

Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Finnigan, Gladys

Interviewer: Debbie Goldman

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Gladys Finnigan Interview - April 1, 2024

**Debbie** [00:00:11] This is April 1st, 2024. Not April Fool's Day because this is going to be a real recounting. We're on zoom. This is Debbie Goldman, who's doing the interviewing of Gladys Finnigan, spelled F-i-n-n-i-g-a-n. Correct?

**Gladys** [00:00:36] Yes.

**Debbie** [00:00:37] Hannah Goldman is doing our sound recording and Jeff Rechenbach is in Cleveland or somewhere thereabouts as he's driving a car while we're doing this interview. Okay, now we'll go back to the question. Tell us where you were born. When?

**Gladys** [00:00:56] Good morning. I was born in the same town that I live in now which is Cortland Manor, New York in 1962. I was the last of five children. My parents, Joseph and Gladys. My father was involved in real estate sales and insurance sales. He had his own business which ended up closing. Then he went to work for New York Telephone Company in the real estate division. My mom worked in retail. She was a stay-at-home mom early in my life. Then when I was probably school-age 8 or 9 she did go to work in retail and continue to do that. They both retired and then went back to work. They worked into their 80s, my mom in the library and my father went back to selling real estate condominiums. They were very active and independent. My father passed away when he was 88 and my mom at the age of 90. They both lived independently and good long healthy lives. I moved out of Cortlandt Manor temporarily but I came back. I live in the town with my husband. I have two children ages 26 and 28. I retired from CWA and I've been enjoying retirement since December 31st, 2022.

**Debbie** [00:02:46] Lovely. You were blessed to have your parents with you for all that time. Let's just do a little bit more about your childhood. Cortland Manor, is that New York? And tell me about the community of Cortland Manor.

**Gladys** [00:02:59] Cortland Manor is in Westchester County, New York which is about 50 miles north of New York City, of Manhattan, about 35 miles north of the Bronx. It's a town. I don't know how many people are in the town. It's fairly large.

**Debbie** [00:03:21] A working-class town? Middle-class town?

**Gladys** [00:03:24] It's a middle-class town. A lot of blue-collar workers, some middle-management. It's not a high CEO sort of town. It's definitely a working-class town.

**Debbie** [00:03:43] And your background. You come from Irish background? Catholic?

**Gladys** [00:03:51] We're mixed. I was raised Catholic. I'm mostly Irish. I do have other parts of German and English. Mostly Irish though which was what people in my family seemed to be most proud of.

**Debbie** [00:04:11] When you think back to your youth, what kinds of values did you learn as a child that you think were reflected in the kind of work you did for the union?

**Gladys** [00:04:29] Hard work. One of my mother's favorite words was stick-to-itiveness. So if you started something, you finished it. You didn't quit. You didn't give up. You just stayed with it until

you figured it out. If you didn't know how to do it, you just stayed with it until you figured it out and you just don't give up.

**Debbie** [00:04:53] What high school did you go to?

**Gladys** [00:04:55] I went to Walter Panas High School.

**Debbie** [00:04:58] Is that a public or private school?

**Gladys** [00:05:00] It's a public school. It was in the Lakeland School District. There were two high schools that serviced our community, one middle school and then we broke off into two different high schools.

**Debbie** [00:05:15] Did you go to college after you graduated?

**Gladys** [00:05:19] No. I took some college classes but just local at the community college and decided that I just wanted to work. I got a job at the phone company when I was 19 years old.

**Debbie** [00:05:34] Tell us about that. Your father worked for New York Tel so I'm guessing that he helped you get the job.

**Gladys** [00:05:44] Well, he probably got me the test. He told me how to go through the testing process. My father worked for the phone company and my brother worked for the phone company and my father's best friend actually worked for the phone company also and that's how my father got in. I wanted to be a field technician. I wanted to climb telephone poles. They were just starting to hire women into those roles. There were not that many. It was mostly male-dominated. So I applied to work for the phone company, probably when I was 18, for those field tech positions and I wasn't getting called. Then one of my sisters got hired as a telephone operator and I still didn't get called. And then another sister got hired as a clerk, and I was still waiting even though I had applied first. I wasn't quite sure why that was and I contacted the employment office and they told me the reason that I wasn't getting called was that they just weren't hiring field techs at the time. But if I wanted to work as an operator I could start right away. So I said, okay, I'll take the job as an operator figuring I'll just get my foot in the door that way. So that's what I did. I became a telephone operator in July of 1981 in Briarcliff Manor, New York. It was kind of my first real full-time job, if you will, with 40 hour, 37 hour workweek and benefits. It was exciting. Wasn't the job that I wanted, though.

**Debbie** [00:07:38] And you never had the opportunity to test to be a technician?

**Gladys** [00:07:45] Well. Things kind of changed and I didn't really want to do that anymore because I got involved with the union. Also, at the time it was easier to get hired off the street as a field tech than it was to get promoted into those fields. Once you got an entry-level job as an operator or a clerk, it was kind of difficult to get an upgrade to those jobs.

**Debbie** [00:08:17] That's interesting.

**Gladys** [00:08:19] There were some barriers that were in place with the transfer system that gave an extra benefit to people who worked in these technical jobs so that they got the job ahead of

everybody else. There were steps that they had to follow to fill a vacancy and some of it was geographical that they would look in certain areas first. But then if you had certain job experience you got an added benefit. So even if they had less seniority, if you were in a repair center, for example, answering phone calls, you would get an “adder”. And you would get the job before an operator or a clerk. I felt it was a little discriminatory the way that they did it at the time. But we were able to change that later on in bargaining for other workers.

**Debbie** [00:09:27] It's interesting because you were hired in [19]81. The EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] consent decree [with the Bell system] had expired. And so New York Tel was not under any kind of obligation to hire more women into technician positions. So that's interesting, your story. I don't think we've interviewed anyone who was an operator in the early [19]80s. So I'm going to ask you a few questions. Tell us about your work. Had they yet brought in the TPS, which I forget what it stands for, but those TPS systems.

**Gladys** [00:10:07] It was TSPS. [Traffic Service Position System]

**Debbie** [00:10:09] Thank you.

**Gladys** [00:10:10] And I forget what it stands for also. TSPS was just the type of equipment that it was. We were really toll operators. There were two types of operators. One was toll and the other one was directory assistance. I started as a toll operator. I never worked in the directory assistance portion which is information. The toll operators handled long distance calls, collect calls. If you had trouble getting through to a number, we would help you dial the number. Overseas calls, person-to-person, credit card billing, all sorts of billing, any call that needed assistance with billing, payphones, we collected the coins on payphones. It was shift work, meaning that the workers came in basically every 15 minutes they'd start a new shift. So if your office opened at seven, a couple of people would start at seven, a few more at 7:15, 7:30, 7:45, 8:00. And that went on all day long, people coming and going. You got different shifts every day of the week. You worked five days a week any given five days. So Sunday through Saturday. Some offices were open 24 hours. My office was not open 24 hours, so thankfully I didn't have to work overnights. We also had what they called split shifts. Split shift meant you would come in in the morning work, for example, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and then you'd leave. Then you'd have to come back at 5:00 and work until 8:00 or come back at 6:00 and work till 9:00 to finish up your shift. That was very disruptive. Some people liked those shifts, but if you can imagine, you're working 12 hours really over the course of the day having to commute twice to your workplace and home twice and getting paid for seven and a half [hours]. So, wasn't like you really could do much else with your life.

**Debbie** [00:12:41] I've been told that some people who had young children or elementary school-age children liked it because they could come home to be with the kids and then go back to work.

**Gladys** [00:12:53] That's true. There were some people who liked it and those people who liked it were able to get that shift all the time. If that was your first choice, you could have it. There were far and few between people who actually liked it.

**Debbie** [00:13:10] How many people were in your office at any one time during the day?

**Gladys** [00:13:16] Probably 60.

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**Debbie** [00:13:18] And did most people live in the area?

