So, it's hard to know I mean I'm not privy enough of the interworking of the hierarchy, but it really hurt to know that what we were doing was likely to succeed even though we were told it would and so I'm disappointed. But did they fail us? I don't know. They tried to keep us informed. We did have strike pay. I felt like they were working to try to resolve this in our, to our benefit, but the forces the money that was behind the newspaper organizations was just so outpaced anything we had. You know we realize it, how much, what the odds were. Maybe we, I don't know what we could have done maybe. Maybe we should not have gone on strike if we known a little more. But I can't regret it, I can't regret what I did, what I did for good purposes.

Shlebah: You said that if you went back by August first they would have given you your jobs back.

Ingber: Yeah.

Shlebah: And at that point you believed that the strike was on your favor?

Ingber: I did, I did. I remember that deadline day actually my sister and I went with our kids to Canada's Wonderland. So that's where we were that day, we were in Canada. And that all right well the deadline is gone by. I've made my choice. I thought it was a good choice at the time.

Shlebah: Did some people go back on that day?

Ingber: Some did, some did. Like Marty Kohn, like Dana Jackson who turned out to be a very very sick woman. She retired recently and people can't even believe that she's still alive cause she, I had seen her like last December with tubes and thin little legs and she revived enough to come back for a little while and retired. Had an nice party for her. She was an, I don't know what they call it, copyaid in editorial. So she came back and so a few people I knew in line went back.

Marcy Abramson, like the one I had lunch with today. So we didn't end our friendship over this. She went back and the ones that went back, guess what? They got raises and they've all, they're all in the higher payer scale than their co-workers for the rest of their careers. My friend who almost lost her house she's always sat side by side with this Hollean Lorber who got more money than she did forever and Hollean, well Hollean is a lucky person she and her husband were planning to leave Detroit to move to Hawaii and she was going to give her notice and then she finds out about the buyout. There were buyouts coming, so she just bitted her time for six weeks and got the buyout. So now she has a year's free pay and free healthcare, and she's in Hawaii. So hey.

Shlebah: So some benefited?

Ingber: Oh some made out very well, the ones who actually you know didn't stay in the strike. So there is some resentment to those people.

Shlebah: But some friendships did survive?

Ingber: Yeah, like Marcy. Marcy and me. Cause she, she and I worked together for the whole twelve and half years and we grew pretty close. I don't know, I couldn't fault her. I mean later on, after the strike I even worked again as a freelancer for the Free Press and for the News, writing about restaurants and other things. They had local sections for neighborhood news and community Free Press I don't know if you remember those. So I wrote about restaurants and now I write about restaurants for the Detroit Jewish News, and that's where I was right before I saw you, at Mezza Mediterranean Grill, it's a Lebanese restaurant on Southfield Road near thirteenth. So that's off the subject.

Shlebah: Why did some friendships fail and some stayed? Like you said that you and Marcy stayed.

Ingber: Well, maybe, maybe it was closer to begin with. Because, like I know this Dana Jackson who is still a friend of mine but still never quite as good a friend as we were before. She had a son at the same time I had my daughter, younger ones. But she was great friends with Gary Graff who used to be the music critic and he wants nothing to do with her and Audrey McKenna same thing, wants nothing to do with Dana Jackson even though as sick as she was. I mean some people would just kind of put it aside because of that. And it hurt her a lot but I mean I guess people had to do what they thought what was best for them so and she needed those benefits. So I can't condemn people who want back except for Mitch Albom, because he has plenty of money and he could have been a leader, that would have been his, the best thing he could have done. For if he cared at all for his co-workers which I don't think he did or does.

Shlebah: You said that the unions would tell you that you were going to succeed in court.

Ingber: Right.

Shlebah: And then you wouldn't, how did that make you feel? Every time that the courts would deny you?

Ingber: Ah, just really frustrated. Frustrated, just thinking I hope this is going to work out you know invested so much time into this cause and you know we were just devastating sometimes when the rulings would come down. There were several of them. But you know the tide of history was against us I guess with the labor movement was losing power, losing force.

