

Communications Workers of America Oral History Project

Interviewee: Gurganus, Jimmy [Jasper]

Interviewer: Jeff Rechenbach

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Jimmy Gurganus Interview – June 21, 2024

**Jeff** [00:00:00] Today we've got Jimmy Gurganus with us. Jimmy is in his home. Where's your home now? [Interview was conducted on June 21, 2024.]

**Jimmy** [00:00:08] Myrtle Beach [South Carolina].

**Jeff** [00:00:09] Is it actually Myrtle Beach?

**Jimmy** [00:00:11] I'm not on the beach. I don't want to be on the beach. Too much erosion and flooding there.

**Jeff** [00:00:21] And traffic.

**Jimmy** [00:00:24] We live in Cypress River Plantation, which is a community that's actually in the area of Socastee. It's off the Intercoastal waterway. Not on the beach.

**Jeff** [00:00:38] Okay, cool. We've got with us also today, Debbie Goldman in her home in Washington, DC, and Hannah Goldman at her home in Brooklyn, New York. I'm Jeff Reichenbach and I'm at home in Cleveland, Ohio. [The interview was conducted over zoom.] We're going to get started. Jimmy, let's start at the very beginning. Where were you born and when?

**Jimmy** [00:01:00] I was born on June 3rd, 1947 in Holly Ridge, North Carolina which is a little community in Onslow County in North Carolina.

**Jeff** [00:01:13] Where in North Carolina is that? Is it the western part of the state?

**Jimmy** [00:01:19] No, it's on the very eastern part of the state in Onslow County. A lot of folks know what Camp LeJeune is, a major military installation. And it is south of Camp LeJeune about 25 miles. It's a little suburb. My father actually worked on Camp LeJeune actually building the base, back during World War II when they actually built the installation. We actually lost our land to Camp LeJeune. The government came in and took it away from us. In fact, their first Camp LeJeune headquarters was in our house that we used to own, that Uncle Sam took from us. And we didn't get fairly compensated, Jeff, which we think has been a pet peeve of ours through all our generations since. But it is what it is.

**Jeff** [00:02:20] From all the TV commercials that I see, at least you got away from the bad water.

**Jimmy** [00:02:27] That's a long story about that water.

**Jeff** [00:02:30] Yes, I'm sure it is. But we're not here to talk about that today. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

**Jimmy** [00:02:41] I have three living. Well, two living now. There was originally six of us in the family, but three of them have since passed away. I don't know if because I have better genes than they had or just what, but the three of us surviving them.

**Jeff** [00:02:58] So how many boys and girls to begin with?

**Jimmy** [00:03:02] Well, there was four boys and two sisters. The sisters were older and my mother put them in charge of us four boys. That was a task on their selves. My mother would require the young ladies to look after us. And if we got into trouble, it was usually their fault. Then when mother gave out the whippings, I was a middle child so by the time she got to me, she was tired. So I didn't get as much of a whipping as the others got.

**Jeff** [00:03:38] Were you number three or number four in the order?

**Jimmy** [00:03:42] I was number one, two, three, four.

**Jeff** [00:03:48] Where'd you go to school?

**Jimmy** [00:03:50] I went to school in Jacksonville, North Carolina. I graduated high school there and from high school there I was hired by the local telephone company.

**Jeff** [00:04:00] Was this a public school?

**Jimmy** [00:04:03] Yes, public school.

**Jeff** [00:04:06] When did you hire with the phone company?

**Jimmy** [00:04:09] Right after high school, I actually started to work for a company called Carolina Telephone and Telegraph Company. It was a truly independent company at the time. But of course, it's gone through a lot of transitions since then, but it was that company. It was a fairly large company that covered most of eastern North Carolina. It was unorganized at the time. When it was organized, it was a big organization drive by CWA. I'll tell you this part of it. I went to work for them in 1966 and within six months I was drafted into the military and spent a tour in Vietnam. When I came back from being in the military, there was an organizing drive going on by CWA to organize that company. I joined that organizing drive. I didn't start it, but I did join it. I think there's a lot of history here, Jeff, that we need to talk about. People that probably nobody even remembers. But I remember them until I die I will. The people involved, you know some of them, Bill Holder.

**Jeff** [00:05:37] Oh, sure.

**Jimmy** [00:05:40] Delbert Gordon and Wayne Gray. They were the staff CWA had that was involved in organizing. Actually, the first meeting I ever had with any CWA people took place in a community called Goldsboro, North Carolina at an old theater that had been shut down and the CWA rented it to help start facilitating the organizing drive. And it was successful. Now this was the third attempt by CWA and IBEW to try to organize this company, but this one was successful. It only organized two departments which at that time was the plant department and the traffic department. That was the major employee base of the company. What had happened in the past, they had attempted to add other departments in there which at that time was the commercial department, which we liked to call them prima donnas at that time. They were not interested in having a union. So it ended up defeating the union in the past. So this drive only involved two departments which was successful.

**Jeff** [00:07:00] What year was that?

**Jimmy** [00:07:03] This is 1968. Our actual first contract that we signed was in 1969. I know to folks today that's ancient history, but it really isn't that ancient. Some of the things that we accomplished, CWA, I'm telling you, changed the lives of a lot of people. This was a company, even though if you look at eastern North Carolina, all of the communities are relatively the same size. They had different wage rates in each one of these towns, depending on what they could get people to go to work for at the going rate. That was a thing. One of the things that involved me was that, remember I lived in Jacksonville, but I could not be hired in Jacksonville for the telephone company. They wouldn't hire you in the town that you lived in. So I actually went to work in a town called Kinston, North Carolina. That was where I actually went to work. And the only way that you could transfer, since we're talking about I was in the plant department, I was an installer repairman. The only way you could transfer from one town to another was you had to go to the town that you wanted to transfer to and find out if somebody there wanted to transfer to the town that you were working in. Then you had to get the district plant managers that they looked at the two employees so that they made sure they got apples for apples. They didn't want to trade one good employee for a bad employee. So you had all this stuff you had to go through just to transfer.

**Jimmy** [00:09:03] So there was lots of reasons to organize this company. I got involved with the organizing drive because of things like that, because of the ability that I could not be hired into town that I lived in. I had to go somewhere else. So that kind of didn't seem right to me that for no reason other than the fact that you lived there, you couldn't work there. And the only way you could get somebody to allow you to transfer was to find somebody on your own to transfer or to trade places with you. That was the history that we had. Plus, nobody knew what anybody else made because that was not allowed to be talked about. When we first started bargaining our first contract, that's when we found out about the different wage rates in each town. So it took a while for us to actually negotiate these changes. I mean, CWA did a great deal for these workers and it takes time. Nothing happens instantly. But CWA changed the lives of people. It made them middle-class citizens. I became a steward after we organized the company in [19]69. I can't give you dates for all this stuff, but I can give you a general idea of how this progressed.

**Jeff** [00:10:49] Let me dial it back for just a minute. So you hired in 1966. You're 18 or 19 years old at that point.

**Jimmy** [00:10:59] I'm roughly 18, 19. I graduated high school at 17 and I was 18 years-old and I got hired.

**Jeff** [00:11:07] And what job were you hired into?

**Jimmy** [00:11:10] I was hired in as an installer repairman.

**Jeff** [00:11:13] Okay. And then how long did you work before you were drafted?

**Jimmy** [00:11:20] Less than six months.

**Jeff** [00:11:21] Okay, so now you're drafted into the army.

**Jimmy** [00:11:25] The U.S. Army. Yes.

**Jeff** [00:11:26] All right. And tell us a little bit about that experience.

**Jimmy** [00:11:31] Well, there's some funny things here, Jeff, that I tell people that they won't believe, but some of them probably do. When I was drafted I went to Fort Bragg for basic training. Now, the company, Carolina Telephone tried to use its influence to keep me in communications. So I went to Fort Bragg, had basic training, and out of basic training I then was sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey for what's called wireman's school. We used military equipment learning how to basically set up military communications. I then went from Fort Dix to Fort Gordon, Georgia for further training. And from Fort Gordon I went directly to Vietnam. I never served in a unit in the United States. They just ran me to Vietnam from there. And when I went to Vietnam, I flew, and you understand you're talking about a young kid that's 18 years-old, he's never been on an airplane before. They fly me to San Francisco. The funny story here is we had a company which is now US Air but it was Piedmont Airlines at the time. It had these old YS11 turboprop twin engine planes. In order to get from Jacksonville, I had to go from Jacksonville, to let's see, where did we go, we went to Augusta and then we flew into Atlanta. We then got on an Eastern Airlines plane from there and flew out to San Francisco. We were there just long enough for us to get put on another airplane and fly to Vietnam for 22 hours it took us to fly there. We landed. I'm trying to remember where we landed. We landed midway and I think it was in Midway or somewhere like that. From there we flew to Bien Hoa airbase in Vietnam.