**Gladys** [00:13:22] I'd say we all lived within 20 miles of the office

**Debbie** [00:13:29] Of the 60 who worked there, how many were men?

**Gladys** [00:13:39] Probably 7 or 8.

**Debbie** [00:13:41] Oh, there were that many?

**Gladys** [00:13:42] Yeah. Young.

**Debbie** [00:13:44] Okay.

**Gladys** [00:13:45] Young people like my age. 19, 20.

**Debbie** [00:13:54] And so you actually interacted with customers? It wasn't just about pushing buttons.

**Gladys** [00:13:59] Oh, no. I spoke to several hundred customers a day. There was a lot of pressure to handle calls quickly. You've probably heard of the term AWT, that stood for average work time, and that was a measurement that they used to measure your job performance, how fast you could handle calls. Gosh, I think they wanted us to handle calls on an average of 30 seconds per call. 30 seconds probably. So that was in and out. Once one call dropped off, the other one was right there behind it. You didn't control the call. You didn't push the button to say, I'm ready to talk now. They just popped in.

**Debbie** [00:14:48] And were you monitored?

**Gladys** [00:14:50] Right.

**Debbie** [00:14:50] In what ways?

**Gladys** [00:14:53] Well, they would actually have a position which looked exactly like our position. We had a very large console that we sat at. It's two people side-by-side at identical consoles. The managers had a monitoring station that they would plug into. It was the same identical station that we had and they could see every button that we pushed. They could hear the customer, they could hear us. They would monitor us and listen.

**Debbie** [00:15:28] How could they see the buttons? I'm trying to picture that 40 years ago.

**Gladys** [00:15:34] So if you push a button, it would light up on their console. Whatever button you pushed would light up.

**Debbie** [00:15:43] So you would get evaluated both on the way you talk and on a range of items. What were some of the items that you'd get [evaluated on]?

**Gladys** [00:15:53] Well, they had set phrases that you had to use in order to talk politely. They didn't want you just to speak the way you would normally speak at home. You had to use their phrases. If there was any pause after a certain amount of time, you had to say, I'm sorry for the delay. One moment please. I'll be right with you.

**Gladys** [00:16:26] This is so long ago.

**Debbie** [00:16:28] Well, it's very interesting because I think that a lot of people have the picture of the old days of the operators at the long cord boards and with the plugs going in and out. And as I understand it, in the period when you started that was no longer the way that the technology worked and that operators, as you said, were sitting at consoles. I think it was one of the first places that the digital switching came in. You were working on electronic equipment and it changed the work.

**Gladys** [00:17:14] Probably correct. Yes. You were tied to this equipment with a headset. We used to plug in on the left hand side. You had to get in your chair a certain way. Enter from the left, exit from the right. Because when you were going on a break, someone would come in next to you to relieve you. They would put their plug in. There were two plugs side by side. They would plug in and you couldn't pull your plug out until they plugged in because they would take over to relieve you. They'd come in from the left, you exit from the right.

**Debbie** [00:17:56] If you had to go to the bathroom at a time when it wasn't your break time. What did you do?

**Gladys** [00:18:06] It's kind of humiliating that you had to let them know that you needed to use the bathroom or you needed a what they called an incidental break. If you took too many of those, that was a problem. They would call you out on that. On the top of your console was like a flat shelf. Some offices had red cups, like a solo cup, that you would have to put up on your desk to let them know that you needed a break, while other places had these little cards that were marked. Yeah, they had different cards for different things. One was if you were at the end of your shift and going home, another one was if you were taking a scheduled break, and then there was one marked incidental, if that was for bathroom or if you needed to leave for a personal reason. And sometimes you'd have to wait until they relieved you. Back when I first started they would often leave you waiting there for 15, 20 minutes before they would come in and tell you it was okay to use the bathroom.

**Debbie** [00:19:15] I'm not going to comment on the pun that you used about you'd have to wait till they relieved you.

**Gladys** [00:19:24] Right. Well. We started changing that over time. It was remarkable to me. One thing that really bothered me when we started working, they would post a schedule. I told you we started every 15 minutes, so you had to know your schedule for the week, write it down in a calendar. They would give you a little slip of paper. They didn't call your shifts or your tours of work shifts or tours. They called them tricks. We were all mostly women and they would refer to the tours that we worked as tricks. The operators were all okay with it. It bothered me. I think it was even in our contract that we would be assigned tricks.

**Debbie** [00:20:22] Tell me what you liked about that job and what you didn't like.

**Gladys** [00:20:33] I liked the people that worked in the office. There was a wide range of workers in terms of age. I liked the senior workforce. They were funny and engaging and the young folks were fun to hang out with, too. I met a lot of nice people. The work was boring, but sometimes funny also. I mean, we had a lot of different types of customers and characters that were repeaters that would call back all the time. So sometimes you just talk to lonely people. They were just lonely and would call up just to have somebody on the other end of a phone. Older people. There were a lot of fun stories that came out of operator services. The office atmosphere was caring. They had office parties. Some of the best office parties that I've ever been to came out of operator services. Everybody cooked and brought food in and took care of each other in that way. So the people aspect is what I liked most.

**Debbie** [00:21:52] And what didn't you like?

**Gladys** [00:21:59] I didn't like the way that they managed it. It was a little bit demeaning, the whole calling it tricks. They just didn't treat you very well, making you wait to go to the bathroom. Things like that just didn't sit right with me.

**Debbie** [00:22:25] Would you call it paternalistic?

**Gladys** [00:22:31] I guess that would be a word to describe it. But, the managers were women but they were not always nice. They were some nice ones but there were some mean ones that were vicious.

**Debbie** [00:22:46] There were a lot of rules, right?

**Gladys** [00:22:48] A lot of rules.

**Debbie** [00:22:50] Did you have to wear a skirt?

**Gladys** [00:22:52] No.

**Debbie** [00:22:53] Oh, you could wear pants.

**Gladys** [00:22:55] Yes.

**Debbie** [00:22:56] Okay. I think we've had a lot about what it was like to work as a toll operator and also about the relationships within the office. Let's get to the union story which is a very interesting story. At that point you were represented by the TTU. Is that correct? Telephone Traffic Union, which was affiliated with TIU which I don't know what that is.

**Gladys** [00:23:35] You know what? I was trying to recall exactly what that stood for myself and I couldn't. I think it's Telephone International Union. So yes I was TTU. When I first got hired I signed a union card. I don't remember having much interaction with anything union after that until we went on strike in 1983. My office was set back from the road a bit. We were not part of a garage. We didn't share workspaces with other departments. It was just operators. So we walked around on a picket line. We were assigned to picket duty a couple hours, not even a full shift. Probably a couple hours a week, 10 or 20 hours a week. So that was my first involvement with the union. I didn't know what the issues were. I don't remember anybody from the union coming around and

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talking to us before the contract, and I don't remember going to any union meetings. I don't know if they had any. I can't say that they didn't. If they did, I didn't attend them.

**Debbie** [00:24:55] TTU represented at that point all the downstate operators for New York Tel? Who did they represent?

**Gladys** [00:25:06] So the TIU had different affiliates in it, the Telephone Traffic Union, there were two telephone traffic unions. One was downstate New York. That was my local. And then there was upstate New York which ended up joining CWA also as local 1112. They also had the two commercial units [business offices]. I think they were CUTW. They ended up as local 1105. And the upstate commercial union went with IBEW. And they're local 2213. Then there were the two accounting units, one from downstate and one from upstate. So we were all part of TIU.

**Debbie** [00:26:05] And that's who was on strike, all of those units in [19]83?.

**Gladys** [00:26:09] CWA was on strike at the same time. Our contracts all expired at the same time. I don't think they bargained regionally together, but we always heard that our union rode on the coattails of CWA. So whatever CWA got we would we would pretty much get in terms of money, benefits. The local agreements were bargained on our own.

