

Jim Weitkamp Interview – June 5, 2024

Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Weitkamp, Jim

Interviewer: Jeff Rechenbach

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Jeff [00:00:00] I'm Jeff Reichenbach in Cleveland, Ohio. Today we've got Jim Weitkamp with us at his home in Modesto, California. Also on board, Debbie Goldman at her home in Washington, DC. and Hannah Goldman, our producer, at her apartment in Brooklyn. [The interview was conducted on June 5, 2024 via zoom.]

Jeff [00:00:18] Thanks everybody for joining us. Jim, the way we've started these and just so you know, Debbie and I have taken turns doing these interviews. It's my turn today, so I get to do today's interview, but I'll ask her to chime in at any time and ask additional questions as well. We kind of tag-team this a little bit. But the way we've always started these, and I'm particularly interested in this part of your life, is starting at the very, very beginning. Part of this has to do with what I've seen online about your father and we'll get into that in a few minutes. But can you tell us where and when you were born?

Jim [00:01:05] Yeah. I was born May 26th, 1957 in Los Angeles, and I grew up in Baldwin Park which is an east Los Angeles suburb. Curiously enough, I grew up on Roehenbach Street, which is spelled exactly the same way as your name with an O. (laughs)

Jeff [00:01:28] I'll have to check that out next time I'm in L.A. I've never heard that. So tell me a little bit about your early days, schooling and growing up in Baldwin Park.

Jim [00:01:44] It was a typical youth for that time. It was a great place to grow up, southern California. We were close to the mountains, close to the beach, any time we wanted to go. I went to Catholic schools for 12 years, played football, just had a good time and had a very good upbringing.

Jeff [00:02:16] That's interesting. I gotta say, probably at least half our interviews have gone to Catholic school.

Jim [00:02:24] Oh, really?

Jeff [00:02:24] Yes. That seems to be a common theme among key labor leaders so far. So it's an interesting piece. Tell me about school, did you enjoy school, what subjects did you particularly excel at besides football?

Jim [00:02:47] Grade school was great. I had, I'll never forget her, a very, very young nun, taught me to read very quickly at six. That really opened the world for me. So I owe a lot to her. I think it was a much better than average education. I got good grades all the way through. In high school I particularly liked history and those types of things. I worked all through high school. I had my first job when I had just turned 15 and worked and played sports, also wrestled, also threw shotput, did those all through high school. It was an idyllic upbringing and typical middle-class at that time.

Jeff [00:03:47] What job did you have at 15?

Jim [00:03:50] I worked at the In and Out, the original In and Out hamburger for a while and then at one of those in Arcadia.

Jeff [00:03:59] That is still my favorite stop. Every time I go to visit my daughter in San Jose I have to get at least one trip to the In and Out.

Jim [00:04:11] Yeah. The original stand that they opened was about three miles from my house.

Jeff [00:04:17] Wow. It's a shrine.

Jim [00:04:21] Yeah.

Jeff [00:04:23] What were the name of the schools that you went to? Was it all one school?

Jim [00:04:28] The grade school was Saint John the Baptist in Baldwin Park, California, and then the high school was Bishop Amat in La Puente, California. It was known at the time as a great football program. We put out a lot of people and pros over the years. John McKay, Pat Hayden, Eric Bieniemy, who has just been hired as a coach by UCLA [University of California Los Angeles]. John Sharrod. It was a powerhouse, so that made it very fun. We won the state championship three years in a row.

Jeff [00:05:18] Wow. Any siblings?

Jim [00:05:22] I have two older sisters. They're ten and eleven years older than I am. The oldest one passed away last year and nobody in between. So I was kind of a surprise to my parents.

Jeff [00:05:40] That is quite a gap, particularly at that time in life. Tell me a little bit about your parents. What did they do for a living and how did they influence your upbringing?

Jim [00:05:55] Mom was the typical stay-at-home mom of the period. She had very bad vision problems. She was near near-blind and so she was very dependent on my dad for getting around and those type of things. My dad was just this pugnacious little guy. He worked for the phone company, went to work for them right after the war [World War II] ended. He took part in the [19]47 strike that led to the forming of CWA. My grandfather was an organizer with the Brotherhood of Railway Clerks and helped bring that union into the Los Angeles Southern Pacific rail yards in the 1920s. So we had good politics and good kitchen table talks growing up. My folks were liberals for the time and I got some very good principles from them growing up. Dad worked 37 years at the phone company, worked hard and retired and never spent a dime or traveled with the money that he made, just saved the dollar.

Jeff [00:07:28] So many stories like that from that era, right?

Jim [00:07:31] Yeah.

Jeff [00:07:33] Tell us a little bit more. I've read online about your dad's war record. Tell us a little bit about that and what that was like. Did he talk about his experiences in World War II?

Jim [00:07:50] Yeah. Dad went into the Army Air Corps in 1940 before the war started and wound up in the Philippines when the war started. Managed to get out of there and he went to Java, which was a little-known battle. He was on the last plane out as the Japanese took the island. They were literally blowing up the airstrip behind him. He flew a lot of combat missions down there out of Australia for the remainder of 1942. He came home for a year and was a flight engineer instructor on B-17s, which he flew his whole career. Then he volunteered for combat again in 1943 and was

sent to Europe. He flew his missions at a time when the life expectancy of a bomber crewman was about one and a half missions. He was shot down on his eighth mission and was a Prisoner of War from May 29th of [19]44 through April 29th of [19]45. The P.O.W. camp he was in was Stalag Luft IV. It was evacuated in January of [19]45 ahead of the Russian advance and he was on foot marching ahead of the Russians for three months during the worst winter they'd had there in a hundred years. He managed to make it through that, got home, and he was very sick when he was finally liberated. They quote, "fattened him up" for a couple of months before they'd let him go home. When he got home, he returned home on July 4th of [19]45. He weighed 99 pounds when he got home and promptly married my mother in Texas and two hours after the wedding keeled over from hepatitis and yellow jaundice that he had. Wound up in the hospital for a while. But like I said, he was a tough little guy, five [feet] six [inches] on a good day and he never missed a meal the rest of his life. (laughs)

Jeff [00:10:46] Wow.

Jim [00:10:47] But he was great work ethic and just tough guy. A lot of wisdom there.

Jeff [00:10:55] I'm sure. I just watched *Masters of the Air* [TV show] and they had in there about marching out of this one Stalag ahead of the Russians.

