

Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Evans, Gail

Interviewer: Jeff Rechenbach

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Gail Evans Interview – January 11, 2024

The interview with Gail Evans was conducted on January 11, 2024. Jeff Rechenbach conducted the interview via zoom from Cleveland, Ohio. Gail Evans, Debbie Goldman, and Hannah Goldman were in the CWA District 2/13 office in Lanham, Maryland.

Jeff [00:00:00] We found the best way to start this is just start at the very beginning. Tell us about when and where you were born.

Gail [00:00:09] I was born in Baltimore, Maryland. One of five children, two girls. We were born in the hospital. The three boys were all born at home. That's how we were divided through life. Two girls worked at the phone company. Three brothers were operating engineers.

Jeff [00:00:27] Very cool. What did your parents do for a living?

Gail [00:00:31] My father was a steelworker for years. Once he did retire, he entertained himself -- I'm going to say selling used cars and betting on the horses. I tried to learn his system. I never could win \$52,000 for the Pick-6, but he did.

Jeff [00:00:56] So when he was a steelworker, was he in the Steelworkers Union?

Gail [00:00:58] Yes he was.

Jeff [00:01:00] Okay.

Gail [00:01:01] He worked for Bethlehem Steel. He worked for 30 years. He took the 30 and out. He retired young. Just like a lot of our phone company people wound up doing with these early retirements because they got into that period where they retooled, outsourced jobs, and really closed up what was considered Bethlehem Steel, Sparrows Point in Maryland. But here it is a couple generations later -- my oldest son works at that location for an industry called Lafarge Industry. It's one of the largest concrete manufacturers. What they're doing is reclaiming the earth back there-- cleaning it up, and they take that gravel and work with the barges that come in. It is amazing, some of the archival things that he finds, brings back. He's also a local president of the Steelworkers that represent that group.

Jeff [00:01:58] Very cool. Well, this is genetic.

Gail [00:02:01] I think it must have been those disciplinary meetings.

Jeff [00:02:04] Tell us about your mother.

Gail [00:02:06] My mom was a homemaker. She did work before the five of us got there. But it wasn't until later in life that she did go out, and she worked a small job. You see these people in Costco and places like that that are giving out samples or whatever, grocery stores. She did that, and she liked it because of the social aspect of it. She did that for a few years. But never really had a real career other than kids.

Jeff [00:02:35] That's a pretty good job. Where are you in the pecking order of the five?

Gail [00:02:42] I'm number two. Oldest daughter, second child.

Jeff [00:02:48] So lots of pictures of the first child. Not many of you.

Gail [00:02:52] Well, there's a couple. Even less of [number] three, four and five. I'm the oldest. My sister complains that there's lots of pictures of me as a baby, but very few of her.

Jeff [00:03:03]. That's how it goes. The novelty had worn off, I guess, by the time the second one came. Where did you go to school?

Gail [00:03:11] I went to school here in Maryland. I went to Perry Hall. I went to a couple of elementary schools, but I graduated from Perry Hall Senior High. And from there -- This is one quirk I had with my parents. They believed the boys should go to college and the girls should marry someone who went to college. I'm not sure how that osmosis works. It was my goal to go to college. When you get into the phone company at 16, and you're paying attention -- because a lot of people don't pay attention to these things -- I found their tuition assistance plan and I went at night. I went to community college and got my AA degree there. Then through the National Labor College, got a BA in Labor studies.

Debbie [00:04:08] A Catholic school or public school?

Gail [00:04:09] Public school.

Jeff [00:04:12] You said you started at the phone company at 16?

Gail [00:04:15] Yes, I did.

Jeff [00:04:16] So tell us about that.

Gail [00:04:17] I started on like summer break from school. I was still in high school.

Jeff [00:04:26] Doing what?

Gail [00:04:26] Started where all women work. Directory assistance. That's where we all started. From there I worked until like May of the following year. I worked shifts, like 2pm-10pm. I worked some 12pm-8pm, 1pm-9pm. They couldn't work me past 10:00pm, but that gave me full-time hours. It allowed me to really garner almost a whole year of service before I became permanent. I only went to school not even a full day, but it wasn't a half a day. They have classes I know they call diversified occupation, but I did not go through that. I went on my own. I had enough credits to graduate.

Jeff [00:05:32] You started when you're a junior or just after your junior year?

Gail [00:05:36] Correct.

Jeff [00:05:37] And then all through your senior year of high school.

Gail [00:05:40] Correct.

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Jeff [00:05:41] Was there a separate rate of pay?

Gail [00:05:45] No.

Jeff [00:05:46] Same rate as the operator you're sitting next to.

Gail [00:05:48] You're just classified as a temporary employee. That didn't matter whether I was a high school student or someone hired off the street at legal age. I stayed in that job for three years. Couldn't wait to move someplace else. I did become familiar with the MAP program, where they let you look at jobs through the company. [Mobility Application Plan]

Jeff [00:06:17] What year is this now?

Gail [00:06:19] I went to work there in 1970 so this is 1974

Jeff [00:06:23] Okay.

