Andrea Gundersen
Interviewed by Ann Froines
Chicago, IL., September 27, 2006

I'm taping Andrea Gundersen in a telephone interview on September 27, 2006. Andrea, do I have your permission to record this telephone interview?

Yes, you do.

Ok. Let me start out by asking you how you first entered 925? What was your first encounter with the organization?

I knew Anne Hill from a political organization that we were involved in, in the mid to late '70s, called the New American Movement. And we were both active in this organization. And I had been working in Chicago with a organizing project of the OPEIU, Office and Professional Employees Union, as an inside plant, working in clerical positions to try to assess whether certain workplaces were good candidates to be organized by a union—that is, the women clerical workers. So this was kind of a parallel project to 925. And Anne approached me, and asked me if I would be interested in working for 9to5, the Working Women's organization, as a staff person. I think that was in 1979. And I really jumped at the chance. Because I knew Anne, and was very in awe of the work that the working women's organizations were doing to develop organizing efforts among women office workers all over the country, at that point. I just really jumped at the chance to be part of that.

So I was interviewed for a position at Cleveland Women Working, and I moved from Chicago to Cleveland to work on that staff. That was the beginning for me.

And what were some of the organizing activities you did with Cleveland Women Working in those early days?

I worked for them for two years, as an organizer on staff, and the organization was really in its heyday, in '79 to '81. Helen Williams was the director, and she's just an incredible organizer. Just great instincts. And Anne too was on the staff. The one campaign that I remember really well, as I looked over your questions, or I remember better than anything else, is, we did a campaign on age discrimination in the workplace. And the way that Cleveland Women Working typically organized their campaigns—it was almost like a template—was to write like a white paper. Release a report that was both a combination of hard research on the facts about age discrimination, and then interviews with women office workers. Their experiences were woven into the report. We were documenting the horrors of how older women are treated in the white collar workforce. Then the report was released with a lot of fanfare, and there were actions created in the downtown area to get press, that involve women office workers in bringing a message to the—at that point, a lot of our focus was on getting the EEOC, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, to do its job better. So we would present it to them, and then

continue to put pressure on them, and against particular employers that we felt had the most...what would you say...problems.

Discrimination?

Violations.

Were they letting older women workers go, was that what was happening?

They were letting them go, they were paying them less, they were passing them over for advancement, in very blatant ways. One of the classic things that Cleveland Women Working did was send organizers out every lunchtime to have lunch with an office worker. And we would just have our brown bag lunches together, and we would interview them, talk to them. And I just remember what a profound experience it was for me to hear these individual stories of these women who just were so tough and so kind of quietly angry about what had happened to them. No one had ever cared. No one had ever asked. And so to be asked was a powerful experience for them. And to be told was a powerful experience for me.

And then as a young organizer myself, to take those stories and help to create this document, which then kind of took on a life of its own, and became part of this larger campaign that involved the women in the next phase of making it public and then putting pressure on the EEOC. It was just a wonderful way to organize, and a wonderful thing to be involved in for me.

Had you participated even before NAM in any women's organizations or actions? Did you consider yourself a feminist, for example, when you got involved in these organizing activities?

I did. I was young, I was in my early 20s, or I guess mid-20s by that point. And I think I really developed my feminist politics in college, in the early '70s, kind of on the heels of the early women's movement and the antiwar movement. But I had been politically active as far back as the McGovern campaign, and in the early environmental movement. And then in college, doing antiwar kinds of organizing. It really wasn't until I got out of college and was in NAM that I became active in reproductive rights organizing, but then also this effort to organize women office workers with OPEIU. So that really just got my juices flowing, and made me apply my kind of fervor to right the wrongs I felt were true for women everywhere. The inequalities that I was aware of [inaudible].

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

No, not really. My parents were both professionals, were not union members, I didn't know many people who were in unions. So it was new to me. The idea of unions was really something...although I grew up in a very liberal family, so in general I grew up with the idea that people deserve to be treated equally, no matter what their race or class

background. So that's more where my impulses came from than a working class exposure, union exposure.