**Jimmy** [00:14:15] My first vision of Vietnam is I'm looking out the window and I see all these fires. It seems like everything was on fire there. And we landed. One of the funny experiences was that we landed, when we got off the plane, there was another group of military personnel across on the other side of this airfield. They were cheering like hell. I'm trying to figure out why they're cheering. Well, I figured it out. They were going to get on the plane that we had come in on and get the hell out of there. But we were there just long enough to process us and send us out. I was sent to the First Infantry Division. Remember the story about the telephone company tried to arrange for me to be in communications. Well, when I got to Bien Hoa there was a master sergeant there that changed my orders and put me in the Second and 28 Infantry. I tried to explain to him how that wasn't supposed to happen, that I was supposed to be in communications. Well, within a matter of a month and a half I injured my right leg. Well, I thought that was the ticket home. Okay. I injured my right leg. Mortar landed in some concertina wire and the wire wrapped around my leg and cut my leg up. Oh, this is going to be good. Well, all they did then, because they were having trouble with it healing properly, they decided to put me where I originally belonged in communications. So they just transferred me within the First Infantry division over from the Second and 28 Infantry over to the 121st Signal Corps. I finished up my tour there. Then I thought, well, okay. Then it came out. As my tour in Vietnam was ending, they came out with a thing that anybody who had less than six months left to go would be released from the military once they returned to the United States. Well guess what? I had six months, two weeks and three days. So, I said, what the hell? (laughs) So I got sent to Fort Lewis, Washington. And remember I told you that that I thought this isn't so bad. But I never got put in a unit when I was in the United States. I simply got transferred from one training facility to another and then to Vietnam and then from there I went to Fort Lewis, Washington. I really thought about maybe staying in the military, until I got to Fort Lewis and then I figured out that this wasn't a thing for me. They really didn't have anything for us to do and we had very little time left in the military. I got to go down to the motor pool and they had these military cables and we got to roll them off of the reels they were on and wash them and roll them back up and stack

them in order. And then we got to take the military vehicles, which is what's called Deuce and a Half trucks and drain the oil out on one day and put oil back in on the next and we would do that. Then we did some work on the rifle range for ROTC folks that would come in and stuff like that. I decided this was crazy. And so it was no interest whatsoever on my part to stay in the military after that experience in Fort Lewis. But anyway, that was my military career. When I returned back to the telephone company CWA was organizing and I joined that drive.

**Jeff** [00:18:54] So when you return back, was your service all bridged at that point?

**Jimmy** [00:19:00] Yeah. That was required by law. Remember this wasn't something companies were doing on their own and being nice guys or something. The Universal Service Act required them to 1) give you your job back, and bridge all your service. So wasn't somebody doing the right thing. It was doing what they were legally required to do. And that's how that worked.

**Jeff** [00:19:26] And you came back to the exact same job and location that you left?

**Jimmy** [00:19:31] Yes. Well, we were organizing at the time. I was in Kinston. I worked with, I'm trying to remember the actual employees that I worked with. George Patrick was one of them. Slim Edwards and I can't remember the other guy's name right now, but we worked with them. We went through all the required captive audience meetings. They [the employer] would bring us in and they would bring an executive down. I remember the company president at that time would come to these meetings, and he would say your name. Well, come to find out, he had been prompted by the supervisory personnel, and he would know your name because that first line supervisor would tell him who you were. But he was very personable, came across as a good guy and explained to us how we didn't need a union. I brought up the fact that I couldn't transfer and his response to that, he said, well, that's something we ought to look into without any commitment to ever doing that kind of thing. But that was the story.

**Jimmy** [00:21:01] Now I continued to work as a steward. Then I became an executive board member of the local. I was a member of local 3681 which was headquartered in New Bern, North Carolina. Because the company was actually broken up for CWA-wise into three distinct locals which matched up with three distinct divisions of the company. Each one had a headquarters in the division [which were] located in Fayetteville, North Carolina, New Bern, North Carolina, and Rocky Mount, North Carolina, and the locals matched up that structure to deal with what was then divisional plant managers and traffic managers. That's how it was. Then I continued on with that and I was elected a local president in 1976.

**Jeff** [00:22:01] And how big is this local?

**Jimmy** [00:22:03] The local at the time had about 1400 members. But we didn't do full-time stuff. We did the stuff on part-time. One part of it was originally we didn't have any leave processes with the company that would allow us to take leave and work in the local full-time. If you did that there was no accruing of service or any of that kind of stuff took place within this company. So you were pretty much somewhat hamstrung because you had to run the local on a part-time basis. Now you had unlimited number of union leave days that you could use. And any time you were meeting with the company that was company-paid time so it didn't count against the number of days you had available. But that's how we ran the local was on a part-time basis. We had our board members in

each one of the geographic towns. Remember, I'm was telling you about the towns. I think we had board members in Greenville, Jacksonville, Kenston, Morehead City, Washington, Williamston. These are all towns of comparable size throughout eastern North Carolina. The other locals were set up in a similar basis through their divisions. But if it matched up with what's called district offices, we'd have a board member in that district office to correspond to whoever that district manager was either in traffic or plant. That's how we structured our locals. It matched up with the structure of the companies.

**Jeff** [00:23:54] So this is a pretty good-sized geography that you're covering.

**Jimmy** [00:23:58] Yes.

**Jeff** [00:23:58] And it's still just plant and traffic. Were their efforts trying to organize the commercial ones?

**Jimmy** [00:24:05] We did. It took us a while to do that, but we did organize the commercial offices. Of course, this was through transitions. I'm trying to remember the company. But we organized and it took us 20 years to organize those office locations but we managed to do it. The CEO of Sprint, because this company now went through a lot of mergers itself. Carolina Telephone was bought by a company called United Telephone Company out of Kansas City, Missouri, which subsequently started Sprint. And ultimately because of all the money it had spent on advertising Sprint, that it actually changed its name to Sprint. But, the [Sprint] CEO bragged over and over about there not being any organizing drive within their company. And I remember a conversation I had with them after we organized those offices. They pulled out all the stops now to prevent us from doing this. We would get a drive going and get it up and they would figure out who the ringleaders were, and they would either buy them off by a promotion or try to figure out some way to get rid of them. They ran a very aggressive anti-union campaign. I remember some conversations and they told us they were not anti-union. But he did everything that they could possibly think of, from hiring their lawyers to whatever they could come up with to try to keep the union out of anything other than what they had already lost. In fact, when we organized Carolina Telephone in those departments, they actually got rid of some of their General Managers because they blamed them for the fact that the union was successful in organizing.

**Jeff** [00:26:30] So what year is this approximately?

**Jimmy** [00:26:34] When they originally organized the company, I told you that that was in 1968. And I'm trying to remember some of the people --

**Jeff** [00:26:43] This was while you're still local president that this is going on?

**Jimmy** [00:26:46] Oh, well, no. The actual organizing of the business offices and didn't happen until 1992 or [199]3. So you're talking about a long drawn-out campaign. We would get it going. They'd figure some way to defeat us. It would die out for a while. Because once you get it going, you figured if you had support or not. And we would just live to fight another day. It took us 20 years to do this. Okay.

**Debbie** [00:27:25] I remember it was after Sprint bought them. And since I started in [19]92, I know it was significantly after that. It was during, as I recall, or after the campaign to try and organize Sprint long-distance.

