Oral History Interview with Larry Gabriel

April 2, 2013
Wayne State University Walter P. Reuther Library
Detroit Newspaper Strike Oral History Project

Larry Gabriel, Interviewee

Lawrence Gabriel was born on February 27, 1953 in Detroit, Michigan after his family emigrated from New Orleans. He has been married for 35 years and has children. He is currently a freelance writer but has been an editor for the *Detroit Metro Times* and the *Detroit Free Press*. At the time of the strike he was an assistant features editor and discusses what he learned about striking and his feelings towards the events during the strike.

Leilani Ward, Interviewer

Leilani Ward is a graduate of Oakland University in Anthropology and is currently a graduate student at Wayne State University in the School of Library and Information Science focusing on Archival Administration. She interns at the Oakland County Pioneer Historical Society and plans to have a career in the museum field. She had also interned at the Cranbrook Art Museum and the historical home of Edsel and Eleanor Ford.

Interview Location and Other Notes

The interview was conducted in one of the offices on the second floor of the Walter P. Reuther Library in Detroit, Michigan. The interview was recorded on a Marantz professional PMD660, Audacity 2.0 in WAV format. There were brief interruptions from the heater but not very bothersome.

Ward: This is Leilani Ward and I am interviewing Larry Gabriel on April 2, 2013. Could you tell me something about where you grew up?

Gabriel: I grew up in Detroit. First pretty much on the southwest side and then when I was eleven years old we moved over near University of Detroit, the Livernois and McNicol's area. I grew up there till I was eighteen and went away to college. But I'm a lifelong Detroiter. I used to live in Cass Corridor here in the 1970s and early [19]80s. So that's where I grew up.

Ward: What was your family like?

Gabriel: You know, a large family—my family moved to Detroit from New Orleans in 1951. I was the first person in my family born here in Detroit. I was born in 1953. All my older siblings were born in New Orleans. So, you know, I guess we were kind of typical, that Southern migration that Northern migration from the south to work at the car factories. My father was a musician previous to that and he traveled around the country and he was on his way to Cleveland for a music job. My uncle had moved here and was working at the Rouge plant, at the Ford Rouge plant, the Ford River Rouge plant (both laugh) and he was talking to my father and it's like, hey look, you have five kids, you're traveling around the country, half the time you don't even have enough money to send home for the kids. Here, stay in Detroit and I'll get you on at the plant. Next morning he took my dad to the plant they hired him right on. My Dad didn't even make the job in Cleveland. He sent a different bass player to Cleveland to play that job. So that's how we got here to Detroit. And in my, in my family when I was young we were a culturally a New Orleans family.

Ward: So after high school where did you go to school?

Gabriel: I went to Michigan State University. I got my Bachelor's degree there in 1975. Then I came back and I was caretaker at the first Unitarian Universalist Church which is down there at Cass and Forest. I was a caretaker there for a couple of years and then I went, in 1977, I went to Graduate School at Penn State University. I got a Master's degree in Speech Communication, then I came back to Detroit against their advice (both laugh). I resumed working as a caretaker at the Unitarian Church for a few more years. Then, I guess it was 1974, I left there, not '74, '84, '83 actually, I left there. I was doing, I had been doing a lot a small contracting jobs from various church members. I was getting to be more and more into that. I was doing painting, carpentry, plastering, roofing, some plumbing work. The only thing I didn't do was electrical work. I was afraid of electricity. I figured if I made a mistake with anything else the repercussions weren't that bad. But electricity, I could burn down somebodies house or something so I left that alone. And I wasn't a licensed contractor or anything. Also during that time I was playing, I was playing music with my father's band. My father was a bass player and led his own band. Well, it was him and my uncle, the Gabriel Brothers New Orleans Jazz Band. My father had had a heart attack around then and he was playing the bass and singing in the band, and after he had his heart attack then he would take me on the jobs and I played the bass and he'd sing. So that wasn't too hard on him. So I was playing with my father's band around then and I was playing, I had a couple of little rock bands in the in the area. I was also freelance writing for some arts magazines, writing a lot of poetry, that kind of thing. Then you know I had this thing that I was doing around then that I would work until I had enough money to go to Mexico for the winter for a couple months (both laugh). So I had been working, actually I was teaching French and Spanish at Benedictine High School. It was because the teacher who was doing that was pregnant, she'd taken a maternity leave for the first semester. So I taught for the

