

Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Rosenstein, Hetty

Interviewer: Debbie Goldman

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Hetty Rosenstein Interview – March 27, 2024

Debbie [00:00:00] This is March 27th, 2024. Debbie Goldman is conducting the interview with Hetty Rosenstein, who is in -- where are you, Hetty?

Hetty [00:00:12] I'm in South Orange, New Jersey.

Debbie [00:00:14] In South Orange, New Jersey. This is via Zoom. Jeff Rechenbach is joining me and will also pose questions and make comments as appropriate. He's in Cleveland -- you live in Cleveland, right?

Jeff [00:00:31] Cleveland. Yes.

Debbie [00:00:31] Cleveland, Ohio. And Hannah Goldman, our producer, is in Brooklyn, New York. Hetty, you may see some last name correspondence. Hannah is my delightful niece. Because of her, Jeff and I don't have to fiddle with all of the technology. The goal here is to record the union experience and the lives and the values and the beliefs of a range of CWA leaders from over the past fifty years. Jeff and I are particularly interested in understanding how union leaders responded to the enormous changes that were going on in this period, and used and developed strategies, tactics, and relationships that strengthened and transformed the union -- and also those areas in which there was less success. We begin at the beginning. Hetty, tell us when you were born, where, and a little bit about your family background and your community.

Hetty [00:01:45] I was born in 1955, and I grew up in Brooklyn and Queens until I was about fourteen years old. Then my parents moved to Maplewood, New Jersey. My parents were political activists, and I grew up in a very left, activist, pro-union household.

Debbie [00:02:10] Tell us the names of your parents.

Hetty [00:02:13] Miriam and Phil. Miriam Yaffe and Phil Rosenstein. They met at UCLA [University of California – Los Angeles] on the library steps where the left students hung out. My father was there on the GI Bil, and my mother was a student. That is where they met and fell in love.

Debbie [00:02:40] Tell us then about what kind of household it was, given that they were activists, and how that shaped your own upbringing and values.

Hetty [00:02:51] I don't think that we understood it, that we were very different as children than everybody else. But we were. We went to very left-wing summer camps and we participated in boycotts. My father went to Washington in 1963. We knew that. My mother worked for the Civil Rights Congress [radical civil rights organization that used litigation and demonstrations to raise awareness of racial injustice in the U.S, 1946-1956} My grandparents were activists and leftists. My father grew up in the coops in New York in the Bronx, which was a socialist, union-owned cooperative. My grandfather ran for shop steward.

Debbie [00:04:23] Shop steward of what union?

Hetty [00:04:25] I think, it was the ILG [International Ladies Garment Workers Union] at that time. Actually the coops, I think, originally were ILG. I'm not sure -- they were definitely garment

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workers -- whether or not it was yet the ILG, I don't know. So that was the household that I grew up in. [The coops in the Bronx were a project of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union.]

Debbie [00:04:44] When you said your father went in 1963, that was to the March on Washington?

Hetty [00:04:49] Yes, to the March on Washington. we engaged in the civil rights movement our whole lives. I was at this summer camp, Twin Lake Camp, where we learned that TLC didn't stand for Tender Loving Care. You didn't go to Twin Link Camp to have fun. You went to learn responsibility to your community! I was six. [*Laughs*] But I remember when they found [Andrew] Goodman and [James] Chaney and [Michael] Schwerner, and at camp, we were called together. [The Klux Klux Klan murdered these three civil rights workers in Mississippi in 1964.] So I grew up in this very intensely active world. When I was nine years-old, we moved to a cooperative housing project in Queens called Rochdale Village.

Debbie [00:05:48] Called what?

Hetty [00:05:49] Rochdale Village in south Jamaica, Queens.

Debbie [00:05:51] Can you spell it?

Hetty [00:05:53] R-O-C-H-D-A-L-E. There had been a Rochdale in Great Britain. It was very at that time sort of forward-looking. Huge co-operative development. Our cousins moved there and other families that we knew from politics. There was a core of very left families that we grew up with. So again, it took a while before I suddenly realized that this was not, particularly, the usual family and the things we said weren't, generally, agreed with. [*Laughs*]

Debbie [00:08:39] How many siblings do you have?

Hetty [00:08:52] I have an older sister, Meda, who was the president of Local 2110 of the UAW and is the organizing director there now for 40 years. I have a brother, Jed, who lives now in France, and I have my sister Stacia who's eleven years younger than me. She was sort of the next generation of us. There were four of us.

Debbie [00:09:21] What work did your parents do? Paid work.

Hetty [00:09:25] They were librarians. My father was a medical librarian. Eventually, my mother goes to library school while we are little kids and she also becomes a medical librarian.

Debbie [00:09:40] Why did you move to Maplewood, New Jersey?

Hetty [00:09:43] My father got the job. He got this job for the University of Medicine and Dentistry as the head of libraries. This is a huge change in our lives because he kind of makes a living. He makes a lot more money. I'm sure it wasn't a lot of money, but it was a lot more money than being at Brooklyn College of Pharmacy. First it was located in Jersey City, and then it moves to Newark. It was too much of a commute. He did commute for a couple of years. So there's this decision that we're going to move. We're going to move so that he can commute to Newark. They find this house in Maplewood, New Jersey. It's the first single-family home I think I had ever really been in. I mean, my cousins had one, but they were sort of more of the little boxy types in Canarsie.

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So it was a little different -- but a big, single-family home with a yard. I thought they were moving me to Hooterville. I could not believe what they were doing to me, moving me to this place. They took us to see the house for the first time in January. In the downtown of Maplewood there was this Dickens Village, which were these cute little houses that were from Charles Dickens. I saw this Dickens Village, and I could not believe that they were moving me to this place that had a Dickens Village. [Laughs] Anyway, so we moved to Maplewood.

Debbie [00:11:37] And that's where you went to high school?

Hetty [00:11:39] Went to high school, yeah.

Debbie [00:11:40] And I think I heard -- your grandparents, were they immigrants from Eastern Europe?

Hetty [00:11:46] Oh, yeah.

Debbie [00:11:47] All four sets?

Hetty [00:11:48] Well, my grandfather was from Lithuania. On my mother's side, they were from Lithuania. On my father's side, they were from Zuromin, Poland, which was a town that essentially got entirely wiped out during the Holocaust -- the whole town. I mean, they were here already. But on April 30th [correction: October 30] in, I think, 1940, the entire town was told to come out, and the entire town was eliminated, eventually. Yeah. Yeah. So that's where they were from.

Debbie [00:12:32] Any stories or memories from your pre-college years -- and I'm assuming you went to college; I'm not sure you did -- that you would like to add to what you've said so far?

Hetty [00:12:49] I followed my sister, my older sister Meda into the labor movement. She was organizing with [UAW] District 65 at the time -- clerical workers at NYU -- and she was a clerical worker at NYU. But the thing that I remember most about my sister and her union-like activity is when she was in high school, she and a few other girls led what became a citywide pants strike. Girls had to wear dresses. They led a pants strike, where all the girls in support of that strike wore pants to school. It actually broke the rule that girls had to wear dresses.

Debbie [00:13:43] I'm guessing late 19]60s. Is that correct?

Hetty [00:13:46] Yeah.

Debbie [00:13:47] I couldn't wear pants to school till 1968.

Hetty [00:13:51] I was going to say, "I think it's 1968." That was what I was going to say. I think it's 1968. And I think, really, that pants strike is the beginning of the end of the rule.

Debbie [00:14:02] Jeff, do you want to ask anything about the period up till where we've come so far?

Jeff [00:14:10] This is fascinating. I'm [unclear] blown away with this. This is really great. Thanks for doing this and sharing this with us Hetty -- big deal to me.

Hetty [00:14:20] It's nice to do.

Jeff [00:14:22] Let's get to college.

Debbie [00:14:23] Yeah. Okay. Did you go to college? If so, where? And were you an activist? Tell us a little bit about that.