So then when did you become an organizer for District 925?

I worked for Cleveland Women Working for a couple of years, and was missing Chicago tremendously.

Was that where you grew up?

No, where I lived after college. And I just really wanted to be back in Chicago. And I kind of was watching from the wings as—because the national 925 offices were in Cleveland, and Anne had moved over to the national offices. And there was this flurry of activity to create this union way of organizing through SEIU, and I was just *thrilled* with it. As luck would have it, they decided to open a District 925 office in Chicago. And so I interviewed. And returned to Chicago in 1981 to open the District 925 office in Chicago.

That must have been quite an experience. What was that like, just starting from scratch?

Oh, my God. (Laughs.) It was amazing and so exciting. I just can't believe I did it. I was 29 years old, I think, and really no exposure at that point to the labor movement. And here I was working out of the offices of Eugene [Moats], who was the head honcho for all of SEIU in Chicago.

How do you spell that name, please?

Eugene M-o-a-t-s. He just...with the benefit of hindsight, his whole operation was trusteed about eight years ago, I think, by the International. And he was booted from office on the evidence that he was...just had tremendous graft and corruption, throughout all the locals in Chicago. And we all knew that. It was pretty obvious to us. But he also had all the power, all those years.

He was personally benefiting?

He was personally benefiting, his children were all employed. And I don't even know all the charges, but there was a grassroots movement within his main union local, which was all janitors, to get him out of office. And this was some—the International came in literally with guns drawn, to take—to trustee his local.

Literally, with guns—?

Literally, with guns drawn. There was a suspicious death during the process, there was just—it was really hairy. And I tell you that just to help flesh out what it was like to step into this situation where I had a little office in his Local; his Local was enormous. He probably had thirty business agents. It was like this empire.

And very male-dominated presumably?

Very male-dominated. Very old world way of organizing and thinking about the labor movement, with a touch of all this corruption thrown in. It was a snake pit, essentially. It was really a very strange and weird and uncomfortable place to work in many ways. On the other hand he knew that the International was supporting this effort to build women's. . . to organize women office workers, so he did give us certain resources, and—

Would you say he threw any obstacles in your way, or just...was fairly supportive, or...

He was fairly supportive. He was certainly not openly hostile at all. He was there. He wasn't going out of his way to help. And he did at times command his old boy network on our behalf, sometimes in ways that were not that comfortable for all of us, but he certainly did...he was there. There was just this whole other layer of people who were business agents who were given the job as favors, and there was just so much politics at the level that I was at, that he presided over. So it wasn't like that we directly had influence from him of this corruption, but it was all around us. He had, for instance, an excellent law firm, and the lawyers helped us tremendously and were great allies. So, there were ways that those resources were useful. It was a huge city, though, and I felt really quite daunted by the task of trying to figure out how to proceed, and just grateful that Anne and Bonnie—well, Bonnie and Cheryl started coming into town on a fairly regular basis, and Jackie Ruff, and Karen, so everyone—of those four anyway. all those five [women] really helped me—provided a tremendous amount of outside support, so that the District could have a presence that was more than just me.

Did you strategize together about where to begin organizing and things like that?

Yes. We did. One interesting story that gives you a sense of what I was stepping into is that I was out at a one of these annual dinners for a local organization. The director of Women Employed, which was the Chicago working women's organization, unaffiliated with 925, came up to me, and was very friendly. I wasn't sure what she would think, because we were kind of competition coming to town, but she was friendly and chatty and invited me to come over to her office sometime in the next week or two, to see her and to spend more time talking. So I arrived, having discussed kind of what to say and not say, with my supervisors in District 925, and not sure what to expect, and was basically taken into a room and reamed, by her and by [Jay Creamer] and one of her colleagues, for the SEIU's position on the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois. Because the SEIU had not supported the Equal Rights Amendment.

Was the battle still going on at that point?

It had just finished, because—it had not passed in Illinois.

Right, that was the crucial state, I remember that.