Jim [00:11:07] There's a scene in that that matches -- and dad did talk about it when I got older. I had cousins that were in the Marines in Vietnam and coming home wounded. He wound up talking to some guys in some early group things on PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] because he was wracked with that, horrible nightmares for years. But there was a scene in *Masters of the Air* that completely mirrored his. That's when they were going into the camp and those that were already prisoners were hanging on the wire and yelling at the newcomers. One of the ones that was there, he heard his name called, and it was a fellow named Jack Shearer who dad enlisted with in October of 1940, went all through high school with him, and Jack wound up working at the phone company as well for a career. But by the time the camp was evacuated, there were five different guys that my dad went to high school with all in the same camps. So amazingly small world.

Jeff [00:12:23] It is remarkable. So you've got sort of that background as part of your upbringing, and you've got this genetic connection to the labor movement, clearly, from your grandfather and father.

Jim [00:12:39] Absolutely.

Jeff [00:12:40] So you finish high school. What's your path from high school?

Jim [00:12:44] I went into the Air Force and was in the Air Force for a couple of years. They were downsizing because a lot of -- Thailand [in] particular had kind of booted out the U.S. forces and so there was a glut of people in the career field I was in. So they offered to those of us that had over two years to be able to get out early with full benefits. I got out in August, [19]77 and then went to work for the phone company in October of [19]77. That was my primary job. I was a lineman. I started out as a supply man and a year to the day after I started, I transferred on to a heavy construction line crew. We did primarily wrecking of all the old obsolete plant that was still in the air in the southern Cal[ifornia] area.

Jeff [00:13:57] Talk a little bit about wrecking. Part of what we're trying to do here is get sort of a picture of what life on the job was like as well. Those of us that grew up in the phone company, we know a lot of this terminology. But when somebody reads it, "wrecking," what exactly does that mean?

Jim [00:14:21] The line crews at that time were large, generally about eight people. We didn't have a lot of the tower trucks, things like that. We were climbing poles on hooks and taking down primarily lead cable. The hazards of lead, about five years into that project, they started taking heavy precautions with the lead dust that we were around. But prior to that there were just none. That's why a lot of people say that a lot of the old linemen and splicers were kind of crazy from the lead exposure (laughs) but it was heavy work. You were pretty dependent on your fellow workers for your safety and theirs because one false move, you could get hurt pretty badly. It was a good job, Probably one of the best outside jobs that I had. Good camaraderie, hard work. You really felt you'd accomplished something at the end of the day.

Debbie [00:15:35] Can I ask a couple -- no, keep going and then I have a couple questions.

Jim [00:15:39] Oh, sure. No. Go ahead.

Debbie [00:15:41] I don't want to interrupt you.

Jim [00:15:44] No, that's fine. I'd finished that train of thought.

Debbie [00:15:48] I wanted you to explain. Jeff probably knows, but I'd like you to explain what you mean by climbing poles and hooks. And why were they taking down lead cable? And what were they replacing it with? I assume this is Pacific Bell.

Jim [00:16:06] Yeah, this was Pacific Telephone at the time. Climbing on hooks meant you were using gaffs. There were no steps on many of the poles, and you had iron gaffs that were strapped to your legs. And we carried for that type of work about 60 pounds of tools as well on the belt. So, you became very proficient in climbing because you were on those gaffs about 6 or 7 hours a day.

Jeff [00:16:43] These are hooks, almost, or daggers that stick into the pole so you can climb.

Jim [00:16:48] They call them hooks because they're in a J shape to go through the instep of your foot and they have a big gaff on the inside of the iron and that sticks into the wood.

Jeff [00:17:00] And you've also got a belt then.

Jim [00:17:03] Right with all kinds of tools hanging off of it and ropes and things like that. A lot of the aerial and underground cable at that time in California had lead sheaths on it, lead insulators. It was becoming very rigid. It was subject to water intrusion very badly. So at the time I was doing this, they were wholesale replacing that cable with a plastic sheath cable that was more resistant in theory to water intrusion. Some of the lead cables were very large and very heavy. So the wrecking process was one that really took some knowledge of weights and those types of things to be able to get it on the ground safely.

Debbie [00:18:08] How much training did you have for this?

Jim [00:18:12] On the job.

Debbie [00:18:14] All of it?

Jim [00:18:16] All of it on the job.

Debbie [00:18:17] You didn't even go to a pole climbing school?

Jim [00:18:20] It was a one week crash pole climbing school because they were really expanding the line crews at that time for this work. So everything else was on the job. We had two older fellows on our crew that had been doing line work. One of them since the 1930s with a little vacation for World War II and then back at it. The other one had been doing it since the early [19]50s. They were good guys to learn from.

Jeff [00:19:02] This is pretty clearly recognized as the most dangerous job in the telephone industry.

Jim [00:19:10] Yeah, I think so.

Jeff [00:19:13] So to follow up. You started to talk about the plastic sheath cable. In California, was that still going aerial or were they putting most of it in the ground?

Jim [00:19:28] They were replacing at that time aerial with aerial and in new developments it was going underground. Then in the years subsequent, they did a lot where they could put it underground, but there is still a lot of old plant in the air that the Bell Company now is trying to abandon in place, literally, and walk away from landlines.

Debbie [00:20:02] And that was different back then. Now, as you said, the company abandons in place. But when you were talking [about] the late [19]70s, if there was a replacement of cable, you took down the old stuff?

Jim [00:20:20] Yeah. Because they were doing such large-scale renovation. We took down an awful lot of it. There was some that they kind of abandoned in place and what they would do was keep those jobs for anytime when regular new construction was kind of slowing down. Then they would have that work for us, we'd go back out and wreck.

Debbie [00:20:50] What garage did you work out of and how big was the territory that your wrecking crew would go and take stuff down?

Jim [00:21:00] I worked out of the Grand Street garage in Rosemead and then the Repetto Street garage in East L.A. and the Raymond Street garage in Pasadena. That covered greater East L.A. and the whole San Gabriel Valley was the area we were working.

Debbie [00:21:28] When you hired in, why did you get placed in the wrecking crew as opposed to some other position?

Jim [00:21:37] That was the work that was there predominantly. It was a huge project. There was a lot of hiring that took place in 1978. And, like I said, I had transferred in from being a supply man for the first year I worked there.

Debbie [00:21:59] And you're a former football player, so you're strong.

Jim [00:22:03] I was at the time. (laughs)

Jeff [00:22:09] So, you're on the line crew now. What's your first involvement then with the union?

Jim [00:22:17] Well, my dad and my grandpa taught me you carried a card, you got a card and you signed up and you participated. The second day I was on the job, I sought out the steward. That was at the Alcoa Street garage in Vernon California. The Local at that time was 11513. I signed up as a member then in the latter part of [19]78. There were just so many new people and [in] a couple of the garages there was no union presence. So that's when I got involved as a steward and got very active in the Local right away.

