

Voices of Feminism Oral History Project

Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College
Northampton, MA

PATRICIA REEVE

interviewed by

KATHLEEN BANKS NUTTER

November 21, 2003
West Roxbury, MA

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Narrator

Patricia Reeve was born in Akron, Ohio, in 1953, the daughter of a chemical engineer/lawyer father and an Italian immigrant mother who “broke with family tradition” by attending nursing school and continued working as a nurse until Pat was in grade school (by then she had three younger siblings). She was raised by “devout Catholics” and is also the great niece of Ella Reeve Bloor. While Pat was a sophomore in high school, her mother died; until her father remarried a year later, Pat “assumed responsibility for the household.” She graduated from Northern Illinois University (B.A., History, 1975; M.A., History, 1978) and is a Ph.D. candidate at Boston College, expecting to finish in the next few months. After several clerical and retail positions, she joined 9to5 as an organizer in 1979, working in the Boston area until 1985. Thereafter she joined the faculty at the Labor Studies Program, University of Massachusetts, Boston, working primarily with non-traditional students. From 1997–2003, Pat was director of the Labor Resource Center at University of Massachusetts, Boston, coordinating the labor education program there. She was a co-founder of WILD (the Women’s Institute for Leadership Development) in 1986 and remains on their board today; she is also active in the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network. She and her partner, Debby Briggs, adopted a special-needs child in 1996: today Laurie is a thriving thirteen-year-old.

Interviewer

Kathleen Banks Nutter was for many years a reference archivist at the Sophia Smith Collection. She is currently adjunct faculty at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. She is the author of *“The Necessity of Organization”: Mary Kenney O’Sullivan and Trade Unionism for Women, 1892–1912* (Garland, 1999).

Abstract

The oral history focuses on the various phases of Reeve’s life but is especially strong on her union activities and her career as a labor educator.

Restrictions

None

Format

Interview recorded on miniDV using Sony Digital Camcorder DSR-PDX10. Four 60-minute tapes.

Transcript

Transcribed by Luann Jette. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Kathleen Banks Nutter. Reviewed and approved by Patricia Reeve.

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

Video Recording

Bibliography: Reeve, Patricia. Interview by Kathleen Banks Nutter. Video recording, November 21, 2003. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection.

Footnote: Patricia Reeve, interview by Kathleen Banks Nutter, video recording, November 21, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, tape 3.

Transcript

Bibliography: Reeve, Patricia. Interview by Kathleen Banks Nutter. Transcript of video recording, November 21, 2003. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection. **Footnote:** Patricia Reeve, interview by Kathleen Banks Nutter, transcript of video recording, November 21, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, pp. 20–22.

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PAT REEVE
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at: above

by: KATHLEEN BANKS NUTTER

BANKS NUTTER: This is Kathleen Banks Nutter. I am at Pat Reeve's house in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. It's November 21, 2003. Thank you so much. It really does mean a lot to me that you are my first oral history for this project. And the information you did in part in your biographical form was really helpful and so I'd like to start from that. Tell me about your childhood, a little bit, your parents, especially, and their background.

REEVE: Just jump in?

BANKS NUTTER: Please do.

REEVE: Well, in my background, the more dominant personality was very much my mother. She was an Italian immigrant from Sicily who had a very definite sense of propriety and it didn't always conform with middle-class values but often it did, because she did aspire to middle-class status. Just by virtue of being so Italian-identified. That permeated some of our house. I grew up not really completely understanding that my father wasn't Italian. It wasn't as if he was an afterthought but her culture really shaped the family. My dad — he was a quieter presence in the house although he had a pretty good temper, but he deferred to my mother in terms of management of the house. He was sort of Heinz '57 background, and was the first person in his family to go to college actually, and he did that on a GI bill, and that's actually where he and my mother met each other, was when he was at the University of Michigan.

BANKS NUTTER: And what was she doing there?

REEVE: She was working as a nurse. I'm trying to remember — it must have been roughly 1951-50. I'm not sure. Her father had died literally on her 18th birthday and she had already gotten his permission to go to nursing school when it became clear that she wasn't going to get the scholarship that she should have gotten actually. And, the more I know about them, the more I'm impressed that at 18, she was able to persuade him to let

her go off to school and leave. That was really a departure from what was expected of her. And more than that, that she had the gumption to move that far away from her mother after her father died, to go to work in her — she was born in Italy but they settled in central Ohio, Marion, Ohio, and then she ended up working in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which I've always found fascinating because it's not as if women in that generation were moving around particularly after the war, but for an Italian immigrant to do that is really a break with tradition.

BANKS NUTTER: So when you say your mom was dominant and it was an Italian immigrant household that you grew up in, what does that mean, I mean, how did that materialize itself in your life as a child?

REEVE: Catholicism and being, you know, Italian descent were completely intertwined. Even still, my sense of what it means to be a Catholic is very much filtered having grown up with an Italian immigrant. Also, she and my father were in agreement, actually, about this — it's not as if this was her role and not his — they were very much, very old school. Children were to be seen and not heard? Although I think they took a lot of delight in their kids. But, frankly, they were also overwhelmed. They had four children. She was working, he was working and he was going to law school at night. So for the first several years of their married life, I'm sure they were sleep-deprived.

BANKS NUTTER: If nothing else. So, was that, in that she was working, and this is in the 50s, when our vision is often Harriet Nelson who's at home baking the cookies, and your mom was working full-time while having kids, did you have a sense of that as a child, that your household was different, or was it maybe not so different in that way, do you think?

REEVE: I had no sense that it was different, and it's interesting because my mother died when I was 15 and my father subsequently remarried and what I later learned, my stepmother challenged my father on this, was that with both my mother and stepmother, he had basically prohibited them from working after a certain point, a decision he now regrets, particularly with regard to my stepmother. She challenged him, told him it was either she goes back to work or she gets a divorce. And my mother, I think, had she lived — she died in '68 and things hadn't changed that much for her generation. Her sisters are very different; they were like her and became very different. But she didn't challenge him.

BANKS NUTTER: Now, one of the other things and you've already sort of brought it up, too, is that this was a devout Catholic household. I guess, first if you could maybe clarify for me, in part being a non-Catholic, what does that mean? What does it look like, feel like, taste like in a day? From a child's point of view.

REEVE: There was a way in which the observance of the faith was involved in every part of our life, everything from Sunday Mass — and God help you if you weren't ready to go out the door when my father was ready [laugh] — to the fact that I went to a parochial school, an all-girls school, from first through eighth grade, and I was really, for those eight years, immersed in the Catholic universe. I had no conception of what it meant to go to a public school — and it wasn't even so much that, it was more that my universe was Catholic, sort of, defined. The nuns were incredible role models. The school had once been a boarding school and it was now a day school on pretty extensive grounds, so we were very involved in the nuns' lives.

I remember being a kid and going to wakes and I was just terrified, but there was something very normative about it. They painted, they played music, they had studios, they — the teachers, by and large, not every teacher, but they were very free thinking, and it's remarkable when I think of how — because I've certainly heard all the jokes and the stories about very punitive Catholic elementary schools and in fact, my brothers went to one. But where I was was much more oriented to cultivating girls' minds. And I see that now. I just took it for granted then. But even then, we were being raised to be good Catholic girls. And I don't mean that in sort of the simple-minded sense of that, but being reflective, being kind, being conscious. We were told repeatedly to pray for our vocation, and I grew up thinking that not to know your vocation would be this devastating experience.

But the other part of the Catholicism, of course, was just the high holy days. You know, Easter, Christmas. They were very spiritual in our household. I mean, they were certainly festive. That's the thing about Italian Catholicism, that there is a variant Catholicism that's more severe, anesthetic, it's not Italian Catholicism, if you can imagine.

BANKS NUTTER: You mention that the vocation piece, because one of the things I was thinking about asking you was that sort of classic, you know, "What did you want to be when you grew up?"

REEVE: An astronaut. [laugh] I'm serious.

BANKS NUTTER: Yeah?

REEVE: I did. I wanted to be an astronaut. [laugh].

BANKS NUTTER: When they said pray for your vocation, that's what you did — and what was it that appealed to you in that astronaut, and of course, this is the 60s where we're, you know, going off. But what was it, do you think?

REEVE: You know, it's interesting. When I think about what captured my fancy, I went through — every Catholic girl, I think, goes through this — I went through a brief period of thinking I wanted to be a nun. My mother would come downstairs and find me reading the lives of the saints, for Christ's sakes.

BANKS NUTTER: No pun intended. [laughs]

REEVE: Exactly. But, yeah, I was fascinated by space, and long before we hit the moon, and I'm not sure what that was about. I think that's my father's influence. My father really had a fascination with, and still does, with astronomy. I can remember going outside with him, and he'd set up a camera on a telescope and then, then we'd — if you do the photography right, you can watch the stars do a 360. And I was also, as I got older, I got interested in science fiction, so, you know, that was certainly being fostered.

But honestly, by the time I was in my mid- to late teens, my advocacy self had begun to emerge. I can remember reading *Exodus* and being so moved by the Jews' creation of Israel, and it was certainly not on the basis of any kind of principled stand — I didn't know that much about what had happened, but I was just moved by the literature of that land, the struggle, and knowing what they've gone through during the Holocaust. I can remember sitting at the dining room table one night and saying that I had been thinking about converting to Judaism. I thought my father would die — that's not something you say in a Catholic household, particularly because there was certainly, you know, there had been no rapprochement between Catholics and Jews at that point in time. But I was moved by that sort of spirit of advocacy that I think now, I think I identified it with Judaism.

BANKS NUTTER: So, as a child then, you're thinking of being an astronaut. As you became a teenager, did that change? You left that parochial girls school and went to a high school — was it a Catholic high school you went to as well?

REEVE: We moved in '67 and I was — I guess the end of '66 and I was in the middle of eighth grade so I was put in to a public — whatever, I guess they call it a middle school now.

BANKS NUTTER: Junior high, then, probably.

REEVE: And I was very relieved. I was ready for public school at that point. I really wanted to go. And I think it was probably good that I made the transition then, because going into a public high school would have been tough without that break.

But, you know, the truth is that my teen years were pretty sad. My mother was dying of cancer the latter part of my eighth grade and through my freshman year of high school, and then she died, literally, two days, roughly, before I started my sophomore year of high school. And I don't remember much. I remember sort of coming alive again in my senior year of high school. I had lousy grades through most of high school, and then decided, sort of in the course of waking up again, I decided that I was tired of hearing that I was an underachiever so I made a point of getting all A's that year. And frankly, it's the only reason I

was able to get into college. On the basis of the previous three years, I would not have made it. But, you know, the mind and the heart do strange things. I basically just capped that experience, those first three years off and I put them away for a very long time.

BANKS NUTTER: Do you mind talking about that a little bit more?

REEVE: No.

BANKS NUTTER: For anyone who loses a parent early, it's a devastating experience and being the oldest and the female, then that sets up in another dynamic.

REEVE: Well, it was confusing because I realized in hindsight that my mother was teaching me to run a household the last couple of years. She had it rough for two years and the last six months became quite acute, and so her capacity for her doing much of anything in the way of parenting was really pretty diminished.

BANKS NUTTER: And how old are your siblings at this point?

REEVE: I was 15 when she died, my brother Rick was 14, Tom was 12, and my sister was 9 about to turn 10. They were young. It was worse because for reasons that as an adult I understand, just barely, my parents didn't tell us that she was dying, so we were told the week before she died that she was going to die. So it was quite a shock. She didn't want us to know. She didn't even tell her mother. And I can remember part of the trauma of her death was that her reasons — again, as an adult, I understand — in the interim, we had moved to Illinois, which is why I ended up at public schools, we had left Ohio, and really, for almost five years, there was virtually no contact with the Fazios after she died.

BANKS NUTTER: That's her family?

REEVE: Yeah, so, and we had spent every holiday, major holidays with them, and so I felt like a whole chunk of my life had just literally evaporated overnight. And it took a couple of years before I warmed to the Fazios again. I think I blamed them for abandoning us. I think that's how I saw it. But I can remember taking a walk with my Grandma Fazio, because I did start visiting them in my twenties and she was furious with my mother for not having told her, and my grandmother was so far from being judgmental, but she carried that hurt. And I absolutely understood it and it was actually quite a relief to me to hear her say it. I remember trying to talk about it with my father once when I was older and he was just so defensive, he couldn't talk about it, you know, without feeling attacked and feeling like he had to defend my mother.

BANKS NUTTER: Her decision not to tell you all?

REEVE: Yeah.

BANKS NUTTER: You had a sense that she was ill. You knew-

REEVE: Yeah, absolutely. Because I can remember driving my high school buddy, Janet Ponte and her mother and her mom was asking — I'm sure her mom knew, and —

BANKS NUTTER: The adults knew?