Yes, that's right. And they were *furious*. And they basically decided I was the person, new to town, that they could really, just, you know, *shred*. It was delightful. And I knew that this was happening, but I hadn't been part of it. But it was an example of how SEIU was a difficult organization sometimes to be part of.

Anyway, so with those kinds of encounters, I slowly tried to start thinking about where to organize, and actually ended up in my years there, I was realizing, just as happened in many other places, finally really only finding enough of a critical mass in public sector organizing. So I really spent my time there, in the beginning, organizing some small units that were employees of the City of Waukegan, and employees of a school district down state, and kind of cut my teeth on doing that organizing, and negotiating those first contracts, learning how to do those skills, starting to do grievances—it was really my first experience with that.

Were they mainly women office workers in those units?

Yes.

And when did you decide to take on a section of the Cook County government?

There was a state law that got passed, and I'm not going to remember the details of this, but basically the governor gave that to the labor movement, a state law which paved the way for the organizing of county employees. SEIU and AFSCME basically went at these new units that got created, of office workers, at the same time. And suddenly I went from having a staff of like three, to having as many sometimes as thirteen people being organizers, and I was the director, with really the national district running the campaigns, but me as the director on the ground. And that was so exciting, to have basically, suddenly, go from being the backwaters, to being this really central organizing drive, and having the full resources of the International at our disposal. We had organizing campaigns in I think seven units, if my memory serves me correctly. It was going up against AFSCME and—

So you were essentially competing with them?

Yes.

In the same elections?

Yes. We were—

What was that like?

Oh (laughs), it was crazy, and there's such a long history of this kind of competition between the two unions. It was vicious at times…I'll never forget sitting on the filing day, on the day of filing for these units, I can't remember what office you filed at, it

opened at 9 so I was there at 8:30 with all these petitions to file, and we were expecting the press. And Paul Booth, who was the director of organizing for AFSCME in Chicago, arrived like half an hour later. We proceeded to sit in an uncomfortable silence across from each other, and finally neither one of us could stand it any more, and we started just kind of batting back and forth the various reasons why the other union shouldn't be doing what they were doing, even daring to try to compete for these locals. And also trying to wait so that we could get press, because the press hadn't shown. We waited and waited and waited, and finally Paul got tired of sitting there, and left. And within 20 minutes I think the press showed up. So I felt very much like I had won the day, because we got all the press coverage for filing these petitions.

It would have been really, I guess, up to the International's central offices to sort of negotiate, for the two unions to share—

Right.

-not to compete, to cooperate, and that wasn't happening?

Uh huh.

So there wasn't much you could do on the ground, I suppose.

Exactly. So, we just both hired legions of organizers, and they went after the same groups of people, and these people got fed fried chicken lunches every day, and fortune cookies with fortunes about how they were going to vote for District 925 inserted in them

(Laughs.) That's a new tactic. I hadn't heard about that one yet.

Yeah, that was a great one. And we had boxes of fortune cookies around the office. We were constantly snacking on fortune cookies. And leftover fried chicken. And I was actually pregnant with my daughter at the time, so I've told her many times that somewhere in her is probably a special love of fortune cookies and fried chicken, because that's practically all that got fed to her in utero during that campaign. (Laughs.)

So did you have some victories in those Cook County campaigns?

We did. We won...oh, God, I know the recorder of deeds and the treasurer...at least two, maybe three units. And I think AFSCME won about the same number. It wasn't a fabulous victory, but it was more or less respectable. And then I went on to negotiate the...did I? Yeah, I negotiated the first contract for the recorder of deeds and the treasurer, I think. So that was basically the last thing I did, when I was working for the District: negotiate those contracts with the Cook County Board, which was also just a fascinating experience, to work at that level.

Those are probably mostly political appointees, in some sense, right?

Yeah, and George Dunn was the president of the County Board, who was kind of like Gene Moats: a very commanding member of the old boy network. So all of his minions of appointees were in charge of negotiating this contract.