Jeff [00:23:10] And then what Local was this?

Jim [00:23:11] That was 11505 after I transferred in.

Jeff [00:23:19] So now you're a steward. Talk a little bit about what that experience was like. What were some of the grievances that you might have handled in that role?

Jim [00:23:32] For the most part, they were issues for folks that had gotten themselves in some trouble. It would run the gamut. A lot of them would just be somebody that on one end of the scale, there were guys that would always get singled out for negative attention. Then there were other guys that had just made a mistake and there were others that were, frankly, malcontents that were repeat offenders. It was always those kind of things. 99% of it was discipline. A little bit of it was pay errors and things like that. But in the department I worked it was mostly that. We had decent managers when I was working there because most of them had come right from the ranks at that time. It wasn't till later that the quality of management kind of took a dive.

Debbie [00:24:43] Were there any women?

Jim [00:24:47] After about two years we started having a large number of women show up in that line job. Prior to that, there had been a lot of women that were transferring from inside jobs to installation jobs. So it was changing literally at that time, where those opportunities became available. There was a period before I started where women weren't allowed to even put in for transfers for any of those outside jobs. They were just not considered.

Jeff [00:25:35] What was the racial makeup of your crew or your garage mates?

Jim [00:25:41] We were all Caucasian or Hispanic in that area. There was few African-Americans, a lot of them were splicers, but that started changing as well. Those opportunities were coming up more in abundance for good, high-paying outside job.

Jeff [00:26:17] Talk a little bit about your trajectory then with the union. You're a steward. How do you progress? Go ahead. Do you have something you want to--

Debbie [00:26:26] Before we go to the union, I wanted to ask about the work culture. When we talked to Chris Shelton, Dennis Trainer, they talked a lot about the work culture at [Local] 1101 in New York City. They talked about if there was something that was a problem, people would walk off the job. They talked about Friday afternoon there was always something that they walked off the job. Was there that kind of a work culture in your area? Oops. We lost him.

Jim [00:27:09] Am I back now?

Debbie [00:27:10] You're back. Now you're back. I want to hear about the work culture among your crew. How you cultivated solidarity.

Jim [00:27:29] In the line crew we were very solid. Like I said, we depended on each other for safety. If you didn't carry your weight, because it was a very manually heavy job, you just didn't get along with everybody else. So everybody pitched in and everybody was good and, like I said, it was a great job working outside as a lineman.

Debbie [00:28:01] But you didn't have Friday afternoons where we could find you at the bar rather than on the job?

Jim [00:28:10] Once in a while, once in a while. (laughs) And usually with our supervisor at that time. So yeah, we had little tricks and things we would learn about getting a work load out. We had a real good boss for one time. He'd give us a week's worth of work on a Monday and whenever you got it done, you could relax on the clock. So we became very good at getting things done by Thursday or early Friday morning. There was during the period, too, a lot of storm activity which led to tons of overtime because the plant was in such bad shape and rainstorms were pretty disastrous for service. So we worked an awful lot of overtime and it was a good living for folks.

Jeff [00:29:19] Talk a little bit about your path through the union.

Jim [00:29:24] In 1980, I got onto the executive board of my Local. In 1984, our Local president was retiring. He had been a long-term Local president. I ran for the president's job and lost the election by four votes which, politics being what they were at the time, the winner tried to cut me off from doing anything. Bill Demers, who was vice-president of District 11 at that time, put me on blue voucher work. Around [19]84, [19]85 was when we were first starting to see layoffs and potential layoffs. The process, because they'd never laid-off, was very complex. The project I was put on was kind of a liaison for the Locals and the personnel that were managing those things. From there in 1988, I can't remember the actual year, I think it might have been [19]87, Districts 11 and 9, which were northern California and southern California, merged. Harry Ibsen, became the vice-president for the District and in 1988, Harry appointed me to the staff. So, I started full-time on the staff in [19]88.

Jeff [00:31:13] Just to clarify, blue voucher is like a temporary hiring status that the national union had where they would hire people off the job to do particular tasks, whatever a task might be.

Jim [00:31:31] Right. We would supplement the staff that were there at the time.

Jeff [00:31:39] And your assignment during blue voucher work was to sort of work through these potential layoffs or working with the locals on them?

Jim [00:31:48] Yes.

Jeff [00:31:51] So, okay, now, 1988 you come on CWA staff full-time. So you've really kind of been there for four years de facto but 1988, you make it official and you're now full-time staff representative. What's your first assignment?

Jim [00:32:11] I got assigned to go back east and organize the water company workers in Prince George's County, Maryland. It was supposed to be a 90 day project. Larry Cohen was the organizing director at that time. And about 30 days into the project. Larry called me into his office and asked me what I thought of what was going on with that drive. I figured I'm going to be very honest. I told him, in my opinion, it was a loser. We were running into more animosity than anything else. I said I just didn't see it as a good use of resources. So again, it was supposed to be 90 days and kind of a probationary thing for being put on staff at that time. So after short of 30 days, he said, well you can go ahead and go home. I literally left thinking I had failed, (laughs) that I told him something that wasn't the popular thought. Well, I came back and Harry Ibsen called me in and he had a letter from Larry saying what a wonderful organizer I was, that I was a natural at it, that I didn't need to do 90 days training.

Jim [00:33:54] So from there I did mostly staff work, but also some organizing. We were organizing psychiatric technicians statewide in California and other state workers. I wound up on a large project trying to organize lifeguards that worked at the state beaches in California, which was fun because they were all young guys that were mostly medical students that did this stuff seasonably. That was a good project because I was close in age to most of them. I was pretty young when I was first on staff in comparison to a lot of the other folks. I think there was a period where I might have been the youngest one there for a while, so that was good. But I really wanted to get into bargaining. I had a taste of that in the Local when I was there, bargaining with a company called Phaostron that they tried to bust and we had a long prolonged strike there. I saw that there just wasn't many people that were doing bargaining. So I jumped at every opportunity that came up at that point and started doing more and more bargaining and got put on a lot of different projects.

Jim [00:35:28] I had a lot of good mentors at the time. Harry [Ibsen]. Bill Demers was a great mentor. Very old school, and Dina Beaumont, who had been a vice-president of District 11 and was a special assistant to VP. She took a liking to me and she was a great mentor through the years. At the time we were trying to jealously hang on to any type of national bargaining we could with the larger employers. So, if there were special committees or committees that would try and work on a national basis, she would pull me into a lot of those. I got exposed and started working with T.O. Moses on some of the independent [companies] outside of the Bell System, as well as that and really learned my chops at bargaining from the two of them, really. Tony Bixler was a great mentor and a great friend. I had met him on the picket line at that Phaostron strike years ago and we had become fast friends. Larry [Cohen] was a mentor in all things organizing. And, Morty [Bahr, CWA President 1985-2005] was too, and I got pulled into some unique things, like when we first merged with IUE [International Union of Electrical Workers, merger in 2001] Morty and the first president, was that Ed Fire president of the IUE at that time?

