

Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Sunkett, Brooks

Interviewer: Debbie Goldman

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Brooks Sunkett Interview – January 12, 2024

Debbie [00:00:00] This is January 12th. It's Debbie Goldman interviewing Brooks Sunkett in Washington, DC. Brooks, we start at the beginning. Tell us when you were born and where and what the community was like.

Brooks [00:00:12] I was born in a working-class community in New Jersey in 1948.

Debbie [00:00:19] What town?

Brooks [00:00:21] It's Camden, New Jersey. At that time, Camden was a union town, had a lot of major industries there. New York Shipyard, General Electric, RCA, Campbell Soups and all those industries were unionized and of course, a host of other type industries.

Debbie [00:00:43] And what did your family do?

Brooks [00:00:45] My father worked for RCA. He worked sort of as a janitor, and he became a wireman. It was in a shop that built TVs, etc. and he was part of IUE [International Union of Electrical Workers, which merged with CWA in 2000]. That was his union, so I was always familiar with that at a very young age. And he always proudly wore his badge around.

Debbie [00:01:10] Was he active in the union?

Brooks [00:01:12] I don't think so. I think he went to the union meetings, but he wasn't like a shop steward or anything.

Debbie [00:01:17] And your mom?

Brooks [00:01:47] She was a nurse. She was an activist, very much so, up until well into her late 70s. She was a nurse, but generally she was a stay-at-home mother and she always believed in the community, going out, helping people. I remember at a very early age, there was a fire not too far from us. She got us all to visit the family that was burned out and see what we could do to help them out. She was that type of person. She was very aggressive in that way. She was the type of person, didn't mind taking on City Hall. I remember once there was a traffic light. People were getting killed at a certain intersection, and she had gone to ask them for a traffic light, and they hadn't gotten it in months and months. So she got together, organized the community, and had a protest and went out and stopped traffic. It made news all over the place, but they got their traffic light. She was always active in those type of activities. Community. She was a community activist.

Debbie [00:02:57] And that was an influence on you?

Brooks [00:02:59] I'm sorry?

Debbie [00:03:00] That was an influence on you?

Brooks [00:03:01] Absolutely. Absolutely. And she always told us, "Don't be afraid, and stand up for what is right." And not only you should do it, you have an obligation to do it.

Debbie [00:03:13] How many siblings?

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Brooks [00:03:15] There were nine of us. And I'm second eldest. So everybody was younger than me.

Debbie [00:03:22] So that was quite a challenge to raise nine kids.

Brooks [00:03:26] Well, she did it very well. She was very systematic.

Debbie [00:03:30] What kind of community in Camden did you live in?

Brooks [00:03:33] I was born in a house, and it was a mixed community. Like I said, it was a working-class community. Camden, like most of the cities in the northeast, started going down. Industry started moving out. We moved out to the suburbs probably when I was about in the seventh or eighth grade, which is Lawnside, New Jersey.

Debbie [00:03:55] Say it again.

Brooks [00:03:56] Lawnside, New Jersey. It's not much. I mean, most people don't know about it. What's unique about the town -- it was founded by runaway slaves. It's an all-black community. It's the only all-black community north of the Mason-Dixon line.

Debbie [00:04:10] Can you spell it?

Brooks [00:04:13] L-A-W-N, Lawn, Side, S-I-D-E.

Debbie [00:04:16] Wow. What an interesting background.

Brooks [00:04:18] It's right outside of Haddonfield, Cherry Hill, New Jersey. It's about ten miles from Camden.

Debbie [00:04:24] When you were in Camden, you said it was a mixed community. Mixed what way?

Brooks [00:04:28] Yeah, well, it started out being a mixed community. Eventually changed.

Debbie [00:04:32] But mixed, meaning white-black?

Brooks [00:04:33] Meaning white and black. Right. I remember that. So we moved out of that community back when I was about seven, eight years-old.

Debbie [00:04:42] And you moved to a different neighborhood?

Brooks [00:04:46] Then we moved to another neighborhood, which was basically the projects. Which was not far away. That was because they were going to decimate the neighborhood, because they were building a highway through.

Debbie [00:04:56] And when you moved to the projects, you were in public housing?

Brooks [00:04:58] Yes.

Debbie [00:04:59] Tell me about what it was like to live in -- were these high-rise or low-rise?

Brooks [00:05:03] These were low-rise. They were like garden apartments, almost like condos, everybody's own private entrance etc., and back door, little small backyard.

Debbie [00:05:13] It helped make it a little more affordable to raise nine kids.

Brooks [00:05:17] Right. Well, you know, there weren't nine of us at that point. I think there were maybe about five of us, six of us.

Debbie [00:05:22] And you went to elementary school where?

Brooks [00:05:24] In Camden. The first years of my life was in Camden. Ironically, one of the heads of AT&T probably about ten years ago, his name was Gordon. I don't know if you would remember him --

Debbie [00:05:38] Bruce Gordon?

Brooks [00:05:41] No, it was a guy.

Debbie [00:05:42] Yeah. Bruce.

Brooks [00:05:43] That was his name?

Debbie [00:05:44] I think. Who became a top executive at C&P. And then he went to the Urban League, I think.

Brooks [00:05:52] Right. His father was my grammar school principal.

Debbie [00:05:56] Really?

Brooks [00:05:56] Yeah. I didn't know him, but there were people in my community that knew him. I found that out because he was being honored in South Jersey and I was told about it. And I went to it and introduced myself. We talked a little bit.

Debbie [00:06:11] How nice.

Brooks [00:06:12] Yeah.

Debbie [00:06:13] Was your family active in the church?

Brooks [00:06:22] Very active.

Debbie [00:06:23] Which church? And talk about it.

Brooks [00:06:24] My father, my mother's father was a minister, which I never met because he died before I was born. There's a church called Bethel AME Church in Camden -- a lot of our family

helped found that church. We were all members of that until we moved to Lawnside. I can go to church every Sunday and see half my family up in it, right? And that church, far as I know, is still there. It's a pretty old church. Later other CWA leaders were involved in the church. The husband of Carolyn Wade [local 1040 president] became a minister in the church many years later. The family of Calvin Mooney [president of a welfare local and later CWA staff] was also active in this church.

Debbie [00:06:54] Was that formative in you shaping your values?

Brooks [00:06:58] I think so.

Debbie [00:06:59] In what way?

Brooks [00:07:00] Well, it talked about doing right and wrong. It talked about supporting people. It's talking about working with people, trying to get along with people. So, I think so. And my mother was always in church. We went every Sunday regardless.

Debbie [00:07:18] Are you still active in the church?

Brooks [00:07:21] I am not. No, I am not.

Debbie [00:07:24] Did your family come up from the south?

Brooks [00:07:26] No. Well, [*unclear*] my father did. And it was years and years before I thought about it, but I was actually, from his side of the family, first generation born in the north. My mother's family was always -- has been here for generations.

Debbie [00:07:42] Where'd your father's family come from?

Brooks [00:07:44] Virginia.

Debbie [00:07:45] Okay.

Brooks [00:07:46] And their name Sunkett comes from Virginia. I didn't actually go there. Well, I don't have recollection of going to it as an adult. So I did go to Milford, Virginia.

Debbie [00:07:59] And Sunkett is from Virginia -- What did you mean?

Brooks [00:08:02] I'm sorry.

Debbie [00:08:03] When you said Sunkett is from Virginia, what did you mean?

Brooks [00:08:06] Well, I just meant the family name came through Virginia.

Debbie [00:08:09] Okay.

Brooks [00:08:10] Stuff you don't give much thought to when you were young. You know, you just kind of go along with stuff. But anyway, when I got older, I kind of researched it. There's not another Sunkett the United States that's not related to us.

Debbie [00:08:24] Very interesting.

Brooks [00:08:25] I did a little bit of background research on it.

Debbie [00:08:28] Now you're in Lawnside. Where did you go to high school?

Brooks [00:08:31] High school -- Haddon Heights High.

Debbie [00:08:33] And you said it was an all-black community?

Brooks [00:08:38] Yeah. The high school was just the opposite, because our community was too small. We didn't have our own high school. There were three communities in the area and the three communities made up the high school. That was Barrington, Lawnside, and Haddon Heights. The high school was physically in Haddon Heights. Haddon Heights, or both those other communities, particularly Haddon Heights, was all white upper middle-class community. That's where we went. The people that went to the Lawnside, probably there was no more than 100 students at Haddon Heights. The school probably had about 800, 900 students. So we were truly minorities there.

Debbie [00:09:25] And what was that like for you?

Brooks [00:09:26] Oh, it was different. I mean, it wasn't -- I grew up in Camden, so part of my life was in a mixed community, other part was totally all black. And then you go to all black community to finish up my grammar years, and then you go back into, and I didn't realize how few blacks that were in school to actually look back on it because after a while you just adjust. But when I go to yearbooks, you go from page to page. You don't see any black people, right? [*Laughs*] I said, well, I didn't realize there were so few of us there. We had issues. There were skirmishes and differences because you had upper middle-class white community. You had a white working-class community. And then you had white, black working-class and poor all going to the same school. So you can see it could be some conflicts.

Debbie [00:10:24] Were there activities where you all came together or was it pretty segregated socially?

Brooks [00:10:29] No, there were some activities. Yeah, absolutely. We're always coming together around sports, except for basketball. We weren't allowed to play basketball.

Debbie [00:10:40] What?

Brooks [00:10:40] I don't know. I know that sounds weird. [*Laughs*] So there were no black people on the basketball team.

Debbie [00:10:48] You weren't allowed?

Brooks [00:10:49] Well, we assumed we weren't allowed because no black person would ever -- could ever make the team.

Debbie [00:10:53] Wow.

Brooks [00:10:54] That happened after I left. That changed. I think it had a lot to do with the teacher.