Hetty [00:14:31] I went to college first at University of Massachusetts in Boston. I was living in Boston in 1971 with my musician boyfriend going to Boston State College. UMass is Boston State. We took over the radio station in protest of there not being any girls' athletics and what became the Title IX case. I remember that -- we took over the radio station. [Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits gender discrimination in any school receiving federal funding.]

Debbie [00:15:21] What do you mean, "what became the Title IX case?" This was the lead case?

Hetty [00:15:26] Well, [there were] a bunch of places where there ended up being plaintiffs from. This was one of them and it was part of that struggle. I was an early feminist, and that was the place where *Our Bodies, Ourselves* was formed -- in Boston. [*Our Bodies, Ourselves* first published by a feminist collective in Boston in 1970.] So it's really early feminism which is pretty militant. We took taekwondo self-defense classes and did all this self-looking at people's cervixes [*laughs*] and all of this. There was all of this issue about learning about -- there was a gay rights movement at the same time. And we would say, "I'm a political lesbian." [*Laughs*] I was really active in that while I was there. Then I ended up moving back to New Jersey after a time and going to Rutgers and certainly was active.

Debbie [00:16:46] Were you in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] or any feminist collectives?

Hetty [00:16:51] Well, in Boston I was.

Debbie [00:16:54] Which one?

Hetty [00:16:55] I don't know if I know what it was called. I know we had a Center and I went to it -- and beyond that I can't really remember. Then when we moved back to New Jersey, I was definitely active and did things at college. I wasn't as much in an organization for a while. I certainly was engaged politically, but I wasn't a part of an organization at that point. When I left college, I got a job at a pension consulting firm. I wanted to be a teacher, but believe it or not, there were no teaching jobs then. It was really hard to get a teaching job. Of course I was going to be a teacher for social studies, which there were a million of them. So I went to work for this pension consulting firm and I became an assistant actuary. That's only interesting because years later, I still use it when we have pension fights. Then after doing that I wanted to go back to teaching. I found a job at the New Jersey Job Corps, which was a Job Corps that was run by the state of New Jersey. The working conditions were just horrendous and there was nothing for the students. I mean, we didn't have materials. The conditions were terrible. So a group of teachers actually organized there because we needed to organize in order to be able to do our jobs. It was really connected to what work we would do. We had no idea that the state of New Jersey had a union, the State Employees Association, because nobody paid attention to anybody at Job Corps. There wasn't any agency shop

then. So you just didn't even know. We had no idea. So we filed our own petition to management that said, "We, the undersigned teachers, are now part of the New Jersey Job Corps Union." [Laughs] I did it because my sister was organizing. I knew we needed a union. So we gave them that. Then I went figuring out -- how are we going to find a union? Then management came back to us and said, "There is a union. It's the State Employees Association." Then when we tried to track down the State Employees Association we found out that they were being decertified and there was an election taking place between the AFT [American Federation of Teachers], CWA [Communications Workers of America], and AFSCME [American Federation of State, County, Municipal Employees].

Debbie [00:19:42] What year is this?

Hetty [00:19:44] That's 1980 and 1981.

Debbie [00:19:50] And this was soon after --

Hetty [00:19:52] [19]80 is the first one. And then I think [19]81 is the runoff.

Debbie [00:19:55] And this is soon after or before New Jersey passes the collective bargaining law for state employees?

Hetty [00:20:03] It's after. I think the New Jersey collective bargaining law is 1968 or [19]'69. It's very early, the New Jersey collective bargaining law. The New Jersey collective bargaining law connects up, actually, with the initial organizing of public workers that takes place with AFSCME, and Martin Luther King, and Frank Forst, who is the father of Fran Ehret, who's the New Jersey area director now. He is the person who does the work to get the New Jersey collective bargaining law passed. So it's later.

Debbie [00:20:54] Okay.

Hetty [00:20:55] The State Employees Association had been a civil service association. When the New Jersey collective bargaining law takes place, the civil service association morphs into a collective bargaining agent. This is getting rid of the civil service association and the State Employees Association and coming in with the union, basically after a 1979 failed wildcat strike.

Debbie [00:21:26] Okay, we won't go back to that, but offline, I want to talk to you about that because I thought it was much later. Now we're around 1980, 1981, and you said there's an election going on between the State Employees Association, AFSCME, and CWA -- which is where Larry Cohen comes in. Correct?

Hetty [00:21:49] That's right.

Debbie [00:21:49] Okay.

Hetty [00:21:50] The State Employees Association affiliates with the AFT. AFSCME already represents the non-professional workers in the institutions. Then CWA comes in. Larry Cohen is the organizer for this State Worker Organizing Committee, S-W-O-C. SWOC. I don't think we knew, but he certainly deliberately chose the same thing as what was the Steelworkers Organizing

Committee at one point. [in the 1930s] [*Laughs*] Okay. So I'm at New Jersey Job Corps, and we learn about this, and I call and try to find people to come down and talk to us about what's happening, in terms of this election. I call, really, just as the election is happening. I don't think we even get ballots at Job Corps. I think we're trying to find out what's going on. CWA wins the clerical unit. There's a runoff between AFSCME and CWA in the other three units. We are in the professional unit at the Job Corps. That's really the point where I become most active -- before that runoff.

Debbie [00:23:23] Okay, keep going with the story.

Hetty [00:23:27] I don't remember -- I think that I get all of our people to support CWA. In fact, I know what happens. I go to see these friends -- a friend of mine whose parents were really active. I didn't know CWA and I wasn't sure about AFSCME. I went to see these friends of my parents who were still very active. My friend's father said, "Oh, go with CWA because that's an industrial union. And that's CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations]. Go with CWA." That's why I have everybody go to CWA -- end up voting for CWA.

Jeff [00:24:25] Can we send them a thank-you note?

Hetty [00:24:29] Yeah. [*Debbie laughs*] There's so much to this. Anyway, I'm getting really active in the union, and they're forming locals. I don't even remember --

Debbie [00:24:44] Now CWA has won the runoff for the professional unit?

Hetty [00:24:49] I think they may even form the locals before the runoff. I can't remember now. But yes, CWA wins the runoff and takes all four bargaining units. It's a 40,000 person unit. It's the largest organizing drive since probably the [19]50s in this country. I mean, it was a huge victory -- and an unbelievable thing that happens in New Jersey. It's a moment in time for the labor movement itself in New Jersey and completely changes the labor movement in New Jersey, which at that point, prior to CWA, is basically auto workers, garment workers. So there are still industrial and manufacturing [jobs] in New Jersey, which is going to disappear. And there's building trades. In New Jersey, you never really get a merger of the AFL-CIO. There's the CIO unions and there's the AFL unions. It's very, very different.

Debbie [00:26:12] Eventually is CWA in both?

Hetty [00:26:16] Well, eventually the AFL-CIO basically crushes the Industrial Union Council. It kind of becomes a fringe group. You know, I mean, it's good. Like, Carol Gay [long-time CWA activist and eventually staff] is still the president of the IUC here. But at one point, the IUC was really -- we sort of really breathed life into the IUC. It was a going concern. We had auto workers, and we had machinists and garment workers, but that disappears. So it changes. The progressive part of the labor movement becomes, really, CWA -- and some other unions -- but it's CWA. It becomes the progressive part of the labor movement in New Jersey.

Debbie [00:27:05] So now CWA has, you said, four units. I heard clerical, professional --

Hetty [00:27:12] Primary level supervisory and a secondary supervisory unit. We've got everything but paraprofessionals that AFSCME has and some trade and craft that IFPTE [International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers] has.

Debbie [00:27:34] And how does CWA form the state worker locals? What's the logic and your role in that?