**Debbie** [00:26:42] So it's a pretty big story, the organizing that went on of the operators joining CWA. So tell that story.

**Gladys** [00:26:50] Okay. So the TIU was looking to merge with AFSCME [American Federation of State, County Municipal Employees] at the time.

**Debbie** [00:26:57] Why AFSCME?

**Gladys** [00:26:59] I don't know.

**Debbie** [00:27:00] Okay.

**Gladys** [00:27:03] I could guess they probably had some sort of arrangement for transfer of leadership. But that's just a guess. The workers didn't really like that idea. CWA started a task force of organizers which I joined. My brother was a steward with [CWA] local 1101 in the Bronx. I went to a meeting at their office with Joe McAleer and a bunch of other union folks from CWA about organizing and there's a few operators from different locations. Probably 8 or 10 of us all together that kind of started going to these CWA meetings. CWA started organizing from the ground up, putting together a campaign so that we could tell our union that we wanted to join CWA instead of AFSCME.

**Gladys** [00:28:19] Once that started, IBEW started doing the same thing. There was a big fight between all of the unions, I guess, because the national TIU still wanted AFSCME. They ended up putting that to a vote which failed in all of the units, the AFSCME affiliation merger. Then all of the units individually voted independently at different times whether they wanted to join CWA or IBEW. Our ballots had a choice between the two unions and five out of the six went with CWA. That's what our unit did.



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**Debbie** [00:29:05] That was in 1983?

**Gladys** [00:29:10] 1985.

**Debbie** [00:29:11] 1985. Was it fun to be organizing?

**Gladys** [00:29:18] It was fun. It was a little scary. But I didn't have anything to lose. I think I was still living at home with my parents so it wasn't like I was going to lose my house or my apartment if I lost my job. But the union wasn't fond of what we were doing initially.

**Debbie** [00:29:40] Which union?

**Gladys** [00:29:42] Our union, Telephone Traffic Union. Once they heard that there were these mobilizer or organizers internally they tried to stop us. I had taken a leave of absence to go work for CWA, to go around to all the different offices. And my union, the Telephone Traffic Union, got that blocked. They had me pulled back to work so I couldn't take the leave of absence. We had a lot of offices in just my local zone. We had over 60 workplaces.

**Debbie** [00:30:19] Oh my goodness.

**Gladys** [00:30:21] In downstate New York. Downstate New York covered Westchester south. So we had all of New York City and Long Island and Westchester.

**Debbie** [00:30:31] So you traveled around? Well, you weren't allowed to go off the job. So you did it when you weren't working for New York Tel?

**Gladys** [00:30:42] I did it when I wasn't working for New York Tel. I did it at night, days off. They also had -- have you ever heard the term AE in operator services? You could buy time back from the company. This was a weird thing too. You had a job that you could work and then you'd beg for time off without pay which we all did. You could sign up at the beginning of the day or at the beginning of the week and ask for time off without pay. If they didn't need people on any given day, you could get time off. That was anywhere from 15 minutes up to the full shift you could take back and get time off.

**Debbie** [00:31:33] So it's called AE?

**Gladys** [00:31:35] Absence Excused.

**Debbie** [00:31:40] So you would do that?

**Gladys** [00:31:42] I would sign up for as much of that as I could get and then go to work for CWA. Yeah.

**Debbie** [00:31:46] Why did you want CWA and what did you tell other workers why they should vote CWA?

**Gladys** [00:31:56] Well, after having been on strike and my brother was a CWA chief steward in 1101. So he was fairly involved. I saw their unity. I saw how they talk to people. I saw a presence in

their union that I wasn't seeing in my own. I felt more power in CWA, or it looked like they had more power than we had in Telephone Traffic Union. And I wanted more of a voice for the workers in our department.

**Debbie** [00:32:37] Now 1101 represented mostly male techs. How did they understand the workplace of the operators which was so different?

**Gladys** [00:32:50] Well, I don't know that they understood the actual work. I don't know how to answer that. (pauses) I mean they understood that we needed to make improvements, that we needed more of a voice, and we needed better representation. My workplace wasn't shared with other people, but I mentioned we had over 60 workplaces. A lot of them were in central offices where all different types of phone workers worked. When you worked in one of those offices, you saw how other people were treated at work compared to how you were treated at work as an operator. The [service] reps were kind of in the same boat. Anybody in a call center had stricter rules than people on the outside.

**Debbie** [00:33:54] And the operators even stricter than the service reps at that period.

**Gladys** [00:34:00] Probably.

**Debbie** [00:34:08] Was it also the case that many operators had other family members like you who were in 1101?

**Gladys** [00:34:20] Well, so interestingly one person that I met who was very important in my life as part of the organizing into CWA was a clerk who worked in Manhattan -- and I had never met her before, that was miles away, I wasn't a New York City girl at the time -- was Joyce Petrella. Joyce was in our local and she was doing the grassroots organizing too. I met her at some CWA meetings and we became friends, lifelong friends. Joyce was dating Chris Shelton at the time. Chris was the chief steward in local 1101. That's when I met Chris. Dennis Trainor was a chief steward in 1101. I met him there also. So lifelong friends were made right from the beginning there. She [Joyce] didn't have family but she knew Chris, so I don't know if that's how she got in or if they met at work. But as far as the other operators that I worked with I don't know if they had family members who were in the union, in CWA. I don't remember that being the case.

**Debbie** [00:35:59] When you voted CWA who was the district vice president then?

**Gladys** [00:36:05] Morty Bahr.

**Debbie** [00:36:07] What was his role in this organizing?

**Gladys** [00:36:11] Well, he was the vice president so he wasn't on the day to day. But it's kind of funny. Gosh. They started organizing, probably in [19]83. It was a long campaign and we voted in [19]85. But I was very young. I wanted to be a leader in the union. I wanted to run for office. I did run for a shop steward in my work group and was elected as such. But I wanted to run for business agent. They called it something different at the time, but I wanted to run for business agent in our new CWA local. We had it all lined up, who was going to run for what position. and then things kind of got changed around a little bit because somebody from the Telephone Traffic Union came out and said they would support CWA. So now we had to include that person. So everybody kind of

got pushed down and that meant I was getting pushed out of what I wanted to run for. I didn't think it was fair the way that it was handled. Looking back, I can't believe that I even did this but I must have called Morty at some point. I wasn't even in CWA at the time. I was just some kid, and told him that I didn't feel I was being treated right and he invited me to come and meet with them. I went down to Pine Street [CWA District 1 office]. I was so nervous and met with him and talked it out. Things didn't really end up changing from the decisions that had been made. But I was really impressed that he took the time out of his schedule to meet with me. That stuck with me. That's how it all worked.

**Debbie** [00:38:13] That was quite a story. Do you want to say anything more about what you thought of Morty?

**Gladys** [00:38:22] I loved Morty. He was just so genuine. He really took the time to make sure that people understood why we were doing things the way we were doing them. And if you didn't understand, he took the time personally to make sure that you did, in my opinion, from that point on. He came to bargaining in 1994. He came to bargaining after having discussions with the company about this Telecommunications Technical Associate deal that he worked out where people could go to college, go to school on company-paid time to get a degree in telecommunications. That really helped us resolve a surplus issue. I just thought he was brilliant.

**Debbie** [00:39:30] That was, as I recall, creating a new top craft title. This was during the digital transition. It was also for the company they were getting people who were trained to work on new digital technology, is that correct?

**Gladys** [00:39:51] It is correct. I don't know if it was Morty's idea or whose idea it was, but we were in bargaining when I first heard about that. But we were facing layoffs. 16,800 is the number that sticks in my mind as we went into bargaining and the company had announced that they intended to layoff or reorganize that many jobs out of our bargaining unit. We probably had about 60,000. So it was a good percentage of our workforce that they were looking to get rid of. And by people who were signing up for this going to school one day a week, that's 20% job security just in those jobs alone. So it was kind of genius.