Jeff [00:37:25] He was the first president that we dealt with. Yes.

Jim [00:37:29] He and Morty were touring a lot of places with Larry throughout the country, and they had me take them around all of those places. So I got to see that firsthand. Then with the Newspaper Guild, I was very involved with helping that merger along and going out, which is basically an organizing project. So I got exposed to a lot of different kind of projects. Although my background was all telephone company, I wound up bargaining contracts in virtually every sector that CWA had, with the exception of the airlines. I never sat a table with the airlines, but I [did] public sector, private sector, telephone, independent companies, things like that. I, kind of took to bargaining. I guess I had a knack for it.

Jeff [00:38:38] Tell me a little bit about that first bargaining experience. What was that like for you? How did you learn from that experience?

Jim [00:38:47] I just learned that the key thing was you had to keep people together and keep them informed as best you could as to what's going on, especially during a strike, because it's really hard. Every Monday morning you got to make sure you're not losing people that are going back to work and getting discouraged. You had to not only be at the table, but you had to be with the folks and let them know that you knew their issues and that you were doing the best you could to fight for them.

Jeff [00:39:24] How long was that strike?

Jim [00:39:27] That was, as I remember, about three and a half months.

Jeff [00:39:33] Wow.

Jim [00:39:34] We got a contract, which was a compromise contract, and less than a year later they closed the plant. It was a company that made aircraft instruments. That was very frustrating.

Jeff [00:39:52] Yes, for sure, for sure. Talk more about bargaining and some of the tips that you might offer to others. You've talked about keeping the bargaining committee together. What about across the table? What were some of the tips for dealing with the other side?

Jim [00:40:13] When I started bargaining, the kind of culture amongst a great part of the management people that did that, there was some honor there. When they gave their word, you could trust it. A handshake deal meant a handshake deal. So we had that luxury for many years. That was primarily in some of the major industries, the phone industry, things like that. Because most of those that were doing the bargaining had been with the company and knew the company, knew the job. As the years went by, they started more and more, both external and internal companies, relying on lawyers and union busters and the trust level became very low. By the time I was finishing my career, it was just nonexistent. I was very frustrated. You couldn't trust folks to keep their word. Everything was trying to get one over on people rather than trying to solve an issue. So it became harder and harder over the years.

Jeff [00:41:42] In District 9, you've already listed the who's who of important people in the history of CWA from Demers to Beaumont to Ibsen to Bixler. Can you contrast a little bit their different leadership styles? What they were like as people? You didn't work necessarily for all of them, but what they were like as leaders and how they viewed the work that they were charged with.

Jim [00:42:18] Yeah. Bill Demers and Tony [Bixler] both were kind of the tough old school leaders. Never threatened, knew where their power was and used it absolutely masterfully. Dina Beaumont, who I learned most of my stuff from. I've always told people Dina was the smartest person I ever met, man or woman. She was just brilliant when it came to bargaining and the nature of people and things like that. She taught me how you had to get into, the degree you could, into the mindset of the people that were sitting across the table from you. Harry Ibsen was a more intellectual leader. He would try and approach things from that angle. So it was a great, great gamut of people to learn from. T.O. Moses was one who personal relationships with the people you bargained with were paramount when you could establish them and he was a master at that. It became very, very frustrating for him at the same time it was for me when things began to change and you just couldn't deal with people on that level. So, again, it was just great teachers, great experiences. Geez, I bargained well over 35 contracts during my career and I only had one that did not ratify on the first vote during that time.

Jeff [00:44:25] We'll talk about that one in a little while. We'll get there.

Jim [00:44:30] Yeah.

Jeff [00:44:30] Talk a little bit more about your time on the staff. You had different roles, obviously, staff rep[resentative] and then I guess an administrative assistant, then an assistant to the vice-president.

Jim [00:44:45] Yes.

Jeff [00:44:46] Talk more about some of the significant experiences or events during that particular time.

Jim [00:44:56] During that period of time when I was becoming more and more involved in administration. I hated running the office and personnel stuff. I just couldn't stand that. But it was part of the job and I did it. For many years there I was an admitted workaholic, just constantly, constantly working on something. We always had 2 or 3 contracts going somewhere. I had to keep track of all of the arbitrations and things that were going on in our District. I had to do a few arbitrations myself. So it was a pretty well-rounded experience by the time I became VP. I succeeded Tony, who retired in, oh, boy, when did he retire? 2009 I think is when he retired and I was VP from that point on until when I retired in early 2014. Being the vice-president was, quite interesting, different level of responsibility. The buck stopped with you on everything politically, practically. But it was a good experience. I got to work with a lot of the other Districts, too, which I don't think was common with a lot of staff experience. Mostly you worked within your own District, but I worked with folks from your District [District 4], worked with folks from the south in District 3 and District 6, and got along with all of them and was able to do things. I think I kind of became on some of the contracts a troubleshooter and would go in when things were bogged down and try and bring them to a close. That's why that ratification rate was pretty good, because to do that and mediate in those kind of circumstances. People on both sides tend to be not 100% happy with the outcome, but the outcome would speak for itself.

Jeff [00:47:38] I'm thinking back to particularly the Bixler years. That sort of intersected with a lot of my time on the executive board. There were some really interesting, creative things you guys were doing out there at the time. Can you talk about some of those?

Jim [00:47:54] Yeah. I know that PacBell at the time wanted very much to get along. It was after the merger [SBC merged with Pacific Bell in 1997] and there were other things. They had a lot of irons in the fire. So we were able to do a lot of things jointly. A large part of it was, frankly, the power and charisma that Tony had being able to deal with them. So, we had the luxury with PacBell for a while of being able to do things in a more elegant way than we could with other employers. Now General Telephone [GTE], who was the other big telco employer in our district, was exactly the opposite. For many years it was very competitive, very adversarial. It's funny, even though I came from PacBell, I wound up working a lot with General Tel to the point folks thought that I came from that company because of the dealings I had with them. I got some very good contracts. I was particularly proud of, I think it was the best contract they had. General Telephone had a history in California. They'd had a very bitter strike in 1963 and they kind of broke us at that time, went back to work. This was before my time, but they had hired many, many scabs, and they kept them all on and they grandfathered them. So they didn't have to belong to the union. That caused a bitterness for years. Well, I was able to chair a committee that we not only got recognition for them and forced them under the agency shop clause, but we also got a monumental change in their retiree medical. To get medical as a retiree in that company, for a time they had this tortured points system that you had to have of years and service and all this other stuff. A lot of people would hit retirement, be able to retire when they're around 60, but they still couldn't get medical. I was able to negotiate for the first time a service-based medical benefit for future retirees there. I was particularly proud of that and that was a very popular contract at that time.