REEVE: I think people knew something was really wrong. We were being told that mom was anemic. But, I laugh now I think about that. But Janet, in the way that high school kids do without thinking, said, "Oh, I know somebody else whose mother was really sick and then she died." I burst into tears and her mother was furious with her. And, you know, there's moments where I realized, I knew. I knew that the adults weren't telling the truth, but I didn't know quite what it meant. And kids protect themselves.

BANKS NUTTER: One of the things you noted in your biographical form was that after your mom's death, as the oldest and a female, oldest female, that you ran the house. How did that feel as a 15, 16-year-old?

REEVE: Well, I was 15, I was 16 the following March. She died in September, and then my dad married again in late October the following year. Again, that was a year, the same year, I imagine where I numbed out. I was almost robotic. I basically would get up, get lunches made. I don't even really know how I did it, when I think back on that, and then I would go to school and I would come home and I would get dinner ready and I would clean up. My father's chores were the laundry and the groceries but I did everything else. And I just did it because it — that's the other part of, I think to some degree, growing up in an Italian immigrant family — girls do. I mean, but the time I was 12 or 13, I was expected to clean the whole house on Saturday, it wasn't even discussed. I was just — that's what I was supposed to do. And so this was just an extension of that. But it was only after — I can remember my father telling me he wanted to marry my stepmother and I remember thinking and actually I think I said it to him, "If she's willing to take it on, she can have it." I was very practical about it. I had had enough at that point. Because I had really been doing a lot of that while my mother was ill, too. It was just never acknowledged by my parents.

BANKS NUTTER: Right. That you had stepped up in that way. Do you feel that your relationship to your brothers and your sister — did that change at that point?

REEVE: That is a really insightful question. My sister and I have a very close connection and it's developed later in life, but I think that we have been able to bridge sort of the chasm that developed those years, and that's been very important to me. I only later in life found out what that

experience was like for her, and she really looked for mothers for the next ten or fifteen years of her life and other parts of her life and frequently, unbeknownst to me, because I went off to college two years later, was frequently not home. She got home at night, tried very, very hard not to be home.

My brothers and I — the way I characterize it now, was that we atomized. We lived in the same house, but we were atoms floating in space. There was no current that brought us together. We were just that. And, my father within a very short time, took down all my mother's pictures. We didn't talk about her. We didn't talk about the fact that she had died. It was like it'd never happened. But to this day, I believe I have a somewhat conflicted relationship with my younger brother, because he was just young enough that he immediately recast me as mom, and he had a very tough relationship with my stepmother, and I think he at some level, still holds some anger that I didn't step up in the way that he would have expected his mother to step up and defend him.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, it's a hard thing, a formative experience, for sure. So you go off to college. You said your senior year, your stepmother's now there and you've decided to become the overachiever instead of the underachiever, I guess?

REEVE: That's interesting. I never thought it that way, but you're right, that's what I did.

BANKS NUTTER: And so, was being an astronaut still propelling you? I guess not, and you majored in history?

REEVE: No, I actually didn't until the eleventh hour. I had gotten very involved with music in high school. I'm not a great talent when it comes to singing but I loved singing and you know, if you practice and everything, you get pretty good. I couldn't do it now. And, I managed to get myself on sort of the more elite choral group and really wanted to major in music. The problem being you had to play an instrument. I was accepted at U of I, into the music department. Now I had to go down for what's called the adjudication. And I flunked it. I just wasn't talented enough as a pianist. And I was classic 17 or 18, it was all or nothing. I couldn't do it, then, you know, because they were encouraging me to take lessons for a year, come to school, stay in the College of Liberal Arts, then try the test again. And I said, "No." That's just the way I thought then. I laugh about it now.

So I ended up at Northern Illinois University and majored in art for close to 3-1/2 years and then, the middle of my junior year — I was nine credits short of a BFA — and decided — I became politicized and really wanted to study history. I can remember the advisor, the graduate student who was the advisor for my history program, tried to talk me out of it because I was so close to graduation. But I did it. I crammed an entire major into the next three semesters and then summer school. I was determined.

BANKS NUTTER: Wow. A lot of reading [laughs], I imagine. And you became politicized. Tell me about that. What was that?

REEVE: Well, I was certainly aware of the Vietnam War, and I was aware of politics. I have a vivid memory of when my mother was in the hospital in downtown Chicago during the Days of Rage. And watching TV in her hospital room and there was a way in which her death and that time is very connected for me. I remember watching the SDS demonstrations in the streets and Mayor Daley's fascist troops out there and you know, those kinds of things were percolating but they hadn't been articulated yet, consciously. I remember getting involved with women's issues as a college student. I helped — I helped actually, I forgot about this, creating women's studies minor at Northern Illinois University.

BANKS NUTTER: While you were an undergraduate there?

REEVE: And the war in Vietnam was still going on and I think we had just bombed Cambodia. I was a freshman. Yeah, I think that's right. The timing was right. And at the school, people just poured into the streets. And I can remember passionately trying to get my then closest friend, someone I'm still very much in contact with, to come with me and she just didn't want to and I remember being so upset that she didn't understand the enormity of what was going on, and it was really only by my junior and senior year that I was beginning to identify myself as a political person, which became a source of tension between myself and my then boyfriend, because he was more of an artist and didn't have a lot of respect for left politics.

BANKS NUTTER: What did that include? Feminism? I mean, would you have, at that moment in time said, "I am a feminist?"

REEVE: Oh, absolutely. At that point in time, I would have called myself a feminist-Marxist.

BANKS NUTTER: And what did that mean?

REEVE: Whatever that meant to me.

BANKS NUTTER: What do you think it meant to you now?

REEVE: I think the way I understood it then — I absolutely understood the feminist piece, I didn't have to — that was no stretch, but I think that I was taking Marxism as a kind of coat and trying it on, and I think what I meant was just simply a radical analysis, because in my heart of hearts, I think I'm actually sort of a small D social democrat. I'm a socialist but it's — not populist. I don't quite know how to describe it. I'm not militantly Marxist, and I think that I was quite enamored of the persona that I took that to be. Someone who had a clear world view, clear

critique, could articulate that critique. This was a point where, and you have to understand, I had been going from drawing where you don't talk and you don't write, to having to speak and write. And so, part of what Marxism represented to me was a kind of hyper-intellectualism and so I aspired to that.

BANKS NUTTER: And so, in this process of becoming politicized, of self-identifying as a feminist-Marxist, what did that — I guess, basically, what did that look like? Did you go to a meeting and all of a sudden — or was it something you read? I mean, was it somebody you heard speak?

REEVE: It was in the history department that had become a kind of refugee camp for people who had been drummed out during the McCarthy era and then people who had been drummed out in the early years of antiwar activism and the new left. So, it was actually this fabulous place, and I know that now because I have a sense of the field and the discipline. But I was just lucky enough to have happened into it at that point in time. And partly what I was soaking up were the ideas I was hearing in the classroom. We weren't proselytized to, but I was being asked to think about human experience in ways that I had never thought about before, but it resonated with that part of me that had been so moved by the *Exodus*. That was the connection. It moved my heart.

BANKS NUTTER: And the feminist piece?

REEVE: Coming out of the family I came out of, once I got away and got to college, my freshman year was another blur. I didn't want to be there. I got pretty depressed actually, in my sophomore year things turned around for me.

BANKS NUTTER: And did you not want to be there because you were still wanting to be the pianist who went to the big school?

REEVE: I think I — well, yes. Somebody once said something about me is which, I think, really true, that I tell stories about my life. I never knew this about myself till she said it and then I realized the truth of it. And when the story shifts, I go through a period where I am kicking and screaming because I don't have another story to tell about my life. I don't have another way of thinking about it, and that's what freshman year was. I didn't know who I was and I had to re-find it myself. Those four years. But absolutely when I got away from home, I began to make some sense of my experience growing up in that household and just the enormity of the responsibility I had, well beyond what a teenager should have been dealing with. And I construed that from a feminist perspective.

BANKS NUTTER: I would assume that your stepmother, as you said, if she was willing to take it on, she could have it. So was that in a sense what freed you to go, to leave for college?

REEVE: I think so. She married my dad my first semester of junior year of high school and I immediately got a serious case of mono, serious. My father in fact panicked because initially, you know, you get very low white counts. He was panicky that I had leukemia like my mother had. But it was just a virulent case of mono. I was out of school for a couple of months and, I think I just collapsed. I hadn't grieved the previous year. And I think I was still grieving when I went off to college and you know, I think it was just an accumulation of being very unhappy in my life.

BANKS NUTTER: But going to school and making that shift from art major to history major: was it out of frustration or did it feel freeing somehow, that process?

REEVE: I often make changes in my life without knowing how it's going to feel till I've been through it entirely. So all I can tell you is that it was a deep, gut instinct that this is what I should do and — you know, I probably had taken a history class, I'm guessing, as an elective and got really excited about it. But I also grew up in a family, Kathleen, where people talked about history a lot. My grandmother Reeve was a walking encyclopedia of Irish-Canadian history and of Canadian history, and could remember down to the color of the clothes they were wearing, stories going back, you know, three generations. Not just her family, but her husband's family, which is quite amusing. And even now, my brother Tom, who's in business, fantasizes about becoming a historian and my father read history when I was growing up as did my grandparents. I don't remember my mother being a reader and she probably wasn't — not enough time. Not sure where I was going with that but it's — I just think it was kind of an organic experience to find myself in a history class.

BANKS NUTTER: Now your Reeve grandparents, you mentioned them as important people in your life, and the Reeve family is — as you know I know, there's some interesting connections there. But, tell me first more about the Reeve grandparents who were so important. They lived nearby when you were growing up? Was it a physical closeness?

REEVE: Not particularly, because we had to drive from Akron, Ohio, to Holland, Michigan, and it's about a seven- or eight-hour trip. And I think that's probably why it made such, for such a wonderful experience because we would go for a week at a time and give my mother a break. One of us or two of us would get shipped off every summer for a week each. But their standard of living was better than my family's because they didn't have four children. They just had themselves and had for a long time. So things that would have been a luxury in my household, like all of us going out to dinner, they could do. So I just had this sense of being in fairy land whenever I would go there. But the truth of it is that they really doted on me, too.

My father has since told me, actually, in recent years, that they were much more interested in me and my brother Rick than they were in my younger siblings, which is sad. But I don't think I knew that, but I certainly felt, you know, the connection and the focus. But my grandfather Reeve, I think of him as being kind of an emotional cipher. He was a very loving man with me but he was present and absent. I now realize that he was pretty checked out. I can remember trying to get to know him better in my early twenties, writing him letters, saying that. And he wrote back and said something on the order of, "It would be better if we left things where they are. Better for all of us." And I remember thinking, oh, OK. Pretty clear statement. But yet, it's interesting. He actually came from a very interesting family, as you know, and his father's sister was Ella Reeve Bloor, but he had never mentioned her nor had my father. It was my grandmother Reeve, who was not Ella's blood relation, who told me about her, and had been carefully keeping all these documents for years. And so she told me about her and I was just so excited to get — she told me about her, I think, in the latter part of college, because I wasn't in graduate school yet.

BANKS NUTTER: So it was around that time you were shifting from art to history, you think?

REEVE: Yes, and that might be why she decided to share with me, because I remember learning about it in my senior year in college. And I was fascinated, and I remember, in a way, you know, how dramatic kids can be at that age and I say that now advisedly — there are kids who aren't and I know that. But, here I was, not quite 21 and I felt it explained who I was. I felt like — I couldn't explain who I was in relationship to the rest of the family, but this woman helped me feel like, oh, this is where I come from. I just felt like she was roots for me. And you know, I really don't remember much more that, other than that she shared the materials with me and it was really only after I had entered the master's program that I made an active effort to try to reconnect with Carl and Ann Reeve. But my father was furious, absolutely furious with his mother for having told me about it.

BANKS NUTTER: For sharing that? Why?

REEVE: Well, he had gone to college to become a lawyer during the McCarthy era and he was terrified, I think, still. I don't know what he was afraid of, I mean, we're talking the 70s, but he bore the imprint of that experience and I also think that he's very much of that generation that all communism as a sort of model work of evil. Now he's intrigued by the fact that Ella has become this historical figure and so now, I think he's willing to claim some connection to her. But, it was many years before he could work up any enthusiasm about her at all. And in fact, the truth is, none of Ella's siblings were particularly wild about her. My great-grandfather was one of the few people she actually had an

emotional connection with, and I don't even know how substantial that was.

BANKS NUTTER: Did your father — had he ever met her or —?

REEVE: I don't believe he had, because I know that my grandmother had not but my grandfather had. He'd accompanied his dad once to see her. As you probably know they corresponded.