**Debbie** We'll get back to [19] 94 or whichever year it was [19]94, [19]95. Bargaining [19]92. Let's jump back. So now you're in CWA and you're in 1101. Do you have your own seat on the executive board? How does that how do they incorporate?

**Gladys** [00:41:10] Okay, so I think I confused you a little bit maybe. We did not join into local 1101. Local 1101 and many other locals worked on organizing the operators and worked on organizing the [service] reps into CWA. But we came in as our own locals. We came in as affiliates and when we joined in 1985. We were our own local with a full executive board and our own autonomy. We had an affiliation agreement where dues were a staggered increase until we reached full dues. I think there was a three-year period where they increased a little bit each year. We had a guaranteed position on the regional bargaining committee with New York Telephone. We also had AT&T workers so we were on that bargaining as well.

**Debbie** [00:42:21] You had AT&T operators?

**Gladys** [00:42:24] Yeah.

**Debbie** [00:42:25] Okay. If you remember back, how many members did you have when you became CWA?

**Gladys** [00:42:33] We had about 6500.

**Debbie** [00:42:37] I am guessing that the entire time that you were in the leadership of that local, you saw the numbers going down, down, down, down.

**Gladys** [00:42:48] Yes. Technological changes had a devastating effect on the number of members that we had.

**Debbie** [00:42:57] Talk a little bit about the demographics of that 6500. White. Black. What percent?

**Gladys** [00:43:10] I couldn't give you. Mostly female. Geographically, it depends. In New York City, it was mostly black women. When you got to the suburbs, Long Island and Westchester, it was probably a lower percentage. Probably 70/30, maybe.

**Debbie** [00:43:40] And in your leadership of the union. Were black women in the leadership?

**Gladys** [00:43:51] Yes. I'm trying to recall back when I first started we probably had about half and half. And we had men. We had male representatives also on the E board. Not too many, though.

**Debbie** [00:44:16] So you were elected a business agent. And you say [in your bio that you sent me before the interview] that after restructuring, "I also represented Manhattan and then was elected president of my local in 1993 and remained in that position until we merged with local 1108 in 2004." So that's a long period. What were some of the major issues that you were dealing with and some of the progress that you were making in terms of bargaining. You said that you made a lot of changes to some of the rules and oversight.

**Gladys** [00:44:57] The first bargaining that I really took part in was in 1986. I was involved in the strikes. But as far as being at a bargaining table, 1986 was my first experience with bargaining.

**Debbie** [00:45:16] And you were at the local table? Because by that point, you also had NYNEX regional bargaining.

**Gladys** [00:45:29] No, in at that year I was with the AT&T table under [vice-president of the CWA office responsible for the AT&T membership] Jim Irvine.

**Debbie** [00:45:37] That's interesting.

**Gladys** [00:45:39] With no experience, that was probably the worst bargaining to start on. It was 1986. It was the first bargaining after the breakup of the Bell System and we had all the regional Bell operating contracts that had to be merged into one agreement. I think there were 27 agreements that had to be merged into one. Coming from New York we had some pretty good contracts. Even though we were part of the Telephone Traffic Union, because we had bargained closely through the years with CWA, we had some pretty good contracts. We were at the top of the 27, in my opinion,

as far as working conditions. What was expected of us was to come up with one agreement and unfortunately, the people at the top stood to lose the most and the people at the bottom on contracts stood to gain because they were going to land somewhere in the middle. That was very tough. Tough to accept. We did as much as we could to protect everything that we had with little breakouts and such, but it was a different looking contract than the one we went in with. It was tough.

**Debbie** [00:47:08] This was the AT&T Communications contract?

**Gladys** [00:47:11] Yes.

**Gladys** [00:47:13] And your role there was to merge the contractual agreements for the various AT&T operators?

**Gladys** [00:47:28] It wasn't just operators, it was everybody. All of the units. Technical, commercial, all of the units that were represented by AT&T. I think there were 27.

**Debbie** [00:47:45] Jeff, maybe you can help me understand. There was an AT&T Long Lines contract before this, but --

**Jeff** [00:47:59] Yeah. So, post-divestiture, AT&T retained the long-distance business, so that would have been all the toll operators in addition to the Long Lines, in addition to the [Bell] Labs. Some of the different and sundry units that retained with AT&T. It was trying to take those 27 contracts then and come out of there with one common contract, I guess. I wasn't in on those negotiations, but that was the Irvine office and Ron Allen and that crowd that were responsible for trying to bring all that together. You could imagine, you have 27 contracts. You've got the employer trying to grab the worst of those 27 contracts and us trying to grab the best of those which likely would have been a contract out of New York state where you had the best union density. So I can imagine that had to be brutal going through that process. We did a semi-process of that in the Midwest but only five contracts.

**Debbie** [00:49:04] We've talked about this before in some of the interviews, and the way I'm understanding it is that some kinds of work that had been done by the local Bell companies, such as installation of equipment, were now moved into the new AT&T long-distance company. Those people had been under local Bell contracts and now were moved. I understand that. In terms of operator services for AT&T, I would have thought that they were under the Long lines contract [before divestiture], not under local Bell, but I guess I'm wrong.

**Jeff** [00:49:45] They would have been under local Bell contracts at that point [before divestiture]. So it would have been a NYNEX or a New York Telephone contract.

**Gladys** [00:49:52] Right.

**Debbie** [00:49:54] And in fact, as I understand it, before this contract, AT&T came to CWA and said we have to create a whole new {business} -- well, now I'm talking about service reps, not about operators.

**Gladys** [00:50:12] So the directory assistance stayed bargaining with New York Tel or NYNEX. The toll operators became AT&T.

**Debbie** [00:50:25] So all of those different contracts for the operators needed to be combined into one contract. You were saying it was a very challenging bargaining.

**Gladys** [00:50:35] Particularly because I had never bargained before. It was it was a challenging bargaining for an experienced bargainer. It was very challenging, It was very tough.

**Debbie** [00:50:51] And you had run for and got elected to this bargaining committee?

**Gladys** [00:50:57] No. Because we affiliated we were guaranteed a position on bargaining tables and I think because they wanted a representative from each contract. I think they wanted one from each contract. But I ended up there somehow. I don't know how. My president told me to go, and I went.

**Debbie** [00:51:23] Who was your president?

**Gladys** [00:51:25] Paula Buckley.

**Debbie** [00:51:28] It must have been a huge bargaining committee.

**Gladys** [00:51:31] It was. It was very large. And they broke out into groups. We bargained in Somerset, New Jersey, I believe.

**Debbie** [00:51:39] And as I recall, you went on strike in [19]86, correct?

**Gladys** [00:51:42] Yeah. A brief strike, a couple of weeks. Three weeks maybe.

**Debbie** [00:51:48] Do you want to say anything about the strike?

**Gladys** [00:51:53] Well, I was actually at the bargaining table so I didn't have too much picket line experience or discussions with the members at that point. We were kind of locked up in in Somerset, New Jersey. I just remember it wasn't that long. It was not a particularly bitter strike. My unit, the operators -- I just want to go back to the strike of [19]83 when we were Telephone Traffic union. I didn't know this at the time but out of those 6500 workers there were a lot of people who crossed the picket line. Not in my workplace but in New York City and other places. And after the strikes ended really not much changed. People weren't treated any differently. It was almost like they turned their head and the union didn't do anything to them. Nobody brought up any charges against them. When we joined CWA, we took a strong stance on that. People shouldn't scab and we educated folks on it. Our first strike in 19-- I forget which strike it was. It was before the [19]89 strike. Maybe [19]86 or -- it must have been [19]86. We had about 500 scabs in our local. We had to file charges under the Constitution and go through that process of bringing them up on charges for 500 cases. We did that for every single one and fined everybody who crossed the picket line a day's pay for every day that they crossed. Of course, they didn't want to pay it and didn't pay it. In a lot of those cases we ended up having to bring people to court to collect the money and set up payment schedules for folks. We did that and the next strike after that was in 1989 and the number of people who crossed the picket line was greatly reduced. So I was so happy that we took that stance because it really helped us have stronger picket lines and stronger strikes in the future.