Jeff [00:51:00] Talk a little bit about how the phone lines were drawn in California. What territory was General Tel, what territory was Pacific Tel. What were those boundaries like? How did that evolve?

Jim [00:51:20] As for the evolution of it, General Telephone was primarily in the northern part of southern California and in the rural areas. Over the years they acquired other small regional telcos in the state that were again in rural areas. Pacific Telephone had the rest of the state, particularly all of the urban areas and then some. Then we had Nevada Bell, which was really kind of a possession [subsidiary] of Pacific Bell. So those were kind of the rough boundaries. Of course, after [AT&T] divestiture [in 1984] and when General Telephone became Verizon, it became kind of the behemoth in its own right. Because they got into areas they'd never been because of their cellular service. [Bell Atlantic merged with General Telephone in 2000] So, rural versus urban, was quite a difference when I first started out.

Jeff [00:52:50] So all the major cities Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, Sacramento.

Jim [00:52:54] All of that.

Jeff [00:52:56] All of that would have been PacTel and then the rural parts of the state essentially would be General Tel. [Pacific Telesis was the Regional Bell Operating Company (RBOC); Pacific Telephone or PacTel and Nevada Bell were subsidiaries of Pacific Telesis.]

Jim [00:53:05] Correct.

Debbie [00:53:06] Can I jump in?

Jeff [00:53:10] Absolutely.

Debbie [00:53:11] You mentioned divestiture. What difference did it make?

Jim [00:53:17] Made a huge difference going, frankly, from being a regulated monopoly to a competitive company. The whole mindset changed over time. So did the type of management. Prior to that, bargaining, for example, to a large degree when it was a regulated monopoly, bargaining was almost, well, this is how much money we got, how are we going to divvy it up, to becoming very competitive, cost-cutting, headcount cutting, all of those things. After a few years, the divested companies bore no resemblance to the old traditional companies. Completely different management culture. You had these top managers and CEOs that were focused on acquisitions and growth and made a lot of boneheaded decisions that killed service to the point where now AT&T is becoming a joke in California for their poor service and just the way it's run. I don't run into anybody that's still working and that's happy. [SBC bought AT&T in 2005 and changed the merged company's name to AT&T.]

Debbie [00:54:54] You mentioned that in [19]84, [19]85, one of your assignments was to deal with layoffs. This is right in the post-divestiture period.

Jim [00:55:05] Right.

Debbie [00:55:05] And you said this was the first time. [19]89 there was a strike. Do you remember it?

Jim [00:55:14] Yes.

Debbie [00:55:15] You want to talk a little about that?

Jim [00:55:18] Yeah. The [19]89 strike, I was new on staff and I was going from local to local. I was assigned different locals, and I spent most of my time on the picket line with workers during that time and we were hugely solid. It was one of our last real national bargaining sessions. We won. We won, clearly, I believe, and people went back to work more unified than they had been when we started. So it was a good experience. I got to hand it to Morty. I think, Morty was brilliant as a strategist and actual nuts and bolts bargainer at that time.

Debbie [00:56:26] And the [19]89 strike in your unit was over health care?

Jim [00:56:33] You know, I, think so, but my memory's dim on the issue. I remember mostly being focused on the people and trying to keep them together on the lines.

Debbie [00:56:47] In 1997 SBC buys Pacific Bell.

Jim [00:56:53] Yeah.

Debbie [00:56:55] Do you want to talk about the District's involvement in that and what you might have gained or lost during that period, how you tried to intervene to make that work for our members?

Jim [00:57:10] Yeah. Again, Tony Bixler was the VP at that point, and I don't know how he did it. It's a testament, like I said, to his charisma and his sense of power, but he developed a decent relationship with [Ed] Whitaker who was head of the acquisition group. [Ed Whitaker was CEO of SBC at the time the company bought Pacific Telesis.] That was the beginning of a period of detente. So I think we gained some strength when they did that. One of the things I always regret was the loss of any real semblance of any national bargaining. I think national bargaining gave us strength, and there's a lot of different opinions on this. People have much different opinions in some areas than I do, but national bargaining was a key to a lot of our success and unity as a union. When we had to start bargaining by regions, that led to much more difficulty and people started, and to a degree rightfully so, focusing on their own regional issues to some degree rather than what bound the whole. So, again, it was at that time that it became tough and frustrating and continued to be. Much more political as well.

Debbie [00:58:54] Yeah. Back to the merger or the acquisition. My recollection is that one of the conditions for CWA support in front of the regulators, and you had a very tough regulatory commission in California, was the agreement by SBC for card check and neutrality over wireless. Do you remember anything about that?

Jim [00:59:23] Yeah, it was a specific agreement. Prior to that, in some small groups, we in Pacific Tel, if we were organizing and we got a majority of cards, we could get recognition. Others we couldn't, we would have to have an election. But that agreement led to us being able to pretty much pull in all of the loose ends that we hadn't been able to organize within that company over the years. So that was a big thing for us.

Debbie [01:00:06] At one point there was a big election at the University of California, the UPTE unit? [Union of Professional and Technical Employees]

Jim [01:00:14] Yes.

Debbie [01:00:15] Do you want to talk about that a little bit?

Jim [01:00:18] Yeah. I wasn't in involved. I had other duties at the time when that actually took place [in 1993], but subsequent to it taking place, they had bargaining going on and, boy, taxing my memory. I want to say they had four major bargaining units and it was bogged down in virtually all of them. I got put into one of the groups and was able to bring it to a contract that got ratified and that kind of set the stage for the others to fall into place. So it was a shot in the arm and it brought some new culture to CWA there. For the first time in a long time, we had a very, very large body that was non-telco and not related at all to telecommunications. So it was interesting for me being able to bargain in the public sector that way with the university.

Debbie [01:01:31] Back to you, Jeff.

Jeff [01:01:32] Okay. So, you're leading up now to your time as vice-president. That starts, I think you said, in 2009 with Tony's retirement.

Jim [01:01:46] Yeah.

Jeff [01:01:46] That sounds right to me as well. Talk about what kind of a change that was for you at that point in your career.