Gail [00:06:25] And this would have been like [19]74. From there, I applied for the job of service representative. They even posted those, I remember, on the bulletin board, went down, tested, tested out, and was given the job and couldn't wait to get out of there. It's like, you died and went to heaven because first of all, it was more pay. Two, there was a little more flexibility and it was a little more challenging. Back when I was a service representative, it was a job where you did the billing side, the sales side. It wasn't diversified, which is what it's like today. You either just sell or you just collect. But it was like reading a book. Every customer coming on the line was a new chapter, so you really kind of made your day go fast. I guess maybe five years after that, I went back to that MAP binder and I applied for a frame attendant job, which is a plant job in our area. The goal there was -- If I'm going to work, I might as well work for money, and that certainly paid more money. So after applying, qualifying, I moved on to the frame.

Jeff [00:07:42] This is all after the Bell System entered into the consent decree with the EEOC.

Gail [00:07:48] I have an article somewhere where it shows 1983. I was interviewed here by the Sun Papers because I'm right there. Divestiture. I'm a female in a male job -- frame attendant was considered that. So it was up to that point and I guess I had been on the frame maybe two years. But what I did in that period of time, and I remember that interview, was to say that I'm not stagnant, I'm not going to stay here. I was taking classes through what they call the ATLAS program, taking some of their classes like basic electricity, binary numbering system. All of that helped me pass the test for Central Office Technician, which I moved into maybe about four years after being on the frame.

Debbie [00:08:38] Just to jump in. The EEOC [Consent Decree] was in 1973.

Gail [00:08:44] I didn't come under that at all As far as applying for jobs, etc. to my knowledge.

Debbie [00:08:58] They didn't specifically recruit you as a female to go into a tech job?

Gail [00:09:04] Nope.

Debbie [00:09:06] What did you do as a frame attendant?

Gail [00:09:11] As a frame attendant? We installed the wiring inside those brick buildings or Central Offices. That was for plain old telephone service or what we called POTS. An installer would come out on the other end, connect the wire at the terminals and posts and give a customer new service -- or in reverse, disconnect it. There were several different technologies that I worked through, from five crossbar to 2ESS, different type of office equipment which made the job progressively less labor intense. I kind of found it to be easier.

Debbie [00:09:53] 2ESS is digital right? [2nd generation electronic switching system]

Gail [00:09:55] Correct.

Debbie [00:10:01] And you were with C&P Telephone?

Gail [00:10:03] I was with C&P Telephone.

Debbie [00:10:05] In Baltimore?

Gail [00:10:06] In Baltimore.

Jeff [00:10:09] What's the difference between a frame attendant job and a central office technician job?

Gail [00:10:14] A central office technician -- I remember one of them telling me this once -- gets paid for what they know, not what they do. In other words, you can be the trouble [shooter] person. If something breaks, you're going to be responsible to figure out what's broken and you're going to fix it. They also did a similar job to the frame attendant, but they worked on special circuits, special circuits meaning businesses, hospitals, not the plain old telephone service.

Jeff [00:10:48] That's an interesting point, which harkens back a few years. When you're a service rep, are you dealing with residential customers or business customers?

Gail [00:10:56] I dealt with residential customers. Actually, I didn't stay in one office. I went and did a couple of years when American Bell came around. Remember, that? It was a phone center store. I worked in the mall and from there I worked in a public office [customers came to the business office to conduct business]. I enjoyed those jobs, too, because they were face-to-face. You had that contact with people. You weren't just sitting behind a telephone all day. But the service rep job in the office was still interesting because you probably handled 35 calls a day and every one was different.

Debbie [00:11:33] This was before the computers. So you were dealing with paper records.

Gail [00:11:39] Correct.

Jeff [00:11:42] Let's go back. You're 16 now. You enter into that office. Are you approached about joining the union at that point?

Gail [00:11:52] At that point, it was not CWA. The union that represented operators in Maryland at the time was known as MTU, Maryland Traffic Union. They eventually merged with CWA. Yes, I was approached to join the union and yes, I did.

Jeff [00:12:12] Tell us a little bit about Maryland Traffic Union. This is a bit of CWA lore that I didn't know about.

Gail [00:12:19] Maryland Traffic Union primarily had the directory assistance operators and you could call them long-distance operators. They also had dial administration clerks, which was a little strange to me, but nonetheless, those were the three job titles that they had, and it wasn't a real strong union. In my opinion, as I look forward or I look back, I guess, was it a very strong union? They were not aggressive. I don't think I saw a grievance handled in the Baltimore office. I did see one handled in the Holibird office. They just weren't aggressive. You have as many discipline problems, that's for sure.

Jeff [00:13:10] Do you know how many people were in that union?

Gail [00:13:14] It probably was only a couple hundred. Well you know what. I can't speak to that. I'll say a couple of hundred that I'm going to be familiar with. But they covered Washington D.C., Virginia, and West Virginia, so they were probably a couple thousand. That'd be something in our archive somewhere, I'm sure.

Jeff [00:13:35] You don't recall what year they merged with CWA?

Gail [00:13:38] It was around [19]72, [197]3.

Jeff [00:13:45] So while you're still an operator they merged. Did the local, the union leadership, then become local leaders at that point? Did they merge into a local or did they get their own local?

Gail [00:13:58] They got their own local. In Maryland, it was 2110. Maveon Garrett was the president.

Jeff [00:14:04] Then you go on to service rep. You're already in the union. You're in a different local though at that point. What local were you in then?

Gail [00:14:15] I was in local 2100 which is the local --

Jeff [00:14:18] This is when you first arrive in 2100?