**Debbie** [00:54:35] What a story. It didn't lead to resentment against the Union?

**Gladys** [00:54:40] No. No. A whole culture of a scab is a scab and you treat somebody like a scab either way. You're not in my life anymore if you cross a picket line. That was hard for people to do because of the office environment. They were friends and people didn't want to stop talking to their friends. But there was a lot of pressure put on people, but also support for people who legitimately have to work, I have children, I'm a single mom, I need money. There was a lot of support. CWA's Defense Fund and Members' Relief Fund was a lifesaver for folks. It really helped people stick with the union and do the right thing.

**Debbie** [00:55:42] Talk about some of the bargaining you did that gave protections to the operators around working conditions.

**Gladys** [00:55:55] My first year at the regional bargaining table was in 1994. That was the first bargaining after I became president.

**Debbie** [00:56:05] This is New York Tel now or NYNEX?

**Gladys** [00:56:12] I think that was still NYNEX. Yeah. When do we become Bell Atlantic? 1998?

**Debbie** [00:56:18] Yeah.

**Gladys** [00:56:25] We had made a lot of improvements prior to that in terms of working conditions. We got extra pay for holidays. We got triple pay on some holidays. A lot of improvements in pay treatment, language in the contracts as well. We were able to hold on to benefits. 1989 was a huge fight over benefits and after a 17 week strike, we were victorious in keeping our no premiums for health care. In 1994, the bargaining committee that I served on, we were facing restructuring, re-engineering where the company wanted to eliminate 16,000 jobs across all bargaining units. Huge job security issues were at stake. So that's the year that we gained job security in the contract.

**Debbie** [00:57:31] What does that mean?

**Gladys** [00:57:32] We got no layoff provisions for all employees. Unless there was some sort of external event the company couldn't lay people off. They could reduce the payroll in different ways through voluntary retirement incentives. We improved the Upgrade and Transfer Plan language to take away those barriers for the inside forces to get to the outside technical jobs which were higher paying jobs that our members really wanted to get into. We had seen the company start to close a lot of work locations. I mentioned we had over 60 work locations in my local. They were starting to close them down and consolidate work groups which made it hard on workers because they had to commute further. For people in the southern suburbs, if you had to commute into the city that was an added expense. Not only just added time, but added expense in terms of gas tolls, trains, things like that. So, we got this 35 mile language in our contract where the company couldn't transfer people more than an additional 35 miles to add that to their existing commute. It limited the amount of offices that they could close. It didn't stop them from closing, but it slowed them down a little bit. It made it impossible for them to take a worker from Westchester and force transfer them to the east end of Long Island.

**Debbie** [00:59:26] These are huge achievements and you did it without a strike. How did you get them?

**Gladys** [00:59:38] Oh. (sighs) Every bargaining that we went into -- in 1994, I think we went into early bargaining.

**Debbie** [00:59:44] You must have because the cycle would have been [19]95. The contracts were [19]92, [19]95, [19]98. Anyway.

**Gladys** [00:59:56] Okay.

**Debbie** [00:59:56] That doesn't sound right?

**Gladys** [00:59:59] No. You're right. I didn't think about that. So, we must have gone into early bargaining, but it seems like every time we went into early bargaining expecting to get a contract in three months, we were still there for 10 or 12 months anyway.

**Debbie** [01:00:16] And who was the vice president of District 1 at that point?

**Gladys** [01:00:24] In [19]94. I think it was Larry Mancino.

**Debbie** [01:00:33] Jeff is nodding his head yes.

**Gladys** [01:00:39] I know Larry was [19]98, but I wasn't sure about [19]94 if it was him or Jan Pierce.

**Debbie** [01:00:48] We'll check. At any rate, my question remains. Huge achievements: a no layoff clause, no forced transfer past 35 miles. You talked about the positive of the new title in which people were off work for training. These are huge achievements.

**Gladys** [01:01:12] The whole union was focused around force adjustments. It was all about those jobs. And I think that's the year that we came up with the Telecommunications Technical Associate also that I mentioned that Morty came and talked to us about for the college degrees for the highest title. You know what I'm talking about.

**Debbie** [01:01:42] Yeah. I'm still asking you to tell people in the future who will be like me in awe of what you achieved. When you think back to it, how did you have the power to win those things?

**Gladys** [01:02:05] We had the power because the members were behind us. In 1989, I think that's when we started mobilizing. District 1 did a fantastic job of understanding what the workers did. Each worker, each title, did on a day to day basis. They understood the need for leverage and they knew how to get it other than strikes. We knew that strikes weren't the answer for a lot of what we needed to get. We needed to come up with other ways of putting pressure. So we used internal pressure with the members. It was, of course, political pressure. We had a great political program. And Bob Master [CWA District 1 political director] pulling all those strings. But really the members understood every step of the way what we were facing, whether it was health care cost shifting, re-engineering with job security. They understood the Issues. And so they drove everything, the members.



**Debbie** [01:03:26] Did you do work-to-rule kinds of mobilization?

**Gladys** [01:03:31] Yes.

**Gladys** [01:03:33] Give some examples of what that meant.

**Gladys** [01:03:36] I mentioned before 1989 really was my first experience with mobilizing. Do you want to hear how that came about?

**Debbie** [01:03:47] Yeah.

**Gladys** [01:03:48] Bob Master was the chairperson of some of the meetings that we had. District 1 put together a task force of people from the various bargaining units that came and met with Bob and some other folks from the national staff reps. And we just talked about the work that everybody did, they got a good understanding of all the different titles, what the shifts were, what those operations looked like and got workers to talk about what could be done to impact the company without breaking the rules.

**Debbie** [01:04:36] Is this 1989 or a different year?

**Gladys** [01:04:44] This was 1989. It started early because of the cost shifting with Verizon, not Verizon, NYNEX started to put in. Our contract expired in May, in August rather. In May, they started to try to take money out of everybody's paychecks for health care cost shifting for premiums. And they wanted us to sign cards saying that we agreed to have this money taken out of our paychecks. We had to mobilize around that and get people to not sign those cards because that wasn't something that the union had agreed to. There was a big dispute between CWA and the company about whether this had been agreed to in a previous contract. CWA said we didn't agree to it and the company said we did. So we knew early on that there was a fight there. That's when this whole-- Mobilization was a new word to us. We didn't know what that was. We just knew had a strike. So Bob met with us at all. He put together the toolbox of ideas that we got from workers in the field on how we could impact the company. There were things that seemed very small but they built solidarity and they built strength among the members and unity. Tapping pencils on your workstation when you're an operator, it doesn't seem like much but if 60 people are tapping pencils at the same exact time for five minutes, it sends a message to the company that we were united. We'd start small and build our way up. By the end or by the time we were ready to go on strike, we'd start doing practice picketing, lunchtime rallies, things that people had to come together for.

**Debbie** [01:06:54] And you were doing those things during the bargaining of [19]94/[19]95?

**Gladys** [01:07:02] Every bargaining after that one. Yes.

**Debbie** [01:07:04] And would you do education too with the members. How did that work? Did you have manuals that you would go through?

**Gladys** [01:07:14] We had trainings in different years. The Stewards Army training, that came in 2006. We did trainings before that just smaller groups. I forget what those trainings were called. But we did some trainings of stewards and activists in pretty much every round of bargaining. We did

flyers, we would do phone trees, starting the mobilization plan of ten members for one mobilizer, getting the word out about certain things. If there was going to be an activity, visit workplaces, go into the lounges, meet with people during their breaks or before their shift, after their shift. In operator services and in the commercial world it was a little tougher than the technicians. The technicians could have a garage meeting before everybody dispatched in the morning and get the word out very quickly to their entire group all at once. It took us a little longer because of the nature of the job.