Jim [01:01:55] Well, I had a lot of support at that time and so it was an easy transition. Like I said, the bargaining experience I had, I was known in all of our different sectors, and I would like to think I was pretty respected at that time for bargaining and for other things. So, again, it was an easy transition. I was appointed and then subsequently elected to the position. But it was at that time that relationships with a lot of these major employers really started to sour because of their different things and no interest. Everything became a fight. Then, frankly, I was working way too many hours and not taking care of my health during a lot of that period, and it caught up with me in the end. But the job became very, very tough for me, and it was harder and harder to achieve goals. Like I said, it was during that period that I had the first contract I ever negotiated that didn't ratify on the first vote. A lot of that was political and some of it practical. We did wind up bringing in a contract that ratified. But it was kind of a brutal experience.

Jeff [01:03:35] Can you talk more about that, the political and the practical aspects of it that made that one so challenging? This was 2013, right?

Jim [01:03:47] Yeah.

Debbie [01:03:47] With what employer?

Jeff [01:03:49] With AT&T.

Jim [01:03:50] Yeah. It was the advent of them getting into cable TV and those kind of things. Frankly, they had the ability and the power to bargain a second-tier installer. Very, very controversial. We ultimately had to make a decision. It was a matter of lock them in to the union and get recognition for them and try to bargain improvements later or get into a huge fight that was questionable whether or not we could win and whether it was legal because we would have been fighting and striking over recognition. That controversy hung for years and that's still going on in the unit. They're still trying to bring those guys up to full parity. I had the unfortunate experience of being the one that had to make the tough decisions at that time. It was a time when it was becoming more and more having to make very, very tough decisions from a very long list of bad choices.

Jeff [01:05:16] It's interesting. So we've gone from a union that is representing predominantly, heavily regulated industry. And as you identified before, the question was in each bargaining, just how are we going to spend the money to one that now has changed radically and is completely broken out from that cushion that they had and you're still dealing with leadership, in the union, local leadership in particular, that has to make that migration and has a harder time doing that.

Jim [01:05:53] Right. Actually managing expectations could be near impossible sometimes because people had expectations that were rooted in a past that just didn't exist anymore.

Debbie [01:06:08] Jim, this is new to me. Jeff clearly knows all about this. Did you create a new job title? Who was the second tier and how different was it from the other installer position?

Jim [01:06:27] We had bargained a second-tier called Premises Tech that the company [AT&T] wanted to have a very broad scope of work that would encroach on some of the higher-paying jobs. So a big part of our goal was to limit the scope of that job, bring the pay up as much as we could, and what got sacrificed in the end was a lot of work rules that had been traditional and things like that. So again expectations were almost impossible to meet for the existing folks. They felt these people, and rightfully so to a degree, that they were a threat. And then the new ones coming in -- the older ones to a large degree, in my opinion, poisoned the well because they gave them expectations that were impossible to meet.

Debbie [01:07:31] So what you were faced with Prem Techs was the company said, we can contract out this work or you can keep the work, but you have to bargain a lower tier title. Is that correct?

Jim [01:07:45] Correct.

Debbie [01:07:47] And am I correct? The Prem Tech title came in around the same time as PacTel [correction AT&T] was getting into the expansion of the broadband?

Jim [01:08:02] Yeah, all of that came during, oh hell, what was his name? Randy, Randall.

Jim [01:08:09] Randall Stephenson's tenure. And developed this merger-happy acquisition mindset that turned out to be a disaster. They were trying to cut costs to do that and got themselves in such huge debt that I don't think they ever recovered from it. And again, he, in my opinion, was a terrible person to deal with. He surrounded himself with sycophants and just wouldn't listen to reason and then shielded himself from trying to get into any hard decision making. So again, not a happy time.

Debbie [01:08:57] Jeff, the Prem Tech position was it bargained into I think all of {AT&T} contracts?

Jeff [01:09:11] Except [the CWA bargaining unit at] BellSouth, I think, rejected it. There was a bigger, longer fight down there to organize those workers. We haven't got anybody key from District 3 yet to talk about what that was like, because that was a completely different experience down there. They basically said, no, we're not going to bargain for them. We're going to go ahead and organize them independently. It was a challenge. Anyway, that's a different conversation. That's a different interview.

Debbie [01:09:46] Jim, the choice in essence that you faced in 2013 was is this a strike issue or not? And could we win a strike over that. Is that it?

Jim [01:09:57] In my mind it was a strike issue, but it was one that in the final analysis, I didn't think we could win. There was a lot of others in the same frame. Some of the political aspect was there were local leaders that privately agreed that we couldn't win, but were out beating the war drums nonetheless and playing both ends against the middle.

Jeff [01:10:35] You might be hesitant to do this, but talk a little bit about that political side of this as well, because that is a big part of what these jobs are whether we like it or not. I mean the leadership jobs in CWA are elected positions and as you know, by nature there's politics involved in

that. And there are times when people will take advantage of difficult situations to try and leverage their politics into it.

Jeff [01:11:05] Yeah, it's human nature in a political job to try and leverage any power you've got or believe you have. It's where you believe you have power and you don't and you're trying to leverage things, that things tend to go to hell. When I started out in CWA, politics were a lot more heavily issue-based than they were personality-based and kind of a microcosm of what was going on in the greater political world in the United States at that time. Things started becoming more and more contentious, more and more political or personality-based. And that was tough. Over time, there was a lot of things when I started out that transcended politics in CWA. But that list of things that transcended politics became a very short list by the time I retired. And more and more, factions were starting to brew. So trying to keep solidarity and keep focused on the prize, really and these things, became more and more of a job in and of itself. And to me, I found it exhausting.

Jeff [01:12:46] It does detract from the job itself. We do this work because we want to make a difference and when you get bogged down in the politics of it, it really does detract and drain. For myself personally, it's a drain on your energy levels. It just really does have an impact.

Jim [01:13:11] Yeah. Actually, I wound up physically ill at one point from the stress and had a heart attack. That was a key part of my decision to retire when I did. My doctor told me my job was killing me at that point. It's just my nature. I was a workaholic. I would get into these things. The frustrations were starting [to] outweigh the rewards. It was time to hand it off for me.

Jeff [01:13:50] You don't have to answer this if you don't want to, but I know you've had some health issues even beyond your retirement years. Do you think there's any chance that some of that might have been related to the work you did with lead cable back in the day?

Jeff [01:14:06] There is that thought because I have stage four kidney cancer that's metastasized to my lungs, non-curable, but it's treatable. I've undergone chemo and I'm currently undergoing immunotherapy. They don't know what caused the kidney cancer, but there's a lot I have read that links it to lead exposure and exposure to trichloroethylene which is what we used to clean the lead when we were opening it up to splice it and things like that. I was around both of those in spades for a long time and before there was any respirator used, any means to cut down the lead dust. So it very well could but I don't dwell on it. I'm trying to live the best life I can for the time I got.