Just a quick anecdote on my part: I managed to get a summer job, through my precinct captain in Chicago on the west side, when I was in college. And it's sort of amazing, because my parents were just two voters who voted Democrat. And that was it. We had no other influence, money...but the system was unbelievable in the way it kind of gave out things to people who would vote the way they wanted them to vote.

Yeah, it is that—the machine, right there, at its grassroots.

And it was a state job. It was with the Illinois Department of Registration downtown.

IDPR.

Yeah. Horrible job. I did telephone reception, but anyway, I needed the money. Was there anything distinctively different about, say, District 925's approach to union organizing compared to other unions, that you encountered?

Well I've never worked for another union, so...but I...I think the thing that...I was thinking about these questions after I saw them written ... There are two things. One is just tremendous creativity, tremendous ability to cut below the surface and engage, with humor and heart, women. And to really speak to the lives of women office workers who were a new sector. I think labor unions in general, their approaches and their methods, are so shaped by industrial unionism and by male ways of working and by male ways of being in relationships and in the world. District 925 really found kind of a new paradigm that I think much more accurately reflected the experience of women as workers. And that was evidenced in the tactics they used—just fortune cookies as an example, or the way that 9to5 in Cleveland, as I described, used women's experiences woven with fact to present cases. I mean, the other thing, the other piece of it is, I think, besides the tactics, is that they also were very much more explicit and strategic about nurturing women's leadership, both their staff, people like me,and, more importantly, workers themselves. Which I think is absolutely a key contribution of 925 to organizing: the way they organize. It's a hallmark of [_____], that kind of support.

Since you were organizing in the public sector primarily—

Yeah.

Or exclusively, I guess the workers' jobs weren't really at risk for participating—

Right.

Right, but did you ever face that, where you felt—got a response from workers that their jobs were at risk if they participated, and what did that feel like? I guess I'm asking a question about the kind resistance you might have encountered from the employees themselves, too?

I don't remember. I definitely remember people being nervous about doing this. It took courage. It took...and people oftentimes had bravado about it. But underneath was . . . it wasn't only that they would lose their jobs, but that they might face other and more subtle means of discrimination or negative favoritism.

Right, right, the anger of their supervisors, for example.

Yes, exactly, the anger of their supervisors. Yeah, and not getting the vacation time they requested. Just more subtle things. I think people definitely were aware of that. I was thinking, too, about what a difference there is in this realm that I was aware of between blacks and whites, that—certainly not across the board, but it just felt like it was a very frequent experience that blacks didn't care. But they just really believed in some instinctive way, that it would be better to have a union than not. Whereas white employees often felt more the possibility that in the end, the equation wouldn't equal out. That the kind of problems they might encounter because they were associated with the union wouldn't necessarily benefit them. They wouldn't be benefiting from the union as much as they would suffer as a result of having done the organizing.

Did that translate into the black or African American employees getting involved in the organizing committees, and—

Absolutely.

--really participating?

Yes. It did.

In the leadership and so forth.

Uh huh. I mean, there were whites involved also, and African Americans were most often in key positions and were more quick to come to the organizing, and see the benefits and be able to articulate it to their fellow employees.

Ok. Do you have any observations about the roles and experiences of men as members or organizers of District 925? Was that ever an issue for you?

....you make me think about the men that were on my staff.

Hired as organizers, you mean.

Hired as organizers, yes. And also I have a picture in my mind of one of the men, who worked in one of those units, treasurer or recorder of deeds, who was a leader, and...I think it took a special kind of man, to play those roles, particularly on the staff. And we found them. We found really wonderful men. Men who were willing to be supervised by women, and to take a message out there that was primarily about women, because they believed in organizing workers, and saw that this workforce was in need. So...other than that, I don't have any opinions.

Well, that's a good answer. Was there any particular exhilarating struggle that you remember, during your years of organizing with District 925? I mean, you've mentioned filing for the elections, but are there other moments and tactics that you can remember that seem to stick in your memory as exhilarating ones?