Debbie [00:10:58] Were you involved in sports?

Brooks [00:10:59] There were some -- I'm sorry?

Debbie [00:11:01] Finish what you were saying.

Brooks [00:11:03] No, I did go for the team. I think you were going to ask me. I did go out for the team. No, I didn't make it. That was one of my passions. Basketball.

Debbie [00:11:10] Were you in any sports?

Brooks [00:11:12] Yeah, I played football, and I ran track.

Debbie [00:11:15] What position in football?

Brooks [00:11:18] I was a cornerback and a halfback.

Debbie [00:11:21] What did you run in track?

Brooks [00:11:25] Not too fast. [*Laughs*]

Debbie [00:11:27] Not too fast.

Brooks [00:11:30] No. Well, you know, I mean, the name Sunkett had a big name in that area because my cousins were all great athletes. That's probably a little off subject, but my cousin went to a high school in Camden, that during that time period, which was 1959, 1960, I would say even when I look back on that, that's probably one of the greatest high school basketball teams in the history of sports in the United States. How do I say that? They won 50 straight games. And so the whole tenor while he was in high school, [*unclear*] they never lost a game.

Debbie [00:12:07] This was Camden High School?

Brooks [00:12:08] This is Camden High School.

Debbie [00:12:09] Wow.

Brooks [00:12:10] Which unfortunately does not exist. They tore it down. But anyway.

Debbie [00:12:17] Well, let me ask you, besides your big family of nine siblings, were you -- It sounds like your extended family was in the area as well, was that --

Brooks [00:12:27] Yeah, well, my father's brother, who also had nine kids and because the name Sunkett was so odd -- and he was also a detective. He was always in the newspaper locking somebody up and blah, blah, blah. His son was really big time because he was in high school

basketball team that was undefeated for four years, three years, sort of. Whenever you mention your name's Sunkett -- I mean, I can go to court, and they say, "Oh, you're Sunkett." And case dismissed. [Laughs] So I kind of lived that kind of a life, too. That's how I got to run track. That's a long way of saying I ran track. The guy [from] track comes through. He says, "Well, you're a Sunkett. So obviously, you're a good athlete." And I said, "Well, I don't know." So he goes, "Why don't you come out for the track team?" I said, "I don't know any Sunkett that ran track." He goes, "Well, I'm sure you can do it." And that's how I got on the track team. So I did it for a year.

Debbie [00:13:20] So during this time, the civil rights movement is particularly active, both --

Brooks [00:13:25] It is.

Debbie [00:13:26] -- in the south and the north.

Brooks [00:13:27] Right.

Debbie [00:13:27] What do you remember of your involvement, your family's involvement?

Brooks [00:13:32] In my school, particularly because of the makeup, you had conflicts. The high school administration created a civil rights committee to address the conflicts and I was picked to be on that committee. Actually, I got together with -- I had a great -- I had some great teachers. We were supposed to put together a program around civil rights or whatever we wanted to. My partner and I got together and we decided we would do something on Martin Luther King. Rather than just talk about it, we figured we'd demonstrate it. Passive non-resistance. We're going to class and we decided that we'd walk in. We wouldn't say a word to the teacher. We'd sit on his desk and wouldn't move. He freaked out because he didn't know what was going on. [Laughs] We just sat there, and he started saying, "Okay, guys." Gives you a full report, and we wouldn't even look at it. We turned away, and then he got upset, and he sent somebody to go get the principal. And at that point, we got up and said, "This is part of our presentation." Then we started doing the presentation. He loved it so much that he took us out of our class, and we had to do all his classes the rest of the day. [Laughs] That was the way to demonstrate what it was like. He says, "I couldn't actually do anything. They didn't say anything. They didn't do anything. And this is how it works. This is what they do in the south."

Debbie [00:14:52] Were there demonstrations in Camden and was your family involved?

Brooks [00:14:57] Well, I did --

Debbie [00:14:58] Or your church?

[00:14:58] I mean, yeah. I got involved in some demonstrations later on when I got back from Vietnam. One of the things I had problems with is that my school had no black teachers and we wanted black teachers, you know, some. We wanted some black history courses. So we demonstrated at the school, and at this point I was about 19 years old. I was about 20 because I'd gotten [unclear] service. And I came home. This is one of the things that -- because I still had brothers and sisters still in high school. And they talked about it. I said, "Well, it's time for us to do something, so we should demonstrate." So we did. I think we won. We got some black courses introduced. Eventually -- it took about a year or so -- they eventually got a black teacher. That

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school is totally different today. But going back a little bit, I actually did the same thing in the military, which was pretty risky. I went to Vietnam. First of all, I was opposed to the war.

Debbie [00:16:00] Now we're jumping. You finished --

Brooks [00:16:02] I'm jumping. I'm going back.

Debbie [00:16:03] No, no, no. That's great. You finished high school and you were drafted?

Brooks [00:16:07] Yeah, I was drafted. The draft was still active then. I was drafted. War's raging.

Debbie [00:16:12] And you're about 18 years old?

Brooks [00:16:13] Yeah. I got drafted. They were upset with me, too, because you're supposed to sign up when you turn 18. I turned 18 in February and never signed up. *[Laughs]* I didn't think about it, so I became top priority. I didn't have plans to go to college right away. I was going to work and then eventually go to college. When they call me up to the draft board, and they told me my number is going to be moved up, and, "You never signed up." And that it could be a problem. So that fall -- I come out of school in June -- that fall --

Debbie [00:16:54] What year?

Brooks [00:16:55] 1966. Then I got drafted in October. And I was in.

Debbie [00:17:05] Tell us a little bit about --

Brooks [00:17:05] I'm sorry?

Debbie [00:17:06] Keep going.

Brooks [00:17:07] I had read a lot about the war, and I was then very much opposed to the war. I was very big on Martin Luther King, and he had -- and I think I still got the album. He talks about the war and why it was bad. And you know, that's why he became vilified after that.

Debbie [00:17:25] Tell us about your service. How long were you in the service?

Brooks [00:17:28] Two years.

[00:17:29] In the army?

[00:17:30] Yeah, in the army.

Debbie [00:17:32] Tell us a little bit about it.

Brooks [00:17:33] Well, I protested a little bit about the war, which was kind of nuts because you're already there in the military. I really didn't want to be there. I went AWOL[absent without leave] a couple times knowing that I wouldn't stay AWOL. When I got my orders to go to Vietnam, they sent you home for a couple of weeks, and then I was supposed to report. So I came home in May. I was

supposed to report early in June. I wound up staying home pretty much the summer. [Laughs] Which was -- My parents said, "Don't you think you should be going back?" "Nah, I got -- still got time." My father said, "Sure." I said, "Yeah." Anyway, I turned myself back in. They locked me up. It wasn't a formal jail. It was like, couldn't leave the barracks type of thing. So it wasn't like a formal jail or anything, but they called it that. And then I got -- the orders were changed, and then I went out to Seattle, Washington. The reason that's significant -- so they didn't send me to Vietnam right away, which -- I would have been in Vietnam by that point had I not gone AWOL. We're in Seattle, Washington, because this is during a time period -- and you probably wouldn't remember this, and you might have been in high school at the time -- when President [Lyndon] Johnson had the big buildup. He said, "We're going to send all these troops. That's gonna make a difference." Well, I was part of that buildup, so they sent me to Seattle. Of course, I didn't know it then. They sent us to Seattle and they had us sitting there because all our training was done. They had us sitting there, and we sat there for about, I don't know, 60 days, while they rounded up more troops and kept bringing them in. The idea was to send us all to Vietnam at one time. Thinking -- flood it with troops. We could win the war that way. Of course, that was bad thinking. It didn't happen. Anyway, I was part of that build-up. I actually went over to Vietnam on a boat. One of the few people that went over in Vietnam on a boat, and it took us another 30 days by boat to get there.

Debbie [00:19:42] 1967 now?

[00:19:43] That was [19]67, right.

Debbie [00:19:46] And how long were you in Vietnam?

Brooks [00:19:48] For a year. I got home around latter part of [19]68.

Debbie [00:19:53] I know it's tough to talk about.

Brooks [00:19:55] It is. [Laughs].

Debbie [00:19:56] But anything you want to -- okay.

Brooks [00:19:57] No. That's okay. I'll handle it. I'll talk about it. The summer was kind of crazy, because -- One of the things that I did when they sent us over there -- Normally they send you right into combat right away. They didn't send us into combat right away because we're all new, because we went over, this big group. They had us in the rear for a while. And while we're in the rear they took us through various exercises. One of the things I did to try to organize the troops there and -- we started writing letters, and I wrote our congressman about Vietnam, and I wrote Bobby Kennedy which it caught up with me after I got back to the States, which is another whole story. But anyway, while I was in Vietnam, we had the different troops write to congressmen and talk about the war, and why it was unfair, and we didn't want to be there and we thought that our environment was wrong.

Debbie [00:21:00] So how did your -- I don't know what the right word would be, your platoon leader, your sergeant, your commanding officer -- Did they know you were doing this?

Brooks [00:21:08] I don't think they did. I think they -- we'd get together on Sundays and have people come over to the mess hall and we'd get together and sit down and talk about it and write. It

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started off as a small group of us, 3 or 4 of us, and then it kind of grew, and I don't know if we got to a big portion, but it was like, about 50 of us at one point. And --

Debbie [00:21:30] Tell the Bobby Kennedy story.

Brooks [00:21:32] Well, I'd be jumping ahead.

Debbie [00:21:35] That's okay.

Brooks [00:21:35] Well, what happened is -- Kennedy responded, but he didn't respond to us till I was out of Vietnam. When I left Vietnam, I went to Fort Ord, California, which was crazy in itself. That Army base was set up, and they brought people back from Vietnam, and they segregated us off into another part of the post. You got to realize these posts are huge. There were barracks and barracks of people that just got back from Vietnam at some stage or another and what they would do is take them out into the desert and keep them out there all week. What they would do is run tests on them. These were combat veterans.