first semester and then when the semester ended—actually they tried to hire me on permanently— but I was like no, that's the end of my contract, I'm going to Mexico. So I went to Mexico. I came back and it was the spring of 1985 and I needed a job and *Metro Times* was advertising for a listings editor, the person who does the what's happening section about all the bands that are playing or whatever else is going on. I started working at the *Metro Times* doing that, and I did that for a couple of years. It was a good job and you know I like doing it. Then I got a grant from the Michigan Council of the Arts to write a book, actually it was a family memoir, it was called *Daddy Plays Old Time New Orleans Jazz*. So I did that for a couple of years. I did that and I did other things. I did some more contracting work and then I started working at the Graystone Jazz Museum. Right in there my wife got pregnant. That's where I was like, ok, I got a kid coming, now I really got to get a real job. Right around that time the *Metro Times* was hiring again and so I went to work there as a, what is it, managing editor. So I worked there for a couple of years as managing editor and one day the phone rang and it was somebody from the *Free Press* calling up to ask if I was interested in working at the *Free Press*. They're looking for an assistant entertainment editor and it was, hey, a huge raise in pay. So I went to work at the *Free Press* in '91, which put me in place to be in the strike in '95. So that's kind of how I got there.

Ward: Yeah.

Gabriel: It was kind of funny because when I went there in '91 they were talking about going on strike in '92. There was, I guess, I think there was a contract negotiation going on in '92 and they're talking about going on strike. That was the first time I've ever been faced with the concept of going on strike. I talked to my Dad, because he was a member of UAW Local 600 for twenty-one, twenty-two years. I was like Dad, they're talking about going on strike, what would

I do? My Daddy said, "stick with the union." So we didn't go on strike then but we did go on strike a few years later.

Ward: I just have one more question about your youth. What was it like winning the 1975 creative writing competition in poetry?

Gabriel: You know what (unintelligible), I thought I was going to be a poet. I should have been a poet. I could have been a poet, but winning that was like, hey, that was like a big deal culmination. I was like the best poet at Michigan State University, or, you know, not necessarily but I had the paper to say it. So that was good. That was great. I still write poetry.

Ward: What was your first position at the *Detroit Free Press*?

Gabriel: Assistant entertainment editor, it was kind of halfway between being an editor and a writer. I did a lot of writing, but I also did some editing too.

Ward: What was that experience like at the *Detroit Free Press*? What kind of people did you, and environment did you come into?

Gabriel: Well, I thought it was pretty good actually. They treated me pretty well at the *Free Press*. I came in and to me it was the big time. I'd made it to the big time and I was making good money. I could support my family. I was publishing my writing. They really liked my writing. They promoted me in terms of my visibility in the community, not like a promotion up to a higher job.

Ward: Yeah.

Gabriel: I was meeting other people who were good writers in my profession. Actually, the thing that amazed me was that there were some people who were, I had been seeing their name in the paper for years who were supposedly great writers. And I was editing them and I was finding out that they weren't really that good (both laugh). So I was I was surprised at that. I was writing like never before. I was able to write about—I was given a lot of freedom. They didn't have a lot of black writers on staff, particularly in that department. And part of the reason why they hired me was I'm a Detroiter. I knew Detroit. I was doing a lot of writing about cultural things in Detroit. I was a voice for a segment of black Detroit that know body had ever paid attention to before. I wrote some big stories about the shows at the Museum of African American History. I did a Detroit black history story. I did a history of WGPR, which was the first black owned television station in the country; actually Richard Nixon gave them their charter back in the 1970s. They have since sold off. They sold off to CBS or something while I was at the *Free Press*, which is why I wrote that particular history. A lot of jazz musicians—I wrote about black filmmakers and stuff like that. I didn't exclusively write about black stuff, but I was given a free rein to probably 90 percent of the stuff I wrote was stuff that I came up with. I remember one thing I didn't like writing was—Barbara Streisand went on tour for the first time in who knows how long and they sent me out to Ticketmaster to talk to people standing in line to buy tickets for the Barbara Streisand concert. I remember thinking, that's just not something that I would have done (both laugh) at the time. I met writers. Kim Herron, who was a very good friend of mine, we met in college actually, in our Journalism 100 class. It was the first journalism class we were both in. I wanted to be a writer and I didn't know anything about how you became a writer so I went to school and it says journalism, that's about writing. So I went to journalism. He [Kim Heron] was somebody who already, who always wanted to be a journalist.