Shlebah: Were there any specific activities that you did during the strike?

Ingber: That were good or bad? Well, you know do get influenced by other people sometimes. So, you know, there, can I be prosecuted at this point for anything bad I did?

(laughter)

Shlebah: I mean if you.

Ingber: You know because such as people would go to the news box and they would just take out all the papers and throw them away. I mean that, I would never tell my kids to do that but you know on occasion I had done something like that. Just cause you're so mad or you see them on the shelves at the Seven-Eleven and you just sort of move them to another part of the store. It was just some those kind of silly. It was just a matter of finding out your hours where you're supposed to be and, with all the chance bought and paid for you can say that to the police, to the Sterling Heights police who were really in the pockets of the owners of the newspaper plant. And they really proved it by the way they treated people. I mean psychical violence was not necessarily. There was a group that all got arrested who sat down, sat down in front of the doors of the Free was it the Free Press or the News? There is a picture of them with handcuffs. I wasn't there that day. It probably is in one these pieces that I have brought. Have you heard of that before? Emily Everett was arrested and Susan Watson and I think they had, they had to go to court. George Waldman is another name, he did a book, Faces, Voices or Faces of the Strike. He was Free Press photographer, I'm not in that book but he was very active. Dia Pierce, there are certain names that you might be hearing about. I mean Daymon Hartley is a big radical. I don't know how. He's married to a woman who is a principle of one of those Detroit prep schools. They seems so different, they met at the Free Press. He's a real radical and she seems more mainstream but they get along. But Dia Pierce is someone I met, Barb Ingalls she's about union

activities. She's a good person. There are some very good hearted people who just really want fairness for people, economic justice. And I'm glad I got to know them. So that's, that's probably one of the best things about being in the strike.

Shlebah: You mentioned the police treatment.

Ingber: Yeah, I remember they beat up John what was John's last name. John, let's see. This John was a Free Press guy, you know times gone by you forget some of the names.

Shlebah: Yeah.

Ingber: But I think he did get rewarded some damages for being attacked by the police. And I know this Benny Solomon was, was compensated, he was very badly hurt. John Cardey? Cassidy? I can't remember. I can picture him. So I did see Benny Solomon getting beaten. I did see it.

Shlebah: You witnessed it?

Ingber: I did see it, yeah. I remember seeing it. There were a lot of people there that night. That was early in the strike, it was a pretty exciting night. I remember we were taken by bus to Sterling Heights where we were parked and Marty Kohn was on that bus and he was, he was really into it. And then he, again his wife Laura pulled him out of the strike again because they needed the benefits, health benefits.

Shlebah: Yeah.

Ingber: But the police you know were, we just felt like they were biased against, against the workers and they were pretty much in the pocket of Gannet and Knight-Ridder. So we hated them.

Shlebah: How? it must have been very emotional just seeing the violence.

Ingber: Yeah that night was really emotional in Sterling Heights. I remember that could have been like the first week or two before the deadline, probably was cause I think that Marty made the deadline. I don't know if I have anything about that. Is that, is this going to be on there. Oh see now Daymon Hartley I mentioned whose the big radical photographer and Margret Trimer Hartley wife who went on. She left journalism and got, she used to worry about education and she ended up being in an education union, MEA or one of them and somehow from there she got into actually working in schools and now she's a principle so, did is the story. This was quite a, quite a time. They even called them goons in the disruption centers. I used to be at the one of on Coolidge on the north end in Oak Park. I hadn't even noticed there was disruption center but that's where you delivered the papers at night and we would just yell at the trucks. I know some of it kind of sounds juvenile like I said it was. It did make you feel young throw you back to your sixties anti-war protests. But you used the weapons that you have and your voice is one of them. We weren't going to go on hunger strike or anything like that. But we were just there our presence was annoying too. People like Art Van and some of the car advertisers Van Dyke.

Shlebah: Were you involved in picketing Art Van?

Ingber: Yes.

Shlebah: How was that experience?