Debbie [00:22:16] These are the returnees.

Brooks [00:22:17] These were returning veterans, army veterans, and [they] would actually play war games. I never went. Time I got back, because I went AWOL, I had to do an extra 30 days, but that was it. And my time was up. So I had like three weeks to go. And I told him, I said, "I'm not doing it. That's nuts. I came from a real war and I'm going to go play war? I'm not doing it." So one of the things that saved me, Bobby Kennedy's letter. He started an investigation of the post. I guess what happened, and I can only think this was what happened, is that it followed me from where I went. And so it came to Fort Ord. I was called into the commanding officer's office. He said -- and this is how he said it, so pardon the language -- "Who in the fuck do you know in Washington, DC? Because of you, this whole post is under investigation." And I was thinking, "What the hell is he talking about?" Because I had long forgotten that I had written those letters and later on found out it was the letters and it was Bobby Kennedy doing an investigation.

Debbie [00:23:23] That's quite a story.

Brooks [00:23:26] Yeah, so I think they were afraid to send me out.

Debbie [00:23:30] So, in Vietnam again, I don't want to bring bad --

Brooks [00:23:34] No, go ahead. That's fine.

Debbie [00:23:34] You were in combat?

Brooks [00:23:36] Yes, yes I was. [*Laughs*]

Debbie [00:23:38] Do you want to say anything about it?

Brooks [00:23:41] I don't know. You have to ask some questions, I guess.

Debbie [00:23:45] I'm not sure what to ask.

Brooks [00:23:47] Well, whatever comes to mind.

Debbie [00:23:49] I assume it was horrible.

Brooks [00:23:51] I'm sorry?

Debbie [00:23:52] I assume it was horrible.

Brooks [00:23:53] It was. It was bad. I mean, every day -- you weren't fighting every day, but every day you're looking over your shoulder. There were days where you got a chance to go to the village and you got some free time. So we had a base camp. The way it was set up, we have a base camp. You go into your base camp. There were people that never left the base camp and they were run like small cities. So you had all kinds of occupations. You had truck drivers. You had mail clerks. You had people that worked in [an] office. And at that time period, not now, but that time period -- for every guy they put out in the field, it took five guys to keep them there. So we had -- and while I was there Vietnam was considered our 10th largest city. We had that many troops over there. So you had something like 5 or 600,000 troops in Vietnam at one time.

Debbie [00:24:43] What was the big base that you were at?

Brooks [00:24:46] Oh, I was in -- called Zian.

Debbie [00:24:47] Zian?

Brooks [00:24:48] Right.

Debbie [00:24:49] X-I-A-N or Z-I-A-N or -- whatever.

Brooks [00:24:53] Yeah. I'm trying to think how it was spelled -- I, A, Z or something.

Debbie [00:24:58] Okay.

Brooks [00:24:58] Z-I. But we never spent much time there. The troop that I was in, which was a vanguard group, which meant that what we did when there was -- when some place got hit, our job was to go out, secure the place. Get rid of the troops that was there and then move on to the next spot. Troops would come in behind us. So, for instance, you had airstrips and they were bombing airstrips. And they had guys [that] would take over airstrips because airstrips, you had them throughout the jungle where there's -- land planes, drop off supplies and take off again. There are certain strategic places where they needed troops to maintain. If something broke out there, our job was to go in and secure it. And then the guys would come -- the other guys would come behind us, and keep it secure. So obviously we constantly saw a lot of fire power. I think the worst thing that happened -- it's kinda not funny and funny -- is we went -- we was there in [19]68, so [19]68 they had the Tet offensive. My group was the first group because a part of what our job was, and because we were close to Saigon, our post wasn't far from Saigon, I think maybe 30 miles. So we had to go to Saigon. It was New Year's Eve. I had never been drunk before. So everybody said, "Oh, it's New Year's Eve. We're back at the rear." Because we don't go back in the rear that often.

Debbie [00:26:24] American New Year's Eve or Têt?

Brooks [00:26:27] I think it was Têt. I guess it was Têt because they don't coincide. But anyway, we decided, "Well, party," and I had never drunk before. I mean, I never had beer, wine, anything. So they say, "Well, Brooks, you need to get drunk." They didn't say get drunk -- "You need to have some drinks." I said, "Fine." Eventually, what happened -- I got drunk. So I go to bed that night in our little cabins back at the base camp. Middle of the night, they woke us up and said, "You got to -- We got to get out. We got to move out. Grab your stuff. We have to go to Vietnam." I mean, "You have to go to Saigon." It was just hit. And of course, our job is to go in to secure places that were hit. I mean, I was literally blind, I was so drunk. I couldn't see. I'm stumbling around, grabbing my stuff. I said, "Oh, God, what a time." I didn't panic, though, which surprised -- well, by that time I had been over there about seven months, eight months. So I kind of [was] used to the drill. Anyway, we wound up going to Saigon. The battle was taking place out in the street. I got behind a wall, just [laughs] "Oh, my God," [unclear] I didn't even stand up. It's more fire power. Just hold it up. So, I mean, that was the humor of it. The crazy part of it -- that it was really, really outrageous and the number of people that were killed. That was awful. So what I did, I actually kept a picture of it, just as a reminder to show people how terrible this war is. I mean, war is absolutely awful. Kids are killed. [shows emotion] I'll be fine.

Debbie [00:28:19] You can take a minute.

Brooks [00:28:21] Yeah, could I?

Debbie [00:28:22] Please do.

[INTERRUPTION]

Debbie [00:28:23] Brooks, I think that this helps explain -- as long as I knew you, you were always opposed to war.

Brooks [00:28:32] Yeah. Because you see the destruction and devastation. That's like, this is so crazy. You see kids walking around that are -- some of them -- you see dead kid bodies. You see them with limbs missing. You see kids, their towns have been devastated and the fields where they work and live have been devastated. You see them in the garbage pile, searching around for garbage just to get enough to live and eat and sustain themselves. When we think about war, people don't really think about the devastation part of it and how it impacts people and communities. I mean, people have real lives. They live in real communities. [shows emotion]

Debbie [00:29:18] Here, give me your hand.

Brooks [00:29:24] Anyway, I think we don't really think enough about that part of it. And it's pretty reckless what we do.

Debbie [00:29:45] Well, jumping way ahead, I remember one of your leadership was to be active in Labor Against the, I believe it was the Iraq War.

Brooks [00:29:59] Right. I'm still in touch with a lot of those people. Time to time, we do stuff.

Debbie [00:30:04] Coming from --

Brooks [00:30:05] Up until about two years ago, when I retired, I got a little bit active in it. But because of Joranne's health [Joanne is his wife] and other factors, I kind of pulled away. But I still get their correspondence from time to time. About the stuff that's happening over in the Middle East now, with the Palestinians and Hamas and that kind of thing, it's pretty bad. [The interview took place during the 2023/2024 Israel/Hamas War.] I don't think we realize what's going on over there, how bad it is, but it is pretty horrendous. There were a number, obviously quite a few people, feel the exact same way I do about war. I'm going to jump back a little bit. When I was in high school, his name was Dr. Kendall. He was my professor. I think it might have been civics or sociology. I can't remember what, but it was in high school. He was a brilliant guy, and we talked about it. We would talk about war and how crazy it was. He was talking about all wars were wars of economics, and I thought a lot about that during that time period. And we talked about the Civil War. We moved up into World War II, World War I, World War II, and those kind of things. It was probably a discussion that was a little bit ahead of our time for the time period and then also for age, but people grasped it and really got it and made us think a lot about it. And [unclear] after that, then we have the Vietnam War happening, and you see it play out every night on TV, too. Which you don't do now, purposely. They don't want that shown.

Debbie [00:31:52] I'm ready to move on.

Brooks [00:31:53] Okay.

Debbie [00:31:53] Are you?

Brooks [00:31:54] Yeah. I'm fine.

Debbie [00:31:55] If there's anything more you want to add about those years?

Brooks [00:32:00] I don't know if there's much more to tell. I mean, I was glad to get the hell out of there. But I felt really bad about the war. Like I said, I understood the things that were going on.

Debbie [00:32:14] What about race relations?

Brooks [00:32:17] I'm sorry?

Debbie [00:32:17] Race relations.

Brooks [00:32:19] They were pretty bad. And they were pretty bad in Vietnam. There were all black troops, I mean, company. So my group was a unit. Our unit was called the "First & Eighteenth." Within that unit or brigade, there is about -- probably about eight companies. Each company has about 40 men. So it's company A, B, C and we made D company, new guys coming in. And so I was always part of D.

Debbie [00:32:52] Company D.

Brooks [00:32:53] Yeah. So --

Debbie [00:32:54] I'd asked about race relations.

Brooks [00:32:56] Yeah. You know when I wrote Kennedy I talked a lot about that as well. The guys that were in the troops together, whether you're white or black, we got along. It was the superior officers. And we felt that they were trying to separate us and that there was a lot of racism at that level. So at the troop level, I don't think there was. I actually had friends, which was kind of funny for me, but there were a number of troops from the South. They said they never had a black friend before, and black people were so much different than what they heard. *[Laughs]* I just thought that was humorous. That's really -- "What did you think we were like?" "Ah, just different than what you really are." The troops themselves got along and they needed to because they depended on each other. But there were a lot of discrimination amongst the ranks. For instance, I told you of different occupations throughout that post. There were a number of people that was in Vietnam that never actually saw any action because they didn't have to. They didn't go outside the post. But those jobs -- there were never any minorities in those jobs, like none that I saw. And I'm sure, probably, maybe some place. My base was pretty large. It was a very -- actually had a landing strip in that base where we land large planes.