I remember winning my first contract. That was *incredibly* thrilling. That was in the city of Waukegan—well, it may not have been the first. But it was the second. One of the early ones, and the city of Waukegan, I also remember that the first meeting of the bargaining teams, the two teams--the employers and the employees. It was after, obviously, weeks and weeks of preparing by the union negotiating committee, during which I had heard so much from them about what didn't work in their workforce, and I had just taken it in . . . We'd crafted these demands, and all of a sudden, out of my mouth, as we opened these negotiations, came this *speech* to the employer side of the table, about what these women endured in their workplace. And it was essentially using their words and their experiences and distilling them down to their essence, and saying them to the employer, as a way to demand—to make our demands. And they were *awed.* I mean, they really were stopped in their tracks. And the committee *loved* it. And they didn't know it was coming—*I* didn't know it was coming—but it was such a wonderful moment of being able to tell the truth to the bosses, face to face, and to represent those workers in that way. It felt really wonderful for me.

That's a great story. You just opened with it, and didn't even know you were going to do it.

Yeah, just opened with it, yeah, as a way to introduce our demands. So that was great.

Do you have any other thoughts about your own development as a leader in this organization?

Oh, my God...I think the one thing that I haven't said clearly enough, and this can practically make me *cry*, because I feel it so deeply, is how much *I* was nourished as a leader by my leaders, and to be part of this team of women who were working across the country. Who were so incredibly good at what they did. I think particularly about Cheryl and Bonnie and Karen and Jackie Ruff and Anne. Those five people really inspired me, to do my best, and to work *incredibly* hard, to do that job. And I couldn't have possibly developed in the way I did without them as my teachers. And they not only taught me but they supported me emotionally. And they came to the city—they came here. And I went there. We would gather, often, during the year. We would come together as a team

of people. And then other people started joining too, more people started being at my level. And to be part of that was just worth it—made it worth it. How hard it was.

Were these executive board meetings or were these more informal meetings?

They were informal. It was more just staff meetings.

Oh, right, right. You were not a union officially, you were—

Right. So that's kind of what it was like from the top down. But then from the bottom up, how much...being—just marinating in the lives of these women workers all the time, powerfully shaped and inspired me to keep going. Because it was really hard work. And daunting and very discouraging. Just the politics of that time. And it has only gotten worse, you certainly know what I mean, trying to organize workers. Just tough work. So those two influences were great.

And the other thing I would say about my leadership is I had never supervised other people before, either. And I stepped into this directorship where my staff kind of grew and then shrank several times, but I was in charge of a fairly large staff at the time. And it was a new job for me, and I found it just *extremely* challenging. And I think I ended up doing fine with it, but if I were to ever do it again, I would first of all get a lot more training in how to actually be in that role. Because I was naïve, and idealistic and not trained for the role of being a supervisor. And it was one of those jobs that—I mean Karen and Ann and Bonnie and Cheryl were immensely helpful in that realm too, but all of us were—we were union organizers! We weren't . . . administrators, at all. So that was also very challenging.

So you were all sort of inventing that as you went along.

Exactly, exactly. But I learned so many skills, about how to work with the media, and how to strategize about huge campaigns, how to negotiate contracts, how to present budget material to the county board—just a myriad of skills which I treasure.

You alluded earlier to the demands of this job when you're also a mother, a parent. How did you manage that? Did you find the union organizing compatible with young children?

No. I didn't. I left, actually, when my daughter was less than a year. I think I was ready to go, and that her birth kind of was a reflection of the ways I was changing and wanting something else in my life. I was pretty burned out on organizing at that point. And discouraged by the state of SEIU in Chicago, discouraged by the state of the labor movement in general, and the state of organizing in particular. And I needed to do something else. And I found that it kind of expressed itself as feeling like it was impossible to do the job and be a mom. Now other people have gone on and done it. So it's not impossible. But for me it was.

Do you think the aims of 925, District 925, were realized, in any way?

Um...were the aims realized....

It's a slightly different question than what is its legacy was. But in terms of its kind of goals...

Well, obviously there are a lot of ways in which they weren't realized. There were big dreams. And I think that really we were...kind of humbled by reality, into the truth that those aims were probably unrealistic.

