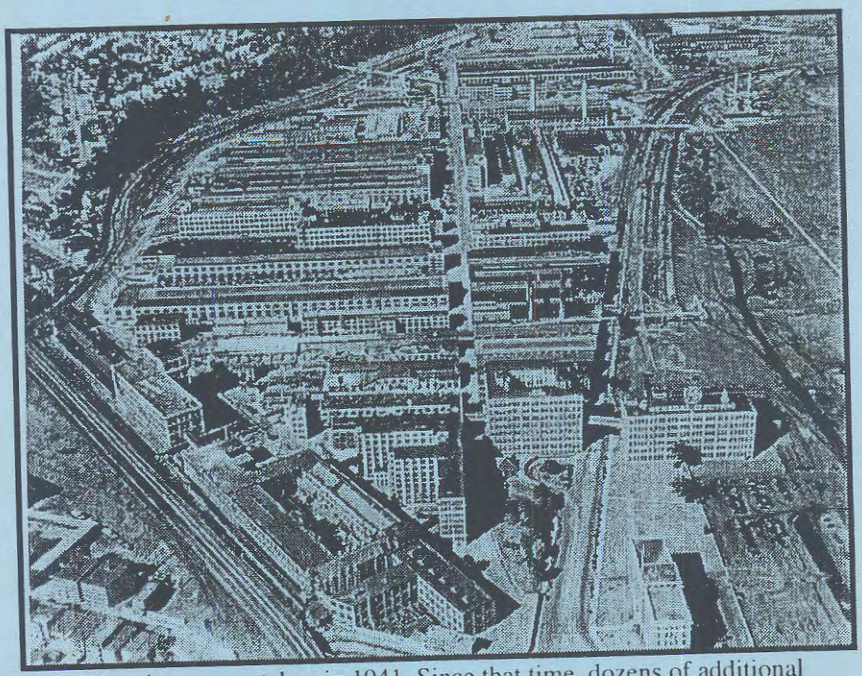
Helen Quirini and General Electric : A Personal Memoir of World War II



This picture was taken in 1941. Since that time, dozens of additional factories and buildings were built at the plant, but in the 1980s and 1990s, over 65 buildings were torn down. More will undoubtedly come down as GE "downsizes" the Schenectady works.

by

Helen Quirini

PREFACE

After a year of research in 1986, Henry Antonelli and I produced a booklet to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our union, Local 301 IUE-AFL-CIO. This local union represents the blue collar workers in the General Electric Company (GE) in Schenectady, N.Y. The booklet was entitled "The Story of Local 301-IUE-AFL-CIO--Reflections." During a year-long effort, we were joined by another dedicated union member, James Carey. We met once a week as we culled through records, searched out pictures, and read old newspapers. We recorded interviews with present and past members, retirees, and officers of our union. We produced that booklet because we love our union and wanted to record the strikes, walkouts, and other events that we had experienced as union members, stewards, board members, and officers of our great union.

We proudly dedicated this story to our members who gave and are still unstintingly giving of their time, money, and dedication to Local 301. Because of Local 301's existence, the standard of living in our city, county, and surrounding areas has increased and has improved the standard of living for all people. But we also leave a legacy as a leader on a state and national scene. Millions of workers have benefitted because of our union's leadership.

The history of Local 301 has been one of struggle to advance the wages and benefits of G.E. Schenectady workers in the face of stern opposition from one of the most powerful corporations in the world. We described the gains our union has made these past 50 years and its pioneering efforts in helping unite other G.E. workers in strong union organizations. We also covered the later development of coordinated bargaining among all AFL-CIO unions who deal with the General Electric giant.

We hoped also that the sacrifices made by so many of our union brothers and sisters in bringing us to where we are today will inspire our present day members to participate in, and help

carry through, the many programs of our local, inside the shop, in the community, state and nation.

We gave this booklet to all the school, county, and city libraries, to all the members of the county and city legislators, to our state legislators, and -- at a modest cost -- to all others. It has been available at our local book stores. We have sold copies to people from all over the United States.

This booklet triggered a lot of other events. Henry and I were asked to address a history class of Professor Gerald Zahavi at the University of Albany. In 1986 we were part of a TV documentary entitled "Company Town". Parts of the documentary are now shown at our Schenectady Urban Cultural Park Center. We are highlighted in one section of the exhibit about labor. Local newspapers have also written about the booklet. We have also been asked to speak at various events.

In 1989, Geoffrey Huth contacted me about the statewide Capital District Labor History Project. This project was named for Harry Van Ardsdale Jr., who died in 1986. Mr. Van Arsdale Jr. led the powerful New York Central Labor Council, which included 500 AFL-CIO unions representing 900,000 workers. The Labor History Project's goal was to chronicle decades of local and regional labor history. More than 450 unions have been active in Albany, Schenectady, and Troy. Union newspapers, posters, and leaflets have reflected social conflicts, strikes, and confrontations with local governments and stubborn employers -- battles to improve working conditions and wages. The project aimed to preserve union records before they were thrown away or destroyed. Other goals were to microfilm fragile documents and teaching records of management, free of charge, to union officials. I was able to share my newspapers, tape recordings, and other records for this project.

In 1990, I received a call from Lisa Kannenberg, a student at Rutgers University. She was working on her master's degree and had read records of the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers National Conventions. I had made speeches at

these conventions about our struggle to get the company to end sexual discrimination. She visited me and I gave her copies of papers that had a bearing on this struggle. Since that time she has written several papers: "Bloom Where You Are Planted," "Paradoxical Impact of the Cold War." The story developed into another article, "The Impact of the Cold War on Women's Trade Union Activism: The UE Experience," which was published in the Spring-Summer 1993, Volume 34 edition of Labor History, a quarterly publication of the Tamiment Institute/Wagner Archive of New York University.

In 1990, Professor Zahavi called and told me about an exciting project for which he had received funding. "The Schenectady General Electric in the Twentieth Century Project" is an oral history and document collection project initiated by the Oral History Program of the Department of History at the State University of New York at Albany (SUNYA). Professor Zahavi, a business and labor historian who specializes in regional studies, initiated this independent project with the cooperation of local corporate and trade union leaders. The project is devoted to making accessible to scholars and the general public the history of one of the nation's premier electrical industry pioneers. Since 1990, the project has flourished and, in spite of meager funding, is still functioning.

The Schenectady GE Project has been guided by two working goals. The first is to collect oral histories focusing on the evolution of life and labor at the Schenectady General Electric plant by interviewing male and female production workers, engineers, scientists, managers and office employees. The hope is to assemble an oral chronicle encompassing the experiences of several generations of GE managers and employees. Professor Zahavi anticipates that he and fellow interviewers will conduct more than 250 interviews.

A second and equally important goal of the Project is to locate and preserve document sources on the history of the Schenectady G.E. plant. Pamphlets, leaflets, newspapers,

photographs, movies, videotapes, corporate and union records, diaries, letters and personal papers pertaining to local GE history are being collected, inventoried, microfilmed. Eventually they will be deposited at the University Library, Department of Special Collections, at SUNYA, where they will be open to the public.

When Professor Zahavi first contacted me, I was elated to think that someone cared about a GE factory worker. During my years at General Electric, I hoped that some day others would be interested in the struggle to end discrimination against women in GE. I kept copies of union and other newspapers, pamphlets, diaries, movies, still pictures, and other documents. Also during the background research for "Reflections" I had collected and sorted many other records. When Professor Zahavi asked if there were any files that I would be willing to donate to the project, I was happy to give him 13 boxes of some of my records. Since that time, I have found many more files and given them to the project. They are now part of the "Helen Quirini Papers."

I have also received calls from students at other colleges asking to interview me. In 1991, during celebrations of the 50th anniversary of World War II, I was asked to speak at the New York State Museum celebration of "Rosie the Riveter," which was part of an exhibit and an extensive series of programs exploring World War II on the home front.

With Edna Miller, another GE worker, I was also asked to speak at the third annual Humanities and Arts Festival at Russell Sage College. In October 1992, I was part of a panel with Professor Zahavi and Elizabeth Griffin at the Oral History Association 1992 Annual Meeting in Cleveland, Ohio. In 1993, I was a speaker at the Schenectady Urban Cultural Park as a part of their 50th Year Commemoration Exhibit of Industrial and Civic Achievements in World War II.

The Albany Institute of History and Art asked me to be a participant in a discussion on February 6, 1994. This was just

one program of an all day festival to celebrate the birthday of the Institute. The two hour program was entitled, "Remember When? Share your memories of World War II overseas and at home." People who had been in the armed forces and those who had participated on the home front reminisced about their lives then. It was fun and enjoyable and I was elated that people cared about preserving the memories of this war which was called "The war to end all wars." The sacrifices that people made during this period should never be forgotten.

In July 1994, I was interviewed by Mr. Steven Dunn from WMHT for a documentary about World War II. Mr. Dunn was very interested in the feelings and attitudes of the workers and how the war affected their lives. The hour-long program he produced, which was aired in December 1994, included interviews with servicemen and women and others who participated in World War II. One portion of the program focused on my writing in the General Electric Company newspaper, chairing committees to sell war bonds, collecting blood, and my involvement in the Block Plan.

Because of the interest and activity regarding blue-collar union endeavors, my nephew, Dr. Robert Dunn, suggested that I write about my life as a factory worker in the General Electric Company. Because there is so much to tell, I decided to write only about the World War II years and the 1946 strike in this first effort.

If there is enough interest, I will consider another book about my experiences as a woman factory worker, a union officer, and a community volunteer from 1946 to 1980, when I retired after 39 years of service. I have tried in this book to be as factual as possible. I have researched union newspapers and other sources, including my extensive records to make this a historical account of these years in my life. In a few cases, I have decided not to use people's real names.

I worked with some fantastic, beautiful people during my time at G.E. Blue collar workers should be written about

because of their great contributions to our war effort as well as throughout history not only for our country but the world. This is my tribute to the people who work with their hands. I was proud to be one of them. I proudly dedicate this book to the women who are profiled in the last chapters.

CHAPTER 1: JOINING UP

I wondered if there was some kind of omen in the fact that I was sitting in the waiting room of the personnel office at the General Electric Co. in Schenectady, N.Y. on April Fools day in 1941. I was apprehensive and scared as I waited my turn to be interviewed. I was twenty-one years old.

I had vowed that I would never apply for a job at G.E. for several reasons. I had heard that with thousands of people out of work during the depression, "job selling" became a vicious racket practiced by men in high places. If you had the money and made the right contact, you could purchase a job for about $300 which was a lot of money in those days. People had told me about this and said this was common knowledge and the "big shots" of the company knew about it. But shortly after 1936, the union had cooperated with the district attorney and the police department to expose this "job selling" racket. As a result, the G.E. Schenectady employment office manager was discovered to be the man behind the job selling. He was found guilty, sentenced to prison, and later discharged by the company. But I wondered "why did the company allow it to exist in the first place?"

During the past several years, I had attended discussions sponsored by the federal government at our high schools. I met men who were unemployed and asked them why they were not applying to G.E. since they were hiring. I was told that they were too old. In answer to my surprised question, they told me that they were over 21 and the company was only hiring males under 21 because they called them boys and they paid boys and women lower rates than they paid men.

Paying women lower wages also made me angry but since this was common practice and not against the law, there was not much I could do about it except decry such discrimination.

I also reminisced about how I did not want to go to work in G.E because I really wanted to go to college. But since my family could not afford to send either my brothers or my sister to college, I was forced to take the commercial course in high school so that I could support myself. I had also taken a key punch course in night school and worked for the state on a temporary basis during income tax time.

My sister had worked in one of the five and dime stores before she took the key punch course and finally landed a job in G.E. My older brother was working in the cafeteria in G.E. and my other brother was just hired to work in the factory.

When I graduated from high school with a commercial course I could not find a job. The only ones available were working for a family which meant live in and only have Sundays and one other day off. My brother had worked in a grocery store in the vegetable department and had than moved up to renting a concession in a meat market. I worked part time for him and then the store owner who ran the meat and grocery sections needed a "delivery man" who also worked in the store. I applied for the job and with some apprehension, he hired me. Some of his customers did not like the idea because I wore slacks and besides this was not the traditional "womens" job. The job was tiring because it seemed that all the customers lived on the second or third floors of the houses. After a while, they accepted me and even asked me to have a cup of coffee which I refused because I had other deliveries to make.

My brother and I then decided to become entrepreneurs and opened the "Brother and Sister Cash Market". We sold bakery, vegetables, and groceries. My brother's job was to get up at the crack of dawn and go to the farmer's market to buy vegetables and my job was to pick up delicious bakery from Scotia and bring it to the store for sale.

I remembered with a smile about our first day of operation. The bakery was hesitant to sell to us because we were so young. So to prove to them that we were reliable we decided

to get orders for over 25 pies. We ended up with four times that amount. The bakery had to hire extra people to bake these pies and we worked overtime to deliver them. We didn't make any money on this deal, but we did prove that we were "reliable". We worked 7 days a week about 10 hours a day. I made $12 a week and gave home $10 for room and board. It was hard work, but we liked the idea that we were our own bosses. We were forced to close our store because of the difficulty of getting supplies because of shortages and the war clouds over Europe.

Photo 1: Where I worked -- with my brother -- before I entered General Electric.

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I was brought back to reality when I heard my name called and I went into the office of Mrs. Mary Holmes, personnel director. I handed her my application for a job in the factory.

Upon looking at my resume and seeing that I had worked as a key puncher for the state; that my diploma from high school was for the commercial course, which included shorthand and bookkeeping, Mrs. Holmes asked "why do you want a job in the factory with all of your background which would qualify you for a job in the office?" I told her that I had heard that people in the factory made more money on piece work than office workers. I was planning on going to college and the sooner I could raise the money, the sooner I would be able to realize this dream.

She tried to persuade me to reconsider. She said that there is a better class of people working in the office. Her statement did not surprise me because this reflected the "feelings in the community".

There was widespread discrimination. Words like "kikes," "wops," "chinks," "spics," "niggers," "polacks," and so on were common. Added to this was discrimination based on where you worked; the type of job you worked on; what education you had, and where you lived.

But the one discrimination that transcended all the above was the discrimination based on sex. Regardless of all other considerations, if you were a woman, you were to be discriminated against based on this fact alone. In many industries including G.E., married woman would not be hired and if she was employed and married she was asked to leave.

Polish people were changing their names by deleting the ending "ski" because of discrimination. Rumor was that if you were a Mason, you had a better chance of getting a job in G.E. I asked a Jewish classmate if she was going to apply for a job in G.E. and she said, "very few Jewish people are hired in G.E."

And, of course, a Negro was only considered for a job, if at all, to work as an elevator operator, sweeper, porter or on a lower paying, less desirable job.

We were brainwashed to believe that all Indians were bad people. That's the way they were portrayed in the "western movies". The best baby sitters on Saturdays were the local movie houses. For a nickel, a child could be entertained for several hours. Western movies were the most popular ones shown.

Also the history of Schenectady included the "burning of the stockade by the Indians". It wasn't until I became older that I understood the true story about how the Indians were used by the French and the English.

During my school days, I was exposed to many ethnic groups except Jews, Asians and Negroes. When I was in grade school, junior high and high school, my best friend was Italian. I went to school with her, played with her, and often ate at her home. Her family was very close and I couldn't understand how anyone could discriminate against Italians. Of course, being Polish, I resented the demeaning jokes that were told about us.

In high school, I was very active in sports and met girls of all nationalities and races as we played together on baseball, soccer, basketball teams, and other sports. Nationality, or race did not matter when a teammate scored a basket or a home run. But there still was a tendency to associate with your own kind after the games.

While in Mont Pleasant High School, I became friendly with a great gym teacher, Miss Julia Van Voast. She took me under her wing and taught me a lot. She taught me how to drive and I was happy to run errands for her. Mont Pleasant High School had great boys basketball and track teams. One of the track stars was an Indian, Ray Trail, and another was a Negro, Ernie Marshall. I thought the Indians and Negroes can't be all bad if they were represented by two such great guys as Ray and Ernie.

Ernie had to work after school to help support his family. Miss Van Voast asked me to drive him home after his workout. She even had me buy steaks for him so that he would be in top

condition to run track. I was surprised and shocked when another teacher told me that I should never drive with a Negro sitting in the front seat with me. If I had to transport him, he should sit in the back. Miss Van Voast said "don't pay any attention to her. She comes from the south and this is how she was brought up." I was happy when I was given permission to drive Ernie home. This incident added to my hatred of discrimination.

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I answered Mrs. Holmes by saying that as far as I was concerned people were people. That just because circumstances forced them to live in a certain life style it didn't make them any less important than others. Realizing that my mind was made up, Mrs. Holmes signed my papers and instructed me to go first to the G.E. clinic for a physical and than report to building 89.

As I walked out of the door to the inside of the grounds of G.E., I thought that my father and my sister were not going to be happy because I was going to be a factory worker. I remembered how my father had refused me permission to work as a waitress during my summer vacations. I know he was going to ask me "Why can't you be like your sister and aspire to work in a job that you could be proud of?"

I glanced down the street and saw all the buildings on both sides and looked down a long avenue as far as the eye could see. I thought "wow, this avenue looks like the main street of a small city" As I walked past the buildings, I noticed the numbers on the buildings. To my right was an office building no. 5. This building was connected with an overhead enclosed walkway to another building.

I read the numbers of the buildings. On my right was buildings 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19. On my left were buildings no. 10, 12, 14, 16, 18. I noticed how the ground trembled as I walked in front of buildings 17 and 19. I later found out that these were the punch press buildings which contained big

machines which the people called monsters. These machines were used to cut various shapes out of sheets of metal which were fed under big cutting jaws. The sheets of metal came in big sheets about 2 feet wide and only fractions of an inch thick. These sheets were covered with a thin film of oil so that they would move easily. Every time the top of the cutters came down it made a nerve-wracking noise which the operators had to endure during the 8 hours of work. To add to the unpleasantness of the job, with the noise and the oily surfaces, there was the isolation because the operators could not talk to anyone while they worked.

I had ridden on the street on the outside of the G.E. plant next to this building and felt the earth shake. But the noise inside the plant was much louder. I thought I am glad that I was not going to work in either of these buildings. I walked in front of building 41. Across the street was building 40. Another street next to a small park behind which was another building no. 50 and the cafeteria. On my right between the fire station a little back from the main street was the G.E. clinic. I went in and had a complete physical. After which I was told to go to my building and they would let my new boss know whether I had passed or not.

As I resumed my hike down the avenue I saw building 52 and the G.E. store on my left and building 60 and 69. There were a lot of little buildings behind these buildings. I got tired of keeping account of the numbers and continue until I finally came to building 89. I thought no wonder they call this the mother plant of the G.E. the electrical workshop of the world. It had so many buildings, miles of paved streets, its own fire department and police department. It really was a city within a city.

I walked into the building and was pleasantly surprised as I looked at my papers and saw that the boss I was going to report to was a woman. "This is great, imagine a woman boss in the factory. Maybe this won't be such a bad place to work in after all". As I walked down the aisle, I felt the eyes of all the workers

following me. I noticed rows and rows of tables on both sides of the aisles. The workers were seated about 4 feet apart. And there were a lot of panels, parts and screws and nuts on the tables. Some women were working with a soldering iron, pliers and screw drivers.

I presented my papers to Anna B. as the people called her. She had a Polish name that some found hard to pronounce. She looked over my papers and called one of her leaders to show me where to hang my coat, where the ladies room was and where I would work. I was also taken to the tool crib where I had to sign for tools that I would be using.

My leader was a caring woman who was kind and patient as she explained the ropes to me. Stella was a widow with a 10 year old son whom she adored. Her husband had died several years ago. She had to go to work to support herself and her son. Stella and I later got to be good friends and she would join me and the other women when we went visiting, or to movies, crazy auctions, and other events.

Photo 2: Radio transmitter assembly, 1943.

I was told that I would be on piece work. My wages would depend upon whether or not I could produce enough pieces. I had a breaking-in period of 4 weeks to show that I could produce enough pieces to be kept on the job. During this 4 weeks, I would be guaranteed a minimum hourly wage, if I did not make more money on piece work.

The first job I had was monotonous and really tried my patience and perseverance. To break the monotony, I developed a game which I used every time I worked on piece work. I would check the price paid for each piece and calculate the amount of pieces I had to do in an hour to make the A.E.R. (Anticipated Earning Rate). This was the minimum a piece worker had to produce to be kept on piece work. Then I would try to produce more pieces to make a percentage above the minimum.

The job involved forming wires on the top of a fixture. A set up man would set up pins in the proper holes and when a straight piece of wire was placed on the fixture, a handle was pulled toward the front and it would form the wires in the desired shape needed to be assembled.

To break the monotony, workers would talk to the person sitting next to them. Many beautiful friendships were made this way. Many inner thoughts, anxieties etc. were shared during the many hours of working.

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In order to do the job, one had to understand and know how to read blue prints, wiring diagrams, schematic drawings, and instructions. As part of our breaking-in we were given a variety of different panels to work on utilizing all of these papers. Anna B's area was an area where people were trained and then moved out into different departments when they proved they could read directions, blue prints, wiring diagrams and work with soldering irons, pliers, screw drivers and other tools.

The other requirement was that the worker could make out on piece work. Each job had a minimum of pieces that had to be completed to make your money on piece work. I liked piece work because it gave me the opportunity to make more money than those people on day work. The number of pieces determined your earnings. Usually a piece worker would make a minimum of 15% above what a day worker would make.

My sister who worked in the office couldn't understand why I would go into the factory when I was qualified to work in a nice clean office. When I came home from work, she couldn't wait to confront me. "Let me see your hands," she asked. "I bet they are all cut up and bruised". She was shocked to see that they were the same as

Photo 3: Women soldering in Voltage Regulator Department, 1944

before. I had always liked working with my hands, keeping my car clean, changing the oil, working around the house, and the work I did in G.E. didn't affect my hands at all.

And after being on the job for a month, I compared checks with her and found that I was making as much money as she was with five years service in the office. This fact reinforced my decision to work in the factory.

Anna B's area worked on sub-assemblies for the building of transmitters. When workers were needed in other areas, they would be transferred. I slowly learned the ropes about piece work. Piece work rates were established by the timing of the job. I watched while such a time study took place. Before a job was to be timed, a good union shop steward would make sure that all conditions were normal. During these times, the company would conveniently have material handlers, porters and supervision to stand by. During regular working hours many of these people could not be found.

The rate setter used a special watch that recorded hundreds of a minute. He would keep track of the operations and write down the time for each operation. After a certain number of the operations was recorded and if there was no protest, the union and the company would negotiate the results.

Protests by the company might include accusations of workers intentionally stalling, working too slowly, or failing to follow instructions. Union objections were based on the worker being nervous or so concerned about making a good impression that he/she worked faster than normal. Some workers could not work at a normal pace while being timed because they are nervous. It isn't easy to work while someone is timing you because you know your time study will be used for all future prices on this particularly job.