Debbie [00:34:21] Well, thank you for all this information.

Brooks [00:34:25] When you're ready to move on, I am when you are.

Debbie [00:34:27] It's very powerful. I could listen to this for a long time, but let's move on.

Brooks [00:34:32] Okay.

Debbie [00:34:33] You came back from Vietnam. This is now [19]69?

Brooks [00:34:38] I got back in [19]68. I went over in [19]67.

Debbie [00:34:41] Okay.

Brooks [00:34:41] I got back in [19]68. I got back the latter part of [19]68.

Debbie [00:34:44] What did you do next?

Brooks [00:34:46] Well, nothing much. I kind of hung out. Like I said, I was involved in a few protests up in Camden. There were protests at my high school.

Debbie [00:34:55] So did you go to work or go to college?

Brooks [00:34:58] I didn't work too much. I didn't -- well, I didn't do either. I knew I wanted to go to college, but I figured I got home, and that's fun to go out for a bit. And then, you know, the other thing is, when I left to go to Vietnam, one of the things is when going to service. I got drafted. They said, if you get drafted -- because I was working when I got drafted, I worked at Campbell Soups, making soup of all things. They said you would get your job back because when you get drafted, you're entitled to get your job back. When I came back, I couldn't get the job back, and I was *[unclear]*. No matter where we went -- Now, I'm thinking we have to understand, back during that time period the Vietnam War was -- people started hating the war, but they hated the people that

participated in the war. I didn't talk about this. I came back with three friends. I went over with three friends. We came back. Fortunately, we all came back together. We talked about that. Now we were dropped off in San Francisco. You feel if you've been away for over a year and a half, you'd be rushing to get back home. Well, we were a little intimidated because we didn't realize what people thought of us, what our families would think of us. We were in this brutal war, and they would call you baby killers and stuff like that. So we didn't know how that was -- you got news you didn't get a lot of it, but you did get some news. That was a concern to us. So we wanted to just kind of bond for a couple days before we split. We spent the last year and a half being together every day.

Debbie [00:36:40] You went back to the Camden area?

Brooks [00:36:44] No, I went to Lawnside.

Debbie [00:36:45] So, the next big part --

Brooks [00:36:49] So we couldn't get jobs. We couldn't get jobs. We tried for a long time. We tried to get, I couldn't get a job. Nobody would -- you were Vietnam veteran. "Okay, we'll think about it." [unclear] What is this about?

Debbie [00:37:03] So how'd you get working for the state?

Brooks [00:37:05] Actually, I started working for the state after I got out of college. I'm trying to think if I worked before that --

Debbie [00:37:12] So you went eventually to college?

Brooks [00:37:15] Right. I went to college.

Debbie [00:37:16] Where'd you go?

Brooks [00:37:16] My first school was Hartford, Connecticut, School of Accounting.

Debbie [00:37:22] On VA benefits?

Brooks [00:37:23] Yeah. I paid for part of it. My parents paid for part, and then VA benefits. I stayed here for about six months, and then I left, and I decided to go to Rutgers. And the reason why? Because Rutgers was offering money and I could get money from being a minority. So I figured, well, and also my girlfriend went there, so she kept telling me to come to Rutgers.

Debbie [00:37:48] But they had a program then at Rutgers --

Brooks [00:37:49] Yeah, they did.

Debbie [00:37:49] -- a state university, to increase minority enrollment?

Brooks [00:37:53] Exactly, absolutely.

Debbie [00:37:55] So you got a scholarship?

Brooks [00:37:57] Yeah.

Debbie [00:37:58] And what did you study?

Brooks [00:37:59] I studied political science and sociology.

Debbie [00:38:02] And got your B.A.?

Brooks [00:38:03] Yes.

Debbie [00:38:04] Okay.

Brooks [00:38:05] In sociology.

Debbie [00:38:06] And then you went to work?

Brooks [00:38:09] Yeah, I went to work for the federal government. I did disaster relief for the federal government for about a year.

Debbie [00:38:20] I want to try and jump up to when you started working for the state.

Brooks [00:38:25] I was taking a number of state jobs, I mean, tests, because they were told that being a veteran, you had lists, and you got on a list based on your grades, how you finished the tests. All veterans were pushed to the top of the list, and I was encouraged to take my -- actually, my girlfriend, actually wound up being my wife, I married her, which is not Joanne. She had to work for the state. She says, "You should take this job, blah, blah, blah, I mean tests." If you take these tests, you veterans will probably go to the top of the list. My first job was with one of our locals. Actually, it was Middlesex County Welfare.

Debbie [00:39:08] You worked in the welfare office?

Brooks [00:39:09] Yeah, that was my first job. I forgot. I skipped along. I was going to school, Rutgers, and I got a job at Middlesex County. That was my first public sector experience. I was going to school full-time and I somehow I worked it out and negotiated with them. They allowed me to work at the agency full-time. I could leave and come back, after you go to class. That's what I did. I forgot about that.

Debbie [00:39:38] Good for you.

Brooks [00:39:40] So that was my first interest in public sector.

Debbie [00:39:42] You were working for the state and this is the early --

Brooks [00:39:48] That was 1972.

Debbie [00:39:52] Okay.

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Brooks [00:39:54] Yeah.

Debbie [00:39:54] And then did you --

Brooks [00:39:56] Well, after I got out of school, I moved to Trenton. I graduated from school. I went to Trenton.

Debbie [00:40:02] Where do you work then?

Brooks [00:40:03] Then I worked -- I got a job with the Department of Transportation.

Debbie [00:40:07] Okay.

Brooks [00:40:08] Because my wife worked there and she got me a job.

Debbie [00:40:12] Very good. Okay.

Brooks [00:40:13] Then I took the test and then ended up in Taxation.

Debbie [00:40:16] You ended up in the Department of Taxation?

Brooks [00:40:19] Yes. The Trenton department.

Debbie [00:40:20] What were you doing?

Brooks [00:40:21] I was collecting taxes. [*Laughs*]

Debbie [00:40:25] [*Laughs*] Okay. That's what you do.

Brooks [00:40:26] Well, that's basically the job, but I went after delinquent taxpayers.

Debbie [00:40:30] I want to go to the state worker organizing committee. How did you get involved in that and why?

Brooks [00:40:40] There was a law passed about -- I was in the union. I was in the employees union. It wasn't that effective. I was basically a member just on paper. They would come around, have meetings at the office. I went to the meetings and there was talk about more units coming in. There was AFSCME [American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees], United Food and Commercial Workers, what else? AFT [American Federation of Teachers]. I thought at that point -- now, I always had concerns about what was happening and how employees were being treated, etc.. I used to have discussions with my supervisor about stuff like that anyway, and just little stuff that was just irritating. Anyway, when the union came around and then I heard about -- we would have these meetings and they said they were going to affiliate with AFSCME. I said, I think I better get involved because I'd like to have some input on what they're doing. Anyway, I heard about CWA and I went to one of their meetings and I was impressed by what they were talking about.

Debbie [00:41:57] Who was the "they?"

Brooks [00:41:58] I'm trying to think. I think it might have been Carol Gay. And so, meet with her and talk to her about it. She was explaining that she worked for the Welfare in Camden. Well, I'm from Camden. My first experience was with the Welfare. We had that in common. And, started to meet with her and talk about it. She would say, "If you want to volunteer to help out." I said, "Yeah, fine." That's how I got involved. I'd get up in the mornings, go to leaflet, and then go to work. Then eventually I met Larry [Cohen; lead organizer of the state worker campaign; eventually national CWA president 2005-2025.]. And I hate to use a cliché, but the rest is history. Yes. I met Larry.

Debbie [00:42:42] What impact did he have on you?

Brooks [00:42:44] Oh, a lot. And I think one of the things, and that's another thing, I was pretty --

Debbie [00:42:48] Larry Cohen.

Brooks [00:42:48] Larry Cohen. Right. We went to a Saturday session and it was a volunteer session, or an educational session. I think it was about 20 of us there, 25 people. We spent the day there, and we went through all this -- the drive, the organizing drive, a lot of the issues that we were experiencing. We were able to walk through them. He kind of walked us through them. It was really eye-opening, and I thought, this is fantastic. You might remember, too, that one of the things I've always been big on is education because it made such a difference. It's not enough to tell people, "This is the right thing." I think people need to know why and understand it. So I felt, always felt passionate about that as well. But that made a big difference for me.

Debbie [00:43:36] This was a day-long session?

Brooks [00:43:37] It was a day-long session.

Debbie [00:43:38] That CWA organized?

Brooks [00:43:39] Yeah.

Debbie [00:43:40] With the top organizers?

Brooks [00:43:42] No, it was just the people that had volunteered. They wanted us to go through the session.

Debbie [00:43:46] Volunteered to be active in the organizing drive.

[00:43:48] Be active in -- yeah, the organizing drive. They had done something to display their activity. They either did leaflet -- well, they did certain things to help get people to meetings. They were identified as people that we might want to invest more in. So those people were identified, and then they were asked, would they come to a meeting? And those that agreed would go to the meeting. Then there was a session where we talked about the campaign, we talked about CWA, and we talked about what we were trying to achieve and why it was important.

Debbie [00:44:20] Did you become one of the leaders organizing in the taxation department?

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Brooks [00:44:24] Yes. Eventually I organized while I was working and they said, "Listen, we'd like for you to come on full-time. And what we'll do is take you off a leave of absence."

Debbie [00:44:34] CWA would?

Brooks [00:44:35] CWA would. They had the ability to do that, which they don't do in most campaigns. It's because they had affiliated with SEA [State Employees' Association] and the Civil Service Association. The New Jersey state workers were actually represented by two different organizations, which is kind of weird. They had joint certification, which means that you can leave one organization, you can go to the other. You can go back and forth, but the organizations were run totally different. CWA and Larry were smart enough to affiliate with Caroline Wade's group. I'm trying to think -- what was that called? It wasn't called SEA. It's called something else.