BANKS NUTTER: So, in your grandmother's not her direct relative but when she told you about Ella Reeve Bloor and had saved these things, did she seem impressed by Bloor and her work or was it just more the notoriety?

REEVE: I think it was more intellectually grounded than just sort of the sensationalism. I meant what I said earlier about my grandmother's love of history. She had a historian's instincts and appreciation of sort of the material aspects of history. She respected Ella's documents. She took very good care of them, and she didn't give them to me until she thought I would take very good care of them. So she was really sort of the flame keeper in a way for the Reeves. I mean, and my father figures in the family too, not just Ella. And in many respects, it's kind of ironic because she had more to lose than anybody in that family, in her immediate family, due to the connection to Ella, because she was naturalized as a citizen in the McCarthy era, and you know, she acknowledged later with me when she told me about Ella, that there had been some speculation that she would be investigated, because, of course, about that time, Ella's children were being investigated and red-baited.

BANKS NUTTER: You said, and I know you got in touch with Carol and Ann Reeve, what was that like?

REEVE: Oh, the whole process was so interesting. I remember telling Al Young about Ella, you know, because he was like, he was one of the first people I took courses with as a master's student and I just adored him. I was intimidated by him but I loved him and he was so exciting and of course, I didn't know his radical past either.

BANKS NUTTER: And this is at Northern Illinois.

REEVE: Yes, sorry. So he, you know, I tried getting — I tried writing, I think, Carl and Ann, I can't remember how that played out, but he was the one who figured out, because he was more sophisticated than I was at 22, who knew that I needed to be vetted. So he wrote Herbert Aptheker who was their contact. Herbert was coming to DeKalb, Illinois, to present and I had a private meeting with Herbert because he wanted to make sure, for Carl, he was instructed by Carl to figure out who I was and whether I was OK. And I think Al's endorsement probably helped quite a bit.

Um, so then what happened is that after Herbert said, “She’s OK,” I took the train out there, they lived outside of Philadelphia, and by the time I was in college, my father had achieved a very decidedly middle-class life and I was struck immediately by the poverty. I mean, they owned their home but they were poor, and I think that, the truth is I had never really understood those differentials, those kinds of economic differentials in quite the way until after that visit. It really woke me up in a way, hearing what had happened to them. His loss of jobs repeatedly because of his mother; at that point in time, they were selling antiques at flea markets and antique shows to make a living. And here were these people, probably — I’m guessing at that point, in their late seventies, maybe even early eighties, I’m not sure, seventies. Of course, at that age, you think everybody is older than you are.

BANKS NUTTER: They’re ancient.

REEVE: But they were pretty elderly (two voices). Carting this furniture around in the truck. From place to place, loading it and unloading it. I just was really moved — I didn’t characterize their life as a tragedy, but I was moved by what had happened to them by virtue of their views and principles and angry about it. And I can remember coming back to DeKalb, there were a number of older graduate students there who have since become quite prominent in the field of history and one of them, I remember them saying to me, well, something like, “Well, what do you expect.” Dismissing them as old left communists. Because the department was predominantly populated by people who were other than me quite new left, and I was furious at the presumption, here he was, speaking from his protected status as a graduate student. But, Carl and Ann brought out all of Ella’s papers for me and I was just overwhelmed and so excited. I loved their knowing and wanted to write her biography and then as you know, Al and I tried to — Al and I almost succeeded — in having the University of Wisconsin — I shouldn’t say I did it, Al helped and I wrote the letter and, the University of Wisconsin was prepared to pay for them, because Carl and Ann were very frank with me. They couldn’t afford to give them, and an individual who will live in infamy had them taken to Hollins College and part of the agreement was nobody else could use the papers for three years. And my project was gone, but more importantly Carl and Ann were mortified. They felt terrible: that had meant that Ella’s story wasn’t going to be told by me. So, I moved on. And there it was, sort of like the music experience. Suddenly I didn’t know what I was going to do.

BANKS NUTTER: You’re a graduate student now and that was what you were intended to do, a thesis. That’s why you went in, you know —

REEVE: I went there partially because I didn’t know what else to do. I’ll be frank about that.

BANKS NUTTER: Hey, that's what graduate school's for. Especially for a history major.

REEVE: Yeah. I've always had the bad luck of "I need degrees during the recessions," so I'll do it again.

BANKS NUTTER: So that piece — actually I didn't realize the close — I forgot that part about that they were closed for that time when they were at Hollins.

REEVE: Very strong feelings about that.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, for the historical record, we're all glad they're at the Sophia Smith Collection now. So, with that juncture then again, you — did you have to cast about for another thesis topic or reason why you're in graduate school, were you still politically active at that time?

REEVE: Yes, and I don't remember what I was doing, to be honest. I wasn't terribly active, not as active as I'd been as an undergraduate, partly because I'd had a cold dose of reality. I'd worked as a clerk almost fourteen months before I went back to school and the gap between rhetoric and reality sort of slapped me in the face. I was still digesting that experience. But I did cast about and I was — I've been lucky in that I ended in places where I belong. I ended up in J. Carroll Moody's seminar on labor history, a year-long seminar, and then I took another semester and worked with him, and I maintained my interest in communism.

I ended up doing a year — basically, you either do a thesis or you do the two-year-long research seminar, so I took the latter option after losing the Ella papers. But I did my first one on the International Labor Defense and really enjoyed that. And because I was in continuing contact with Al, although I wasn't continuing to take classes with him just because of the nature of my major, because that doesn't really matter, but in any case, Al's love of social and public history have really left an imprint on me, and I somehow discovered, I'm not sure how I found out about Miles Horton and Highlander Center and I was so excited about it and I think that Al was excited that I was excited about it.

I know how I found out about it: Doug Gamble, who was then on a tenure-track position, who would eventually go on to work at the Highlander. I quite fascinated by the Highlander Center and I just knew that I wanted to do something with history that brought it out in a classroom and, as is often the case with academic departments, a lot of my colleagues who were graduate students thought it was such a waste of my degree that I wanted to do something like that, because they were headed for faculty land.

BANKS NUTTER: So what would you have been doing at the Highlander School?

REEVE: Popular education. That really appealed to me, adult education, which is of course what I ended up doing for many years. That's when I first

crystallized my interested in popular and intellectual education with a labor focus. So when I moved to Boston with Greg Kaster, at that point then I knew that I wanted to find something in organizing. I had made the leap from academics to popular education to education for change. I think that was really the development.

BANKS NUTTER: Quite a trajectory. Looking back now at that path from academics to public education — was it more the Marxist piece or the feminist piece that was guiding you?

REEVE: At that point, I think I knew that I was not a Marxist and that I was more a socialist, and there was a faculty member who, a very bright man, Marty ?, Martin?, who — I'll never forget him saying in class that some people are moved to act from their head and others are moved from the heart. And I knew I was from the heart. So I had limited patience with the rhetoric and sectarianism on the left. I would say that's still true for me. I'm interested in sectarianism as a historical subject, but I get very impatient with it in practical terms when I'm in a political environment where I have to deal with that. And so I had, at that point, very little use for many of my graduate student colleagues because they were academic sectarians and I felt they weren't grounded in everyday life.

BANKS NUTTER: And from your point of view, did that seem a product of their background or of society in general?

REEVE: I think at the time I saw it as a function of male privilege. They were white, they were male, they had all the prospects in the world and so they could afford the luxury of sectarianism and academic pursuit.

BANKS NUTTER: Were there not many other women in your graduate program?

REEVE: No. And that was a very hostile environment for a female graduate student. Not the faculty, they were welcoming to students. That's why I swore I would never go back, because it was a fairly awful experience. The learning was fabulous. But the rest of it I could have left easily behind, and I did.

BANKS NUTTER: Reflectively, does there seem to be some reason why that particular cohort that you were part of was like that? I mean, was it a reaction to the rise of feminism?

REEVE: I think that partly, I mean as a historian, I think about it now and probably you are, too, that this was a population and I've since known them —

BANKS NUTTER: You're talking mid-70s here, now, right?

REEVE: Yes. Men in the early 70s, mid-70s. Men who had come of age during the antiwar and civil rights movements but not during the women's

movement. So they had a very developed race and class analysis and were very scornful about the women's movement and its political impact. God help us that we would even think about sexuality, that was just not even on the radar screen at that point, um, but I was just deeply offended and incredibly judgmental because it was probably a defense. But I really did see their academic elitism, and it was kind of a left elitism, as being male-grounded. And I don't know that that's fair or even accurate but that's how I saw them.

So by the time I left the department, I knew what I was and wasn't as a political person. I knew I was a deeply feminist socialist, and I knew that I didn't want any part of academia. It's ironic. And it wasn't just a function of being a woman there. I had male friends who were feminist, who had a very hard time in that department because they weren't behaving the orthodox way. They weren't saying the orthodox things.

BANKS NUTTER: It must have been difficult. So, moving to Boston gave you the opportunity to make a break. Tell me about that. So this is a very conscious move and break?

REEVE: Yes and no. I'd like to say that now but it wasn't. I was graduating. I didn't know what I was going to do next with my life. The man I was with at that point had received a fellowship at BU and so I came with him. It was really that simple. I was 26 and that's the kind of thing you do when you're 26 and you don't have other things holding you back. So I came here and worked for a good year and a half as a cashier, and rebuilt my sense of self-esteem.

I was pretty devastated after Northern, and then finally decided I was going to organize and I was volunteering at that point for the Massachusetts Branch of National Abortion Rights actually, although I don't think NARAL existed then, but I could be wrong, and through that, I began to network in circles of people who were hiring for social justice organizations, and this was the time when the economy, the VISTA program, things like that, were helping these organizations thrive. I mean, the Reagan years saw the wiping out a lot of them. So it came down came to taking a job as a community organizer at Mass Fair Share or taking a job at the 9to5 organization. And I just was drawn more to the notion of a labor context than the community context. So I went with the 9to5 job.

BANKS NUTTER: Now you had had your own work experiences that I assume, you know, informed you and you've got the labor history background already, you had covered, you knew that, but you had your own work experiences. Do you think they were a necessary part of becoming a labor organizer?

REEVE: Yeah, and I don't know if I thought of myself at the time as a labor organizer. I saw myself as an organizer of clericals and my connections with the labor movement really only developed once I got to UMass. I had been a clerical worker half-time throughout college. I was a full-

time clerical worker and a clerical worker again before moving to Boston, and that's what I meant about being sort of a slap of reality. I discovered that I was valuable because I could type or because I could alphabetize. My mental capacities weren't particularly valued, except as much I could problem solve. And ironically, I was very dis-invested but I came across as being serious, to the extent that I was kind of the good girl. I was actually given very good reviews. But I was completely emotionally detached from the work.

BANKS NUTTER: Now, where was this? What clerical job was this?

REEVE: I worked at Northern Illinois University.

BANKS NUTTER: So in the university system.

REEVE: Sort of classic experience of helping to pay your way. And then I worked for AAA after I graduated, doing the mind-numbing job eight hours a day, putting those trip-ticks together. And then when I moved to Boston, I became a cashier. And it's not that much different. Lots of responsibility, no authority, lot of customer service. People really just have no sense of autonomy at all or mental privacy in those experiences. So for me, when I came to 9to5, I came to it in the spirit of somebody who felt like a rank-and-filer. Not somebody who was sort of intrigued by the world of organizing. I felt a visceral connection to the organization when I found out about it.

END TAPE 1

TAPE 2

BANKS NUTTER: If you had to summarize, and I guess I'm asking you to do that, in a few sentences, what brought you to the labor movement at that moment in time?

REEVE: Well, again, I didn't think as going to the labor movement, I had thought of it as organizing women I felt like I understood, who I cared about. I saw it as organizing around economics. That's really how I saw it. I differentiated between economic organizing and community organizing, and the labor context was interesting to me, but I don't think that I consciously saw myself as connecting to the movement. And in fact, a piece that I left out is that I probably, at that point in time, wanted very little to do with the labor movement as I understood it because as a clerical worker, I had been an AFSCME member.

At that point in time, AFSCME International was organizing clericals at publicly funded universities. And I don't know the history of this so I'm not certain. What happened, the little that I know, is that there was a decision made in the International to basically walk away from it. We ended up getting decertified, and I didn't have a particularly sophisticated understanding of what it meant. All I knew was that whatever connection personally I had felt to the labor movement in its institutional sense was minimal at best and that [my experience] left a sour taste in my mouth.

So I liked the fact that 9to5 wasn't a labor union, and so I was very much like the members I was organizing in that respect. What I loved about that job and I did love it — I had a few different jobs there but what I loved about that experience until the very end was the sense that we were making a real difference, and we did in those years. Of course, many of the gains we organized and won, can be undone, in fact, collective bargaining [the only guarantee of institutional change], that was a lesson we learned, and of course the panorama of Massachusetts corporate life has changed. A lot of headquarters used to be in Boston, so you could really do targeted campaigns. You can't anymore because they are elsewhere. Your enemy is elsewhere. Your target is elsewhere. But it was just fabulous. It was a learning experience. I learned laws I didn't know. I learned how to organize.

