**Heather Booth**
**May 17, 2006**
**Interviewed in her home by Stacey Heath**

[Note: Interviewer questions are inaudible.]

Heather Booth. My full name is Heather Tobis Booth, T-o-b-i-s.

Just 9to5, or 925 the—

This really would be 9to5. Before I say how I got connected to them I just want to reaffirm what probably everyone is saying whom you talked to. They were such a breath of fresh air. They were so bold and interesting and fun and insightful and energetic and skillful and dedicated. And the energy and spirit around them was just really moving.

I don't remember the exact year when I first heard about them. But in 1972, I was part of an effort in Chicago, that had grown both about the women's movement, and had really burst forth in the most visible way in 1970. In 1970, there was the women's strike, that said, "don't iron while the strike is hot". That laid the groundwork. And out of that there was a great deal of women's activity. There also was some increasing activity as young organizers and people who had been in the student and women's movement [came] into the labor movement. In Chicago, we had a little group in talking about what you could do to combine the women's movement insights and the labor movement. My husband was working for a union at the time, and Day Creamer, who's now Day Piercy, was working with the YWCA which became a headquarters for women's activity in Chicago. We had [lots of] discussions about, should there be an effort of a women's group that's going to focus on labor, or a labor group that's going to focus on women, and how should we organize women as workers —there were just lots of discussions. And we heard then that there were other people having similar discussions in similar places. In Chicago, it lead to Women Employed, which still exists [and now Anne Ladkey's the head of it]. Day Creamer had been the first head of it. In San Francisco, it led to CWE. I'm trying to remember what the initials stood for, I think... Committee for Women in Employment—but I'm not sure what it stood for. And then we had heard there was this group in Boston. In Boston and Cleveland? It was then I heard about 9to5. In 1973, with money I got from a back pay suit, from organizing clerical employees, I started a training center called Midwest Academy. And that still exists. Jackie Kendall is now the director and I'm the president of that.

The first class was focused on training women organizers, with an emphasis on women organizers who were organizing women, because I had gone to the IAF, which amongst many other things provided good training, but they also did say they didn't think women who could be organizers. I was the third woman who went through their training session. We set up our own training session, and the first focus was on training women organizers. Actually, there's a picture of the first class upstairs, if you want to see it.

Ellen Cassedy came to the class, who had been part of the founding group with Karen Nussbaum, of 9to5. And [it just grew]. That's my first contact.

Karen Nussbaum in particular is just so effective. She's so smart and clear thinking and strategic in her thinking. She's such a good organizer. She's always organizing, and figuring out how to engage other people. She makes such a dramatic impression on people, so appealing to them and attracting them into this kind of work and into really whatever ideas she might have had. And her commitment was so clear and inspiring. We were thinking about how would you build this kind of group in one city, how could you build it in many cities, how could you have a network of these working women's groups.

And Ellen was a complete delight. She not only was clearly a good organizer and smart and very dedicated, she was so honest and unpretentious and cared so deeply about everything—I was going to say about women and office workers, but really cared so deeply about building this new element of progressive movement as well as building a specific organization. Ellen is in this picture in the first class. She remembers that the class, we taught things like, how you dress [chuckles], how to make a positive impression on women who are office workers, when many of us came out of a movement culture where we might be wearing work boots and dungarees. And you're working with women who are in suits at work, in a work environment, [in fact] more professional environment. But I remember her from the past, throwing herself into everything, into every exercise, totally engaged, asking just such honest and earnest questions, and having such incredibly warm and human, humane insights about how people really react.

It left a **very** big impression. I loved Ellen. I love Ellen still (laughs). She had just such a fire in her soul for this. And so spirited. And still really has the same decent caring deep commitment to values. And Karen is also... I just saw Karen last night, ironically. And in this pretty extraordinary collection of people last night, I thought no one was more effective in their comments, and no one was more strategic in their comments than she was, in what she said. And I think that was true then and its true now. So the people made a very big impression. Jackie Ruff, Janet Seasce...I think Janet Selcer may have been in the [picture]. If you want to wait one minute, I can get you the picture. (gets the picture)...