Jeff [01:15:17] Judging from what I see online, you're doing a good job of that.

Jim [01:15:20] Yeah, yeah.

Jeff [01:15:21] With the regular jaunts to Hawaii and chasing the Rolling Stones across the country and the world. Didn't you go overseas to watch them at one point?

Jeff [01:15:30] Yeah, I went to Liverpool and Amsterdam and fortunately, like I said, it has affected me and it does affect my health. I have a constant cough, things like that. But if it's killing me, it's killing me slow. (laughs) So I'm good. The hard part is that with it spreading into the lungs, it's inoperable. So immunotherapy seems to be working about the best now, so that's part of my routine.

Jeff [01:16:14] I didn't mean to sort of pick at that, but it just hearing you talk about the work you did with lead early on in your career just made me think about what you're going through now. It's the hand we're dealt and you play those cards. Talk a little bit more about some of your experiences as the vice-president. You had this grueling 2013 negotiation that became so political and you come out of that. How do you socialize the change that was built into that 2013 contract?

Jeff [01:16:57] (sighs) It took a lot of tough meetings direct with people. There was a lot of telling folks what they didn't want to hear. It led to a series of -- After that, negotiations would become more and more protracted every place we were. You were digging in for the long haul and it was costing just tons of money. So there was budget issues and those kind of things. Trying to keep together bargaining committees that were really savvy enough to understand the issues and the large-scale implications of that was tough, too. It was a tough job, but it was it rewarding, too, for me because I was doing this across, like I said, a lot of sectors. Negotiated contracts at newspapers, the university, with law enforcement. Boy, you name it. Everything except airlines. Even sat at the table with Disney, which everybody thinks, oh, Disney. They're horrible to bargain with, just horrible, they had no respect for their workers. But it was an amazing -- and in the end I found that people would try and shy away from what they didn't know about these other industries. In the end, worker problems are worker problems, no matter who the boss is and what type of work you're doing. So I think that knowledge helped me adapt to these challenges as they came up.

Jeff [01:19:10] So you've had this remarkable career. Tell me, what would you say was your biggest frustration during the course of your involvement with the phone company and more specifically with the union?

Jeff [01:19:24] Biggest frustration was not being able to trust a word out of people's mouth. And again, I came from an era, and the people that mentored me came from an era where a handshake meant something. It took me a long time to adapt to living and making my mind work in that kind of an arena. That was a huge frustration. I was a proponent of trying to merge locals and possibly even districts because I saw a lot of strength in that. Boy, that was an uphill battle. That was a political battle that I just was never able to surmount.

Jeff [01:20:23] And so the converse of that over your career. What are some of the things that you're most proud of accomplishing?

Jeff [01:20:31] Yeah, like I said, that GTE contract that I mentioned earlier. Right after the merger with the Printers and the Newspaper Guild, there was *San Diego Tribune*. This was in the late [19]80s. Largest paper in San Diego and they'd had a union buster in their bargaining. They had been, frankly, at impasse for several years. I got stuck in there. Morty actually assigned me to go in there with them and try and break the logjam. First thing I had to do was win over the actual bargaining unit and the leadership of that bargaining unit. Once I did that, we were actually able to get a contract and get it ratified on the first vote. So I was very proud of that. There was a lot of political pressure from inside the old Printers hierarchy against me doing that. I remember I got a call from the head of the Printers union at that time telling me I'd never work again if signed that deal. And Morty told me you just go do your job, I'll take care of that, and I did, and never heard another word about it, from him anyway. But, I was particularly proud of that because it was something that was completely foreign to me. I didn't know the culture. I didn't know the work when I went in. By the time I finished, I probably could have worked on the floor with them there. And, that was[a] proud [achievement]. Under adverse times, I think I achieved a lot of solidarity in

our District for a long time. For the longest anybody could, I think, under adverse circumstances. So I was always particularly proud of that.

Jeff [01:22:50] Let me dial back for a minute to San Diego. *The Times-Union*, is that the paper in San Diego?

Jim [01:22:57] *Union-Tribune*.

Jeff [01:22:58] *Union-Tribune*. So that contract was for the Printers union. Was the Newspaper Guild involved as well?

Jeff [01:23:07] They were in bargaining at the time, a separate union and frankly, breaking the logjam with the Mailers on the floor there helped break the logjam with their protracted bargaining and they got a contract too. Although I only went to the table with them once or twice, but it was kind of ultimately two contracts in one in brand new industries. I built a lot of new friendships and a lot of new relationships in both unions at that time. I still have friends from the Newspaper Guild that I'm in touch with and the Mailers has pretty much ceased to be. It's another one that's gone the way of the horseshoers.

Jeff [01:24:02] And that contract negotiation actually predates the merger of the Guild with CWA, right? Or were they already in?

Jeff [01:24:11] No. The Newspaper Guild was not in at that time. It was just a cooperative thing. They invited me to go with them after settling this other contract. I developed a good relationship with their business agent. Boy, I can't remember his name. The guy that was the president of the Guild at that time. Boy, how soon we forget. But I got along well with him and they didn't cotton so well to outsiders at that point. It was a very different culture and mindset. So I always viewed that as kind of a good achievement.

Jeff [01:25:00] That is remarkable because with an awful lot of our merger partners in particular, they tend to hold their bargaining very close and want to retain complete control over their bargaining process. And so, for example, you stepping in with the Printers and Mailers in San Diego is not the norm. That was definitely out of character for the relationship between the two unions.

Jeff [01:25:28] Yeah. And the Mailers union there at San Diego *Tribune*, their bargaining history predated the passage of the Wagner Act [National Labor Relations Act of 1935]. So we actually had recognition problems hanging over that because we'd never been certified through an election. That was a hard one to work around because they could have really pulled the plug any time they wanted to.

Jeff [01:25:58] Wow. Any other things you want to add to your list of accomplishments? Like I said, it's just a remarkable career that you've had out there. Anything about some of the people that you've mentored? You talked about who mentored you. People that you've mentored and what you've done with them?

Jeff [01:26:23] I think I made a lot of good appointments and good opportunities for some really good people. One who really comes to mind is Sarah Steffens. [She organized her East Bay, California newspaper into the Newspaper Guild, was appointed to District 9 staff, served as CWA

national union secretary-treasurer 2015-2023.] I mean, that was politically a very hard appointment to do in my District because she wasn't from telco and telco was the huge majority. What a stellar choice she was. What a pleasure to work with her. Very smart. There was a lot of local leaders that were perfectly content to stay at local levels that I worked with and we gained a lot of mutual respect there. So, all in all, I'm proud of my career. I'm proud of what I did accomplish and frankly, I wish I could have lasted a lot longer at it.