**Jimmy** [00:27:47] Yeah.

**Debbie** [00:27:48] And you were being very humble, but you were the key to pursue that.

**Jimmy** [00:27:54] I was tenacious. I knew that we had sincere people who wanted to be organized. Jeff, we need to think about what these people were going through with dress codes and makeup and all these things and high-heeled shoes and everything. These business office personnel, they tried to make an aura about these people that they were somehow different than the people that were represented by the union. That we were some kind of vagabond or something and these other people were prestigious. That was one of the barriers they tried to create in preventing organizing from taking place in these locations.

**Debbie** [00:29:01] I interrupted. When you're done, I'll have a question.

**Jimmy** [00:29:08] It wasn't just a matter of -- there was differential treatment naturally for these folks. A lot of our operator service personnel, they saw that as a place for them to transfer from being a telephone operator into the business office. That was a more prestigious type job. That was one of the ways that, quite frankly, helped us organize these folks, that we had some folks that were used to union in operator services that moved into these business office jobs. And they liked some aspects of that new job. But they also missed the fact that they could say pretty much what they pleased and have some sense of security that if their manager or supervisor didn't like them, that they had some recourse. But in that business office environment, they did not. Some of the players, I don't remember the name, I remember this district, and the manager in these business offices, commercial part, they were the figurehead for the company in that particular town. And so that manager's job was more prestigious. I got in an argument with one of these guys. It was about one of our telephone operators who transferred into the business office. Me and him, we got a little loud and we were talking and he said Jimmy, damn it, you don't represent those people in my office. And I said, let me tell you something, you SOB. One of these days we will and I will come into your office and I'll get in your damn face and I'm going to tell you, you're not going to run this thing the way in hell you've been running it up to now. That day's going to come, just as sure as sunrise. It will come and we will be there. And I'll never give up.

**Jeff** [00:31:34] And was he still there when the day came?

**Jimmy** [00:31:36] No. It took too long Jeff. (laughs) But that was some of the confrontations we had. One of the things that bothered him, I think to some degree, because remember that the commercial manager was a spokesperson for the company in that particular town. So we started working politically. We started getting to know the mayors and the city councils and police chiefs and sheriffs and all that kind of stuff.

**Jeff** [00:32:19] Again, put a time frame on this. This is when you're still a local president, right?



**Jimmy** [00:32:22] Oh, yes. I'm local president. I got involved very much in this 21 years I was local president. You remember John Edwards running for the Senate? Well, I was the one that nominated him and got his endorsement from the AFL-CIO when he ran for the U.S. Senate.

**Jeff** [00:32:48] Wow.

**Jeff** [00:32:50] I had some good friends who were in the state legislature and stuff like that. Being in the union business -- We had a strike there in 1979. I remember that clearly and we had made friends. We knew[who] the chiefs of police was and we knew who the sheriff was. In fact, Ed Brown was the sheriff at this time in Jacksonville and his brother worked for the telephone company who was also one of our members. There was one incident I remember that day. We were on strike in 1979. I was local union president. A telephone cable got damaged. They brought in references from [the] sheriff's department, police department, FBI. I remember I knew the FBI [agent]. They brought them in to try to intimidate us and trying to blame us for the cable. Well, we did our own investigating. We found out that a dump truck had his bed up and snagged the cable with the truck when it was in the upright position and tore the cable down. I remember [the FBI agent] because he said to the company at the time, he said, look, I'm from West Virginia. He said, when the coal miners go on strike up there, he said, they created a lot more havoc than what you've had here. You guys are calling up about somebody getting hit with an egg, or somebody blocking a car going into the entrance to a company facility. Those guys knew that if they went out there, he said, they were complaining about our picket lines, and they were complaining about how many people we had on picket lines and all that kind of stuff and the things we would do to try to intimidate them. I remember, we used to get the vendors that were servicing all their machines that they had in there, selling the various candy bars and snacks and all this kind of stuff. I met with them and I said I don't want you service those machines. They said we gotta service the machine or they're gonna make us take them out. I said, okay, here's what you do. Every time you pull up to the picket line anybody that wants anything off your truck you give it to them. Whatever it is, whether it's pop, or potato chips, or whatever. You give it to them. I said but you stop and you're being respectful for all those people and you go in there and you do the bare minimum you have to do to keep your contract, and then you get the hell out of there. And they did that. But that was really funny. But I remember [the FBI agent.] He was a trip. Anyway, that was a strike in 1979.

**Jeff** [00:36:29] So how long did that strike last?

**Jimmy** [00:36:31] Two months.

**Jeff** [00:36:32] Wow. And what was the main issue?

**Jimmy** [00:36:37] Well it was the general thing. It was over wages, pensions. I remember we were trying to improve the pension benefits. This company even had a Social Security offset in their pension plan. If you don't know what that is I'll tell you. What it does is it reduces your pension because the company is paying Social Security taxes. That's what it did. And we were bargaining to get Social Security offset out of the pension plan. We were successful in doing that and we were trying to improve the formula somewhat. We were able to do the pension formula improvements and we were also able to get rid of the Social Security offset. That was a big deal to us because it reduced pensions dramatically because of their taxes they were paying.

**Jeff** [00:37:36] Is this still Carolina of Telephone and Telegraph or is it United by now?

**Jimmy** [00:37:42] Oh, at this time it was United. But they had a local company president there, but basically it was all controlled out of Kansas City. But they did have a local president; since [then] they've eliminated all that. There's so many funny stories I can tell you about it. After this strike, the company president was fired. Okay. And they brought in a new guy to be the president. I'm a little fuzzy. I can't remember his name right now, but he and I became good friends. He was a little short guy. And he was a lot of fun. When I first met him, he and I became, I mean, we became on good terms. We did. I wouldn't say we were friends but we became [on] good terms. His claim to fame. He worked for Southwestern Bell Telephone Company and he was a traffic manager. You remember that movie about The Greatest Little Whorehouse in Texas? He was the traffic manager that handled the telephone service to that location and that was his claim to fame.

**Jeff** [00:39:13] (laughs) That was his 15 minutes of fame right there.

**Jimmy** [00:39:16] Yeah, that was his claim to fame. But anyway, he was something but they ended up -- Because what they did, we actually arbitrated a case. During the strike, they hired people. Okay. And when we returned to work, they didn't want all the workers to return when the strike was over, which extended the strike. We ultimately agreed to arbitrate the issue, which the union won. They wanted to keep the strikebreakers that they had hired. And I remember, I said no way in hell can we leave any of our members on the street. Said we will not return to work until hell freezes over and we're able to skate on the ice before we allow you to keep our members on the street, while you keep those damn strikebreakers that you've hired in place. I remember talking to the HR [human resources] vice-president. I told him I said ain't happening. I said you can take it any damn way you want it, but that's the way it's going to be. I'm telling you, I cannot, in good faith as a local president return to work and leave my members on the street. So you either just figure out what the hell you are going to do, but it ain't going to happen. Not now, not ever. The guy I was talking to was a guy by the name of Pete Long. Pete was HR VP. He said, Jimmy, look, I got to sell a package to my superiors. I said, well you go back and tell them that this is a nonstarter, that this don't happen? It just don't happen. And so you figure out how much longer you want this strike to last. What he had said, this guy that was president, I'm trying to remember what his name was. I think it was Kittinger. But he said the guy had promised these people that he hired that they wouldn't lose their job when this strike was over. I said I wasn't there. I didn't make the promise and I'm telling you, you guys figure out what you're going to do. But ain't none of our members going to stay on the street when the strike is over. You just figured out what you're going to do, how you're going to fix that. I don't give a damn where you put them. But they ain't going to be any members left on the street. It ain't happening.

**Jeff** [00:41:59] So for a bit of context, you're negotiating with the company in the Carolinas?

**Jimmy** [00:42:09] Yes.

**Jeff** [00:42:10] The strings are being pulled by Kansas City.

**Jimmy** [00:42:13] That's correct.

**Jeff** [00:42:14] With United Telephone. At this time -- this is just for people who are reading this -- is there any kind of pattern bargaining for the other United units around the country?