Gail [00:14:20] Correct. At the time we had a local president that was very supportive of females, which you didn't see a lot of that, believe it or not, in line. Probably the first time I met him is when I called the office and said somebody has got to get down here and talk to these people about how to pick a schedule. Because we all didn't work the same shifts. You had change in shifts, and it shouldn't be that somebody gets stuck with the late shift all the time or vice versa. There were people that didn't like the early shift. So they came down. It was in the public office. And they came down and we just sat in a group and talked with management. There was no grievance filed or anything, but I was just impressed that they came, they addressed the issue, and we got it resolved. They followed up by -- this was one of their hooks. I remember Al Anderson and Mike Armiger

telling me about this one day, "Yeah, this is how you hook them. You invite them to the meeting. You feed them some food." He said, "You talk to them. You build them up. And then you got them!" And really, that's some of it. That is how we bring some people in to try to build that, some friendship. Not necessarily to have to be best friends, but you've got to be cordial and be interested in one another.

Jeff [00:15:46] And is that how they got you?

Gail [00:15:47] Yeah, pretty much after that incident there. Then, a little further down the road, I got suspended for being late to work, of all things. I was just beside myself. I said, "Everybody's late to work here." But I was the example, is how it turned out. Long story short, we grieved it. The second step, they gave it back and they explained that, "You know, since we suspended you, it's really improved around here." That's why I got that time back. But I thought that kind of didn't make sense to me. I could have carried that as a chip but chose not to. That kind of brought me in. I continued going to the stewards meetings. Then around election time, they asked me to run for the area vice president, which 2100 in Maryland has always been the plant local. They had all the cable splicers in all the counties, I'm going to say, except Prince George's and Montgomery, and part of Anne Arundel and the Eastern Shore. Those were other locals. But other than that, we had 5 or 6 counties in the other direction.

Debbie [00:17:00] Which direction?

Gail [00:17:00] North.

Debbie [00:17:01] The people listening may not even know what north --

Gail [00:17:06] That would be Baltimore County. Carroll County, Frederick County. It would be Cecil County. Harford County. It would be northern Anne Arundel County. I think that about covers the counties there.

Debbie [00:17:18] Maryland north of the DC suburbs toward Baltimore, but not Baltimore City.

Gail [00:17:23] And Baltimore City. I would include that -- Baltimore County, Baltimore City to me.

Debbie [00:17:27] Okay.

Gail [00:17:27] It was a large geographical area. It was a lot of outside plant members. We had the highest per capita dues dollars and we were able to do things that a lot of the locals couldn't. Thank goodness Albert believed in it too. You got to educate people. We did our own stewards training and what have you, long before you really saw it at the national level, which at the national level and our local level, I would say we were just heads above other organizations out there that I had become affiliated with, the AFL-CIO. Really at the community college, a couple of courses that I took there, one in collective bargaining, it was me and all these auto workers. World of difference. World of difference. That's when I became involved because I a) got in trouble and I saw how they operated, and through that steward system, and through them inviting me in -- "Run for a job here."

Jeff [00:18:32] So you're asked to be a steward. What job were you in when you were asked to be a steward? Is that when you're in the public office?

Gail [00:18:37] I was ~~in~~ on the frame.

Jeff [00:18:39] So you're already on the frame and they asked you to be a steward. Then shortly after that, you're asked by whom to run for the area vice president?

Gail [00:18:50] The president of the local asked me to run for the area vice president job. District vice president, they called it. I'm still a frame attendant at the time. I ran and beat my opponent 2 to 1. And boy, doesn't that give you the confidence when you're like, the only female on the frame, the only female in the central office at the time, and you're looking around thinking, okay. There were other reasons I got that job.

Jeff [00:19:20] When you run for this, you described it as the district vice president. Is this a geographic district that you represent or is it a job discipline that you represent?

Gail [00:19:35] Geographic. I had the inside and outside titles. There were central office people, central office technicians, and there were cable splicers and installers and service technicians.

Jeff [00:19:47] And just for my benefit, 2100, does that include service reps as well?

Gail [00:19:52] It did when they were located in areas of our jurisdiction. But after a while they were moved out of our jurisdiction.

Jeff [00:20:03] You're now district vice president. Tell us about that. One of the reasons we wanted to talk to you is you're a bit of a unicorn here. You've done all kinds of jobs within the phone company and then had every job within the union.

Gail [00:20:21] A staff rep told me once, "Can't you hold onto a job?"

Jeff [00:20:25] Well, that's great for our benefit because we want to try and capture as much of this as we can. Tell me a little bit about that experience.

Gail [00:20:34] So as a district vice president, I represented, these outside technicians and it helped me understand their job. I will not say that I learned how to do their job. It certainly taught me how to understand their job. But at the end of the day, I always thought that the problems they had were the same problems inside people had. A lot of the grievances were the same. You know, the scheduling issues are the same, lateness and absence issues are the same. They're people issues. They're not just specifically to the way you do your job, I'll say. That came much later when they decided, we'll shortcut this and we'll make quantity and quality really count. It'll be quality for a while and not necessarily quantity. And then we'll reverse it. It's just how many widgets you make and not how many -- or not how well you make them.

Jeff [00:21:36] You're district vice president, how many districts are in the local at that time?

Gail [00:21:40] Seven were in the local at that time.