Ideally the effort should be at normal pace or 100%. If this were so and the times seemed to be about the same for all operations there usually were no disagreement. However if the times were erratic, than the company wanted to take out the "slowest" times while the union representative would try to take out the "fastest" time. There were negotiations to everybody's

satisfaction or the job was timed over either with the same person or with another person.

The company and the union had negotiated that ideally a job would be made standard within 6 months. In the meantime the company had the option of putting on a "temporary" rate. Or in certain cases, the workers would be paid their "average earnings" which they had established by previous earnings.

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The world was shocked with the dastardly Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This was the beginning of many changes at the plant. We were told that from now on to be ready to work all kinds of overtime. And the regular work week schedule would be seven days a week with only the second Sunday every two weeks off. The whole country was being put on a war alert and our servicemen needed supplies to fight the war. President Roosevelt declared war on Japan on December 7, 1941.

The windows of the factory were all painted black so that no light could be seen outside of the building. We never saw the sunshine. We were told that because of G.E., the American Locomotive Company, and the colleges in our area we were a likely target if the Japanese ever got over here.

Needless to say, I, like most people, was angry at this shameful action of December 7th at Pearl Harbor, and I knew that people on the home front would have to work harder to supply our troops with the much needed weapons and equipment needed to fight this war. The union, being very patriotic, signed a "no strike" pledge on December 23, 1941, despite opposition from some members.

Our group was one of the first to be moved to a huge building on Campbell Avenue. It had been the Weber Electrical Company and G.E. made arrangements to move its transmitter department there.

We were originally put on an unusual shift. We worked from 6 A.M. until 1 P.M. with no time off for lunch. I loved

this shift because it gave me a lot of time out of the shop. We were in a big room all by ourselves in the beginning. It was cozy. We worked hard but there was less stress and noise than where we worked in the big factory.

For example, one day I brought in lollipops for everyone. Even our boss, Anna B., took one from me and as we were all sucking our lollipops while working when a group of big shots walked into the room. Anna B., upon seeing the surprised look on their eyes in seeing the lollipop in her mouth immediately took it out, apologized and disposed of it.

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To break the monotony of working, we played games when time allowed. One day I took a few workers aside and told them to watch me. I told them. "I was going to pretend to yawn and asked them to do the same." I predicted that before long the whole area would be yawning.

Sure enough after several fake yawns by me and the partners in crime, the others started to yawn. It wasn't too long before the whole room was yawning. The original small group started to laugh and all others joined in and even playfully threw small nuts and screws at me.

Another time, I told this inner circle of workers that I wanted to try an experiment. We would choose a co-worker who came into work feeling fine and after we conducted our "game" she would not feel so well.

When our victim came in and greeted everyone with a cheery good morning, the first worker looked at her and asked whether she felt all right -- she looked awful. Where did it hurt? Well, after several people gave her the same story, the victim really doubted her well being and really looked ill. We finally let her in on the game and told her that she really looked good and that we were pulling her leg. She was much relieved but ready to kill us.

Another day we discussed how people have a tendency to embellish a story when they tell it to others. To prove my point I set up a situation. I took a few into my confidence and we started with a simple fact that one of the women had very hurt her finger very badly. She told a worker who was not in on the game and asked her to tell the next worker and pass it on. Before this experiment was over, the original hurt finger developed into a broken finger, then a broken wrist and than a broken arm. My point was proven.

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After being in the shop about a month, I was asked to join the union. I said "no way". During my high school studies, unions were not held in high regard. Also my father had condemned unions because he said they were communistic. I also felt that the company would always treat a worker right if the person was a good worker and gave a good day's effort. I had been reading the derogatory criticism of unions in our local press and how unions collected a lot of money and were mishandling the money. Also, I wondered why, if the unions were so good, did they allow favoritism in the passing out of jobs. That was normal in my area.

I also was disturbed that discrimination against women was allowed and blamed the union until I started to read Local 301's newspaper. The union was fighting against discrimination not only against women and boys but also against Negroes. I read about the Local's initiating the fight for Equal Pay for Equal Work way back in 1936, that it was their consistent support of that principle that resulted in the highest women's rates of any UE local in the G.E. chain. In fact, in 1942, the National UE was the first or one of the first unions to adopt the Equal Pay for Equal Work principle.

I was happy when I read that Pope Leo XIII backed unions in 1939, and that the UE national officers-James Matles,

Director of Organization, Julius Emspak, Secretary and James Carey, President denied being Communists.

I read that in 1940 Philomena Desienna ran for the executive board from Building 53. I thought this was great that women were allowed to run for leadership positions in the union.

Just after I had been hired, the union asked for 10 cents an hour and was turned down. I was very impressed to see that 5000 people attended a mass meeting at the hall. I also saw that they negotiated a contract they wanted.

In July of 1941, 1,862 new members joined. As of October 6, 1941 the local union had 18,000 members which shortly increased to 19,280. The union had 240 shop stewards. The local had 10,000 members and the National had 375,000 members.

Even though I had read all the newspapers, I was still apprehensive and still refused to join the union.

CHAPTER 2: RECRUITED

During high school I had been involved in athletics. I loved to play basketball and softball. I became aware of the G. E. Athletic Association, and was pleased when I visited the club house and saw the great facility. The building included a basketball court, a bowling alley, an area where ping pong and billiards could be played. There was a library, lockers, showers, and a room where you could relax and meet before or after the sport you may be involved in. There was also a cafeteria.

The outside facility consisted of tennis courts, baseball courts, and a running track. I was very impressed and felt "Gee, G.E. really cares about its workers." This facility was mostly funded by the money made on the many vending machines in the plant.

I joined a softball team and a basketball team and met many women from throughout the plant. We became very good friends and these relationship lasted for many years. I use to go to the annual meetings. One day, Billy Mastrianni, an active union man, asked me to vote for him at the annual meeting since he wanted to get on the G.E.A.A. (General Electric Athletic Association) board of directors.

I was surprised and shocked when the election was held that I was nominated and elected. Billy was not.

I became a very active member of the board. I was the only factory woman on the board. There was a staff person who helped to arrange schedules and made sure that everything was handled right. Working with him, I organized not only internal but inter-work softball and basketball games. We also had a woman's bowling league. We hosted games between the Fitchberg, Pittsfield and Syracuse plants. I also organized "canning and baking" contests and was able to get Martha Brooks and another local radio celebrity to be the judges. We were all surprised when a man won the baking contest.

I was asked by the personnel director, Mrs.Holmes, if I would arrange meetings for women. A Mrs. Kisby was to be sent here from the war department to teach civilians about the dangers of syphilis or gonorrhea. This civilian effort was also aimed at preventing servicemen from getting infected when they came home on furlough. I had formed a women's club at the G.E.A.A. I was happy to arrange a series of lectures to be given by Mrs.Kisby.

Mrs. Kisby, who was sent here was very knowledgeable about the different kinds of liquors. One of her jobs was to check bars to see if they were diluting their liquors with water and overcharging their customers.

We had a favorite spaghetti restaurant. Many of the women would meet with Mrs.Kisby before the lectures. We had a great time. She told us how when a serviceman returned to his base and had contacted syphilis or gonorrhea he was asked who he had been with. Many would not even know the name of the woman or to protect the person would say "I don't know her name". But this was not good enough. The next question was describe her, when did you meet her?, Where did you meet her? This information was put together and before long this woman would receive a knock on the door and be taken care of by the armed services.

I was very concerned about the fact that there were so many women working in the plant who were naive and hadn't really been "out in the world" before. They were easily flattered by some of the male leeches. I asked at many meetings that a woman staff person be hired to plan programs for women so they would have a safe place to go to and have something positive to do in their spare time. I was ignored and finally on October 18, 1944 I handed in the following letter:

My dear Mr. Myers and the gentlemen of the G.E.A.A. board of directors.

At our last director's meeting, I mentioned the fact that I had some new business to discuss but because of the lateness of the hour and other business waiting to be discussed, I left with the promise that I would write it out and send it in. Well, here it is.

Please consider this as my letter of resignation as the woman factory representative on the G.E.A.A. board of directors effective at once. I would, however, greatly appreciate the privilege of being allowed to continue to handle Mrs.Kisby's lectures which will be over November 21.

In resigning may I state the following facts in all sincerity with the desire to really open up the G.E.A.A. for women..

In the first place, too little attention is given to the women employees of GE in relation to the clubhouse. I strongly recommend that equal representation be given to women on the board of directors in proportion to the number of women employees in the Schenectady GE Works.

Nothing I can say or have said apparently makes any impression as to the absolute necessity of securing a qualified and competent woman director for the clubhouse. This should have been done long ago even before this war emergency. I think I fully covered this issue in the letter I sent to Mr. Myers a short time ago.

As you all know, during the 9 months of my directorship, I attempted a great deal of diversified activities for women. On the whole, I can unbiasedly state that they were all successful considering the fact that I had only a limited time to devote to the activities and also the fact that the publicity angle doesn't help much. (I wrote the articles for the works news listing the meetings with Mrs. Kisby but had to use the terms "social diseases" instead of syphilis and gonorrhea). I

know from my experience in these activities that there is much interest among the women employees and that a good director of women's activities in the clubhouse could do a swell job. But it is a 40 hour job and there is no getting away from it if there is a sincere desire on the company's part to really provide the women employees with a well planned and organized system of recreation.

I know that I cannot properly handle any future activities that may come up because I haven't the time in my spare time and I feel as though I have no right to expect my supervisors to be as lenient as they have been in the past in regard to the time I must spend in work not only answering telephone calls but also making contacts. It is with regret that I hand in this resignation but I feel that if I can not do a job well, I don't want to try to do it at all.

May I say in closing that I have enjoyed my short term as a member of the G.E.A.A. board of directors and I sincerely hope that the conditions I have brought out today will be alleviated in the very near futures.

Respectfully submitted.

Helen Quirini

* * *

In an article In the G. E. Works News, about the election of a new president, the following paragraph referred to me:

"*Following the election, Helen Quirini, of C.A.P, who has given much of her time to the promotion of women's activities at the club, briefly reviewed the club's progress in furthering the women's program and presented movies taken at*

outstanding events held for women members during the past year."

Right after my letter of resignation was received, a member of the GEAA board of directors visited me at work and asked me to please reconsider. I asked if they were going to recommend hiring a woman director and upon receiving his negative answer told him I would not reconsider my resignation.

* * *

Thousands of UE members went to war. Those who stayed behind and together with other factory workers had the gigantic responsibility of supplying the forces of democracy with the weapons needed. Before too long several thousand people were working in Campbell Avenue.

I was transferred out of the "women's" area and placed on a job doing assembly on transmitters. This was a job formerly done by a man. I loved this job because it was not quite as monotonous, and required me to use my brain. I had to read diagrams and assembly instructions. I also moved around a lot instead of sitting in one spot. These transmitters were about 5 feet high and 2 feet wide by two feet. They were placed on pedestals and my job was to assemble transformers, capacitors, and other parts for the first operation. Then someone else did the next operation and another person did the next operation. We sat on little stools to perform our job..

One day as I was deeply engrossed in my work I felt the presence of a man standing watching me. I looked up and the gentleman introduced himself as Fred Jones. I thought "Wow this is the new Assistant Superintendent. What did I do wrong?" I stood up and he extended his hand. He called me by name and complimented me on being active in the G. E. A. A.

We talked for a few minutes and he moved on. He made "rounds" in the factory and talked to many people regularly. In subsequent talks I got brave enough to express some of my concerns. I criticized the suggestion committee and the way

people were placed in jobs and the need for woman counselors throughout the plant because of the number of women in the plant.

In regard to suggestions, I told him it took forever to get answers on suggestions; the suggestions did not seem to to be properly investigated; that many suggestions, if adopted, could help our war effort; that if you were a boss's pet, you were more likely to get your suggestions adopted and paid more money. I further suggested that awards based on one year's savings was not fair. The payment should be based on the savings over the lifetime of the suggestion.

I told him that women had special problems that could affect their work but that they were reluctant to talk to male bosses about them. The problems could better be handled by a woman counselor.

He asked if I would be willing to talk to people about my ideas. Of course, I agreed. Several weeks later he greeted me with the news that he had set up appointments with the plant manager, Mr. Barney Tang, and the suggestion committee and with Mrs. Mary Holmes, head of personnel.

When he told me about this, I was skeptical. What was I getting myself into? Would my immediate bosses resent my going "above their heads"? Who did I think I was to be criticizing these top "big shots"? But I went home and collected documentation that I needed to back up my complaints.

I had handed in a several page suggestion about the way people were hired. I listed eight cases where people who had good skills were being put on jobs that ignored these skills -- such as the jeweler who was accustomed to working with small tools and was put on jobs required the use of heavy tools. And they were always looking for people who could work on jobs requiring working with small tools. His hands were swollen from using the heavy pliers. In another case, a music teacher, who certainly had skills of reading the fine details of music notation, was hired as a matron. Yet money was spent trying to

train people who couldn't read blueprints, wiring diagrams, and other documents. And there was another case about the man who was a shortwave ham operator and had repaired radios. He should have been used in inspection or in some job requiring his knowledge. I emphasized that not only were the people unhappy in their jobs but the full utilization of their skills would help the war effort.

I also wrote in detail about the need for "woman counselors in personnel" throughout the plant so that women would have someone they could relate to when having problems. I pointed out that in Cambell Avenue there were about a thousand women. And with the proper counseling there might be less absenteeism and hopefully the women could produce more.

I met with Mrs. Holmes on September 27, 1943. As I entered her office, she greeted me with "I remember you, you were the person with office skills who insisted on going into the factory". I first thought she must have a good memory until I saw that she had my personnel file in front of her.

We met for several hours. She discussed each of my cases, justifying the placements. We also discussed the part of my suggestion dealing with woman counselors throughout the plant. I reiterated that with so many women in the plant that if they had a woman counselor to talk to maybe their problems could be solved and absenteeism would be reduced. She indicated that she did not think this was a good idea. Imagine my surprise when these counselors were appointed later, even though I never was paid for the idea. A Mrs. Simonds was appointed in Cambell Avenue. We became good friends and discussed how to make life easier for women workers.

But realizing that Mrs. Holmes was not going to approve my suggestion I said, "Mrs. Holmes, you are a busy person and I have work to do so thank you for your time." After exchanging pleasantries I left.

The next meeting was with the suggestion committee. I was flabbergasted when I saw the names of the men from top

management who were on this committee. The plant manager, Mr. Barney Tang, was the chairman. They had my suggestions in front of them and we discussed them. I pointed out that it took almost a year before suggestions were answered, and that with the war some good ideas should be put into usage as soon as possible. I also complained that the cash awards were not fair. The amount of the award was calculated on the amount of money the idea would save in a year. I argued that the award should be based on the amount saved from the time adopted. I pointed out suggestions that had been rejected but later used which I had reopened to get paid for. I had suggestions that were adopted and paid for that were never used. There were other abuses of the system I listed.

They also thanked me. The time for answering suggestions was speeded up and many years latter, the method of paying for awards was liberalized.

* * *

I met many great women when I joined the G. E. A. A. I played on the women's basketball and softball team and also bowled. Four of us who worked in Campbell Avenue developed a very close friendship.

Two other women, Bert and Redhead, and myself worked in the factory and the fourth person was Betty, nurse for the whole building. There was a specially equipped medical office in the former office space (where we first worked when we moved to Cambell Avenue). Betty was loved by everyone. She was a special kind of nurse. If she had to give you a shot it seemed to hurt her more than you. If she gave you medicine she would taste it first and describe the taste to you so you wouldn't mind it so much. She was a good athlete and played every position to the fullest. I really admired her because she would not hesitate to take on management to advocate for a worker when called upon.

Bert was a good athlete and she and Redhead (you can guess why she was called Redhead) became very good friends. Redhead was no athlete but she tagged along and helped with the equipment and keeping records etc. Betty and I became very close friends. The four of us not only played on the basketball and softball teams and bowled together but we went to movies, each other houses, out to dinner and other affairs.

There were a lot of activities around the war at this time and Betty, Bert, and Redhead and I decided that we would like to do something special. I came up with an idea to create this 8 by 12 foot board to recognize people for their wartime support. Bert, Betty and Redhead enthusiastically agreed to work on this project with me. We got permission from our supervisors who cooperated by obtaining the board and hanging it on a wall. Behind the board we had decorated the wall with red white and blue crepe paper.

This board had a blue background. In the center was a huge white cross that dominated the board. In the center of the cross was a red star. On the cross, on the star, and on the blue background there were little nails that held bakelite name tags. On the star were the names of the people who had donated a gallon of blood. On the cross were the names of the people from Campbell Avenue who were serving in the armed forces and on the blue part were the names of people who had donated blood. Across the top in big letters were the words "Lest We Forget" and at the bottom of the cross were smaller words "Cap Honor Roll". At both ends across the bottom were little crosses with the names of servicemen who had been killed. We worked many months on this board not only collecting and keeping the names up to date but also working on a special name plate machine to print the names. We did this on our own time.

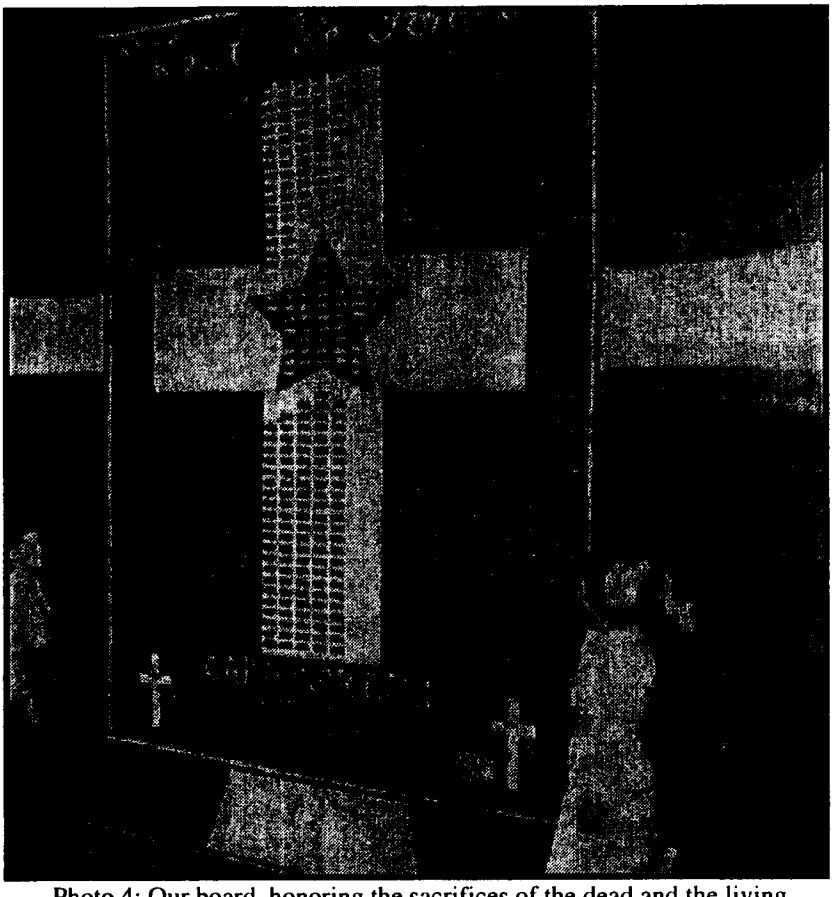


Photo 4: Our board, honoring the sacrifices of the dead and the living

This wall with the board and the red white and blue crepe paper was the background for many rallies held during the noon hours, rallies with entertainers, bands, and speeches to sell war bonds, and encourage people to give blood. When the news was received about one of our workers being killed we would hold a memorial service. Bert, Betty, Redhead and me -- and our efforts in creating the Honor Roll board -- were prominently written up in a special issue of the GE Works News on October 27, 1944. This same edition also had a picture of a softball game that Bert, Betty and I played in.

I also served on the Building Safety committee and on a committee called the War Production Council, an organization made up of management and labor and devoted to increasing production for the war effort. I had fun serving on the Safety committee. The company had come out with safety glasses which consisted of unbreakable glass. I would go near a person and throw my glasses on the floor. When the worker saw how strong they were they were more inclined to wear them. I thought "how great that the company really cares about us workers and spends all this money to protect our eyes" until one day during a safety meeting the company representative told us that this project was important because of the high cost of paying for workman's compensation for the loss of one eye.

The company printed a weekly newspaper that was widely read during the war and was normally mailed to retirees, as well as community, business, and civic leaders. It was also sent to workers serving in the armed forces. Each building or section had a reporter and I assumed the responsibility of writing for Campbell Avenue and later on for Building 69. I would gather news all week long and on Sunday night I would write my column. My father thought I was a little off for spending so much time writing these articles. I found it very rewarding because people really enjoyed them. I was also able to compliment those who were doing good deeds.

Many people in the service wrote to me thanking me for the articles because they felt that they belonged to a family of people who worked in the Campbell Avenue Building. It was also a great way to keep track of our former co-workers who were serving our country.

The following are excerpts from some of my columns:

Sgt. Dominic Iaccobucci made the supreme sacrifice.

Sergeant Frank Swiergiel was awarded the purple heart,

Victor Pecci was wounded in France.

Sergeant "Billie" Walton was medically discharged.

Mrs. Kisby is to speak at the G.E.A.A.

According to the Army Hour, on Sunday December 1944, 103,250 people were killed, 326,127 were wounded, 66,567 are missing in action, 59,667 are prisoners of war. We are sad to report that to date five of our former co-workers were killed in service.

Bea Jennings, Julia Pochily, and Lorraine Carey have been notified that their brothers are prisoners of war.

Out of 1500 employees who work in Campbell Avenue. We are donating between 50 to 75 pints of blood a month. Jack Nelson has come to visit us.

Victor Szymanski was wounded in service.

In one section 33 out of 35 workers bought war bonds.

David Carol was wounded in Italy.

Freddie Kelodis was wounded in the South Pacific.

Sue Mack and Josephine Oropello entered the service.

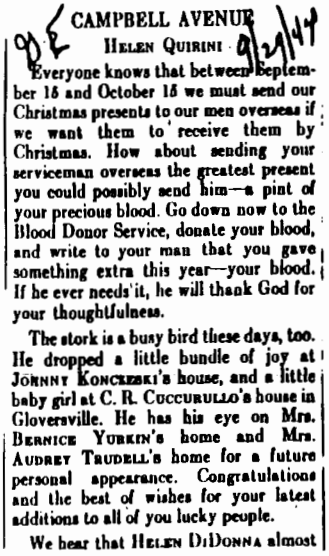
Pete Petroski's sons, Corporal Eddie Petroski is somewhere in the Pacific, and First Lieutenant Carl will be sent overseas.