**Debbie** [01:08:32] How would you do it?

**Gladys** [01:08:34] You had to spend more time in the workplaces. You had to actually be there from the first shift up until the early afternoon and then maybe have somebody there at night that was spreading the word as well.

**Debbie** [01:08:50] In the break room, you mean?

**Gladys** [01:08:51] Yeah.

**Debbie** [01:08:55] So you were elected local president in 1993, remained in that position till you merged with local 1108 in 2004. Talk about why you merged and the process.

**Gladys** [01:09:11] One of the reasons we merged was I was going to work for the national union and we were smaller in size. Financially, it was tough to keep a local going.

**Debbie** [01:09:28] How many members approximately?

**Gladys** [01:09:34] I would be totally guessing. Probably 2000 or less.

**Debbie** [01:09:39] So you dropped by two thirds by that point?

**Gladys** [01:09:43] Yeah. Okay. Maybe more. So it was it was tough to keep a local going financially. We did have a space that we rented which was expensive. We had salaries. Our geography was still pretty widespread so you needed a lot of union reps that could go around to the various locations. Wasn't something you could do with just a couple of folks. So it just became hard to manage and we thought it would make sense to merge when we were at a point where we still had money in the bank and still had income coming in and could have some leverage to negotiate a good merger agreement with a local where we would have a voice on their executive board, get a spot on the executive board so that our concerns would be addressed.

**Debbie** [01:10:51] And 1108 represented whom?

**Gladys** [01:10:56] They were a plant local in Suffolk County, New York.

**Debbie** [01:11:03] Why did you choose -- go on.

**Gladys** [01:11:06] We had discussions with a couple of locals around that time. We had considered really three locals. I won't give you the numbers because I'd just rather not. One local said it wasn't something that they wanted to do because the dues income really wasn't -- we weren't a high paid

craft. So the dues income was not what they were looking for in a merger. And then the other local that we considered didn't work out for one reason or another. I forget exactly why. And local 1108 was where we landed.

**Debbie** [01:11:52] Who was the president then of that local?

**Gladys** [01:11:54] George Welker.

**Debbie** [01:11:57] What would you say to folks today who may be thinking about decline in their membership. Should they merge? What did you learn from this? What advice would you give?

**Gladys** [01:12:15] It was important to me and I think -- CWA doesn't always enforce constitutional requirements of locals. But I think that there's some times when locals get to a certain point where you can't really effectively represent your members, but you also can't meet your obligations under the constitution of attending the conventions and doing all the things that you're supposed to do to be a fully functioning local. And if you can't do that, then I think you should really consider merging.

**Debbie** [01:13:01] You mean like having equity committees and women's committees and political action committees and those kinds of things?

**Gladys** [01:13:09] Those kinds of things and also even just attending the convention. There's locals that don't attend the convention. That's where our constitution gets amended, that's where appeals get heard and important issues get discussed and voted on. I think that's your obligation as a local. But yeah, also to have those committees. If you can't do that then you should merge so that you can.

**Debbie** [01:13:42] Jeff, I see you nodding. Did you want to jump in?

**Jeff** [01:13:47] I think that's right. We've all struggled with that, smaller locals and how do they actually deliver the kinds of service and connections to their members that we need in order to build a union. I was nodding in agreement with that notion that we really gotta try to address that more directly and be better stewards of how we manage the local structure within CWA so that it is connecting with members.

**Gladys** [01:14:18] I think it's hard because there are some exceptions to every rule. We all know a small local, or at least I do, very small local that doesn't have the money to function correctly, but they are a solid unit and they're better off staying as a small solid unit because they're just so good together. And if they merge with a bigger local, they'll just get swallowed up. So it's a catch 22, I guess.

**Debbie** [01:14:53] I have just a couple more questions about your time as local president. During this time, the operator numbers are going down. Were there some things that you were able to do to help people as their jobs were being eliminated?

**Gladys** [01:15:14] Well, we did not face any layoffs in my department. So that was a help. And the way that we managed that was through voluntary retirement offers, which was fantastic for my work group. Not good for the union necessarily because we lost members. But to see people who had enough time in the company to retire or get an extra \$70,000 and make their life more

comfortable was really a great plus. It was great to be able to deliver that to people through the bargaining process to see jobs open up and upgrades. We bargained provisions in the contract where the company had to do internal upgrades before they hired off the street, certain percentages they had to hire internally. So to see people go from a job that paid \$900 a week to a job that paid \$15 or \$1600 a week was fantastic.

**Debbie** [01:16:33] What kind of jobs were they going into?

**Debbie** [01:16:35] Technical jobs. Central office technician. Field technician.

**Debbie** [01:16:40] Did the local help them study for and pass the tests?

**Gladys** [01:16:45] Yes. We had upgrade and transfer testing manuals, we had classes. That was another thing that we negotiated, I forgot about that Debbie. We negotiated a training program where on company paid time we had people get training to help them pass the upgrade and transfer tests. And we had union appointed folks. So we kind of ruled the program. I picked the trainers for my local. I had a group of 5 or 6 trainers and they did that full-time. They went around just training people on how to pass upgrade and transfer tests.

**Debbie** [01:17:27] And the women operators were doing it?

**Gladys** [01:17:33] Yes.

**Debbie** [01:17:35] They were going into technical jobs, not service rep jobs.

**Gladys** [01:17:41] They did both.

**Debbie** [01:17:42] Wow. Okay. I'm going to sneak in this question. During this period you were raising two kids?

**Gladys** [01:17:54] Yes.

**Debbie** I don't know if you were single or married.

**Gladys** [01:17:57] Married. My husband is a Verizon worker too.

**Debbie** [01:18:02] What does he do and what's his name?

**Debbie** [01:18:04] He was a field tech. Tom [01:18:05.]Einterz[0.0s]

**Debbie** [01:18:08] How were you balancing raising kids and a demanding union job?

**Gladys** [01:18:16] Oh. Well, I had both of my children after I was elected president. So that was kind of good because I was kind of the boss. So I had some flexibility, but I can't say I really used it that much. I did not take extended leave, parental leave. I only took what Verizon gave, which was six weeks, I think, after the birth of your child. I took off and then went back to work. I had a long commute. I tried to leave work at 4:00 or right around then so that I would be home every night for dinner. I did have very good childcare which was key. I had somebody come into my house so I

[could] leave early in the morning without having to wake up babies and drag them to daycare which was a big plus. So I was lucky in that regard. It was not easy. But my kids were brought up in the union life. They'd come to the office with me. My daughter was born in 1998 and that was one of the years that we went into early bargaining. I remember I was three months pregnant when we started and she was three months old when we finished. So getting back to the point of early bargaining lasting forever. Imagine being pregnant through the whole thing. It seemed like twice that long. But she came to the bargaining table with me.

**Gladys** [01:20:14] At the end there in 1998, I don't remember if we had a strike. No, I don't think so. But Chris Shelton was our local chairperson for our local bargaining table and I had my daughter in the stroller. It was one of those late nights, she was sleeping and it was a stroller that could lay down flat like a baby buggy kind of thing. I brought her down in the 11:00, 12:00 deadline. One of the last things that we got in bargaining that year, and Chris got this, he said he got it because of my daughter. we got triple pay for Mother's Day for all the operators in the contract that year. So my daughter there at the table she got it for us.

**Debbie** [01:21:09] That's great. What's her name?

**Gladys** [01:21:11] Jessie.

**Debbie** [01:21:12] And your son's name?

**Gladys** [01:21:13] Tommy.

**Gladys** [01:21:14] Are either of them union members now?

**Gladys** [01:21:18] No. Unfortunately.

**Debbie** [01:21:21] Okay. So you went on staff in 2004 in Avenel, New Jersey. Then you transferred to the District 1 office in 2006 or [200]7. You were promoted to area director in 2012, assistant to the Vice President Dennis Traynor in 2015 and retired in 2022. So that's a big period. What were some of the issues and activities that stand out for you during your time on staff?

**Gladys** [01:22:03] Wow. When I worked in Avenel, it was a brief period, it was completely foreign to me. I didn't have any Verizon or phone company assignments. My assignment was all public workers and health care workers which I had no experience with at all. So it was a learning experience in both regards. My first day on the job I went down to a brand new unit that was just organized by Tim Dubnau for the New Jersey Nurses Union, Local 1091. They were bargaining a first contract in Lakewood, New Jersey with Saint Barnabas health care system. First contract for health care workers. First day on the job. That was CWA. (laughs)

**Debbie** [01:23:13] Were the skills that you had learned bargaining with the telephone company transferable?

**Gladys** [01:23:22] Not really.

**Gladys** [01:23:28] The telephone company bargaining up until that point, the national union did a lot of the bargaining behind the scenes. So you were there, you talked about issues, but you didn't

actually develop the language. People did that for us. So in these other units, it was more learning the language of their contracts. And in health care they had a lot of issues that I never had to deal with before.

**Debbie** [01:24:05] And this was a first contract?

**Gladys** [01:24:08] This was a first contract. Yeah. It would have been easier if it was just a subsequent contract, just trying to get improvements and wage increases and such. But it was building it from the ground up for two different units for a hospital and a psychiatric hospital.

**Debbie** [01:24:31] Who helped you? Who mentored you? Or were you just on your own?

**Gladys** [01:24:36] At first I was on my own. But here's one thing that I learned. If you don't know what you're doing, you better ask for help. So I did and I started working with Steve Weisman, who was really helpful.

**Debbie** [01:24:52] Who's Steve Weisman?

**Gladys** [01:24:54] Steve Weisman is an attorney that is hired under District 1. He handles a lot of the cases out of New Jersey. They were Weissman and Mintz at the time. I think they're still Weissman and Mintz.

**Debbie** [01:25:07] I think so.

**Gladys** [01:25:09] Yeah. So he was he was helpful in trying to frame it together with me. The whole staffing issue in health care was foreign to me. I didn't know how to address it.

**Debbie** [01:25:28] Well, it must have been a positive experience as you moved up in the district hierarchy.

**Gladys** [01:25:37] Yeah. Well, it was a good experience. I wouldn't change it now. I wouldn't say that. I might have reached out to Debbie Hayes [leader of CWA nurses' units in Buffalo NY.] a little sooner, tap into that resource, because I wasted a little time in the beginning just trying to put it together before I realized I needed help.

**Debbie** [01:26:07] What were some other major events during the period when you moved to the district office at 80 Pine Street? What were some of your assignments there?

**Gladys** [01:26:24] Well, I had a couple of Verizon locals in mid-state and Brooklyn. And I took over the chairperson role for the Work Family Committee which was kind of a big committee in Verizon where we bargained money in the contract each year to help address any work and family issues. There's a couple of million dollars that they put into the contract every year and we gave people money for dependent care reimbursement. We developed different programs, trainings, domestic violence awareness programs, elder care programs. We reimbursed people who were trying to care for their parents. We would reimburse them for those medical alerts to give you a little peace of mind when you're at work. You could get a medical alert and we would reimburse through that fund. Just trying to help people out who had dependent care needs or adult care, elder care needs.

**Debbie** [01:27:45] I'm trying to remember the name of the woman in District 1. I think she might have been a staff rep at some point for whom this work family committee was -- she was very committed to it.

**Gladys** [01:27:58] I think that was most of her assignment. That was down Donna Dolan.

**Debbie** [01:28:01] Thank you.

**Gladys** [01:28:04] I took that assignment. They changed that assignment from her and they put me on it.

**Debbie** [01:28:10] Was it first bargained in [19]89 or [19]92?

**Gladys** [01:28:14] The work family money?

**Debbie** [01:28:15] Yeah.

**Gladys** [01:28:20] I don't remember.

**Debbie** [01:28:21] And I believe it's gone away now, is that correct?

**Gladys** [01:28:25] No. We still have it. And they still do the dependent care reimbursement even though the workforce is older and they don't have as many dependents that they need child care for anymore. But when was in my local it was a big deal. It really helped people a great deal pay for adequate childcare.

**Debbie** [01:28:53] So people could get reimbursed for their childcare expenses?

**Gladys** [01:28:57] Yes.

**Debbie** [01:28:58] That's huge.

**Gladys** [01:29:00] Yes.

**Debbie** [01:29:02] Do you remember how much?

**Debbie** [01:29:05] It changed from time to time depending on how much money. If there was a great need, we would have to reduce it because there was a limited amount of funds. And, if we had excess, then we would increase it. I think it was \$75 for each dependent. And we capped the number of dependents. There was some times that we had to cap the number of dependents. So it could be \$75 a week for two kids.

**Debbie** [01:29:39] This was something that you did as a joint committee with the company?

**Gladys** [01:29:44] Yes.

**Debbie** [01:29:45] So the militant District 1 also engaged in working together [with the employer] on certain committees together?

**Gladys** [01:29:52] Yes, sure. We worked on a lot of committees together.

**Debbie** [01:29:57] What were some of the other ones?

**Gladys** [01:30:00] Well, the work family one is the one that I was mostly involved with, but we had training committees, training advisory boards. We had health care committees. After the 2016 strike, we had, I don't know what the name of this committee was. But it was kind of a working together committee after that big fight where we actually mended that relationship there after the 2016 strike with the plant department through a committee that was chaired by Billy Gallagher [ [area director].

**Debbie** [01:30:51] Talk a little bit more about the strike and then about the joint committee to mend the relationship with Verizon.

**Gladys** [01:31:01] Well. The 2016 strike. I chaired that bargaining. The plant locals were under scrutiny from management very aggressively. Management would follow workers to their job. Then they'd call them in the next day and question them about their whereabouts every minute of their day. People were getting suspended left and right for 30 day clips of suspension. It was very severe. It caused a big problem in bargaining. Bargaining sessions were very heated because of that. They were called QARs. They would call them in for what they called QAR discussions. Quality assurance review I think that's what that stood for. So every day in bargaining we hammered the company about the QARs. And this committee -- and I can't remember the name of it [working relationship committee], I could get it to you if you want -- came about after that round of bargaining. Nobody thought it would work. We just thought it was one of those committees that you throw in a contract at the end thinking that it's going to help solve the world and nobody does anything. But this one actually worked. They got together after bargaining and kind of mended fences.

**Debbie** [01:32:43] What did they do and what was their mandate?

**Gladys** [01:32:47] I wasn't directly involved but I know that they tried to help the company do the job better. Where there was bad plant situations there would be a way for workers to report that, where something actually got fixed rather than a run around. So [it] solved some of the frustration on the workers end. And then management kind of took the pressure off the workers and stopped doing those QARs. Things just seemed to run a lot smoother after that.

**Debbie** [01:33:31] Fascinating.

**Gladys** [01:33:32] The number of disciplines [were] greatly reduced. The number of cases that we had to put through arbitration was greatly reduced. The relationship got better.

**Debbie** [01:33:55] Anything else you want to add about being on district staff and eventually assistant to the vice president?



**Gladys** [01:34:07] Anything that I want to add? Yes, I wish I could just find the right words. My experience in working for the union. I just feel like it was a dream job. It didn't feel like work. It felt more like a passion or a cause, just something that we were all fighting for. Aside from having a horrible commute, going to work every day was a pleasure. I wouldn't change it for anything. I worked with incredible people, really smart people who I just learned a lot from.

**Debbie** [01:35:01] You want to name some of them?

**Gladys** [01:35:03] Oh, my gosh. I feel like we had so many great people. Morty [Bahr] and Larry [Mancino] earlier on in my staff life, Larry was there. But, I worked so closely with Chris [Shelton] over the years from when he was a chief steward and then he was my staff rep, and then he was the area director, and then he was the assistant, the district vice president and president. Dennis [Trainor] is the cream of the crop. If you've ever worked closely with Dennis, he has an incredible way of making everybody feel included and cared for and heard. He never gives up. Getting back to my mother's favorite word, he'll stick with it forever but make sure that before he signs a contract, everybody's okay with it and everybody's happy. We're not always happy, but we're all okay with it. Bob Master. Brilliant. Smart. He's just a great guy. Gay Semel [District 1 counsel]. Pat Shea [CWA headquarters attorney]. I loved working with Pat.

**Debbie** [01:36:28] I want to go back to Gay for just a second. She was involved with you in the operators organizing campaign, correct? Back in [19]83, [19]84, [19]85.

**Gladys** [01:36:40] Gay when she was an operator was in the earlier organizing effort that failed in the [19]70s I believe it was. I think she was with the national union when we came into CWA, though as a contractor probably.

**Debbie** [01:37:02] What would you say are some of your greatest achievements in your long history with the union?

**Gladys** [01:37:17] I think that turning our local from unorganized, non-militant, really non-participatory group of workers into a stronger, solid, unified local who could get behind issues and use our power collectively to make the workplace better was really amazing.

**Debbie** [01:37:59] Any disappointments?

**Gladys** [01:38:03] Yes. Yes. My disappointments are that I didn't follow people around with a tape recorder gaining all their knowledge before they left like you're all doing. This is great what you're doing now. I jokingly told Pat Shea when I heard she was retiring. I asked her is anybody following you around with a video camera? Because when people walk out the door, we lose so much and there was so much knowledge that she had. I had an opportunity to talk to people more, write down all of their experiences. So I regret not doing that. And sometimes regret not staying in touch with some of those people after they left. One of your emails kind of hit home. You said before it's too late, because sometimes, unfortunately, it has become too late and we've lost those people and I can't reach out to them anymore. So that's a regret.

**Debbie** [01:39:09] We'll send you the fascinating interview we did with Pat Shea as just one piece. Well, that's lovely to hear.

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**Debbie** [01:39:18] Pat Shea was a godsend to me so many times on appeal cases that I didn't know what to do with. She's a gem.

**Debbie** [01:39:27] I think she told us she left her annotated Constitution for the legal department because there's some things that --

**Gladys** [01:39:38] I hope they preserve it.

**Debbie** [01:39:41] I think so.

**Gladys** [01:39:45] But really, that's a regret. That we don't transition well when somebody is leaving, in my opinion. We don't do what we need to onboard people in the right way. Everybody learns, you get there, but it would be a lot easier if we did more shadowing while we have the chance. But we're all so busy, so nobody has time for that.

**Debbie** [01:40:16] Exactly. We're so narrowly staffed. I think I have two more questions. The union has certainly changed a lot over the 40 years that you've been a leader and an activist and the external environment has changed a lot. How would you describe some of the major changes in the union and why the union has been able to make those changes?

**Gladys** [01:40:59] I don't know if you're talking about big scale changes like the union has expanded from -- I was part of this small telephone world and then realizing that there's more to CWA and all of the mergers that we've had with the News Guild and the airline workers and the people -- Not that it's a merger, but organizing into different fields, health care and those sort of changes have been very good. Made us bigger, made us stronger, made us more of a voice in the political world, I believe. What was the second part of your question? What am I missing?

**Debbie** [01:42:02] How the union was able to do that.

**Gladys** [01:42:07] Your great leaders. Stick-to-itiveness. I don't know, once they set out to do things, they just did them and CWA. I think I'm missing the point of your question.

**Debbie** [01:42:34] Jeff. You want to help me on this one?

**Jeff** [01:42:39] That's a tough one. There is a level of creativity that we had with leadership like Bahr and Cohen and Shelton that welcomed change, didn't shy away from it. Even Glenn Watts before that sort of recognized that change was on the horizon and were willing to deal with it. I think that's a tough one to answer in a setting like this. It's more of a global union question as we try and figure out where we've been. As we've talked about, these interviews are just terrific. They're a great chance for us to get a little more insight into what built our union and how it sustained over these years.

**Gladys** [01:43:37] So since you were just talking, one thing that I think of a lot is how we changed in the 40 years. Everything used to take a strike to settle things. And when we shifted our thinking to be more strategic we didn't always have to strike to win major, major things and using different leverages and working smarter and using our political connections, we were able to do things without having members having to sacrifice their paycheck. Including the members in every step of the way, in educating them, making them aware of the issues only made us stronger. Once members

knew what to talk about. We've had rallies and strikes or practice picketing where news reporters would show up to talk to a member and they would be able to articulate what we were fighting for better than anyone, as well as anybody. Even at the bargaining table, they could tell reporters why they were there. That is very impressive that CWA came up with that structure on how to communicate with members and mobilize in the workplace and politically as well. So that's one change that I saw through the years, the way that we fought and the way that we won.

**Debbie** [01:45:28] I think you've articulated it very, very well. When you came in was the beginning of a sharp decline in union density and power in the country. Huge political backlash against unions. And within the telephone industry the end of monopoly, that made it easier [correction: harder] to bargain for our members and represent the members. The development of the mobilization strategy and tactics that you've talked about here -- what I hear you saying was a very powerful response of the union, as well as looking at other sectors. As one of our powerful women leaders. I'd be interested if you would say any changes in terms of gender leadership within the union?

**Gladys** [01:46:35] Well, we have seen changes in terms of gender leadership. In our District there are a lot of females on staff and four of five area directors are female. When you go to the convention, you see changes on the floor of the convention in terms of leadership. And also at the national union level on their executive board. There's a lot of female leadership there as well. Now we have Ameena [Salaam] in the secretary-treasurer's office. We had Sarah [Steffens] there before, so the top leadership in the union is -- Not female president yet, but there will be someday.

**Debbie** [01:47:59] Hannah, anything you want to ask?

**Hannah** [01:48:06] You've talked a lot about people who inspired and mentored you. I'm wondering if there's anyone that you feel like you may be inspired and mentoring, if you want to talk about them, and maybe some stories about that.

**Gladys** [01:48:22] Well, I know that I inspired a lot of people when I worked in the local. I definitely had a very good team of people that I definitely mentored and inspired and helped people too along the way. We had a lot of people who had issues with domestic violence in my membership and issues with substance and alcohol abuse that we helped them get help and get healthy and get out of bad circumstances. On staff, oh, I don't know, I'm a little embarrassed to say if I think I'd mentored anybody, but I'm sure that there would be people that would say that I did have some impact on them in the workplace.

**Debbie** [01:49:28] So this is your opportunity to talk to the next generation. What has life in the union meant for you and what would you say to others who are just beginning their life in the union?

**Gladys** [01:49:47] So life in the Union, as far as being a leader has been a dream job for me. It was not something that I ever thought I would ask for when I started working for the phone company and I never intended to come in and take a role in the union. I was kind of dragged into it by my brother, but once I got a taste of it, it was just something that I knew I had to follow through with and stick with and I would not have changed a thing that we did. The next generation of people that we left behind. I know in District 1 there's some really fantastic people and I have no worries that they're going to do amazing things in the future. They've already been doing amazing work. There's

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a lot of bright leadership there that's just going to see it through. So, don't give up. Stick with it and keep on fighting and stay strong.

**Debbie** [01:51:10] And we want to send a thank you to your brother who dragged you into it.

**Gladys** [01:51:17] Thank you. I'll let him know.

**Debbie** [01:51:19] Yes, please. Jeff, do you have any last words?

**Jeff** [01:51:23] No. This has been wonderful. Gladys, thank you for taking the time to do this with us. As you mentioned, we really do want to capture as many of these stories as we can before they're gone. I think what prompted us was the notion that we missed the opportunity to talk to a Morty Bahr about things like this, Barbara Easterling [former secretary-treasurer], who's still alive but has got memory issues at this point. So it's really, been a joy for us working on this project. So thanks for being a part of it.

**Gladys** [01:51:59] Thanks for including me. I appreciate it. I'm honored.

**Debbie** [01:52:04] We're honored to include you.