I consciously apprenticed myself to somebody in the office, Elaine Taber, who eventually became a good friend, I could tell by watching her she had mastered the techniques of organizing, and I don't mean that in the sense of this disembodied, unemotional sense. She just knew what it took to move people so they spoke and acted for themselves. And I wasn't being taught that because I was originally hired to fundraise. I was sent off to the Midwest Academy to get trained there as a fundraiser. And that was a wonderful experience, quite an eye-opener.

BANKS NUTTER: Tell me about that.

REEVE: It was wonderful. When I was hired, I was hired by Ellen Cassedy, one of the founders of 9to5. She was great, what a character. I'll never forget, after two months on the job, she brought me in her office and said, "You know, when I hired you, I thought you were competent." [laugh] and I was a little stunned to find out she didn't think I was. But the truth was, I didn't know how to plan. People now think that's very funny. But she taught me how to plan. How to plan long-term, short-term. I had never done it before. And she shipped me off to the Midwest Academy to learn how to plan for fundraising, how to think about the connection between fundraising and organizing, and achieving economic self-sufficiency. But I met wonderful people there.

It was a long weekend in Chicago, and I was with these people from all over the country from lots of different organizations who were just so dynamic. So I came back and it was like I had religion. I knew how to do it. They had done a great job with all of us and I had probably turned a corner in my self-confidence. And then, I did that for a couple of years and then I was hired to organize on the health and safety campaign [Boston chapter's focus was then advocating for ergonomic safeguards for users of VDTs]. I've had, as you know, a longstanding interest in issues of health and safety, and that was a learning curve as well because for the first time in the Boston chapter's history, we decided to have a legislative campaign with the lobbyist. And then, I ended up becoming director [of the Boston chapter].

And in hindsight, I wish I had not taken that job, because the truth is, my skill set was not a good match. I had very little administrative and management experience. I wasn't a good fit for the organization, and it was a time when the organization was in crisis. When I became director, it was discovered that we had a significant deficit and I lacked the skills to know how to manage it, both in terms of the public representation of it and how to deal with staff. So I had the onerous duty of laying off the entire staff. Yes. And then myself. It was a tough learning experience. It really was. But up until that point, I just adored the job. I can remember walking through Copley Square on my way to what we called membership lunch — recruitment lunches. That was the basis of our outreach. And I can remember walking across Copley Square thinking I had the best job in the world. I just really loved it, and I was part of a wonderful work community, too.

BANKS NUTTER: And can you tell me a little bit about what a 9to5 organizer's typical day was?

REEVE: The skills I needed as organizer and as fundraiser were much the same. Ellen had taught me to plan my week before the week started, so I would know when I came in what I needed to get done at my desk, who I needed to call. We were required to and it really was a regular part of your job that you have a certain number of recruitment lunches a week because that was the lifeblood of the organization. Your day was built around meetings, desk work, issue research if you had to do that, following up with members because we all staffed committees with

members. That was the structure of the organization. There were working committees that were topically and issue based. There was an executive board that was internal, and the only person who attended that meeting from the staff was the director. The staff itself met at the beginning of every week on Monday morning for two hours and we would just basically walk through it [pending campaigns].

Ellen left shortly after I was hired. No connection. She went to Philadelphia with her husband, just left. But I had the very good fortune of working with the then very young woman, younger than I was, Joan Quinlan, who was an extraordinarily talented administrator and manager and from what I hear, still is, and she just really ran a tight ship in the best sense of that word.

And then, beyond that, when I became director, my duties obviously changed. I had supervision. I worked with the executive board, and I also worked with an external advisory board, who was sort of the fundraising face of the organization. Each step along the way I had to learn and acquire new skills, which is probably what kept it fresh for me.

BANKS NUTTER: The other day, one of my students asked me when I used the phrase grassroots organizer, “What does that mean?” I was taken aback for a minute, so I’ll ask you. How would you define grassroots organizer, and would you say that’s what you were doing for 9to5 at that point?

REEVE: As close as we could get to it, given the structural limitations of organizing women who came downtown. In an ideal world, in the world of the prewar years, they would have lived downtown, too, so that you could combine labor and workplace and community organizing. But many of these women left the city at night so that piece wasn’t the same. But I understand what you’re saying in your using that phrase, in that, there are people, you know, there are the Vanguardists who organize down and there are people who do bottom-up organizing and I was much more a bottom-up organizer.

That’s what I mean about being a social democrat. I like work that’s grounded in people’s experiences and in their knowledge of their own lives. And I very much respected these women’s perspectives. There was a certain tension and there always is in any organizing organization between sort of the momentum that gets created by the leadership of that organization, sometimes even just the staff, and the rank-and-file sense of what the organization ought to be for them. And I don’t think I really encountered that dilemma until I had been there a good six years. There was a fair amount of congruency between what I was doing in the field and what they were going to say what was expected of me. I didn’t feel I had to turn myself into a pretzel to meet organizational goals while I was also helping women advance their goals.

BANKS NUTTER: They were in tandem?

REEVE: Yes, exactly, exactly.

BANKS NUTTER: Something you said earlier struck me. That it wasn't a labor organization per se, it wasn't a trade union.

REEVE: It wasn't a trade union, and I did not have a sense of being part of a labor movement. I had a sense of being a part of a women's work movement as opposed to what I would now see as a labor movement. And in fact, a lot of my friends would argue that while I was at 9to5, I wasn't part of the labor movement. There are people who would argue that.

BANKS NUTTER: People in the labor movement would say that?

REEVE: Part of the problem with the labor movement [laugh] –

BANKS NUTTER: Oh, I'll get to that. How is it different? What was the difference? Is it because it's women?

REEVE: I think the difference is sensibility, a sense of traditions, how you locate your issues with respect to movement-based issues. We embraced relational organizing, the notion that you move people by getting to know them and listening to them. You don't move them by handing out cards in front of the workplace. And because we were not part of mainline labor, the organizational structuring and governance could shift according to a changing environment and the composition of the rank and file, and it did a couple of times while I was there.

And I think that to the extent, where a trade union and 9to5 are similar is that, and this became sort of a critique while I was at 9to5 and I've heard it ever since, was that it was a numbers' game. You know, an election and trade union is winning — you have to have the right number of bodies and people would gripe at 9to5 that we didn't have the right number of recruitment lunches and then the right number of memberships coming out of that, that we weren't valued. That was the proverbial, I mean perennial, gripe. And, there was a certain amount of truth to that. But the truth is, that is what those organizations are all about, is bringing people in.

The distinction at that point that I would make between the trade union movement and what 9to5 represented is that we developed leaders, something that labor doesn't do a very good job of still. We were always thinking about that — we called it the second tier of leadership and other organizations do as well. You've got your elected leadership in place. Now who's coming up through the ranks? So we were always thinking about who's the de facto leadership? Who's moving up the ranks and what do they need to get to the next step? Who are the rank and filers who have the potential to keep moving? We were always thinking about back-filling leadership. Always. And that's not, that is absolutely not what goes on in trade unions to the degree that it should.

BANKS NUTTER: Was this a function of it being a women-centered organization, a feminist organization, or was it the politics involved? I mean, where did that distinction come from?

REEVE: I think partly that it's women, but not entirely, because look at AFSCME, it's partially female dominated. I think it was more the fact that it was a new organization on the scene, it wasn't held hostage to organizational practices that were grounded in the culture of male trade unionism. That created — in its worst form could create — what's the word? — nepotism. Why would you cultivate leadership? But in an organization like 9to5, you didn't own your job. It wasn't passed down to you.

BANKS NUTTER: Is there one organizing drive in particular that stands out for you now?

REEVE: The Boston Survey Group. That was so much fun. I don't know how much you know about the Boston Survey Group but they were a semisecret, really, monopoly of major Boston employers. They denied their existence after a certain point in time, I think even after the 50s. It was some prolonged period of time that they went underground. But they would get together and set wage scales. And again, this is a time when most of the major employers had their headquarters in Boston.

BANKS NUTTER: All across industries?

REEVE: Banking and insurance predominantly because that was where if you're organizing clerical workers, you're either organizing in the universities, hospitals, insurance, and finance. We did very little with publish[ing] — sorry, with hospitals or universities. We did much more with publishing. We had a couple of major victories, class-action suit in publishing, banking and insurance. And the banking and insurance industry —

BANKS NUTTER: Was that the Vault?

REEVE: Well, the Vault sort of subsumed it to some degree within, some of the same employers in those two organizations. But, the Boston Survey Group campaign was aimed at employers who — well, the Boston Survey Group represented employers in banking and insurance, so it was sort of a "two-fer" for us. But it was also a way to take down this elephant in the room that nobody was acknowledging existed. So I can remember, you know, showing up in Concord and picketing one of their allegedly secret meetings. We just had so much fun with it. And the thing that was so fabulous was watching how just really clever and creative secretaries and clericals were about this campaign. Because we, basically, just flooded the city with leaflets. Whenever we did the campaign, we would keep it up. I spent many, way too many mornings at T stations, in front of banks and insurance companies. But once women knew what we were targeting, they would send us correspondence that came across their employers' desks. It was so

fascinating because people look at clerical workers and people in retail as almost like they're invisible. Think about it, I know you've waitressed. Think about the personal conversations you've heard as a waitress because you're invisible. And so, they were getting this incredibly sensitive documentation, so we knew when the group was meeting, we knew who was going to be there, and we'd show up. It was so much fun.

And the other thing that we did was to consult with Ray Rogers, who at that point, he's sort of Mr. Corporate Campaign. In the early 70s, he — I'm sorry, the late 70s — he was really moving corporate campaigns as a union tactic. He helped ACTWU in its JP Stevens campaign. They developed a corporate campaign targeting board members of JP Stevens because as you may recall, they won the election but then they didn't get a contract for many years. Actually, my director's husband was running the Boston campaign. It was not unlike Mary Kenny O'Sullivan and her husband. There were a lot of marriages across these different organizations and it was very interesting. But he helped us. He came to town. What a character. He was a bodybuilder. I'll never forget it.

BANKS NUTTER: Literally?

REEVE: He was a bodybuilder. He drank milk [laugh]. So, he was really something. But he walked us through the rudiments of running a corporate campaign against the Boston Survey Group and the John Hancock Company and we did it. I remember one of the things that we did, this was the kind of thing we did, we found out that Hancock was taking worker's pension funds and investing them in antiunion places like Marriott. So we went to the hotel workers. And said, "Did you know?" And you know, he had really helped us understand how you build a very broad-based campaign focused upon a single employer. So we just had tremendous amount of fun and I think it was Belotti? No, not Belotti. I can't remember which attorney general settled it — there was a consent decree and they agreed to cease and desist but never took responsibility for their existence. So that was just great fun.

BANKS NUTTER: So that was a victory — and fun.

REEVE: Oh, yes.

BANKS NUTTER: That's always what you aim for, I think, anyway. I think you know Sue Cobble's new book is out, *The Other Women's Movement*, and she writes about 9to5 and I'm just going to read you a quote that she has there. She says "They (9to5) cared about traditional labor issues such as low wages and job control, but they also ventured into new territory, defining job duties based on traditional notions of male and female roles as exploitation." What's your response to that assessment?

REEVE: I'd have to think about that for a minute.

BANKS NUTTER: Sure.

REEVE: The gist of that feels true to me, at least in the Boston experience for the years that I was part of it. It's the word exploitation that doesn't quite ring true. I'm having trouble figuring out why, to be honest. I'm trying — I want to make sure I'm not just speaking for myself here. Certainly, we know about occupational segregation, I mean, that was part of the plan, we really try to keep that front and center. And that was a big issue for the Boston chapter. I think that the way we talked about it, though, was not so much in terms of exploitation, but more in terms of dampening women's economic opportunities, the glass-ceiling issue, which as I think about it, is a more middle-class liberal critique than exploitation, which is a more left critique. I don't know what my coworkers would say about that.

Certainly, we knew and talked about the fact that so many of our really talented leaders were doing work, particularly in the legal industry, that was very parallel to what attorneys did, but because they were paralegals or secretaries, they made quite a bit less money but they frequently did the grunt work that allowed lawyers to prosper. This was before paralegals really blossomed as an industry and you and I both know how much clerical workers do in universities. So to the extent that the term exploitation fits to the extent that women's labor was devalued, which meant that the employer could maximize that resource without having to put much out.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, it's an interesting concept to have part of your life written about now in the history — that was one of the things I was wondering about, is how does it feel?