Ingber: Mostly it was tedious. You know it was tedious back and forth with your signs, cars honk in support of you. And you're just there to let people know they shouldn't come in and patronize those people advertising this, in the papers in the scab papers. And that was our job. We had a job to do. For my, how much did they give us? I think you know like, have you heard

of figure from doing these interviews. I'm thinking three sixty-two but that might be the unemployment figure. Whatever it was, it would be very hard to live on. There was a guy, a guy that we worked with who was he didn't have a very ranking job. His name was Chris and I believe he became very radicalized he was like a copy aid and I understand he went through all his savings. He was going to buy a house and he just blew through all his saving during the strike. So that he could be there through all this time. He had a Greek last name like Minolus or something like that. So some people just really really went nuts. I mean I tried to have a balance in my life. I was a mother. I had my part time job. So I just tried to schedule in everything. I scheduled everything around my striking activities as much as I could. And you could, you could chose when you came in. So if I had to be with my kids, my children I didn't have to go out and then my husband could be home with them.

Shlebah: So from the wages that the unions were paying the strikers it seemed that it was more about principle not about the....

Ingber: Not about the money, no. It was nothing to compare it with what you were earning when you were working there. And of course there were no health benefits. Course now a days there are no health benefits either. You know contract jobs. It was the principle, that we were doing there.

Shlebah: Do you feel like that principle lives on with you today?

Ingber: Lives on with me?

Shlebah: Yeah.

Ingber: Yes and no. I don't think I would go out on strike again, just cause I, it would be harder, I was younger then, I don't think I could stand in that cold weather. But yeah I'm very much still, I mean I'm, we are on Facebook, I would circulate petitions and sign petitions. I would alert people to things coming up and I'm active in our local dem, dem's party. My daughter who is kind of alerting me to things going on. We went to a program that was held at Wayne State law school a couple of weeks ago about post, what was it called, post racialism? About the profiling of vulnerable populations in Detroit, and they had, they had panels on what's going on in the immigrant community mostly Hispanic community and the Muslim community, Black communities of the three target areas and some very well spoken people shared their experiences. And you know it was very eye opening if you are not in the trenches. Hearing about these things. John Conyers spoke and this women I forgot her name Rinku, Rico she's got a blog colorlines.com. She's very, very well spoken, she's an Indian woman. And it opens you up to a lot of things going on that the major papers are not covering and they were saying if you want to help, some people said, "What can I do about these terrible things? About children coming home from school, their parents are undocumented and they're parents are taken away? They don't know where they are?" So they said you can contact the churches in that area and give them. They need food and supplies and it seems so little in a way but, but if there are rallies go to the rallies and try to give your point of view. So I think it's important to hear about human rights and not be complacent and you know I will never be complacent. But whether I will actually do heavy duty picketing anymore I don't think I would.

Shlebah: Were you involved with Action Coalition of Strikers or Reader's United?

Ingber: Not Reader's United, the Action Coalition was uh.

Shlebah: of Strikers.

Ingber: Well, I think those were support, kind of support groups. Weren't they?

Shlebah: Um-hm, Um-hm.

Ingber: So I was an actual striker so I guess I would say no. But I knew people who were supportive. Maryann Mahaffey, the late Maryann Mahaffey was on city council. Selma Goode whose been a friend of mine, she works for the Jewish Labor Committee. So certain people you would see. And John Conyers would come down there and whether its' official or non-official but we appreciated anyone who was rallying to our cause.

Shlebah: You mentioned earlier that as you were striking, cars would honk in support of you.

Ingber: Yeah, yeah.

Shlebah: So did you feel like that...

Ingber: That gave you a good feeling and you know then you kind of pump your fist or raise your sign a little higher. And a lot of cars honked and we really felt like the city was with us. You know, I don't, I don't know how it was as time went on but certainly in the beginning. I think that everybody was just getting tired of this. I mean we were getting into the 1997, 98. It's a long time, like you said it was one of the longest strikes. But I felt, I did feel like the community was for us.