Private Chester A. Prylowicz came to visit us.

David A. Tripp, Lieutenant Colonel, was awarded the Bronze Star.

Private First Class W.R. Reichel sent in pictures.

Sal D'Amica was awarded a medical discharge.



CAMPBELL AVENUE

HELEN QUIRINI

Everyone knows that between September 15 and October 15 we must send our Christmas presents to our men overseas if we want them to receive them by Christmas. How about sending your serviceman overseas the greatest present you could possibly send him—a pint of your precious blood. Go down now to the Blood Donor Service, donate your blood, and write to your man that you gave something extra this year—your blood. If he ever needs it, he will thank God for your thoughtfulness.

The stork is a busy bird these days, too. He dropped a little bundle of joy at JOHNNY KONCZESKI's house, and a little baby girl at C. R. CUCCURULLO's house in Gloversville. He has his eye on Mrs. BERNICE YURKIN's home and Mrs. AUDREY TRUDELL's home for a future personal appearance. Congratulations and the best of wishes for your latest additions to all of you lucky people.

We hear that HELEN DiDONNA almost

The reporters also sent in articles that were printed in the main part of the paper. The Big Board was highlighted, and so were the many rallies we had for blood donations, bonds, and safety.

* * * *

The Block Plan was part of a civilian mobilization civilian war services. This was set up to involve civilians in the war effort. There were leaders who oversaw the whole effort, zone leaders and sector leaders, and one person for each block. I

was recruited to become a zone leader. My territory was the Mont Pleasant area and one of the municipal housing tracts.

Our mission was to involve each home in the war effort. We organized the collection of tin cans and showed how to cut the ends off and flatten out the other parts; collect aluminum foil, grease, newspapers, and other materials. We encouraged people to have victory gardens, and to rent rooms to war workers. We also advocated for the creation and expansion of day care centers.

* * * *

The one meeting I will never forget involved an army recruiter. This woman spoke glowingly to us of the honor and the romance of being in the service. She spoke directly to me, and after hearing of my skills and factory knowledge in wiring panels and my involvement in the union and the GEAA, she told me that if I enlisted she would recommend that I go to Paul Smith College in the Adirondacks for officer training.

The GE discouraged women from going into the service. Even though they guaranteed men that their service would be continued if they joined the armed forces, they told woman that if they enlisted they would sever their service with the company. I admired the women who told GE that they were going to enlist anyway.

The recruiter took her jacket off and told me to try it on. The women in the audience oohed and awed about how nice I looked and that I should join up. I was almost convinced until I asked the sixty-four dollar question. "Will you guarantee me on your word of honor that I will be able to go to Paul Smith College and be trained as an officer?" Her answer was "I will do everything I can to get this to happen but I cannot guarantee it."

I took off the coat and said "thank you, but no thank you." I had known other women who were promised certain roles in the armed services and the promises were not kept.

They ended up doing kitchen duty. Needless to say they were very disappointed and told me if they had known than what they know now they never would have enlisted.

I was very happy later on during the war that the company rescinded their first stand and did give service women who returned to GE after the war the same rights that men had.

I was especially pleased one night when I chaired a big meeting of the Schenectady Block Plan group in the auditorium of Mont Pleasant High School, my alma mater.

CHAPTER 3: UNIONS

When there was a lack of work in your regular area, because of a shortage of material or parts or paper work, you were "farmed out" to whatever area had work.

During one of these times I was transferred to a "shipping job." The job involved working on a table 4 feet wide by 8 feet long. At one end of this table there were two pipes about 4 feet high which held a four foot pole across the width of the table that held huge rolls of shipping paper. New rolls were about two feet in diameter.

The job consisted of first pulling the paper to the full length of the table, putting the part on the paper and cutting the paper to fit the part. Heavy tape was used to keep this package together.

When the new roll was first put on the pipe, which was than put on the two supports, it was so heavy that a battery truck had to be used to put it in its place. When I pulled the paper onto the table, it required a great deal of physical effort. When the roll was new, I had to grab the paper from the sides, pull it to about 3/4 of the length of the table, and than placing myself in the middle of the four 4 foot width, I would brace myself at an angle so that I would have enough strength to pull the paper to the end.

After working on the job for a while, I found that I was so tired that I would go to bed as soon as I got home and sometimes didn't even want to eat. I didn't associate my fatigue with the job because I was a strong athletic person. It was a slow gradual building up of physical exhaustion

I remember stopping in to see Mrs. Simonds, the woman counselor, and starting to cry. I told her that I didn't know what my problem was because I was so tired all the time. Then my stomach area muscles hurt. I first resisted going to my doctor but finally the pain was so bad that I made an appointment to see him. He examined me and asked, " You have a great deal of

tenderness in the area of the pain. What have you been doing differently which could cause this pain?"

It wasn't until I told him about changing jobs that it finally dawned on us that the job was creating this condition. He gave me a statement asking that I be taken off of the job. Which did happen, thank goodness.

In looking at the situation, I came up with a suggestion that the ends of the pole holding the paper be put on a ring of ball bearings so that it would not take so much energy to pull the paper. This was turned down.

* * *

One of the jobs assigned to me was sitting next to a stout woman who was a union shop steward. The job took several days and I was fascinated as I listened to her answer to my questions about the union. She had been around a long time and knew from firsthand experience of what she spoke. As we worked we exchanged ideas and I learned a lot.

She had an answer to the many criticisms I had about the union. She told me what it was like to work in the shop without a union. That even though there was much yet to be done and things were not perfect, at least there was the opportunity to speak up and have your complaints listened to.

She described conditions before the union--outright favoritism and a lack of equal justice for all. People had to brown-nose their supervisors in order to keep their jobs or get a fair shake on the jobs that were passed out. She spoke about how in one department the foreman sold a certain brand of automobiles on the side and how it was not coincidental that most of the people working in that division owned this brand of car.

She spoke about employees working on their bosses' camps or homes after work hours for no pay to remain in the boss's favor. In some incidents women had to put up with sexual

advances and harassment by their bosses; and in order for women to keep their jobs, they would tolerate this behavior from their male bosses.

She spoke of the times when foremen were "God" and could fire anyone on the spot if the worker did something the foreman didn't like. The foreman had the power to give an employee three or four days off. He had unchallenged power. There was no such thing as seniority. The foreman could go out into the streets and hire someone to replace the worker. And once you were laid off, you were in trouble. The same divine right exercised by foremen in laying off employees was practiced on recall. Many people came back to the plant, day after day, month after month. Maybe they were finally put back on the payroll. This reemployment had no relationship whatsoever to seniority, their previous work assignment or their previous rate of pay. Those who were lucky enough to be rehired often found they were being treated as new employees. In some cases, the company deliberately kept "laid off" employees out longer than their service date, which automatically changed their status to new employee.

She answered questions about the "job selling" which had been allowed to exist in the company. She pointed out that this was the company's responsibility. G.E. allowed this to happen. She spoke of the union's role toward the elimination of this cruel practice of selling jobs for as much as $300, how it would take a new employee more than several months before he/she could earn enough to make up for this bribe.

She spoke of how the company would cut wages, give time off, eliminate vacations, fire people and other actions without the workers opportunity to protest. Employees wouldn't even be given any notice. When you received your pay that was the moment you were told that you were fired. There was no use complaining about it. G.E.'s decrees were law in those "good old days" before there was a real union. She recalled that in 1938 the company decided to put a wage cut into effect. Our union

notified management that it would take all steps necessary to prevent this wage cut. Salaried workers were cut but the union members were not.

Before the union, management alone decided when and if an employee should receive merit wage increases. Foremen would withhold raises from thousands of long service employees who were clearly entitled to job rate raises. At the same time, favorite employees with less service, were rewarded with regular raises and job rate increases.

I asked "How could it be that favoritism still existed right here in Anna B's area? For example, those who brought in food and bakery for their leaders would get better jobs."

She said "This was hard to prove even though it seemed to be common knowledge. But there was no union member who was willing to sign a grievance about being affected by this unjust practice. If a worker asked me to file a grievance, I would gladly do it."

In regard to my questions about the criticisms of the union she replied "Don't believe everything you hear or read in the local press. Go to your union meetings and judge for yourself. Listen and ask questions. If you don't like the way things are being done, work to change it. This is a precious right but members must exercise this right. No one is going to do it for them. The union is only as strong as its members want it to be. It is easy to sit on the sidelines and criticize the union but the opportunity is there for members to take part. Get involved. If you find things you don't like, work to change them. First make sure that your facts are accurate. Then work for change."

She spoke glowingly of the fact that Local 301 had grown to 650 members out of a plant of 11,000 blue collar workers in 1935. But today in 1943 there were over 10,000 members out of a workforce of over 25,000 workers.

She explained that we had a very democratic union that really cared about the members. Procedures were to have a shop steward for about every 30 workers under a foreman. There were

hundreds of shop stewards who handled thousands of grievances. Settlements of these grievances have already resulted in millions of dollars in the pay envelopes of union members. She also explained the process of electing the board of directors who each represented a certain number of shop stewards, and praised the democratic procedure for the election of the officers of the union.

I questioned her "Why does the union let the company get away with discrimination against women and males under the age of twenty-one?"

Her answer was that the union has grieved about this but to date have not been successful. It is an ongoing battle to end discrimination. She said "You were working here in 1941 when the union negotiated an agreement with the company which established the principle of equal pay with men when they do equal work. This agreement now gives the union the right to grieve about this discrimination".

And then I asked her the sixty-four dollar question. "Mary, are you a Communist? Are our officers Communists?"

She said "I was waiting for that one. No, I am not a Communist and as a matter of fact President Carey and other officers have denied being Communists." She angrily stated "This accusation is one of the most difficult to explain to all union workers. Red baiting has been used as a gimmick to keep people from joining unions for many years".

She continued "One of the most significant documents of our our union is our constitution. Our leaders were long-time union activists before the United Electrical Radio Machine Workers of America was chartered. They had seen what happened to people when they complained in some unions. So they wrote a constitution that guarantees everyone rights. All shop stewards, board members, and officers swear to uphold our constitution when they are sworn in".

She gave me a copy of the union's constitution which states" 'We, the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers

form an organization which entitles all workers in our industry on an industrial basis, and rank and file control, regardless of craft, age, sex, nationality, race, creed or political beliefs or affiliation to lawful organizations, and pursue at all times a policy of aggressive struggle to improve our conditions".

She said, "There is one word that you should be happy with -- 'sex'." All unions do not welcome women. As a matter of fact many unions only admit craftsmen. Our contract with the company does not include the word sex in the discrimination clause. And we must fight to get that word in the contract."

She gave me a printed history of the union (full text in the appendix 1). This extended conversation was quite an eye-opener. It was difficult for me to absorb all she had said.

I joined the union and attended union meetings and later was elected a shop steward and an officer. I was happy that we had had this important interchange of ideas.

I knew that without the union advocating for the end of discrimination against women and minorities the company would continue to treat some people as second class citizens.

* * *

I was asked to run for shop steward for a newly appointed woman boss. Before I accepted, I went up to the union headquarters. Sal Vottis, one of the officers who worked at the hall asked if he could help me. I told him that I was asked to be a shop steward and before I accepted I would like some questions answered.

He invited me into his office and, in answer to my requests showed me the books of the union. I wanted to find out what the Union did with all the money it collected each month.

The books revealed the many ways that the money was spent. Regular monthly allocations were sent to CIO, the National United Electrical & Radio Machine Workers of America, Districts Three and other organizations we belonged to.

He explained the monthly reports passed out at the membership meetings where anyone can ask questions. Also the annual audit that was conducted by the elected trustees.

The salaries of the office staff, the business agent, assistant business agents, and the janitor was another item. But the biggest amount was spent to reimburse the members, shop stewards, board members and officers for lost time involved in handling grievances and the running of the business of the union. The rent of the hall and equipment necessary to run such a big outfit also cost money.

I looked for any evidence that Communism was a factor in the information. I found none. Being satisfied with what I learned and feeling sure that I could answer questions from the membership about how the money was spent, I decided to agree to become a shop steward.

I did have some reservations because I knew my father was not going to approve and I worried that the company might retaliate against me for becoming active in the union.

The concern about retaliation by the company stayed with me until I retired. I never felt completely safe. When I purchased property, I made sure that there was a rental unit included. At times, I also had reservations about the union discriminating against me. Unfortunately, this concern had merit after some years of involvement in the union.

I also hesitated because I was basically a shy person who avoided controversy. But my desire to correct injustices overruled this feeling. I felt that any injustice would eventually affect me and if I could resolve the problem, I would also benefit.

When the newly appointed woman boss acknowledged my appointment, she told me, "I can get all the cigarettes I want." I told her "Number one, I don't smoke and two all you have to do is treat everyone fairly and live up to the contract and we would have little or no trouble."

I wish there had been more training for stewards and was pleased when many years later, the union did have classes for stewards and I was proud to be one of the teachers. I felt more secure when I learned about the Wagner Act and the protection of union members for union activities.

I didn't mind too much arguing with the foreman about a grievance because it was the way I could correct an injustice or resolve a problem. But I will never forget the first time I made out a written grievance. I called the board member and asked advice about whether the grievance was properly made out, the proper reference was made to the clauses in the contract, and of course get his signature on the grievance.

When it came time to give the grievance to my foreman, my palms were sweaty and I had butterflies in my stomach. I had been brought up to not bite the hand that feeds you and be glad that you have a job, and respect authority.

I handed the grievance to the foreman. I put the time on it and requested an answer within 24 hours. If there is no time on the grievance, the foreman can take his sweet time to answer it. After this ordeal was over and the guards didn't come in to take me away or the devil didn't appear, the next time I handed in a grievance these anxious feelings were lessened. I still had some qualms about this process especially if I happened to really like the foreman. I also discovered that the actions of a foreman are not necessarily his decisions.

Passing this hurdle, I had to get prepared for the next step which was in Building 41 the first level of union negotiations. The first time I had a case at this level, I got the same feeling of anxiety, sweaty palms, and butterflies in the stomach because I didn't know what to expect. I always thought that it would be great if the new stewards were allowed to attend a meeting in Building 41 to see the process even before they had a grievance to be handled there.

Then there was the third step where the union met with the plant manager. If the case could not be settled locally it was referred to the national level in New York City.

The first time I was involved in a case in New York City I again was apprehensive about speaking up. After all, the company top negotiators were there.

I had been part of a foursome of women shop stewards who were affected by the discriminating case around the Anticipated Earning Rates. The company treated women differently than men. The company representative was very insulting and really said in effect that women were second-class citizens. I was taken aback and hurt by his blatant remarks about women: that women only worked for pin money, they didn't need as much money as men who were heads of families, and they weren't smart enough to do the work that men did, the proper place for them was in the home.

I was sitting next to the business agent, Leo Jandreau. He argued for our side and waited for us women to join in. The company man finally said something that really made me mad. Leo bent over and asked "Are you going to stand for that? Answer him."

What he said that upset me was "My five year old son could do any of the jobs that women worked on."

I answered him "Mr. so-and-so, you know, I have a 3-year old nephew who could do your job. Because all you can do is say "No" and he can say that as good as you do." There was silence in the room and I was never afraid again to take on anyone with whom I was negotiating.

* * *

As more Negroes were hired in the factory, there were incidents that had to be handled by shop stewards. I was very surprised when a group of white women came to me and said

they had a grievance, they did not want to use the same toilets as the Negro women, only they used the N word.

I looked at them in disgust and gave them a lecture about discrimination. How an injustice against anyone is an injustice against all of us. I told them to get out our union's constitution which prohibits discrimination against many groups, including because of race. I also told them that various directives from the Federal Government also prohibit any kind of discrimination.

My words fell on deaf ears. They said if I wouldn't handle the grievance they would go above my head, contact the union board member and go to union headquarters, if necessary. They said they had already gone to management but got no satisfaction.

I told them, "Be my guest." They angrily asked "What are we supposed to do if we don't want to use the same toilets as the Negro women?" I told them they could always go outside the building. But my position was firm. They did go above my head, but thank goodness they got the same answer wherever they went.

I thought about this incident when I was asked by the union to go to another building because the office women were refusing to use the same toilets as the factory women. The company was trying to accommodate the office women, but it would mean building more toilets which they did not intend to do.

I first talked to the factory women to get their side of the story. I asked about the toilets, whether they may be at fault by messing up the toilets more than the office workers. Their answers were that they are just as clean as the office workers except for their clothes. They wore long aprons over their regular clothes. But they said that they would take these aprons off when they went to the toilet.

I made up a written report stating that the office workers had no reason to refuse to use the same toilets. I thought this was another example of subtle discrimination that was inherent

in Mrs. Holmes telling me that office workers were a better class of people. The perpetuating of this class distinction does a disservice to many good people.

* * *

During union membership meetings under the "good and welfare" part of the agenda, we were constantly lectured to by a retiree. His name was VanDerSee. He was a very thin man and he would plead with us to remember the pensioners in our negotiations.

His talks were usually at the end of a busy meeting and we were all tired. We listened politely and applauded him but didn't pay too much attention. We had enough of our own problems to be concerned about.

In researching the union newspapers, I came upon this article that condenses his many appeals to us.

GE PENNY-PINCHING PENSIONS CRITICIZED BY OLD TIMERS TRYING TO LIVE ON THEM.

Pensioners compared notes on the hardships caused by their low pensions A newly-formed group voted to meet regularly at the union hall.

One pensioner told the story of a party being given for pensioners at the plant, and his being asked to call for another old-timer. He stopped at the man's home, saw it in darkness, and was bout to go on, thinking no one was at home. Just to make sure, he rang the doorbell. The door opened, and there in darkness, was the old timer he was supposed to pick up. His pension did not allow him to have lights, the man explained. Another pensioner brought along a letter from GE explaining he would get all his pension from the federal government because his federal social security payment would be about $29 a month and

the GE monthly rate would be only $27.94. It was years before the union was able to negotiate with the company to also give the G.E. pension in addition to Social Security.

The GE official who wrote the letter had finished up, "I personally congratulate you on your long and honorable term of service, and express to you our appreciation of that service." The meeting voted to invite speakers from the Social Security Board to future meetings, and decided to write letters to congressmen in favor of liberalized social security and against anti-labor legislation.

The fight for adequate pensions still goes on 50 years after VanDerSee lectured us. I am eternally grateful to my brothers and sisters in the union who struggled and sacrificed to make my life better. They were the true heroes and heroines of their day. All worker's lives are better because of them. What a great legacy they left us.

But we are still picketing the company and carrying signs stating: *"GE, Why are you forsaking your pensioners?"; "GE Brings good things to everyone except pensioners"; "Retirees need Cost-of-Living Raises"; "GE, Share our huge billion dollars pension with us."*

Photo 5: Retirees picketing in 1986 for a bigger share of the General Electric Company's huge pension fund, then worth over $14 billion.

* * *

The G.E. personnel manager, Mrs. Holmes, was asked by a YWCA assistant director of adults, Bessie Humes, to recommend a factory woman worker who could become part of a new wartime program for women workers at the YWCA.

Because of my activities in company activities and being active in the G.E. Athletic Association, Mrs. Holmes called me and asked me to meet Bessie. She said Mrs. Simonds, a G.E. Personnel Counselor, would accompany me.

My first reaction was "I don't want to be bothered." My information about the YWCA was negative. I had heard that they discriminated against Negroes and that its board of directors were a group of tea-drinking women with white gloves who had no idea about the real world and most of them were wives of G.E. "big shots." Mrs. Holmes persisted, and I finally agreed to attend this meeting. I later found out that she was active in the YWCA.

We met after I got out of work at four in the afternoon. Bessie talked to me about the Y's effort to foster "Industrial Girls clubs" and other programs in which she thought I might be interested. I told her I didn't want to belong to an organization which professes to be Christian yet is exclusive and discriminates against Negroes in their residence, in their swimming pool, and gym. That the Negroes who do belong to the YW have to meet in segregated meetings.

She told me that even though some of my accusation were true, steps were being taken to end discrimination in the YWCA.

(Racism -- I was very upset when I read articles about lynching of Negroes in the South; how it was accepted behavior and very seldom was anyone arrested or tried for this heinous crime. I hurt when I read about slavery and how Negroes were treated worse than animals, that they were sold on the auction block and had no say or recourse in their own lives, how children

were wrenched from their mothers' arms and sold, that mothers would never see her child again.

I wondered how this great country of ours which expounded the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness could still allow this form of discrimination and cruelty to exist, that any person could be treated as a second-class citizen. But then again, I as a woman was treated as a second-class citizen. I felt a special kind of kinship with anyone who did not enjoy first-class treatment in our country.

I read about the laws in effect in the South of "White only" rest rooms and water fountains. Negroes had to use separate facilities which in most cases were not as good as the "White only" ones. How Negroes could only ride in the back of the bus. I was so proud of my brother who was in the Navy. While on furlough, he told my father and me that when he got on the buses in the South, he would sit in the back of the bus. My father's reaction was "be careful, remember you are breaking the law.")

Bessie continued her answer to me. She said that the Schenectady YWCA had opened its physical education facilities to Negroes in 1942; in 1888 the Schenectady Y was organized to work with young immigrant women arriving from Europe who needed housing and fitness and Bible reading; that the Y movement was really committed to ending discrimination.

She talked about the history of the YWCA in fighting against child labor. In 1920, the Y developed the National Industrial Conference for Working Women". This was the prelude for the formation of the YWCA Industrial Clubs for women; it marked the beginning of YWCA public policy programs that supported the eight-hour work day, prohibition of night work, and the right of women to organize.

She continued "All these resolutions helped working women in their struggles for a better life. And they should help make your life better." She was happy to tell me, "During the 1932 National Convention a public policy was supported which

shall be effective against the menace of lynching and mob violence. You see, we are trying to address the concerns that you and many people have in regard to racism."

All her statements made no difference to me. I had closed my ears and my mind. I was intent on not listening. The words were good but I thought where were the actions? All I wanted to do was end this meeting.

At times our discussion became so heated that Mrs. Simonds expressed dismay at my strong words. My answer to her was that I had not asked for the meeting. I only came to please Mrs. Holmes. I finally got up to leave and thanked Bessie for her time. I will never forget her response. She got up from her chair, looked me straight in the eye and said "Helen, I believe as much in the YWCA as I do in God"

I was taken aback. I stared at her and said "There must be something special about this organization to make you believe so strongly. O.K., I will agree to come again to see what there is about this organization that you feel is so special". She invited me to a meeting of the Industrial Girls committee. This started my relationship with this great women's movement. I became involved and recruited many other women to also join. (During these meetings, Bessie gave me a detailed history of the YWCA now included in appendix #2)

This was an answer to my searching for some place where working women, but especially factory workers, could spend their leisure time in pleasant, safe surroundings with people who cared about them. I became very active in the Industrial Girls Committee which led to also being asked to join the Legislative committee and the Employed Womens committee.