REEVE: It's bizarre. I remember being at the Organization of American Historians [conference] — well, it's been bizarre in a couple of different ways. When I made the transition into the labor movement, big block letters [laugh] I'm kind of embarrassed to say I didn't know what the AFL-CIO was, by the way. I knew enough not to tell anybody that. But in any case, not only was 9to5, I mean, 9to5 of course has come into vogue in the ten years as a topic of research for historians. But the truth is, when I came into the mainline labor movement, I had the same strange sense of being a stranger in a strange land because I had such a defined sense of what we had been doing and to hear it dismissed in the ways that — not everybody did, I don't mean to say that that's the case, but for instance, it came up quite clearly when I applied for the job as Associate Director of Labor Studies. Many people were surprised that I got the job because I wasn't labor, I found that out later. Which I think is intriguing as hell.

And by the time I left 9to5 had affiliated with SEIU. I really did see that many of the victories that we had won were being eroded by the lack of collective bargaining. But I didn't grow up in a trade union family. I didn't have that dyed-in-the-wool sense of what it means to live, eat, and breathe the labor movement the way that many of my

students at UMass did. I learned a lot from them about that. So that's what I mean about feeling a bit like a stranger in a strange land. Not only did I not have the experience that some of my friends had, particularly the red-diaper babies, but secondly, I hadn't come of age in the union movement. Many of them had. Many of them had gone into the trade union movement in the 70s in factories when there was sort of that back-to-the-factory movement. Karen and Ellen and others were unusual in that that's not how they came to the labor movement. A lot of their peers did.

But in terms of academia, I can remember being at the Organization of American Historians [conference] and a student of Alice Kessler Harris — is that right? I think so — was giving a talk about 9to5 and I remember getting the chills and feeling creeped out and it gave me a lot of respect for what it means to be a historical subject. [laugh] I find I'm much more careful a historian now when I'm quoting somebody or using primary data, because this is their experience, not mine. And I really believe that. And then I think I shared with you that a year ago, this past fall in 2002, I was on a panel with a woman named Ruth Fairbanks, a great person doing great work, and we discovered over dinner with her family that she was writing about a campaign I'd been part of. And we disagreed about what the campaign had represented. And we've since corresponded about it. And I think, from my vantage point, we'd probably have to agree to disagree. But the God's truth is, she's done the research in the sources, I haven't.

BANKS NUTTER: You were at ground zero.

REEVE: I was at ground zero. I don't know what was happening nationally. But I have such a proprietary sense of my own experience and so it's been a strange experience.

BANKS NUTTER: I can imagine. The piece about the 9to5 experience from the standpoint of an organizer, being not of the labor movement or not, really intrigues me and I wonder how that looked to the rank and file. Is that how you drew women into 9to5, by it not being a labor organization? We all know Alice Kessler Harris's article "Organizing the Unorganizable," and here we've got women clerical workers. So it's like a double whammy of difficulty.

REEVE: Right. Absolutely there were some women who were attracted to 9to5 because it wasn't a union. But like me they grew up without those traditions. The women who have grown up with those traditions felt quite at home being part of an organization that put economics front and center and put the workplace power issues front and center. I mean it's — that's where, I think, Dorothy Sue Cobble was correct. Workers did understand the basic Marxist notion of appropriation of labor. That they got. Many of them. They just didn't use that language to talk about it.

There was — I do not recall this well anymore, because it's happening in the early 80s, it's almost 23 years ago, when Karen and

others began help — basically, negotiating, exploring negotiating the relationship with the unions and eventually the SEIU. And, you know, if she were here I would ask her, but she's not. I don't know in hindsight whether she and the founders like Eleanor and Janet Selcer really were anti-labor in the way that we think, anti-mainstream labor, or whether that was rhetorical. Or whether it was something we attributed to them that was never the case. There's a kind of folklore that emerged around them pretty quickly.

BANKS NUTTER: You know, I wanted to ask you about your relationship with them but we should finish this point.

REEVE: But in any case, as the shift towards the relationship with the SEIU occurred, you know, there was certainly some backing and forthing with members who worried about losing control of their whole organization. They saw 9to5 as theirs, many of them. Some did not. Some were acutely aware of staff intervention and involvement, and didn't like that. The majority did feel like it was their organization.

BANKS NUTTER: And that built a base that you could go from there, I would think. So beyond that labor union piece, were there particular issues around organizing these women that made it challenging, you think? And were they all feminists? [laugh]

REEVE: Oh, God, no. Not anymore than trade union women were all feminists. I mean, they were smart and savvy and understood the economics of their situation. And some of them resented the limitations on their opportunities, but not every one of them who saw that interpreted it in feminist terms. Part of that was that the organization got started in the 70s and really flowered in the mid-70s to the early 80s. Many of these women were already 40, 50, and even close to retirement. So they had not really imbibed of some of the literature, ideas, etc., that you and I might have, or even younger people.

And I can remember one individual. There was a point at which the staff decided we really ought to hire an older woman, in our naiveté we said this. And the truth is, I'm sure we made her feel quite marginal without intending to do so. But when I think about Marion, she was someone who was quite decidedly feminist and quite a character. I remember her carrying her dog around in a basket. But she really understood that women her age didn't necessarily come at this from a perspective of feminism or gender. They came at this from a perspective of fairness. It was unfair that they were denied opportunity, that they were denied equal pay for equal work or pay equity. It was really a fairness issue for them.

BANKS NUTTER: That's interesting. So this is the women's movement, the leaderless movement, as we like to think of it. But at the same you said that, and certainly the literature supports this, that there was this sort of persona that grew up around Cassedy but especially Karen Nussbaum. What was

your relationship, personally, as an organizer and director, and the chapter's relationship to them? To the founding mothers.

REEVE:

As I said, Ellen hired me and Ellen did not suffer fools gladly. A very warm woman, but very to the point and direct. I liked her, although we worked a very short time together. Karen was, at this point, I believe, already in Cleveland and may have just moved there. Ira [Nussbaum's husband] had taken a job with Ohio Citizen Action Organization so 9to5 moved its national — its very limited headquarters to Cleveland so I didn't really meet her except as in her official persona. I didn't get to know her for quite a while. I was hired in '79 and we had our offices at the Y[WCA] on Clarendon Street and I was put into this tiny little office with two complete and total overachievers and workaholics. I would walk in and say hello and we would not talk for the next eight hours.

Janet Selcer, who had been a very early member of 9to5 and quickly was on the staff. She now works in the education system in Brookline. Very smart woman. Janice Blood, who was delightful, really great fun. She was a dame in the best sense — came out of journalism and was a writer, she was the PR person for both the local and the national, but she stayed in Boston. There was always a group of people who worked for the national who were based in Boston.

And I was, you know, 26, but kind of immature, to be honest, and completely wowed by these women and kind of horrified at their seriousness because I wasn't used to this sort of work place. Clericals chatter, because we can, and it's one of the few outlets that office workers have when they're doing that kind of work, is the human connection. And as I said, Ellen was pretty blunt with me early on, that my performance was not up to snuff. She and I have kept in touch with each other, just barely. Every so often, you know, some official correspondence around the union will cause her to drop a line or what have you. But it's been a long time. Karen and I see each other, you know, not by design but by accident maybe once a year, if that. I actually have nothing but good will toward her. She's like any public figure — she's a lightning rod. But I have nothing but good will toward her. I like her sort of sense of dry humor and irony.

The structural issue that you raised, though, about the relationship between the chapters and the national, I think it's more complicated and it's probably specific to where you founded your chapter. I mean, there were some chapters that predated the national, and that's always going to be a different kind of tension.

BANKS NUTTER: And that's the case with Boston?

REEVE:

Yeah, Boston, Chicago. And then there was, there were the chapters that the national created, particularly in the south and southwest — southeast, I should say. Um, and, you know, whenever you're the progeny of something, there's a more familial relationship. And I'm sure there were tensions. I'm just not aware of what they were. And in Boston, because Boston was, you know, at one point, very well

resourced and was having these major league victories and pioneering a lot of the tactics that other chapters have used, there was sometimes tensions about ownership of funders, granters, trajectory in the organization. Should we be taking the nationals lead? What level of autonomy did we have? And these were worked out privately, you know, between whoever was the director and their national liaison. The executive board would occasionally raise these issues.

BANKS NUTTER: Were those tensions, did they limit what 9to5 could do in Boston or nationally? I mean, were they that debilitating, or were they just sort of natural things?

REEVE: This is a case where I would actually have to dig, plow through some of the materials, because my recollection is pretty limited. I remember that we could ask funders for up to X-number of dollars. If we went beyond that in that request, we had to clear it with the national because they might also be going to that funder, you know, they didn't want to compete for fundraising. We couldn't just go off and develop a campaign without some dialogue with the national — it's not unlike, say, a state federation then. They have a political sort of synergy with the state affiliate. But there were sort of unspoken accountabilities that we were aware of. I'm not sure I can articulate them though, you know, from this point in time.

BANKS NUTTER: But in the Boston office itself, where Karen has already moved on, Ellen Cassedy and such, the big names seem to have shifted. But was there any tension within the structure itself?

REEVE: Locally?

BANKS NUTTER: Yeah, yeah.

REEVE: Sure. You know, with any staff there was a certain quiet rivalry around who gets the key assignments etc. There was a certain amount of that. And there were also occasionally tensions between the staff and the executive board about direction of the chapter. There were sometimes tensions between executive board members and committee members. You know, all the kinds of structural dynamics you can imagine were certainly at play in the local chapter in Boston. And those took different forms. Sometimes class issues would emerge among the members themselves and the leaders. We had a women-in-publishing committee and as you might expect, they were very well educated, some came from a union background but many, or most, did not. And they were extraordinarily articulate, both orally and in writing, and for women who didn't share that background, it could sometimes be, as you say, very off-putting. So there were sometimes very class-based tensions. And that was the thing that really was fascinating to me, that often — office workers varied incredibly. The status and commission of office work varied tremendously depending on where you worked.

BANKS NUTTER: And there was a hierarchy. What about race?

REEVE: Oh, that was really the weak link in the organization for many years. There had been, before I got there — I believe I'm right about this, that a woman named Yvonne Forrest had been on staff — I could be wrong about that — an African American woman who is well known in the Boston area as an activist. She died many years ago. But in any case, there was a couple of efforts to hire women of color on staff and we made the classic error that many organizations make, which is to say we hired a person of color and then sort of said, here, go bring us some members of color. We didn't understand until quite late in the game, at which point we did address it, and I've learned also at WILD we didn't understand that to really create an inclusive true democratic organization was going to require rethinking how we did business, really fundamentally.

BANKS NUTTER: And how?

REEVE: The organizational practices we used, were they native to being a white person? To the extent that there were cultural dimensions in organizational practice, we were really blind to them. To the extent that we had a particular way of working and talking, that could be very off-putting. I can remember one of the black staff telling me as a supervisor that she just found it incredibly limiting that I began every meeting with an agenda. It was really, it was very off-putting to her. And I heard this again when I went into WILD that white women have a way of organizing themselves in meetings that is very agenda-driven and outcome-driven, that many women of color found very alienating. Like they had to aspire to that standard or else they wouldn't be taken seriously, and they resented it. But also, just the ways we thought about leadership development, who did it include and exclude?

I learned at 9to5 the hard way because of struggles between the program staff, i.e., the organizers and the canvassers — we were very dependent on canvassing by the time that I left — was that here we were in this organization that purported to be feminist, at least the staff self-identified as feminists, and certainly in the 70s and 80s there was this rhetoric, and I think there still is some of this in the women's movement that somehow we were better at conflict resolution than men. And the truth is our default strategies aren't that different than men's. So we would have this huge gap between the rhetoric of problem solving and the theory of that and then the practice. As someone once put it to me, when a woman's back is up against the wall, there's not much difference between what a woman does and a man does [laugh]. And there was really some truth to that. Collectivity aside, collective processes aside. That can be a gloss sometimes on conflict.

BANKS NUTTER: Given that, what was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the organizing at 9to5? Do you feel like you addressed by the time you left 9to5, the race piece at all? Much less the class –?

REEVE: Not satisfactorily.

BANKS NUTTER: Was that the most challenging or was there something else?

REEVE: Well, I guess it depends on how you think about the question. If you look at just from the mechanics of organizing, I didn't find it onerous or difficult. I liked it a lot. I knew what I didn't know and I tried to learn it. In terms of really grappling with the human dimensions of being part of an all-female organization with a political line, like everybody was affiliated with it. I grappled a lot with the difference being theory and practice. And, certainly, absolutely, when we made forays into trying to bring women with children into the organization, and tried attracting older women and women of color, we made a number of errors that in hindsight were a function of just not being reflective enough, being young. We were all in our twenties. I mean, the founders were older at that point, but our staff was really just — with the exception of one person, we were all in our twenties.