He was right where he wanted to be. He was working at the *Free Press* at the time when I was hired in so I already had a good friend there. There were (pause), there were very few black guys and it seemed like almost all of them were named Larry (both laugh). Larry Holmstead was there, there was another, Larry Connelly was there and then there was another Larry. I can't remember. But it was kind of interesting. I thought it was like all these guys named Larry were at the school. To me it was great. I got to—they sent me to cover like the jazz festivals. I just spend the whole weekend down at Hart Plaza doing stuff that I loved so; it was good working there. I liked it.

Ward: Now did you have time for your music while you were working at the *Detroit Free Press*?

Gabriel: You know what, I did play music somewhat, but I made a choice earlier in my life. I was like, well, look, you've been kind of messing around with this music thing, been kind of messing around with this writer thing, what's it going to be? You going to be a musician or a writer? I knew a lot of musicians who I felt like, there better than I'm ever going to be and there having a hard time making it. And I knew people who were successful writers working at the newspaper and putting out magazines and winning awards and stuff. So I just felt like I had put in more time and that I was a better writer than I was a musician. So, yeah, I was still dabbling in music, but that was not what I was trying to make a career out of. Also at that time—it was a hard time in my life because my daughter was born in '89 she died in '92. So I got depressed and I actually, when my daughter died, she died in the spring of '92, and then in the January of '93 my half-brother died. Two weeks to the day later my brother died. And then I think it got into February one week to the day later my father died. So I lost four people very close to me in that period of time, so I kind went off the deep end. They were good to me about that. They

gave me time off work and sent me, told me who to go to get some counseling and that. So you know that was a bitter time of my life.

Ward: I'm very sorry to hear. So what are your views on the strike?

Gabriel: The strike, ok. July of '95. First of all, I didn't think it was going to last that long. I figured we'd be out for a couple of weeks, there'd be negotiations and we'd go back to work you know in a relatively short period of time. I remember Hugh Grantum, who just died a couple months ago I guess, a photographer. I remember him saying, "well, I hope it would last long enough so I can go visit my mom." His mom lived out on the east coast or something and he wanted to go out and see his mom and get back before the strike was over. Actually, I remember thinking, well, I hope—I had just moved—it was funny because (sigh) I moved a week before the strike hit. I had taken time off and I remember my wife had just finished, a year before my wife had just finished school. She was an occupational therapist. She had gone to work and we'd saved her entire salary for that year so we could—we had lived in this, you know, small crappy house we bought for like thirty-five hundred dollars over in the Brightmore neighborhood. We slept on the living room floor for the first six months. Our Christmas present was that we were able to move into our bedroom. We were fixing up the place. We lived there for several years. Then we were, we can buy a nice house now. I remember we were searching for a mortgage and I had gone to the, there was a union mortgage company, and I was like hey I'm looking for a house. They told me, "oh, we'll give you a three hundred thousand dollar mortgage and other companies were talking like that kind of thing and we were like no (both laugh). We want to buy a house that if one of us loses our job we can still pay the mortgage on this place. So we ended up buying in Detroit in the Brightmoor neighborhood, which is near Woodward and Eight Mile and a week after we moved I went on strike. And I never went back

to that job again. So it was very odd, but it was like we did the smart thing. We didn't lose our house. We still live in that same house right now eighteen years later. So, you know, at first I didn't take it real seriously. My father had been on strike working at Ford for all those years. So I had seen him on strike before and the strikes never lasted that (emphasized) long. So with that as the model I thought ok, the'll be negotiations and then we'll go back. They refused to negotiate, the other side refused to negotiate. So it was like I started taking it more seriously a few weeks later (cleared throat). But, you know what, I didn't want to be regimented. I didn't want to say you have to be here at this time and picket for this amount of time and that sort of thing. Which, now that I know, really you do have to do that. I'd show up and picket down at the Free Press sometimes. And then they'd have pickets out at the printing plant and I'd go, show up and picket there. I didn't really realize what an effort you have to put into being on strike. It's a very serious thing. It's like, people's families broke up. People got sick and died. People had to move their families across the country to take other jobs. It's not something you do on a lark. It's not something—you said ok, were going to strike. It's a very serious endeavor. It's something I've learned since then that I really respect people who make that decision to do that. Because it's a life changing experience. I never went back and worked at the *Free Press* again you know.

Ward: Uh-huh.