Shlebah: Earlier more so then later?

Ingber: Yeah, just because they were was, there was enthusiasm. I mean people say that enthusiasm wans anything. I mean look at the shootings in Newtown, there was so much support

for gun control earlier and they were saying on the radio that some of that is waning now and the President is trying to pump it up again. You get people to a, you know, to continue push you know their congress people to support it. But it's just not. There are a lot of people, Democrats as well as Republicans are supportive of guns even though it's not infringement on the Second Amendment to have background checks and to not allow assault and rifles and the magazines that could be loaded so quickly. That's something I care about that issue. That there should be more gun control and it doesn't mean, it doesn't mean that you are taking people's guns and you want to take away guns. But people, people I think that it's a natural thing in human beings that you just don't, can't keep you enthusiasm level at the same point. That it, if time goes by unless there is some new, fresh impetus they are going to move to other topics. Other interests.

Shlebah: How did the strike, if at all, change your perceptions on the unions?

Ingber: I think unions still have an important role in this society. And I was reading that the union membership has been going up slightly in the last year or so I think that's encouraging because if you don't have union and you're a worker then they can throw you out without any recourse. I mean with a union you have, there are certain steps that have to be followed. And I think workers need some protection because it's a very nasty employment world out there. My husband, I'm remarried. My husband has been a white collar worker, engineer, and most places are at will employment. But they can just for reason, just you're out. And he's had some problems with some of his employers and he said I wish I'd had a union. Cause if you have grievances you can take there. And I think unions help build a middle class and help people have comfortable living styles. And I think the corporations want to get rid of that. I mean you are workers, maybe make fourteen dollars an hour and it's just not enough to support families the way they could in the old days. And when union workers' wages, benefits go down then it's going to have an impact

on non-union. And these right-to-work laws that have been were pushed through by the lame duck legislature in our state, signed by Snyder, Governor Snyder, who supposedly was not interested in doing that but he did. This is going to hurt a lot of families and I think there are some cases that are already coming up. I don't know was it Wayne State or was it somewhere else but some contracts are up now and according to this law when contracts come up then they don't require people in the union to pay dues, its voluntary. And a lot of people will be more than happy to be represented without paying dues and I don't think that's right. So I see a role for unions in this country and I hope it's going to be a larger role. And a lot of it depends on the kind of people we elect and if we keep electing people who are conservative and not progressive we are going to see a back slide on union membership and wages and benefits in this country and you know how are we going to compete? I mean how are we going to? I like a model more like the Scandinavian countries they are Social Democrats and I see nothing wrong with it, I don't think there is anything wrong with caring for your people and those who can pay, who can afford to pay more should pay more. And I think Obamacare is going to make a big difference in people's lives. Right now my husband is out of work and I do a lot of freelance. I don't have, we both a paying healthcare. He's still got COBRA, I've got a Blue-Cross plan between the two of us it is a thousand a month. That is a big bite. So when Obamacare comes in, in full force next year that will, that would have been the answer for us. Although I'm getting a year and a half away for Medicare, it'll help me. But my daughter is twenty-three and she could be covered under a parent's insurance. So if he gets a job she and I will be under him. It'll be, will have to pay something but it will be much better than what we have to go through now. So yay for unions!

Shlebah: So there is an optimism for unions?

Ingber: Um-hm.

Shlebah: At what point did you realize that the strike was not going your way?

Ingber: It must have been after one those court rulings. I'm forgetting which year it was, but I think, you know by the time I was working at other places. Yeah, I worked at a place called, it went out of business, Visual Services. And there was another guy that I worked with who had been at the Detroit News, I'm at the Free Press, you know were enemies but now in this situation we were, we became friends.

Shlebah: Yeah.

Ingber: He's George Bulanda, he's now with Hour Detroit and so I worked full time for them for a year and a half. And did my striking on weekends and nights. What a time that was. What was the question?

Shlebah: When you realized that the strike....