Debbie [00:45:19] She had a different -- was this an organizing drive or had it already had been there?

Brooks [00:45:24] No, it had already been here. So the state workers had a union, was more or less an association. That means they didn't have chapters anywhere else, it was just there.

Debbie [00:45:35] And Carolyn Wade was in that organization?

Brooks [00:45:37] Right. As was -- you probably don't know him -- Norm [Levins]. He was the head of it and Caroline Wade worked for him and it was joint certification. It's two separate organizations representing the same people. You could go from organization to organization, which was very unusual.

Debbie [00:45:56] And eventually they were merged?

Brooks [00:45:57] No, they never merged. So what happened? CWA merged with one of the groups.

Debbie [00:46:05] One of the groups of that --

Brooks [00:46:07] Right one of the two groups. Right. Exactly.

Debbie [00:46:09] And that was Caroline Wade's group?

Brooks [00:46:10] That was Caroline Wade's group.

Debbie [00:46:11] Which was a lot of the Welfare, right?

Brooks [00:46:13] No. This is state workers.

Debbie [00:46:16] Oh, she had health and hospitals, right?

Brooks [00:46:18] She did hospitals. Well, she did the institutions. They were all institutions. I think, if I remember correctly, and Larry probably brought this out, that he started off organizing institution workers first. It failed. He came back. So he had already, I guess, a relationship with that

organization already. This is institutional workers. He came back and I guess they started to do a widespread campaign. [Institutions refers to the mental health and mental retardation state institutions.]

Debbie [00:46:47] So you were taken off [the job]? CWA paid your lost-time.

Brooks [00:46:51] Right.

Debbie [00:46:52] And then you were signing up --

Brooks [00:46:53] Right.

Debbie [00:46:54] -- members. And then eventually you had an election --

Brooks [00:46:56] Right.

Debbie [00:46:56] -- and won!

Brooks [00:46:57] Right.

Debbie [00:46:58] And then?

Brooks [00:46:59] There was never any doubt that we were going to win. I don't know why, but we just -- we were very cocky, very sure of ourselves. We figured this is the right way to go and people will see it. Of course, that's not necessarily true. But you know, we're young, we're naive. But anyway, there were -- I think we started with about 6 or 7 of us. The original people that were taken off the job. Our job, obviously, to organize, but also find other leaders and develop other leaders. Since I came out of Taxation, I got Taxation to do, and Taxation is part of Treasury. Within Treasury there are other groups. There's banking, there's insurance. I started branching out into those places as well, because nobody else would do it.

Debbie [00:47:42] You're recruiting people from a variety of job titles.

Brooks [00:47:50] Right.

Debbie [00:47:51] From clerical to professional.

Brooks [00:47:52] Exactly.

Debbie [00:47:53] Tax assessors and --

Brooks [00:47:54] Right.

Debbie [00:47:56] And they were interested in joining the union.

Brooks [00:47:59] Yeah. They had some union sense because they were part of the association. They didn't have a lot of it, but they knew enough that -- we should join the association. They weren't particularly active in the association.

Debbie [00:48:11] Okay. So now the state workers have their union, CWA, and then are you working for the union? For the local? What local did you become?

Brooks [00:48:24] Well, I became [local] 1033, but I was a founder of 1033. So our local is made up based on the places that I organized.

Debbie [00:48:36] And which departments were they?

Brooks [00:48:38] It was nine different departments. It was Department of Treasury, which included all those other little offices, law and public safety. I'm trying to think what else. [unclear] Public safety, education.

Debbie [00:49:01] And very much Trenton based.

Brooks [00:49:02] Right. That local is still formatted the same way. They still represent those people. So the idea was we will represent all those people. The local was set up by departments and it was set up geographically. The people I represented in Trenton might have been represented or were represented by a different local in northern Jersey as well as South Jersey. The uniqueness of New Jersey is that most of the workers worked in and around Trenton, which is the capital, and the rest of the agency were more or less -- trying to think of the word -- extensions of that. Field office.

Debbie [00:49:48] Yeah, except for the institutions.

Brooks [00:49:50] Right, except for the institutions.

Debbie [00:49:51] Were you the local president?

Brooks [00:49:54] Yes.

Debbie [00:49:54] For what years, about?

Brooks [00:49:58] 1981 through, I guess, [19]86, [19]87.

Debbie [00:50:10] So for six years, you were president of the local.

Brooks [00:50:13] Right.

Debbie [00:50:14] 1033.

Brooks [00:50:15] Right.

Debbie [00:50:15] I'm going to jump past that now. And then you ran to be the vice-president of the public workers sector?

Brooks [00:50:23] Yeah, actually, I stepped down from being a local president, and I went back to work for the local, and then I was recruited. "Listen, we think you'd probably be good as vice-president." And I'd say, "I don't know if I want it." Blah, blah, blah. My daughter was just born. I

just got married again. So I said I don't know if I wanted to do that. "Well, we think we need somebody." Blah blah blah. And he says, "There's not really many minorities on [the] CWA executive board. Might be something you might be interested in." And I said, "I'll think about it." My name was entered into the hat and I was getting calls talking about, "We heard you're running for office." I said, "I'm not aware of that." I eventually, in about a month or so, decided to run a full campaign, and I did it.

Debbie [00:51:13] What year were you elected?

Brooks [00:51:15] I was elected 1989. Now before that, which was another thing is that I was selected by the public sector local as local president. They had this thing that Ed Schultz had, and it was called the Public Sector Bargaining Council. Where what he did -- and I knew Ed Schultz because Ed Schultz had worked in New Jersey.

Debbie [00:51:44] He was staff, right?

Brooks [00:51:46] Yeah, I'm sorry?

Debbie [00:51:47] He was CWA staff?

Brooks [00:51:49] Yeah, yeah, he was staff.

Debbie [00:51:52] In District 1?

Brooks [00:51:54] Yeah. I don't know if he was -- he was something, but I don't know if he was staff. I know he worked for 1040.

Debbie [00:52:03] Local 1040.

Brooks [00:52:04] 1040. I think he was staff, then a history that I heard -- I guess Larry can verify it -- is that he worked for AFSCME. He was the staff person for AFSCME. He had a big fight with AFSCME. He decided to leave AFSCME and CWA had been trying to recruit him anyway. What he did is he went with CWA, but they had these petitions that they were going to enter for election. He took the petition, didn't enter them for AFSCME. He entered them for CWA. *[Laughs]* He told me this himself.

Debbie [00:52:37] Okay.

Brooks [00:52:37] And that's how we ended up with the public sector in --

Debbie [00:52:39] So you had this public sector --

Brooks [00:52:40] -- in New Jersey.

Debbie [00:52:42] -- council.

Brooks [00:52:43] Right. So anyway, they had this organization and then we met like, once or twice a year in DC. It's called the Public Sector Bargaining Committee. It would come together to

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talk about different issues in the public sector. I got a chance during those type of meetings to meet people from around the country.

Debbie [00:53:00] Although at that point, public sector in CWA was primarily New Jersey or New York, correct?

Brooks [00:53:07] They had them all over. They had New Mexico, they had Florida. I'm trying to think where else. Wisconsin.

Debbie [00:53:16] In the late [19]80s?

Brooks [00:53:17] Yeah. Oh absolutely, yeah. Now, I'm not sure where they had come from --

Debbie [00:53:22] But they were small locals, weren't they?

Brooks [00:53:23] Yeah, I didn't have the history of it, but they were there. There were local presidents and they all came into this meeting that Ed Schultz was running.

Debbie [00:53:29] Okay.

Brooks [00:53:29] Also, Missouri came in around that time period. Larry was recruiting people because he tried to recruit me to go to Texas, to go organize in Texas.

Debbie [00:53:44] Texas State Employees Union.

Brooks [00:53:47] Right. That was during the late [19]80s. I think they also tried to recruit me to go to California, organize the California workers. Not UPTE [Union of Professional Technical Employees that came into CWA in 1993.] There was a California group that they were organizing. That eventually fell -- we had them for a while and eventually fell through.

Debbie [00:54:03] So, at any rate, I believe that by [19]89 there was a vice-president over the public sector. But that was the first. You were the first, correct?

Brooks [00:54:14] No, I was not. Connie Bryant was the first.

Debbie [00:54:17] She was a VP? Or she was a director?

Brooks [00:54:21] I think they made her -- she came in as a director, and I think they changed it, made it a VP.

Debbie [00:54:26] Okay.

Brooks [00:54:26] So she spent one term as a director. One term as a VP, I believe.

Debbie [00:54:29] Okay.

Brooks [00:54:30] Eddie. So Eddie Schultz started it. He brought Eddie Schultz to Washington. He would have these public sector meetings from around the country. They didn't consist of much. But

he would bring them, bring us in. But the good thing is we got a chance to meet. And that's big too. That's important because it was during those meetings that we come in. We said, "This is such a waste." There was so much more that we could do. Eddie Schultz taught us that -- so we challenged Eddie Schultz, "How come we can't get more substance to the meetings?" He says, "Well, I'm not allowed. I'm on the staff and I don't have the right to make any decisions." Then we start exploring the executive board. Come to find out, there's no public sector on the executive board. At this point, we're starting to grow because we came in with New Jersey, 30,000. I think 35,000. And then we had the -- that's not counting the welfare locals, and not counting the other places that I talked about. So we had that meeting. I had called the meeting together in my hotel room, and talked to some of the players here and said, "Listen, there's something that we need to do. Eddie Schultz is our representative. But of all the people that have represented the other sectors, they're all vice -- they're all elected." It wasn't vice president, but they were elected. "So we think our position needs to be elected too, and what do people think about that?" They all agree. So we said, "What we're going to do is we're going to try to get [the] rest of the public sector involved. And we're going to send a resolution to the convention."