BANKS NUTTER: The companion question then is, if that were the most challenging, what was the most rewarding piece of it all, do you think?

REEVE: I loved seeing women who had been unaware of their own skills and aptitude just blossom in the organization. For many women, it was the first time anybody had cared to ask them what they thought, or had cared to given them opportunity to learn a new skill. Um, there were some women who were so repressed in every sense of that word when they got to the organization that when as they developed those skills and developed leadership, they ended up divorced. And I'm not saying that that was a huge number by any stretch, but I personally knew of at least two women whose husbands left them over this issue, because they became independent. So for some women coming into this organization was a life-transforming event. For me also, one of the things, and this is more personal than I guess in that sense, more minimalist, but I came out in '95, and –

BANKS NUTTER: I was going to ask you about that.

REEVE: Yeah, and it's a little sloppy around the edges for reasons I'd rather not get into, but I remember being so scared to tell people in the organization, and at that point there was a woman, Kris Esterberg, who now teaches up at UMass Lowell, who was a member in publishing and as lesbian-identified, was very quietly, not at all militantly but very quietly pushing me on opening the chapter up to this issue.

BANKS NUTTER: We talked about class and race. What about sexuality in 9to5?

REEVE: Well, this happened in WILD, too. To the extent that you have an all-female organization, you're always going to be vulnerable to gay-baiting. Sometimes from inside. Women who don't have a history of all-female company or all-female organizations, what have you. This came up in WILD, too, women who had never spent a weekend with just women would get gay-baited before they came, and they would hear stories about what went on. There was less of that at 9to5, partially because the queer movement just wasn't as visible as it has since become.

It was definitely a time where it was subversive and 9to5 Boston began changing, not because of the program staff who really held the reins, but because the canvass staff. We were attracting large numbers of very young women, 18, 19, and 20, a lot of them lesbian, who had very strong connection to the organization by the mid-80s because it was women and feminist. They were unabashedly feminist and queer, and it really pushed the envelope and it allowed women who were members, and at that point, I mean, I came out close to leaving. It's not like I can claim any responsibility or role in this. It was really the queer members on the canvass staff that pushed that issue and succeeded in having the women office workers bill of rights altered so that it included sexual orientation rights.

BANKS NUTTER: Now, how did that sit with some of the older women who were in their forties who were involved in 9to5? What was their reaction?

REEVE: I came in in '79 and by the time I left in '85, the heart and soul of the organization was really different. It was very dominated by women in publishing when I first got there and by the time I left, it was much more women in banking and insurance, women who you would think in some ways would be more judgmental or traditional or conservative, whatever word you choose to use, I'm not sure quite where I was going with that, except that there was a sense of — there was a shift in class identity, I think, for the organization to a more working-class organization in many respects.

BANKS NUTTER: And did the age composition change with that, then? Because you said initially you were working with older women and now your staff is changing?

REEVE: We tried, we tried. We weren't massively successful. We have women who by our measure were older, at least. You know, partly what altered the environment for someone like me coming out was at this point, the organization was in such flux. There was tremendous unrest among the canvassers, and it spilled over into the rest of the organization and it presented me with a personnel issue. It presented the executive board with an institutional crisis. The program staff felt attacked by the canvassers and the canvassers felt unappreciated. So my personal coming out was really small potatoes. There were many more

compelling issues. And you know, we went from knowing we were in deficit to having to do layoffs fairly quickly. So, you know, it really is, to some degree, the reality of what it meant to embrace the question of sexual orientation really got lost in the wash, because there was so much organizational crisis.

BANKS NUTTER: You call it flux. I mean, it sounds really like it was a crisis.

REEVE: Well, it was. Some of it was just flux. I now have enough experience to know that organizations encounter internal dissent and conflict and that it takes skill to manage them. We weren't terribly skillful. None of the parties to the conflicts were. But I also think that with Reagan coming in and we immediately lost funding and we immediately lost the VISTA-funded positions, we were immediately in a financial crisis because resources we had depended on were gone. And we became much more dependent on canvassing which of course exacerbated tensions among the canvassers, who felt like they were valued only because of their door-knocking and fundraising skills. Then, we had to grapple with some internal tensions and contradictions inside the organization, and I think that part of what contributed to it is, it was all sort of pieced. Joan, as I said, had run a pretty tight ship. She communicated a lot of authority for someone so young. Her replacement was someone who was equally skilled but didn't communicate quite the same level of authority and she had gotten very involved in the Ray Flynn campaign. Part of what happened was that they were split down the middle with staff. There were many people working for Mel King and many people working for Ray Flynn.

BANKS NUTTER: This was '83, '84.

REEVE: Yeah, whatever that campaign — I'm forgetting the year, and that created and added to, the sort of boiling pot.

BANKS NUTTER: So Boston mayoral politics had a spillover into 9to5?

REEVE: And vice versa. Well, our then director ended up becoming one of his policy people. She left the organization to take that job. That's why I became director.

BANKS NUTTER: So that added to it —

REEVE: And actually, I think it's Roy Wilkins's granddaughter who was at that point working on our staff. And she was working for Mel, very prominently, was very offended that the then director was working for Ray and there was a backing and forthing over that campaign that was unproductive and a little ugly, actually.

BANKS NUTTER: Such are the racial politics of Boston.

REEVE: So as I think about it, yeah. It was a pretty conflicted period of time and all of this came to a head in that that staff unrest wasn't managed well. So, yeah, it was a pretty tough last 18 months, let's put it that way.

BANKS NUTTER: And that was during the period in which, at the same time, there's an oral history that Karen Nussbaum did a few years ago and she referred to the early 80s, the quote is "we got smashed over and over." In terms of the antiunion sentiment, just from the PATCO strike on. So that on top of the other piece. And this is the moment in time when Nussbaum and the national 9to5 leadership made that decision of affiliating with SEIU. Do you think, in retrospect at this point, did organized labor, in its traditional way, if you can call SEIU that, because they're a little different — do you think organized labor finally accepted 9to5, or the concept of it?

REEVE: Well, it depends on who you talk to. I mean, labor is so heterogenous. I mean, Kris Rondeau is certainly using some of the same rhetoric and strategies at Harvard to organize the HUCTWU [Harvard University Clerical & Technical Workers' Union] folks. For reasons I was never clear on, my understanding is that she and Karen had words — I don't know what about. I know Kris now and she has, to my knowledge, she has never credited 9to5 with doing exactly what she has become renowned for at Harvard. Um, there were people in SEIU who resented the fact that Karen was able to negotiate an entire Local 925 of SEIU — sort of a subcategory of international — and in any organization, there's always a competition for resources and Karen had to contend with that. You know, I had forgotten to mention that, when I was hired in '79, it was August or September, there was already a Local 925 in Boston. They shared office space with us and Karen made the shift from Boston 9to5 to the Boston chapter of Local 925 before going to the national and you know, my recollection is, although I'm not sure this is accurate, is that this was the experiment that led to the affiliation with the international. But she may obviously have a different recollection because she's the one who made it happen.

END TAPE 2

TAPE 3

BANKS NUTTER: You mentioned WILD and I definitely wanted to ask you about that. I tried to do some preliminary research and wasn't able to find a whole lot about it. So as much detail, initially, at first, that you can give me. It's Women's Institute for Leadership Development is what WILD stands for and if you could first just give me a background on it and then I have some questions.

REEVE: To understand where WILD came from what you need to know is that there has been a university and union-based labor educators' association for years. It's currently called United Association for Labor Educators. It's university and union, again. Its predecessor organization was the University and College Labor Education Association (UCLEA). UCLEA, now ULAE, every year, sponsors regional events in schools that are week-long, they're intensives, every aspect of skills training, definitely end up developing women's leadership, and let's see, I got to UMass in '86. I think it was in '85, UCLEA did one in Massachusetts, the northeast school rotates among seven states and my predecessor at UMass, Cheryl Gooding, and the then director of what was then Southeastern Mass University that later became UMass Dartmouth, Erica Bronstein, she directed the labor education center there, went to it and were so excited about it, they kept wishing that there was something that happened in Massachusetts annually so that people wouldn't have to wait seven years for it to cycle back. But they also felt that it would be more sensible to do it for a weekend.

So out of that, the sponsoring organizations were what is now UMass Dartmouth's Labor Center, the Labor Studies program because this predates the Labor Resource Center, and I had arrived on the scene at that point as, just as it was really getting off the ground, as the associate director. Cheryl was not yet the director of WILD. She would be within the year. CLUW sponsored it, Joanie Parker represented it, but in any case, the sponsors again were Dartmouth, Boston, in terms of UMass Amherst, Dale Melcher was one of the founding grandmothers at this point, CLUW and I'm forgetting — oh, and the Mass. AFL-CIO. And Nancy Mills, who is now the head of the national AFL-CIO Institute for Working Families Institute of America, represented the state fed at that point.

And initially, it was conceived solely as a weekend residential school for women's leadership and I was lucky enough to get hired just as it was getting planned for the first year. And it was a fascinating experience. Actually, Cheryl and I had written twice about this experience. Somewhere in my files, I've got the articles, I'll get them for you. But it was fascinating to watch the tensions that emerged internally around what constituted leadership and for what, and also just to watch how challenging it was for some women to get their unions to pay for them to go. And over the years, it's developed quite a wide following. Now sadly, as I understand it, it's in some fairly serious

financial shape right now. I don't know what's going to happen [p.s.— it's regained its financial footing—PR] But, over the years, we formed a board of directors but first there was a steering committee for a good six years that was comprised of the institutional representatives. So, we basically set the agenda, established committees, and it wasn't a membership organization but the alums of the program would get cycled back onto the planning committees, various kinds for the institute, so it was a way for them to continue to network and build skills.

Eventually, however, various innovations began to emerge. We established caucuses: the women of color caucus; the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender caucus; the Latinas caucus. But the other thing that happened is that ad hoc programs throughout the calendar began being offered and there's now — I believe there's a weekend or a day-long winter institute as well.

But after we'd been going along for six years, WILD had developed a constituency, and that constituency was increasingly women of color who had real questions about how six white, largely middle-class women were running the organization and I think back on it now, and this is not to pat myself on my back or any of that, but I'm proud of the fact that the steering committee, we all made the decision that this organization needed to be of and by the women it was training, and made the decision to shift to — I think we even formed a 501C that would have its own board of directors, so that it could have representation from among the various women who had gone through its programs, or who might be in a position to help with recruitment.

Now, what ended up happening was I got to experience in a positive way what had not gone well at 9to5 because there wasn't a vocabulary or even techniques for addressing these issues. We really did, in many respects, a really wonderful job of diversifying the ranks of the leaders in WILD, certainly increasing in big numbers the number of women in color who were coming through. The one population that I would say that's — although there's been a change, transition, to say this, but when I was there, Asian and Asian American women were underrepresented.

Now Cheryl and I, while I was still on the steering committee and she was director, co-taught a year-long course in the labor studies program. It was FIPSE [Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education] funded, which was great, and we had roughly ten rank-and-file women, all of them WILD alums, and we did a year-long assessment and report on questions addressing the issues of confluence of race, gender, and class in the organization and issued a report at the end of it. Our students learned how to evaluate a program, they learned adult training and development theory, and the most fabulous part of it is that we did focus groups with various constituencies of the organization and people who should be allies to it. So I can remember very one high-powered focus group with African American women or women of African descent that happened at Harvard, one with white

working-class women who talked about their experience of the middle-class women in the organization who come through as students. We met with Asian and Asian American women. That was a small group and the thing that was so interesting about that is we discovered that in Chinese, for instance, there's no word for leadership.

So it was really an eye-opener. Our students learned so much. And the information we learned about how people of varying backgrounds think about power, empowerment and leadership, was then followed back for revision of the curricula. And then I left in '92 because it was time for school and there's been continuing, and I would say, intensification of a lot of those directions. Now again, my understanding is that there's financial problems and I don't know the specifics of that.

But the first article Cheryl and I wrote about this experience was for *Policies Studies Journal* and we talked about the dilemma of establishing an organization and solidifying it, that the avowed purpose is to develop women's leadership in a movement that has had something of an aversion to challenges to incumbents by men, much less women. So we talked about the gap between labor's stated goal of leadership development and in fact what really happens in terms of, you know, with certain local's occupations. The second one was much more of a free-wheeling rumination on what we had seen. Much more pointed politically, not particularly well documented. It was more anecdotal. It wasn't scientific [laugh].

But I learned a tremendous amount from WILD and I sort of wish I could recover that enthusiasm I had for a good six years. I'm not sure — there are certain things you just can't go back to. I think that may be one of them for me, although I certainly care about girls' empowerment and development and women's. But I think for me, it may well be in another direction.