These committees included women of all backgrounds and financial status. Our views were respected and we felt welcome. I also met with some Negro women and they told me that they wanted to meet in their "own" meetings. I could relate

to this because I felt safer in meetings with my peers. Also I felt better meeting only with women.

It was while being involved in meetings, discussions and other activities in the Y that I was able to improve my speaking skills and feel better about myself and more confident.

In almost all of my other activities I was the only female in a group of men and did not feel equal. We had been programmed to believe that we should be subservient to men. That our place was in the home. And some even thought the best way to take care of a woman was to keep her pregnant and barefoot. The man was boss. A woman should obey her husband. Her role in life was to be a good mother and wife.

Girls in high school were counseled to take the commercial course so that they could work before marriage to earn their own keep and supplement their families income until they got married. If the family had any money but only enough to send one child to college and there was a boy in the family, he would be given this opportunity. After all, a college education would be wasted on a woman if her role in life was to be a wife and a mother. I met a woman who was enrolled in college but after two years had to leave because her younger brother had graduated from high school and there was only enough money to send one child to college. So of course, the son was chosen.

Industry and society perpetuated this discrimination against women. Women could only work on certain jobs. Of course these jobs paid less than male jobs. (That is, unless a male was under the age of 21 in GE. In that case the male was paid the same as a woman).

But GE also had another discriminatory system. They would assign points to jobs based on the requirements of the job both for men and women. After the points were assigned, the GE job evaluation manual stated that payment of the points is on the following basis: For female operators, the value shall be two-thirds of the value for adult male workers." Note: males

under the age of 21 were also two-thirds of the value for adult male workers.

Women could not even ask to go on so-called men's jobs until during the war when over thirty-five percent of the workers were women. They could never hope for promotions above their "woman's rates". Women even had a different seniority system in G.E. No wonder I did not feel equal. Women who finally worked on so-called "men's jobs" knew that after the war was over, they would have to give up these jobs.

Discrimination hurts. It destroys people's self esteem and relegates them to a second-class position in society. As a white female programmed by society to feel inferior, I felt in some small way that I could relate to the inhuman, terrible, humiliating way that Negroes were treated. I vowed early in life that I would speak out against all kinds of discrimination.

I found the Y a vehicle which was working to correct discrimination. I was delighted when I first read:

> *The YWCA's purpose which provides the dynamics for action, new insights and new relationships--we also have an advocacy role to overcome practices and to effect change in areas where people, but especially women, are not provided the opportunity to achieve their full potential. We are concerned that all women achieve self-determined social change. We join together in the struggle for peace and justice, freedom and dignity for all people." It is an organization where women are provided with the loving, caring atmosphere to achieve their full potential.*

While we didn't immediately make any close friends with the other women in the YWCA, as we became better acquainted, we developed some beautiful and long-lasting friendships. We also brought our viewpoints and our life's experiences into the

fabric of the Y and everyone was enriched as we shared each other's cultures and lives.

It wasn't always easy being with different people. I remember a meeting of the Legislative Committee where we were discussing current affairs, and the chairperson, who was a wife of a G.E. executive said, "Unions were getting too strong and should be regulated by the anti-trust laws."

I was angry with her statement but because I was angry I wouldn't respond. I thought "Who am I to argue with a the wife of a G.E. executive?"

After the meeting, Bessie asked, "Why didn't you argue with her? You know that she was wrong." I told Bessie that I was angry and I wasn't sure of myself. I didn't know exactly how to answer her. But I vowed to research the matter and be prepared the next time we met.

The speaker and I met many times after that and I was able to explain my thoughts to her. Unions did not have to be governed by any anti-trust laws. They were democratic organizations and membership-controlled -- quite different from companies that were only controlled by a few men. We became good friends and shared many ideas. We educated each other.

She did say during one of our meetings that any organization is only as good as the people who belong to it--whether it is the YWCA or the union. She indirectly strengthened my decision to become more active in my union.

I was elected to go to the 1946 national YWCA convention with nine other delegates. I was elated and excited when I attended a special meeting of Industrial Girls. There were over 500 women from throughout the country. We discussed many bills before Congress and passed motions to go home and advocate for laws that helped all people.

But I will never forget this convention. This was the convention that adopted the "Interracial charter" which stated, "Wherever there is injustice on the basis of race...our protests

must be clear and our labor for its removal vigorous and steady" Wow!!! This in 1946!!

The discussion was emotional and heated, with Southern delegates saying while they may agree with the statement personally they would not be able to live with it when they went home because of segregation and discrimination. After many hours of debate, the charter was adopted.

There were many other great issues discussed such as discrimination against women, child labor, voting rights, and so on. But they were overshadowed by the Interracial Charter.

From this day on, I fell in love with the YWCA and committed myself to work with and for this great organization. I had really found a new friend.

* * *

G.E. received a contract to build a part for the U.S. government. This part was so secret that the company had to build a special room inside the Campbell Avenue Plant. It was named the green room because it was painted green. A person had to have special clearance and a special badge in order to work in this room. Only those with badges could enter the room.

During lunch half-hours when the workers from the green room ate with other workers, they told stories about the mean foreman and less than desirable working conditions. Many of us counted our blessings that we did not have to work inside of this "notorious" place.

I was surprised when one day the union executive board member asked me if he could appoint me as shop steward temporarily until they could find someone inside the room to agree to run for shop steward. He said the women in the room were too scared and intimidated and afraid of reprisals if they dared to criticize the foreman.

My first response was "No way. Why should I take on this headache?" But as time went on and I heard more stories

about incidents in the room and the foreman running rough-shod over the women, I reconsidered. I couldn't stand seeing the tension and fear in the womens eyes. No one should have to work under such conditions. But the final argument to myself to accept this appointment was the following question. "What if I were to be transferred into that room on a permanent basis? There but for the grace of God, go I." I know that in order for me to fight injustice, it is easier if I am not personally and emotionally involved.

My appointment was confirmed. When I formally introduced myself to the foreman as his shop steward, he was sweet as apple pie. He made small talk and than said, "You know, Helen, I have a resource where I can get all the cigarettes I want" (cigarettes were hard to get during the war). I said "Good, enjoy them. In the first place, I do not smoke and even if I did, I wouldn't want any cigarettes from you. All I want is for you to treat the women fairly, live up to the union contract and we will get along just fine."

The executive board member called a meeting of the women at noon time and introduced me to them. He told them if there were any problems or questions-to get in touch with me. They could only leave the room to go to the bathroom; on their break or during their lunch hour. So we arranged that if anyone wanted to see me, the material handler would come and get me.

I met with the women several times as a group. They told me about certain incidents but they were afraid to complain on an individual basis. They worked on a conveyor which was set up to operate at a certain speed which determined how fast they had to work to make out on piece work. The members told me that the foreman would slyly walk by the controls and set up the speed. But we had no way of proving this.

I wrote the following summary about the "reputation of the Green Room.

REPUTATION

1. Women go home before they will go in there.
2. Call it the concentration camp of Campbell Avenue Plant.
3. Members of the War Production Council have been fighting since Nov. for ventilation and better lights. Ventilation O.K. since Charlie Diaz got in there. Lights are promised--heaven knows when.

Attitude of company safety man was that if prices were better the women wouldn't complain about conditions. Finally got vents put in after much complaints. Conditions being cleared up after 6 months at last.

4. Foreman Folger's--attitude

A. Bosses instead of leading and asking.

B. Petition handed in about 5 months ago to Mrs. Simonds and Mr. Jones about his attitude. Women have been in to see Mrs. Simonds constantly about it.

C. Keeps misinforming women about:
Prices when job has not been timed.

D. Women have to work until 12 and 3:3O by their benches.

E. Almost everything he says can be taken wrong--women in constant upset and under nervous tension because they have lost faith in the foreman and the company because of his attitude..

F. Checks up on women going to see Mrs. Simonds. Doesn't trust any of them--they resent it.

G. Yesterday after an argument with some women regarding the work--he told them, "If they don't like it they can quit".

H. After a union meeting as a result of which he was slapped down, he told the women they were bunch of lemons and the lousiest bunch of women he ever had to work with.

I. Checked up on several women who went to the hospital. He called the hospital.

J. Women bawled out because they take too long to go to the toilet.

K. He has no faith in the women. Told me they weren't working as hard as they could.

ABSENTEEISM
FRI. 30 OUT OF 159
SAT. 29 " " "
MON. 33 " " "
TUES 23 " " "
WED. 19 " " "
THUR. 12 " " "

L. Set up now--women sitting too close together.

M. General attitude is that they have been lied to and promised everything--nothing been done.

N. Women are thoroughly disgusted and don't care about fighting anymore.

O. Both Mr. Simpson, General Foreman; Charles Diaz, Assistant General Foreman; and Mr. Fred Jones, Asistant Sperintendent have been told about Folger's attitude.

P. Between three and five women being sent home sick every day for last week.

There were many grievances also handed in. They are included in the appendix #3.

I also handed in suggestions about this room which give an overall sense of some of the conditions the women had to work under. They covered such subjects as; Lack of Ventilation, Inadequate lighting, Need for more exits, Need for fire drills, Unsafe equipment and Unsafe working conditions. Details in appendix #4.

I will never forget two incidents. As I built up the case against the foreman, I was advised by the union that the company wasn't paying any attention to our complaints. Since it would take time to go through the grievance procedures, if I wanted some immediate action, I should recommend to the women that they stage a short sit-down strike to call attention to their angry feelings.

The women refused, feeling that because they were working on parts for the war effort a sit-down strike would hold up production. I admired them for their stand.

Imagine my surprise when one day the material handler came out and told me that the girls were refusing to work and had called a strike all by themselves. I ran into the room and there they were looking very pleased with themselves. I asked "What happened? You should have talked to me about this to make it official. Exactly what caused you to take this action at this time?"

Their answer was not surprising. "It was too damn hot to work." There was no ventilation in the room and it had become unbearable. One of our complaints to management had been the lack of ventilation. Campbell Avenue itself was hot in the summertime but the building of this special room within the plant made it that more humid and hot. We had asked for fans and to date had not seen any.

I immediately got in touch with the executive board member who called union headquarters to alert them to the situation. He also called the assistant superintendent, Mr. Jones. We were pleased when Mr. Jones instructed the material handler and the porter to come up to his office and take his fans. After they were connected, the women agreed to go back to work. And we pursued our demands that more fans be purchased.

I thought how funny it was that it took something like this to give the women the backbone to pull a strike. They wouldn't strike about other problems that affected them emotionally and financially.

* * *

After the end of the war, I was transferred to the Industrial Control Department in Building 69 on another piece work job. During the first week that I was on the job, I asked a lot of questions about the way jobs were handed out, and why

workers did not get the vouchers listing the price of the operation before they started a job. The ultimate ideal is to have all jobs in negotiated standard prices. But in this department there were many special or temporary prices. Workers should negotiate with the foreman before they work on a job. If the price is not right, the operator has the option to refuse to do the job and get the shop steward involved.

I was only on the job a week when the women asked me to become their shop steward. I said, "Wait a minute. I need to get my feet wet". At that time, the union would pay a shop steward, board member or officer a fee for signing up new members. It seemed that this was all the union leadership cared about in this department.

But conditions were so bad, and I too was going to be affected, that I agreed to become their shop steward. My friend, Bert, also agreed to become the shop steward in another foreman's area.

The Assistant General foreman ran these two departments. He was a very clever man. He had formerly been a shop steward and knew the contract and also how to manipulate people. For instance, every time an individual came to him, he would demean the person by saying, "You are the only person complaining. How is it that everyone else is satisfied except you?" The worker would feel that she was the only one complaining. They wouldn't even tell their co-workers about their complaint because they thought no one else cared.

This department violated many clauses of the union contract. The workers were being exploited. They worked hard and were just barely able to make their minimum rate. If they couldn't make the minimum, they would have to negotiate with the foreman and he would act as if he was giving them makeup money out of the goodness of his heart.

The contract called for piece work prices to be negotiated with the union through time studies. When there was agreement about the time study, a standard price was put on the job. This

was to be done within a reasonable time after new jobs were developed. Before standard prices were established, temporary or special prices were allowed, or the people were paid average earnings. In this department the temporary prices were too low and to compound the problem, the vouchers were not available before the person went on the job. A worker was at a disadvantage trying to get made up after finishing a job. I worked on a job which took me about eight hours to complete. The job should have paid about $5.00. The temporary price was less than $3.00. And to add insult to injury, this same job when it came out again would have a different temporary price on it.

Another area where the company chiseled was on how they paid different workers the day work rate. Day work would be paid if a worker had to wait for any reason when ready to go on a job, and also for other cases. The job classification determined the amount that was paid for day work. In this department, different day rates were paid to workers on the same classification. This allowed the company to take care of the brown-nosers and those who did not complain.

A shop steward needs the cooperation of the entire group and when there are some people getting preferential treatment, it is difficult to fight the company.

I couldn't believe what I found out about this area. My first recommendation to the women was not to work on a job until the prices were on the vouchers. The women were afraid in the beginning but finally followed my advice, even though the foreman gave them a hard time about refusing to work without a price. But this gave the women and the union the opportunity to negotiate a price before a job was started.

These were difficult jobs to price because we worked on quantities of one to twenty units. The company told the union that they wanted to negotiate a table from which they could get the elements to price individual operations. This process was started.

In order to file grievances about the violations to the contract, I needed documentation. Fortunately the women kept their triplicates of the piece work prices and the day work vouchers. I collected hundreds of them. On a Sunday night I had all these triplicates covering the entire living room rug as I sorted and separated them according to operation, shop order and day work.

When my father came home, he told me, I was some kind of a nut. It was bad enough that I had to join the union but to also become a shop steward and bite the hand that feeds me was crazy.

My grievances to the foreman on the first level of negotiations were not answered satisfactorily, so the case was moved to the next step of negotiations. The business agent couldn't believe me when I described the problems I was having. When we went to Building 41, I took out my brief case full of the triplicates and covered the entire table with them. The company had to admit we were right. The day rates were standardized; workers did not have to start work until they had the vouchers, and the foreman was more amenable to the women and to me as shop steward.

The negotiations of the table took so much of my time as shop steward that I kept a daily diary of shop orders, operations, and results to verify the amount of loss time the union paid me. Also I was pleased that many times when a dispute would arise, and I was able to show how we had settled similar prices in the past, that my foreman would agree with my argument.

It was in this area that I learned a great lesson. There was a grievance that affected several women in my area and in Bert's area. We made out the grievance in the names of the people affected and asked them to sign the grievance which they did. The day the grievance was scheduled to be discussed in the assistant general foreman's office, when Bert and I went into the office, there were no workers to join us. The assistant general foreman had scared them off. We argued but he laughed at us

saying that we were trouble makers. The members did not back us up. In order to save the day, I crossed out the names of the people on the grievance and wrote "group". He said, "You can't do that!" I said, "I just did." And we proceeded to discuss the grievance.

Bert was so angry. as we walked out of the office, she said "You and your union. You are nuts to care about these women. They are chickens and don't deserve to be represented." She talked about resigning. Of course, I was also angry. But I reminded her that we were also affected by the working conditions in these department.

When we returned to our work stations, the women avoided looking at us. From that day on, whenever possible, I would put "group" on any grievance that affected the entire group.

Several days later, the women came up to Bert and me and one by one, with tears in their eyes, apologized for their behavior. They said it would never happen again and asked, "please do not resign as shop stewards." Bert and I were happy these women finally got some backbone because it takes a united group to take on the company.

Our department moved to Building 81 and it took years and many meetings to finally agree to a table which was used to price individual jobs.

* * *

Another time, the material handler came out and told me that two women were sitting by their bench crying. I went into the room and saw two women who were working in the corner of the room on individual operations. I asked them "What is the matter?" Between sobs they told me that they had claustro-phobia and has asked the foreman to move them out of the corner, but he refused. He came over to me in anger, and asked "What is the problem?"

I told him that I am sending the women up to the nurses' office to calm down. He argued with me and I said, "I don't care what you say, these women are going to see the nurse before they get all the women in this room upset."

I told the women to leave and they did. The nurse gave them some tranquilizers and I went to see them and asked "Why didn't you call me when he refused to move you? You are both grandmothers, you should haven't let yourselves get into this situation."

The nurse contacted the foreman and urged him to move the women away from that corner. As incidents occurred, I sometimes wondered, where did I get so much nerve to do some of the things I did? I concluded that sometimes circumstances force you to do things you ordinarily wouldn't do.

* * *

Suggestions cover many subjects. They reveal background information about working conditions. I had handed in suggestions that covered areas outside of the green room. I have included a summary in appendix no. 4

CHAPTER 4: *IMPORTANT ISSUES AFFECTING WORKING WOMEN*

May 26, 1944
Women play real role in war effort

Dec. 15, 1945
Equal pay case before the war labor board

Myths: Answers to companies' reasons for paying women less: Women are young temporary workers. They quit after a few years to get married. Greater turnover of women.
Fact: many women are over 35 years of age and had held present jobs for at least five years.

Myth: Women don't have families to support. They work for pin money. General sociological factors justify lower pay for women.
Fact: one of every four women workers have children under 18 whom they must support. One out of every five is either widowed, divorced or separated from her husband. Many have to work because they are war widows, wives of disabled veterans, or of men now in the army. But most women work because their husband's pay is inadequate to support the family needs. Over 90% of all women work because they have to support themselves of their families.

Myth: women aren't as strong as men. They need extra help for heavy lifting, etc.
Fact: the over-emphasis on physical effort is a trick often used by companies to justify sex differentials. Actually, physical effort alone has little to do with the value of a job on the company's own scales, which place common labor digging ditches at the lower end and tool and die maker at the top. But in a survey by the women's bureau pointed out that that: "the

constant arm and finger movements involved in many women's jobs were, in the course of a day, is probably more wearing in many cases than the occasional lifting of a 30 or 40 pound box. The jobs done by women "often involve close attention to work and concentration that is fatiguing."

Myth: company states their rates for women are in line with established community practice. Industry has always paid women less. We're justified because every company does it." *Fact*: if this contention were sound, it would follow that no exploitation of any group could be ended (saved by voluntary action) if it constituted the common practice of the employers in the locality. The real question is whether any exploitation exists. If it does exist, it should be ended...the claim of community and industry practice cannot be advanced as a sound reason for doing nothing to correct an injustice which patently exists. Moreover the company as a whole or dominant employer in the community in many instances, may have themselves initiated or supported the practice.

The real reason for lower rates for women is because women's job opportunities had been relatively limited in industry in the past, it had been possible to get them to work for less than men, and employers took advantage of this fact to underpay women.

* * *

ARTICLES FROM LOCAL NEWSPAPER

UE HONORED BY STARS AND STRIPES AND THE ARMY-NAVY "E" BANNER

On February 9, 1944, *Stars and Stripes*, the G.I. overseas newspaper stated editorially: *"It's gratifying to note the excellent record made by the UE. Topping a long list of achievements is*

a record of no strikes since Pearl Harbor -- the electrical workers have given their solemn pledge . . they have kept their pledge."

* * *

Schenectady works was one of many shops awarded the Army-Navy "E" banner signifying great production accomplishments. In Washington, UE leaders served on the War Production Board with other government agencies directing the war effort. President Roosevelt and General Eisenhower were but two of the national leaders who cited UE for its patriotic accomplishments during the war.

* * *

In 1943, Local 301's vigorous campaign to end discrimination against women resulted in the upgrading of hundreds of women's jobs. This Local 301 project was the first plant survey of women's rates in the GE chain.

In 1944 the fight went to the government. A second survey of women's jobs was made by Local 301. Hundreds of grievances were filed and won. When management balked, Local 301 took the case to the War Labor Board of the U.S. Government. The government upheld Local 301's position and ordered GE to end discrimination against women. Again, hundred of Schenectady women workers won upgrading wages. Our precedent-setting victory on this case opened the way for thousands of women all over the country to win similar wage cases.

* * *

ARTICLES FROM LOCAL 301 NEWSPAPER

There were many great articles in our local's newspapers. They covered many subjects that I was really interested in. Some of the subjects covered were:

Women doing men's work at lower pay in transmitter
Men's work--women's pay
Equal pay for women on men's jobs
Second survey of women's jobs
The Negro and the union

WOMEN PLAY REAL ROLE IN WAR PLANTS [Article from *Electrical Union News*, May 26, 1944]

It has long been thought that an article should be written in praise of women war workers. So many people picture the women war worker as a gay Rosie the Riveter, happily chewing gum and wearing a tight fitting sweater because movies and short story writers have so pictured her. How very surprised the public would be if they were to have the opportunity to see women war workers in action.

This article, written by a woman in G.E. was prompted by a very spirited discussion which took place between her and a gentleman of the press. He believed, as most men do, that the woman's place was in the home and that she is not capable of doing a man's work. How very wrong he was!!

Women conscientiously do their work as well and in some cases better than men can. They have a patience that comes from long years of trials and tribulations and the burden that all housewives have of making ends meet with very little to do it with. There are very few women war shirkers. Too many of the women have sons and husbands in the service to even think of being lazy. This G.E. woman writes as follows:

"I work with a group of women in building No. 73 who are typical of most women defense workers. Most of these women are married and have children. They rise early in the morning in order to send their husbands off to work and their children to school. Their remaining hours before reporting to their shop are spent in doing their house work. They have very little time in which to rest or play before reporting for work on the second shift."

"Working with these women has given me a great deal of respect for them. They report to work smiling and cheerfully plunge into their work uncomplainingly. They are earning every cent of their wages in the room of boiling water and stinging acid. These women are helping to speed the war effort immensely."

"Don't think men respect women, however, for their efforts. I am single myself, and only a single girl could know how cutting the word "labor" uttered in derision by the lips of a handsome Marine could sound to a weary girl who had just completed a hard day's work. This happened to me as I was waiting for the bus on State Street one night. I suppose my slacks and G.E. button so classified me...as his uniform classified him a Marine. If it weren't for women war workers, the immense production which the war has brought about would not have been possible.

Many of the women also give blood at the blood donor center.

WOMEN DOING MEN'S WORK AT LOWER PAY IN TRANSMITTER 5/30/42

Bringing in the fore the increasingly pressing problem of equal pay for equal work, the members of the Assembly in Transmitter 89 met at the Union headquarters to thresh out the problem of women's vs. men's jobs. the women turned out in

large numbers to discuss recent developments within the department.

MEN'S WORK--WOMEN'S PAY

From information brought out at the meeting it seems that girls have been put into the assembly line along with men and being given increasingly harder work with no increase in wages over their former rates. In cases where the girls have replaced men who have been sent elsewhere, the job has been cut some thirty-five cents an hour. To show the type of work the girls are handling one of the women in the group showed her blistered hands. It was obviously not women's work in the usually accepted terms.