Ingber: Oh, wasn't going well. Oh well I guess, so I guess it must have been late 96' early 97' like you know this is just going on too long and it's not...if we are not losing we certainly are not winning. And you don't want to cut your loss, I mean I'm not. What are we going to do? I'm not going back to the Free Press anymore, my job was gone. So I'm just going to live my life but I'm going to keep trying to help because that's what I do. And then when I, when I was able to work for the Sunday Journal that was kind of some satisfaction. Professional satisfaction, helping and we did pretty well, it was a nice paper. I mean there was talk about trying to make it a permanent paper but it came out once a week so it wasn't exactly you know like a daily. But, it was a nice paper. Some good people, hard working people made it happen. I'm not sure how they came with the money for it, maybe it was a larger union.

Shlebah: Yeah.

Ingber: Emily Everett was involved with that. Oh, John Castine that's the guy who got beaten up. I knew I was going to get to that eventually. John and Peggy Castine was his wife, yeah he was injured. He got money for that and I think he was, it was one of these where you are not supposed to talk about it. So he got some decent money, but they beat him up the police. What did he do? I can't imagine, I mean as far as I know I used to see him on the picket line just a regular guy doing what we all did.

Shlebah: Was it a collective realization that?

Ingber: Collective, I guess so, I guess so. I mean my good friends were Carol and Susan, Susan is the one I said single mother, almost lost her house. Carol is the one who was going to be a teacher. So the three of us were pretty tight. And we, yeah there was that sense that we may, may not win. But what's going to happen? We don't know. But we made our, made our choice and so let's follow through and not let the other people down.

Shlebah: Do you feel like that something could have been done different, that would have resulted in better results? For the workers.

Ingber: I guess our leaders should have been more realistic. But, they should have, I mean I don't know if that is possible but they should have tried to have a better handle on what was going on with the money that was going to be thrown at, keeping us from succeeding. I mean Knight-Ridder and Gannet had very deep pockets and they can keep up the fight indefinitely and I don't know how long could we keep going. So it was David and Goliath. So, I know some, I think some people did get frustrated at times when Lou Mletzko, who was a head of the Newspaper Guild, they thought that he should do more should know more. I mean I didn't really

have a problem with him but that's what people said. My friend today was telling me that, she said that you should call the Newspaper Guild and see if you're eligible for any retiree health benefits. You know, that was never mentioned to me. I do get a very small pension cause I worked twelve and a half years, three days a week. So I'm entitled to about a four hundred and fifty a month, which I share with my first husband. So it's very small. But he also shares his city of Detroit bigger pension with me. But if that's the case I don't know whether the union should of informed me of that possibility. But I kind of think that maybe I didn't work enough years may be it had to be twenty years. But I'll find out, I'll call Monday.

Shlebah: Good luck with that.

Ingber: Thank you.

Shlebah: Before the strike began was there any internal discussion of member mobilization by the union? Such as like implementing the work to rule concept?

Ingber: The what to rule?

Shlebah: The work to rule, where you work by the rules.

Ingber: I'm still not sure I understand it. I mean we had meeting before the strike. They would get people together, unit meetings. So there were discussion. And there was just a lot of anger about this merit pay issue that, we didn't want them to single out more people to get more money than others. That was a big issue. But of course that's exactly what happens now, and that's exactly what happened to people who crossed the line who were forever paid at a higher level. So yeah we talked about it before, but the work to rule I'm not sure I understand that.

Shlebah: I think it was for others.

Ingber: Oh okay. So there was talk and we did know there was a possibility that there would be a strike because our leaders told us we would probably win. That we wouldn't have the merit pay, they wouldn't bust the wages of the other unions. I mean it was all going to be, mostly we were looking for status quo. We weren't looking for more, we just wanted things to be the way they had been. But Knight-Ridder and Gannet wanted to make it a worse situation for it's employees. I just heard today from Marcy that this one guy Jerry Skora, he was editorial page editor. For years he's had his own office and worked weekdays nine to five. She said he came to work last week and they, they busted him down. They put him in the news copy desk and gave somebody else his job. Now I don't know whether, could the union do anything for him? I don't know. But you're really at the mercy of these, she said, she thinks that people who didn't take the last buyout, he's sixty, she thinks that some of them are being punished. Cause another guy who was, who had some distinction on the news copy desk is been busted down to just a regular copy editor, another guy who is in his sixties. So she's glad that, she took her buyout in November. The people that got buyouts some of them you know it was, it was generally a year's pay and a year's healthcare. So if you timed it right that when the year ended that you were eligible to collect your pension and your social security. So for some of them it worked out beautifully.