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Jeff [00:21:41] You're one of seven. You're on the executive board of the local?

Gail [00:21:46] Correct.

Jeff [00:21:47] Who's president at this time?

Gail [00:21:50] Al Anderson was president.

Jeff [00:21:50] Al's still president. How long did you serve as the district vice president for your region?

Gail [00:21:57] I served one three-year term. When the term was up, we were losing our treasurer, or we wanted to lose our treasurer, and they had me run for that. I became the treasurer at that point. While I was really not as heavily involved at that point of representing, I was really the administrative end. I enjoyed it. Actually when I was promoted to Central Office Technician and they put me on nights in Baltimore City. It was convenient because I would carry the books with me and do the books while at work. They did a silly thing there. They promoted a couple of us and they would give us a set amount of work to do. It's because we were taking circuits down. And they're special circuits. We're taking them down and we're putting SMAS points in. They called them their remote testing points so that remotely they could test those lines whenever they had problems. We would take it down, we would rewire it and put it back up. They would let us do 5 a night. Well, that took 25 minutes. I'm telling you, I did all kind of crafts. I did the locals' books.

Jeff [00:23:45] What year is this now that you're the treasurer?

Gail [00:23:50] I'm going to say 1984.

Jeff [00:24:10] How long did you serve as treasurer?

Gail [00:24:12] I served for a year, not that complete term.

Jeff [00:24:18] Tell us about that.

Gail [00:24:20] Because our executive vice president, who was Bill Brandt at the time, he left. But I had to run for that job. I didn't have to, but I chose to. I ran for that job, and I became the executive vice president. Ask me what year that was. It's like 1985. It was like three months later, Al went in business with his brother and left Verizon, retired. Our by-laws read that the EVP moved into the president's spot. So I became president by virtue of the bylaws at that point. But I will tell you that after that fact, I never had opposition except one time.

Jeff [00:25:53] This is 1984 now right?

Jeff [00:26:00] Your bio says [19]84.

Gail [00:26:03] Does it?

Jeff [00:26:03] Yeah.

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Gail [00:26:06] Could be.

Debbie [00:26:22] So it was '88 or '84?

Gail [00:26:24] It was [19]84.

Gail [00:26:30] Well, it says that she led the local as president from 1984 through 2004.

Gail [00:26:35] That might have been when I moved over into the slot from Albert. Then I'd have to look at that timeline again.

Jeff [00:26:43] It says from [19]76 to [19]84, you're a job steward, Area Vice President, Executive Vice President, and Treasurer.

Gail [00:26:50] There you go.

Jeff [00:26:50] I guess not in that sequence, obviously.

Gail [00:26:55] That makes sense.

Jeff [00:26:57] How many members are in 2100 in 1984 when you become president?

Gail [00:27:02] Probably about 4000.

Jeff [00:27:04] Here you are, you're president of a major local in the district -- the largest local in the district?

Gail [00:27:12] No. There were probably four other locals that were larger.

Jeff [00:27:15] Oh, really?

Jeff [00:27:22] So substantial local for sure. I'm guessing, based on my experience, a female president of a plant local of that size was a bit unusual in that time.

Gail [00:27:38] Yes. But they knew I cussed.

Jeff [00:27:42] So tell us about that experience working with these --

Gail [00:27:45] I did have some people come up and say, "I can't believe we have a woman as our local president!" Once they got to know me, it was very different. I had some contention from some of the other local presidents who actually thought they knew what their jobs were. But, we'd get along after a period of time, but the new people on the block, they gotta get their comeuppance.

Gail [00:28:12] I won't say it was unbearable, I survived it. And within the local -- I didn't really have any enemies within my local, to be honest. I've had my old secretary, who just recently retired down there, told the new staff rep here, she said, "Oh, everybody loved Gail. She'd just do whatever they wanted." I said, "Well, that means when they had a problem, we tried to address it." It wasn't that we did what they wanted. It's that we tried to fix it. That's our job is to be a problem solver.

Which is probably what I liked about all of these jobs. Whether it be the leadership in the local or negotiating contracts. Same thing. You're trying to solve problems. Hopefully.

Jeff [00:29:05] Any interesting experiences, particularly with your peers as local president and during that time frame?

Gail [00:29:13] Running for bargaining as the Maryland representative. I can remember being at a president's meeting stating, yes, I'm running and I had the votes. I knew that I had the votes. But a supporter of the current administration -- which I wasn't -- stood up to address the fact that he was going to run also. He looked over at me and he said, "Gail, as a mother of two, you probably don't have the time that it's going to take." I mean, it was just all so negative! And I said, "Really, who died and left you boss?" But we didn't fight. I just said, "Let him talk." I had already proven myself to enough people. When you can count, then you stop. Why waste your energy?

Jeff [00:29:59] So is that how bargaining was arranged? You were elected -- somebody from each state?

Gail [00:30:04] Back then, we had four contracts. Let me back up. We had four states in the contract for C&P Telephone at one time. That was four contracts, but they merged. But we still kept a representative from each state. You were elected by the presidents of that state.

Jeff [00:30:26] And what were the states?

Gail [00:30:27] Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.

Jeff [00:30:35] And your local, 2100, is one of the larger ones in Maryland?