Specifically what aim are you thinking of here?

I'm thinking of the aim of the District growing and growing and growing, and representing more and more women office workers, and really being able to organize that sector in a meaningful and impactful . . . in a way that would continue to grow.

Including presumably the private sector, right?

Including the private sector. And that didn't happen. But I think that the aim of providing the labor movement with . . . I don't know how much of this was explicit in the beginning, but looking back, I can certainly see and want to acknowledge how much did get contributed, even if it wasn't originally what we set out to do. It was to really develop the skills of a whole generation of women in both staff positions and regular workers, in leadership positions in the union, and also to, as we've talked about, develop a women's way of organizing and began to bring women into a labor movement that was so male-dominated. Kind of a first wave, or a second or a third or whatever, depending on how you're counting—that was an important contribution, in its own way.

Do you think 925 had an impact on SEIU, in particular, and how would you describe it?

Oh, so mixed. But yeah, I mean, SEIU kind of has this—I perceive it as this union that has a kind of a modern feel to it, that it's perceived out there, and this may be just me, but my sense is that it's perceived as really reflecting how people live and work in this century, as opposed to the last century, like the UAW and Steelworkers. That doesn't come from nowhere. It comes from the kind of people that SEIU organizes, and also from how they organize them. And 925 contributed to that immensely. And I know that from the way that organizers talked to each other, and tactics and ways of organizing that get disseminated through word of mouth and the organizing culture that 925 has had a big impact at that level.

Right. I'm going to take a tiny break here while I flip the tape.

END of SIDE A
START of SIDE B

I guess these really are the questions about what you did after you left District 925. What kind of work did you move on to then?

I worked part-time as the co-director of a small women's organization, doing grant writing and basic administrative work. So I just worked part-time. And then I had another baby, and [since] also was the director of another small not-for-profit that did health policy research and organizing. And then after that took a big right turn and became a massage therapist. And for the last 17 years have been in private practice doing work that's evolved from massage therapy to body-mind integration. So I'm working with people both verbally and through the body. Mostly to heal trauma—I work with torture survivors and people with a lot of traumatic history. So that's where I took it all. And I always tried to find a way to keep my politics involved in my work, mostly through working with torture survivors, and lately with the VA—veterans at the VA hospital.

What kind of organizations does working with torture survivors put you in touch with?

There are actually 27 torture treatment centers in this country, in most major cities, which provide aid and assistance for refugees who are seeking political asylum because of their treatment and their own political beliefs--as a result of their own political beliefs. And those organizations are also, obviously, doing a lot to expose the fact of torture around the world, which is made only more powerful by a lack of exposure.

Yeah, it's certainly something that has come forward in a way that I only knew through stories about the Vietnam War. But now, it's much better publicized as we focus more on human rights.

Did you need to train as a psychologist or a social worker to move in this direction?

That's a good question. I actually just finished all the course work for a Master's degree in counseling. Because I finally just gave in to the need to have that degree. But I mostly did my training kind of on the job.

I see a kind of parallel between your evolution as an organizer, and your evolution in this work, where you just got in there and did it.

That's right.

And that's really interesting, I think. And I suppose, though, to work at the VA, places like that, they're looking for those credentials?

Oh, yeah, exactly.

And anything that sort of vaguely relates to health care, it changes your pay rate, I'm sure, to have those degrees.

Right. Exactly.

What do you find particularly rewarding and satisfying about this work? Because you've been doing it quite a long time now. And it seems like the kind of work that could also lead to burnout.

That's so true. Several things. One is that I can set my own pace. I think built in to—for me, in order to do this work well, you have to take care of yourself, you have to take time, to be healthy and on aware of your own internal imbalances, both emotional and physical. So I really appreciate that pacing a lot. But I have control over it. I found that working 60, 70 hours a week just...it was *brutal.* And it just didn't work for me. So that pacing really helps. And also I think for me it was a big move from wanting to work within organizations, and then choosing to work one-on-one. I just really decided that where I could make my best contribution was in trying to affect how individual people face the world. And organizations are so challenged by people within them who don't know how to function well in relation to other people in the organization. And I just got so frustrated by that—just all the dysfunction in organizations. And I thought the best thing I can do is go and try to have some impact on some dysfunction, person by person. So... but I still get drawn back to organizations. And I think may be ready to start working in one again. (Laughs.)