TO TAKE SERIOUS PART IN ORGANIZATION

On Brother Jandreau's suggestion the girls agreed to arrange another meeting of the entire transmitter department to go over the complete problem and formulate an acceptable policy. The girls promised to mobilize all the women and take a much more active part in the Union. It was planned to hold regular weekly meetings to solve the increasing number of difficulties of this expanding section of the plant.

EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN ON MEN'S JOBS 8/24/42

All jobs and occupations generally performed by men shall be recognized as men's jobs and women assigned to such jobs shall receive rates of pay equal to rates received by men under similar circumstances. Women employees who apply for men's jobs will be given an opportunity to qualify for men's jobs in preference to hiring new female employees for such jobs.

With the trend definitely towards women taking over more and more men's jobs in industry because of men leaving

for service in the army, this clause assumes great importance in order to maintain the present standards on men's jobs.

Article in 12/15/45 *Electrical Union News*

The Equal Pay case which has been pending before the National War Labor Board came to a head last week with the report of the national UE office that the General Electric Company had taken an arbitrary stand on the National War Labor Board's recommendation for settlement of the case. The recommendations were as follows:

1. The parties shall negotiate a formula for narrowing the immediate future, unreasonable wage rate differentials now existing between men's and women's jobs as such. The Board suggests that in such negotiations the parties consider one or more of the following approaches, or a combination thereof.

a. Reduction of the number of job classifications below common labor in each plant; establishment of a specified ratio, or maximum cents per hour differential, between the lowest male job rate and the lowest female job rate for all plants; adjustment of rates above common labor in each plant so as to balance the wage structure; or

b. Establishment of a fund for each plant involved, based on specified sum per hour per woman employee on women's jobs, to be used for the purpose of narrowing differentials,
the parties to bargain collectively with reference to the allocation of the fund in each plant, either without specific guide posts or with guide posts as suggested in paragraph 2 below; or

c. In conjunction with (b) above, immediate payments of a specified part of the fund to all women on women's jobs presently employed, or a minimum guarantee to all women on women's jobs presently employed and employed on the date the

fund is finally allocated.

2. The Board approves the principle of a single evaluation line for all jobs in the plant regardless of whether the jobs are performed by men or by women. As the basis for a long-range wage structure for men's and women's jobs, the Board recommends that the parties undertake jointly the selection of key jobs in each plant, without regard to whether the jobs are performed by men or by women, and alignment of all of the jobs in the plant accordingly, so a single key sheet, for all jobs in the plant; therefore, narrowing of differentials generally, and elimination of inequalities between particular job classifications. If either party has already prepared plans for a single line or key sheet, it is suggested that such plans be discussed in connection with the prompt disposition of the issue in the pending case.

3. If the parties have not reached an agreement within ten days from the date of receipt of these recommendations, the Board will proceed immediately to issue final and specific recommendations along the lines already discussed by the Board with the parties."

The Board also voted unanimously to take final action on Monday, December 10, on all issues in the case still outstanding at that time.

At a meeting arranged by the union with the company, which was attended by Leo Jandreau, the Union attempted to obtain a concrete proposal from the Company on the following basis in line with the Board's recommendations:

1.--A straight increase in cents per hour across the board to all women on women's jobs.

2.--Agreement on the maximum number of cents difference between the lowest men's job rates and the lowest women's job rates.

3.--A reduction of the number of job classifications below common labor.

The Company refused to make any specific proposals on the above basis, or on the basis of any of the approaches to the question recommended by the Board. The Company tried to evade the Board ruling by talking about local negotiations on the subject.

The Committee regarded this attitude of the Company as an attempted evasion of settling the issue.

Inasmuch as the company still continued its defiance of the National War Labor Board recommendations as this paper went to press, it was anticipated the Board would issue a final ruling on the Equal Pay issue December 8 and all other issues on Dec. 10.

* * *

THE NEGRO AND THE UNION

THE QUESTION -- by Troy Snipes, building 48

Some seem to think that when a Negro asks a union official to help him get a better job or to correct some grievances, he is asking for a favor, but that is not true. He is only asking for rights and privileges that others are getting and he is helping to pay for, and the moment this is understood half of the Negro's problems will be solved. I have been told that if the Negro would attend meetings it would help him in many ways.

I know that this is true, but we can't ignore the fact that there are hundreds of others receiving the rights and privileges that the Negro is asking for and never climbed the stairs of 301. Anyone wishing to write on or criticism this article is invited to do so. For good criticism is food for thought and bad criticism reflects only the one who writes it.

THE ANSWER – by the editors. [condensed]

We have considered the above as this week's question because we feel a definite clarification is needed on the point raised by Brother Snipes.

The union officials and the definite policies of this organization, are in full accord with Brother Snipe's statement that if a Negro member of our union requests the correction of a grievance or an aid in upgrading, he is within his rights and privilege as a union member.

It certainly is a misconception on the part of some of our members that a Negro is asking for a favor when requesting the correction of a justified grievance.

The objects of the CIO, as those of Local 301, are -- "To bring about the effective organization of the working men and women of America regardless of race, creed, color, or nationality, and to unite them for common action into labor unions for their mutual aid and protection. [I was disappointed to see the word "sex" left out].

Local 301 is an organization of all American workers, united as its constitution and its leaders declare "regardless of race, creed, color or nationality" for the purpose of maintaining and expanding democracy and freedom.

* * *

THESE WORDS REINFORCED MY IDEAS:

It violates right order whenever capital so employs the working or wage-earning classes as to divert business and economic activity entirely to its own arbitrary will and advantage without any regard to the human dignity of the workers, the social character of economic life, social Justice and the common good. -- Pope Pius XI

If you divorce capital from labor, capital is hoarded, and labor starves. -- Daniel Webster.

Whatever there is of greatness in the United States, or indeed in any other country, is due to labor. The laborer is the author of all greatness and wealth. Without labor there would be no government, and no leading class, and nothing to preserve. -- U. S. Grant

The involvement of organized labor has helped make America a better place to live. We have been in the forefront of every fight for progress--for the public schools, for the protection of the aged, the poor, the sick and the young, and for the elimination of child labor, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions and discrimination of all kinds.

American workers and their union have played an important role in defending and extending the principles laid down in the Declaration of Independence, which became reality only through war and sacrifice. They must be defended on a daily basis or they will wither and die. -- George Meany.

Slowly we are learning that low wages for labor do not necessarily mean high profits for capital. We are learning that productivity of labor is not measured alone by the hours of work, nor even by the test of physical fatigue.

What we need to deal with are not the limits to which men may go without physical exhaustion, but the limits within which they may work with zest and spirit and pride of accomplishment. When zest departs "labor becomes drudgery". When exhaustion enters, labor becomes slavery.

Employee satisfaction depends on economic security and cultural opportunities--in a word--the employee's standing as consumers--zest is partly a matter of physical condition, but It is largely influenced by mental reaction.

Are we doing well with our lives? Are we providing for our families--not merely clothes and food and shelter while we are working, but an insurance for them when our working time is ended either by age, disability or death?

Are we providing more cultural opportunities for ourselves and our children? In a word are we free men?

No man is free who can provide only for physical needs. He must also be in a position to take care of cultural opportunities.-- Owen D. Young, former Chairman of the Board of G.E. at the dedication of the present campus of the Harvard School of Business administration in 1927.

* * *

CHAPTER 5: THE 1946 STRIKE

Photo 6: Picketing during the 1946 strike

On December 13, 1945, a strike vote was conducted by the government under the provisions of the wartime Smith act. Our union had demanded 25 cents an hour in wage increases to make up for the 3 1/2 years during World War II when wages were frozen by government order and when union members had voluntarily pledged not to strike as their commitment to the million of American working who were "over there" fighting the war against Hitlerism, Japanese militarism and Italian Fascism. During the war, the cost of living had increased 45% but wages had only increased 15%.

While wages were frozen, the company's profits were not. During the war, G.E. along with many other companies were guaranteed their costs plus a certain profit. The corporations had

intended to ride out the strikes because they had $117 billion in wartime profits. Charles E. Wilson, G.E.'s CEO, had made an offer of ten percent or ten cents an hour on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

A vote was taken on January 15, 1946 – to accept Wilson's offer, or reject it and strike. By an overwhelming margin, the strike was approved. President Truman, making a last-minute effort to resolve the situation in the steel industry, had recommended an 18 1/2 cents an hour increase. CIO Philip Murray first advised our UE of his union's intention to go along with this amount and announced it publicly. U.S. Steel, the leading corporation in the industry, promptly rejected Truman's recommendation.

It was obvious that the companies were not going to budge so on January 15, 1946, Local 301 joined with the other two hundred thousand UE members and set up picket lines at the Schenectady General Electric Company. This was an unprecedented action.

In the union newspaper of January 18, 1946, the following article explained the reasons for the strike:

WHY THIS UNION MEMBER AT GE NEEDS A $2.00 INCREASE.

He's a machine operator, married, with four small children, and pays $35 a month rent.

This member kept his weekly pay checks. Here are typical examples of six weekly checks.

1943	*1945*
$48.55	*$23.73*
$58.32	*$29.02*
$64.19	*$36.17*

1.--G.E. states: With overtime that will be necessary to meet consumer demands this year, the average employee would have more "take home" pay than he had during the war.

UE-CIO ANSWERS: Long Hours of overtime will:

(1)--deprive war veterans of employment

(2)--deprive thousands of G.E. employees laid off since V-J Day, of employment.

(3)--compel workers, not yet recovered from gruelling working hours of war, to continue to be deprived of time with their families.

2.--G.E. states: It will continue its policy of paying miserly wages because the rest of the community does likewise.

UE-CIO ANSWERS: Lloyd K. Garrison, as chairman of the National War Labor Board, on December 29, 1945, made it clear in a Board ruling in a case condemning G.E. and Westinghouse companies that "the claim of community and industry practice cannot be advanced as a sound reason for doing nothing to correct an injustice."

It was in the same ruling that the WLB stated in regard to low wages paid by G.E. to its women workers that "we believe that...exploitation exists and should be ended".

3.--G.E. states: "Nothing can be gained by a strike now..."

UE-CIO ANSWERS: Our union---representing 100,000 G.E. employees--has made every possible use of collective bargaining and Government assistance to prevail upon G.E. and Westinghouse to bargain in good faith.

The companies have refused.

While UE-CIO was seeking a fair settlement, G.E. was secretly meeting with representatives of other large corporations in New York on January 9, to plot war against their employees, force down their wages and destroy their unions.

Low wages mean hard times, unemployment, and depression. UE-CIO demands $2-a-day wage and salary increases for G.E. employees

G.E. refuses to bargain in good faith.

THAT'S WHY G.E. EMPLOYEES ARE ON STRIKE!!!

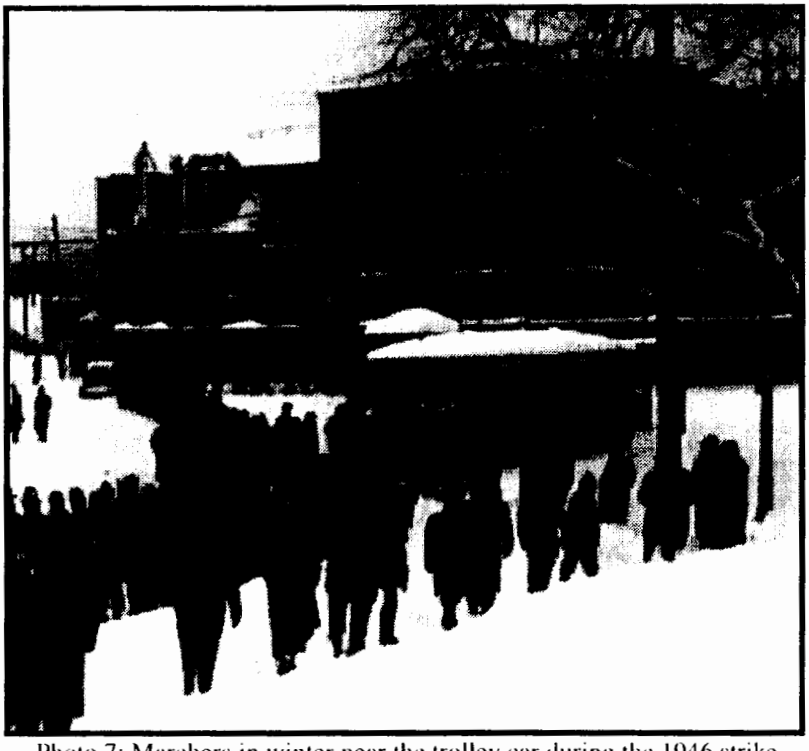


Photo 7: Marchers in winter near the trolley car during the 1946 strike.

The local executive boards set up essential committees: strike, picketing, kitchens, welfare, food for strikers' families, publicity, community relations, fund-raising, and entertainment. I was put on the strike, publicity and public relations committee.

Picket rosters were set up and each member was given a picket card which was punched when they reported to picket. The roster listed names of people, their designated times and places to report. These places included several gates at the main plant, gates at the various entrances and at buildings outside of the main plant. Board members and their stewards were responsible to assure that the areas under their jurisdiction were covered. This included calling up pickets who did not show up. A copy of one of the many rosters is enclosed.

The strike committee issued regular news releases, contacted the police, the local commissioner of social welfare, the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and other groups who could help. They met with local officials, oversaw the radio programs, and met with the religious community. Separate committees of Negroes, women, and war veterans were also set up from which many volunteers were recruited. There was a welfare committee to handle cases of striker's families who needed food, money for rent, heat, and so on.

Photo 8: Food distribution during the 1946 strike

The strike committee handled the solicitation and collection of voluntary strike funds. Other plants in the UE remaining at work contributed to the strike fund. The committee also arranged for the securing of a trolley car at the front gate of the company. This was used by the strikers to temporarily escape from the extreme cold as they fulfilled their two hour stint on the line. There was great anger when the trolley car

disappeared on January 18. The strike committee appealed to the public and finally the car was returned.

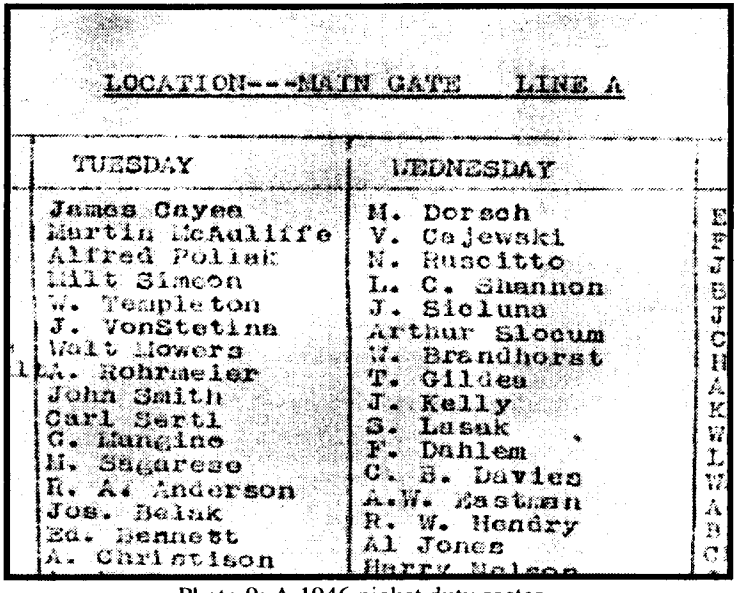
Huge containers of coffee and soup were delivered to the picket sites on a regular basis. This involved many people in the kitchen of the hall who had to prepare the food. Sandwiches were made and bakery and other foods that were donated from time to time were also given to the strikers.

Like many other workers I practically lived at the union hall. I showed up for my picketing responsibility, but saw another need, so I got permission to drive a beat-up car which one of the union members had donated. This car had loudspeakers mounted on the roof of the car. Inside the car was a record player and a microphone. My friend Bert and I took over this car. We drove from gate to gate, playing music and announcing news. Sometimes we would bring other women and we would get the strikers to join in and dance. We passed out song sheets and led the strikers in singing as they marched. Before the strike was over the strikers had learned some famous union songs: *Solidarity Forever*, *We Will Overcome*, *We Shall Not Be Moved*, *Union Maid*, *On the Good Old Picket Line*, *Joe Hill*, *Roll the Union On*, and others. Of course, we also sang *The Star Spangled Banner*, *America*, *God Bless America*, and other well-known songs. This helped to relieve the monotony of just walking the line and helped to keep morale high.

At each gate there was a big steel barrel. Wood was burned all day and night to help keep the strikers warm. It was the responsibility of another committee to keep these gates supplied with wood. Farmers and small businesses regularly contributed money and food to the strike. One man dropped off bunches of bananas on a regular basis.

Delegations of war veterans and local union officers went to see their congressmen and other legislators. Radio programs were sponsored. On February 8, 1946, more than a hundred strikers descended in a body upon City Hall and called upon the City Council to take a stand in support of the $2-a-day demand

and take steps to compel GE to settle the strike on those terms. They also presented a petition with hundreds of names to support their position.



LOCATION---MAIN GATE LINE A

TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY
James Cayea	M. Dorsch
Martin McAuliffe	V. Cejewski
Alfred Poliak	N. Ruscitto
Milt Simeon	L. C. Shannon
W. Templeton	J. Sicluna
J. VonStetina	Arthur Slocum
Walt Howers	W. Brandhorst
A. Rohrmeier	T. Gildea
John Smith	J. Kelly
Carl Serti	S. Lusak
G. Mangino	F. Dahlem
H. Sagarese	C. B. Davies
R. A. Anderson	A.W. Eastman
Jos. Belak	R. W. Hendry
Ed. Bennett	Al Jones
A. Christison	Harry Nelson

Photo 9: A 1946 picket duty roster

On February 16, 1946, hundreds of Local 301 members and friends stood outside the crowded Schenectady Court House while union attorneys locked horns with General Electric's legal staff in the first injunction suit. Leo Jandreau flanked by union attorneys George A. Marcus, Schenectady and David Scribner from New York emerged on the steps and told the crowd that the hearings had been postponed. The crowd cheered and followed their leaders to the union hall where an impromptu meeting was held.

Judge John Alexander subsequently granted the injunction intended to break the picket lines. A mass picket line was formed in reaction to the injunction. This picketing activity was the principal factor in winning the strike.

Preliminary to the 18 1/2 cents offer by G.E. was the picketing agreement in which the company recognized the complete effectiveness of the Local 301's picket lines and agreed that workers outside the striking group should enter the plant only upon proper check by union inspectors. Office and salaried workers were required to show their badges to union inspectors.

Meetings were arranged and local governments were asked to back up the strike. Only the town of Rotterdam took a position backing up the strike. The others refused.

An entertainment committee was set up and they organized entertainment for the picket lines and also at the union hall. The hall was filled with people playing cards, or just socializing and they appreciated any activities that took place at the hall.

The strike lasted 9 weeks during which the weather was the coldest in the history of the Northeast. Local 301, as the largest local, set the example. No one entered the Schenectady plant.

Picket lines were huge with 20,000 workers taking part. Only people with passes issued by Local 301's headquarters were allowed to cross the picket lines to maintain necessary equipment. In 1946 there were no repressive laws against labor. As the strike was solid, the union won the strike. They had passed the test of fire. The picket line unity could not be broken.

Wilson's original offer was rejected because he offered 18 1/2 cents an hour for men and only 15 cents an hour for women, including grandmothers, whom he called "bobbysoxers". This is the same Wilson who sought to reverse the wartime labor board ruling on equal pay for equal work that UE had won. The union continued the strike until finally Wilson agreed to also pay "bobbysoxers" the same as men.

There was a mild demonstration at the union hall when Jandreau phoned from New York at 7:10 and announced the company had offered the 18 1/2 cents raise in line with the

national pattern, and other acceptable conditions. Bill Mastriani, picket chairman, was hoisted to pickets' shoulders.

The victory message from Jandreau congratulated the picketers for their nine weeks of courageous and united struggle on the picket lines. "You have already recognized it as a victory not only for the strikers, but for the whole community and for the preservation of democracy in our land. You, by your unity and determination, won the fight. There were other important factors – the strike was called only after careful preparation. The leadership of our national leaders. The resistance to outside groups trying to divide us. The solidarity of the efforts and the high morale. The spirit of the Schenectady workers, their united stand against all efforts to provoke trouble, makes them unbeatable."

"We now turn to the job ahead as we return to our work in the plant. We have to consolidate the victory, to see to it that all workers get their full rights, and to complete enrollment of every employee under contract. We have to help the office workers organize, so that they can take their rightful place with us in improving conditions in the plant. We have to help the Alco strikers and the Transport workers win their just wage and contract demands."

"We have to use our experiences in the strike to discharge our responsibilities to the community, in fighting for the welfare of all, for price controls, for the election of true servants of the people, for the building of a genuine people's political action movement in cooperation with all of labor, with the whole community,. We must play our part in the fight to preserve democracy at home and prevent another world war."

"We have learned the lesson of the strike victory. We shall go forward--UNITED!!!"

In May, Women's rates were increased an estimated average of 3.2 cents an hour to correct, in part, the company's discrimination in rates against women. This company

adjustment resulted from union pressure to eliminate this differential--especially as a result of the case UE brought before the national War Labor Board in which G.E. was found to discriminate against and "exploit" women. (See appendix)

* * *

When the strike was over, there was a big sigh of relief by the workers. It is never easy to go on strike. It takes a lot of courage and nerve to agree to lose pay for an indeterminable time. Many workers, especially those with large families, don't make enough money to carry them for a long time. And in the background is the fear about the length of the strike; the possibility that the strike might be broken; you could lose your job; the possibility that you may be hurt or arrested on the picket line; and last but not least the extreme cold weather to be endured during this strike.

The cause must be right and worthwhile. The union members must be thoroughly informed about the issues. They have to know that the union has exhausted all means to settle the dispute before a strike vote is called for. The General Electric workers did know and understood the issues.

I met many good, fine people during the strike. It seems that adversity has a way of bringing people together. We worked together through the various committees to try to make sure that no one was hungry; couldn't pay their rent or their heating bill. The labor movement rallied around and those workers in unions who were not striking sent money to our strike fund.

I was proud of the union for the democratic way in which this strike was handled. The people were kept informed every step of the way and we joined with other national unions in the labor movement to correct the inequities of the war where the workers had taken a no-strike pledge and in a sense a freezing of their wages while the companies were paid on a cost-plus basis.

My father, of course, was very unhappy that I had gone so far as to join the strike against the company. One night he confronted me and we had a very loud and emotional argument. I was brought up to be obedient and respect your parents. But I was now over 21 and felt very deeply that what I was doing was right that I dared to ask my father "Is it true that you worked for G.E. for three days before you quit?" His answer was "Don't be impertinent".

I finally said "Pa, if you are so firm in your conviction and I am sure that I am right, neither one of us is going to change, maybe I should move out. Just tell me when you want this to happen and I will leave." His answer was "the devil has got you."