Shlebah: Yeah. There seems to be a lot of trust put in the unions before the strike began.

Ingber: Yeah.

Shlebah: Do you feel like that trust is lost now after the strike?

Ingber: I mean, of the people who still work there?

Shlebah: Of people involved.

Ingber: Probably less I would say so. I think people are more realistic now. They've been through trial by fire and you know I don't think the unions were lying to us. I think they were just not as informed as they should have been. We probably expected more of them. I mean considering what a lot of us lost that, that was a bad decision that I don't know what the word is. I mean there inability to communicate and understand the business climate situation hurt a lot of us and our careers. I mean what would my career would have been like if I had stayed there. I mean as it turned out the Jewish News has been very good for me, I've been on staff and now I'm a contribute writer. They don't really have staff people, they've cut back quite a bit. And I've had some other interesting experiences. I worked as a marketing director for the Jewish Federation. So I've done some interesting things I wouldn't have done if I stayed at the Free Press. I might have more financial security though if I stayed there. I imagine if I had stayed till the end and got a buyout too. That would have been nice, I would have a nice pension. So I lost a lot, you could say I could blame the union for telling us we could do something. But back then there hadn't been as many as these strikes. I don't know if we were the first or one of the first unions, union strikes, but they called it unfair labor practices. They had different terms but we might have been one of the first that attempted this and others learned from our experience that maybe they better not try to go out and so I wish there had been that experience somewhere else that our union leaders could have drawn from and maybe not led us that way. I kind of, I kind of feel like even though I'm glad I did it and I'm glad that I had the experience it also was a setback on my life in some ways and you know I wish we could have negotiated. I mean now that we've lost, the company has the upper hand in everything. And I know that there used to have a lot more sick days and that, that got taken away and now they have less than five, they used to have two weeks. So things that were not everything was absolutely essential but did give you a quality of

life. Gave you some security had been taken away. I wonder what other people are saying on that question, I'd be curious to know.

Shlebah: Do you have any concluding thoughts?

Ingber: Oh we are at the end? Yay. Well I think I kind of told you what I thought. It was an interesting part of my life, I'm glad it's over. I'm glad it happened but I also wish that I'd have the opportunity at least to go back. To go back to my job, to the way others, the way my friends did who were just as dedicated as I was. And you know I thought, I thought I would have a chance you know after they concluded. It concluded it was about 1998 or 99?

Shlebah: The conclusion?

Ingber: Yeah, I mean I didn't even know just its hard to even to remember when it ended I was so out of the situation by then. So, when, I guess, I thought I would be asked to come back again but I didn't get asked again because they said they didn't have part time jobs anymore.

Shlebah: They offered you a full time?

Ingber: Only full time. And I wanted what I did before. But then someone said well you don't need, you don't need to take the full-time, they'll get put you on the list and then when the strike is over you'll get an opportunity to say what you want to do. But I didn't. So, I don't know how, whose fault that is. But I didn't get. I'm trying to think, I'm trying to think what my latest thing is in here. I mean I was very diligent about saving these for a while. Linda Foley, I guess this might be interesting an email with my friend. She says, Linda Foley, I think she was active with the Newspaper Guild. Do you know that name?

Shlebah: Yes.