Gabriel: So that was it. Anyways, I used to go down and picket at the Free Press. Kim Herron, the guy I was telling you about earlier, the guy that was my good friend, he used to do regularly picket there. I remember we were out there picketing one night, we used to picket in the evenings together sometimes, and the story came back to me through some people who were inside the building. They had—there was some scab and they had told him to go out and do

something and he was like, he looked out the window and me and Kim were out there. He was like, "oh, I can't go out there there's these two big scary black guys out there picketing." Somebody else looked out there and just laughed, "that's Larry and Kim (both laugh)." Just like, what you scared of them for? That was one thing that happened. Another thing that happened actually out near my house is, you know they were because there were boycotts that came on the newspaper. A lot of people were canceling their subscriptions and they started just delivering the paper for free to everybody's porch. They had these scabs driving around the neighborhood in cars dropping off newspapers. So I remember I had been a block over from my street and I saw these guys doing it. I told them, I live on the next street over, this is my address do not put one of those scab papers on my front porch. So then I go home and a little while later they come through and they're throwing them and they throw a paper on my porch. I'm watching. So I run out there and the guy sees me and they just close the car and drove off. I found out later that the guy had gotten scared. He had come in from Oregon or something he went back to Oregon after I chased him (both laugh). But you know, that's kind of what was happening. Ask me some specific questions. Other questions?

Ward: How did you feel about the company?

Gabriel: You know what, I really began to hate the company after a while because not only did they refuse to negotiate, they were committing unfair labor practices. The thing is when you commit an unfair labor practice you get taken to court and then all the politics of, well, we're going to postpone this hearing and that hearing. So they were guilty. They were found guilty but it took so long before they were found guilty it really didn't matter. We're talking about a year later, two years later, when this stuff was coming out. For instance, one time out at the Sterling Heights plant there was a big picket out at the Sterling Heights plant and their trucks

caught on fire. They accused the union of burning their trucks. There was, you know, it was like, television cameras love fire and the TV cameras were out there and they're taking picture of the fire and they're showing it on TV and the union burnt the companies trucks and blah blah blah, they're saying on the news. Then after the Macomb prosecutor did an investigation several months later and he said as far as we can tell these guys burnt their own trucks, which they can do but they should get a fire permit if they're going to do that. That was like this[showing about an inch with fingers] much news on page twenty-five. It was like as much as anybody knew, the strikers burnt the trucks, when after the investigation it was found that the company burned their own trucks, and then blamed it on the strikers. It was that kind of thing. They're considering, considering, they're committing unfair labor practices and then you know blaming it on the union. That's kind of how I learned that's how they do it. They were out to break the union at that point. They weren't out to negotiate a contract. They'd come to the negotiating table and then walk out and it would be months before you could get them back to the negotiating table. It was terrible. It taught me some lessons about that sort of thing. Then later on I went to work at the UAW. I was editing *Solidarity Magazine* and I knew exactly what was going on then. Whenever people went on strike, you talk to these workers who've been on strike for like eighteen months and they don't know which way to turn. I could understand that. I could relate to that because I knew how that worked.

Ward: And that helped a lot when in 2002, when you started at *Solidarity*?

Gabriel: Yeah, that's probably, probably one of the reasons I was hired, because I'd been a newspaper striker. Although I was hired by Steve Yokich when he was president of the UAW. I think that the thing that I told him that really made the difference was when my father worked at Ford, he worked in the paint shop and he got a permanent nasal infection from the fumes in the

paint shop. He sued Ford Motor Company for a medical retirement. He didn't sue them for like damages and all that, but hey, I want my medical retirement. He wasn't there during the years of the great contracts. The great contracts for big three workers didn't really start until the late seventies, and you know, he never made more than about five dollars an hour at working at the Ford [River] Rouge plant. Anyways, he was suing Ford Motor Company and he got Ken Cockrel Sr., who was a big civil rights lawyer in Detroit in the sixties. He's the father of our city council member Ken Cockrel Jr. And Ken Cockrel told him that he was going to have to hold out for three years to win this suit. That he would win, but he's going to be able to hold out for three years. Kind of the thing they would do, is the Ford Motor Company would get like, the trial hearing postponed and then they'd come back and they'd offer my father a job in another part of the plant. It's like hey, you've got a family, you're paying a mortgage and you know your money's not coming in and they offer you another job, there's a temptation to do it. But my father didn't. And actually part of the reason that he didn't have to go back was because he went back to playing music full time and he was able to bring money in from that. Also, I came home from school, I was at Michigan State, I came home from school and got a job and I was turning my money over to the family for about four or five months there. So (clears throat), when I told Steve Yokich that story he got up and was like, "ok." I was hired at that point. So it was kind of like I had a background of kind of knowing how labor confrontations worked out. The strikes not over in two weeks or four weeks necessarily and that's the other thing that I really learned about from the newspaper strike. If you're going to go on strike you have to stop the other side from making money. Ok, you've got to stop production. If they can go on making money with scab workers, keep what, they have no reason to negotiate with you. The other thing I learned was you can't, in the era of corporations where your home office is somewhere else, you can't