**Jimmy** [00:42:26] Well, there was some patterns. A lot of the stuff was going on now. In 1979, if I remember correctly, I'm trying to remember who the name was, there was a vice-president in CWA or an independent telephone director. Rudy Mendoza, if I remember right. They were having some conversations with these people. But the point here is that this company never accepted the union. It was a "tolerate them but we don't want them to be a player in anything our company does." We will tolerate the union being there, but we don't really want to have a real relationship with them. That's the paradox that our CWA folks were doing. We're trying to figure out what strings to pull everywhere to try to make this company accept the fact that they [had a] union. But it was an ordeal because you're dealing with a company that -- The guy in charge of United Telephone at that time I remember now was a guy by the name of Bill Esrey. Esrey was the one that bragged about not organizing, so you know what kind of guy you're dealing with here. That's what he was.

**Debbie** [00:44:06] He was with United before Sprint because he certainly was CEO of Sprint.

**Jimmy** [00:44:12] Yeah. He was United Telephone. If you go back in n your history, Debbie, remember. I'm trying to think of the companies that were involved. You remember a guy named Bernie Ebbers? Okay, Ebbers and he was negotiating, Esrey was, about merging these companies. Ebbers remember he ended up in jail because one of the things that he was doing was cooking the books. And remember, CWA fought the merger of United Telephone company with, I'm trying to remember Bernie's company. It was MCI, but it had changed into something else. And I'm trying to remember what the name of the company was.

**Debbie** [00:45:03] WorldCom.

**Jimmy** [00:45:04] WorldCom. That's it. Remember WorldCom and Sprint, or United Telephone, they were trying to merge this stuff together. CWA opposed it and was successful. The federal government rejected [the merger] through the Justice Department. We actually sent people to Europe remember to try to fight this merger. [In 1998, WorldCom bought MCI to become MCI WorldCom. Then MCI WorldCom tried to buy Sprint, but the US Department of Justice rejected the merger. In 2002, Bernie Ebbers, CEO of MCI WorldCom, was found guilty of massive accounting fraud.].

**Debbie** [00:45:28] Who was one of the people we sent?

**Jimmy** [00:45:34] I know, one of my fellow local presidents at the time was a guy by the name of Rocky Barnes. And Rocky went to Europe and he spoke to the European Parliament, if I remember. And I'm trying to remember the gentleman from CWA headquarters that went with him.

**Debbie** [00:45:56] Rick Braswell, probably, or Eduardo Diaz.

**Jimmy** [00:46:00] Eduardo Diaz was the one. [CWA international affairs director at that time.] Remember he passed away, but he was the one that went with Rocky to Europe in this fight to prevent this merger, which they later found out that Ebbers was cooking the books. I remember, CWA was getting a lot of pressure from AT&T because they couldn't understand the profit margins

that Ebbers was reporting, and they couldn't figure out how in the world he was making this level of profit on their long-distance business when AT&T could not. They [AT&T] were wanting concessions from our membership to match the kind of rates that Ebbers was reporting. And remember he ended up going to jail over this stuff because he was falsifying the records. But we were in a real fight to prevent this merger from happening. You were involved in that to some degree. I remember you had some work on this thing, did you not?

**Debbie** [00:47:25] I did and I believe Jimmy that's when I first met you.

**Jimmy** [00:47:30] Is that when it was? When you're dealing with an old guy like me, we don't remember dates and stuff too good. But I remember this fight. CWA did so much in lots of things that our members kept their money, they kept their pensions and all this kind of stuff and their vacation time and things. But sometimes they lose track of all the other things CWA was doing to make life better for our folks. Things like this, whether it is fighting in the capital of Washington, D.C. or fighting in Raleigh, North Carolina, or wherever, we were trying to be a presence there. And I think that because we do those kind of things and that we make a real difference in the lives of our members. It's not just our members, we've made a difference in their lives, and it's the peripheral people that's associated.

**Jimmy** [00:48:36] I was having a conversation with my stepson in Ohio a couple of weeks ago. He works for AT&T in Ohio. I said, let me tell you something. You would not have the wages you're collecting and the benefits that you have if you didn't have a union that represented employees. Because if they could short-change our members, they would damn sure short-change you too. So you better count your lucky stars that company has a union. Sometimes you forget that and you get pissed off with folks. Coming in and filing grievances and all this kind of crap. But you're getting paid a lot more to listen to them than if you had not had a union there. They would stick it to you just like to do it (unintelligible). What they understand is money. I said one of the lessons I learned in dealing with the union, in dealing with everything else that I did as a local president. It's always about the money, and as a union, we have to figure out how we affect the money. If we can affect the money, the companies listen to us and if we can't they do not. They're not nice guys out there. They're about reporting to shareholders and stockbrokers and that kind of crap. That's what they're about. It's always about the money. And one of the things I tried to do was figure out how to affect the money. Whether it was at the state legislature, whether it was at the city council or wherever it was.

**Jimmy** [00:50:25] I remember one of the things we used to do was buy stock in all these companies that we represented. And we did that so we could put in shareholder resolutions and get before the shareholders at their private party where these chairmen of the boards and CEOs were, so we could talk about things that were of value to our members. I would go to some of these meetings to speak on some shareholder resolutions and I would be surrounded by some of these executives that were there wanting to know what the hell I was going to say because they didn't want their chairman or the president or whatever to be embarrassed by what I would say. I remember going to the Alltel shareholder meeting and talking about how the CEO used the pension funds' performance to inflate the company's shareholder performance reports, when in fact the damn shareholder price went down. I asked him the question. I said, how in the hell can you justify the kind of raise you just got when the value of the stock went down 5%? How do you justify that? And they say it's a performance bonus. It sounds like to me it should have been a performance cut. But that's what

CWA brings to our members and not just our representative members, but all the other folks that are out there. I'm talking too much.

**Jeff** [00:52:10] No, no, no, not at all. You're making my job easy is what you're doing. But let me again --

**Jimmy** [00:52:18] Get me back on track.

**Jeff** [00:52:19] No, no, you're on track. Let me dial back the track a little bit. So you're local president for 21 years?

**Jimmy** [00:52:27] Yes.

**Jeff** [00:52:27] At your local. Wow. So, any other experiences within that 21 years? You talked about the [19]79 strike. Anything else that sort of really stands out about that time as a local president? That's a long time, obviously, for us.

**Jimmy** [00:52:45] Lots of things Jeff. I remember being involved in AFL-CIO North Carolina politics. I remember being involved with some of the politicians. Some of the things we did and I think this is important. It's all about CWA's ability to negotiate change and improvement for folks. One of the things we did, and I'm sure you remember how the companies were changing their technologies from analog to digital technology. This was something when they switched from these analog switches where somebody oiled and adjusted and all this kind of stuff to these digital switches it required a lot less manpower. So we gave that a lot of thought. A thing we negotiated, which I was proud of, I was the daddy of this puppy, so I'm proud of it. We negotiated what we called anticipated surplus. We knew that when the company ordered new central offices to switch them out from analog to digital, it was going to cut the manpower requirement in that center by half. We knew also that when they [the company] ordered this equipment they had a time lag. No manufacturer was sitting there with this new switch sitting on a shelf somewhere and they were just going to cart it in and install it and be out of there in a couple weeks. So we negotiated a thing that when the company made a decision or they had already made the decision but made this change. When they actually had a switch that they were going to order, they would come to the union, notify us of the fact that they were going to change this location, this central office out from an analog switch over to a digital switch. So we would take those personnel in that office and put them in a special class, and we would then give them preference over getting placed in available jobs as the company prepared to switch over to the new switch so that when that switch conversion actually took place and they actually made a transfer, we wouldn't have all these people suddenly lose their jobs. So we did that. I remember having this operational vice president, me and him, I'm trying to remember his name, but I'm not good at remembering some of these names and stuff. But I remember he was a tall, lanky dude. He must have been seven foot tall almost. I asked him when he got hired if he was a damn basketball player in college or what.