Ingber: Well okay she visited with our union local, this is November 1996. “The nutshell report for the people of the meeting National Guild honchos unhappy with strike's progress, do not think we have a winning strategy, do not think they are getting bang for the buck, that we are hurting the national at this point in other cities, urged us to make unconditional offer now, no sense to wait. Not asking us to split with other unions, not pulling plug on the Sunday Journal or strike pay yet, but urges us to quickly what to do cause current plan is not working. Lou, that Lou Mletzko, and Don Kummer argued to stay the course. So those were our leaders. So Ellen Creager said, I'm trying to pass this around this information, seems like a really good time, may be our last chance to call them with our opinion. Stay the course, make offer, wait for other unions to act then follow, wait for national to pull the plug, try and hold on to NLRB verdict or other options. And she wanted me to pass this on to others, especially this one striker whose not on email that would be great. By the way can you see yourself returning to the Free Press when the strike is over? She says call me crazy but I still want to, if only to see what's left, post-war.”¹ And she did go back and she didn't really, she didn't get punished at all. She was the travel writer.

Shlebah: Did you feel like if you went back, could you see yourself go back post-war?

Ingber: If I had been able to go back to what I had, part time. Because I still had my children to raise. I was happy with that situation.

Shlebah: Yeah.

Ingber: So here is when you asked about police, “Oxford police spy on strikers. The scandal of Detroit Newspapers buying the Oxford Township police department, converting it into a private

¹ Reading off of email from Ellen Creager, Tuesday November 19, 1996.

surveillance outfit has escalated with the newest press revelation that the tiny Oakland County community has received a hundred thirty thousand dollars from the two scab papers. There is a front page account in Sunday's Oakland Press, the money was spent for surveillance work that included following union strikers in communities dozens of miles outside of the Oxford Township borders. Documents obtained by the newspaper under the state Freedom of Information Act revealed that the surveillance cover was blown last October fifteenth when two Oxford officers confronted Teamsters representative William Freitas and Jim St. Louis, I knew Jim St. Louis, of Mailers Local 240 outside a Troy car dealership. The strikers called police after two men sitting in an unmarked car pulled a shotgun on them and threatened them verbally.”² That night was a mess out there, said the Troy captain. But the confrontation with the Oxford officers it was something we wished hadn't happened. And they identified the officers and in a taped phone conversations one of the Oxford officers talks of quote trapping end quote union strikers in the arena. Maybe we can let somebody know and get them trapped in there and get some arrests for once out of this. So they were very interested in fighting back against the strikers.

Ingber: Oh here is, I told you about Ox Roast, these were some nice events that they had Ox Roast Cajun Fried Turkey Dinner, help us honor carriers who honor our picket lines! Those were really good, I went to some of them, it was fifteen dollars for supporters, three dollars for strikers, free for carriers, news paper carriers.³

Shlebah: Um-hm.

² Reading off of The Alliance (Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions) Strike Day Number 232.

³ Referring to Ox Roast ad in the The Alliance (Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions) Strike Day Number 232.

Ingber: Would you like this?

Shlebah: Sure. And this is published by the alliance?

Ingber: Yeah that was the, that was what we would pick up when we would get our strike checks.

Shlebah: Um-hm.

Ingber: Lou Mletzko, the Detroit officer of the Newspaper Guild but all the, all the unions got that. Fox's TV nation filmed the news paper strikers, Michael Moore was bringing his TV show, TV nation to Detroit that was on August 28th probably the first year. And there are so many things that I don't know if I should just hand these over to you. I mean I'd like it to go where it would do the most good.⁴

Shlebah: It'd be going to the Reuther Library at Wayne State.

Ingber: So do you think they could use this?

Shlebah: It would go under there.

Ingber: Yeah the archives?

Shlebah: Yeah.

Ingber: All right, I'm ready to give these out. You go through it, that's in here, whatever that will help you with your contribution to this.

Shlebah: Thank you.

⁴ Referring to strike related material that she donated to the Reuther Library.

Ingber: And then from there you can donate it, you can let them know it from me though?

Shlebah: Of course. I will, actually, let's just conclude the interview. Did you have anything else to add.

Ingber: I think I properly told you enough.

Shlebah: Well, thank you for doing this interview with me today.

Ingber: You're welcome, you're welcome.