Hetty [00:27:41] Well, it's probably pretty mixed. To some extent, I think those locals get formed around what leadership is there. There are a couple of statewide locals which are the institutions [mental health, mental retardation, other facilities], which is Local 1040; Local 1032, which is the Department of Transportation, which covers the whole state; and Local 1031, which is higher education. It's the non-faculty clerical and professionals in higher education at the state colleges. Then in the downtown Trenton area there are locals formed covering several departments because there's huge numbers in these departments in downtown Trenton [the state capitol]. Then there are two field locals, one in the north and one in the south. 1037 is in the north and 1038 is in the south. I'm in 1037. 1037 is people in field offices from Ocean County up through Sussex. That's the whole northern part of the state. Local 1038 is from below Trenton down to Cape May, which is the whole southern part. So we're kind of mirror images of each other as locals. I am in Local 1037. I'm basically taken off the job initially to do organizing, internal organizing. We have very, very few members. In these field locals, we probably have the lowest membership of all because most of the attention has been focused in Trenton and to some extent in Essex County, New Jersey, up north -- but not in the field locals. My initial job is to get people to sign up for the union. I feel like I'm born to it. I feel like I have the organizing gene. I didn't know it, but I'm born to it. We set up this program and we are really successful. We get people to join the union. We establish shop stewards. We create this really robust shop steward program.

Debbie [00:30:10] What is the organizing gene?

Hetty [00:30:14] I do think it's related to being a librarian. I don't know. I say "the organizing gene" because some people -- I'm not saying you can't learn organizing, because you can. But there are some people who just think like organizers.

Debbie [00:30:29] And what is that? Is it thinking about tracking and keeping records? Is it about liking people? Is it --

Hetty [00:30:41] I think it's about figuring -- well, first of all, for me, it's very visual. So it's like, where are all the places of power, and where people are. Then it is identifying leadership that people will follow in those places and working with them. It's being able to know what -- letting people figure out themselves what are the issues that they care about and that they'll organize around and what is meaningful to them. Then being organized, really being organized. The tracking part, I think, is critical, but it's not how it starts. I think it starts with a vision of what's out there and who are the people and what's the power, and how do you recruit and find leadership from those groups and then have them be those leaders. I really came from this shop steward model and the idea of trade union education, and that's how I saw the union organizing work. I was always all about the shop steward, shop steward, shop steward, shop steward, shop stewards. So that was one part. Then there was a second part, which I think was really critically important for Local 1037 and the state worker locals, which was -- and Larry [Cohen] articulated it -- that we were not only organizing for ourselves and doing this work for ourselves, we were going to represent the services that we

provided as public workers and the people who relied upon those services. We saw our work as deeply ingrained in the organizing of the working class, I think, and what are the public goods. That the public sector represents the public good. It was a very different model and, I think, vision of the union, frankly, than what CWA had before. We were definitely the odd ducks in that way -- not to mention the fact that we weren't all white men. That was very clear. When there were these conventions -- these earliest conventions that I went to -- they were huge. They had this camera that would do a whole huge scan of the entire convention. We could always tell where New Jersey was. Because it wasn't all white and it wasn't all male. You could see it from there -- "Oh, there we are. Right there." So we were different.

Debbie [00:34:07] Can you give an example, when you talk about marrying the worker issues with the public good?

Hetty [00:34:15] Yeah, we did it early on. Very early on, we engaged. So, I think, unlike anybody, I don't think any unions ever did this -- right? We knew there was not enough money to provide good public services for people. So we created [*unclear*] New Jersey Citizen Action with other allies, with Larry Cohen as the founding chair. We took on the issue of progressive taxation with a Republican governor. We passed a progressive income tax. So we did that. We knew it was related to our jobs but it was also just related to what kinds of public services will we have? What will New Jersey have? And what we thought about progressive income taxes. We were the only place that had a legislative/political director. We didn't have a title for it in New Jersey. It became a staff rep. It was Steve Rosenthal [who later became political director at the AFL-CIO].

Debbie [00:35:30] Oh!

Hetty [00:35:31] We were the only place in the country that had a legislative/political coordinator. We focused our work around the broad range of social justice issues that there were. The other part was that because we were public sector, we didn't have a legal right to strike. I mean, we did strike, by the way. People forget that. We did have strikes. We did have walkouts. But we didn't have a legal right to strike. So we had to figure out other ways to express power. In CWA, it wasn't even [AT&T] divestiture then. [Divestiture occurred in 1984.] So CWA conducted nationwide strikes and was a militant union, but it relied upon the strike. That was the method. Well, we didn't have the strike, and we had to figure out how to be powerful in this state without it. I think, to this day, there are people who don't really understand how strong we have been and how we do exercise tremendous power without the right to strike. We figured out other ways to do it, whether or not -- we were very politically active. We did mobilization. We created this thing called the Committee of a Thousand.

Debbie [00:37:07] Talk about that.

Hetty [00:37:10] Yeah. So we were in contract negotiations. There were very different levels of organization in different locals, numbers of shop stewards -- people just had different degrees of capacity at that time. So we created this Committee of a Thousand. I'll have to come up -- I think it's 1986 at that point. And we had a thousand members of the Committee of a Thousand who were going to mobilize the rest of the workforce. We started mobilization, which was one person who was responsible for ten or twenty others. We would start with buttons, move to petitions, do demonstrations. Everybody stand up, everybody sit down, everybody blow a whistle, everybody

walk out. All of the things that ultimately become the CWA model for mobilization, they start in New Jersey.

Debbie [00:38:23] And how does that show power?

Hetty [00:38:26] Well, there's tremendous engagement from workers. We do a lot of work to connect with other unions who, at that point, have -- nobody's been doing anything like this in New Jersey. So we are getting involved with other unions. We are developing these relationships with other groups and creating these coalitions and having our members directly engage in direct action. In New Jersey, people fall under civil service, and the civil service can change your rule by just publishing a new rule in the *New Jersey Register* and by holding a public hearing. They would do that all the time, except what we did was we went to the public hearing. We would turn out 900 people to some public hearing in Essex at a church -- because they would hold them in a few places -- and we would turn out hundreds and hundreds of people and make the connections between civil service and civil rights, and civil service and good government, when they had long been lost. Oh, I should say -- this is one of the things that we did that I think was incredible. In probably around 1983, maybe, Tom Kean is the governor. We put together a campaign to divest New Jersey pension funds from South Africa. We are the first -- and we convince Tom Kean, a Republican, to do it. We run a whole campaign with allied groups. We are the first state public pension [fund] in the country to divest from South Africa. And years, years, years later, I'm at a concert where Hugh Masekela, for the first time, is in New Jersey performing, and he comes out and he says, "Hello, New Jersey! You know, you were the first people to divest pension funds from South Africa. So I wanted to say thank you to you." It was really incredible. We did amazing things.

Debbie [00:41:04] Let's stop for a minute around that specific one.

Hetty [00:41:08] Yeah.

Debbie [00:41:10] You talked about diversity. Where did the commitment to participate in the [movement] to end of apartheid in South Africa come from? And what role did that play in terms of the union and representing the voice of -- what I believe, in your units, was a significant African-American membership?

Hetty [00:41:43] Yes. I think that's true. There were certainly many, many more black and brown people in the New Jersey public sector than any place else in the --

Debbie [00:41:58] Than any place else in the union, you're saying.

Hetty [00:42:02] Union, yeah. Because we had civil service, so they couldn't deny you a job. We have a whole story about what we did in terms of LGBT rights, because in 19 -- either '83 or '86 -- we negotiated into our contract that there could not be any discrimination against people based upon gender preference. In our CWA contracts in [19]83 or [19]86 -- pretty incredible. And domestic partnership in 1996, I think, or 1999. So really early. Yeah. I think part of it is that -- look, at the core we have Larry [Cohen]. So we have this really extraordinary leadership. It's leadership, and it's leadership that's unusual in the union. So we have Larry Cohen leading the organizing drive in that direction from its start. And we have pretty sophisticated political people who are part of the union early on. We have Steve Rosenthal as our political director. [Laughs] You know, the guy who becomes the political director for the AFL-CIO. and he becomes a deputy under Robert Reich [at

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the U.S. Department of Labor during the Bill Clinton administration]. So that's our political director.