I was running a training center with trained organizers, in the skills of direct action organizing. We trained several of their staff, several of their leadership, and spoke at some of their conferences. And that is really the formal relationship. There was also a social relationship. I thought they were great, and wanted to know about it and learn from it, what they were doing, we could train other people in what worked for them. And the theory of the direct action organizing training, and there's a book called Organizing for Social Change. It's a manual. [ ] In one way or another, they've incorporated it into the work that they did. They made it their own and made it more appropriate for however they wanted to proceed. But the basic idea is based on three key principles. One was that we organize in order to actually win, not just to talk about abstractions like justice and equality. But you actually have to improve people's lives, with concrete improvements

that they can see how it impacts them. The second is that you have people organizing so that they get a sense of their own power. And the third is that you change the relations of power and build institutions that hold those in power more accountable. Changing the relations of power so it was building a popular organization that sustained your own power so you were there to fight another day, as opposed to just one tactic and another but something sustained over time. And also creating institutions if you could that held those in power...[because of] these corporations more accountable. reporting back on progress that had been made. So those were the three basic principles, and the kind of training taught strategy, particularly. How do you conceive of a strategy for building sustained, issue-oriented campaigns, organized with popular involvement, as opposed to either just one tactic, oh, let's send letters to the mayor, or let's circle the corporation or have a picket line—what's a sustained strategy to actually win, so you have to do a power analysis of what power they've got, what power you've got, what power you'd need in order to win, what tactics you'd need, what resources you'd need, and how do you combine that across time. And then the training also included movement building, history, history of the labor movement, history of the women's movement, history of the civil rights movement, so the skills, strategy and the context of our work, economic [and political context].

They probably were on a track to do something like this on their own, independently, and we provided certain types of training that supported them, and that they could then take that approach and incorporate it into their work. And we were all developing this whole conception of building people-based issue campaigns that build organizations for power. That was a relatively new idea. You had previously the 50s, in which there was a cut-off from many kinds of organization, partly because of McCarthyism, and...ac quiescence. Then you had the 60s, with first civil rights and then antiwar and then student and then other movements developing. At the beginning of the 70s there was a start-up of the Nader-style consumer organizations, the explosion of the women's movement. In a number of places there was an attempt to take these new insights of building locally in places, an ongoing organization that would be driven by issues of concern for people and sustained over time. It wasn't quite the same as the explosive movements of the 60s, but it focused on [and] also different constituencies and this was on working women, and it was learning new skills all developing at the same time.

What also happened in this period of time was that we were doing in Midwest Academy was trying to stimulate and develop a new model of locally-based citizen organizations that worked on multiple issues at once. And by 1977, 1978, there were five of those state-wide citizen organizations, that they also were doing training for. And Karen's husband, Ira Arlook, was heading up a group working on plant closings and other economic issues in Cleveland. And it was becoming the infrastructure for an Ohio statewide multi-issue citizen's organization. And the Academy increasingly became a training center that trained these organizations]. So while we had done some of the background training with 9to5, we also were doing training with citizen organizations that Ira was working [with]. And enough so, so that Ira and Karen—so that we had become friends. But there was a physical distance. I went up to Cleveland to their

wedding party, I think. We were friends who shared common vision over a distance. I had gotten approached to go to a conference in Denmark on the American movements, and I recommended that they go. So both couples went to this conference...one of the first perks from being in this work at all, other than the wonder of the work. And then Ira became the head of a citizen's organization called Citizen Action. Then three years later, I became co-director with him, and left the Academy, and day-to-day training.

District 9to5 was growing. It was very exciting that a union actually embraced and was funding and was organizing working women with a women's consciousness and an activist spirit, and a vitality that combined the best of the movements of the 60s, the citizen organizing of the 70s, with the trade union infrastructure, which in many unions had been divorced from the movements of the 60s, partly because of this whole war mentality that had occurred, and so it as very exciting that Karen would have been hired and promoted. They were in the Service Employees.

I've merged in my mind what 9to5 the association did, and what the District did. So I'm not sure which one it was. I also wasn't in a place where they were active (Chicago), so I didn't see it first hand. But I'd get their newsletter, I'd hear about it, celebrate their victories. One of the things they were terrific at was creating media actions, that created visibility and gave an impression of strength far greater than what anyone else was doing. We really were all learning from it. They had like the worst—I don't know if it was the rat of the year, or like the worst employer of the year, and they gave out awards on that. So it made fun of things that...and gave them a human face, so you'd have particular stories, that I think was quite effective. They also highlighted the stories of specific clerical workers, and so you understood what the lives of these real people are like, so it wasn't an abstraction. They also were organizing insurance workers in Boston. It may have been someone else, but what happened was their vitality and drive was then infectious in the most positive way.

They then did come to Chicago. And there was a period of turf conflict, both with Women Employed, 925,, and with AFSCME, which was the union that my husband was with. It was a very sad period, because all the things which we said we should be working for together ended up in jurisdictional conflict. Having friends and relationships on all sides of those conflicts was difficult.

END OF SIDE A.
START OF SIDE B.