shame them. Maybe with this, if this was a family owned company who lived locally, maybe they could be shamed into negotiating with you. You can't shame a faceless, a nameless, faceless corporation. They're out to make money, that's their goal. We got some people to drop, you know, their subscriptions. We were working on an advertiser boycott, and I'm sure they lost some advertising. But they were able to keep coming out every day. I know some of the people on my street, my neighbors, I saw deliveries coming to their houses. So if you can't stop production, you're in a bad way when it comes to striking. They knew they were going to force a strike, they were ready for the strike. They had their scabs lined up. Actually, when I look back on it, for about the last year before the strike happened, they were hiring a lot of people from right to work states. People who were not particularly union oriented, so that when the strike hit they were like, "hey I'm back to work I ain't going for this strike stuff." They were new in town. They weren't settled in. They had to get their paychecks and they were not particularly favorable of unions. So that that's something else that happened. Now at the same time, I think the union itself wasn't real ready for a strike. At the time, I think the union was kind of like me—yeah they're going to negotiate it and we'll be back you know in a few weeks or you know a month or something. The union did not, and certainly me individually, had not educated me as to what this was all about and what it was going to take. That's kind of funny because I was one of the few people who would show up at the union meetings, like two years before the strike. The union would have some meeting or something and I'd go to a meeting, there'd be like three four people there. But I was not full-on ready and knowing what to expect when that happened. Then the other thing that happened was that there was like, after the strike happened, there were huge union meetings and people in the union were fighting with each other over what the tactics should be, what we should be doing. That very much turned me off. I was

like, "hey, we're supposed to be together in solidarity here." And these guys are fighting with each other at the meeting, taking up all the time fighting with each other instead of us being able to talk through, you know.

Ward: So you think that there should have been more consistency in training, letting people know how the strike was going to take place and more making sure that there's understanding with everybody?

Gabriel: Yeah, I think that the union could done that. Now there were people in there who'd been political and labor activists and that, but you know they had different ideas about what you should do and how you should do this. Part of it was this thing of (pause), you don't want to do anything illegal because then you lose face in the community and they can charge you with things then for doing things that were illegal. But if you can't stop production, which you have to do something illegal to stop production, and that was, part of that was the big fight. People were fighting about, we should be radical and it's like no we have to follow the rules. In the end we pretty much followed the rules, but that was a bone of contention. You know what, like I said, if they could just keep on making money and going to the bank, they have no impetus to negotiate with you.

Ward: Yeah, what was it like on the picket line?

Gabriel: The pickets—according to—picketing, like out in front of the Free Press (pause) at night was pretty uneventful. There weren't a lot of people there but we're just picketing to maintain the picket there. Then there would be like focus pickets where it's like ok we're going to get a lot of people out here. That was actually, that was really great because you're with your co-workers and there was solidarity. If you were feeling down, that there was problems, like

your co-workers could pick you up. And you know, it was great. You'd hear the speeches that reminded you that you were in the right. So those were really great. Like I say, when they have the big pickets, it was very much a sense of solidarity and sometimes of celebration. Now there was also pickets down at the river front plant. Those were the most confrontational pickets because that was the actual attempt to stop production—if they couldn't get the papers out from the printing plant. So what would happen would be like, the police would let us block it for a while and then they'd clear us. I remember being down there and the police were on horses and they rode on the picket line with horses. Man, those horses are scary. You're standing there, you're holding ground and those horses were just walking on you, man it's just like broke up the picket line. Now there was other times when we'd be blocking the gate and they'd be coming out of plant on trucks and they'd be acting like they were going to run you over. I knew the trucks weren't going to run me over. I could stand there and I knew they were going to stop, or if they ran me over they were going to be in the wrong. Those horses, man, those horses don't know who the hell you are and I was more scared of the horses. I remember standing out there in front of the gate when the trucks would be coming up and the union leaders who weren't there. There was, I think there was three different unions involved, there was the newspaper workers and then there was the Teamsters, who were like the truck drivers and that, and then there was the clerical people. Then there was like the AFL-CIO guys who were like we're dealing with groups of you. So one of the big honchos, they would, they'd be out there and we'd be in front of the trucks and we'd block them a few times and then they'd say ok we made our point. Let's get out of the way because it was actually illegal to do that and they'd let us do that for a while then the union leaders would say ok let them out. I was like, hey I'm going to stand here, you know. But it was illegal and it was like no you're going to get arrested and then the

union's going to get cited for RICO or racketeering or something. So we had to let them do that, but that happened out at the river front plant too. It was pretty wild sometimes, you know. Like I said those horses were scary man (unintelligible). Horses are big, man. You don't realize that until your standing in front of one and they're looking like they're getting ready to step on you, it's like, man, they used big horses.