He did not ask me to move out and he shortly after developed an aneurysm. He was operated on in a New York hospital. I used up my vacation time to spend time with him during the operation and visited him each week end for about a month. He died in the hospital in September 1946.

My dreams of going to college were shattered with his death. After the war's end many people lost their jobs because war orders were cancelled.. Also as the men and women came

TERMS OF SETTLEMENT OF THE 1946 STRIKE AGAINST G.E.

Strikers will be called back without discrimination.

An 18 1/2 raise an hour to all, effective immediately.

Retroactive pay of ten cents or 10 percent for all work since January 1. (Some workers worked to assure that machines and equipment were properly maintained).

home from the service, if they had more accumulative service, they would bump people with less seniority.

I now had 5 years service and I seemed to be safe. Also I had spent all my savings on transportation and lodging and food during the time my father was in the hospital. I was now an orphan. My mother had died in 1942. My father and I were buying our home and I would have to assume the total cost of housing.

Some people say that you never win anything by striking. They are wrong. Striking is but one kind of protest, usually resorted to when all else fails. History has shown that when there was injustice, good men and women who stood up and with great sacrifice have been able to change history.

I am grateful, for instance, to the men and women who fought for decades to give me the right to vote. I am grateful to the workers who at even great risk of their lives demonstrated and join strikes for better, safer, decent working conditions. It took a lot of courage and fortitude to strike before the Wagner Act because people were fired and blacklisted for such actions. I am grateful for all those who worked and lobbied to make the Wagner Act the law of the land. The protection of this law gave the workers the right to organize and form unions. And what about our brave forefathers who left England to come to America with the dream of a better life.

Since this strike, the union has continued to register many victories and make important gains for the membership, on the job, as well as in contract settlements. The 18 1/2 cents an hour increase in pay in 1946 meant that all wages, all increases from then on would be on this higher rate. This affected not only hourly rates, but vacation pay, sick pay, holidays, pensions, etc. But the most important result of this strike was that the company learned that our members were behind the union and we were a force to be reckoned with.

I wondered what the future held for me. If I had a crystal ball, I would have seen that I would become very active, even

being elected as an officer. I would be red-baited like all officers. I would become a leader in the fight for equal rights for women. In my most horrible nightmare I would never dream that G.E. would tear down over 55 buildings in the 1980's. But that's another story.

* * *

CHAPTER 7: WOMEN AT WORK

Edna

Edna Bailey Miller was a tall, proud stately Negro. Her mother had told her since she was a little girl that her family came from "the best black blood in Virginia." When Edna first told me this I kiddingly asked, "Isn't your blood the same color as mine?" Her answer was, "You know what my mother meant."

Her father was Pastor of the Dyer Phelps African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Saratoga Springs. Edna had attended Howard University for several years majoring in playground recreation. While Commissioner of Girls Scouts in Saratoga Springs, she was told that if she had a college degree the Girl Scouts would hire her. Her younger brother graduated from high school and since her family could only afford one tuition, Edna had to leave college. She came home and enrolled in a Troy Business School. She also worked as secretary to her bishop.

In 1942, Edna applied at the Schenectady G.E. Works for a job. She like many others were bombarded with pleas to go to work in the factories because they were badly needed for the war effort. She was shocked when after reading her resume, which listed all her college and business school credits and her serving as secretary to her bishop, that the woman personnel director told her the only jobs open were as a sweeper or elevator operator.

She refused these jobs and pointed out to the director her office experience. The director said again, the only jobs open are as a sweeper or elevator operator. Edna left and applied several times but again was told that there were no other jobs available. She went home and continued her job as secretary to her bishop.

Then one day her mother was reading the newspaper and pointed out to Edna an article that said it was illegal for any company receiving federal grants to discriminate against minorities. She called the office of the Federal Employment

Practices Commission and explained the situation. A man from this office came to visit her and gave her papers for her to get filled out by the General Electric Co.

Edna waited several weeks before she got the nerve to go back to the employment office. Some of her other Negro friends had taken sweeper jobs or elevator operator's jobs and told her she couldn't fight the General Electric Company.

As she walked into the office, the personnel director impatiently told her that there still were no openings other than what she had been offered.

Edna said "I hear you, but will you please sign the enclosed forms so that I can send them to the Federal Government?" The director became flustered after reading the papers and said "let me check and see if anything else has opened up." Edna remembered that the director had to go through several other doors because of security and everytime she went through the doors, bells would ring. It was quite noisy for a little while.

She finally came back and said "it so happens that there is a job in the factory." Edna was very disappointed. She felt that she was qualified for an office job but she sized up the situation and decided that she would have to take the factory job.

When she entered the building she was to work in, she had to walk down a long aisle to get to the foreman's office. It was the longest walk in her life. She said she knew how a convict feels as he walks down the aisle to be executed. The girls sitting behind the benches on both sides of the aisle poked each other to see the Negro lady walking by.

Upon greeting her, the boss said "you look terrible. What is the matter?" She told him how she felt and didn't know if she would stay. He talked her into staying and even asked if she had other friends who may be interested in working in the factory. She said that as a matter of fact there were several people in her car in the parking lot waiting to see how she made out. He urged

her to tell them to apply at the personnel office -- that factory jobs were available.

Edna left but she was so unnerved that she waited two weeks before finally going to work. White girls wouldn't eat lunch with her and ignored her. But soon she became friendly with an Italian girl and a Jewish girl.

Saratoga Springs is 25 miles from the Schenectady G.E. plant and Edna had to get up at 5 a.m. to get dressed, eat and catch the bus. At night she didn't get home until about 2 hours after leaving work. It was dark when she went to work and dark when she came home. The bus would get stuck in the snow and slide off the road adding to the time that she had to spend going to and from work. She also had to walk 6 blocks from her home to the bus and 6 blocks from the bus to her home at night.

She often thought there must be a better life than this. One day while uptown on her lunch break, she saw a poster with Uncle Sam pointing a finger at her and the words "Uncle Sam Needs You". This was a recruiting poster for the Army.

She impulsively walked into the office and before she knew it she was sworn in to go to the Army. She said once you raise your hand and swear to go into the service there is no return. She went home and cried herself to sleep. She didn't tell her mother or her brother but her picture was in the paper with Skidmore College girls who had entered the service. Her mother was furious when she finally found out, but the die was cast.

As she packed up her belongings and was ready to leave G.E., she was pleasantly surprised when the girls presented her with a beautiful wrist watch. She couldn't believe it. Unfortunately it was stolen from her after she got in the service.

She went through basic training with many others but when she was assigned her regular unit, it was a segregated one. She remembers the discussions they had between the Damn Yankees and the Crackers as they called each other. This was when she found out the meaning of "Cracker." When slaves were reprimanded by being lashed with whips, the whips had

several ropes at the end to which were also added small parts so that when the whip connected with the flesh of the slave it would crack.

Edna was promoted to Corporal. After D Day, she was told that she had to go to England. However others who had gone to England called her up and told her not to come. The conditions were awful and they didn't even have basic supplies such as soap and toilet paper. When she told her immediate commander that she did not want to go to England, the commander became very angry and said the Army didn't spend money on training you so that you can get out now.

Edna went over her commander's head and explained to the officer that she had a mother in the states and that she really didn't want to go overseas. She was convincing because he gave her permission to leave and before her commander knew it she was on her way home.

Edna had been home for several weeks when an employment officer at General Electric called to see if she wanted to continue working in GE. She then got rehired and continued her service with the company. After working in the factory for a time, she was injured in an automobile accident and was out for several months. Her medical records stated that she could never work in the factory again. She was offered a job in the office.

She was always offered only lower-rated jobs. She continued to speak out against discrimination, and many Negro women are treated better because of her advocacy.

In the beginning of this book, I wrote about widespread discrimination -- based on where you worked, your occupation, your education, where you lived, and so on. I remember attending a panel on discrimination which had an Irishman, an Italian, a Polish man and a Negro. The Irishman told about discrimination in this country and how the Irish were forced to do hard labor on the railroads and that there were the Shanty Irish and the Lace Curtain Irish; the Italian told about how they

had a hard time finding anything but hard labor. The Polish man said they had to change their names and take the "ski"s off of their names if they wanted to be treated fairly. The Negro man said very simply: "All people have to do is look at me and I am automatically discriminated against."

I cringed when I realized the full impact of his words. And like women--where sex alone is the factor that leads people to discriminate against you, so too, it is with the Negro; color alone is grounds for discrimination.

I am proud to know Edna. We developed a beautiful friendship, I know that her courage in fighting discrimination as with so many other "salt of the earth" Negroes has made life better not only for her race but for anyone who is discriminated against.

Peggy

Peggy was a quite, sedate woman. She had been divorced and now lived with her mother and brother. She also was very religious and was blamed for not being able to stay married. Divorces were frowned upon. She didn't have much of a social life because she had to "care for her mother". She was a very obedient daughter. Her life was very organized. It seemed that many women also lived this kind of life. They washed on Monday, ironed on Tuesday, cleaned the house thoroughly on Saturdays, and of course church on Sunday and maybe other times during the week. They would also scrub their kitchen floors on their hands and knees. They had special times in the year when they changed the curtains and bedspreads, times when they cleaned out their closets and other areas.

I would become impatient with women like this and tell them they needed some life of their own. That they were "nasty clean" as I called it. After working at their physically tiring jobs all day, they needed some recreation. But to most of them my words fell on deaf ears. They were slaves to their houses.

One day Peggy brought in her income tax for me to figure out. Her mother was sickly so Peggy had a lot of medical bills. I was dismayed when figuring out her tax, to see that she had been using the short form which did not allow medical bills to be taken as a deduction. When I showed her my final results which amounted to a big refund, she was elated. Her brother had been doing her taxes but only used the short form. I also was able to file for back refunds for several years.

She never told her brother that his forms were wrong because she said her mother and he would have resented that she had challenged his work. So for several years, she had him do the taxes but filed the ones I did for her. I hurt when I saw so many women like Peggy sacrifice their lives for others. Their own lives and their expectations were subservient to others. I thought what a shame that this is happening.

Sophie

Sophie was in her late forties. She had been divorced. She had several children and just recently remarried. She was a great kidder and very loud and boisterous. She had an infectious laugh and laughed a lot. She was the life of the party. After she remarried she would come in and tell us how her husband couldn't keep his hands off of her and sometimes they even had sex on the bathroom floor. Since we didn't dispute her story, she talked about her sex life whenever the opportunity arose. We didn't believe her but let her think that we did. One day after she had held forth about her sex life, one of the older married woman very astutely said, "those who have to brag about how much they are getting usually are not getting it at all". Sophie from than on in very seldom talked about her sex life.

Sophie spoiled her children and didn't have any qualms about doing it. She said she was sorry for them because she had divorced their father and now even though her new husband was a good man, he was still their stepfather. She represented the

attitude of a lot of workers who wanted their children to have more than they had as they were growing up. She bought one of her children a car for graduating from junior high school.

I asked her, "What are you going to buy him when he graduates from high school -- an airplane?"

One of the grievances I had filed involved a substantial amount of back pay for Sophie. About a week after she had received this money she came over to me and with tears in her eyes thanked me. I said, "That's OK; that's what a union is for -- that's what you pay union dues for."

She said, "But you don't understand. You have been telling me for a long time that I was spoiling my children, that I spent money on them and neglected myself. For a while, I have been having pains in my left eye but shrugged it off. Well, when I received this back pay, I finally went to the eye doctor. Before I received this money, I wouldn't spend money on myself. And when I went to the eye doctor he told me that I have a malignancy in one eye and that I may lose that eye."

She was scheduled for another appointment. We shared this information with the other workers and they all expressed sympathy and said they would pray for her. She did lose her eye but if she hadn't gone to the doctor when she had, he said that the malignancy would have spread and she could have lost her life. When she came back to work after the operation, her "work family" welcomed her and supplied the emotional support she needed as she adjusted to the loss of her eye. Her situation was quite a shocking lesson that affected the entire group. When you work eight hours a day with others, they become part of your work "family."

And it seems that all of the heartaches, all of the joys of everyone else is shared and helped to build a lasting relationship among the workers.

Julia

Julia was a heavy-set woman. She lived with an aunt. She was unpopular because she was constantly harping that married women should stay home and let single women have the jobs.

Work in the industrial control division was unpredictable. When there were big orders, people would be hired. When the big order was completed, there had to be a reduction in forces. This happened several times, which really disrupted the work force because new people who were hired had more seniority than the "core group" which meant that some experienced workers who had been in this group for a long time would have to be transferred.

I negotiated with the company that before there were these layoffs, if the workers were willing, the company would give them temporary lack-of-work slips so that they could qualify for unemployment insurance. Then, if after a short period big orders did not materialize, there would be layoffs. This practice involved a financial sacrifice because after qualifying for unemployment insurance, there is a waiting period which results in the worker losing a week's pay. Also the amount paid when they did qualify only amounted to half of their regular weekly pay. However, many workers liked this opportunity because it meant that they could have some time off from the burden of working.

In order for this to happen, I had to get all the women to agree to rotate taking time off and going on unemployment insurance. The first ones to lose work were the lower service people. The others followed, all according to seniority.

Julia agreed in the beginning, but than said she did not want to lose any more time. They should lay off all married women who had other incomes before they forced single women who had no other income to lose money. This was a major point of contention throughout all of industry. Our union's position

was that there are no second-class workers and everyone should be treated equally. But in other plants, even within our national United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers Union's jurisdiction, members insisted that married women be laid off out of seniority when there was no work.

This also was an attitude of industry. During the late 1930's at Schenectady G.E., women were automatically laid off when they married. Some women hid the fact that they were married. They wouldn't wear their engagement or wedding rings and would only tell their closest friends of their marriage for fear of losing their jobs.

After much discussions by all the workers, we came up with a way to resolve this problem. I was finally able to get everyone to agree that they would rotate and take the time off except Julia. Of course this dissension really hurt the group. There were a lot of hard feelings. Many harsh, hurtful words were said.

I remember one day as I was working, a quiet, unassuming woman came over to my bench and said she would like to tell me something. I said, "O.K. how can I help you?"

She said, "I don't need help. I want you to swear that you will not repeat what I am about to tell you". I assured her that I would not tell anyone and would keep her secret. She continued. "I don't share my thoughts and my life with any of the people I work with. Some try to get friendly and ask me a lot of questions but I stay by myself. But even though I am married, I want you to know that my husband is in a mental institution and the only money I have to support myself and buy him some small gifts is the money I earn on this job. It is none of anybody's business about this part of my life and I really resent the derogatory remarks made by the single women who want us laid off".

I said that she didn't have to tell me this information. She was entitled to a job based on her seniority just like anyone else.

It was ironical. Several years later, Julia came in all excited. She had met a man on her two-week vacation and they had been married. Many women razzed her and asked, "Since you had argued that married women should be laid off, are you going to quit so that a single person can have your job?"

She answered in anger, "No way; he is not making enough money for us to live on." Needless to say, from that time on when the occasion occurred that there was to be a temporary lack-of-work situation, Julia was part of the group and took her time off.

I thought how circumstances affect a person's outlook. Wouldn't it be great if one walked in other people's shoes before discriminating against them?

Anna

Anna was a woman in her forties. She was a timid person. She would not start a conversation, but was very pleasant when she was spoken to. At lunch time, some of the women went into the ladies room to eat and others just cleared off their benches and ate together. During these lunch times, many subjects were discussed. One of the topics discussed was how poor we were when we were younger, and how our lives had been affected because we were poor.

It was surprising the way that families coped with the cold weather. Most of them had pot-belly wood-burning stoves in their dinning rooms and a combination wood stove in their kitchen. I heard stories from some women about when they were children -- how they would pick up coal that had fallen from trains along the railroad tracks. One girl told about the time that there was not enough money for coal, and after burning newspapers and scrap wood, they had to burn the leaves of their dinning room table to keep warm. Of course everyone admitted wearing extra clothes during the day and also at night when they went to bed. They told of warming bricks on the stoves and

wrapping them in towels to put between the covers. Some spoke fondly of their feather beds that they snuggled under.

Now that people were working, their heating systems had been upgraded to an oil or kerosene stove in the dining room that was dismantled and stored in the summer time.

One of the women said that she had been embarrassed because in order to save money, her mother would wash and bleach the cloth bags that flour came in and make under-clothes for her. Other women said their mothers did that also. Anna very quietly said "my mother still does that."

During our other conversations we heard that although Anna lived 25 blocks from work, she walked to and from work in all kinds of weather. It was not bad going to work because it was all down hill, but going home after eight hours of hard physical work was a hardship.

Anna had to give her whole pay check to her mother who doled out Anna's allowance, which did not include money for the bus to go to and from work. I hurt for Anna. She was in her forties yet she let her mother dominate her and treat her like a child.

When there were union cases at the first step in negotiations, workers were asked to attend to support their grievances and the union would pay them for their lost time. As shop steward I would pick up the money to give to them or the union would send them a check. Anna came to a few of these grievance meetings and I would get her money for her. Once the check was sent to her home and Anna contacted me and asked in the future to please give her the cash because then she would be able to have some extra cash that her mother did not know about.

I helped make out income tax reports for my co-workers. One day Anna asked me to help her out with her taxes. I said I would be glad to. She then told me that her mother wanted to meet me and asked if I would come to her home for Sunday dinner.

I accepted the invitation and enjoyed dinner after which I made out Anna's taxes. I noticed that Anna's mother was ignoring her. Her mother told me that she went to mass every morning and she and Anna went to church on Sunday.

When I saw Anna at work the next day, I asked whether it was my imagination or was her mother ignoring her when I was there.

Anna said very sheepishly, "My mother is not talking to me. She got mad at something I did several weeks ago and her way of punishing me is to not talk to me."

I thought, how sad. Here Anna is working hard, bringing home the bacon. A middle-aged woman who lets her mother dominate her and doesn't have the courage to speak up for herself. I wondered how her mother could be so religious and go to mass every morning and every Sunday and still treat her daughter this way.

Camille

Camille was a tall, slender Italian-American who was very proud of her ethnic background. She wore her hair combed straight back ending in a braided bun. Her mother had died suddenly right after twins were born. Her family consisted of her father, two boys, and five girls. Many teens during this time had to leave regular school to go to a continuation school part-time so that they could either work to help support the family or help in the home. Camille become one of this group of teens. She got a job at G.E. Her wages were necessary to supplement her family's income.

She never really had a childhood as most people do. She had to grow up in a hurry to assume the void left by her mother's death. This was not unusual. In many large families the oldest girl was expected be a mother's helper in the raising of the other siblings.

There was a lot of love in her family. Because of her influence, the family would gather for all holidays and join each other in the celebrations of birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, and other occasions. She especially loved Christmas because the entire family participated in the preparation of the various fishes and other foods that are a part of her Italian tradition.

One of the nice things about working was the half hour we had for lunch. Many of us would eat lunch together and talk about our families and other thoughts that we wanted to share. Of course during the holidays we would talk about what we would be doing with our families. Camille would share with us the happy get-togethers that her family shared. We got to know each of her brothers and sisters as she talked about them. And later as we would visit each other's homes, we would meet them face to face.

She was most proud that her family stayed together. We knew it was her influence that kept her family together. And even after many of her brothers and sisters married and had children of their own, they still got together for holidays and other events.

When I first visited Camille in her home, I saw that it was like so many of the two-family homes in Schenectady that had been built when there was a great influx of workers hired by G.E. There was one flat on each one of two floors. Her flat had a 9-by-12 living room, a somewhat smaller dining room, kitchen, bathroom and three bedrooms that measured about 8 by 10 feet each.

Realizing that Camille's family consisted of one parent and six children, I asked "How did you manage in this house with the size of your family?" I was surprised when she answered "We took in a boarder who rented our living room."

This was a practice that many families had to resort to to survive. Many of the boarders were immigrants who had also come to the United States to get jobs with G.E.

When I met Camille, her father had also died. So she was really the head of the family. She was also one of the most supportive, vocal backers for fighting for the rights of workers. She was a steadying influence because I depended on her wisdom and advice as I carried out my duties as shop steward. Sometimes an issue would become very emotional and people didn't even want to wait until a grievance was filed to go through the system. They wanted to refuse to work or they wanted to walk out. Camille would advise me as the shop steward to, "Keep talking and see if you can't resolve this issue by mediation. You are smart; see if you can try one more time."

But if the time came and we could not resolve a hot issue or any other time when we voted to take some action, Camille was the first to lead the group in their protest.

There was one foreman who made our lives miserable, and I had filed many grievances against him to no avail. When I complained to the business agent about my problems with this foreman, I was told there is only one action that the company will recognize. He advised me to bring my whole group into Building 41 when the grievances against this foreman came up for discussion.

When I asked my shop mates to accompany me to Building 41 and back me, Camille was one of the first to lend her support. The others soon followed; the entire group agreed to go when the case came up. It was an unusual action, and the first time in all my time as shop steward that I had to resort to this strategy.

There were 13 women involved and when the time came for us to leave, two chickened out and said that they wouldn't come. Of course, I was very disappointed and the group was angry because the company would say that it was only some of us who were having trouble with this foreman. There was a lot of angry name-calling, the most polite being "brown-nosers," "scabs," and "sell-outs," aimed at the two people.

As we were being seated around the table and introduced to the company men, all of a sudden the door opened and there were the two women who had not joined us in the first place. I welcomed them and immediately asked if they had notified the foreman that they were leaving. On receiving their negative answer I told them to go to the telephone and call him and let him know where they were, otherwise he could give them a warning notice for leaving work.

I was taken aback when during the discussion, the company asked, "If this man is so bad, why did your group give him a Christmas present?" I had to think fast, because when the women talked about collecting for the Christmas present, I had argued against it. But they said other foremen were getting presents and it wouldn't look right if we bypassed him.

I said to the Company men, "Give these good people credit that they could forgive this man's actions at this most Holy of Holidays. Maybe deep in their hearts they were hopeful that he would see the error of his ways and change".

We won the case and the foreman was later moved out of the department. This was very unusual. I knew that my grievances were right to have the company take such actions.

Camille's advice became easy to understand when she would reminisce about the Company during the Depression. At one time, the company gave each family a ham or a turkey for Christmas.. And when there were deep layoffs, she and her brother were called in and told that only one in a family could be kept on the payroll. They decided that her brother would be the one and she took a layoff notice.

She was a faithful unionist and picketed whenever she was scheduled. Many strikers even spent more time at the union hall helping out. She was one of them. She was always around when needed and was a hard worker for the cause. Camille was one of the activists who fought for the end of sex discrimination. She attended the seminars, meetings, and rallies that were held to keep this cause alive. She also joined me when I started the

YWCA Industrial Girl's Club and other groups of working women. We became an integral part of the YWCA in Schenectady.