Debbie [00:43:36] Was Eileen Kirlin in New Jersey?

Hetty [00:43:39] Eileen Kirlin is part of the original organizing drive, and she's one of the staff representatives. Alan Kaufman is a staff representative. He was a Freedom Rider [during the Civil Rights era]. Alan Kaufman was one of two Freedom Riders in Mississippi and he's a CWA staff rep. So it's pretty extraordinary, this mix that comes together there in New Jersey. It's also a point in time that you get [President Ronald] Reagan and the air traffic controllers. [Reagan fired striking Professional Air Traffic Controllers in 1981.] It's a time of real destruction. Larry sent us all [and] we all went and we brought local members to picket at airports for the air traffic controllers. We knew what was going on. It was a pretty extraordinary -- not just an extraordinary time, but the union develops in a certain way in New Jersey.

Debbie [00:44:55] I want to add -- when you mentioned Citizen Action, am I correct that you became the chair?

Hetty [00:45:02] I became the chair of National Citizen Action at a certain point. I became the chair of New Jersey Working Families [Party]. We founded New Jersey Working Families [Party] (it was the New Jersey Working Families Alliance in NJ originally, because we weren't a party). here. Yeah. I'm still active in New Jersey Citizen Action and New Jersey Working Families [Party]. CWA is still critically important to those organizations.

Debbie [00:45:33] Well, let's go back to organizing. Were you involved then in organizing the state and local units of CWA?

Hetty [00:45:43] Somewhat. I see that my battery is going down. I'm going to run upstairs, if you don't mind, and get my cord and plug it in. Is that okay?

Debbie [00:45:55] Oh. That's great.

Hetty [00:45:58] Be right back.

Debbie [00:46:02] There's so much that you mentioned and I jotted down that I want to follow up on, and I will try not to go down too many rabbit holes because we do want to move this forward. But I think, quickly, just talk a little bit about -- CWA then expanded, if I understand correctly, to represent the county employees and the local employees, so eventually --

Hetty [00:46:27] CWA represented the county welfare boards before the state workers. Those locals kind of felt out in space. But we had welfare boards, the social service boards, before the state workers. Local 1085, which was the Gloucester County group, is the place that Larry Cohen first goes to do organizing. He's really there at Local 1085. So the local government groups were there already and then the state worker group comes in. Then we do a lot of organizing after that. We expand a lot in New Jersey. We organize a lot of private nonprofits. We organize a bunch of municipalities. We affiliate a lot of old civil service groups. So Camden County, they are now CWA Local 1014 -- and there's a bunch of them like that. There's a huge, robust public sector. We also, at the same time, though, have telecom, but telecom is shrinking. In New Jersey, the plant

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telecommunications is not CWA. It's IBEW [International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers]. And it's operator services that is CWA. Of course, operator services has shrunk down to nothing.

Debbie [00:48:19] And you have service reps.

Hetty [00:48:21] Service reps, too. Yes. But we had 411 operators, huge numbers of 411 operators. [Information service operators]. [Today,] there's none. When I started, you had huge [telecom] locals. Local 1022 and 1023 were enormous. And Local 1010 and 1012 -- those were big locals. They've all combined to be Local 1000 and it's not that large a local.

Debbie [00:48:53] And you also, at one point, had AT&T.

Hetty [00:48:56] We had AT&T.

Debbie [00:48:57] And Bell Labs.

Hetty [00:48:58] And Bell Labs. [*Laughs*] Right. Telecom shrunk enormously in New Jersey. The public sector has remained pretty stable and, in some cases, expanded. So New Jersey, again, is very different from the rest of the district.

Debbie [00:49:20] Talk about how you impacted and were impacted by being in District 1.

Hetty [00:49:32] That's a good question. There were a couple of parts to that. At the time that New Jersey organized, any place else that had brought in that many people would have probably become a district. But Morty Bahr was the vice president of District 1. Larry was working for District 1. And the plan was, we're going to make District 1 bigger. So when Pennsylvania came in -- when [Local] 1300 came into CWA --

Debbie [00:50:26] Local 13000.

Hetty [00:50:27] [Local 13000} 13000 came into CWA, which is after this, that becomes a district.

Debbie [00:50:33] That was part of their merger agreement.

Hetty [00:50:35] Right. And that was maybe a third of the size of New Jersey. So New Jersey comes into District 1 -- I mean, was in District 1 but stays in District 1 -- with this additional 40,000 people and it makes District 1 a behemoth. In many ways, District 1 had already been the powerhouse, but having that many more people come into the district makes District 1 a behemoth. That's an interesting fact, I think, about District 1 and the overall politics of the union that has positives and negatives. So how does it affect us? Well, Morty Bahr goes on to become the president of the union. So we have this direct relationship with the president of the union, certainly. Larry goes on to be the organizing director.

Debbie [00:51:51] I'm trying to remember -- when did he leave New Jersey? Morty became president, I think, in [19]85.

Hetty [00:52:02] Well, Larry goes with him.

Debbie [00:52:04] Yeah. It wasn't long after you all organized the state --

Hetty [00:52:11] I think we bargained the 1986 contract, Forward in '86. I think Larry is still here when we bargain the 1986 contract. But he leaps, and he goes with -- Then Jan Pierce is the vice-president of District 1. So we, again, have a very progressive activist vice-president at that point. But what I will say is that New Jersey -- this is a positive. I think overall we were ignored a bit by District 1. We're not important to District 1. District 1 thinks mostly about telecom. So we are left -- very nicely, in certain ways -- to not have to be in that. There's a whole very negative period in New Jersey where there's locals fighting -- lots and lots of development of that -- but I do think a lot of things that develop in New Jersey are able to develop because they aren't part of that culture. They are a different culture. The way we did politics, being really ingrained inside coalition forces, and seeing ourselves as part of this broader progressive coalition, I think, made a big difference for us.

Debbie [00:53:52] So what I'm hearing from you is there wasn't a significant cultural impact of bringing in a more diverse workforce, of bringing in the mobilization mentality or tactic or strategy -- that didn't fertilize the telecom locals in New York.

Hetty [00:54:17] Well, there's a couple of reasons why I would say yes, and otherwise, no. Remember, in 1989 you have this huge telecom strike. This enormous NYNEX strike. This is a very powerful, militant moment in the union, and certainly is massive mobilization. I don't think that it's New Jersey that influences that. I think this is the union's culture, and it's, in many ways, at its finest moment. But it doesn't mean that we -- yeah, we don't really mesh in that sense. But you do have this extraordinary moment, and you do have this very militant vice-president. I will say that I think Jan Pierce was very supportive of the work we did in New Jersey, very supportive of it. And in New Jersey, at the same time, you have Christine [Todd] Whitman taking over [as governor, 1994-2001]. We get this Republican and this direct attack on our rights and our benefits. So we go through a very, very difficult time period and a very, very rough contract where we take a beating.

Debbie [00:55:55] Which year was that?

Hetty [00:55:56] That's in 1996 or 1995. 1995. We take a beating and it's rough.

Debbie [00:56:05] Beating in terms of privatization, in terms of the pension --

Hetty [00:56:15] All of it. Privatization, concessions, dismantling of a lot of our healthcare. I mean, now what happened seems nothing compared to what ends up happening eventually. There's layoffs. There's a lot of layoffs. There's cuts in federal funding because this is the Reagan era. There's cuts in federal funding that result in many, many layoffs. There's closures of institutions. There's privatization of [Department of] Motor Vehicles. It's a very, very hard number of years for us that we fight. We fight hard.

Debbie [00:56:54] Do you want to give some examples of the fights?