Ward: Yeah, sorry I lost my spot. So did you enjoy the support that you got from the other unions?

Gabriel: Yeah, I mean like when you're out there it's always great to know that somebody else supports you. The UAW, the UAW came out supported us. It makes me, when I see other people on strike or picketing, I give them whatever support I can give to them at that time. Sometimes it's just blow your horn in support; sometimes it's like hey I got a couple of hours I'll come out here and stand on the picket line with you for a couple of hours. There was people who would just show up at the picket line and they'd have like a basket full of like hot dogs on buns or bologna sandwiches or something. And it's like, hey, I just wanted to bring you guys some food to eat your out here on the picket line. So that was that was very cool, that was always great when you were out there picketing and people start beeping in support of you, cause hey, you feel alone (both laugh). When you're out there in front of the Free Press and they got their security guards and their bringing the scabs in on trucks and with their security guards around them and you're like. I actually had a security—Here's another thing that happened. They, the *Free Press,* during the months coming up to the strike, they were having construction on one of their floors. And it's like, oh, we're fixing this place up don't go in there. And as it turned out they were building barracks for their security guards to live in the building when they forced the strike. One of the security guard guys came out there and he was talking to us on the

picket line one day. He was like, yeah, you guys are getting screwed they're just fucking you over. And it's like, so well why are you helping them? Well, I'm from out of state and I need a job (both laugh). But they built a barracks for their security inside the Free Press building. These guys could live there and protect the people that they were bringing in on trucks and that sort of thing. So that's, that was pretty weird. And then you know you see people that used to be working with who were your friends who they're going into work and you're like sitting there. Just like, hey, I'm not making any money. Well, strike pay was not that much, but it's like it was tough being out on strike.

Ward: So, I understand that you have very strong feelings towards those strikers who crossed the picket lines?

Gabriel: Well, you know what, I did, but and some people (pause), it's a little more than others. You know what, it's been eighteen years since the strike. I carried that in my heart for a long time, well over a decade and in my life I've just been trying to let go of the negative things. Just for my own growth as a person and to be able to live my life and live a good life. I've been letting go of some of that stuff. There are people that I've just, you know what, they're not worth me putting energy into hating them. I read the *Free Press* now, mostly online. I don't like to give them my money. And I won't get a subscription to them because I don't want my name on their list (clears throat). But (sighs) you know what, I'm not like going to be overly friendly to people who crossed the picket line. I don't carry that in my heart anymore. And I don't carry that—I used to, I'd see a newspaper box and (growls, angry noise); it's like it's not good for you to walk around like that and carry that negativity in your heart. So I have, and (clears throat) most of the people who work there now weren't around then. They're people who you know five years ago got a job at the *Free Press*. So what do they have to do with the strike? It was

like the strike was long over when they came. Actually there's a guy who's an editor there right now, my daughter, I got a daughter who was born in ninety-seven, she's fifteen now, my daughter and his daughter go to school together and there like best friends. I mean, it's like, I don't want to tell my daughter you can't go over to their house because of something that happened years before you were born. The other deal is there's few enough friends available anyway. When I was a little kid there was like forty kids on the block, we'd have mega kick the can and tag, and all that, games. Now, it's like, hey, there's like maybe five kids on the block and is one of them your age (laughs). So my daughter plays with his kid. I talk to him. We're not super-friendly, it's just like, ok our kids play together. But there's nothing antagonistic going on between us. So, yeah, it's been eighteen years and I know that there's other people who still will carry a very hard heart towards people. It's hard when somebody who was maybe close to you, used to go out and have lunch together, and then you're on the opposite sides of the picket line. I'm trying to think. I don't really, I don't hang out with any of them now. If I see somebody out on the street, if I'm out at Noel Night and somebody walks by I'll say hi to them, that kind of thing. There's this one guy, Luther Keith, he was working at the *News* at the time and I don't think he was in the union. I think he was in management. But, I don't even know how much, how true it is, is that he got a striker fired (clearing throat). He was crossing the picket line to go to work and somebody from the picket line yelled something at him that he said was a threat and so he reported them and said I feel, I feel threatened for my safety and the striker was fired. I don't know that is particularly all true but that's story that was circulating around. So (clearing throat), Luther Keith is all, Keith is also a musician. He's a blues musician. He's got a band and he calls himself Luther "Badman" Keith. Well, so I felt animosity towards Luther for a long time. Well Luther runs this nonprofit now called Arise Detroit and he's