BANKS NUTTER: But in terms of WILD, what was its relationship to the Mass. AFL-CIO?

REEVE: My introduction to the relationship between women workers and women dominated organizations and the state-fed leadership happened at 9to5 and it stood me in good stead when I ended up at the labor studies program. I can remember during the organizing campaign, trying to get legislative safeguards for VDT users, ergonomics and the like. I met with the then president of the Mass. AFL-CIO, Arthur Osborne, Sr., who had a very conservative executive council, ran a very tight ship and I mean that in a negative sense. I actually kind of liked him. But I can remember meeting him in my 9to5 capacity of the lead organizer on that campaign and walking in, sitting down with him, trying to get him interested in endorsing the campaign.

Now mind you, the man who would eventually become president of the Mass. AFL-CIO, Joe Faherty, was already on board and because he represented the clerical technical workers at Boston Edison. But in any case, I gave Arthur my spiel. I'll never forget Arthur leaned forward and just looked at me and said, "And what makes you think that anything

you have to say would make a difference to my membership?” And I started laughing and I said, “I guess I was foolish.” And I got up and walked out [laugh] What makes you think-? It was like dealing with the godfather.

He had come out of the Raytheon plant. Kind of an Osborne dynasty up there, local 1505 IBEW. That has shifted, but absolutely in the mid- and early 80s, Arthur’s administration in the Mass. AFL-CIO really put a lid on anything that smacked of a progressive agenda. When I got hired in ’86, at labor studies, part of why I was hired is that Jim Green had been getting red-baited for years. And they wanted somebody who might be able to build some bridges to the old AFL-CIO, which in hindsight, I must confess, is somewhat laughable because in fact, the only person I really knew in it was Joe Faherty. But Karen [Nussbaum] wrote me a letter for that job, Joe wrote me a letter. But the red-baiting of the program at that point was bad enough that Joe actually said to me, “Are you sure you want to go there?” He was concerned for me personally, that it was a bad choice. But in any case, that experience helped me understand what was likely to transpire with WILD.

But I’m trying to remember when Arthur left and I don’t remember the sequence of events. But at some point, Arthur left and Joe Faherty came in, and Bob Haynes was secretary-treasurer. Nancy Mills was an executive VP and was appointed to work with us. Now, she was gunning for the secretary-treasurer’s position at that point in time before she went to D.C. with her husband, and she — this is by way of saying that because she had accountability to the administration of the state fed, but she also had obviously sympathies with WILD agenda, she was always trying to balance that. And it would sometimes slow the rest of us down. And it’s not to take anything away from Nancy but she was more cautious, I would say. Her replacement on the state fed, who then came to us, was Sandy Felder, who had been a rank and file mental health worker who ended up as president of the SEIU Local 509, was my president when we organized and joined 509. Sandy was more adventurous, not foolhardy, but she was willing to take risks that Nancy had been reluctant to take. And I think partly because Sandy didn’t have designs on leadership in the Mass. AFL-CIO, in all honesty. So, you know, we were able to move certain things. But Joe Faherty, who I actually think is a wonderful human being in a lot of ways, he and Bob remained very suspicious of WILD and even engaged in some gay-baiting of WILD themselves, which was sad. And, this was addressed a couple different times to my knowledge. It was never virulent, but it would be the off-hand comment and so it was very interesting. It was transgressive that women were doing this and to marginalize it, they tried to use the label of gay to make it completely disreputable. But that was something that was used repeatedly by union leadership who didn’t want to send their women members. They would justify it on the basis of hearing about something — there was a lesbian caucus that was very visible. The first time, when the first time the caucuses got started, each caucus would stand up — and I don’t know if they still do this — at the

Saturday event and they could do whatever they wanted, they could talk, give a rap, whatever. Well, I can remember people's astonishment when they called the lesbian caucus forward and nineteen of us stood up, and—

BANKS NUTTER: Out of how many? Nineteen out of how many?

REEVE: Oh, it was probably a good 10 percent of the people in the room. Is that true? Probably closer to 20 percent. So, it was brave in some respects but WILD did it, knowing what was going to happen. But, I don't know what the status of the politics are right now between WILD and the Mass. AFL-CIO. Relations improved. Kathy Casavant could probably tell you more about that. She replaced Sandy just as I was leaving and it was the early 90s and she was very involved in WILD. I believe she no longer is but I'm not positive about that. But in any case, there are a number of women presidents and vice-presidents who ran because of their experienced with WILD so it altered the landscape. There's going to be a meeting, I think December 4th for women who are sort of mothers and grandmothers and former leaders to try to figure out how to put the ship back together again. So I'll go to that and see what, if anything, I can do. I think they're trying to figure out what's next.

BANKS NUTTER: OK. So your sense of WILD then, since the early 90s has been more peripheral, in terms of how they've dealt with these same issues but I guess in a more recent way?

REEVE: From what I could see until recently, they were doing excellent grassroots organizing. I can remember Jim Green asking me something recently about putting together a panel and he named some women of color who he wanted to include and I wasn't trying to chide him but I just said to him, "You know, Jim, the truth is, neither you nor I really know who the women leaders of color are these days, because WILD's done so much to increase that pool of women," and I knew Jim and I didn't have a current sense of who that was. I don't go to WILD's Institute anymore which is where I would meet them, and Jim is completely removed from it, so I think that my sense is that they've actually done a fabulous job with immigrant women. They have a track that's targeting Spanish women; the African American women of African descent, that is what they call themselves now, caucus is very powerful. The Latina caucus is very powerful. So if WILD can be rebuilt, it's actually kind of what Alden Morris called the churches in the civil rights South, a halfway house for women of color because there aren't many places in the labor movement where they can come together and have their needs recognized.

BANKS NUTTER: So you think that it's still necessary, then.

REEVE: Absolutely. Oh, yeah.

BANKS NUTTER: It hasn't outlived its usefulness then?

REEVE: No. Well, I actually think it would be fabulous if there were really strong organizations in Massachusetts for African American trade unionists and Latinos and there are nationally, and for Asian Americans, certainly, nationally. Massachusetts has never been particularly fertile soil for that kind of organization.

BANKS NUTTER: Why is that, you think?

REEVE: I think its cultural and historical antecedents in Irish community and in the trades have made it difficult. It's either been the trades in the ascendancy or it's been people, Irish and Italians from the trades, particularly laborers, to some extent also, leadership, Irish American leaders from retail and manufacturing. But I think as the Service Employee International Union locals gain in strength and continue to do the kind of work they're doing with leadership development, I'm guessing in another ten years, the profile of the labor movement in Massachusetts could look very different. There's really a thriving immigrant workers' sort of impulse, for lack of another word, in Massachusetts.

BANKS NUTTER: Well that whole notion of globalization and that is a piece of what WILD is about, I think.

REEVE: Yes, in a sense that it certainly talks about solidarity. I mean, it did and it may well now, just a little that I've seen of some of its stuff, solidarity across international lines among them. But that global strategic focus isn't evident in Massachusetts labor. The only place where I've seen it really in play in pretty solid ways is at General Electric IUE/CWA Local 201, and that's because so much of their industry has been decimated by globalization. But they go to all the NAFTA globalization rallies. In fact, I think he's the president—Jett Crosby, who's a [UMass] Labor Studies alum, at one point was almost not let into Canada for that particular globalization rally because he had a history of having been arrested at Seattle. But in any case, they've been really right out there.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, there's definitely a connection that can be made. It's interesting that you make the segues for me. That when you talk about WILD being gay-baited, at times subtly and not too subtly, because one of the other organizations you listed as being a part of and active in is the Gay and Lesbian Labor Activists Network and I was just wondering if you could tell me a little about that.

REEVE: It's funny, because I'm actually going to be re-upping, as they say. Well, for the last, really, almost nine years, I've been very peripheral to that organization. I got involved in the years before I went back to school and I certainly was by no means the founder. There is a group of

people who have been long-time friends of mine who were. And it started out — I do recall, however, being dragged by my then-roommate, Harneen Chernow [now director of Education and Training for the Mass AFL-CIO], to Doyle's [a pub] in Jamaica Plain because the people who were really the emerging leaders wanted to have a discussion about what people wanted from it. Did they want a social group that would get together and people could just kibitz and commiserate and exchange stories about life in the labor movement, or was it going to be from an advocacy and activist orientation. And eventually, actually one of my good friends, Nancy Marks, who's no longer in the labor movement in an active sort of sense, really pushed for more of an activist-based organization. She had moved from Amherst to Boston and was quite the spark plug, you know, in terms of getting things rocking and rolling. So I can remember early discussions about what the scope of GALLAN's work would be.

I think if people had to do it over again, they might come up with a different name than Gay and Lesbian Labor Activist's Network, because it omits completely people who are bisexually identified or transgender people. And you know, it's interesting because I think that one of the experiences I've had a lot of is being in places where I've had to come out and challenge stereotypes, and in that organization, at that time of my life, I identified myself as bisexual. Now I just call myself queer and I don't think too much about what that means, because it resonates emotionally with me as a term. It's kind of ambiguous and I like that. But at that point, I was pretty militantly bisexual and I can remember a discussion among my GALLAN comrades about how to name the organization and who to identify and I think we were ready to do the constitution and bylaws. And a couple of people made some very snide comments about bisexuals and I am not someone who gets mad in public a lot, but I had this visceral reaction and I was furious, and I don't know what I did but all I know is that people were looking back at me shame-faced and not speaking. And it was kind of a horrifying moment for me personally because I hadn't meant to shame them, that wasn't the point. But I'd gotten them to think and that wasn't a bad thing and I felt it was important to me to say, "Look, this is who I am and you're making fun of me." That was important to me.

And at this point, I would say, certainly, based on what I know of who the people are in GALLAN now, it's lesbian-based largely, and gay-based, but there's certainly other kinds of folks there, and I think that's good. But I'm definitely interested in getting involved with them again now. Now that the SJC [Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts] has made its decision about marriage, I'm less concerned about the right to marry and more concerned that the right not be lost. That this not be used as a rearguard effort to restrict civil rights for queer people. So, I'll work with GALLAN on that issue.

BANKS NUTTER: It was founded in the mid-80s? I know you said you weren't there — but you came in pretty early on.

REEVE: Yes, because it was getting founded right when I bought my house. I'm trying to remember, I mean, I'm embarrassed that I can't remember this. The way I measure it is, I bought my house in '85 and that year, '85 to '86, I can remember being dragged to that meeting by my roommate, Harneen, because she was trying to get people who had shown some interest in getting GALLAN together to figure out what it was going to be.

BANKS NUTTER: What was the inspiration for it? I understand you've said it wasn't clear at the start whether it was going to be a social network or an activist network but what were some of the issues that prompted people to feel they like needed an organization of some kind?

REEVE: Well, not unlike the issues that would prompt any group that's marginalized to want to come together for mutual comfort, safety, support, ideas, and then, as I said, it grew to be more of an advocacy-oriented grouping and at that point, GALLAN was addressing issues like protocols around needles with AIDS, dealing with healthcare workers and AIDS, and we saw specifically our agenda as being a bridge builder between the gay rights movement and gay-identified people in the labor movement. And from where I sit, GALLAN has done a pretty remarkable job in that. And there are several excellent leaders in that organization but two women who are particularly skillful: one is absolutely an unsung hero of Massachusetts labor, Karen Wheeler. She's been around for the last thirty years in every struggle that you can think of. And Harneen Chernow — she's forty now. When I met her, she was in her twenties. She's one of the brightest, most creative people in the labor movement I've ever met. She's really quite remarkable. She's the director of education and training now for the Mass. AFL-CIO.

BANKS- NODER: So, your sense over time is that there's been progress in organized labor around these issues?

REEVE: Yes. You know, there are many more women's committees than there used to be. However, activism in women's committees does not necessarily make you president. You might end up as secretary-treasurer. There's kind of a woman's track as opposed to the men's track toward leadership and sometimes it's almost impossible to make the leap from secretary-treasurer to president.

BANKS NUTTER: Although isn't that — for a man, wouldn't that be the progression?

REEVE: Yes. And I mean, women sometimes wind up in other organizational roles too, that don't allow for moving towards central leadership. There are caucuses of color in a lot of the service industries unions. They call them purple caucuses, lesbian and gay caucuses in unions. GALLAN

and its counterparts around the country founded a national organization called Pride at Work which is now one of the constituency groups in the national AFL-CIO.

BANKS NUTTER: So, it's always good to see change over time –

REEVE: Yes, incremental but –

BANKS NUTTER: That allows us to shift a little bit. As you said, WILD in a sense came out of, or at least came along in tandem with, the labor education piece of your life and I definitely wanted to spend some time talking about that. I guess, first, why did you leave 9to5 and end up at the Labor Resource Center?