Debbie [00:55:58] And that would be a constitutional amendment, correct?

Brooks [00:56:01] Right. That's what we did. Constitutional amendment. We met and then we had a public sector conference. So us as leaders went to that conference, because that meeting was before the conference. We went to the conference. We solidified it at the conference and then we started pushing for it. Now, what happened was we didn't have a personality in mind. We just had a position in mind. [CWA President] Glenn Watts decided he really liked Connie Bryant, so he thought this would be good for Connie Bryant. She's a minority. She's a woman. She had been active, too. She had high visibility because she was on the Committee of the Future. [unclear]. Because of that, he wanted to push her for the slot. And some people weren't with it, and Eddie Schultz obviously was running for it himself. He was a mixed bag. Some people really liked him. You either really liked him or you didn't like him at all. He was that kind of a person. Anyway, the rest is history. Connie got elected at --

Debbie [00:57:12] [19]86, probably?

Brooks [00:57:13] I think that was [19]86.

Debbie [00:57:15] So the same year that you got the constitutional amendment through, then you --

Brooks [00:57:22] They had an election. Yeah. And there was a convention in between that too. It was called -- that's what -- it was called the Committee of the Future [1981-1983].

Debbie [00:57:29] And that's when the recommendation --

Brooks [00:57:31] That's where they submit the recommendations. I forgot that part. So the recommendation was committed to that, to that body and they agreed, right? Why shouldn't the public sector have their own identity? And that was written into the Committee of the Future. I still have those reports at home. That was written into the proposal.

Debbie [00:57:52] So you ran in [19]89 and you won.

Brooks [00:57:56] Right.

Debbie [00:57:57] And then you come down and you were a long-serving vice-president. Until when?

Brooks [00:58:03] Until 2019.

Debbie [00:58:05] When you came on the executive board. How many other people of color were on the executive board?

Brooks [00:58:14] One black person. One woman.

Debbie [00:58:17] The one black person was you.

Brooks [00:58:19] Right. One woman was Barbara Easterling.

Debbie [00:58:22] That's right. Because by then, Dina Beaumont was executive assistant. She was no longer on the executive board. What was it like?

Brooks [00:58:31] It was different because you had a couple challenges, right? First, to be the only black and then second of all, being from a totally different industry, which people didn't want to talk much about anyway. I found out later, because they knew so little about it. It was kind of intimidating for them to talk about the public sector. They just chose to sweep it to the back. It was always that struggle trying to get it front and center.

Debbie [00:58:55] What structures were there during the 1990s, even 2000s, for people of color within the union?

Brooks [00:59:03] Not much.

[INTERRUPTION]

Debbie [00:59:05] I'm going to be kind of general about that over twenty-year period that you were public worker vice-president. Are there particular activities or achievements that you would want to talk about?

Brooks [00:59:24] I think a lot of it was running the training that we did. With your help as well [reference to Debbie Goldman], the research department. We put out a lot of educational materials. I think you did something on prisons and, I don't call them prison guards, but public safety officers that work in prisons. We put out a number of things. We did stuff about taxes, and we did training on taxes and budgeting. I think the biggest thing we did was teaching workers or teaching the locals that a lot of their achievements come from within their local. Too often, they were looking to the national to do everything for them. And we said, "Listen, with good training and working at it, you can do it." I think Chris was very good at that too, Chris Kennedy.

Debbie [01:00:13] He was your assistant.

Brooks [01:00:14] He was my assistant. Not initially, but eventually. Eileen Kirlin was my assistant for a while, and she did a very good job, I think actually, well, I'm skipping her name. This is crazy. Louise.

Debbie [01:00:30] Novotny.

Brooks [01:00:31] Novotny, right. That lasted for about two weeks. She was the assistant.

Debbie [01:00:36] She was an assistant to Connie Bryant, I think.

Brooks [01:00:39] Connie Bryant had left. I came in behind Connie Bryant. So she was still there, and she was telling me -- it was so funny. I kept saying, "Well, what do you think about this?" She said, "Brooks, I'm not going to be here. I'm leaving." I said, "Well, before you leave, what do you think about this? We had a good relationship because I used to talk to her all the time prior to coming to DC. If I couldn't reach Connie Bryant, I'd run it through Louise. And that's how I got to know Louise. I felt I had the hand on the pulse of what people were thinking, and that helped her out a lot as well.

Debbie [01:01:15] One of the innovations I think of CWA in the public sector was in the states that did not have collective bargaining.

Brooks [01:01:24] Yeah. I didn't think about that. That's true.

Debbie [01:01:25] And I know that MASE -- Mississippi Alliance of State Employees -- was a big project of yours. Talk a little about that.

Brooks [01:01:34] No, that was fantastic. And of course, I've worked with Danny Fetonte on that [leader of the Texas State Employees Union and District 6 Organizing Director]. But the one that -- that was already started when I got elected.

Debbie [01:01:41] Which one? Texas State Employees Union?

Brooks [01:01:43] Texas State Employees Union. That was only one that was started at that time which was fascinating to me, because of what they were able to achieve without collective bargaining. So that was duplicated in Mississippi. It was duplicated in Oklahoma, which I was in from the start. I think that the idea was that we're able to achieve this stuff, and it brought home the point. The central point of the union is that it's our unity that is our power, and not through laws and various regulations. And if we get that through, there's nothing that we couldn't accomplish. And so a lot of my remarks when I spoke, I talked a lot about that and why that's important. Because initially, particularly from where I came from, people thought you could solve everything by going to court, by filing a grievance. The unity part was always lost, so that drove the point home. Then the other point I think that's fascinating is that was the largest -- not the largest -- I think the largest local in CWA.

Debbie [01:02:54] TSEU.

Brooks [01:02:55] Yeah, TSEU.

Debbie [01:02:56] Eventually.

Brooks [01:02:57] Yeah.

Debbie [01:02:57] It was about 10,000 people -- 10 or 12 at its height.

Brooks [01:02:59] It was about 10,000 people. Which is fascinating given they don't have any collective bargaining rights. At one point, they didn't even have dues check-off. Eventually, they got dues check-off. I think you know about that story. And we were able to do that in other places. We got dues check-off in Mississippi. Of course, they had it in Missouri already, and we were also in Oklahoma. Oklahoma was very difficult because they had another association there, and they had a long history of that association. That's what made that very difficult.

Debbie [01:03:34] Within the union, what structures were there to develop leadership and to address issues of people of color?

Brooks [01:03:52] You said within our union?

Debbie [01:03:53] Within CWA.

Brooks [01:03:55] They had the minority caucus, and then they started the equity committees to deal with that. The minority caucus I thought was very important because they kind of [unclear] getting paid by CWA.

Debbie [01:04:10] I'm sorry, I didn't hear you.

Brooks [01:04:11] They weren't getting money through -- from CWA.

Debbie [01:04:13] The Minority Caucus.

Brooks [01:04:15] Minority Caucus.

Debbie [01:04:17] This was a grassroots effort?

Brooks [01:04:17] Right. They were more grassroots. They had their own money coming in.

Debbie [01:04:21] From where?

Brooks [01:04:22] From the membership. Wasn't a lot, but it was money coming in from the membership.

Debbie [01:04:25] So people would paid dues to the minority caucus?

Brooks [01:04:27] Oh, yeah, pay dues. It was truly a membership organization where people pay dues to be a part of it.

Debbie [01:04:35] And elected leaders?

Brooks [01:04:36] And the elected leaders.

Debbie [01:04:37] Who were some of the leaders?

Brooks [01:04:39] Well, [*unclear*] Andrew [Walter Andrews from Atlanta, Georgia] was one of them. Who else was -- Rudy.

Debbie [01:04:46] What was Rudy's last name?

Brooks [01:04:48] I'm trying to think of Rudy's last name. I don't remember. Rudy Francis.

Debbie [01:04:55] Where was he from?

Brooks [01:04:55] Louisiana. District 3. And his local's whatever local is in Louisiana. He's part of that local. And Andrews succeeded him.

Debbie [01:05:07] Walter Andrews.

Brooks [01:05:08] Walter Andrews.

Debbie [01:05:09] From Atlanta, right?

Brooks [01:05:10] From Atlanta, right.

Debbie [01:05:11] And what did they push for and what was accomplished?

Brooks [01:05:16] I think one of the things they pushed that the executive board didn't like they passed this resolution where [the] executive board had to get equity training. I don't know if you remember that. They had to be trained in equity. They pushed for --

Debbie [01:05:33] What does that mean?

Brooks [01:05:35] They wanted them trained in -- what's the word I'm looking for? I guess it was racial sensitivity training.

Debbie [01:05:50] Was it any good?

Brooks [01:05:54] [*Laughs*]

Debbie [01:05:54] Use words.

Brooks [01:05:55] I went through it. I thought it was -- You know who helped put it together was Yvette.

Debbie [01:06:00] Yvette Herrera [CWA education director].

Brooks [01:06:01] Yvette Herrera. They pushed for that, and they felt very uncomfortable. But it was done not to ruffle any feathers. What else did they do? From what I was told, they pushed to get the first seat that I was in -- or Connie was in -- they fought about that at the executive board, I mean, at the convention. So they were leaders in that fight, and I don't remember that. But that's what they said.

Debbie [01:06:30] Because a lot of the people of color were coming out of the public sector, is that correct?

Brooks [01:06:35] Right. Well, we had a higher percentage. Our percentage in the public sector is probably about 35, 40% minorities, 50% women. It's the highest ratio of both groups.

Debbie [01:06:48] When you're saying minorities, I want to know -- you mean African-American, Latino?