Hetty [00:56:57] Oh. Motor Vehicles. We nearly take Christine Whitman down with Motor Vehicles. They go to privatize Motor Vehicle agencies, which they successfully do. But we walk out three different times and shut them down. We create a massive political problem for her because we expose that these Motor Vehicle agencies are being given out to people politically. So you can have your own Motor Vehicle agency because you're a Republican. And here it is. We expose it. It is a

brutal fight and it's taking place in the middle of a contract, and they're attacking our healthcare at the same time. We lose our healthcare indemnity plan. We do ultimately lose the Motor Vehicle privatization fight. I mean, it happens -- one night -- we're almost there. We almost win it. It falls apart and Motor Vehicles is shut down and given away. We continue to work with Motor Vehicle workers. We follow them. We try to organize them. But we have a whole relationship with them. So the next governor's race, when Jim McGreevey is running against Christie Whitman, he almost beats her that time. He doesn't. But we get a commitment from him -- we're going to get Motor Vehicles back. The very first thing he does when he comes into office is he brings back Motor Vehicles. So that was a long-time, pretty amazing fight. But anyway --

Debbie [00:58:52] That's a great story. Tell another one. [*Hetty laughs*] That's a story of sticking with the workers.

Hetty [00:58:59] Yeah. That's right. Yeah. It was an incredible, incredible victory and an amazing thing to do. I think that there are a lot of things to talk about. There's Chapter 78, when Steve Sweeney comes in and dismantles our healthcare collective bargaining rights and they stop funding our pension for twenty-five years.

Debbie [00:59:30] The ideological background to that one is very interesting. Steve Sweeney was a building trades guy, right?

Hetty [00:59:39] He's an ironworker.

Debbie [00:59:41] Talk about that tension, then, between unionized private sector and public sector and how you maneuver that.

Hetty [00:59:51] Well, I think that for many, many years, powerful forces in the Democratic Party, but particularly Sweeney, use the difference between the building trades and the public sector. The building trades are real union people. They're men and they do real work. And us public sector people are girls and we're not white. And we work in offices. So Steve Sweeney, who was the big labor candidate, is going on the attack, initially against Jon Corzine [NJ governor 2006-2010]. He doesn't want to pay [fund] our pension. He comes out with Save Our State, with a long list. It's Democrats who come out with this long list of everything -- dismantling our contracts, taking away our holidays, making 35 hour workers 40 hour workers without any additional pay, taking our healthcare away, not putting us in a 401K -- this huge list. That fight goes on with him for many years. When [Governor] Chris Christie [2010-2018] comes in, he's successful. He makes a deal with Chris Christie and six Democratic senators and a handful of Democratic members of the Assembly and all of the Republicans vote to pass Chapter 78, which dismantles our healthcare collective bargaining rights and imposes very, very large costs on our members for healthcare, cuts the value of the pension by huge amounts -- which they still then don't fund, and cause us to pay more for it. And it's brutal. It's a brutal, huge fight. CWA and other public sector unions -- we hold a demonstration in May on a Saturday where we must have had 40,000 people.

Debbie [01:02:30] May of what year?

Hetty [01:02:32] I think it's 2010. And in 2011, they actually pass the Chapter 78. We have tons and tons of people who walk out and end up in the streets in Trenton, outside of the statehouse, in the pouring rain. The Democrats that aren't supporting Sweeney walk out with us. They walk out of the

statehouse for the vote -- 16 state senators and I don't remember how many members of the Assembly, but it's probably like 35 or 40. They walk out with us. All of this is taking place at the same time as Wisconsin. [Governor Scott Walker and the legislature in Wisconsin in 2011 decimate public workers' collective bargaining rights.] So we have these signs that say "Sweeney plus Christie equals Walker" which he hung up in his office. He was proud of that sign. [Laughs] He's running for governor, by the way. So we've had a, I don't know, twenty-year fight with Steve Sweeney.

Debbie [01:03:44] Is it fair to also add to that that he played on the anger and anxiety of private sector workers who were losing wages, who didn't have pensions, who didn't have healthcare -- in other words, the decline in working class living standards -- and portrayed it as, "Oh, those public workers have those things and you don't?"

Hetty [01:04:14] Oh -- "And they're taking them from you. The reason there isn't enough money and we're not building is because all the money goes to them. They have all the money." Which -- yes, it's public and private. I mean, it's sexist and racist too. "They have it. You don't have it. They are getting things you don't have." They did outrageous things. They had the new -- God, I'm losing words, you know? I want to say the interns. [Laughs] It's not the interns. It's the folks coming into the trades. Right? They have them come to hearings and events against us.

Jeff [01:05:13] The apprentices.

Hetty [01:05:15] Against us! It's really quite remarkable.

Debbie [01:05:20] So did this mean that -- did you have a political education program to redirect the focus on corporate America as who we should be fighting?

Hetty [01:05:33] Yeah. Thanks for prompting me. Because we did, and we did all the Train the Trainer work early on. I can remember doing Train the Trainer work, which maybe I don't remember if the original stuff was designed by Les Leopold [of the Labor Institute]. It's really early on. We did work with shop stewards and watching people, the scales come from their eyes when they realize what is taking place in terms of corporate power. And at that point you don't have anything near the Runaway Inequality -- but the role of Wall Street, the role of money in politics. By the way, in New Jersey, before *Citizens United* [Supreme Court decision in 2010 that restricted the federal government's right to restrict corporate financial donations to candidates], we passed a public funding -- political funding -- it was a pilot project, and we ran Linda Greenstein, who's still there, and two others -- now, I can't remember who -- under public funding. We had to get a certain number of campaign contributions of \$5 or more in order to qualify. We basically did it with our members. We went out and we said, "We need this, so we have to raise this money -- in Trenton, and in that district -- and raise \$5 contributions to have them be eligible for public funding." And then *Citizens United* came and it was gone.

Debbie [01:07:10] Linda Greenstein. I don't know that name. What did she run for?

Hetty [01:07:14] She's a state senator now. She's still a state senator. She ran for Assembly with the public funding bill. There were a group of them that were very much supporters of ours. We had some really great legislators at that time. We had Alan Karcher at one point as the Assembly Speaker [in the 1980s]. It was really quite remarkable, some of this work.

Debbie [01:07:39] Your leadership and your units were definitely known for your focus on steward training. Talk about that.

Hetty [01:07:50] I still think it is the most important thing that the union can do. I felt very strongly that every part of our work was going to run through shop stewards, that shop stewards were going to be the worksite leaders. Our political work, our representation work, regulatory work, mobilization, health and safety work -- every single thing at Local 1037 -- all of that work would run through shop stewards. That's not generally the point of view of the union. That's not the CWA model. It's not the CWA model in New Jersey now. I mean, we have these LPATs [legislative/political action teams] and we have health and safety committees and we have those things separate. That was actually not my point of view, but whatever. I continue to think that shop steward education is the thing that is most important and what we must invest in. And we did. We invested a huge amount of money in shop steward training, in taking shop stewards off the job, in projecting shop stewards as leaders, and in trying to give them as much support as possible in doing that work on the job. And I still think it's critically important and I don't know any other way to do it. It still seems to me to be the most important work that the labor movement can do.

Debbie [01:09:34] And why?

Hetty [01:09:36] First of all, you can't possibly hire enough staff to -- and we did it out of necessity at Local 1037. We had 450 different field worksites representing 10,000 people. There was no way you could do it if you didn't do it with shop stewards. But that's true for the labor movement as a whole. You can't represent all these workers, and you can't have engaged workers, unless you have people on the job who are doing it. So I think part of it is really out of necessity. But the other part is that it is too hard for people to know what is going on for themselves as a working class -- as a state worker, as a telecom worker, as a bus driver -- there's no way, in your own life, that you can know all that is going on for the people that are like you unless you get some specific time and opportunity to learn all of that, and then be able to tell other people about it, because we're all siloed. We're all so separated. It's even so much worse now because we do it on zoom. We don't even do it with each other. We're separated by whether or not we're this kind of worker versus that kind of worker, whether we live in this area or that area. Everything's on our phone. There's so little community that I kind of feel like the only way you create that is if you have leadership trying to create it. So when I became the area director in New Jersey --

Debbie [01:11:35] -- which was in -- I'm looking at your timeline -- 2008.