**Jimmy** [00:55:51] But anyway, he and I got into a pretty heated discussion trying to get to where we were. And he said to me, he said, Jimmy, damn if we will hire two people to fill one job. We're not going to do that. We're not going to spend that damn money. I said wait a minute. Let's figure out then how to take these people and get them -- Because you're not a heartless S.O.B. I mean, you go home at night and you have to go to sleep too. And if you don't figure out how we can address

this. I mean, I got an idea here. We need to think through this so that when you go to church on Sunday morning, you don't have to sit there and ask for forgiveness for what you have just done to a bunch of your damn employees. So you need to think about that. And that's where we got to. He said, I'll tell you what. We're not going to hire two people. I'm not asking you. I told him I'm not asking you to hire two people for one job. What I'm asking you to do is take into consideration that you've got this group of people that are working in these central offices, and you know damn well you're not gonna need all of them when you cut this switch. Your folks tell me that you're going to need half as many as you got in there. So let's figure out what we can do with that. And that's how we ended up getting there. And then we ended up actually putting it into contract form. That's what we did. We would take these people --

**Jimmy** [00:57:29] Of course, we had some pushback from people in other jobs. So I said, wait a damn minute. Why don't you let me have that job and then take that person and put him in my job, I mean, all these arguments. I got a lot of heat over this. In fact, I got them -- remember that 21 years we're talking about? I had some people wanting to vote me out of office because I was negotiating something like that. But my argument was what would you expect us to do if it was you, if you were the one that was on the bubble? What would you want done? I said, I'm giving you the same consideration I'm giving these people. Because the shoe may be on the other foot one day and you may be in this spot. And you would want me to be working just as damn hard as I am right now to help you as I am trying to help these people too. But did I get pushback? Sure did. But it was the right thing to do, Jeff. It all worked out. We had some people that retired that were eligible because we would go and kind of canvass these folks, figure out who was going to want to retire. We negotiated some incentives for those that wanted to retire to get out of this mix, too, because the surplus applied to them as well as the other folks that were in the office as well. So we would give them incentives to retire. We would give these others that couldn't retire a way to find another job and not lose their job. So I was proud of what we did there. That was I thought CWA and our negotiating made a difference in those people's lives.

**Jeff** [00:59:22] So 21 years you're local president. At the end of that you joined the CWA staff. You want to tell us about that journey? What position did you have? Who asked you to come on the staff? What was your assignment?

**Debbie** [00:59:41] Can I ask a question before we move on to staff, although it may run into that period. You've been talking about the period, if I did my arithmetic right, from the mid [19]70s to almost the late [19]90s when you were a local president. I'm assuming when you started all the techs were men --

**Jimmy** [01:00:06] Oh.

**Debbie** [01:00:07] Let me finish the question. And the operators were women and probably in what you called the business office or the call centers, they were majority women. I'd like you to talk about whether there was a change in the gender composition of the jobs during those years. And also I'd be very interested to hear about issues about race. Were there black members when you started? Did that change over time?

**Jimmy** [01:00:36] I can fill that page up a lot. I remember this district manager. I'm going [to] first talk about race and then talk about gender too, because both of them were big issues that we fought

over. CWA was very involved in this. I remember a district manager named Henry Bridgers. He goes down to the Employment Security Commission. We were getting people applying for jobs through there. And he made this statement. This is like early [19]70s. He said, if you send me a black person, I'll make him a janitor. If you send me a white person, I'll make them an installer. Now, I got that from the Employment Commission because of some of our political contacts we had. So I grabbed that flag and ran with it. I ran all the way up to the damn company president at the time. It was Ed Kittinger, finally remember the damn name. But I said, is that your management philosophy? Is that what you think? He said no. I said, what are you going to do about? What are you going to do? It ain't enough to say it's wrong. What are you going to do? So he transferred Bridgers over to another location where he didn't have responsibility for people, but he didn't fire him, but I got rid of him.

**Jimmy** [01:02:22] As far as sex issues. Jeff, that was another great battle I'm proud of. You probably met my secretary-treasurer probably years ago. Her name was Pam Ringold.

**Jeff** [01:02:37] Oh sure.

**Jimmy** [01:02:39] She was my secretary-treasurer. She was an operator. And I had some others. This is talking about women moving into what was traditionally male-dominated jobs. I'm trying to remember this lady's name that I went to battle for. We were going to arbitrate this case. They had a job called a record lineman. Now what a record linemen did, they went out and made physical records of the amount of cables and poles and all this kind of stuff that the company actually put in the ground, so they could then build [them into] their rates. Because if they put a telephone cable in the ground, that in order to collect revenue off of it, it could be what they call a 200-pair cable, you know what I'm talking about. All they had to do was put one pair to work in that cable to collect revenue off the entire cable. Okay, so this record lineman job was really important. But the truth was that the clerical folks, and these were generally females, weren't allowed to become record linemen and they were doing the majority of the work. All this guy did was go out and check the physical location and check that it was properly installed, and then he brings that information back and the clerical folks, they were the ones that actually prepared the forms and all this kind of stuff that actually got it back to the company where they could get revenue off it. So this lady that we had wanted to be a record lineman. Okay. And she was doing 90% of the work already. All she didn't do was the field visits where they were out there. Okay. And I'm trying to remember this guy's name. He said she can't have the job because she's a female. I said, I'll see you in hell over that. So we took that case all the way up and we were getting ready to arbitrate it. Evidently somewhere it's one of these courthouse step deals where just before presenting this thing to the arbitrator, and you get a kind of tug on your shoulder saying, can we talk for a minute? And so we go outside and they say we don't want to get on the record. I said, you're already on the damn record. We don't want to get on the record of opposing a woman moving into this job. Right now that's not going to be politically correct. That isn't the word they used but that's what they said. What do you want? I said, I want you to put the woman in the job, and I want you to back-pay her from the time that she originally asked to bid. I hadn't even talked about job bidding because you didn't even have job bidding when [we] worked for these. Remember how I had to transfer? Job bidding was a negotiated benefit. We negotiated, CWA did, for people to be able to bid on jobs to find out what the qualifications are for a job, what training they needed. That was something CWA negotiated. But in this case we broke the back of this deal. My secretary-treasurer, Pam Ringold that you met, she was an operator. She became a central office technician because we negotiated, we said there's no damn way. Only thing

that should prevent somebody from getting a job is their God-given talents. Not whether they happen to be born female, whether they happen to be born black, whether they happen to be short, whether they happen to be tall. Your God-given talents is a reason that they should either get or not get a job. Not their sex, not their color. Remember my vice-president. She was secretary-treasurer. Ron Knight was my vice-president. He was a black guy. He was a switchman. Had we gone back 15 years, he would have been a janitor. That's what CWA meant to those people. So it isn't just the money. It's the human dignity that CWA brings to our people we are privileged to represent.

**Debbie** [01:07:50] These are fabulous stories and Jimmy, things that you are rightfully proud of. Did you have to deal with racism or sexism within the local?

**Jimmy** [01:08:02] We did. I remember there being an instant. This was a Christmas party. Now did we have to do that? Yes. When you start talking with people. People are people. One of the things I learned from CWA in the training that I had, I used to go to leadership conferences down at University of Georgia, and I had this great professor, and he put together this puzzle. This puzzle was made up of various pieces. You had a partner that was sitting across a little screen from you and you couldn't see him. This is where you learn some things. But this professor gave us this puzzle. And what we had to do was the person on the other side would give you directions on how to put this puzzle together. You were sitting on the other side and you couldn't ask any questions, you couldn't say anything. You just had to follow the instructions that you got from the person over there. And this was a great learning thing. The person would describe the puzzle and they would give you different shapes and different colors and you were supposed to take that information and put this puzzle together. But the trick was that the pieces that they described to you were a different color than the ones that you had. Had things the same shape, but they were different colors. So you learned a lesson. Color matters and you learned don't just describe something by color. Don't just do this stuff. Look at it all, the totality. I'm a firm believer in that.