Gail [00:30:39] It's one of the larger ones within what the area of Maryland is called. The local that has Prince George's and Montgomery County was probably the largest local in our state. But for reasons of bargaining and it's outlined in their contracts, they are considered part of the metropolitan Maryland suburban Washington, DC area.

Jeff [00:31:00] Okay.

Gail [00:31:00] I had to work a few people, but not all of them.

Jeff [00:31:11] Tell us about your first bargaining experience. What was that like as a local officer on the bargaining team?

Gail [00:31:20] I took it seriously, I did. I served with three other people out of our district. It was 1992 bargaining, I believe. It was not really a prolonged bargaining. I can't remember whether that was one that we struck or not, to be honest.

Jeff [00:31:47] I've just got your little clip from your retirement party. That's all I've got.

Gail [00:31:55] I think [19]95 was the year we struck. so 19]92, just trying to think of who was on that committee. It was probably Jim Pappas, Jim Hillary and Steve Moss out of West Virginia. I think we worked well together. Back then, we used to have a national table. Then you had a local

table, as you probably did out in district 4 too. The real bargaining between the members on the committee came at that local table. That was the in the days where the company said, "I got this amount of dollars. Spend them how you will." It really put it back on us to argue among ourselves about where that money would go. But it didn't get ugly. We were fair. They knew it made sense. They knew that unless they saw a way for me to be able to sell it to Maryland people -- and that meant give them some of the local stuff too, not just the national stuff -- that without that, it might fail as a whole when they voted to accept that contract. So we bargained among ourselves and got there.

Jeff [00:33:16] Yeah. When you say national [bargaining], at that point the Bell System has been broken up. So now you're no longer part of the Bell System. You're part of Verizon.

Gail [00:33:26] Correct.

Debbie [00:33:26] No. Bell Atlantic.

Gail [00:33:28] Bell Atlantic at the time.

Jeff [00:33:29] Bell Atlantic. You hadn't merged yet into Verizon. So where's the national table for Bell Atlantic at that point? Post divestiture?

Gail [00:33:43] I'm sure that it was the IBEW out of New Jersey, and then also what was District 13.

Debbie [00:33:56] Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey Bell.

Gail [00:33:59] Right.

Debbie [00:34:02] So you had Pennsylvania Bell, Delaware, and New Jersey Bell, which was odd because that was District 1. And then C&P.

Gail [00:34:11] And IBEW.

Debbie [00:34:11] If you did joint bargaining.

Gail [00:34:14] There were issues at the common table. We used to call it common issues that were everybody's common language, and health care, those big ticket items. And then there were local issues that got incorporated into your own agreements.

Debbie [00:34:34] Jeff, in District 4, you did not have that structure, correct? After you merged the Michigan Bell, Illinois Bell, Indiana Bell, etc. contracts into Ameritech, you had Ameritech bargaining. You did not have local bargaining, is that correct?

Jeff [00:34:52] That's correct. We merged through some tortuous process, the five contracts that we originally had in the Bell System into one contract under Ameritech.

Debbie [00:35:04] And when did that happen here? Has it happened? Do you still have a C&P contract?

Gail [00:35:12] No. What we have is a Potomac contract. You can call it C&P, but it's Potomac and they have District 13000 [techs in PA] has their own contract, 13500, which are the service reps in Pennsylvania. And then you have, in Delaware, you have a plant and a commercial [contracts].

Debbie [00:35:34] So you still have common issues for Bell Atlantic South?

Gail [00:35:38] Correct.

Debbie [00:35:38] Or Verizon South, it's now called. And you have local contracts as well.

Gail [00:35:42] And you have local [contracts as well.]

Jeff [00:35:47] So that's your first round of negotiations and you serve on more bargaining committees after that, obviously, over a 20 year period as president?

Gail [00:35:54] Yes. I served in 1995 also, which, that was a prolonged bargaining. It expired in August. We worked on extensions through January 26th, the new contract got dated the next year. That was a very long one, but not as long as the ones I ended up with later. I didn't have the responsibility that Barbara Schiller, who was there, or Barbara Lephart at the time. [assistant to the vice-president and bargaining chair]. But that experience, that's a good experience. It's a learning experience.

Jeff [00:36:31] Where did you bargain these contracts?

Gail [00:36:34] We bargained those in Washington, D.C. at different hotels.

Jeff [00:36:40] Did you commute or did you stay over?

Gail [00:36:43] No, we lived there, weeks on end, and then maybe we would break for a week or two. Sometimes it would be three days. The beginning of the week were common issues, and the last two days would be local issues. So the North -- the Pennsylvania people would go back to their area to do their bargaining locally, but ours was local enough we stayed right there.

Debbie [00:37:06] So you were on both common issues and the C&P tables.

Gail [00:37:11] Yes.

Jeff [00:37:15] You serve according to your retirement [clip] as local president for 20 years till 2004. Then you join the CWA staff. Tell us how that process took place.

Gail [00:37:30] Somewhere along the line, Pete and I made up.

Debbie [00:37:35] Pete Catucci, who was your district vice president.