Hetty [01:11:39] Yeah. 2008.

Debbie [01:11:40] And I'm going to interject here, from the timeline you sent me. You were secretary of the local at some point in the 1980s, became the EVP [executive vice-president] a few years later, remained the EVP for quite a few terms, became the president of Local 1037 in 2002, hired by the national union in 2008 as New Jersey Area Director and District 1 Organizing Director. Now we've got that on tape. Now, keep going with your story.

Hetty [01:12:09] Yeah. I met my husband and married him from the union, also. *[Laughs]*

Debbie [01:12:14] And his name?

Hetty [01:12:15] Mike Hopkins. He was the president of Local 1037. [Mike died suddenly about a month after this interview.]

Debbie [01:12:18] And Hetty, do you have children?

Hetty [01:12:22] I have one. My son, James. We have one. And he is a senior organizer with ATU [Amalgamated Transit Union].

Debbie [01:12:30] Okay. Now, I've interrupted your train of thought. I hope you can get back to it.

Hetty [01:12:35] No, you've been really helpful, because I don't think I would've remembered any of these things. Okay. When I became the area director -- and this was controversial and it's not followed down. I think it worked. So I am disappointed [*unclear*] but -- I worked out with Chris Shelton [then vice-president of District 1 and later CWA president, 2015-2023] directly, and with the support of Larry Cohen, that we were going to try to un-silo New Jersey, and that we would have one area director instead of two, and that I would also direct the organizing that was going on in New Jersey, and, really, that we would integrate all of our work. And we did. Organizers met with internal organizers, with staff representatives, with the legislative political director. And in terms of the work that we did, we integrated it. So if you were bargaining a contract, you got political support, mobilization and organizing support -- and we were trying to put all of those pieces together instead of having telecom here, public sector here, private nonprofits, local government -- we really worked hard to try to integrate it. And I think, successfully -- it's always a struggle. I don't want to suggest that it was perfect, but I think it was a good thing to do. It gave us a great deal more power that we, in those years, really developed, with the kind of stature as a union -- as being considered one of the most powerful unions in the state. And the leadership, again, of the progressive forces -- I mean, we had that with Larry, but there's a real dip off. And I think we did it again. And we fight very, very hard over pensions. And we had before, but it's the meaning of my existence. And it's the first thing that [Governor] Phil Murphy [2017 first elected, in his second term at the time of the interview] does when he comes in -- he makes a full pension payment. We have had the first full pension payments in twenty-five years, and he's made four of them.

Debbie [01:15:18] How did you mobilize for that?

Hetty [01:15:21] Oh my God.

Debbie [01:15:22] Tell the story. That'll make concrete what you're talking about.

Hetty [01:15:26] I mean, every single budget, every time we fought -- there have been so many times where we were calling for pension funding, and fighting for pension funding, and struggling to save the pension. It was always used against us. If we wanted pension funding, they basically would say, "Well, we have to cut your pension so that there's money to fund your pension." Then they would cut the pension and they still didn't make the payments. [*Laughs*] It went on for years and years, but everybody knew it and understood it. And so getting it to the point where it was in the ether that the pension was going to go under and that we had to get funding. And Corzine tried. He was starting to make -- at that point, a full pension funding, a payment, would be \$1 billion. He made a big deal by making a 70%, \$700 million payment into the pension fund. Sweeney had a huge fit, didn't want it. He was doing a penny tax because that was going to go to us, and [*said*],

"See, they're raising the sales tax to pay their pension." Then [in] 2008, the floor went out, the economy tanked, and there wasn't money to make a pension payment. Then when Christie comes in, there's, once again a huge big attack on the pension. But because they never made pension payments, a full pension payment now is \$7 to \$8 billion out of the New Jersey budget. There was a point in time where that pension payment was 350 million, and it wouldn't make it. It's \$8 billion now.

Debbie [01:17:25] Am I remembering that you levied a special fee or raised dues or something to fund a fight around the pension?

Hetty [01:17:37] We did. This was a Steve Sweeney bait-and-switch. Sweeney came to us, before he -- we knew he wanted to run for governor, but he comes to all of the unions, and he says, "Let's do a constitutional amendment that they have to pay the pension." We have many conversations. He's public in many, many ways that we're going to actually do a constitutional amendment -- which we have to put on the ballot to pass a constitutional amendment -- that they have to make payments. This was done after we had sued because they don't make the payments. The judge says they don't have to make the payments under the law. The Supreme Court of New Jersey said one legislature can't bind another. [*unclear*]. So we decide we're going to put this on the ballot, and put it in the constitution that they had to make the pension payments, but if we're going to put it on the ballot, it's going to be unbelievably costly to run this campaign. New Jersey's a very, very expensive state because we only have New York and Philly media. So we pass a dues increase. We get an agreement from the national union that the national union is going to, basically, lend us the money to run the campaign. And we're going to do it with NJEA, and we are hoping other unions as well.

Debbie [01:19:18] NJEA is who?

Hetty [01:19:20] New Jersey Education Association. We're going to do it with them.

Debbie [01:19:24] And Jeff, were you secretary-treasurer at this point?

Hetty [01:19:27] No, no, this is when I'm the area director.

Debbie [01:19:30] No, I was asking Jeff.

Jeff [01:19:34] No, I was already gone by then.

Hetty [01:19:37] So we pass a dues increase with our members. The dues increase is subject to us running this constitutional amendment. That's what we say. We tell people that.

Debbie [01:19:55] So you had to convince the members it was worth it.

Hetty [01:19:59] Yeah. And we do. We get an overwhelming vote for it. We do a membership vote to pass a dues increase that will be used to pay off what we are going to borrow from the union's funds as a whole. We pass it, and we are preparing for the constitutional amendment. And at the last minute, Sweeney -- he's the Senate president -- pulls it and says, "We're not going to have a constitutional amendment." So we end the dues increase. And we're out in Neverland again. We wait until we elect Phil Murphy to be able to get pensions paid. And I'll tell you. I mean, we need to worry because New Jersey has had a Democratic governor now for two terms. That was the first

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time in many, many years we had a Democratic governor for two full terms. The likelihood of -- it will be difficult to elect another Democrat. And we will have a problem again with getting the pension funded.

Jeff [01:21:30] What level is it funded at now?

Hetty [01:21:34] About 44%.

Jeff [01:21:35] Wow.

Hetty [01:21:37] This is the first year in a long time where it's been even enough money [that] comes in as [goes] out. It's the first in a long time. Yeah. If we can keep it funded for another ten or fifteen years we'll be all right. But that's the struggle.

Debbie [01:22:20] How did you promote leadership [of] women and people of color -- activism and leadership?

Hetty [01:22:33] Yeah. Well, first of all, when I was at 1037, we had a staff that was going to reflect the membership. We had women and people of color, LGBT folks on staff and as officers. That was a priority. Our shop stewards were reflective of the membership, and it was a priority, and we took it right on. We were very conscious of it. When I became the area director, New Jersey was, in the District, the place where there were staff that was not overwhelmingly white men. It was still more -- but in New Jersey, we had Black staff reps. When I became the area director -- and to this day, I mean, this has continued, certainly, with Fran Ehret -- I pressed very hard, when we had vacancies, for staff to be reflective and for it to be a diverse group. And for District 1, we were the place that had a really diverse staff. So I think you have -- look, you have to care about -- you have to decide this is what you're going to do. You have to recognize, even in yourself -- and I think leadership has to recognize in itself the tendency to have its own internal bias and select people who are like them and they feel more comfortable with, or they think are better at things. You have to decide that these positions are going to be reflective of the membership. And then, of course, when that happens, you realize the tremendous amount that you gain as an organization and what people who are not exactly like you bring that you didn't have. I think that was critical. Of course, it wasn't just 1037. We had presidents of large state worker locals and local government locals. In New Jersey, because the state worker locals were so large, we always would think of the other locals as small, but they weren't small for CWA. We had a local government local of 600, 700 -- that's not a small local in CWA. But the state worker locals were so big we would think of the small locals -- they were not small locals. And a lot of leadership -- women, Black people. We had Carolyn Wade [long-time president of local 1040 and elected to the national CWA executive board as a diversity seat] and now Michele Vickers -- president of huge local -- an incredibly powerful, respected Black woman. We had that throughout New Jersey.