I don't know how big 925 ever became, in terms of numbers. My impression is that the number may have not been that big. But the legacy is really the breath of fresh air, into the labor movement, and the connecting of the women's movement with working women's concerns.

As we see now, there's such a decline in the labor movement, with organization decline, de-industrialization, the rise of the service sector, the need to consider women going into unions and labor movement that was so heavily men-dominated in leadership

and staff positions and methods and styles of organizing. 925 helped to bring a woman's voice, a women's perspective, an energetic approach—a more youthful approach, too, in different kinds of professions. This was quite a contribution. So I think the legacy within the labor movement is extraordinary. It took something that was important but somewhat ossified, and just breathed a new life into it. Karen was also such an articulate and effective leader, she would demand a voice and representation for women

Within the women's movement, connecting working women's issues, as working women, as well as trade union to the women's movement, is one of the most important connections that could have been made. I believe one of the critical limitations of the women's movement was that it was not adequately connected on issues of economic concern to working women. There was a critical fight over this issue in the women's movement in 19...I'm going to say 78. It was the Philadelphia convention. And Mary Jean Collins, who I mentioned was in that class, was running for president against Karen DeCrow. And the issue was, would you have a fight around a national campaign against Sears Roebuck, with both concern for women as customers—married women couldn't get a credit card in their own name for Sears Roebuck in those days—and as employees —women could only sell things like candy and notions. And you got paid as a percentage—you got a percentage bonus based on what you sold. But if you sold a refrigerator, the bonus was that much bigger. And only men sold those. This fight of would NOW have an economic campaign, or more cultural campaigns on cultural lifestyle issues, but were very important also, but I believe it was a decisive defeated opportunity. It wasn't even a missed opportunity. It was a conscious campaign to prevent it, in part by Sears Roebuck, within NOW. That missed opportunity. Karen understood from the start. She understood there's a way to break through what became class bias within the women's movement, class orientation, and though the women's movement ideas eventually spread throughout the society, I think there was an opportunity to make the kind of connection within the women's movement that Karen was making from the start with the conception of 9to5, to bring labor into the women's movement and the women into the labor movement. That's also part of the legacy, and we would all be richer if the impact had been even greater. I think the insight was right.

So on the impact in the labor movement, I think that actually the legacy did catch on, again well beyond 925. This combined with other changes in the workforce with the rise of the more women based service industries, and women being the most effective target for organizing in more places. And if you're going to really go after women you have to have women organizers. You have to have women in leadership. And even as those changes are slower than they should be, at least they're developing.

In the women's movement, I think there was an impact of those kinds of ideas. As I said, I think we would be far stronger had the engagement even been richer. It's only a positive reflection on 9to5. We need more of it.

And then for the impact on organizing in general, the energy and strategic drive and direction, the realization that media events matter, that what people see and hear in the press matters as much as who you've organized on the ground; that people are

involved in direct action and taking action, as opposed to just a public interest lawyer solving your problems. Which is also an important thing. They created a different style of organizing. So I think that's left a long legacy.

And then there's also the impact on the particular issues. Just recently there is a new effort called Moms Rising (with a new book out by Joan Blades and Kristi Finkbinder, called The Motherhood Manifesto). And a large portion of it is about the lives of working mothers, and again, it's just one example of a continuation of the same concerns and perspective that 9to5 brought back in the 70s, still being novel today.

I'm grateful that 9to5 was created. I'm so respectful of what they've done, and feel there's a continuing impact. They had incredibly talented organizers that were part of it. Long may it wave.

Review and edit the transcription. I'd be glad to give permission on it. I appreciate the chance to review and edit it, both for accuracy and to insure that it's as supportive of 9to5 as I certainly want to be and hope I always have been. I think I was on the advisory committee of 9to5, the association.

Day. D-a-y. C-r-e-a-m-e-r. She then got divorced and her name is now Day Piercy. P-i-e-r-c-y. Ladkey. L-a-d-k-e-y, I think, who's the head of Women Employed. K-e-n-d-a-l-l, who's the director of Midwest Academy. It's S-e-a-c-e (not sure of the spelling—maybe Seasce?).

Among other things, they were conscious about archiving and keeping a record of what they did, not only in their newsletter, but they also wrote a book about the stories of women office workers. I'm not sure if it's the same book called, "They Should Have Served that Cup of Coffee." I may be confusing two books. But Ellen Cassedy wrote a book about the stories of women office workers in 925. I mentioned that there were so many really talented organizers, one I was thinking of was Sam Luciano, who then became an SEIU organizer. She now is a teacher of women's studies.

END of INTERVIEW.