Gail [00:37:38] Right. He was the district vice president. Actually, a staff rep was terminally ill, Jan Buttiglieri. She had talked to him, I understand. This was after the fact, somebody told me. She told him, "I don't know what you're afraid of her for. She does the job that you really would want

everyone to do." Then he came out and asked me if I was interested in the job, that he would like to have me on the staff. So I did accept that job. I took the job. I could hit the street running on that job, because it was very much like a chief steward's job in our local -- handling the top step of the grievance. That really was your main responsibility because we had a few locals here that that's all they did was turn those grievances out. The education -- trying to educate locals, whether you're doing local officer training, whether you're doing things with them in the political arena -- took second place to those grievances being churned, but nonetheless we cared for it till we could outgrow it.

Jeff [00:38:50] All during this era, from when you first started at the company up until you joined the staff in 2004, is a time of pretty tumultuous change within the telecom industry.

Gail [00:39:07] Absolutely.

Gail [00:39:08] Can you tell us a little bit about how you managed that -- particularly as a local leader? But also prior to your leadership in the local as well.

Gail [00:39:21] As a local leader and especially somebody that served on bargaining and helped with language about technological change, the tuition plan and the way we expanded that. You could study to do anything. I'm saying literally anything under that plan. It helped me in trying to help people that were targeted to be downsized. One thing that was a selling point for me was get this education. This is something nobody can take away from you. Get something that you want to do. Because if you're no longer working here, why would you want to get telecommunications classes under your belt? Unless you see that you can be promoted through the ranks and be that outside labor tech job title. I would say that most of the others are really targets.

Debbie [00:40:16] Which ones?

Gail [00:40:17] Which ones? Frame attendant was a target. Central office technician downsized greatly. Didn't do away with them, but downsized greatly. I'll bet you don't have a handful of frame attendants left out here.

Debbie [00:40:29] This is because of the move from mechanical to digital [switching]?

Gail [00:40:36] It was part of it, but also a lot of clerical positions when you think about it, that technology really -- in CWA we all did our own letters. We typed them. I'm going to say that internally within Verizon's operations, they didn't need all that clerical staff either. They had their field people, they would specialize -- they have a supervisor in the garage that did nothing but mark down absences and latenesses and maintained administrative records. That was a supervisor's position now. He just absorbed the clerical pieces that somebody else used to do. Where they made the assignment of phone numbers, for example. plant assigner. It's only one piece of that job, but it's one that I remember that they can do it by a computer now. So that's one piece gone. And then this is another piece gone. So you're somebody that's on the hit list too. You'd also get the notices for surplus, and you get them far enough in advance that people need to really start looking at that. I took, in my local here again, mostly outside plant people interviewed with a group that had these private training classes, little schools that tapped into our tuition assistance. They set up classes. We probably had about eight of them where we got outside technicians to be interested in them. I took those classes with them where we built our own computers, put them back together. It's not a skill

I'm going to use forever in a day. But nonetheless, I did it to demonstrate that anybody can do it. You need to get out here and get this. That helped some people in passing tests for other jobs. That's the other thing, an engineering assistant -- that's a horrendous test. But if they're paying attention and if they would read more -- we used to tease them, "Read more!" -- it would certainly help them go a long way.

Jeff [00:42:44] Did they teach you how to use headphones on a Mac?

Gail [00:42:46] Not really.

Jeff [00:42:48] Lost on me, then. Now you're on the CWA staff. You've joined with a leader who was a little skeptical of you.

Gail [00:43:00] Yeah.

Jeff [00:43:03] So tell me about that experience. What kind of assignments did you have right out of the box when you stepped into that role?

Gail [00:43:09] Right out of the box, he gave me those locals that were the grinders of grievances. I'll tell you, I had the Washington, DC group and I had the Maryland suburban 2108. And then after a while, I expanded. I had the eastern shore too, because we were down people and they were moving people, but it was manageable. I enjoyed that though. Kept me busy. There's nothing worse than having downtime, and it wasn't downtime you could add on to your weekend or what have you. And I got along. After a while, we kind of respected one another. I can remember a few things that he asked me about. And I said, "You know what? When you did that, when I was a local president, it did set me off." I said, "That's why you got a pen pal letter that day. That's why this happened." I said, "So if you want to respond back to letters," I said, "Go ahead. It's good therapy. I used to do it too. And then I'd throw them in the trash because all you're doing is prolonging this stuff." But at the end of the day, I remember some comments he made at a district conference. The last one he said that goes back to that reading thing. He said, "I listened to her one day." He said, to an old local that I belong to, he said, "Somebody called her with a question and she said, 'Do you have your contract there? Okay. Go to page 32. Okay. Read with me.'" And he said, "I bet they never called back and asked that question again." At least not to me. But again, I saw that light a long time ago to start educating yourself around here.

Jeff [00:44:44] At some point here, you go from being a staff rep to an administrative assistant. Is that your next --

Gail [00:44:53] Yes.

Jeff [00:44:54] -- step on the path?

Gail [00:44:55] Director or whatever we were called for a while. Yes.

Gail [00:45:03] Ron Collins moved up. Ron was the administrative director at the time, and Ron and I -- I actually had signed Ron up into the union, believe it or not, in the phone center store in Glen Burnie [Maryland]. We worked well together. We had a history. He asked me, did I want that

job? I said, "Sure, I'll do that job. I'm not going to be a grievance handler the rest of my life." That's when I became the director over here.

Jeff [00:45:34] Describe those duties.