There was a love and camaraderie that developed among us women. Many of us considered our co-workers as our extended family. I made many good friends of the people I worked with. Camille was one of them. We went out in the evening to movies, crazy auctions, parties, celebrations and other activities. We visited each other in our homes and camps. We got to know each other's families. We shared our joys, our sorrows, our successes, our failures, hopes and disappointments. We use to joke about the times we would hold a party just to arrange another party.

One day as I was working on my bench, Camille came over to me and standing next to me but with her back to the bench, she said, "Please keep working and don't look at me or I won't be able to talk to you without crying." She lit a cigarette and continued.

She told me that one of her sister's sons who was two years old had just been diagnosed as retarded. They thought this had happened because a doctor who had come to her home to give his older brother a shot said in passing, "As long as I am here, why not give his brother a shot too?' She shared with me the agony the family was going through and how her sister was searching for help in her dilemma but that there did not seem to be much help in the community. She than walked away leaving me teary-eyed as I thought of this tragedy that had befallen her family.

Camille was owner of a camp at Old Orchard Beach in Maine and looked forward each year to relaxing at this popular resort. She would invite some of us to her camp. We enjoyed each other's company as we basked in the sun, swam in the ocean, ate sea-food, walked around town, and went to carnival-like events around town. We really enjoyed ourselves as we shared our love with each other.

One of the many qualities I liked about Camille was her attitude about discrimination. As our circle of friends enlarged and we met other people, we made friends with Edna Miller who was a Negro. Camille included Edna in invitations to her camp and her home. She told us that some of her neighbors at both places didn't like the idea that she had invited Edna to be included with the rest of us. She told them it was none of their business and that she would invite anyone she wanted regardless of their disapproval.

One weekend, I had driven Edna and a couple of her "fresh air kids" to Camille's camp. One evening after supper, we sat on the long screened in porch that covered the length of the camp. The kids and Edna started singing hymns, gospel songs, and spirituals. As they picked up the beat and rocked these beautiful songs, neighbors came out of their camps and asked if they could come in to hear the concert. It was a great never-to-be-forgotten evening. The people forgot about their reservations and soon were joining in singing.

During one of the meetings at the YWCA, the subject of discrimination came up. We had been friends for a while so we felt secure about really sharing our feelings. Some of us were very frank and told Edna that they had been afraid of Negroes because of all the newspaper articles and media coverage. Edna lamented that the media was responsible for helping to create this false impression. She said that this attitude also was responsible for Negroes not being able to get jobs, to live where they wanted to, and other expressions of discrimination.

The women said that they wouldn't mind if a Negro doctor or lawyer or teacher wanted to move into their neighborhood. Edna asked, "What about me, just a factory worker?" The usual answer when Edna asked was "Oh, Edna, you are different. Of course, we wouldn't mind your living in our neighborhood." Edna countered with, "I am not different from others. You just say this because you got to know me." We all were educated that day.

Camille said she was afraid of Chinese people. When asked why, her answer was: she went to the FuManChu movies that were the rage at this time; that she listened to radio programs that portrayed Chinese people as gangsters, with knives between their teeth; that they had dope dens, and secret passages under their houses, and sold girls into slavery.

The real shocker was when one of the women said, "I am afraid of Italians." Camille was shocked and said, "For goodness' sake, what makes you afraid of us?" The woman replied, "Oh, I didn't mean you, Camille, I mean other Italians." Camille asked, "What other Italians?" The answer was, "You know, I am afraid of Italians because of the Mafia and how they are gangsters and always killing people." Camille asked, "What about all of us ordinary salt-of-the-earth people who happen to be Italian?"

It was an evening we would never forget. It really made us stop to think about how stupid discrimination is and how the media's portraying of people really influenced and perpetuated discrimination and that when we get to really know people of different races and nationalities, we will accept people based on who they are not what race or nationality they are. We were all a lot more tolerant after this frank interchange.

Ellen

Ellen was one of my union members. She confided in me that her mother was a prostitute. She was very hesitant to tell me about her mother initially, but when she started to talk a great avalanche of words came out.

Her mother was a fixture in our community. Many men knew her and would proposition Ellen when they found out she was the daughter of a prostitute. They would be highly insulted when she refused them. They called her names and asked, "Who do you think you are to refuse me?!"

She was always broke and as she talked, I found out why. When her mother was arrested, Ellen would pay her bail and fines to keep her out of jail. Her mother had been knifed and beaten up several times and Ellen ended up paying the doctor bills and hospital bills.

Ellen was afraid to tell me about her mother. She had been burned previously by people refusing to associate with her after finding out her background. I told her that she had no choice in the selection of her mother. People should not blame her for her mother's actions. The only way she should be judged was how she was living her own life.

One day while eating lunch with my co-workers the subject of mothers came up. I made a major mistake when I said that all mothers did not deserve respect. The women were vehement in their anger at my statement. I tried to explain, but to no avail. They asked, "What do you have against your mother?" I told them, that I was fortunate to have a good mother but they didn't want to hear any more.

For about a week after this episode, I was given the cold shoulder by these women who didn't want to accept the possibility that anyone would not have a wonderful mother.

Timber

The Campbell Avenue Division was in a huge building about the size of a football field. One of the women working in this division was nicknamed "Timber".

She was well endowed with a huge bosom. Whenever she walked down the aisle, she strutted just like a drum major and would shake everything she had. In the beginning nobody noticed, but soon the men would look up from their work with smiles on their faces. Someone yelled out one day "Timber!"

From that day on, the first person who saw her yelled "Timber!" Everyone would laugh and stop working for a

moment to watch her. It brought a little levity to the workers and helped to break up the monotony of working.

I was very surprised, and later on thought how naive I was, when I saw her walk when no one was watching and she walked just like any other woman.

The Woman from Vermont

My concern about women needing some place to go and people to talk to was reinforced when I met Rhoda. I was sitting next to her as we worked on a job. Rhoda was a heavy, well-built woman. Her home was in Vermont and this was the first time she had ever been away from home. We talked about generalities and about our families and other subjects. I was surprised when she asked if she could share something with me with the understanding that I wouldn't tell anyone else. I agreed and she said that she felt that there was something wrong because she had missed her period for several months.

She was embarrassed to talk about the matter. I asked her if she had talked to anyone else about her problem. She said, "No, that she was living in a boarding house and didn't know any one she felt close to. She didn't have any friends and didn't go out much." I suggested that she go up to see the nurse and she said she would think about it.

Several days later she was absent from work and I was shocked to hear that she had had a baby. I don't think she even knew that she was pregnant. Because of the way she was built, her pregnancy was not obvious. She had not been to a doctor or any other medical person.

I wondered if her situation was similar to that of the woman who didn't know she was pregnant and when asked, "What do you think was happening when you were with a man?" Her answer was, "He told me that he was giving me artificial respiration."

Judy

Judy was a very shy person. She never offered an opinion unless asked to do so. If you stepped on her toe she probably wouldn't even say "ouch". She would usually follow the rest of the crowd. She was not a fast worker so she made less money than the rest of us. When others talked about their families, she was always quiet. Since she was so quiet and introverted, the rest of the people left her alone. She didn't have many different clothes but the ones she had were clean. She joined some of the women as we formed a club at the YWCA called the Vigorettes. We met every other week and exercised, swam, and than shared refreshments and speakers.

Being a smaller group, we paid a little more attention to her. We knew that her father had passed on recently and that she was the main support of her mother. The group decided to do something for Judy. Her hair was too long and she really needed a hair cut and a permanent. We chipped in and collected enough money and gave it to her with the expressed suggestion that she get a permanent.

Judy was a little embarrassed when we gave her the money but she graciously accepted it. One day as I was sitting next to her, she again expressed her gratitude to me for the gift. Our discussion continued and centered on her financial status. We discussed our incomes and expenses, and I was shocked when she told me that she had a brother who was in a mental institution in Poughkeepsie and she was sending in a weekly amount to help pay for his expenses. I asked her why she had to contribute. She told me that her father had started a while ago to pay toward her brother's keep and she just kept it up. I explained that when her father was alive, there were two incomes coming into the house -- hers and his, and now there is only one. She said she was afraid not to send the money because she was concerned that her brother would not be treated right.

I suggested to her that she write to the place where she is sending the money and explain that she is the only support for her mother and that it is a hardship for her to continue to send the money. I was elated when a week later she came in and with tears in her eyes, thanked me for suggesting to her that she send the letter. The authorities wrote and told her that she didn't have to send money and assured her that her brother's treatment would not suffer because of her not sending money.

After a few weeks, Judy still did not get her permanent so one day as we were walking out together, I asked her why she still did not get the permanent. She said that she was seriously considering giving the money to the nuns. I told her angrily that the money was for a permanent and the nuns would be disappointed if she didn't spend the money for that purpose. I softened my anger by stating that besides the Nuns probably would not take the money anyway. I was happy when she finally got her permanent. She really was a pretty woman and the permanent enhanced her looks.

Sometimes I would entertain the members of the YW club at my home. I had a player-piano and we enjoyed sharing a meal and then singing good old player piano tunes. One day Judy and I were put on the same job again and she hesitantly, very emotionally asked me if I ever wondered why she never asked the women to come to her house. She said that most of the other women had at one time or another entertained the group in their homes. I stated that I never thought about it and since I had the room and I was the landlady and we could make as much noise as we wanted, I was happy to hold the meetings at my home.

She asked me to agree to keep the secret that she was going to share with me. She said she had wanted to share it with me for a long time but she didn't know what my reaction was going to be.

My reply was, "Try me." She said she was embarrassed by what she was going to tell me. I waited until she composed

herself and then she told me that besides her mother she also had two retarded brothers living in the upper flat of her home. They never left the house. She had to support them, including buying them cigarettes. She and her parents were ashamed that not only one brother was in a mental institution but also there were two retarded other brothers. They had been the recipients of ignorant neighbor's remarks about their mentally ill brother and so didn't acknowledge the two retarded brothers.

She waited for my reaction. I told her that it wasn't her fault or her parent's fault that the brothers were retarded, that it was too bad that these men had to be kept in the house and never had the opportunity to meet with others or go into the outside world. I reminded her about Camille's retarded nephew and how her entire family were involved in trying to get help for that young child. Now the boy's mother is part of a group of people advocating for a facility for retarded children.

Judy said that was great and she wished Camille and her family a lot of luck, but there was no hope for her brothers who were in their thirties. Her father insisted that they be kept upstairs and now that he was gone, her mother still wanted to keep the status quo and she probably wouldn't even like it that she had told me. I told her that her secret was safe with me and if there was anything I could do to let me know.

Judy came into work one day and she looked very happy. Her priest had introduced her to a middle-aged parishioner. He also was taking care of his sick mother. Judy's mother developed sugar diabetes and had to have parts of her leg amputated at various stages. Even though Judy had another brother who was not retarded and also worked in GE, the main part of caring for her mother fell on Judy.

As her mother became progressively sicker, Judy ran into trouble because she was always late. We had a good boss but he had to explain tardiness and his bosses wanted to know what he was going to do about this tardiness. As Judy's shop steward, I

urged him to hold off temporarily giving her a warning notice. He agreed and in a short time, Judy's mother passed on.

Several weeks after her mother's funeral, Judy came in and was very distraught. I asked why she was so troubled. She started to cry and I told the boss I was going to take her into the ladies room because all the other workers had stopped working and were watching her. The boss told all the other workers to get back to work and told me to let him know if he could be any help.

Between deep sobs, Judy told me that her gentleman friend had asked her to marry him with the provision that she did something about her brothers. She said she had promised her mother on her death bed that she would always take care of her brothers. I told her that she had been a good daughter all her life, sacrificing for her family and that she deserved some happiness now; though she had agreed to take care of her brothers, maybe there was a better way to handle the situation than keeping her brothers as prisoners in the house. I suggested that we talk to our boss. Since we both had a great deal of confidence in him, she agreed.

I told her to wash her face and dry her eyes, and I would arrange for the boss and her and me to meet in a small conference room.

We met in the small conference room with the foreman. I told Judy to tell her foreman why she was crying. She started, and then the tears began again; I had to continue her tale. After the story was ended, the foreman also told her that she had been a good daughter, that it was unfair of her mother to expect that she would spend the rest of her life sacrificing her own happiness to take care of her brothers.

We finally came up with the suggestion that she talk to counselors from one of the United Way agencies. We told her to dry her eyes and finish the day's work. The foreman said he would call up one of the agencies and see if he could make an appointment for her. We went back to work and the foreman

was able to make the appointment for her to meet right after work.

I wondered what the solution could be. Did we dare to come out and tell her that she should not pay attention to that death bed promise? I anxiously awaited the next morning to find out what she would do about her dilemma. I searched her face as she went up to punch her card and was encouraged to see she was a little more relaxed than she had been the day before.

I again asked the foreman to meet with us in the small room. She seemed relieved when she told us what the counselor had advised. Her promise to her mother was to take care of her brothers. There were several ways to do that. One was to continue the status quo. Another was to have her brothers taken away and put in an institution where they would be evaluated to determine what their full potential might be. Were they totally dependent or could they function in some way in society? It was cruel to keep them as prisoners.

She had to give her permission to allow this to happen. She told us that she had discussed the last solution with her gentleman friend and her brother who also worked in GE. After hours of exploring the possibilities, it was decided that her brother and she would sign the papers to have their other brothers removed from their upstairs flat – their home for so many years. She said that she would be told when the removal would happen and she told the boss that she expected to have to lose a day's work when this took place. Several days later she told us that the event was scheduled to take place the next day.

She was very nervous about her decision, hoping that it was the right one and that her mother would understand that it was the right one for her sons. She said that she wouldn't be in the next day. We wished her well.

We were surprised the next day to see her come into work. I rushed up to her and asked, "What happened? Why wasn't she home? Had they postponed the removal of her brothers?"

She said that they came yesterday and when she got home the brothers were gone. She didn't elaborate any further but one of the women who lived on the same street told us that her brothers had cried and fought while being taken out of the house. They had to be subdued and put in straight jackets before they could be put into a special van. It took several men to handle them.

We told her to keep us informed. She said she wasn't making any plans for getting married until she found out the status of her brothers. About a week later, she came in and told us that her brothers were taken to an institution in our state and she and her brother had gone to visit them. They seemed to be all right. They were not accustomed to meeting with other men but were slowly opening up and becoming part of the group. They were having regular sessions with the social workers and had been evaluated. One of the brothers was less retarded then the other and he was being taught how to wash dishes with the hopes that he could eventually get a job on the outside and live independently.

About a month later, she came in and said that her brothers were now much happier in their new surroundings with others to talk to and that they had a whole new world that opened up for them. They were no longer mad at her.

She proceeded to make arrangements for her wedding. One brother did improve to the degree that he was now working in an restaurant as a dish washer and was living in a controlled housing unit on the outside.

When someone was to be married, most of their co-workers would arrange to go to the wedding. In this case a special effort was made by the workers and she had a big crowd to share in her wedding celebration and wish her years of happiness. She deserved it after all the years of sacrifice and being a good daughter. After her father's death, she had continued to care for her mother not only financially but caring for her physical and mental needs as she suffered from sugar

diabetes, and last but certainly not least, supporting her two retarded brothers.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX #1: THE EARLY HISTORY OF LOCAL 301 -- EXCERPTS FROM "THE STORY OF LOCAL 301, IUE-AFL-CIO, REFLECTIONS," AND UE NEWSPAPERS

For many working men and women, the birth of Local 301 marked the culmination of decades of struggle to organize an effective union in Schenectady. The history of the fight for unionism in the GE works goes back to before World War 1, when the AFL had organized many workers into craft unions.

There were more than 30 such organizations within the Schenectady works, and as a result they were able to accomplish little. The workers had the organizations; they had the will to build strong unions; and they had militancy. but they did not have unity.

Jurisdictional disputes among the unions were everyday events. Hardly a month passed by without one union or another going on strike. Picket lines had little meaning, and the workers usually went back to the shop worse off than they were before they took strike action. Through all of this, the company sat back, enjoying the knowledge that they had nothing to worry about as long as the workers were divided.

The depression of 1929 brought a new wave of union organization throughout the country. But by now, the working people had learned valuable lessons. They had come to know that the old system of craft organization which kept workers divided was all but useless in fighting the united power of the corporations. When the big corporations started their nation-wide drive to bust all unions after World War 1, the whole Schenectady organizational setup toppled like a house of cards. GE workers were left without any form of union organization.

The company, realizing that Schenectady workers would not stand for this state of affairs, decided to take matters into

their own hands. It organized the Schenectady Works Council to "represent" its employees. This council had no teeth.

This works council was paid for completely by the company and met on company property. It was dominated by management representatives. Its job it was to sell the GE propaganda line, while at the same time to keep up an appearance of leading an organization of working people. It became the model for hundreds of company unions established throughout the country.

After a while, however, the Works Council in a number of instances proved to be a valuable training ground for future leaders of Local 301.

In the words of Bill Hodges, who was one of the founders of G.E. Local 301, the Council proved to be a "blessing in disguise," because the experience a number of the elected representatives received on the council and their realization that there never could be effective representation with a company union, led them to the path of real unionism.

And so the spark for union organization was ignited, and despite the threats and harassments which the company directed against employees involved in the drive to organize the union, and despite disciplinary action taken against a number of employees and the discharge of others, thousands of cards were signed for the union, and a petition was filed with the National Labor Relations Board in 1936, asking the government to conduct an election at the plant.

In the weeks before the election, the determination of the Schenectady workers was really put to a test, as the company erected all kinds of roadblocks to try and defeat union organization.

Their demand was for industrial unions which cut across old craft lines to bring together all workers under the slogan, "an injury to one is an injury to all." No longer would the bosses be able to set the skilled workers against the unskilled, the

electricians against the plumbers, carpenters against the millwrights, men against women, and whites against Negroes.

The year 1933 saw the depression at its depth. Older workers, and that meant everyone over 40, were fired ruthlessly because they could not compete in a merciless speedup with younger men. Jobs for women were almost non-existent. Out of the desperate situation was born the organization that eventually would emerge as UE, the Schenectady Electrical Industrial Employees Union.

At its inception, the union had as its officers four men who were to play key roles in the formation of UE. They were William Turnbull, the first president of the union, Everett Taylor, its secretary-treasurer, Fred Matern, the chief steward. and recording secretary, Leo Jandreau.

The years between 1933 and 1936 were years of consolidation for the strength of industrial unionism in Schenectady and elsewhere in the electrical industry. Contact was made with similar organizations in the Lynn GE works and the Springfield, Mass. plant of Westinghouse. Contacts was also made with a small but growing industrial section of the AFL machinist union, led by James Matles.

The coordination grew into the Federation of Metal and Allied Unions, organized in 1935 with $21 in its treasury. The work of organization in these days was dangerous and difficult. The companies still had the power to fire workers for joining unions, and open activity took tremendous courage.

But the men and women who were employed in the electrical industry had this courage, and when the "Magna Carta" of labor, the Wagner Act, finally became the law of the land, a strong base had already been built. The new law, which guaranteed that working people could organize and join unions without losing their jobs and being blacklisted from all industry, provided a great impetus to the growing industrial union movement. Everywhere, workers were on the march. The CIO was on the verge of being born as an organization which would

lead the working people toward economic freedom for a dozen years before it was brought down by splitters and disrupters within its own ranks.

In 1936 the electrical union sent a delegation to Washington where a convention of radio workers was taking place. This delegation mounted the speakers' platform to tell their brothers and sisters of the importance of unity. They were enthusiastically received, and a new combined convention was planned for the end of the year.

It was this convention, held in Buffalo on December 15, 1936, which formed the United Electrical and Radio Workers of America--UE. Julius Emspak of UE local 301 became the secretary-treasurer of the national union. It was a natural move for the UE secretary-treasurer. He started in the shop at age 14, completed the apprentice course and then after he finished undergraduate studies at Union College in Schenectady, graduating with PhiBeta Kappa honors went on to graduate school at Brown University in Providencm, Rhode Island. He had come out of the shop to enter Union College by virtue of one of Swope's employee benefit programs--scholarship loans to promising young fellows. When Emspak completed his studies he returned to the shop in Schenectady, where, earning the pay of a skilled tool and die maker, he paid off the Swope loan, meantime serving as a volunteer organizer for the union that was to become Local 301.

Leo Jandreau, another rising leader, choose to remain business agent of Local 301. During the war, his drive and personal talent began to set him apart from even the great labor leaders. His charisma and moving speeches were only an indication of his great skills in negotiating and organizing. Leo's magnetic leadership had almost a hypnotic effect on the membership. They were to follow him for many years ahead.

The next year, the old allies of the Schenectady workers, the machine workers under Jim Matles, left the AFL and affiliated with the new union, forming the United Electrical,

Radio, and Machine Workers of America, the union we know today.

In 1938, UE had grown so strong that GE was forced to sign with it the first national union contract ever entered into by the giant corporation.

The outbreak of World War II saw a growing union ready to buckle down to the great task of destroying the menace of fascist aggression. Thousands of UE members left Schenectady to join the armed services. Those who stayed behind had the gigantic responsibility of supplying the forces of democracy with the weapons it needed. The Schenectady works was one of the many UE shops which were awarded the Army-Navy "E" banner signifying great production accomplishments.

In Washington, UE leaders served on the war production board and with other government agencies directing the war effort. President Roosevelt and General Eisenhower were but two of the national leaders who cited UE for its patriotic accomplishments during these years.

APPENDIX #2: YWCA

As I studied the history of the YWCA, I was pleased to discover that the YW had been in the forefront of fighting for working women and minorities since its inception. The YWCA was created in England by a group of Christian women who saw a need and worked to fulfill that need.

1855--They saw the plight of women nurses led by Florence Nightengale returning from the Crimean war with no place to go, and also the need of many young women and girls coming from the country districts to find jobs in industry and offices. The needs were real: a place to live, help in finding jobs, a chance to make friends. In those days, a woman could not stay in a hotel on any floor if there were men staying there. This was the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and safe housing, meals and employment services were the first programs offered.

1856--The first YWCA in the United States was formed and called the "Ladies Association" in New York City.

1859--Twenty-one students, teachers, and needlewomen take up resident in the first YWCA boarding house for young girls in New York City.

1866-YWCA Traveler's aid work begins in Boston by correspondence.

1868--Boston YWCA accommodates eighty working women and students under the age of 25 in its new residence.

1869--In the face of "unreasoning prejudice and misinterpretation," the Cleveland YWCA opens the retreat, a residence for unwed mothers. Average age of mother is 17.

1874--Working girls pay $3.25 a week for a two-week vacation at sea rest in Asbury park, in the only low-cost summer "resort for employed women, opened by the Philadelphia YWCA and dedicated by President Grant.

1882—Pittsburgh YWCA opens and operated for many years a home for Negro orphans seeking foster parents.

1887--Traveler's Aid becomes a department in the association to insure the safety of innocent girls, regardless of either nationality or color, arriving without suitable protection by train or steamer.