Debbie [01:26:00] What local is she president of, Michele?

Hetty [01:26:03] Carolyn Wade as the president of Local 1040. She's gone now. Michele is the president now.

Debbie [01:26:06] Oh, okay.

Hetty [01:26:07] But the staff in in New Jersey after I left -- well, not all of them after I left, but -- George Jackson, who was the president of Local 1084 in Camden, is now a national staff rep, Black man. Leroy Baylor, who was the president of Local 1079, now a national staff rep. Kim Johnson was the president of Local 1088 in Ocean County. She's a national staff rep. I'd go on and on -- all people of color, coming out of the bargaining units. The legislative/political coordinator for New Jersey is Chris Estevez. So we have a Latino man who was deeply engaged, politically, for years. Fran Ehret, who took my place, is a Latina lesbian. So it is a place of real -- and that's the staff and, obviously, locals are different. Some are stronger than others. But Mickey Santiago, who's the president of Local 1032, a Latina Muslim woman. New Jersey is really an extraordinary place in this way and is something to be very, very proud of in the union.

Debbie [01:27:43] You wrote to me the following: "The New Jersey program ended up driving the union's entire agenda up through Larry Cohen's time as the union president." Could you elaborate on that statement?

Hetty [01:27:56] Yeah. I mean, when Larry Cohen becomes the president, he tries to take this vision that we had in New Jersey, whether or not it was the shop stewards army and the million worker -- I'm forgetting it. You know the booklet, Debbie. Right?

Debbie [01:28:20] Right.

Hetty [01:28:21] That whole point of view -- that comes out of New Jersey, which was having a shop stewards army, and having the shop stewards drive program, and militancy -- recognizing that we can't make a majority by ourselves, but if we are going to have millions of workers engaged, it has to be us. It's got to be civil rights organizations. It's got to be environmental groups, faith groups. That vision of what we tried to do in New Jersey, he expanded, and spoke for the entire union. So I do think that he led it here but he also saw it happen, and, I think, brought it there.

Debbie [01:29:21] Do you think being a public sector local and having members who were doing public service work was part of the shaping of it? Was part of it that you and Larry -- and you mentioned Alan Kaufman, and I'm sure Carol Gay, and I'm sure there are other names you would add, and I hope you do -- came out of a particular political movement that also helped shape the New Jersey experience?

Hetty [01:29:57] Yeah, I don't think there's any question about it. I think all of those people, at one time, were anti-war activists. And we're politically engaged. people [who] believe strenuously in civil rights and in government for the public good. I also think that, even if you didn't have quite that political point of view, in those days, if you worked for a county welfare board, you went to work for a county welfare board because you wanted to do that work. The public sector was incredibly underpaid. I became a teacher because I wanted to teach. I went to the Job Corps because I wanted to teach those kids. We went into that work because we had a vision of government and public service as part of what could change the world. And Larry knew and said, "We do everything. We're in every single place, whether it's social services, engineering, transportation, healthcare." We were everywhere. I do think that there was a lot of it. I mean, Carolyn Wade was a social worker before she was president of the local [1040]. The first president of Local 1032 was an engineer at the New Jersey Turnpike. Mike Hopkins, my husband, worked in employment services at the Department of Labor. So we really had a point of view. And by the way, all of these locals -- like my local -- I ended up representing private sector workers, also. But what did we think about

that? We went and we organized private nonprofits that were doing group home work, home care, healthcare, and, and things of that nature. And we even, I think, looked at telecommunications in this way when we said Speed Matters and that everybody has to have access to Internet. We need equal access because it has something to do with how you can live in this world. We always took this point of view about our work, and I think it made us a really incredible union.

Debbie [01:32:50] Any disappointments you want to mention?

Hetty [01:32:54] I mean, I have some, but I don't want to criticize anybody. I mean, I don't, because it's really tough. After I left, I was really pained over the election for president of the union [in 2023]. That was painful, very, very painful to me – not the end result, but the sausage making that was taking place. I was disappointed in, in people supporting the person who lost. That's the truth. I don't know if that belongs here, but -

Debbie [01:33:43] Yeah. Hetty, you'll have the option to nix that statement if you'd like.

Hetty [01:33:50] Yeah. It's your call -- [*crosstalk*]

Debbie [01:33:55] [*crosstalk*] -- I think, in general, whatever you want -- but, certainly, you'll have a chance to do that. Are there any other individuals that we haven't talked about that you want to acknowledge and mention?

Hetty [01:34:11] I mean, Chris Shelton. Chris Shelton did something that was, really, not heard of. He made me an area director, and I was -- I wasn't on Team National, whatever -- I was a militant. He made me an area director. And at that point there were three women area directors in District 1. That wasn't any place else -- he did that. And he was so supportive of me. You know, if I said, "I want to try this. This is different. Let's try this." He would say, "Go to it." He was so supportive of the work that we were doing in New Jersey. I would not have lasted if it hadn't -- it was hard. It was a really hard job -- stepping on people's feet that didn't like it -- and he was a great support and was a great leader. I was at the table with him when he bargained contracts. I learned a lot from him. I obviously have tremendous love for Larry, who I was very, very, very close with for forty years. But I want it said -- Chris was a great vice-president. And he's a great friend. And he meant a lot to me.

Debbie [01:35:54] Excellent. Hannah and Jeff, either of you want to ask some questions?

Jeff [01:36:04] I'm trying to think of how to phrase this because I don't want to end this up on a down note, but you mentioned some internal conflict with the locals at one point. Maybe you could talk about how you managed your way through that and what pitfalls you would advise others to try and look out for and avoid, if possible. I mean, was it all personality-driven or -- what was the play?

Hetty [01:36:33] Well, I would say in the 1990s, and, really, until I was the area director -- not until I was the area director, but in the 1990s in particular -- there was a lot of tension between the locals. There was a lot of disagreement about what level of militancy there would be, what kind of mobilization there would be, what capacity there would be. There was tension and stress. I think that the leadership that came from the area office after Larry wasn't equipped for it. Then there was tension at District 1. Because Jan Pierce -- and you have Larry Mancino [District 1 vice-president after Jan Pierce] come in, and Lisa Reardon [Jan Pierce's assistant]. There's stuff that happens in unions. There is that tension that takes place. Some of those political tensions end up dividing the

locals, some of which happened recently and is still happening. There's a little bit of this right now where you had the Jan Pierce-Lisa Riordan side versus the Larry Mancino side. That plays into other things. So there's that. When I became the area director, this was a very big change. Area directors that were there for a long time were no longer there. People who thought they might become area directors didn't become area directors. You bring in somebody from a local. So there was staff tension. Then there were locals that I think that got used. There were locals that weren't as supportive of me. I concentrated really hard on building a really strong relationship with the staff and changing the culture in the office -- which was terrible, I thought -- and really working very hard in protecting staff from ugliness coming from locals, which -- if you were going to ask me [about] a disappointment -- there is a culture in CWA that allows people to be abusive to each other. And a lot -- staff, locals -- we have to change it. It needs work. It needs work. I worked very hard at the staff level and really developed great relationships with staff and built that. Then we worked it at the local level. Some people didn't like me. I came to the conclusion that that was okay, too. I could be respectful of their position. They weren't always as respectful. I think there is some nastiness that I don't like, in the way people talk to each other and do things -- and it's tolerated and shouldn't be. But I could be respectful of their position within the union and accept the fact that they didn't like me and I didn't even have to like them. I could just respect their position, and that's what I would do. I did overcome it. But it was hard and it was painful.