Gail [00:45:36] Those duties included a lot of different things that I didn't realize at first, but it was handling the executive level grievances, and that would be a grievance that is very common to the entire contract. It wasn't just a local's grievance. It was something that affected the language, if you will, or how the language was applied. That was my responsibility to handle that. My responsibility was bargaining and it was really to pitch in on all of these programs, whether it be political, mobilization, organizing. Whenever you had a spare moment, you were in.

Jeff [00:46:16] What kind of organizing was going on at that point?

Gail [00:46:19] We had a couple of organizers that came and went. We actually had assigned organizers that were staff, and we would only go when we were called. It wasn't something that I got to go out and pick a location and then try and develop a committee from it or anything of that nature. But I can remember we did a cable company over here in 2108's jurisdiction. I remember something on the Eastern Shore also to do with cable. There were others, but, leave my head. I had a group clear down in southern Virginia, as a local officer. That was an experience.

Jeff [00:47:01] And mobilization during that time frame. How was that managed in District 2?

Gail [00:47:06] Mobilization depending on the bargaining unit that was in need of mobilization. It wasn't just during bargaining, in other words. There were times that we would have an issue that was statewide that the company was pushing, trying to change something in their policy. And we're getting that pushback from the locals. That was the one thing I enjoyed when I was a local president, was throwing that right back to them, whether it be -- I had a director that just -- he was just opposed to them working through their lunch. "You must take a lunch hour and you must take it where your last job is." If you're out in the middle of a cornfield, you're going to take it there. We're not going to pay you to come back to the garage. We did a thing in my local where we went out and we bought sandwiches and we had a meet within a ten minute radius of where these people were. So, you know what? They would just go bananas when they'd see 15 cable trucks out there. They would call us in and we would talk about it, and next week we'd go back to, you could work through your lunch. They worked them over time anyway. What was the big deal? But there were a couple of things we did that again, that was on a local level. On a statewide level, we dealt with overtime issues, and that's always been a messy, messy issue. You sometimes can't figure out really what they want, other than it's always about control. So recognizing it's about control, you could just learn how to take control sometimes. Not everybody gets that.

Debbie [00:48:42] You had a big issue I can't remember was [19]95, I think [19]98, the one that you stayed out for five months. Excuse me -- you didn't stay out. You worked beyond expiration for five months.

Gail [00:48:59] Right.

Debbie [00:48:59] And as I recall, there was a lot of tension because working beyond expiration as opposed to going on strike --

Gail [00:49:06] Right.

Debbie [00:49:06] And so, as I recall -- and Jeff, maybe you recall this as well -- that took a lot of organization and education to have a work-to-rule.

Gail [00:49:21] Certainly.

Debbie [00:49:22] Talk about that.

Gail [00:49:24] [19]98 we also had a subsidiary in Bell Atlantic called BACCSI. I forget what the acronym stands for. They did some of the installation work. Their contract was not up. But they're doing what we called struck work at the time. We did things like -- in my local, I had three locations for BACCSI, and I had a meeting from each one. These kids, and they were kids, they were 19, 20 years old. They all had a van that they took home, so they would leave their house in the morning. They didn't have that second car at home. That was a big benefit to these guys and you could definitely see it. We would get them together at each of the locations somewhere after work, talk to them for two weeks. And then we pulled the trigger on it. We explained to them that you're not going to go from your contract to our contract overnight. You are going to help us with our contract because we're going to picket you off of all these jobs. But here's what we can do to help one another. Turn those trucks in. Everybody turn your trucks in. If you're afraid just to go in and turn your truck in, drive to your first job. Call me at the hall. I have somebody out there with a picket sign. You can call your boss, say, "Come get your truck. I'm afeared for my life." That would be a smart technician. We did that, and in the course of three days our local had cleared the trucks off the street. That was a mobilization thing. Pete did call me and say, "What the hell did you say to them?" I said, "Their livelihood's at stake, too, quite frankly." But that took a long time. It took years after that to get both of those contracts together and to get them everything that they were entitled to, too. But they were brave young men to stand up and do that, to be honest with you. When I think back, they had a director, a female director of BACCSI at the time. She asked me, she said, "What did you say to them?" I said, "Oh, I can't tell you." Because I knew that they also went to her. They went to her with things like, "I'm going to get married. What kind of ring should I buy?" I'm not kidding. These were young men that looked for people to tell them. It was a part of an education process, not just for them, for me to know that you know what? This will work, this plan will work. We tried it with a couple of other locals. They didn't have the amount of people come in, but they had people turn in their trucks. Which we tried to help as best we could. I think that was a turning point of -- well, Pete told me it was a turning point in the bargaining. I said, "Well, good for them." But other than that, in [19]98 bargaining, it was just one of those prolonged things with -- health care was still on the table. I think BACCSI was still on the table, a lot of issues dealing with BACCSI at work. You know, [local] 13000 again, that would have been in common issues bargaining. They got out from under. We'd rather have them as a contractor. Which worked for them, didn't for us.

Debbie [00:52:35] You were on staff during some major strikes with Verizon.

Gail [00:52:42] Yeah.

Debbie [00:52:42] 2016.

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Gail [00:52:45] I was at the bargaining table then. We were in Philly, we were in New York. We were in Washington DC at the Federal Mediation [and Conciliation Service, FMCS] location.

Debbie [00:53:04] I think I meant 2000.

Gail [00:53:06] In 2000?

Debbie [00:53:09] Yeah.

Gail [00:53:11] In 2000.