**Jimmy** [01:10:16] And so did we deal with it? But most of the time, Jeff. That's the thing that disturbs me most about the current politics in this country. I am absolutely amazed at what's going on. The kind of stuff that comes out of [Donald] Trump's mouth and the things he does and the things he has said during his presidency and now that allows people that are bigots and racists. Do you think that's okay? I mean, that's what we're hearing. The alarm bells ought to be going all over this country, and they ought to be ashamed of themselves. So many people that say some of the things they do and take some of these positions. But yeah, we had to work with our members and say, look, folks, would you like to change your color? Would you like to change your sex? Would you think that you would get the same consideration if you happen to be a different sex or a different color? How would that feel to you? Could you accept that? And if you can't accept it for yourself, you shouldn't impose it on anybody else. You shouldn't consider somebody based on anything other than their God-given talents and their integrity. Who they are. That's what we ought to be talking about in this country. And that's something we ought to live by every day, Jeff. I'm sounding like I'm on a soapbox again, but that's how I feel. People are not good or bad based upon their sex or based upon their color. You judge people by their personal integrity in who they are and what they do. Not by any other means. But that lesson about that puzzle ties all that together for me. That went back a long, long time ago. But that professor did a great job. His name was Doctor Hale at the University of Georgia.



**Jeff** [01:12:50] I don't want to get us off track here, but that reminds me. District 3, they had their leadership conferences at the University of Georgia for a long time. Wasn't Professor Newt Gingrich one of the professors that we used in that school. [Newt Gingrich was a Republican member of Congress, 1979-1999 and Speaker of the House of Representatives, 1995-1999.]

**Jimmy** [01:13:06] Yes he was.

**Jeff** [01:13:07] Yeah. I thought so.

**Jimmy** [01:13:12] I'm trying to remember what exactly he taught in that school, but you talk about a guy changing his stripes.

**Jeff** [01:13:20] Yes.

**Jimmy** [01:13:23] He certainly didn't espouse what he espoused when he became a congressman.

**Jeff** [01:13:29] All right. I don't want us going down that rabbit hole, but I had to mention it.

**Jimmy** [01:13:34] Yeah, but he was there. But to Debbie's question, yes, we had to deal with the issue of race and we had to deal with the issue of sex in the local and sure, you take heat over this stuff, Jeff, but you got to be grounded in yourself. In you, in what you believe. Don't let other people tell you what you believe. You tell them what you believe, and you have to ground it on that very principle, I believe is so important to us, and it seems like we're losing our way in this country now over shit.

**Jeff** [01:14:09] Yes, and not to stereotype, but it had to be particularly challenging in a place like Eastern Carolina, to stand up for those kind of values at that time in our nation's history.

**Jimmy** [01:14:23] What you do is, when I was in the local, I'd try to recruit people in the local to be in a position because some of them doubted themselves. Ron Knight was one of them. Ron Knight. Great guy. He started out as a janitor but he became a switchman. Then he became an installer. He got to go wherever his talents took him. But he understood that. There's a great article and I know I'm going far afield, but *Mother Jones* has an article in its current edition about 40 acres and a mule. ["Forty Acres and a Lie," *Mother Jones*, July-August 2024.]

**Jeff** [01:15:06] Hmm.

**Jimmy** [01:15:07] And we talk about reparations in this country and where it's founded. It goes back, as I collected from this article, to General [Tecumseh] Sherman. In the article, Sherman issued an Order, and I want to say it's [General Field Order] Number 15 but I could be wrong about that, about taking the plantations and dividing them up and giving them to the people that were enslaved, 40 acres and a mule. It was actually land deeded to folks which if you go back when [Abraham] Lincoln was assassinated and [Andrew] Johnson became president, he went in and pardoned a bunch of these people in the South that owned these plantations and gave them back their land which they shouldn't have had to start with, because they enslaved all these folks. But I encourage you to read that article. It's a really good article, but it talks about Sherman and his General Order. That was the basis of reparations, as I understand it to restore the property that was properly given

to these folks and that was subsequently taken away by [President] Johnson and his henchmen in Congress. I know that's far afield from where we are, but --

**Jeff** [01:16:41] No, no, not at all. Not at all.

**Jimmy** [01:16:43] That's where we are. But I would say we fought multiple battles over sexism, getting people placed in jobs that they rightfully deserved but were denied because of their sex or because of their color. So I was proud when I left the local, we had a local president that was black. We had a secretary-treasurer that was black. But it wasn't because they were black that they got the job. They got the job because they had the skills and the talent to do it. And so I was proud of that. But I tried to recruit these folks to be in position so when positions came available, they were prepared for them. So that was some of the stuff that I did as a local president. In answer to this question, Debbie, I probably went farther than you wanted me to go with that, but anyway --

**Jeff** [01:17:41] Not at all. No. So what year did you go on staff?

**Jimmy** [01:17:49] [19]97.

**Jimmy** [01:17:50] Okay. Who's the district vice-president at that point?

**Jimmy** [01:17:54] Jimmy Smith. Robbie McNeely had been my staff representative. He moved to Atlanta [District 3 headquarters] as administrative assistant. Jimmy Smith came to me and asked me would I take a staff position? I said, yeah. I tried to negotiate the wages better than they were. But he said, wait a minute, what are you doing? I'm offering you a job, you want a raise. (laughter) But Jimmy Smith put me on staff and I had the assignment that McNeely had. I had pretty much the Independents [non-Bell system telephone companies} in North Carolina. I went from Manteo to Murphy which starts from the Outer Banks of North Carolina to the mountains of North Carolina. I covered that entire area. I represented the company I came from and Alltel, Cintel, I'm trying to remember some of the others that were there. United. Not United, but it was GTE at that time up in western North Carolina. That company has the same history that we had. They were a private company. They became, I think it was Midcontinent or Continental Telephone, and then from there GTE bought them and they ended up in Verizon. [In 2000, GTE and Bell Atlantic merged to form Verizon.] When I left they were Verizon at the time. So they had gone through a lot. See, Jeff, it's not just a matter -- If you're in a Bell Company, you stay a Bell company. You don't change. But these companies, hell, it seems they were changing, seems like every two or three years they were becoming something else and changed the structure of who you had to deal with in trying to represent those members. So it became more and more of a challenge. If you were in the Bell System, you had a set structure. I mean, I remember the battles that the Southern Bell Telephone Company folks had. Remember at the time you had pattern bargaining.

**Jimmy** [01:20:19] Now, I tried to employ that some when I got to Washington by striking certain company that was part of another company, because you could never get them to agree to a single contract. So you sit there with individual contracts out here. And it's all about power and money again. You try to figure out how to affect the money. So you got a group of 50 or 100 people here that are negotiating a contract. You got to figure out how to increase their bargaining power. You have to figure out how you can affect that corporation that owns that company to do the right thing, to bargain in good faith to actually give these people what they deserve. It's a difficult puzzle to try

to figure out. You try to figure out who influences whom, where they get their money from, what boards that CEO is on. Do you have any contacts there that you can talk to try to put a word in this guy's ear to saying, hey, you know, it's not in your interest. You have to look at where they're buying their materials from. Do you have anybody that you can contact from their suppliers that you can influence? Then you figure out where they get their money from. Who are they borrowing money from? Can you figure out some angle there? So, it's a balancing act that you do because if you just simply are bargaining, because that's what happened to us. Sometimes we don't have the right strategy, I don't think. But anyway, these companies go out here and they buy up, just like they bought up Carolina Telephone. And we're trying to figure out how to negotiate a contract there when somebody in Kansas City is pulling the strings. You know. So you just got to figure out how do you impress that chairman of the board and that CEO. I never forget, at one of the shareholders' meetings, I'm trying to remember the guy's name now. At one time, he was vice-chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But he lived in Shanghai, China. He left and they made him chairman of the board of, at that time it was Sprint. He shows up at a damn shareholders' meeting and he's got a lapel pin with a Communist China flag and an American flag like this. And it pissed me off. I said what in the hell are you doing? He said, well we know where the future's going. It's going to China. So we got to figure out, and again it's all about the money, we got to figure out how to do the things we need to do to get what we need to do to operate and make money. I said, well, if I was you, I'd take that pin and put it where it belongs and it ain't on your lapel.