Jeff [01:27:26] I know the feeling.

Jim [01:27:31] Yeah.

Jeff [01:27:33] So we typically at this point -- Hannah has no background with the telephone industry or CWA, and she has to sit and listen to all of these. She gets a very different perspective on what she's just heard and usually comes up -- and now maybe I'm setting the bar too high for you -- but usually comes up with these great questions that didn't occur to us but that would occur to somebody that's looking at it with a lens that isn't colored or filtered by our background. So, Hannah, do you have some questions for Jim?

Hannah [01:28:11] Sure. I have a few things I could ask. First, you said Dina Beaumont was the smartest person you've ever met. I'm wondering if you have a particular story or memory that demonstrates just how whip smart she was.

Jeff [01:28:28] Oh, Dina would always -- if I had questions or was in a jam, she could always help me figure a way out of it, number one. Number two, the way she worked with me was she always answered a question with a question to me and made me think. I mean just her background as being one of the founders of the Federation of Women Telephone Workers going back to the 1940s. And her experience, it was huge. We became pretty good friends. My dad had physically worked with John Carroll and Louie Knecht when they were on the job in California at the time CWA was organizing. So we knew that but we found out, Dina and I got talking one day, and one of her first bosses when she was an operator was my great-aunt. We had never known that. I had a great-aunt that worked as a chief operator from the 1920s through the late [19]40s and she was one of Dina's first supervisors. So again, it becomes a small world. But again, she was just brilliant strategy-wise. She's one of those few people I met in life that really never steered me wrong. If something wasn't working, she was the first to say, let's try another tack, go that way. I would say she was chief among the mentors that I had. But I was able to work with so many other great leaders, Jeff among them. You're only as good as some of the background support you got too. And people like Debbie, Louise Novotny, George Kohl, [CWA Research Department researchers and directors] that I worked with, behind the scenes folks, unsung but really, just really key to a lot of our successes.

Hannah [01:30:52] I'm very curious about when you say you would ask Dina a question she would respond with a question. Do you remember a situation like that, what you asked?

Jeff [01:31:03] There were so many. I'm having trouble fixing on any one. But I also joked that any time I knew I was going to have a conversation with Dina, and they were usually on the phone because I was usually in California and she was in Washington DC, I would settle in for the long haul because it was going to be a long conversation. There were no simple, short conversations with Dina. We would cover every aspect and she would put you through her your paces when you had an issue. She would have been brilliant as a cross-examiner in a courtroom. Again, that tack, which not

a lot of people use. It makes you think for yourself. You can finally come to an answer that's in the back of your own brain. Those are generally the best to go with. I have nothing but positive to say about her. She could be a controversial figure too, but never with me.

Hannah [01:32:19] My other question was going to be about your work on the line crew. I think you said that you worked in rain storms?

Jim [01:32:28] No. If it would rain, we would generally do maintenance work on down lines. We would usually team up with maintenance splicers and repair the lines. But we had a lot of things that would happen. We would have mudslides here in California and we'd have to replace poles and things like that. If it was a light rain, we'd sit in the truck for a while for safety. But there were some things we would have to do out in the weather.

Hannah [01:33:08] What would you say was maybe the most dangerous thing you did as a line worker, besides exposure to the lead and the chemicals?

Jim [01:33:16] Well, one of the main cables we took down and it ran for miles, it was a huge lead toll cable. The old San Gabriel toll cable which ran from the suburbs up into the mountains, the San Gabriel Mountains. This was a huge lead cable about the size and the diameter of my forearm and tremendous weight. The possibilities of literally snapping a pole, while you were lowering it or losing control of it because of the weight were tremendous. So it was a tedious and painstaking operation to do it without screwing something up.

Hannah [01:34:09] How many people would be holding the pole at one time?

Jim [01:34:12] We would usually worked with a crew of six.

Hannah [01:34:17] I guess my last question would be if you have any particular stories or memories of Sara Steffens. I was curious to learn more about her.

Jim [01:34:28] Just her courage when she first got into the movement having been fired for trying to organize in her workplace and that type of thing. Being very young and having those kind of principles and courage and the kind of potential, I saw huge potential and boy did she need it. And such a nice, pleasant person too. Great seeing her kids grow up.

Debbie [01:35:00] She was fired from where?

Jim [01:35:03] Oh, I can't remember where it was.

Jeff [01:35:07] Wasn't it the [Sacramento] *Bee*?

Debbie [01:35:10] I think it was in an East Bay newspaper.

Jeff [01:35:13] Yeah. It might have been. I can't recall specifically where she worked. It might have been the [*San Francisco Chronicle*].

Debbie [01:35:20] It wasn't the *Chronicle*. I think it was the East Bay somewhere.

Jim [01:35:23] Yeah.

Debbie [01:35:24] We'll look it up.

Jeff [01:35:28] And just for reference, you mentioned John Carroll and Louis Knecht. John Carroll went on to be an executive vice-president of CWA and Louise Knecht went on to be the secretary-treasurer of CWA with connections with your father or was it your grandfather?

Jim [01:35:45] Yeah. Father. They both worked in the switch room in the Alhambra area, which is where my dad started out as an installer years ago. So their paths would cross occasionally.

Jim [01:36:03] Debbie, do you have any more questions before we put a bow on this one?

Debbie [01:36:07] I have a kind of nebulous question and if it doesn't work, then it'll fall like a lead balloon.

Jeff [01:36:15] Or like cable.

Debbie [01:36:17] Oh my God. CWA represents people across the country. When you became vice-president and you were interacting with vice-presidents from other districts and learning about their districts, would you say that there was a different culture out in District 9? And if so, how would you describe it? If not, then this question falls like a lead cable.

Jim [01:36:48] Now, for one thing, we're typical Californians. We didn't wear suits for the most part. And, there was a degree of irreverence and being laid-back that we had that was different from other places. A lot of cultural differences with the South, District 3 and District 6. But I worked well with both of the leaders from that. I think for the most part I worked very well with my counterparts in all of the districts and sectors.

Jeff [01:37:33] I can vouch for that. I can tell you in my brief time nationally and working with some of the [CWA leaders who represented AT&T [bargaining units] in particular, that every District respected, and as you said earlier, you were sort of the checkpoint for a lot of what went on with those negotiations. I think people respected your attention to the detail that wasn't always present in some of the tables. So, kudos for that.

Jim [01:38:04] Thank you. Well, I can't think of anything else.

Jeff [01:38:12] All right. Well, Jim, thank you for doing this. This was terrific. You know, it really is kind of fun getting to know people that we worked with over the years in a more in-depth way. So we really appreciate you taking the time to do this.