Have you been sort of active in any other kinds of what we might call political organizations, over the years, while you've been doing this more personal kind of healing work?

Well, I was pretty active for a while in Chicago politics during the Harold Washington campaign. I was very active. And I've been...a little active in moveon.org. What else. Mostly, I've been on the board of a local torture treatment center. I ended up going to Guatemala twice with [Covler? Name of center?. The first trip was to accompany an American nun who was tortured by the Guatemalan military, in her attempt to raise the issue in Guatemala and actually bring charges against the Guatemalan military, which was a very brave thing to do, for all of us, really, to go back to Guatemala in 1994, just on the tail end of the civil war. And then I went again a couple years ago, to provide some training to a torture treatment center that is starting up in the highlands of Guatemala. It is a very brave thing to do even today. So that's really been my political expression-- to help them stay afloat and to work with torture survivors in other countries.

I see. It sounds like really admirable and difficult work to be doing.

Oh, thanks.

Do you have anything else that you would like to say about your experiences with District 925 that I may not have asked about, or any final words?

The one thing that I wish I'd said—this isn't directly about 925, but it's about my own background, and that is; my grandmother and my mother were both activists in the

women's movement, in the earlier women's movement. My grandmother was very active in the Girl Scouts, and also in the League of Women Voters. And was in charge of the League's 50th anniversary year attempt to raise 11 million dollars from corporate sponsors for their work. And she did that. And then my mother and several of my aunts were also, a lot because of my grandmother, very active in the League of Women Voters. So that was my legacy. And I think it really contributed to—not explicitly, but implicitly-- my desire to be involved in the women's movement. My mom talks a lot about how frustrated my grandmother was that the women's movement came along too late for her. And that she couldn't be involved in it. But she really was involved in the precursors to it.

What part of the country did she live in? Where was the League's national—was she working out of the national office?

No, she was working—well, she was from—my family is from LaCrosse, Wisconsin.

I was wondering, with your last name, if you were...Scandinavian immigrants and in that part of the country.

That's right. That's exactly right. But she did—she was on the national board of the League. So she traveled a lot to—I don't know, probably Washington D.C. And went back and forth, and all over the country, trying to get corporate donations for this campaign in 1970. So I want to say that, put that in, too.

That's an important connection. I'm sure you got this implicit message that you *can* make a difference if you got out and participated in things and organized.

Yes! Exactly. And, there's also a parallel between her frustration at how little she had done, and my acknowledgement that what she did made possible what I did. And 925 is similar, I think—District 925, similar in that all of us wished we could have done more, and yet, we don't know the ways we're laying the groundwork for the next upsurge of women's organizing.

Did you ever have a chance to express this to your grandmother?

No....I didn't. No, it's just really much clearer to me now. I have expressed it to my mother.

Well, get those oral histories.

Yeah. (Laughs.)

I used to get my students to try to do family histories and oral histories, because I had so many interesting students at UMass Boston. and they were so busy in their relatively young lives—20s, 30s, some of them 40s—to even think about what it was that their mothers and grandmothers knew and had done. But I was—because I

also had felt that generational impact in my life, I was trying to encourage them to think about it and do something about it before it was too late.

Yup, very good point.

That's a very good conclusion, I think, Andrea, for your interview. I think this was a wonderful interview and I appreciate your taking the time to do it on the telephone.

Oh, thank you for asking. I remembered more than I thought I would.

Yeah, well, we're not asking it for dates and names, but just feelings and analysis. So that kind of thing stays with you.

Yeah. They do.

And eventually this'll all be published? Or—

The main impact or the main result will be the donation of all this material to Wayne State University, the Walter Reuther Center for Labor and Urban Affairs. We are uncertain about publication.

END of INTERVIEW