Brooks [01:06:53] African-American, but also Latinos as well. Afro-Americans, Latinos, and other groups. Asians. There wasn't that many Asians in CWA, not that I know of, but --

Debbie [01:07:04] So was the minority caucus an arena to cultivate black leadership and push on minority issues?

Brooks [01:07:15] They were good at pushing minority issues. I'm not sure about the leadership. They didn't have any formal structure where they actually brought leaders and trained them. CWA's equity committee did that, right? The whole idea of the equity committee was to bring leaders in. Which, by the way, the minority caucus, from what I was told before I got there, actually pushed for that because they said they were constantly being told there were no minority leaders because they didn't have the background or just the training or something. So they pushed for training. And as a result of that training, you had the Minority Leadership Institute, which they came into Washington for -- and I think you taught at once.

Debbie [01:07:54] Maybe.

Brooks [01:07:57] But anyway, they would come in, one person per district, one minority per district, would come in to CWA headquarters once a year, and they would stay about 3 or 4 weeks. They were trained in different aspects of the jobs. Politically, they were trained. They were trained how to speak in front of people, how to write articles, a number of mechanical things as well as political things.

Debbie [01:08:22] Was it effective?

Brooks [01:08:23] You know what? I thought it was somewhat.

Debbie [01:08:27] Do you remember some individuals who --

Brooks [01:08:29] Came up through that? Let me think -- and there are some off the top of my head -- I'll have to think about it because I can't put my finger on any one person. But they wound up going back and becoming staff reps. I don't know if Claude went through that. I think Claude might have gone through that.

Debbie [01:08:53] Claude Cummings. [CWA national president at the time of the interview, elected in 2023.]

Brooks [01:08:53] Claude Cummings, right. Which would be the biggest testimony.

Debbie [01:08:57] After you, who was the next person of color on the executive board?

Brooks [01:09:06] Let's see. Let me think. Well, Claude [unclear] when we pushed for the equity seats. So that was Claude. They have [unclear].

Debbie [01:09:22] Before that?

Brooks [01:09:24] Before that? I can't think of anybody before that.

Debbie [01:09:29] I'm wondering about Linda Hinton. [District 4 vice-president.]

Brooks [01:09:34] No. She wasn't on the board.

Debbie [01:09:35] She hadn't been elected yet?

Brooks [01:09:37] No. She hadn't been elected yet. Linda hasn't been around too long. I mean, she's been around long, but not in that position that long. She might be in her third or fourth term.

Debbie [01:09:49] And for many of the sectors?

Brooks [01:09:50] So most of them came through the equity committee. I think that was it.

Debbie [01:09:53] So until the vote to create the minority seats --

Brooks [01:10:01] There were none.

Debbie [01:10:01] The four -- You were the only African-American and no Hispanics --

Brooks [01:10:07] No.

Debbie [01:10:07] -- on the executive board?

Brooks [01:10:08] No.

Debbie [01:10:08] In a union that at that point was what percent people of color?

Brooks [01:10:12] I don't know, but it was pretty high. You know, it might have been about 25%.

Debbie [01:10:17] At least.

Brooks [01:10:19] Yeah. Matter of fact, there was an oversight of Latinos. When they picked out this committee, we had a committee, I was part of the committee.

Debbie [01:10:31] Which committee are you talking about?

Brooks [01:10:32] There was a committee that created this whole board seats -- the four [equity] board seats.

Debbie [01:10:37] To come up with the proposal.

Brooks [01:10:41] Right.

Debbie [01:10:41] Which then had to be voted on at the convention.

Brooks [01:10:43] Exactly. At the convention.

Debbie [01:10:44] And you were on that committee.

Brooks [01:10:45] Right. And I think Barbara Easterling led that committee up. On that committee, I was sure to be in there for obvious reasons, but they had no Latinos on that committee. So to have women on a committee that some staff rep white men, but no Latinos, I did raise that because I think everybody should be represented. What they did, they didn't go back and put a person on there, but what they did -- we used to travel from different districts -- as we were in a district, they would have their Latino people come in and speak and offer what they thought about what we're doing.

Debbie [01:11:20] So we've talked about at the top level of the union, it was really until the equity seats --

Brooks [01:11:26] Right.

Debbie [01:11:26] -- which I believe is 2007 --

Brooks [01:11:28] Right.

Debbie [01:11:29] -- that there finally became --

Brooks [01:11:30] So prior to that, so that's from 1989 that I was on there. And prior to that you had Connie. From that time period all the way up until -- you say it was 2007? Okay. I didn't remember the date. There were no minorities on the --

Debbie [01:11:43] And what were you hearing was going on in the locals in terms of folks, people of color feeling like they were being treated in an equitable way and able to move into leadership, etc.?

Brooks [01:12:02] You know what? I used to have discussions with various people and leaders from around the country, but at some point they had become very comfortable just having me there. At least we got representation, right? And actually, that's not enough because I'm only one person and I don't have the power to get stuff done as one person. You do need other people. At that time, I think Linda came on the board, so.

Debbie [01:12:28] Linda Hinton.

Brooks [01:12:28] Linda Foley.

Debbie [01:12:30] Oh, Linda Foley, from the [News] Guild.

Brooks [01:12:33] Right, way before Linda Hinton. And it was Barbara Easterling, Linda Foley and myself. At least you had three of us that was on the board. Oh, no, there was one before. Janice.

Debbie [01:12:45] Oh, Janice Wood out of District 9.

Brooks [01:12:47] Right, District 9. Because she lost, she was on one term. She lost the election. I think she was on the same time as Linda Foley. That came through affiliation. Then you had also the woman from the airlines [AFA/CWA]. So we got women on the board. Think about this.

Debbie [01:13:08] Pat Friend. Yeah.

Brooks [01:13:09] You got women on the board from affiliations and not from within. Which is kind of bad, except for Barbara Easterling. [CWA secretary-treasurer, 1992-2008]

Debbie [01:13:20] Right.

Brooks [01:13:20] She's the only one that came through CWA ranks and got on the board, and I was the only person of color at that point that came through the ranks and got on the board.

Debbie [01:13:30] So in terms of we've talked about national leadership. At the local level, did you see a change over this period --

Brooks [01:13:44] Yeah, I did. Absolutely.

Debbie [01:13:46] -- in terms of equity?

Brooks [01:13:47] Absolutely. When you start to see a change and within a local leadership as more people started running for offices and stuff. You got to figure, out of the 35,000 state workers that I came out of, I was the only elected leader that was a minority.

Debbie [01:14:08] Really?

Brooks [01:14:09] You had eight locals, and I was a local president [of local 1033] and that was it, right? Then eventually that started gradually to change.

Debbie [01:14:23] What about Caroline Wade?

Brooks [01:14:23] Caroline Wade -- she wasn't there for. No. Caroline Wade was in the local [1040], but she was not an elected -- she was not a president.

Debbie [01:14:29] Okay.

Brooks [01:14:29] In fact, she became president after I left.

Debbie [01:14:31] Oh, okay.

Brooks [01:14:32] So she became president after [19]89. At that point it was Norman [Levins] -- I can't remember his last name -- but Norman was the president.

Debbie [01:14:41] So did that change even within the New Jersey state worker locals?

Brooks [01:14:46] It has changed. But it's still not that great. It did change somewhat the locals that were welfare locals -- I call them social workers -- they had minority leadership.

Debbie [01:14:58] And that was countywide.

Brooks [01:14:59] Right. So the locals here because -- and you probably know this too -- each state is different. Some [welfare departments] are state level, some are county based, and New Jersey is county-based. And so each county, each one of the counties, they had different makeup and some of them had minority leadership. Not a lot even there.

Debbie [01:15:19] Do you think there was a period in which people of color said, "The local's dominated by whites. There's no reason to get active." Or were there caucuses or whatever that were --

Brooks [01:15:36] Well, when you came out with the minority caucus, CWA creates equity committees. Every local was told they had to have an equity committee. And then alongside of that, you had [the] minority caucus, and the minority caucus [*unclear*] obviously from the locals. And so that was a committee sometime, not in every local because it wasn't mandated, but some locals actually had a minority caucus group, and those groups would meet and sometimes it would be the same people. The person that was running the minority caucus was also on the equity committee. I think that that transfusion helped a lot too. Because that way they would -- they didn't do as much to my liking as I thought they should have because when I got elected I spoke before them several times, and I thought one of the things they should do is they should build the united front with the women's group. It was a women's caucus. They didn't see it necessarily that way. So it didn't happen.

Debbie [01:16:39] This was the minority caucus.

Brooks [01:16:40] Right, the minority caucus.

Debbie [01:16:41] Which still exists?

Brooks [01:16:42] Yeah. It still exists, far as I know.

Debbie [01:16:44] And the committee on equity still exists?

Brooks [01:16:46] I don't know about the equity committee. I'm assuming it does, but I don't know.

Debbie [01:16:49] Okay.

Brooks [01:16:50] Because Claude came up through some of that stuff too.

Debbie [01:16:52] Claude Cummings.

Brooks [01:16:53] He was vice president, Claude Cummings, vice president of the equity -- not the equity committee -- minority caucus for a number of years. He was vice president of that group. I don't know if he went through the Minority Leadership Institute but I know his successor did, which was Andrews.

Debbie [01:17:13] Walter Andrews.

Brooks [01:17:14] Walter Andrews. He definitely did, because I used to go to those things and talk to him. But out of that group, which did help develop a lot of local leadership. You had locals, vice presidents that were minorities, women that were minorities, all coming through that group. That was -- I think it was not as effective as it probably could have been, but it was somewhat effective because it helped develop people. Because if you're in a group like that and you are the minority of a group, it's somewhat intimidating as well. You're just not going to go in and try to take over, run for office. Some locals were more liberal than others. Some locals said, "No way. You can be a shop steward, but you can't be, you know." And nobody stops you from running. But it was hard to get elected. You start to see that change. I think both of those groups helped. One of the things Larry [Cohen] did, he started meeting and having the groups meet together when he became president. He would bring in, and he would officially recognize the minority caucus and bring them in, and have them meet with the equity committee. It was all one meeting which I thought was very good and important. They started getting some recognition along the way because one of the things they would do at the convention is have all the vice presidents come in and address the group. Now, the problem I had with it, I thought, is they should be allowed to ask questions. They didn't want to go there. I don't know why. If they're going to appear before and speak before, you should be allowed to ask them questions, and find out what their feelings are, and what their thoughts are. They came in, they speak, and then they left.