Debbie [01:40:12] That's very helpful. I think sometimes we also don't have mentoring systems that help people, both local leaders and staff. Because it's such hard work, both interpersonally and making tough decisions.

Hetty [01:40:35] You know, and I think also we have to be very direct with management, and part of what we're doing is not considering their personal feelings. We are doing something else. We are representing workers. So we can be very direct and sometimes harsh. Then that turns into it at the union, [where] everybody can be very harsh with each other. There are power struggles that take place and then they show themselves in highly personal ways, that we need to work on. We need to work on it. Take it or don't take it, but what took place in terms of that election and the fact of what came to be known is a part of this. The idea that that goes on -- and it doesn't just go on at a staff level. I mean, I have been the recipient and seen staff be the recipient of grotesque behavior by locals. We do wonderful and great and amazing things. I don't want to take away from it. We could learn a few things. [*Hetty and Jeff laugh*] We could stop doing some things.

Debbie [01:42:08] Hannah. Any questions?

Hannah [01:42:13] I have a few questions, but my first is, is there a process for reporting abuse or harassment within the union?

Hetty [01:42:25] There is. And at the last convention [2023], I think they passed something else. I don't think the problem is reporting.

Hannah [01:42:33] Okay. I have a couple questions I want to ask. The first one is that -- you are the first person we've talked to that mentioned promoting LGBTQ+ rights and safety as part of your work in the union. So I'm wondering, why was that important to you and what was the work you did to try to change the culture in CWA?

Hetty [01:43:03] I mean, we did something incredible. I think it's 1986. It could have been as early as [19]83. There's a nondiscrimination paragraph in the CWA contract. We included in that contract -- I don't remember what the words were, whether it was gender preference or whatever the terms were at that point -- but we included in that contract, in the same discrimination article that spoke about race and sex and, and disabilities and religion, we included sexual preference. I think that was an incredible thing and important and I don't know any other places that had it. So we were the vanguard at that point.

Debbie [01:44:15] Did it come out of the membership?

Hetty [01:44:19] I actually think it came from John Kelly in 1033. I mean, I think there was a person who was on the bargaining committee who said it. So then we did it. I don't know, I could be wrong about that, but it came from the bargaining committee. It was bargained. I don't know exactly how it happened. Then, because we were in civil service -- this is in the [19]80s in 1037. Or it might have been later. It might have been the [19]90s, the early [19]90s. In 1037, we had a trans member who wasn't being given a promotion and who scored at the top of the civil service list and was a vet. So they couldn't bypass her. We made them give her the promotion. So this was remarkable. I won't say that I understood anything there, except for she came and we looked and said, "They got to give you the promotion." We had civil service, so she got the promotion. Then there was a fight for marriage equality in New Jersey. It was one of the first states -- in New Jersey, we took it to the state Supreme Court and we attempted to get a marriage equality bill.

Debbie [01:46:05] The "we" was the union or New Jersey Citizen Action --

Hetty [01:46:08] It was Garden State Equality which was founded by Steven Goldstein. I was still at Local 1037. It was probably 2002. I think I was just a new president then. I get a call from this guy, Steven Goldstein, and he said, "We have this movement for marriage equality and we don't have labor support." I said, "Okay. I'll do it. Let's do it." We arranged for this labor event. The AFL-CIO thought we were crazy but we did this labor event. Basically, I invited all the shop stewards to come because I was going to be a speaker there and we were going to do this. We invited all the shop stewards to come. And of course, we got a lot of LGBT stewards. We had other people come, but we had all our LGBT stewards come. That was really incredible. We were the first union to say we were supporting marriage equality. Then we went and did lobbying with Garden State Equality. I did it with Michele Liebttag from Local 1036. We went and we met with different legislators, where we talked about [how] we have many members and they should be allowed to be married. We did a lot of things like that. Yeah.

Hannah [01:47:58] My other question was -- it's just such a fun story that you, in high school, did this pants strike --

Hetty [01:48:06] Yeah. [*Laughs*] My sister.

Hannah [01:48:07] -- and were part of the nascent feminist movement. Through all your years in the union, how did you see feminism impact the culture at CWA and advancing women's rights in the workplace?

Hetty [01:48:25] I think it's been a struggle. I think it's been a struggle and we're not far enough along. We've had strong women leaders, and women leaders in high positions and as president of

the locals, but -- this is my example. I would hate -- we would go to convention and there would be this report from the Women's Committee. And it would be about tampons in prisons, or something -- not that that isn't important, but it was like, really? Vikki Thurston, who was the executive vice-president of Local 1037 -- she would say, "Oh, here comes the Vagina Monologues." It was performative. So there were things like that -- that, to me, still indicated we have a long way to go. "This is the Women's Committee, and we're going to put them up here. Some women." I don't know. The silos in the union help to cause this. We have silos in the union that, in part, have to do with where Strategic Industry Funds go, and things like that, and sectors. But some of that has helped to continue to have power held in traditional white male telecom hands.

Debbie [01:50:33] Last question. This has been great. This is a record of looking at the past, so you can inform people in the future. Would you like to make some final remarks of what you've learned from your life, that you would like to be some guiding principles or thoughts for people in the future who want to build the union movement, feminism, economic justice, LGBTQ -- movements for equity and democracy?

Hetty [01:51:21] I think, first, to do any of these things, you have to have courage. You have to be able to buck whatever it happens to be -- whether or not it's your employer, it's your union. [Laughs] Whatever power there is, you're going to have to have courage. The only way you have courage is if you have convictions. So you got to really dig deep on what you believe in and then stick with it, because the minute you move off of it, you will find yourself afraid. That happened to me -- where I'm doing something that I don't completely feel comfortable with, but I feel like I've had to make some concession in terms of my own conscience. As soon as that happens, I'm suddenly afraid and I'm nervous. But when I'm back in a place where I know that this is the right thing to do to build power for working people, and I am together with them, well, then I feel courageous. So I think to do these things, you're going to have to have courage and be prepared to live that. I wish that I had been kinder when I was younger. Maybe that doesn't happen until you're older. I don't know. Or maybe it was me, just a flaw in me. I wish I had been kinder to people when I was younger, and that it didn't take me quite so long to be nicer. Part of that, I think, also comes out of insecurity and being afraid other people won't like you, or whatever it is you're doing. But I guess I would like to say that you could be kinder as an individual and still be very strong and powerful in your convictions of the things that you do. I just think we should try to remember that we do look through a single lens when we're inside the union. Lots of things that I understand now, I didn't understand until I stepped away a little bit. I don't think I had the full appreciation of what our allies do and the kind of incredible political and community work that people do with no money, no dues coming in, [laughs] scrambling. I think that it was good to be able to step away and to see that. I guess those are the things I would say. The other thing is, I do feel like having the identity of New Jersey really helped us because people from New Jersey are very conscious of being New Jersey [laughs] -- with its grit and all that it is. I think it helped us and I'm proud of it.

Debbie [01:54:25] I'm ready to end there. Do you have anything you want to add? Jeff? Hannah?

Hetty [01:54:30] No. I want to thank you so much for doing this.

Debbie [01:54:32] Hetty, thank you. This has been fabulous.

Hetty [01:54:34] It's great for me.

Hetty Rosenstein Interview – March 27, 2024

Jeff [01:54:34] Debbie and I take turns, doing these interviews. I'm so glad I was in listen mode today because this has been a delight. Hetty, this was really wonderful. Thanks for doing this.

Hetty [01:54:46] Thank you so much, Jeff. I miss you guys.

Debbie [01:54:48] Oh, we miss you. Hetty, I will never forget when Larry brought you down to teach the staff what it is to do steward training [for] those of us who didn't come out of the ranks. That was one of the best days of my time in CWA.