working with community organizations to help you know save Detroit. He's been doing that for a long time. So, I've decided, you know what, if Luther has done something bad he has made up for it and I deal with Luther. When Arise Detroit has these big Detroit community organization celebrations and all that, I'll do something for Arise Detroit.

Ward: Uh-huh.

Gabriel: It's something that I've been coming around with the last few years of my life. It's just that, you know what, I'm sixty years old. I want to have peace in my life. I want to exude goodness. I don't want to carry that negativity around with me. I don't do that anymore. I did used to do it though.

Ward: It seems like you're doing good with that. Do you have any, do you recall any memories from the communities reaction to the strikers?

Gabriel: Yeah. You know, it's like I said, I had moved to my new house right before the strike. So I'm on strike. I got a sign out in front of my house. One day very early on one of my new neighbors came and knocked on the door and handed me twenty dollars, and was like you're on strike and I know it you can use this money. Another one of my neighbors down the street who I didn't know came down and knocked on my door and handed me some money. So I thought that was pretty amazing. I'm a new neighbor. They don't know me. They just know that I'm a striker and they know I need some support and they did. That was very amazing.

Ward: Was all the community response positive?

Gabriel: You know, I don't recall much in the way of negative response, except for this guy. I had just moved so then I was selling my old house and this guy who bought houses cheap and

rented them out, he owned like, I don't know, sixty houses in the neighborhood. I was talking to him and I was like hey I'm a newspaper striker and he went off on it. "Its communism and blah blah blah. I used to have a machine shop and those guys organized and I closed the place down cause I wasn't going to have no union in my place." But in general, I talked to people. I'd go into stores and I'd say to them, "hey your selling the scab paper here," and some of them would stop selling the paper. Some of them wouldn't, but they wouldn't give me negative. They would just, you know, some of my customers want the paper and I'm providing them a service. By and large the community help—there was a lot of religious leaders who came out in support of us. I would say, actually, the community support as far as coming out and saying, you know, we support the union and that the newspapers should come to the bargaining table was all on our side (clearing throat), certainly, at least 90 percent on our side. And the only company that I can remember that kept doing business with them was Focus Hope. Focus Hope is a community organization and they do a lot of training of workers to go into like industrial work and Focus Hope kept, they had some type of thing that they did with the paper every year and they kept doing it. I was very surprised and disappointed with Focus Hope when they did that.

Ward: Yeah.

Gabriel: But by and large the community was very much in support of us. I would say that the days of the community (clearing throat) support doesn't matter to these corporations that are—have shareholders who aren't in your community and they're somewhere else and they just want to make their money.

Ward: Yep. They do. The *Detroit Metro Times* hired you in January of 1997. Tell me some something about that?

Gabriel: Well I'd already worked for them twice before.

Ward: Yeah.

Gabriel: And actually (clearing throat), excuse me, while I was at the *Free Press,* probably about two years, in they offered me the job as editor of *Metro Times* and I accepted it. I went to quit at the *Free Press* and they said wait a minute, what's it going to take to keep you here. And so I ended up staying at the *Free Press* because I got a huge raise. I told them I don't want to be an editor anymore. I just want to be a writer. So they made me a writer. So that's why I ended up staying at the *Free Press* at that point and time. However, what happened was, the fall of '96 my wife got pregnant (both laugh) and I was working, what was I doing then? I can't even remember where I was working then or what I was doing. I had, I think I was, I was just doing some light contracting work. So my wife got pregnant and it was like, I need a regular paycheck. There was an opening at the *Metro Times* for managing editor so I went back as managing editor again. And then about three months after that I became editor. And so that's kind of why I went back to the *Metro Times*. I've worked for the *Metro Times* on four different occasions in my life. So I've got a good relationship with them. And when I left there, like back in 1987, it was just kind of like, yeah, we know we can't pay you much money. You got this other good opportunity, fine. Shake your hand and pat you on the back and maintain that relationship. So I went back in '97 and it was like going back home for me. I was able to hire a couple of people who were strikers. Kim Herron, when I became editor I hired him as my managing editor. I was able to hire Emily Everett, who was a copy editor at the *Free Press.* I hired her as a copy editor at the *Metro Times*. So I was able to help a couple of strikers when I went there. And, hey, for me it was good. As a matter of fact by the time the strike was over and the *Free Press* called me

back, I was like, hey, I'm editor at the *Detroit Metro Times* and I'm making good money I don't need to come back.