Debbie [01:19:04] I think I have asked the questions about that arena. Are there other things you want to, talk about, Brooks, that sort of sum up your career in the union?

Brooks [01:19:13] I was very disappointed in a lot of ways with CWA and their treatment of the public sector. I think the public sector could have been so much better off and we could have had a lot bigger growth. If I can be honest, the politics got in the way of a lot of stuff that shouldn't have. At some point, people thought I was trying to build an empire. My only goal was to build growth within the organization, and I thought that could be achieved. One of the things we did, we brought Mark Blum in at some point because of the higher education workers. We needed somebody who had an expertise that could help recruit them. It worked much more than we anticipated. We were getting calls from all over the country to become part of CWA, based on a model that he had built for UPTE and training and working on with UPTE.

Debbie [01:20:14]. UPTE is Union of Professional and Technical Employees at the University of California.

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Brooks [01:20:21] Exactly.

Debbie [01:20:21] Which came into CWA. I don't remember the year.

Debbie [01:20:24] I don't remember the year either.

Debbie [01:20:25] And they had collective bargaining.

Debbie [01:20:27] Right.

Debbie [01:20:28] It was a big union.

Brooks [01:20:28] They did have collective bargaining. There were a lot of unorganized community colleges, particularly in California. That group roughly was about 13,000. Alongside of that group there was the research, clerical staff, and support staff that were not organized -- or they were organized into an independent group. They also came out of AFSCME as well. but the term of limitations had passed, which means they could be organized. We were trying to work with them, and Chris Kennedy and Mark Blum met in my office, negotiated their first contract, which was a very good one.

Debbie [01:21:10] Whose first contract?

Brooks [01:21:11] The clerical and technical support staff. They had an organization that they formed.

Debbie [01:21:19] But not part of CWA.

Brooks [01:21:21] Not part of CWA. We were trying to recruit them in. We said, what we'll do is we'll work with you guys, help you out and negotiate your first contract. But we only did it for one year because the idea was to get them to come to the CWA, which didn't happen, but it's a shame. I think we could've put more effort into it, but it might have happened. Anyway, my whole thing is that we had developed various programs to teach and grow the organization. It was met with a lot of resistance. I think people became very suspicious of their motive. You had three people -- myself, Mark Blum, and Chris Kennedy -- that I believe didn't have any political aspirations other than to see the organization run right and somehow nobody believed that, or whatever. But anyway, and so a lot of the stuff that we had recommended was not looked upon favorably.

Debbie [01:22:25] If I recall, there was a tension between the public sector, which was not geographic, and the traditional CWA structure --

Brooks [01:22:36] Right.

Debbie [01:22:37] -- in which there was geographic representation.

Debbie [01:22:40] Right.

Brooks [01:22:40] And that was part of what you were dealing with --

Brooks [01:22:43] Exactly.

Debbie [01:22:43] -- was the power coming out of the geography, where in the public sector you have to influence politicians.

Brooks [01:22:50] Exactly. Good point. Very good point.

Debbie [01:22:51] And so that's geography. And your view was, "But there are issues that a public sector office can --"

Brooks [01:23:00] Can address. Right. And it wasn't in competition. There were a lot of proposals that we ran by them. But it became like a competition or a power thing. You're absolutely right, the way you explained it. I talked about this a lot at the executive board because their whole thing was based on, we needed to get involved locally with the local politicians. There were no programs to actually do that. Most of our political program was national based, which is fine, we have to do that. But it should also have been considered local based as well, particularly at the state level.

Debbie [01:23:38] New Jersey, I think, was an exception to what you're saying.

Brooks [01:23:41] New Jersey was the exception because of the size of the locals.

Debbie [01:23:43] They were politically active in the local and state.

Brooks [01:23:48] My local, 1033, had 6,000 people. I was president in 1981. By 1983, I had over \$1 million in a kitty that I didn't even spend. That gives you the magnitude of the size of the amount of resources that they could have. I had six full-time staff, had three full-time secretaries, and still they would accumulate a very short period of time, \$1 million, which you're talking about 1982, [19]83. It's a lot more money than it is now. They did a lot of their own things because of that, because they had resources. Now, Larry was smart enough to make them large enough so they could be independent. I think that was well thought-out that he approached it that way. That helped make a big difference. They could do a lot of their own stuff.

Debbie [01:24:42] To sum up, changes you saw in the union over those --

Brooks [01:24:49] Well tons of changes. Just a change in the minority make-up. just in changes of the leadership, the changes in how we approached the work, where we become a little more strategic. They started talking about, what is the Fund? The Strategic [Industry] Fund that we had. I used to complain about that. We used to call it Strategic [Budget Committee], but we did nothing strategic. I was on [that] budget [committee]. Of course, I got kicked off [*laughs*] the committee, but I was on the committee for, I think about a year and a half or two years. They had board committees. And on the board committees, you get assignments, but I could never get on the budget committee. So one year I got on the budget committee, and I talked about [how] we needed to be more strategic in how we spend our money and stuff, and just stop throwing money at stuff. We could do that. Well, eventually they got to that point, which was great when they have the Strategic Budget Committee. And you would have projects and you could submit them in. So that was a big major change in organization, because a lot of it was about, and understandably, was just about negotiating a contract. There were things that a contract, and issues that weren't going to be solved, particularly in the public sector. You can't solve half the problems they have through a contract

because [*unclear*] bargaining. Ones that do have bargaining is so limited with taking bargaining, which they can talk about. The only places that really had all-out scale bargaining would be UPTE. That's even over in New Jersey. So you got to approach the work differently.

Debbie [01:26:25] What couldn't they bargain over in New Jersey?

Brooks [01:26:28] I'm trying to think. I mean, they had the right to strike, and we didn't have that right to strike.

Debbie [01:26:33] You mean, California did.

Brooks [01:26:34] California. New Jersey did not.

Debbie [01:26:36] Okay, but you bargained over wages and benefits and working conditions?

Brooks [01:26:39] Right. It was very narrow. Wages, benefit, and some working conditions.

Debbie [01:26:43] So I'm going to ask a final question. What difference did being in the union and the leadership make for you in your life?

Brooks [01:26:50] Oh, a tremendous amount of difference. First of all, I live a better life. That's helped me with my outlook. I appreciate the union. Without the union, I probably wouldn't be half as thoughtful that I think I am, a lot of things that I've been involved in, I probably wouldn't have done -- US Labor Against the War. Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, A. Philip Randolph. So all those organizations -- and A. Philip Randolph is a political organization that teaches you how to get people elected, politically elected. I developed a relationship with the Congressional Black Caucus and helped get certain things done. I had introduced Claude Cummings years ago to [Member of Congress} Al Green. Because Al Green was from Houston, I said they needed to know each other and work together. Today, they're good friends and they do a lot of work together.

Debbie [01:27:54] Member of Congress.

Brooks [01:27:55] Right.

Debbie [01:27:56] From Houston, right?

Brooks [01:27:56] Al Green is a member of Congress from Houston. Bennie Thompson in Mississippi helped us get a lot of stuff done in Mississippi, which would not be possible.

Debbie [01:28:08] The mayor of Jackson, Mississippi.

Brooks [01:28:10] I'm sorry?

Debbie [01:28:11] The mayor of Jackson, Mississippi.

Brooks [01:28:13] I forgot about him. Him as well. Absolutely.

Debbie [01:28:15] Say his name.

Brooks [01:28:19] Let think of hisname. It's an African name. I know it well.

Debbie [01:28:25] Is it Lumumba or something? [Chokwe Lumumba]

Brooks [01:28:27] Yeah.

Debbie [01:28:28] Okay. We'll look it up.

Brooks [01:28:29]. But anyway, he's young. His father was the mayor before he became mayor. That was important because we represent something like 2 or 3000 people, the city of Jackson. I wasn't around long enough through his term there, but one of the things we were working on, considering working on, in organizing other cities in Mississippi -- we approached him. I knew his father. His father died in office. They brought in another mayor. Between that time and he wanted to run. The first time he ran -- they had a midterm election. He lost. So we reached out to him, my office, and told him that we would support him if he was seeking reelection, which he said he was. He was going to run during a major election when other term ended. So I said we'd be there, and we would support you, also reached out to Claude. At that time, he was a District VP. And got some resources from him that we couldn't get from the national. That was actually pretty good, too, during this period, in helping us get some resources. Unfortunately the local was not necessarily that good because the leadership there was not that great but we did get him elected. One of the things we had talked about is that one of the things in Mississippi is they had about six cities. They had workers in there that could be organized that became black mayors that we thought were approachable and that we could organize through that. The mayor of Jackson said when he got elected, he would work with us and help bring them along, because most of those other cities always look to the mayor of Jackson anyway, historically. And so, he would help us in that endeavor. Now, he had gotten elected, year before I left.

Debbie [01:30:30] At any rate, it didn't happen.

Brooks [01:30:31] So it didn't happen.

Debbie [01:30:34] Brooks, I think this has been great. I think it's just been great. I'll give you a chance if there's anything we haven't covered that you want to add.

Brooks [01:30:44] I might call you when I get home. [*Laughs*]

Debbie [01:30:47] You can do that.

Brooks [01:30:49] At this point. No, I can't think of anything.