REEVE: My last year at 9to5 was very difficult. I was the director of an organization that was in deep trouble and as I said, I frankly lacked the skills to manage it. And you know, I'd like to think that I did no harm, as they say, but I may have through my lack of experience. But there's no way to go back and fix that. I don't know. But I was burnt out. I mean, there's sort of a rhythm, unfortunately, to my work life where I just go too far and get crispy.

So I decided just to do something very different and I ended up coordinating a program — it was a board development program for arts organizations at the Mass Cultural Alliance, and I did that for about a year, and realized I missed labor issues way too much. And by that point, I was labor-identified. That reflects some of the changes that had happened in 9to5 and myself. So I had spoken with Cheryl Gooding who was then the Associate Director of Labor Studies and just in passing to her said, "If you ever leave your job, let me know." And she called me three months later and said, "I'm leaving my job." I applied. I was scared to death when Jim Green called to offer me the job, because I wasn't sure I could do it. It just seemed so challenging to me, and teaching, and it just felt foreign to everything I'd done, plus my experience in the master's program, I wasn't sure I wanted to be in academia. Jim talked me into it and I'm forever grateful.

So I was there for the next ten years, and it was just an incredibly wonderful experience in so many ways. I loved-loved-love our students. They're hard-working, they're courageous personally and politically. Jim and I had our rough spots, you know, our sort of speed bumps in the road but we seemed to work through them. I admired greatly his willingness to forego a traditional academic career to do this work. He made sacrifices to do that. And, I just learned a tremendous amount about myself, too. I loved being able to put my political principles to work in the classroom and I tried to do it in a way that didn't dampen the student's ability to talk about their own experience and views. Frequently they would go through a whole semester without knowing exactly what I felt about a given issue. Now some people would critique that but I'm actually proud of that, because the goal there was to hear

what they thought, not what I thought. And I just have so much fondness and affection for some of the people who I got to know as advisees and students. I'm really proud of them in a way. It sounds parental to say that and I don't mean it quite that way but I am. I'm deeply proud of them as human beings. So it was a fabulous experience, it really was.

BANKS NUTTER: One of my favorite pieces that you've written was a conference paper — and I think it might have gone on from that — and the title of it was “If This Was Steel, I'd Know What To Do With It,” which, I was just so taken with the title but, if you could tell me a little about the anecdote that goes with that title?

REEVE: A couple of things that happened at about the same time. I had gone back to school and I had gone to a UCLEA meeting in D.C. where I heard some of those who I got to know later talk about the need to have an organizing model of labor education, and it so resonated with me, because at that point, I had considerable WILD experience under my belt, and just looking at the curriculum of a lot of labor studies programs. Very legal and instrumental arbitration and grievance and there was a lack of emphasis on critical thinking and strategic planning skills, which is so necessary to the labor movement.

John Russo — he's a great guy. He runs the Youngtown Labor Center and Working Class Studies Program, and I can remember teasing him about this, how I literally ran after him, I was so excited, and said, yes, yes, yes. I wanted a copy of his paper. I'm sure he thought I was a nut. But I brought that back with me and that really gave me a fire in the belly thereafter. It gave me the courage to really think differently about what I was doing. And part of that was challenging deeply held ideas among my students, because part of the problem within the labor movement was an unwillingness to break, to shatter old shibboleths and one of the things I wanted to look at, I had my students understand and look at, was the allocation of power in the labor movement and power dynamics, and how that made for exclusion and inclusion. So I decided to teach a course, to lead one course on — how did I describe it? “Getting a Seat at the Table: Men and Women in the Labor Movement” — and in it, I looked at the contraction and expansion of the labor movement with respect to its members. I would look at the structural variables that allowed for contraction and expansion, but I would also look at the internal variables. And I decided to take what was for me a personal risk, because I was just getting comfortable with it myself.

I was back in school and reading books like Ava Baron's collection, which just bowled me over, because it absolutely resonated with my experience in WILD and felt like she was really onto something. In fact, I'd read that before I went back to school. Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgan had another book that I really loved. So I was really interested in trying to figure out how to address questions of leadership without putting off people who hadn't thought about those issues, because either

it wasn't in their self-interest to do so or because it was so normative for them to be in power that they hadn't thought about the fact that their being in power meant that somebody else wasn't. So, that said, I taught it and so I essentially taught the historiography of labor history with a focus on gender, race, and class.

And I was learning as I went, because it's hard to teach historiography. It's easier to teach the facts about the labor movement. It's harder to get people to think critically about the history. And my students were so hard-working and I remember this one guy, a sheet metal worker who stayed after class one day with me and he was really working hard to try to take apart what is admittedly frequently very opaque literature on questions of intersections of gender, race, and class and he finally got so frustrated, he threw his hands up in the air and said, "You know, if this were metal I'd know what to do with it." I just loved that. It just stuck with me. And it was humbling, too, because I thought, wow, there's something I'm not doing here that needs to get done.

BANKS NUTTER: And that labor education piece, when I first heard about WILD from you many years ago and I've seen the literature, it always reminded me of the Bryn Mawr Summer School.

REEVE: Oh, absolutely.

BANKS NUTTER: And that's what comes to mind. And the program the CPCS — what does that stand for again?

REEVE: College of Public and Community Service.

BANKS NUTTER: And that was a very specific kind of program.

REEVE: Yes.

BANKS NUTTER: Aimed at —

REEVE: Adult learners, a quick comment. The 9to5 summer schools, which I forgot to mention, were consciously modeled after the Bryn Mawr School. People from all over the country would come here every summer for a very concentrated weekend of training, well over a thousand people.

BANKS NUTTER: A national based piece?

REEVE: Yes.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, the CPCS — that's when you say you went into the labor studies program at UMass-Boston and that's really what you were part of?

REEVE: That's right and you know, I think in truth, that for a long while, I just thought of myself as being in labor studies and didn't cultivate relationships particularly in the college, although you know, you're at someplace long enough and you develop them. But yes, the college was founded some number of years, over thirty years ago, and it was founded as a nontraditional college for people who for a variety of reasons had never gotten to college. And so the average age was 35. It was predominantly women. Over time, it became more people of color. Now, admittedly in most public universities, that's increasingly what the student body looks like. So that's not a particularly unique claim to fame anymore, but the pedagogy was what really set the college apart.

There were opportunities for what was called prior learning evaluation, and it wasn't a quid pro quo, you know, show me a piece of paper and I'll give you a credit. People had to engage in either oral or written evaluation of their experience and based on it, they had to look at that experience filtering it through literature that was relevant to the experience. So, for example, if I was evaluating somebody's prior learning in negotiation, I would make them do a worksheet where they did an analysis of a couple of different negotiations. They would have to answer some questions in writing. I wanted them to think about the experience, to pull lessons out of it. So we had that dimension of it. It also allowed for people to take more than three credits per course. The work would be concentrated outside the class but we would be able to be on campus one night a week, or one afternoon or morning a week, as opposed to three, which made it much more feasible for people to attend. And you know, there was a time when the college was downtown. We were in the old gas building [now the Renaissance Charter School], where all of us felt like every movement of significance came through that building at one time or another because the faculty and students were so interconnected with those worlds.

Now, sadly that changed once we moved onto the UMass Boston campus in Dorchester. It was just awfully difficult for people to get to us, and people got — I wouldn't say lazy but you know, you thought twice about making yourself leave campus more than once or twice a week because it really cut into your work time. So I think that that sort of organic, sort of cross-fertilization didn't grind to a halt but there was less of it.

BANKS NUTTER: And was it about that program that drew you?

REEVE: I think that I got drawn in there after I got there, because there were many people who never understand what the college is, even after they had spent a year there. It took me a couple of years to really understand how the place worked and what its principles were. But what attracted me to labor studies and then the college eventually was that it was a home for people in the real world of work and activism. I missed being an intellectual, and I didn't want to apologize for that anymore. There's always — as with most social movements, there was a streak of anti-

intellectualism in labor and it's less pronounced than it used to be, which is a wonderful thing. I think the exigencies of the last twenty years have forced people to go back to thinking and writing. There's been a lot of analysis and reflection, which has been a good thing. But I missed the world of ideas a lot, and I liked the fact that it was connected to something I cared about and that made a real difference in people's lives. I saw this as an extension of my organizing in all honesty.

BANKS NUTTER: Knowing you for as long as I have, and being friends with a couple of alums, too, I still have a hard time understanding, there's the CPCS and then there's the Labor Resource Center.

REEVE: Oh, yes.

BANKS NUTTER: Which you went on to be assistant director or director of –

REEVE: The director.

BANKS NUTTER: So before we talk about your role as director, what's the Labor Resource Center in relation to the other or just in itself?

REEVE: The easiest way to understand it is that Jim [Green] and I, through the Labor Studies program, began programs that took on lives of their own. The extension program? That's part of the statewide extension program. That statewide extension was certainly not just created by Jim and me but by people who were on campuses, but also a research component, we got a Ford Foundation grant that allowed us to hire an individual who allowed for the development of some labor-oriented research. When I left the labor studies program in '95, I had decided to take a half-time faculty job on campus so that I could focus on my own work. There was a Center for Labor Research (CLR) that was created that reported to the provost, not the dean, so it was all very disaggregated. There was an extension program, there was the CLR, there was Labor Studies, and very little coordination. In the intervening year or two, for a variety of reasons having to do with the internal resources of the college, there was a move afoot to take extension research and the academic program and bring it under the roof of a labor resource center. So the Labor Resource Center was established in the spring in '97. I was hired on Labor Day and the notion was the LRC, as it was called, would function within the college and the connection, the point of connection would be the academic program. But that we would model ways of using classroom experience and personnel to do work in the community around extension and on research. The problem, though, and it quickly became apparent but I'm much more articulate about it now than I was, is that we were really an add-on in the sense — and I don't mean in the sense of an afterthought, but people hadn't engaged in sufficient thinking and planning about what it was going to mean to have this wholly anomalous structure and set of programs in a college that was

focused on undergraduate education. I would argue that it probably should have existed in a graduate college with undergraduate programs because it's hard to do research unless you have a cohort of graduate students. Amherst has what is essentially a captive audience of graduate students and its own programs.

I've written recently in my portion of a self-study for the center that addresses these kinds of structural issues and the kinds of decisions that need to be made to allow the center to be what it could become. It should either be allowed to develop and the roadblocks need to be moved out of the way, or there has to be recognition that the notion of the center is a fiction and that what we're really talking about is an academic program. It might be that it needs to shrink back to that again. And I don't think that would be a bad thing. I certainly had a vision when I was hired of it becoming richer and more developed than it is, but we were really operating with one hand tied behind our backs in terms of personnel and the operating budget was just so limited, and as well as the insufficiency of the administration. So at some point, I had to ask myself why I was working so hard to build something that had effectively stalled out. Not for lack of good will or good intentions or hard work, God knows, but it just didn't have the gas to run the car. That's what it came down to, and at that point, I decided it was time to let somebody else come in and figure out whether there really was a car or whether it should be something altogether different.

BANKS NUTTER: Now was it structural within the university? Was it the organized labor piece? Because you were working pretty closely with the Mass. AFL-CIO but also you were in the state university system? Where was the weak link?

REEVE: There were several tensions. There was the tension of being a labor-based program, labor-oriented program in a university that didn't, and doesn't, value to the degree that it once did program that doesn't generate its own life. Basically, there's a model that's happened in higher public ed and I was in the last wave of it, it happened first in private and now it's in public, it's the Harvard model of every boat on its own bottom. And that's really the thinking now, in public higher ed, and the center was expected by university administration to float on its own. The problem, of course, is that you can't innovate and you can't fundraise unless you have money. So we were caught in a cul-de-sac that was just really dispiriting and fatiguing. And then there were tensions with constituents because given the demographics of our staff, we all had a tremendous commitment to unorganized immigrant workers. And, there's certainly a lot of good work being done. It's not just rhetoric on the part of organized labor with respect to immigrant workers, but there was also a sense that we weren't doing enough sometimes. I think that they thought we weren't doing enough for mainline labor.

BANKS NUTTER: And you between a rock and the many hard places.

REEVE: Yes. So, I think what I've learned from that is that my strengths are as a mentor, teacher, and organizer. I'm a good planner. I don't have any love for administration. I've done it twice now and now I know. So, I want to do something next that's closer to my strengths and my passions.

BANKS NUTTER: We'll get to that in a few minutes. Just to wrap up the labor education piece — we both know that the history of that, especially in twentieth century, of the Bryn Mawr model but that's just one of many that, at least initially in the early part of the twentieth century in worker education, that appealed then to immigrant working-class women and now certainly in the last twenty years, to women of color workers. Why is it, do you think, that worker education can be so vital to those particular groups of workers? Why do they need it? