Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Middleton, Gloria

Interviewer: Debbie Goldman

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Debbie [00:00:00] This is May 8th, 2024. Debbie Goldman is interviewing Gloria Middleton. I am in Brooklyn. We are doing the recording via zoom. Gloria, are you in. Brooklyn? Manhattan? Where are you?

Gloria [00:00:18] In Manhattan. I'm a lifetime resident of Harlem.

Debbie [00:00:22] Okay. I'm sure that'll be part of the story. Jeff Rechenbach is on zoom from Cleveland and Hannah Goldman is here in Brooklyn. Gloria, we start with the beginning. Tell us when you were born. We just learned you were born and raised in Harlem. Talk a little bit about the community you were raised in.

Gloria [00:00:45] Okay. I was born and raised in Harlem. I'm a 1950s baby. Back in those days when you lived in the community, it was a community. My first memory is moving in to what we called the Projects. Today it's New York City Housing Authority. For us that was a step up from the tenements that were in Harlem at the time. I remember my mother and father being so happy they were getting into a new development because that's when I believe [Governor Nelson] Rockefeller had put the money into the government to make sure that they had these middle-income and low-income housing projects. I remember the day vividly, the first day we moved in, how happy we were. That's my first memory and I was five years-old. Growing up in the Projects, as I said, we were a community. Everybody that moved in at that time, we got to know each other. We became family. I have lifelong friends that we grew up together and we still stay in touch. Some have moved out of state. Some are still here. And we're like family.

Debbie [00:02:11] What was the name of the project?

Gloria [00:02:15] Then it was Stephen Foster. Today it's Martin Luther King Towers.

Debbie [00:02:19] Is it just one building or is it multiple buildings?

Gloria [00:02:22] It was multiple buildings on Fifth Avenue, 112th Street to 115th Street from Fifth Avenue to Lenox Avenue which we would call Sixth Avenue downtown. So it was like 10 or 12 buildings.

Debbie [00:02:39] Wow. That's huge. And just briefly, what was the apartment like? How many bedrooms? Brand new?

Gloria [00:02:46] It was brand new at the time. I was number six of eight children. God bless my mother and father. (laughs) When we moved in, I was five. My brother was like four and my baby sister hadn't been born yet. So we moved into a three-bedroom apartment. My older siblings, some of them were working already because the range of ages of children were amazing. Back in those days they didn't have birth control. So, it is what it is. I remember in my bedroom it was me and my two sisters because they used to have bunk beds in those days, and the apartment was fairly large. Long hallways, big living rooms, nice-sized kitchen. Like I said, it was a step up. We thought we were living high and mighty. The only way my father was able to support us was for him to be in a union. He was a longshoreman. He was a laborer. The Westside highway actually had ships that came in and the men would have to move the packages off the barges. That's the hard work that he did. And because of him being in a union, that's how we got dental, we got medical treatments. He was able to feed eight children, etc. He made sure to explain that to me, even as a young child,

when we went to the medical office. There used to be a medical office on Sixth Avenue. I remember it was Avenue of the Americas, and I looked at the sign and said, daddy, what's that? He said, that's just Sixth Avenue, just named it that. We would go into the building and we would do our full checkups in this one building. So that stuck in my memory as well. As a community, my parents, I later learned, were organizers. They migrated from the south to come to New York to get a better life.

Debbie [00:05:06] Where did they come from?

Gloria [00:05:09] South Carolina. A small, small town in South Carolina. (laughs)

Debbie [00:05:17] Were a lot of the people your parents were friends with from South Carolina?

Gloria [00:05:23] They were mostly from the south, either South Carolina, North Carolina. In that period of time a lot of blacks migrated to the north because Jim Crow was still alive in the time that they came. My parents were born, one was 1912 and one was 1916, so they had been through a lot living in the south. Both of them didn't have more than third-grade education. But I call my mother a PhD. She had a PhD because she was able to take care of a household because she never worked. My father was the breadwinner. She never worked. She took care of the household. We never were hungry, obviously, and always had nice clothes. She would spend Thursdays, I remember the day. Wednesday was laundry day. Thursday was iron day. In the kitchen with the iron, pressing our clothes with starch (laughs) because her children were going to look a certain way. I carry that fashion sense to make sure I look sharp from her.

Debbie [00:06:37] Beautiful. When we interviewed Chris [Shelton] and Dennis [Trainor], they both grew up in the projects. A very different situation that New York City had, I think.

Gloria [00:06:52] Yes.

Debbie [00:06:53] And so your mother, while you said she didn't work, she worked very hard.

Gloria [00:06:59] Oh yes.

Debbie [00:06:59] She just didn't work for pay. How did your dad happen to get a job as a longshoreman? Were there many African-Americans working as longshoremen?

Gloria [00:07:09] I'm not sure, because he started working -- I don't have that memory. But the hard work when it came to being a longshoreman, lifting the bale, I call it lifting the bale of cotton, (laughs) was done mostly by the black men working on the ships. But the higher positions, the supervisors, the foremen, etc. were mostly white. The union leaders were white males. Period. There wasn't even women involved in that. I'm not quite sure how he got the job or heard about it. He was a seasonal worker. He was always trying to get permanent status but because of the type of work that he did, it was called seasonal.

Debbie [00:07:56] So he had a hiring hall.

Gloria [00:07:58] Yes. Yes. I remember him saying he would have to go to the hall to go pay his dues. He literally had a dues checkoff card, sort of like an envelope, which they checked off when

he went into the hall and paid his dues. He would show us that card. It was a yellow manila-like card with his name on it, and they would write in the date that he went to pay the dues, etc. I remember him showing me all of that.

Debbie [00:08:28] International Longshoreman Union.

Gloria [00:08:30] Yes.

Debbie [00:08:31] I believe the east coast union was a separate union than the west coast union.

Gloria [00:08:35] Yes.

Debbie [00:08:36] Different traditions. What elementary school and high school did you go to?

Gloria There was a public school right across the street from the projects called PS170. [I] went there through sixth grade. Back in the day, they used to have these tests to check your intelligence, whatever you want to call it. When they tested me, they found certain children were at a higher level of learning. So they put us in what they called the Intellectually Gifted Class. I remember being in four IGC, five IGC, and six IGC. I'm just trying to remember because at some point they changed junior high schools from seventh grade to sixth grade. So I'm trying to remember whether I went to junior high school in sixth grade or seventh grade, but I think I was in seventh grade because the memory is coming back. Yeah.

Debbie [00:09:42] Which junior high and which high school? And were you also in an intellectually gifted class?

Gloria [00:09:48] We went to Wadleigh Junior High School, which still stands in Harlem, by the way. I went to what they called a Special Progress class. So we were in what they call the SP class. I went there for the seventh grade and eighth grade because that was the first year that students from the eighth grade graduated and went to high school in the ninth grade. That was the first time that that happened.

Debbie [00:10:18] My memory's already bad. Did you mention your high school?

Gloria [00:10:22] No, I didn't. The high school was Charles Evans Hughes High School and I went into the college-bound program.

Debbie [00:10:31] I'm guessing that you got a good education because you were in those classes. Is that correct?

Gloria [00:10:37] Yes. I thought I had a good education. We did all the special courses. My reading level in fourth grade, once we got into the IGC class and I remember having a black teacher. It was the first black teacher I had and he made us read *The New York Times* every day. I went from a third-grade level reading to a college-level reading level.

Debbie [00:11:07] In fourth grade?

Gloria [00:11:08] In fourth grade. Yes. Read *The New York Times* every day you going to learn. Our homework was all the words we didn't know we were to look it up in the dictionary. That was his strategy.

Debbie [00:11:22] But you were implying, you said you thought it was a good education.

Gloria [00:11:26] Yes. I'll tell you why. So, [I] graduated early from high school. I was supposed to graduate in June. I had all my credits, so they told me I could graduate in January. I'm] not sure whether that was a good thing or not, graduating early. I started looking for colleges to go to. I had always wanted to go away to college to have that experience. But my mother, being the mother that she was, she wanted her children close to home. So I got accepted in a state college, but then I applied to CUNY. The City College of New York, which was on Convent Avenue in Harlem, accepted me. I knew that was a prestigious college and it still is. That kept me at home and I thought I would get a good education there. So I started City College in February of 1969. I remember it well. (laughs).

Gloria [00:12:30] I received culture shock when I went to City College., [I] had always been in black schools, had never been in a multi-racial environment. I was going to advanced classes because I wanted English as my major because at the time I loved to write, I loved to read literature etc. I'd get in the class and these kids were mostly coming out of private school and coming into college and a lot of the kids were Jewish who also went to private schools. Their own schools. When I got in the classroom, I thought I had a good vocabulary. They were talking and I was saying, what the heck are they saying? Because their language was different from mine. I came from a different environment. On the other hand with the black students, City College didn't have a black studies course at that time. The black kids were rallying on campus to demand a black studies course. This college is located in Harlem and you don't have a black studies course for students here. I was like, where am I supposed to be? I'm trying to get [an] education. I don't understand why they're rallying, what you're talking about black studies. I knew nothing about black studies. I wasn't taught that in school. I thought history was history. But I learned. So I was [in] culture shock on both ends. I was there for two years and learned a lot. I did take some black studies courses and learned so much of my history that was unbelievable. I can tell you a lot of white students took the course and they were not accepting of the history. Okay. Another culture shock. There were so many debates in class, but college is where you learn. That's why you go to college, you get educated. You find out who you are. So, of course, going to college is expensive even though I was in what they called the SEEK [Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge] program where you didn't have to pay the regular tuition. That's how I was able at least to do those two years. But you still have to have books. You still have to have coffee. You still have to have money for food, etc.. My sister who worked in the community quite a bit found a program where you could go to college and work at the same time. When she told me about it, I said, listen, I'm jumping ship. So I left City College and that was in 1972 and went to work for the Department of Corrections where there was a program where you went to work three days and you went to John Jay College for two days.

Debbie [00:15:39] Let me just get a few facts. Which campus of City College were you at in Harlem?

Gloria [00:15:48] There's one campus. It's on Convent Avenue. It extends from 137th Street to about 145th Street going north of Convent Avenue all the way over to Broadway.

Debbie [00:16:02] That's huge. I didn't realize that. I thought there were different campuses, but there's only one.

Gloria [00:16:08] For CCNY, just one campus. Yes.

Debbie [00:16:11] I thought at some point City College was free tuition by the time you were going there.

Gloria [00:16:17] Yes, it was, depending on your income. That's what I talk about when I say the SEEK program.

Debbie [00:16:24] Oh.

Gloria [00:16:25] It's Capital S-E-E-K. It had some initials. It stood for something, but that's how I was able to go. You had to apply for financial aid and they would pay for it basically. So my tuition was basically paid for those two years.

Debbie [00:16:40] Do you want to add anything about your college experience? You talked about rallying to get black studies. There was a lot going on around black issues and anti-war issues.

Gloria [00:16:56] Yes. The Vietnam War, all of that was happening around that time. I felt very alone because I didn't know which way to go. It was a new experience. Like I said, it was culture shock. I tried to learn as much as I could. I actually did very well in classes, despite what I call my lack of vocabulary. But I did okay even in my English classes when you did papers. I would do my papers and the teachers would give me B's, a couple of A's. So I was doing well. When you're in your 20s, you're still finding yourself. You don't know who you are.

Debbie [00:17:51] That's interesting. And were you living at home?

Gloria [00:17:54] I was still living at home at the time. Yeah.

Debbie [00:17:57] And just to understand a little better, when you say that the white students were speaking a different language. Are you talking about literally black English versus white English.

Gloria [00:18:10] Exactly, exactly. We all speak English, but culturally we have a different way of expressing ourselves. With the white students and sometimes, people like to impress people so they use, I call word salad (laughs) to make themselves look smart, etc.. And I'm saying, what the hell are you talking about? Could you speak plain English? That's the part that used to get me. But I would read my books. I would still do what I knew what to do when I was in elementary school. If I didn't understand a word, go to the dictionary and look it up. They have Google now. (laughs) But I actually went to a book and looked it up.

Debbie [00:19:03] I remember those days. Yes.

Gloria [00:19:06] Or to the library. Go figure. Yeah.

Debbie [00:19:09] Jeff, I'm going to jump to her public service work. Do you want to ask anything that we've talked about thus far?

Jeff [00:19:17] No, that's where I was ready to jump to. I'm interested in this program, this, three days working, two days at school program. So let's talk about that.

Debbie [00:19:28] Talk about that. And I'm guessing that's what got you into public employment.

Gloria [00:19:33] Yes, that's what thrust me into public employment. I actually worked on Rikers Island at the Woman's House of Detention which was, again, a culture shock. My brother had worked there and he didn't want me to work there. But I said, listen, I need money. I can get my education at the same time. I'm going to work. So I did. Like I said, I started in I think the fall of 1973, the funding for the program stopped. You know, all good things come to an end. So they gave us the option. You could work full-time and become an actual full public servant. Or, if you didn't want to continue your education. By that time I was 22 and getting whole paychecks. They were offering $6,700 a year for me. That was big money back in the [19]70s. So I said, okay, I'm going to continue to work. So that's how I got into public service.

Debbie [00:20:53] Did you finish your degree?

Gloria [00:20:55] No, no. Then in [19]74, life happened. What we call "fall in love" (all laugh) and [I] got pregnant. Then I went on maternity leave. So that was in [19]74. By the time I had the baby in December of [19]75 the agency had notified me that they had completely gotten rid of the program. We were called correctional aides, and we would help inmates with phone calls and making sure that they got their lawyers and helping them with clothing and toiletries, that sort of stuff. We were like an assistant to the correction officer and helping them on the social side. So that program had folded. They told us there was no more funding for that. But they were redeploying us to the Department of Social Services. I had just had the baby. I had just got my six-week checkup, and I was still with my mom. I told my parents what was happening. So my mother said, you need to work. (laughs) So go to work.

Gloria [00:22:20] What they were offering me was the Department of Social Services. Now, let me backtrack a little bit. My father didn't always work 365 days for a full year. There were times when my mother had to apply for public assistance. And I remember my mother coming home crying for the way that she was treated when she went to a welfare center to try to get assistance. Her not being educated, some of the letters that would come in, she would ask me to read and I would read it to her and tell her why they closed the case and what she had to do to reopen it, and she would just get so frustrated. So I had said to myself, if I ever get a chance to work for Social Services, I'm going to treat people the way they deserve. You have to be careful what you put in the atmosphere because lo and behold, they said you could get a job at the Department of Social Services At that time it was for a clerical aide position. It was for even more money. Now I had a baby. [I was a] single mom. So I took the job and worked there and began to get promoted through the years. I stayed at Social Services for 14 years. When I left I was an assistant office manager.

Debbie [00:23:37] Department of Social Services is a state agency or a city agency?

Gloria [00:23:45] Well, it's a city agency, but it gets funded by the state and the benefits are funded by the state and the federal government. And back in that day, it was Aid for Families with

Dependent Children, AFDC, and Medicaid and Food Stamps. Then it turned into Income Support. Then it turned into a whole lot of things. And then they had the SSI [Supplemental Security Income] unit [that] did what they call the DAB [Disabled, Aged, Blind] unit, the disability unit, because that's when SSI first came in. It was a mess. I worked at a 125th street in Harlem which was also good for me because I was close to my childcare and was able to get home in case of any emergency. It was wonderful. It was the perfect thing for me.

Debbie [00:24:32] Do you want to tell us a particularly memorable story or incident while you were working there?

Gloria [00:24:39] Oh, yeah, I could tell you some.

Debbie [00:24:40] Tell us 1 or 2 That involves you, that reveal something about you.

Gloria [00:24:54] Okay. Being young and sometimes being stupid, you do things. (laughs) I had what they call a lateness problem. It got overboard. But they knew I was an excellent worker. That's how I got promoted. There was one particular director, Mr. Pyatt. I'll never forget him. He has gone on to glory. But now he said to me one day when my lateness time was ridiculous. He said, Gloria, you know, you could be running this center, but you are stopping yourself from running this center. And because of that and because of this report, I'm going to take ten days pay away from you. Okay, so hopefully you will learn a lesson. So when he took the ten days pay away from me I learned a lesson. By that time, I had moved out of my mother's house and I had an apartment. I had to pay rent, so that helped me move in the right direction, but that's one story.

Gloria [00:26:05] The second story, because I did get promoted, I became what we call a PAA2, which is assistant office manager.

Debbie [00:26:14] PA8?

Gloria [00:26:15] PAA is a principal administrative associate, level two which is a long cry from clerical associate. And the one thing my father told me, if you ever get a city job, make sure you know your contract, know what you can do and what you can't do. So, I did that, but I used the contract to help me not always do the right thing. But once I learned that lesson, I did become an assistant office manager, and it all depends on who likes you and who doesn't like you whether you keep that position because it's what they call the broad band position. You take the test for the first level and if you move up it's at the discretion of a supervisor, which is something we're still fighting for today. A new director came in and she had her own plans of who she wanted to be in leadership at the center, still 125th Street. And when she came in, we were at odds. And being young in those days, I was a girl from Harlem, you're not going to talk to me a certain way. You're not going to treat me a certain way, because I'm going to tell you about it. So one day, I remember specifically she was giving me a hard, hard time. One day, specifically, she did something. She totally disrespected my position by talking to somebody that was beneath me that was a subordinate and changing what I had already planned for the unit. So it was one of those days where the Harlem Gloria just took off. I went and spoke to the director and closed the door and said some things I probably should not have said. A couple of months later, I get a note, a little piece of paper telling me to report to personnel. I said, so what's this about? Nobody would tell me. When I went to personnel, I found out that I had gotten demoted. They wanted me to transfer. So I was hurt. I cried and she did it perfectly because the union people that I worked with were not available that day. I

couldn't find nobody on the phone. I was devastated. But I took another site in the Bronx and went there. But y'all know I'm a spiritual person. I keep saying that, right? A year later, I got that position back in the new site because people knew who this other woman was and they saw my ability and they gave me back the position. And then I got an even bigger position to go downtown and work as a training specialist to teach other people the job. That's where I really got involved in the union. (laughs)

Debbie [00:29:24] Let's back up just a minute about the union. When you were a clerical worker when you started, was there a union there?

Gloria [00:29:36] Yes. At that time, I think it was 1549 DC 37.

Debbie [00:29:42] AFSCME. [American Federation of State, County Municipal Employees] DC District Council 37. And then as you rose through the ranks when you were the PAA was that then CWA?

Gloria [00:29:54] That was CWA.

Debbie [00:29:57] Local 1180?

Gloria [00:29:58] Local 1180, yes.

Debbie [00:30:00] And for people who may not know, it's kind of a unique situation, different than the private sector.

Gloria [00:30:08] Correct.

Debbie [00:30:08] In that, in New York, I don't know if it's elsewhere, but in New York and I don't even know if it's city or state law, certain levels of management can be in a union. So can you explain a little bit about that and about who CWA 1180 is?

Gloria [00:30:28] Okay. Just to back up a little bit. The city and the civil services system made a decision -- the civil service system comes from the state -- made a decision to do what they call broadbanding. In other words give tests for a certain title, take away old titles, give tests for certain title, and then you could broaden that title by doing levels. Once you take the test for the first level you wouldn't have to take another test for higher levels. When that happened, PAAs did not have a union. Some of the union representatives that were there at the time said we need a union because in order to be what they call a manager, you must be able to change policy as well as have the ability to hire and fire. Our titles were not going to be able to do that. So the powers that be searched around and CWA local 1180 said, yes, we'll take you. I think it started with CWA and then it evolved into local 1180 because our charter, I think, started in 1965. You can look that up just to make sure.

Debbie [00:31:56] Just to clarify this. The broadbanding was occurring in the late [19]60s, early [19]70s, and that's when the PAAs wanted to unionize. Is that the origins of local 1180?

Gloria [00:32:16] It's not. I know the charter was as of 1965. Also Arthur Cheliotes [previous president of local 1180] could tell you better about how the union actually got started. But I know

when I became a PAA they explained to me that DC 37 was not going to take us because we would supervise their people. So they didn't want to have us in their union. So CWA 1180 became our union.

Debbie [00:32:48] Was that when you became a member of CWA local 1180?

Gloria [00:32:53] I believe it should have been like 1980. I believe it was [19]80. I came there in [19]75 and after the tests in 1980. Yeah.

Debbie [00:33:10] Was it strange to be a unionist who was also overseeing people in another union?

Gloria [00:33:19] Not to me. I didn't have an issue with it. It gets even more stranger when a level two who is in the same union has to supervise a level one, and the level one gets in trouble and you have to have the union come represent both of y'all. But we've found ways to figure that out. We represent the person that's in trouble period. So it wasn't hard for me to do that. Yeah. And we keep relationships with the other unions and they understand what our role is. Sometimes there are conflicts, but I call us the more professional union. (laughs) DC 37 likes to holler, scream, and bang on the table and all of that. We don't do that. We talk it out. It got to a point that we said to the city, if you all need to meet with us could we have our own separate meeting because they bring 100 people to the table, it's 3 or 4 of us. We just want to get to the point and try to settle it. We have different things that we want to accomplish between the subordinate union and the supervisory union. Most cases they agree to that.

Debbie [00:34:43] Are most members of 1180 in some kind of supervisory position?

Gloria [00:34:49] Yes, some are. It depends on the agency. Like in HRA [Human Resources Administration] where I came from, that's definitely supervisor one level to the other. But if you work in an agency like HPD.

Debbie [00:35:05] What's HPD?

Gloria [00:35:07] That's Housing Preservation Development. You don't supervise necessarily because you're an administrative worker. That's the housing unit. So you may work where people are getting low-income housing vouchers so that you're preparing the work in preparation for that. There are some people who are high-level PAAs, but we also have administrative managers as well as what they call Administrative Job Opportunity Specialists. So it depends on the agency whether you supervise or not. But it's high-level administrative work that we're doing.

Debbie [00:35:50] Okay. I think we were at a point where you moved downtown as a training specialist and you started to say you got more involved in the union. So tell us that story.

Gloria [00:36:00] As I moved downtown and I saw certain things that would be inhabited by many, but I said, that's not right. I always had a big mouth, as you could tell by now. People would notice that and they'd come to me for guidance. They had a shop steward that they weren't very happy with.

Gloria [00:36:59] No, they were not happy with him. So when it came time for shop steward elections, I was actually on the committee that overlooks the election, what do you call that Jeff?

Jeff [00:37:17] The election committee?

Gloria [00:37:17] The election committee. (laughs) Duh. People kept saying, Gloria, why don't you run, why don't you run? So I said, Gwen, actually called me and said, could you please run? So I said, listen, I'm on the election committee. She said, you can always get off. (laughs)

Jeff [00:37:46] Yes.

Gloria [00:37:46] So I did. I put my name in the hat, and guess what, I won. That's how I became a shop steward down there. We were going through some changes because the training program for HRA was an excellent program. People had intense training before they actually went into the field which was needed because you can't get cases done if people don't know what they're doing. But then the program was in jeopardy for funding, so the state was threatening to take over so I had to get involved in that. I had to organize the building because we were at 109 East 16th Street which was a large training building. So Gwen came to a meeting where I had organized the building and it was like 100 people in the room and she was just ignored because that never happened under Animal's watch. [the prior steward; Animal was his nickname.] So when an opening happened for staff rep, she said to me, would you like to apply for the position? I said, I didn't know what it entails. She explained to me what it was. And I said, okay, I'll apply for an interview. I did the interview and lo and behold, I got it.

Jeff [00:39:17] This is a staff rep for 1180.

Gloria [00:39:19] Staff rep for 1180. That happened in 1995. I've been working for 1180 since 1995.

Jeff [00:39:28] Wow.

Gloria [00:39:30] Had no idea I would still be here in 2024. (all laugh)

Debbie [00:39:36] Wow. Staff rep for 1180?

Gloria [00:39:39] Yes.

Debbie [00:39:39] How many staff reps were there for the local?

Gloria [00:39:44] At the time there were five. There were five staff reps that covered all the city agencies throughout New York and H and H which is Health and Hospitals.

Debbie [00:40:04] Oh, I didn't realize you also had members there. How many members did you have then? And about how many now?

Debbie [00:40:13] We've been kind of been consistent. We had 8,000 members then and we have 9,000 now.

Jeff [00:40:21] Can you just tell us briefly the makeup of the local, the different departments that you cover. And I think you've got some other contracts besides the city.

Gloria [00:40:34] Yes. We covered, like I said, every city agency in New York, which includes the Department of Education, NYPD, New York City Housing Authority, the Transit Authority, the Department of Environmental Protection, HRA, which as I said, is a huge organization, Department of Consumer Affairs. Every city agency that you can think of we have administrative managers or administrative staff in those locations, as well as every city hospital. Health and Hospitals are the public hospitals of the city of New York, which has hospitals in every borough, sometimes off-site in boroughs, so there may be 2 or 3 different little off-site hospitals or health clinics in those boroughs. So if we have people there, we cover them there. We also have not-for-profits that we cover. We were steady at 7 or 8 not-for-profits before the [covid] pandemic. After the pandemic, under my tenure as president, which is 2020, the not-for-profits were calling to be unionized left and right. So we went from 8 to 18 since 2020. That includes Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First. Oh, God. Who else do we have? Off the top of my head, I can't think. We're currently in contract negotiations with the Audubon Society and the Trevor Project. We're trying to do first contracts and they are giving us hell. You would think that because of the mission statements of these non-for-profits that they would treat their workers in a special way. But no they don't. They're underpaid, overworked, they do overtime, don't get paid for it. They don't have things like FMLA [Family Medical Leave Act protections], sick time is at a minimum based on the state law. It's unconscionable some of the things that they're doing with the workers that work at this which is why they have such a large turnover because while people want to do that kind of philanthropic work you also have to eat and live in New York City. Some of our not-for-profits are all over the country. We organized the Sunrise Group which is an environmental organization. They're all over the country which is a large group. Trevor is all over the country as well as the Audubon Society. But their main bases usually are in New York City where we could start from there and then organize and mobilize members all over the country. And since zoom happened, that helps a lot because you don't have to be in person and people make phone calls after work or on Saturdays when potential members are afraid to talk at the worksite. So, I'm proud of the work that we have done with them.

Jeff [00:43:50] Which is the largest of those city units.

Jeff [00:43:53] Of the city?

Jeff [00:43:54] Yes.

Gloria [00:43:54] I would say HRA.

Jeff [00:43:56] HRA. Yes.

Debbie [00:44:04] Have you had to have campaigns about outsourcing or privatization of public work? Or that's not so much for the middle management?

Gloria [00:44:18] Not so much for the middle management, but we do work with DC 37 when it happens because if they lose members, we will lose members. So right now I had my attorneys do a response to the city where they are saying that they want to privatize 311. That's the battle I'm currently in. They claim that privatizing it, the calls will be answered more quickly and whatnot.

That's not so. And yet the city is trying to quote unquote, save money. But DC 37 and I have talked and we're going to try to fight that as much as possible. And if they do privatize them, we're going to try to organize them.

Debbie [00:45:09] Good for you. You mentioned DC 37. So let's talk a little bit about bargaining. They're the big gorilla.

Gloria [00:45:19] Right.

Debbie [00:45:20] I don't know what metaphor to use for 1180. How do you do bargaining with the city given the fact that you're one of the smaller unions.

Gloria [00:45:36] We may be small, but we're mighty. (laughs) The city has the utmost respect for our local. I'll get to as to why in a few minutes. DC 37 has the bargaining certificate for citywide issues. So they're usually the first one at the table. They fight between UFT [United Federation of Teachers] which is a larger unit than them and PBA, the uniforms, and this is being recorded, so what. They always think they are better than us and they should not get what we get because, notwithstanding they do put their lives on the line. Okay. But bargaining is bargaining.

Debbie [00:46:26] PBA are the cops?

Gloria [00:46:27] Yes. So, what's in the budget is what's in the budget. What has happened in New York, it has become pattern bargaining. Whoever gets to the table first sets the pattern. So what we do is usually wait for DC 37 to come up with the contract as we did the last time, and they put whatever their demands are on the table. Years ago we used to do bargaining together as to see what the citywide issues are, but that stopped happening somewhere in the [19]90s, late [19]90s. So now DC 37 goes to the table. They do what they do. And then after that, you request bargaining for your unit. What has happened with us, we always consider ourselves special. We're not part of AFSCME, we are part of a bigger union, a nation-wide union. Where we see a problem, we deal with it and we demand respect. In 2018, we acquired the title for administrative managers. They had come to us because they were being treated like you know what and they were not in a union at that time. As I explained in the beginning unless you are able to hire and fire and create policy, you are not a manager. But yet the city was treating them as managers. They came to us to ask us to organize them. We did what we needed to do on the public sector side to organize them. Went to OATH [Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings]. It's funny, they wanted to interview every administrative manager to see what they do for OATH to determine whether they should be in the bargaining unit or that.

Debbie [00:48:36] "They" meaning who?

Gloria [00:48:39] The city asked the judge that every administrative manager be interviewed or come to the trial. Because you go to OATH which is a trial setting, and determine whether their duties were managerial or not. After years of this case we won. Duh. When we acquired them, we start looking at the salaries. Now, years ago, in the[19]80s, in the [19]70s, white males used to hold that title, administrative manager. Once the civil service test was defined for them, women and minorities started passing the test and the men didn't want that job anymore, the white men. When we got the title, we noticed that the range of salary was $52,000 to $150,000. Something wrong with that picture? And guess who was making the higher salaries there? So our executive board, we

had meetings and we had discussions. We hired an attorney who dealt with EEO [equal employment opportunity] cases and the board voted for us to go to file an EEO charge against the city. Because it appeared that once women and minorities started passing the test and they started appointing them, they would hire them at the lowest of the salary and suppress that. They didn't raise the minimum salary with the raises, they just suppressed the salary. Long story short, after years of litigation, and we took it, the EEOC said, yes, we had a case. So then we had to bring it back to the city and said, okay, we can settle this or we can go to court. It was under the [Bill] de Blasio administration [New York City mayor 2014-2021]. We said, yes, let's settle. But it took us another three years to settle that case. So just before the [covid] pandemic, 2019, we settled the case and got a total of $15 million to give to those administrative managers. Some of those administrative managers went from 52,000 to 79,000. Do you know what that means to a family? Plus, they got a little bit of the $15 million. The highest amount was like $7 or $8,000 when you divided them up amongst those who were entitled to the settlement. So the city has a lot of respect for CWA local l1180, needless to say.

Debbie [00:51:19] What a story.

Gloria [00:51:20] Yeah, Arthur [Cheliotes, former president of CWA Local 1180] was the opener of that case. I was the closer. That's what we call each other.

Debbie [00:51:31] Wow. Well, you opened a topic that I wanted to ask about, and that is talking about race both in the workplace representation of our members -- you gave a wonderful example -- and also within the union.

Gloria [00:51:48] Yes. funny you should ask that because as a result of the EEO case, we then had discussions with the executive board and staff to say, so we know this is happening in our union. It has to happen everywhere in the city. I said, what can we do? And I have some consultants that I work with that deal with the city council, etc.. I said, what can we do to bring this to light and to make sure that pay equity is happening in New York City, one of the most liberal cities in the country. Let's make sure that we bring this to light. So what we did was work with our attorneys, our EEO attorney and some others. We made a resolution which passed into law, Local Law 18 which has my name on it. I say my name, but it's CWA local 1180's name on it, which requires the city to form a unit that will look at the statistics of every city agency. First, the law said just a certain particular amount of city agencies, but since then we've evolved to spread it out to more agencies looking at the pay parity between minorities and white men in the agencies. A recent report just came out. This is the second report that was done since 2021 when the law passed. And unfortunately, even under this administration, the pay disparity is still there, especially in agencies where mostly white males are at the top of management. It shows that black women make $0.84 to the dollar of white males in New York City public service. And in those agencies where women head the agencies, like an agency like HRA, where the managers are mostly women because women like to do service, that's what we do, we're nurturers by nature. They make less as managers than those who, let's say, like our NYPD, where the lieutenants and the captains and the chiefs are mostly white male. The wage disparity is unconscionable. So that's been my fight since my tenure as president. I became president in 2018 and we're still in that fight. We just had a hearing and a report just came out. I'll be happy to share it with y'all if I have your email.

Debbie [00:54:35] What's the report called?

Gloria [00:54:43] [00:54:43] Local Law 18 [1.7s]

Debbie [00:54:45] Is there any requirement in the law that then the city do something once they've discovered this?

Gloria [00:54:52] Yes. What happens is this special unit gives the report and it goes to the city council. The city council reviews it, and then they try to make other resolutions and other laws based on what they found to make more efforts for pay equity to happen. There are things that they can do that's already in the law. There's selective certification on a civil service test that says that if you have certain criteria, a certain experience, if you live in New York. We're trying to get them [to include that] if you have a degree, you get more points on a test so that you're higher up on a list so that you can get appointed. There's certain other resolutions that have happened at the city council where we are working with the city council to see how we can fix it. There's power that [00:55:47] DCAS has [0.6s] to make sure that things happen in agency with equity reports that has not been happening because they have taken away the power of DCAS. When I say DCAS, that's the Department of Citywide Administrative Services, [it] used to be the old New York City Department of Personnel, but [Rudy] Giuliani [New York City mayor 1994-2001] changed that. So now they have no power. Okay. They have rules and they have laws that they're supposed to do, but it's like the agencies do what they want to. And until the mayor does something to make sure that DCAS can exert its power, it's just not going to happen.

Debbie [00:56:23] Does the report also look at issues related to Asians and Hispanics?

Gloria [00:56:29] Yes.. Black, white, Asians, and Hispanics. You'll see the report.

Debbie [00:56:39] LGBTQ plus also?

Gloria [00:56:41] Also there's the other [category] because people don't necessarily identify themselves when it comes to city agencies for whatever reason. We have tried to have a Pride committee. Only one person has stepped up within the local.

Debbie [00:57:04] That's interesting in New York City.

Gloria [00:57:05] Yeah.

Debbie [00:57:07] Talk about the issue of race within the union. Either the local, the district, or the national. You're at all levels.

Gloria [00:57:17] Okay. My national CWA history goes back a long ways with me being appointed to the Human Rights [committee], in those days it was called the Equity Committee. I was appointed by Chris Shelton whom I love him dearly. [District 1 vice-president and CWA president, 2015-2023] That's why I have to get there [to his retirement party the evening of the interview]. (laughs)

Debbie [00:57:44] I'll see you there.

Gloria [00:57:46] Yes, yes. Being on that committee enlightened me to so much. Because I think I joined that committee in 2001 or [200]2. After I became secretary-treasurer [of local 1180] and became chair of the Equity Committee. Chris would never kick me off. He said you're staying on

that committee till I get off as president. And that actually almost happened until I said okay, Chris, enough now. So even back in 2000, and, Jeff, you know this, the executive board did not look the way it does now. Okay. There was one black man, Brooks Sunkett. There had been a couple of women by then, Barbara Easterling and maybe 1 or 2 other people in the sectors. But it was still mostly white males. And through the minority caucus, which their mission was to change the face of CWA, which pushed to have people on the equity committee and the women's committee and to report out at the convention about the disparities that were happening within our own union and the issues that we as a union should fight for. I could tell you, when Black Lives Matter happened a long time ago, that was one of my reports. I cannot tell you the debate that happened on the[convention] floor. I don't know if you were there. But we wanted to name the report Black Lives Matter, and it was some officers from California who objected to that. [correction, public safety officers largely from Nevada] They said it should be All Lives Matter. And we had that debate on the convention floor. It was, oh my God, I'll never forget. 20 years later now it's Black Lives Matter. [Resolution 75A-15-9 in the year 2015]

Debbie [00:59:58] That was right after Ferguson. [2014 protests against the police killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. This was when the hash tag and movement Black Lives Matter began.]

Gloria [01:00:01] That's right. But we knew what was supposed to happen.

Debbie [01:00:06] Gloria, I will tell you a secret. I was the staff of the resolutions committee that reported the resolution out as Black Lives Matter, All Lives Matter. So blame me.(Gloria laughs) I needed education.

Gloria [01:00:26] Yes. Yes, yes. I'll never forget a young white male. He came to me and said, I don't think this is right. It should be Black Lives Matter. I said get on the floor and say it. And he did it. The convention was in an uproar. I have to even say, some of my black brothers and sisters, basically the president that had the [police] officer's union, told me they could not stand with me. Okay. He's since made up for it. I let him know, okay, I forgive you. But it was just crazy. I say that to say unions still have so much to learn about race and the inequity of race. And if we're supposed to be a union of dignity and respect for all, let's admit that we need dignity and respect for all. Not for some. I don't need somebody that's other than the color that I am to lead me to make me understand how I should be led. Okay. Because that's also some of the problems. Yeah, a lot of history there. So through the years with the Equity Committee, which subsequently became the Human Rights and Equity Committee, however they call it now. I think it's Civil Rights and Equity Committee now. And that change happened in my tenure as well. It was on the convention floor with Larry Cohen where some stuff went down again, about, I think Canadia wanted its own sector. And the minority caucus was up. Y'all haven't recognized us and you want to give the Canadians a full, whole sector. So that's when things started to change. Larry committed to making the diversity members at-large part of the executive board and at the subsequent convention that did happen. [Four at-large diversity seats added to CWA executive board in 2007 by convention resolution.]

Debbie [01:02:40] And you are now one of the at-large diversity executive board members.

Gloria [01:02:45] Yes.

Debbie [01:02:45] When did you get elected to that position?

Gloria [01:02:48] Well, I was first appointed because Carolyn Wade [long-time president of local 1040] decided to retire, especially after her illness. And then Chris [Shelton] appointed me, Chris again. Actually, Carolyn recommended me and the board fully accepted me because they knew my history with the Human Rights Committee.

Debbie [01:03:07] When was that?

Gloria [01:03:09] This is 2024. We just had an election in 2023. So that must have been [20]20. I know when it was because it was the year of the of Covid where we had the online convention. [Correction: 2021.]

Debbie [01:03:29] Oh poor you. Yes.

Gloria [01:03:33] Chris said he'll kill somebody before he does that again [an online convention]. So that was 2020. Yeah.

Debbie [01:03:42] Tell us what it's like to be an at-large diversity member of the board.

Gloria [01:03:52] I can only speak from my tenure. I do feel like I have a voice. Like I said, I have a big mouth, so I'll always speak, especially when Chris was there. Chris knew me well and he used me a lot, too, because Arthur [Cheliotes] was on the DFOC. [Defense Fund Oversight Committee] and chair of the DFOC (laughs) so he would say, Gloria, could you talk to Arthur, so that sort of communication was good for the board. We still [are] making our way with the new leadership with Claude [Cummings, elected CWA president in 2023] and Ameenah [Salaam, elected secretary-treasurer in 2023], but working with them to see where we go next. So it's been interesting, it's been interesting.

Debbie [01:04:41] Do you feel like a full member of the board?

Gloria [01:04:43] Oh, for sure, for sure, for sure. I like the position I'm in because I'm not beholden to anybody and I can say what I want to say when I want to say it. I'm not being paid per se as a board member. I'm there because I'm elected and I'm there to represent the presidents of the other [local] unions. So I definitely feel like I have a voice. Yes.

Debbie [01:05:14] And do you feel like the work you did on the equity or human rights or civil rights, whatever it was called in different stages, percolated down to the locals? And if so, how? And if not, why not?

Gloria [01:05:28] Okay. No. In some locals, yes. In other locals, no. Okay. If you look at the local leadership, especially in certain districts, you'll see the leadership is still white males. And some locals are afraid to have women's committees and equity committees because they fear that they're going to lose their leadership. That's still a fight of the human rights department to create more civil rights and equity committees and women's committees in certain districts. Even in District 1, if you go to south [New] Jersey, there are no equity and women's committees. Okay. North Jersey and New York, yes, they do exist. And it depends on the size of the local, too. That's another issue that the national is going to have to deal with. How much work can you do with a 200 member local? What are you really doing? Okay. This is an issue. There can't be even a political action committee

with a 200 member local. The president's too busy doing staff rep work. That's something that the national is going to have to figure out. When they figure it out, I'm not sure or how. So that issue is still a big problem in certain districts. Okay. I think you guys know what districts I'm talking about. (laughs)

Debbie [01:07:02] Jeff, before I switch to another topic, do you want to ask anything to follow up on this?

Jeff [01:07:11] I want to dial back one, but I'll do that later because I don't want to lose this thread. Talk a little bit about the change in 1180 in terms of racial diversity and how that's come [about]. It just seems like, from my experience over this period of time, and I left 12 years ago, so I've missed these past 12 years, but that there's been a sea change in that direction as well.

Gloria [01:07:39] Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Well, once Arthur decided to retire. (laughs)

Jeff [01:07:44] Yes. Well that helped.

Gloria [01:07:46] I must say he did mentor us, the black women in the local. He knew that the local had changed. When he first came the local was extremely diverse. I would say it had like maybe 40% white, 40% black and African-American, and then 20% others. But as the years evolved because remember he became president, I believe, in 1974 or [197]5. As the years evolved, black women and women started taking tests for these titles. So it was minorities and that's truly our way to get into the middle-class, to take these civil service tests and become public workers. I know it has been for me. Okay. I would not be in a position that I am in without the union. I am so grateful to the union. So as he [Arthur Cheliotes] began to mentor us and he told me when he retired, this is what y'all are going to have to do, blah, blah, blah. And like I said, when he finally decided, because he had been talking about it for a few terms, but then he's got that fire in his belly. So when he finally decided to do it, he said, Gloria, I want you to run. I can't tell you about the anxiety I had. Arthur reads every book, his favorite program is C-SPAN, CNN, CNBC news, he does all of that, and then he writes us his emails about whatever. So, I'm living with all this is. How can I fill his shoes? I'm not the same person. And then a little birdie told me. Duh. You can only be who you are. So don't worry about what Arthur did. When that light bulb finally went off, then I was able to accept running. So lo and behold, I run. Nobody runs against me. Actually, nobody ran against the whole team in that first election. So I said, okay, God, so this is my destiny. Like I said, the light bulb went off. I started to think. I went to Tish James [Letitia James], who's a good friend, by the way, the Attorney General in New York.

Debbie [01:10:07] Oh, my God, I think the world of her.

Gloria [01:10:09] Yeah, because we supported her since she ran for city council seat. So I got to know her, and I have her cell phone number. She's on speed dial. So I talked to her. I said I'm going to run. She said, okay, so what's your platform? I looked at her. I said, now why does she have to ask me about a platform. I was actually mad at her at first. And then I thought about it. She's basically asking me, so what's going to be your legacy in running this local? I did think about that. And for me my legacy is pay parity. Okay. That's what we've been working on ever since I became the president. So having done that, as I pick my team because we run as a team, a unity team, I keep in mind that I want a diverse team. I definitely want to keep women in leadership, even though we have five males now on the team, both Hispanic and black. The rest are women. We have an Italian,

, we have Hispanics and black women on our team. So I try to keep it diverse so that we recognize that we are a union of diverse people.

Jeff [01:11:30] Yes. Just think it's an interesting circumstance because here you're a union of supervisors and the city essentially for years locked out African-Americans, Hispanics, women from those positions. So as that door gets opened up, that also represents a dramatic change then within the local as well, and your leadership team reflects that now, the change that's happened over the past 50 years now.

Gloria [01:12:02] Absolutely. Yeah.

Debbie [01:12:04] And then they inherit the discriminatory pay system. And so that becomes the fight now that you've gotten into those jobs to ensure that there's [pay equity]. A fascinating, fascinating story and quite a legacy.

Gloria [01:12:22] I'm quite proud of the local. Not that we don't have our problems, god knows, I've had to change some staff through the years. You do what you have to do also as a manager and leader to make sure the local can keep moving and keep going. But, I'm extremely proud of the work that I have done. I say I but it's a team effort. Nobody does this work alone. And if you are foolish enough to think that you do, then you will be a fool.

Debbie [01:12:53] Jeff, you wanted to dial back to something.

Jeff [01:12:57] I was just curious about -- You came on the staff of 1180 in [19]95. You've lived through some very interesting characters as mayors of New York City.

Gloria [01:13:15] Oh, yes.

Jeff [01:13:15] I was wondering if maybe you could talk a little bit about the experience of dealing with some of the more interesting ones that you've had. I mean, you've gone from Dinkins now to Adams and all points in between.

Gloria [01:13:31] Yeah. Yeah. I actually met Mayor [David] Dinkins several times. I even knew him because he was the Manhattan borough president. I live in Manhattan so I knew him that way. And we were really, really gung-ho with him becoming the mayor and we pushed for him. But then we had the biggest layoff ever during his tenure. Okay, so that's why he was a one-term mayor. Okay. So then I think we moved to [Rudy] Giuliani. I called him Goo-liani. (laughs) which was horrible for us because we went five years without a contract. Well, no, not with him. It was Bloomberg because after Giuliani was [Michael] Bloomberg. Right.

Jeff [01:14:22] Right.

Gloria [01:14:23] Giuliani changed the face of the city by getting rid of certain agencies. Like I said, DCAS losing its power. He was a law and order man so he uplifted the police department, NYPD. So we went to whatever change you want to there. We didn't get the best raises with him. But he changed the face of New York City somewhat. Gentrification, which started with the federal government coming on down, that came into play in many phases of his tenure. Then we got Bloomberg who started out all right. And then as his head swelled up having all this power, he lost

his mind. So under him we went five years without a contract. We had to explain to the members that this was every union, because I'm part of the municipal labor committee as well, which is supposed to be a united front of public sector leaders to talk about the issues of health care and whatever else and contract negotiations with the city. So the MLC agreed, and we all agreed, that we would not do a contract with him because his thing was for us to pay premiums in health care with very small wages. And we were not going for that. So it's better not to sit at the table than to sit with him and then have to succumb to that. So then we went back to the table when [Bill] de Blasio came into play. He gave fairly decent raises. But I will say that Mayor [Eric] Adams has given us the best raise we have had in over 20 years. Okay, there are other issues with his administration, but I can't say anything about the contract negotiations with him. So it's been interesting living with these different ideologies of what city workers and public workers should be entitled to.

Jeff [01:16:31] You had 20 years there of Giuliani and Bloomberg sort of stacked up. It just seems like it would have been quite a challenge.

Gloria [01:16:43] Yeah, yeah. Bloomberg with all his -- because we actually did a campaign about him that he called us and asked us to stop doing. We called Bloomberg Bucks and we actually got dollar bills with his picture on it. We did a campaign against him, and it was something specific that we wanted from him. I forget what it is now, but he actually called Arthur and said please stop doing the ads because -- (laughs) and he succumbed to it. Then when he left, Quinn wanted to run. She was the speaker of the Council who was complicit with him running for a third term. So we did an "Anybody but Quinn" campaign for the next mayor. That's how de Blasio got in and she's very upset. I see her every now and then at fundraisers. I say "Hi". (laughs) She waves back, but she'll never forget local 1180. Never. So that's why I said the city has a lot of respect for CWA 1180.

Debbie [01:17:54] Well, when you're a public sector union, your boss is the government.

Gloria [01:17:58] Yes.

Debbie [01:17:59] So you have to be political.

Gloria [01:18:01] Yes, absolutely, and we explain that to our members all the time. I'm proud to say that we have more registered voters at our local percentage-wise than UFT does because we have explained to our members over and over what we do depends on who we have elected. Okay, so you got a vote. That's something. We're getting ready to do a voter registration drive now for the upcoming elections.

Debbie [01:18:33] And do you make political donations?

Debbie [01:18:36] Oh, yes. We are allowed to make city and state donations. We have to go to the national to make the federal. We do that through our COPE dollars, you know that.

Debbie [01:18:49] I think I have two more questions. One of them is, if I'm correct, your local has some very interesting programs for the members. Training programs, education programs. Can you talk about those?

Gloria [01:19:04] Okay. In our contract negotiations we get monies from the city for benefits. So we take those dollars, right now it's 1664 per year per member. We take those monies and we invest

them and we have invested through the years. And then there's money that we get in bargaining called the Additional Compensation Fund [ACF] that we can use for additions to growth, annuity funds, etc.. So with the ACF, we do have an annuity fund for our members that once they retire, they'll get this money that we have invested. I think it started in like 2000 and it's like $2 a day for every day you work. But through investments, that money now, if you have been in it since the beginning, they get like $30,000 when they retire.

Debbie [01:20:14] That's in addition to their government pension?

Gloria [01:20:18] That's in addition to their government pension. That's something that CWA 1180 has provided to contract negotiations.

Debbie [01:20:21] Wow.

Gloria [01:20:22] Okay. Second thing. Through our benefits fund, because the money that comes in from the city that we negotiate, that's 1664 per member per year. With those investments we have the Education Training Fund. I'll tell you a little more about that. We have the benefits fund that does eyeglasses, our prescription drug program, where one of the units that provide prescription drugs for our members. We do that through a PBM [prescription drugs benefits manager] and we do a contract to try to get the lowest cost possible. We do dental. We have podiatry service and we have a short-term disability benefit for our members.

Debbie [01:21:12] So those are benefits that rather than coming through the city program, the city provides the union the money to then provide those benefits?

Gloria [01:21:25] Right. They give us the money and then we do what we want with it to provide those additional benefits. The city pays for health care, period.

Debbie [01:21:34] But they don't pay for dental or eyeglasses or short-term disability?

Gloria [01:21:39] Yeah. Those are additional benefits, that some unions don't provide those benefits because they don't invest. They do other things with it, like pay the high-option rider for their members. They may do eyeglasses, but that's it. In our contract, we request money for a training fund, which is $100 per year per member. With that we have developed [an] educational program with the CUNY [City University of New York] School of Labor. It's now CUNY School of Labor, Arthur Enrik Mansios. The board envisioned a school for labor activists where they can get a degree in public administration or labor management. To get that degree, it's done after-hours where people can go after work. We provide 30 credits for either their B.A. degree or their Master's degree for them to attain their degree.

Debbie [01:22:40] You pay for that?

Gloria [01:22:41] Yes.

Debbie [01:22:42] For college education.

Gloria [01:22:43] Through our Education Fund. Now, for somebody who already has their B.A. [and is] going for their Masters, we are paying for their Masters. So it's a wonderful opportunity for

some members to do 30 credits for the B.A., but then they have to do the rest on their own. But that's still a lot of money.

Debbie [01:23:01] Are these programs then ways in which you bind relationships with the members? They see they're getting concrete things from the union.

Gloria [01:23:12] Absolutely. When we had the court case, and the name escapes me right now, Jeff, you might remember. The Supreme Court case where they said members don't have to join the union.

Debbie [01:23:25] The Beck case.

Gloria [01:23:27] No. The public sector one.

Debbie [01:23:29] The public sector one. [*Janus v AFSCME*, in 2018. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public sector unions could no longer collect agency fees from non-members to cover the cost of representation. The Supreme Court ruled this was a violation of free speech.].

Gloria [01:23:30] Before we had dues check-off. Didn't matter. You could be a member or not, we still get your dues [correction: your agency fees, a portion of full dues.] Now they have to actually sign a card. So a lot of unions are suffering. Public sector unions are suffering from that. We did a campaign to make sure we hit every member. We had retirees go around to our shops for those members who had not signed a [union] card to get them to sign a card, because who better to tell present union members how good the union is when you are a retiree sitting at home[and] have an income coming in your house. So with that we have 99% card signage in CWA local 1180.

Debbie [01:24:14] Oh my goodness. Say it again because I talked over you.

Gloria [01:24:17] 99% card signage in CWA 1180 for the public sector. I have one person whose specific job, as soon as we get new members, to call them and get them to sign a card.

Jeff [01:24:34] That was the *Janus* decision.

Jeff [01:24:36*]* *Janus* case, right. Yeah. Yeah.

Debbie [01:24:38] And 99% of that number. How many are dues and how many are agency or whatever?

Gloria [01:24:46] There is no longer agency payors in public sector. You're either a member or you're not.

Jeff [01:24:50] Right.

Jeff [01:24:51] The private sector still has agency fee payers, but not public sector. Thanks to *Janus*.

Gloria [01:24:58] Yeah, but that works for us. I believe it's because our local is mostly people of color. They understand the benefit of having a union. Our court case didn't hurt them understanding

that. (laughs) I understand the southern [New] Jersey locals are having a hard time because there's people like the Freedom Foundation that are writing to them saying, you want a raise, stop paying union dues. Yeah. So we're fortunate in that.

Debbie [01:25:29] My last substantive question is to talk a little bit about what it's like to be a public sector union within a national union that is largely private sector.

Gloria [01:25:48] When I first came to the national union and being a public sector person, and I am talking about 1998, I felt underrepresented. Okay. I felt like the public sector was second-class citizen. The private sector superseded what the public sector needs were for whatever reason. Because CWA started out as a telephone telegraph union. So that's what they were used to. But of course things change. And if you don't grow the union, you die. So then there was a need to reach out to other sectors to keep the union going. Through the years, and especially because I'm on the board, and especially because I was on the Civil Rights and Equity Committee and my voice was heard and through leadership like Chris Shelton and now Claude [Cummings] because Claude made sure he came to see us when he was running, because he knew how important our votes were. The public sector has grown. We're now 33% of the union. Okay. All right. I even had to explain to a brother who was in the private sector about how important the public sector is to the union today because, he said, but you don't make as much money as the people in the private sector. I said I beg your pardon? (laughs) My people are making 80 to $150,000 in their jobs. What do you make? What do you all make? So we are contributing to the dues structure of CWA because that mindset in some people is still there. But we've come a long way. We have a lot further to go. There's still talk about what to do, like a public sector vice-president because, as you well know Jeff, the vice-presidents don't want anybody coming in their district to organize. I don't know how we get over that. But, with 30% of the union being public sector, I don't think they're going to try to get rid of the vice-president for the public sector, but there just needs to be a better role for that person on the board and we're discussing that.

Debbie [01:28:29] I'm about to ask what I would call the end of the interview summary questions. Before I do that, Jeff, do you have any questions. (You're on mute, though.)

Jeff [01:28:41] Yes, I see that.

Debbie [01:28:43] And what about you Hannah?

Jeff [01:28:46] No, no. Go ahead. I think the questions you're going to ask are the ones that I would ask.

Debbie [01:28:50] Well, then I'll wait and I'll let you ask them, but before I do, Hannah, do you have any questions? You live in New York City. You probably are a beneficiary of some of the things that Gloria's members do, and you probably learned a lot about what it's like to work for the city. Do you have any questions?

Hannah [01:29:10] Sure. Can you mute?

Debbie [01:29:12] Oh, I have to mute. Hold on.

Hannah [01:29:19] Hi, Gloria. The law you talked about that gathers data on pay equity across racial lines. Voters voted on that, right?

Gloria [01:29:31] The City Council voted on it.

Hannah [01:29:35] Okay, I thought I voted for it, but it must --

Gloria [01:29:39] No. I know what you voted for. There was a resolution a couple of elections ago about do New Yorkers want equalization in the City of New York. There was some question about that. But that was a different entity. It had nothing to do with Local Law 18.

Hannah [01:30:03] Okay.

Gloria [01:30:05] In my opinion, that was just a posh question (laughs) because nothing has been done with that, obviously, from the reports that we have. I think it was do you think it's fair to have pay equity? I forget what the question was, but I remember voting for that as well. So now, yes, we believe in it, now what you all going to do about it.

Hannah [01:30:32] Exactly. I guess one question I would have is you talked about the importance of your community, your communal upbringing in Harlem. And you're still there, right?

Gloria [01:30:44] Yes.

Hannah [01:30:45] Has your work in local 1180, have you seen it impact your community in Harlem and folks that you grew up with?

Gloria [01:30:58] Sure. Of course. A lot of the minority residents in Harlem are city workers, especially in housing developments where they had what we call the Mitchell-Lama Projects. I don't know if you know what Mitchell-Llama is, but that's when housing was developed years ago for middle-income people to live and survive in their beautiful housing. It's places like Concourse Village, Coop City. There's some places downtown. I forget the names. That's in Chelsea as well where the rent is reasonable. You're a city worker and you get an abated price for rent or even ownership. These things have helped city workers. If you go to HPD Connect there is housing available for both rental and ownership that you can apply for. It's a lottery. But that's how you're able to upgrade your standard of living. Actually, that's how I am living where I'm living. I do have a coop, not a coop, I have a condo in Harlem. If it wasn't for the condo that I acquired through HPD Connect to be able to afford this one because it's [a] ridiculous price. But I'm looking to create some generational wealth. He'll never be a millionaire, my son, but it'll help him 100 years from now when the good Lord takes me. So it's absolutely instrumental in being able to do public service at the same time being able to get a decent wage and have benefits after you retire to be able to live and sustain yourself in New York. A lot of people do move to the south because it's cheaper living. But this community meant so much to my mother and father. I forgot to tell you, my father after he retired became a minister. Their mission was to feed the homeless and to clothe the homeless. They used to have, twice a year, my mother would call people in the Projects that she knew, ask them to cook food, and we would have lines of people in the lobby getting food for Mother's Day and Thanksgiving. That's what she did. My father would collect clothes and have it in front of the church for people to just pick up. So that's been instilled in me. The community meant so much to

them so I feel it's part of my passion to keep upgrading this community in whichever way and level I can.

Debbie [01:33:46] That led me to a couple quick follow ups. First, it's H-P-D Connect Program.

Gloria [01:33:54] Yes. That's what it's called today. It was something else before.

Debbie [01:33:58] And what was your father's church? We didn't talk about religion at all in your upbringing, but maybe add a few sentences about that.

Gloria [01:34:10] Like I said, after my father retired, he became a minister after going through a lot of life changes. Trust me. And my mother could tell you the story better than I could. We were raised in the church, and in those days you went to church five days a week. Choir rehearsal, prayer meetings, all of that. So I was raised up in the church and actually my best friend from the Projects, she went to church with me and then her father joined the church. So we were like a little family church. We were part of another church, small family church, storefront churches. My father didn't believe in the big churches. Eventually he started his own church, [01:34:54]Mt. Paylor Baptist Church [1.2s] which was a little storefront on Lennox Avenue and 123rd street. We since moved after his passing. My sister became the minister. After that, my older sister, who has passed away as well, and my nephew bought a brownstone in 2000. Thank God he did it then. The church was in the street level part of his brownstone. And we served there until the pandemic.

Debbie [01:35:31] Mount Pella. Can you spell it?

Gloria [01:35:36] P like in Peter A-Y-L-O-R Baptist Church which was a little church.

Debbie [01:35:41] And you have one child?

Gloria [01:35:43] Yes.

Debbie [01:35:44] And what's he doing?

Gloria [01:35:45] Two grandchildren.

Debbie [01:35:46] That's the best.

Gloria [01:35:49] My son, who I learned after losing some money, did not want to go to college. (laughs) Eventually he got a job with New York City Transit Authority and he's been working there for the last 20 something years. He is also a union person and right now the president of TWU [Transit Workers Union] is trying to get him to run for an office. My son isn't a people person like me, but he understands the fight, so he's thinking about it. I say, yeah okay.

Debbie [01:36:27] Jeff, why don't you ask the final series of questions that we usually ask?

Jeff [01:36:38] You've had such a great career so far with CWA. Talk a little bit, maybe, about a frustration that you might have experienced over the course of your time. And then I'm going to ask you about something that you're particularly proud of in your time with CWA.

Gloria [01:36:59] My frustration with CWA specifically?

Jeff [01:37:03] Well, just with your career in general, I guess, obviously a big part of it revolves around CWA.

Gloria [01:37:11] My biggest frustration, especially since I've become president, and even as secretary- treasurer because I've been on various boards, is when I go to these union boards, these central labor councils, these municipal labor committees, I'm one of 4 or 5 women in a room of 30 or 40 men. Okay. There are few black men, but mostly white males. Okay. Like I said, I have a big mouth, so they've come to learn when I raise my hand, you better call on me or I'll embarrass you. (Jeff laughs) Being the lone woman in the room, that's my frustration. I'm actually working with some of the women at CLC [central labor council] to see how we could change this. So that's my biggest frustration. And I talk to women, a lot of women are intimidated by taking these leadership positions. Even if they are in leadership, they are afraid to be in a room or to say something in the room. How do we find ways to change that scenario? We need to be in the room. We are the majority, especially in the public sector of the workforce because we either are raising our children or we have raised our children. And we're looking for a decent income with benefits. The reason I joined public service, even besides all the other entities that happened, was I'm a single mother. I need to be able to take days off to take him to the doctor if he gets sick and I need to be able to be close to home so I could get to him if I have to. With public sector work, especially in the city, you don't have to work downtown. You can work in any borough, any location that's available to you. So it's important that women's issues be heard. You've heard the stories about people, like in New York City Transit, they're not necessarily our members, but the Transit Authority workers, the women that work in the subways and whatnot, the bathrooms are horrible. Where do you go to the bathroom? Okay. They are trying to change that these days. But that's why women need to be at the table so they can talk about these things. Excuse the expression, Jeff, but men can piss anywhere. (laughs) That's not so true for women.

Jeff [01:39:44] And in the city that happens a lot.

Gloria [01:39:47] Yeah, I see it all the time. Trust me.

Jeff [01:39:51] My daughter lived at 105th and Broadway for about ten years.

Gloria [01:39:56] I know that area well.

Jeff [01:39:59] So, I mean. Clearly, as the song goes, you got to be in the room where it happens.. Talk a little bit about, and this may be hard to do, but one singular accomplishment that you're particularly proud of. I mean, obviously, you're the first African-American woman, first woman to be president of 1180. That's huge. One of the biggest locals in the country. But, talk about something that you're particularly proud of over the course of your career.

Gloria [01:40:32] Oh, what am I particularly proud of in this business,. There are awards and there are awards. My office is full of awards. My home is full of awards. I have a room and a storage place with stuff that has awards in it. After a while, you begin to say, okay, another award. But the one I'm most proud of is the award I got from the NAACP because that was something that my parents talked to me about and the struggles. I get emotional about (voice chokes up) what they went through in the South. My sister was alive when I got that award. That's the one I'm most proud

of. The woman that gave it to me, I can't think of her name right now, she has gone on to glory too. But it was the proudest moment I had, and she gave it to me because I was the first woman president of local 1180 and she called me a trailblazer. So, thanks for that question.

Jeff [01:42:01] Well, it's a powerful, powerful story. You think about our nation and we're making slow progress. But over the course of your lifetime, you've leapfrogged that progress to a point where you're in this leadership position that would have been unheard of 20, 30, 40 years ago. Remarkable accomplishment and a remarkable career. We're lucky to have you and we're just so thrilled that you joined us for this. This has been wonderful. These two hours have flown by.

Gloria [01:42:36] Thanks, Jeff.

Debbie [01:42:36] Absolutely agree. I could have done the whole interview asking about your family's background, but I knew we had to move on. But I was calculating generations when you were talking about your grandparents, or your parents in South Carolina. And I was thinking probably your parents' great-grandparents, if not grandparents, were slaves.

Gloria [01:43:01] My mother's mother was a slave. Before she passed, we took a road trip on Amtrak to Whitehall, South Carolina where they were born and I actually saw the cotton field that my great-grandmother worked on. My mother pointed it out. It was so emotional. Because when you look at the field and you see the sun beaming on that field, I said, My God, what did they have to go through to pick this cotton that they did not get paid for.

Debbie [01:43:33] And even the children who worked bringing them water or whatever.

Gloria [01:43:38] Yeah, yeah.

Jeff [01:43:39] Yes. I'm reading a book right now, *The Demon of the Unrest*. It's about the beginnings of the Civil War. I didn't realize this but it really was focused around South Carolina. South Carolina was the catalyst for the South seceding. It's a remarkable tale.

Gloria [01:44:00] The slave owner Middleton had the biggest plantation in South Carolina. We traced our roots. We were from that plantation, by way of West Africa, by way of the West Indies, by way of that particular plantation. Everybody was named after their slave owner. So that's how we got the name. When I say Middleton, some people they say, are you related to Kate? I said, yeah, by way of another mother. (all laugh)

Debbie [01:44:40] Well, I think we should stop there so that you can get ready for the big shindig tonight .[Chris Shelton's retirement party] I want to ask a couple questions off tape. Is there anything more that anyone wants to get on tape? Gloria, do you want to add anything that we haven't touched?

Gloria [01:44:59] No. I think you covered it all.

Debbie [01:45:02] Thank you so much.

Gloria [01:45:04] There's many more stories I can tell, but we don't have time.

Debbie [01:45:06] Thank you so much.