**Jimmy** [01:23:39] But shit like that -- I mean, so many stories out there. You think over all these times and who you deal with and when we were talking about doing this, I said, okay. There are so many that you could tell and so many interactions you have. And Debbie prompted me when I was talking about the civil rights era and the way that women do it. And by the way, we did end up with some male operators too. We did end up with that, but that was a thing that was I guess trying to move people from where they are, to make them look in the heart of their hearts and think about what motivates them. Why did they do the things they do. And can they go to church on Sunday morning and feel right with themselves about what they did that week. If we can figure out those things and the first motivator is money. But at the same time everybody wants to be liked too. So you got to figure out how to make them -- I told one guy one time, he was doing something, and I said, I'm going to make you look like you mugged a little old lady in a back alley and stole her purse. I said, that's what I'm going to do to you. This bullshit you're telling me here ain't working. But anyway, I'll talk forever. Where do you want me to go from here?

**Jeff** [01:25:17] Okay, so you joined the staff in [19]97, but then it's just kind of a meteoric rise, right? You're national director within how many years?

**Jimmy** [01:25:28] Well, I'm trying to remember how this went. When I was on staff, T.O. Moses was vice-president then [of the CWA sector with responsibility for the independent, non-Bell system telephone companies.] He was a dear friend. Now you talk about a fella that had that knack. He could relate to anybody, whether it was a guy shining shoes or whether the guy that was president of the United States. He could relate to him in some way. I truly was privileged to know this guy and I considered him a friend. Anyway, he came to me and he said Jimmy, would you consider this? He had talked, I'm trying to remember the guy's name that he had talked to. At this time. [CWA President] Morty [Bahr] had decided he was going to move the office from Texas to Washington. I can't recall the guy's name right now, but he was an assistant to --.

**Jeff** [01:26:38] Bill Davis.

**Jimmy** [01:26:39] It was Bill Davis. He talked to Bill Davis about doing this job, and Bill didn't want to do it. T.O. come to me and said, will you do it? And I said, yeah. And then I had your help. I had other district vice-presidents help that just got right on my bandwagon. And I said holy shit, I don't know if it's me or T.O. Moses, but I believe it's Moses that got these folks to get on my side of the fence.

**Jeff** [01:27:15] Well, I barely knew you, but I knew Moses. So what Moses said was good enough for me and he turned out he was absolutely right.

**Jimmy** [01:27:24] Dina [Beaumont, Morty Bahr's executive assistant] was trying to get somebody out of California, if I remember right that was with GTE at the time. I'm trying to remember a local president out of Texas that signed on. It was because of Moses. He was GTE and he was very influential with the GTE folks. And he called me up. I didn't call him. He called me up and said, Moses said you're the guy and I said well, I'm going to try to be the guy. I don't know that I'm the guy yet, but I'm gonna try to be guy. Dina was trying to get this guy to run in California. These two -- the guy in California and the guy in Texas -- had a conversation and he said, maybe I don't need to run. And he didn't, which made it a lot easier for me. But I did that.

**Jimmy** [01:28:31] The time I spent in Washington, I tried to work on those things that I could. At first, I wanted to give our independent companies, the locals and units in there, more recognition. I wanted them to really feel that they wasn't just also-ran or anything like that because we were into a time when the industry was changing dramatically. I remember having a conversation with Larry Cohen [CWA national organizing director, executive vice-president, then CWA president, 2005-2015] about what I thought was going to happen. And a lot of it has happened and it still hasn't all happened, Jeff, but a lot of it has. I said this industry is going to evolve. It's going to evolve dramatically, and it's going to be evolving faster than we anticipate because technology is moving it. And, I remember some of the conversations I had with these CEOs in each company. I said, if you stay a telephone company, you're dead. You're dead. I said, what you have to do is see yourself as an information transfer company. A content company, not a telephone company. If you refer to yourself as a telephone company, you're dead. That's what's going to happen. And I said now what you can do, I said, we got some damn good people at CWA that can see the future, perhaps, better than some of your folks do. And you ought to figure out how to partner with us in evolving this industry. And if you continue to -- I said, you know what? Think about it. If you call somebody a son-of-a-bitch often enough, they'll be one. Okay. So we got to figure out how to stop calling each other a son-of-a -bitch, even though we may be one. And figure out how we evolve this industry and protect our members and protect your shareholders and make sure that everybody comes out good. It ain't going to be easy but that's what we ought to be thinking about. How we evolved this industry that we all are privileged to be in. And I said, you're a damn employee just like me. You answer to somebody. And so if you're going to be here, you ought to not answer to the stock analysts and the shareholders' need to make sure that they have a future because if they don't, you don't. So anyway, that was what I tried to do in Washington, was figure out how I can affect the money, how I can influence these companies, and figure out any lever that I could pull, whether it was beneficial, trying to figure out what we could do because that's the challenge.

**Jeff** [01:31:57] So tell us about some of the levers you pulled.

**Jimmy** [01:32:00] Well. I remember working on all of the shareholder resolutions that we did. We would make sure that we had resolutions at every company. I tried to influence Sprint by going to where they were getting their money. I remember going to the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] and meeting with some folks there trying to influence their ability to change their business model. Those were things that I felt like whatever I could do, whether it be as an irritant or whether I could have a major impact on them, I tried to affect where they got their money. I tried to affect their shareholders by going to their shareholder meetings and speaking to the shareholders, getting the press coverage, because these shareholder meetings are supposed to be their show. It's their show. Nobody's supposed to mess with their show and try to change the script, because they're going to get up there and tell you how wonderful everything is and how they did so much for the shareholders. Because what they're playing to there is all the reporters and all the analysts that are sitting in the audience. Because they have minimum number of shareholders there, unless they're big shareholders. The little guys that are in there 401k's don't ever see that stuff. So we tried. We did the shareholders, we did the bankers, we did FCC. I'm trying to remember who was the damn guy I talked to. But it was an interlocking director. This guy had the guy from Alltel on his board. I said, you ought to look into your board membership. Because the CEOs always pick their board members. They go out and they got their committee that supposedly selects their board members. That's why we fought so hard, remember about separating the CEO job from the chairman of the board. Because if you were the CEO and you were chairman of the board. It was yours, it was your company. You got sway. The president is the employee. And that used to piss them off when I called them an employee. They didn't like that. They were the CEO. But those are the kind of things, Jeff, that I tried to do. I'm just trying to think of some specific examples of the finance. I remember Bank of America, I fought with a guy from the Bank of America about some loans that they were preparing. They're out to loan the money. You guys need to figure out is it a good financial risk? That's what you ought to be looking at when you're loaning these CEOs or these companies money. Where is their risk? Because my first wife worked for Bank of America and so that got me a leg in with them. But that's the kind of things I tried to do.

**Jeff** [01:35:44] So any other stories you particularly want to share? Something we might have skipped over or missed? I can remember any time I would stop by your office, the first job that I had to do was to find a comfortable chair (laughs) because I was going to get some stories.

**Jimmy** [01:36:15] I've spent so much time as a local president, less time as a staff, and, less as vice-president. I remember a lot of stories --

**Jeff** [01:36:28] At a time of incredible change within our union, too. I mean, the union looks radically different.

**Jimmy** [01:36:33] Well you are talking about Committee of the Future stuff [1981-1983]. When I was in the local we were working on that. That's where these vice-presidents of Telecommunications come from. Remember you had a national telephone director. And so we were trying to figure out where the future would be for the union and how to interface with -- and that's what Committee of the Future was about. How do we prepare our union for that future?