1888--Schenectady YWCA was organized to work with young immigrant women arriving from Europe who needed housing and fitness and Bible reading. First President elected was Mrs. Maurice Perkins and services provided on 2nd floor at 135 Jay Street.

1889--First Negro YWCA branch organized in Dayton, Ohio.

1889--Two YWCA courses in domestic science are inaugurated in Boston, one for maids, one for mistresses when the Association decided that "incompetency" was a word that fitted the parlor as well as the kitchen."

1892--Indian girls join the YWCA Hanworth Institute in Indian territory (now Chilocco, Oklahama).

1892--Schenectady YWCA was incorporated as non-profit organization in New York State, offering housing, and health and education activities to young women. New quarters were rented at 242 State Street and the 1st General Secretary was

employed. She was Miss Ella Freeman. The Association began work with teens with classes in plain and fancy sewing.

1892--The Association "takes the message" directly to the National Cash Register plant.

1893--Brooklyn YWCA opens the first school anywhere to train women for practical nursing careers.

1895--A YWCA delegation visits the Cunard Steamship lines to demand matrons on all ships transporting women immigrants.

1904--The Association "takes the message" directly to the cotton mills in the south.

1906--The National Board unites all scattered YWCAS into one organization.

1907--The Association "takes the message" directly to the department stores, cigar factories, and paper mills.

1910--The New York Association opens the first International Institute for immigrant women.

1911--The third biennial convention votes to work for a minimum wage law for women to keep them from prostitution.

1911--YWCA International Institute for Immigrant Women begun.

1918--The YWCA'S Docile Morality program becomes the official lecture bureau of the Division on Social Hygiene of the U.S. War Department.

1918--The U.S. Ordinance Department asks the YWCA to service a million and a half women working in war plants. The YWCA responds by setting up 20 service centers near ammunition factories.

1919--When Congress fails to appropriate money for Women in Industry section of the Department of Labor, the YWCA takes over the responsibility of carrying on the program.

1919--The YWCA continues the lectures independently in order "to galvanize an attitude of honesty, open, scientific interest in the subject of sex." 12,412 lectures were given in 1204 communities, 110 cities, and 247 colleges to 1,593,303 girls.

1919--YWCA convened and financed the 1st gathering of women physicians from 32 countries for six weeks to consider the physical conditions of women, their emotional health and their immature attitude toward sex. YWCA's throughout the country developed a policy to require physical exams of all women participants in YWCA Health, Physical Education, and Recreation programs by a YWCA-employed physician.

1920--The 6th National Convention revolutionizes membership requirements.

1920--YWCA developed the National Industrial Conference for "working women". This was the prelude for the formation of YWCA Industrial Clubs for women in the 1920s through the 1940's. This also was the beginning of YWCA public policy program that supported the 8-hour work day, prohibition of night work, and the right of women to organize.

1929--Schenectady YWCA expanded program needed a multi-service building to meet needs of young women in the

County for housing, food services, health and group work activities. Building drive initiated in 1929 under leadership of William D. Dalton.

1931--Schenectady YWCA building dedicated. The building provided residence for 34 rooms for single occupancy, cafeteria for food service, gym and pool for health, physical education and recreation services (Dorp Room and Map Room)

1932--YWCA National Convention supported public policy which shall be effective against the menace of lynching and mob violence.

1936--The Interracial Seminar marks the first intercollegiate, interracial, co-educational conference in the south at Shaw University, Raleigh, North Carolina.

1938--Students at the 15th National Convention call for an extensive investigation of segregation and discrimination in association and community life.

1941--YWCA with other national organizations created the USO for servicemen's recreation and support.

1942--The YWCA extends its services and personnel to Japanese women and girls in ten relocation centers.

1942--Schenectady YWCA opened its physical education facilities to Black people

APPENDIX #3: THE GREEN ROOM, A GRIEVANCE

GRIEVANCE APRIL 6, 1945 11 A.M.
TO FOREMAN FRANK FOLGER
FROM UNION COMMITTEEWOMAN HELEN QUIRINI

I would like to have an explanation as to the freedom allowed a union representative in contacting her people. And also an explanation about the operators under Mr. Folger's supervision--freedom in talking to people while they are working as long as they keep on working and do not hold up production.

I am committee woman for Mr. Folger but do not work for him. His girls are inside the notorious "green room" here in the Campbell Avenue plant. Up to yesterday, I assumed that a committee woman can talk to any one of her members. Yesterday I found out that I was breaking procedures by not telling the foreman that I was going into his section. But being as how his girls are enclosed in this special room and being as how he is always in the room and he can see--I didn't think it necessary to tell him what he could see.

Incidentally the fact that I am temporarily working inside the Green Room at the present time may have some bearing on this incident. This morning one of the girls, Ann, sent the material handler over to tell me that she wanted to see me. So being an obedient little committee woman, I marched myself over to his majesty, Mr. Folger, and told him that I understand that I had been breaking procedure and that I wished to notify him that I was going into his section to talk to some girls. He said "that's right--you have been breaking procedure. You can see one girl at a time--who do you want to see?"

I told him that I wanted to see Ann and he promptly calls the relief girl and pulls Ann off the line. The girl, Ann, was indignant. And I can't see his attitude. Up to the present time, I have talked to the girls as they worked on the line and they would keep working and not hold up production.

I maintain that this is a direct attempt to discriminate against the union and the girls. If every time one of my girls wants to talk to me she has to stop work and come off her job on the line--the girls will know that Mr. Folger knows who is talking to the union and they won't free to talk to me.

Is this Germany and is Mr. Folger the Gestapo or is this America where we have the right to register complaints against people who push us around? I maintain that if the girls have to come off the line or stop work every time they talk to me--and that's plenty because of their dissatisfaction with this foreman, that production will definitely be held up.

And believe it or not, management is trying to tell the people that this job is very secret and so important that the Pacific fleet is waiting to use what we are making.

Another question that pops up at this time--are the girls going to be allowed enough liberty so that solicitors for bonds, Red Cross, Community Chest and all the other company-sponsored causes going to be allowed to talk to the operators who are trying to get them to contribute to these worthy causes?

I request a written explanation as to company policy in this matter within 24 hours.

Respectfully Submitted,

HELEN QUIRINI

Date 5/17/45 Docket 5243

The representative requests that a joint labor management investigation be held on repair bench job drawing no. 7664118 , OP. 18 Adjust & make repairs after test. The rate of job is $.685 per hr. The union contends that a greater am't of skill and knowledge is required on the job and should have been paid a higher rate.

We request the management to investigate.

* * *

Date 6/11/45 Ref. Docket 5243

Dear Sister Quirini,

In discussing docket 5243 with management they agree to a joint investigation and our committee for the union will be rep. Quirini and Board member Morelli.

Hoping that this can be settled satisfactorily, I remain

Fraternally yours,
Raymond Flanigan

* * *

Letter from Folger April 7, 1945

The various matters presented in your written grievance of 4/6/45 have already, as you should know, been taken up with management. For that reason, as you should also know, I am unable to give you the requested answer.

Frank Folger

* * *

(No name on these requests) 5182
4/26/45

1. This representative requests that the material handler and cleaner on the audio line be included in the co-operative piece work set up.
2. The representative requests that an investigation be held on the sub-assembly line in regard to the differential existing between the various operators which vary from $.61 1/2 to $.68 1/2 per hr. These girls have had from 3 to 5 years previous

experience, most of which was spent in the transmitter department.

We are requesting that these girls be granted the top rate of $.68 1/2 per hour. The union is requesting that this be made retroactive to the time the operators were put on the line.

We request the management to investigate.

* * *

5/10/45

There are 6 different cooperative lines under the shop order 501-4914. All these lines were time studied or method checked according to the same system, yet when the incentive percentage was put on them, this percentage varied from 12% to 20%. I would like a break-down as to the reasons for the difference in the percentage allowed.

* * *

5/10/45

I would like to have a joint labor and management investigation of the rates on the repair bench 7664418 gr-3 operation 18 adjust and make repairs after test. The rate of this job at the present time is .685 cents an hour. In the first place this job should have been rated higher than the other jobs in the green room because of the skill and knowledge required to make these repairs. But both the assembling and building of these units and the repair work was all based on the same rate.

My contention is that the repair girls should be rated higher because they have to do both wiring and assembly and they have to be thoroughly familiar with the units in question. One of these units, the audio (7767998g 2), requires 21 different operations. The girl on this line doing operation one makes about .80 cents an hr. (take home). Yet the repair girls who have to know 21 different operations only get .685 an hour. This audio unit is only one of several units the repair girls repair. You

can readily see how much knowledge they must have to do their job.

The union is requesting that this job be investigated and the results be retroactive to the time the job was begun.

* * *

5/10/45

This job -- 7664178 gr. 3 -- was originally set up to include 4 operators and 4.6 hrs of a 5th operator for repair and relief. It was originally priced on Mar. 26-45 for $4.31 and on April 9th it was adjusted to $4.85 or an adjustment of about 12%. About 3 wks. ago the set-up was changed and the line was set up to include only 3 operators and 3.5 hours of a 4th operator for repair and relief. The original 4th operator, Josephine Scolamiello, was taken out of the line set up and put on individual piece work. She not only lost the 12% adjustment allowed on the line, she also lost the hr. and 30 minutes allotted to her for relief and repair which she shared on the line from the 5th operator. Her quota is still the same as the other 3 girls working on the line and she produces as much as they do yet they receive about $42. A week and she only receives $37.

The union asks that this job be put back into the line set up and that Jospehine Scalamiello be paid retroactive to the day she was put on piece work the difference between what she got and what the girls got.

APPENDIX #4: GREEN ROOM SUGGESTIONS

I was highly concerned about the war and how we in the factory could be more productive so I handed in many suggestions. There were many in regard to the "green room", a special room built in the middle of Campbell Avenue. Only people with special badges could get into the room because of the secret nature of the part that was being built.

Some of my suggestions included the following ideas:

WIRE STRIPPING MACHINE. The angle of the foot pedal was at such a funny angle that the operator's leg would get tired easily and certain muscles in her leg hurt. Suggested a foot rest. Accepted paid $5.00

BROKEN FLUORESCENT LIGHTS. Suggested replacement of all lights for better illumination. Operators worked on very small parts and good lighting was needed. Answer: Already Planned.

FIRE DRILLS IN GREEN ROOM.

ANSWER. Supervision are not in favor, however instructions will be issued regarding the use of the exits in case of emergencies. Accepted paid $3.00

DOORWAY BE PUT IN THE PARTITION THAT DIVIDED THE GREEN ROOM AREA.

Answer: Already Planned

GIRLS SEATED TOO CLOSE TOGETHER. New set up was to have a 36 inch space between the girls. Now cut down to 30 inches. Sometimes another girl is placed between two regular girls to keep the automatic assembly line moving. Creates very crowded conditions.

AISLES CLUTTERED UP WITH WORK.

TABLES JUTTING OUT INTO THE AISLE.

HOLE IN THE FLOOR NEAR POST 27-C

There are about 6 to 7 benches leading off of another head bench. At each one of the 6 to 7 benches there are about 30 to 40 chairs for girls to sit in. If a fire or any other emergency should arise, the only exit these girls could use would be the front door. About a month ago a woman fainted on the bench in aisle 1. Believe it or not in order to take her out on the stretcher, they had to wheel her under bench B and the nurse had to jump over the bench to get out.

HOT TAR POT TOO CLOSE TO THE MACHINE NEXT TO IT. Tar is splattered on the machine next to it. The pot is not stationary and the lead that is connected to the outlet sticks out into the aisle and someone tripping on this lead could happen. If this happened the tar pot would be spilled over people. Suggest the pot be fastened down to the bench, and the electric cord be placed behind the pot and not in the aisle. Awarded $5.00

FLOOR IN GREEN ROOM. Present floor consists of wooden blocks laid down with spaces in between. Through the factory is done so that if heavy machines or other equipment needs to be installed, all that is necessary is to just remove the blocks. My suggestion was to cover these blocks with some panels with smooth services because regardless of how many times the floor is swept, it is never clean. This is already done in the test areas. Also the units being manufactured are supposed to have as little dust as possible. Also that the sweeper be hired for the third shift because presently the sweeper has to ask the operators to move their chairs so that she could sweep the floor under the benches. This holds up production.

ANSWER A vacuum cleaner will be used instead of the broom. Awarded $5.00

APPENDIX #5: MORE SUGGESTIONS

HIRING POLICY IN REGARD TO PLACEMENT OF PEOPLE.

Rejected. But did have special meeting with Mrs. Holmes, personnel supervisor in regard to suggestion.

SUGGESTION COMMITTEE/TIME TO RESPOND/FAVORITISM/METHOD OF PAYMENT. INADEQUATE INVESTIGATION/DUPLICATE COPY. ETC.

Rejected. But did meet with the total plant-wide suggestion committee which was chaired by plant manager Barney Tang.

STAMPING OF WIRES USED TO MAKE UP CABLE HARNESSES FOR TRANSMITTERS.

These wires are all black and there were three shifts of people whose job it is to stamp a different number on each wire. Then operators put these wires together on a form and tied them together with black cord and created a harness. A wireman would take this harness, lay it inside the panel and connect the numbered wires to the allocated area. The numbers were white. And as people handled the wires, some of the numbers would wipe off or become smudged. My suggestion was to label different colored wires as certain numbers such as red always 1, blue always 2, red/black 3, etc. (I hesitated and agonized for several days before I handed in this suggestion because it would have eliminated three jobs. But I also thought of the servicemen in the field who would have it easier if there was no possibility of the numbers being either erased or smudged).

I was sad but glad when the answer came back: "The navy rejected the idea""

BLACK PAINT ON WINDOWS.. Rejected. Government decree

ELECTRIC DRILLS INSTEAD OF HAND FILES.
Answer. Available in tool room.

SOLDERING IRONS NOT USED SHOULD BE COLLECTED AND RETURNED TO THE TOOL ROOM.
Answer. Stockkeeper's job.

MAKE FIRE AISLES WIDER.
Answer. Now meets fire codes.

LACK OF CHAIRS IN LADIES ROOMS. Girls now sitting on steps leading to the room. Suggest benches. Answer ?

LACK OF CHAIRS IN FACTORY. Chairs have broken under people and people have fallen off of chairs. Also many broken chairs piled outside of the building could be fixed. Asked also for chairs with backs on them since many women are sitting on stools.. Question whether state law was being broken.
Answer. On order.

FAULTS OF SIT-RITE CHAIRS which have special screw adjustments to fit the chair to the person.
Answer. Checking with manufacturer but in the war emergency they are not permitted to make metal chairs. Still pursuing options.

WINDOW BETWEEN POSTS 28E AND 29E TO INCREASE AIR CIRCULATION. Answer. Present windows adequate except in abnormally humid weather at which time even another window would be of little value.

GIRLS HANDS BEING HURT WHILE TIGHTENING THE CORD TO MAKE CABLE HARNESSES. Suggest archery gloves to protect hands.

SAFETY MEETINGS AT CAMPBELL AVENUE PLANT.
Answer. Will resume; only missed one meeting because of summer time.

OPEN TOED SHOES BEING WORN BY WOMEN.
Answer. "Safety regulations for women in industry" over this.

"SAFETY SUGGESTIONS IN REGARD TO CAMPBELL AVENUE" : ALL WINDOWS BE CHECKED TO MAKE SURE THEY CLOSE TIGHT: DURING WINTER, EMPLOYEES SUBJECT TO COLD AIR BUT ALSO THIS WOULD SAVE FUEL.

TRACKS ON WHICH ASSEMBLY UNITS MOVE SHOULD BE CLEANED OUT AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH.
Transmitters are heavy and cumbersome and have many sharp and protruding points. It is hard to move these assemblies but they may also tip over. Employee could also hurt their backs pushing these units..

LOCKER HANDLES ARE BROKEN AND HAVE SHARP PARTS THAT COULD HURT SOMEONE. EITHER REPAIR OR REPLACE.

MEN'S ROOM DOOR BY POST 37 AND 38 DOES NOT CLOSE TIGHTLY. THIS SHOULD BE FIXED. PEOPLE WALKING IN FRONT ARE EMBARRASSED.

CANDY MACHINE AND LOCKERS JUT OUT BEYOND THE SAFETY LINE IN THE AISLES. They should be moved.

NURSES OFFICE IN CAMPBELL AVENUE SHOULD BE MOVED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SHOP. At the present time the office is located at the front of Campbell Avenue Plant which is about the size of a football field. If someone is hurt while in the back of the building, it would take a long time to either move that person to the nurse's office or to get the nurse to run down to the patient. This could result in harm to a seriously injuried person or death.

RADIO PROGRAM GEARED TO EMPLOYEES..

Answer: Against the rules of the federal communications commission to direct a program to one group of people. Also expensive and had tried but could never find enough people to take part.

OMNIBUS SUGGESTION

REPLACE WHITE LIGHTS IN FRONT OF WGY BUILDING with lights that change colors..

LACK OF SYSTEM AT GE HOSPITAL. Patients waiting one, two and three hours for service. Recommend receptionist to manage the people with doctor designations, etc. Answer. Nurse in Campbell Avenue will call ahead to see if doctor is in and will not refer patients to specific doctors.

WORKS NEWS. TOO IMPERSONAL. Suggest meeting with shop writers for their input to make the paper better.

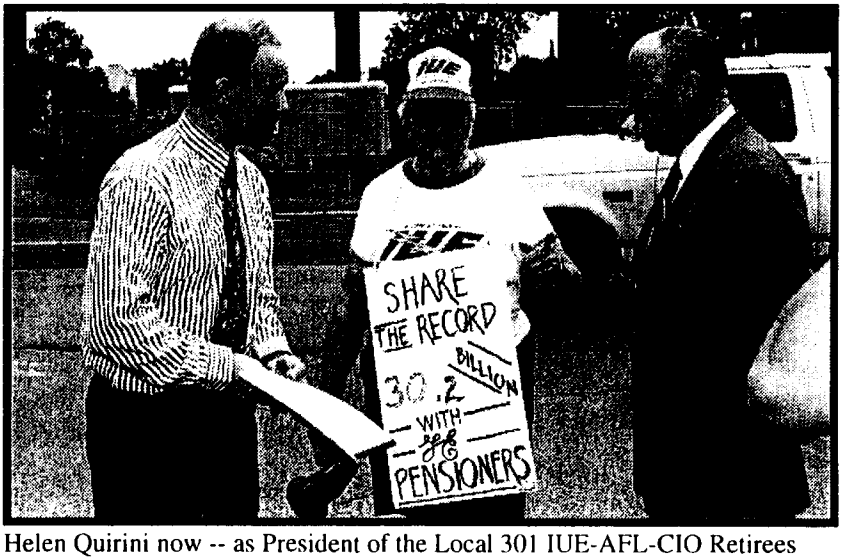
Answer. Will arrange such a meeting.

PUBLICITY TO BRAG ABOUT WORK DONE IN SCHENECTADY, THE DEDICATION AND HARD WORK BEING DONE BY EMPLOYEES. HELP TO DEVELOP "FAMILY FEELING" AMONG THE EMPLOYEES AND BEING RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR EFFORTS AND PRIDE

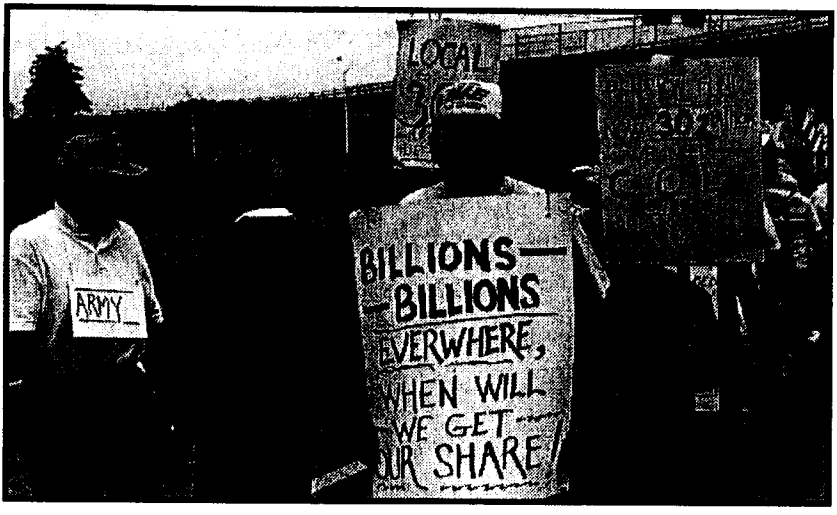
IN THEIR WORK. PROGRAM TO BE SHOWN EXCLUSIVELY IN THE PLANT AT LUNCH HOURS TO KEEP PEOPLE INFORMED. ALSO PART OF THIS PROGRAM COULD BE DEVOTED TO THE NEEDS OF BLOOD, SELLING BONDS, ETC.

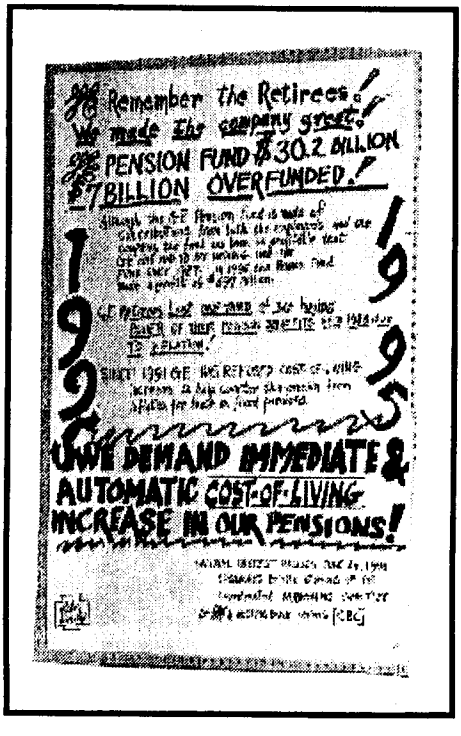
Answer. Thank you for your interest.

End



Helen Quirini now -- as President of the Local 301 IUE-AFL-CIO Retirees Council -- leading a 1996 demonstration protesting GE's unwillingness to distribute pension fund surpluses to older retirees.





In June, 1996, over 175 people again took part in their annual demonstration in front of the General Electric Company requesting the company to share our pension fund with us. According to GE's 1995 annual report, our fund is now worth $30.2 billion dollars with a surplus of over $7 billion dollars.

In November, 1996, the Company gave selective raises to retirees. While this is a step in the right direction, pensioners still need annual cost of living raises and health insurance.


FORGOTEN

Dedicated *to all those who labored* in the factories -- *great* people who worked with their hands -- *without whom the* war could never have been won.

My security badge from 1942.

With many thanks to the following people who encouraged me to write this book and dedicated time to make it a reality:

Gerald Zahavi, Assoc. Professor of History, S.U.N.Y. at Albany
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