Ward: What was it like to cover your fellow workers during the strike?

Gabriel: It was just normal. Those were the people I was dealing. I personally didn't cover them. I edit. I had other people covering them, because, I mean, just in terms of journalistic integrity, it's, what it is, conflict of interest kind of thing. Also, I kind of had to walk a, I had to stay on the path there because my boss he was not a slam dunk union guy. He was definitely a progressive guy. But he had broken a union organization, an organizing drive at the *Metro Times* before I ever worked there in the first place, but in like 1983 or 84, there was people organizing and he fired them all.

Ward: Really?

Gabriel: I didn't know this at the time when I first went to the *Metro Times.* But I learned that later on. I also was not—the only union I was in at that time was the musicians union. The musicians union doesn't do a lot of labor organizing and that. It's not a hard core labor organization so to speak (clearing throat). The musicians union, they do a lot of work for like for instance the symphony organization. But I chose to freelance. A freelance musician out there playing a gig once in a while, there's not a lot they can do for you. They're not negotiating contracts with employers. They do have rates and if I get a job I write out the contract and I take it into the union myself, but every time you get a job they're out there negotiating the contract for you. Not the way you do at big established places. But, so anyways, my consciousness, my labor consciousness developed later on. In 1985 I was just back from Mexico I need a job. I don't know that I'm going to be working at the *Metro Times* twenty-five years later.

Ward: Yeah.

Gabriel: That kind of thing, sort of like if you start dating somebody, you don't know you're going to be married. Thirty-five years later you're still together and you got kids all that sort of thing. So, anyways, you it was strange but I felt like I came at it with more sympathy towards the union than the previous editor had been. So I thought that they were—and this is something— they were objective and I was not objective. I had a point of view, so that was the difference. I had to become more objective as the editor of the *Metro Times*.

Ward: Just one last question: Do you think that the newspaper strike has affected your life today?

Gabriel: Oh yeah. I mean, had the newspaper not gone on strike I could well still be working there now. One of the things that the newspaper does—that the daily's do well—when they decide that they're going to promote a personality they do that and you know you see hey there's that person's picture on the card on the front of the newspaper box; there's that persons picture up on a billboard, there's that person in a commercial they're promoting them and nobody else I've worked for does that. So I feel like, I probably, had I stayed at the *Free Press,* and at the time I was talking to my bosses about becoming a columnist, I probably would be much more of a celebrity in Detroit because they promote you that way. At the *Metro Times* they're not as sophisticated that way and they had not quite gotten to the point where, well, were cross promoting with, we're going to do this thing with the radio station every week and they're going to interview the editor of the *Metro Times* about what's in the *Metro Times,* or anything like that. We were just first starting to get to the internet stuff at that point in time. I feel like I would probably still be working there. I'd probably be making (pause) a fair wage, although now that I

think about it I know like there they've been downsizing and downsizing and people don't make the kind of money they used to make unless you're Mitch Albom. I feel like—it's kind of like you have that financial space in your life where for a year and a half I didn't make money, you never recover from that financially. That's just money that you didn't make and interest that you didn't get or investments that you weren't able to make or whatever. That you just, that's just gone. It made my life different in terms of people who I would talk to and not talk to. I made a lot of friends due to being on strike. People that I probably hadn't talked to that much, but because we were co-strikers, you know, we did. Like I said, I know people who like you know got divorced or had to move their families out of town. There are points in your life where, when looking back, you know this was a life changing event and this was a life changing event. I had gotten more into writing and then I had to get back into editing. I'm a writer. I love writing. That's why I'm a freelancer now, because I don't like editing. I don't like having to be in charge of other people in terms of, oh, you didn't do this right, that kind of thing. I feel like I do what I do, my stuff, well. I don't want to worry about whether you and your wife had an argument and you got to work late. I don't want to have to coordinate the writer and the photographer or the artist and dealing with the lawyers and all that. I'm a writer. I want to write. That's what I do. That's what I do well. That's what I take joy in doing. So, I could've probably continued writing there and I had to get into doing the editing thing again.

Ward: Thank you, you're a very interesting man and I really appreciate the interview.

Gabriel: Thank you.