**Jimmy** [01:37:04] We were insistent that we ended up with the telecommunications vice-president. I mean, we were doing the political part. If the guy from ATTIS and ATTCOM [AT&T Information

Services and AT&T Communications, the two AT&T/CWA bargaining units] became vice-presidents of CWA, then an independent director [of the independent, non-Bell companies] ought to be a vice-resident, too. Because you had an independent telephone director at the time that had a voice but no vote on the executive board. Remember, that was where we stood. And so if we were going to chart a future because we're talking about the breakup of the Bell System. We were talking about what that would look like. And I don't think we really had a good grasp of what that was going to mean in the long-run. Let me go back to the battles with MCI and how it was a specialized common carrier, and how FCC allowed them to get this niche market [in the 1970s] which ended up turning everything all to hell. I think [it was] the Judge [Harold H.] Greene decision that broke up the Bell System. Of course I think they broke it up the way Bell System wanted it broken up. [AT&T agreed to Bell system divestiture in 1982 which took effect Jan. 1, 1984. Judge Greene presided over the court case that led to the 1982 consent decree that broke up the Bell system.] I remember all those discussions. I remember the battles that we had within CWA about our dues structure and the fights we had about setting it up. I remember I took heat in the local because of our support for the two-hours dues structure. Folks at the time were paying a \$6 dues, so it changed things quite a bit for them. Of course if you didn't make as much, you wouldn't pay as much. You're going to pay the same thing as other the guy who just gets paid less than you.

**Debbie** [01:39:00] When we interviewed Velvet Hawthorne She sung your praises of how you --

**Jimmy** [01:39:07] You interviewed her?

**Debbie** [01:39:07] Yes we did. And one of the phrases, I just looked it up from the transcript, she said, you taught her that "You leave the dance with the one that brung you."

**Jeff** [01:39:19] That's right. Always. You never forget. You never forget that who brings you is your members. Okay. They bring you to the dance. I became a local president because of my members. I became a vice-president because of our members. So you never take your eye off the ball and why in the hell you're here. And if you ever do, and shame on you because that's why you exist. That's what you're supposed to be doing. And every waking hour you have when you're doing your job you ought to be thinking about how you can make life better for somebody else. It's not about you. It's about trying to improve their life.

**Debbie** [01:40:10] I'm sorry to interrupt. Can you talk about how you helped [her]. She was in the airlines. [US Airways customer service employees joined CWA in the late 1997; American Airlines customer service employees joined CWA in 2014.]

**Jeff** [01:40:17] Oh, yeah. I used to help her. I would go over. I did steward training. I helped her with steward training and stuff. Velvet is a wonderful person. I would go over when she would have her meetings there in Winston-Salem with her. I was on staff at the time and I would go over with her and help her do steward training. I remember some of the stuff because they were fairly new to the union. And I said one of the most important things you do when you're interacting with a management person is be on their level. I said one of the tricks you can do is, invariably you will go in a meeting with this management person, and you'll go in their office and they got their big name tag, they got the picture the wife and kids, they got what-not stuff all over the desk. And you're going to walk in there and you feel at a disadvantage because you're moving into their space. So the trick is you've gotta make it your space too. So what you do is you get you a chair and you pull up

to the desk. The desk, if you're going to meet them at a desk. I said this is something I learned over time. You take your documents, folders, or whatever the hell you got, and you lay it on their desk, and if there's stuff of theirs in your way for you laying in your stuff down, you move it. You pick it up and you move it around the desk until you make you a space. And I said, sometimes, you'll be somewhat surprised, they're so unprepared for that. Sometimes they will help you move the stuff. I said, but you put yourself on equal with them. That's just a psychological thing. But you have got to get past that point that you feel intimidated because you cannot make the argument you need to make if you feel that somehow you're inferior to the person you're dealing with. So you go in there and you make your space. I said, sometimes you'll find that after a while they'll put a table in their office because they don't want you moving their stuff. So they'll meet with you over here on a table which puts you in a position where you're dealing with these folks on an equal level. But that's what you must do if you're going to effectively represent your members.

**Jimmy** [01:43:05] You have to go to that office wherever the hell I did. I said, I remember the first time I met on a top-level grievance at Carolina Telephone. I went in there and there was three management people in there and there was me. My first reaction was holy shit. What you going to do now, big boy? And I said, wait a minute, wait a minute. You're here to make the argument for this member, okay, so you got to figure out as best you can how to make that argument. And doesn't matter how many people sitting on the other side of the fence. The argument that you believe you need to make is your argument, not theirs. So you don't give a damn if there's three of them or 300 of them. You make what you believe is the facts, what's the issue at hand? Don't chase rabbits. Stick to your guns. Represent your member. I said that. So that was the kind of thing I tried to convey when I was meeting with Velvet and these new stewards and trying to convey to them how to present themselves. And I said, you don't get respect. You demand respect.

**Debbie** [01:44:35] Jimmy. I'm looking also at our time. I think we have a hard stop very soon. Let me turn this back to Jeff.

**Jimmy** [01:44:46] All right. Did that answer your question?

**Debbie** [01:44:49] Yes you did.

**Jimmy** [01:44:50] Okay.

**Jeff** [01:44:52] We always give Hannah an opportunity to ask a question at the end, as an un-interested or uninvolved observer, not un-interested, [rather] an uninvolved observer. She always comes up, seemingly, with these great questions that take us in a different direction. So Hannah do you have any today?

**Hannah** [01:45:11] Sure. I don't think it's a different direction, but, earlier, Jimmy, you said that it's about the money. The people also want to be liked. And there was one point where you told someone, "I'm going to make you look like you're taking candy from a baby" or something, so I'm --

**Jimmy** [01:45:29] Are you talking about the little old lady that got mugged and they stole her purse or what?

**Hannah** [01:45:34] No. You said there was a time you told someone you were going to make them look really bad to get you wanted. So I'm wondering, what's the full context, what's the story behind that?

**Jimmy** [01:45:44] Well, we were up there and presenting a grievance and this guy made this ludicrous argument. I'm trying to remember the text of the argument that he was making. And he was taking that self-righteous position, that the company had done nothing wrong and he didn't know what the hell I was doing there. I said, wait a damn minute. This is the case that was involved. It was a telephone operator and this telephone operator was sick and in the hospital. Okay. And the manager went to the hospital where this lady was in bed and she fired her. Then the argument was that she was a probationary employee so they didn't have any recourse but to fire her because she hadn't fulfilled her probationary period. And I said that's bullshit. You have the discretion of this. She's not at work, so don't count the time she's not at work towards her probationary period because she's in the damn hospital sick. And so you think you're doing the right thing because she's got this probationary period, and since she's out seven days. you should fire her. I said, I'm going to make you look like, I said, this is bullshit, I'm going to make it look like you mugged a little old lady in a back alley and you stole her damn purse. I said that's what you look like. I said where is your humanity? This lady isn't laying out of work. She's in the damn hospital. How do you justify going to someone that is in a hospital being treated for an illness and you fire her. You don't even wait till she comes back to work to fire her. You fire her because you're damn afraid that while she's in the hospital she's going to complete her probationary period and then you have to deal with her as a regular employee. So tell me how you justify that. And I know I get passionate sometimes when I tell you these things, but that's the truth. Human beings should not be treated that way. Through no fault of her own she's in the damn hospital. She's being treated for illness. And the guy said, well, she's been out seven days, so we're going to fire her because anybody that's in a probationary period out of work more seven days, you terminate them. And so you feel justified in doing that? I said, how do you sleep at night when you do something like that to somebody? How do you sleep at night? I said, you ought to think about what the hell you're doing here.

**Jeff** [01:49:03] Just to put a bow on it. I'm hoping you got her job back.

**Jimmy** [01:49:09] Yeah. But the way I did it, Jeff, I said, look, don't count the damn time she's out sick towards a probationary period. So when she returns to work she'll complete, I realize that's more than the six-month period here, but you just tack that on those additional days, you still have all the leverage that you have before because she's a probationary period she hadn't completed because she wasn't at work. But you only count the day she's working, right. So get her back to work. Let her do whatever she's going to do and when that six months is up, if she doesn't measure up, then you can fire. But don't fire nobody in a damn hospital.

**Hannah** [01:50:02] That answered my question. I was just curious what led to that remark. So thank you.

**Jimmy** [01:50:07] I didn't answer your question?

**Hannah** [01:50:08] No, you did. Thank you.



**Jimmy** [01:50:11] Okay, well, you refreshed my memory is what you did of how that came about. But that's what it's about. You know. It is people. People matter.

**Jeff** [01:50:25] I think that's a great spot to wrap up on.