Debbie [00:53:11] And then again in 2016, there was a big strike.

Gail [00:53:14] In 2000 I was in the field with mobilization activities. Then the next one 2003 I was at the location involved in bargaining. I couldn't tell you the issues. I couldn't tell you unless I look back and to see what issues were in that bargaining. Nine chances out of ten, it still had to do with economics. They were just in a mood to downsize. Unfortunately, we bit into some of that with early-outs. That's why you see the reduced number today. Just this year -- you know what medical caps are in these contracts? We negotiated for retirees a medical cap which said as long as the cost of their medical doesn't go over this dollar figure, they will not have to pay. Well, here we are with retirees this year in the Mid-Atlantic area. We have burst through the cap. So anybody that's pre-Medicare and retired are now contributing. And they weren't. They weren't as long as they had retired before 2013. So here again, the North -- whole separate issue. The North people, for whatever reason, did not take as many ISP [income security plan] offers, didn't have as many early [out] people leave. So they've not burst their caps because they don't have that many people in that group. That's a problem here. It's a problem when people just got the notice that it's \$100 a month.

Jeff [00:55:24] These are pre Medicare retirees you're talking about now that are having to pay the \$100 [premium]?

Gail [00:55:29] Right. A month!

Jeff [00:55:33] You've had an incredible career. What are some of your proudest accomplishments for that period of time that you were active in the union from steward all the way to your role in the district?

Gail [00:55:53] I can say that it's advocating for people and trying to educate them. I'll take you to the cash-outs when we first went into this option for retirement. I know I probably had 15 different financial advisors have some type of seminar for the local to participate in. I've since run into, at my friend's 80 year-old birthday, one of the cable splicers there said, "Do you remember down at --" and a location. He said, "I'm still with that guy." I said, "I'm glad you felt comfortable with them and I'm glad they're doing a good job for you." But if they don't know it, I also have people I've run into that have told me, "I took the cash-out. I bought a new car. I fixed something at the house. And now I'm working a job." That saddens me. But it's back to that education piece for people and being an advocate for them to know that this is a good thing. But you got to understand what a good thing is. The idea that I have people that are not paying medical until this year. I mean, I had often told them, "Get out and meet your neighbors. Most of them are working two jobs, are paying for their medical already, years ago." That's the union difference here. So it gets back to -- I'm proud of being

a problem-solver for people and advocating for people, and hopefully have provided the means for people to live a comfortable life. I know I'm living a very comfortable life, and I'm sure hopeful that most of them are.

Jeff [00:57:43] Any particular frustrations over your time?

Gail [00:57:49] I guess lead them to water, but they won't drink. That comes to mind. I mean that -- what I'm telling you about that retiree bought the car and added to the house-- I feel terrible for that person. I just can't imagine what it would be like to be 70 years-old, still getting up at home, going to work.

Jeff [00:58:08] How many members does 2100 have today?

Gail [00:58:11] I just was asking Dee that. She didn't know exactly, but I can imagine they're probably a thousand or less.

Jeff [00:58:18] What was it when you left in 2004? Probably had already gone down.

Gail [00:58:24] It had already started going down. Yeah. Because of the ISP offers. It was probably 2500 or so. It still was a good-sized local.

Jeff [00:58:36] I know the feeling. My local was 2500 members when I was local president. It's out of business today.

Gail [00:58:44] There's different ways to get their attention. I look at the typical person that was there 20 years ago. Their issue was overtime, and how much of it can I work. Today, the issue is overtime, and how much can I not work. I can remember having, I think it was a legislative conference., and Jeff, you did this little workshop about how do you get people to sign up for COPE. [Committee on Political Education]. In our local, it was the guys that were working all that overtime, making all that money, we took a check and we put on it (it was really about comp time): Here's where you worked 80 hours and what you get today. Here it is on comp time. You get a 40 hour check and an IOU is what you got. We did well on that. But that was that time, that period. You have to think of your audience each time. If you can educate them.

Jeff [00:59:58] Gail, this was terrific. Thanks for agreeing to do this.

Gail [01:00:01] Well, you're welcome.

Debbie [01:00:02] Thank you.

Jeff [01:00:02] I think it's important we capture these snapshots of the history of our union. Whether somebody does something with them or not --

Gail [01:00:13] And how ordinary people can come together and do something. You're right. I look around all the time and think, Whew. You know, some of them, they were all high school educated. I knew that, but I can just really applaud most of them.

Jeff [01:00:27] You beat me. I started when I was 17, so you got me by a year. So.

Gail [01:00:33] Yeah.

Debbie [01:00:34] And you were local president at what age, Jeff?

Jeff [01:00:38] 19.

Debbie [01:00:39] It took you into until what age?

Gail [01:00:41] I guess I had to be in my 20s. But I still hold the record for longest -- holding the title here in district, what was District 2, for local president.

Jeff [01:00:57] Yeah. 20 years. That's pretty remarkable.

Gail [01:00:59] But I liked it. I truly liked it. Had a good group that I work with. I still keep in touch with all of them. Each group of them.

Jeff [01:01:11] I keep going back to this, but being a woman leading a plant local at that particular period of time is quite remarkable. I'm trying to think of a similar example back in District 4 and I'm drawing a blank right now.

Gail [01:01:27] Well, it was learning to cuss with three brothers that probably helped me handle it. Whatever it took.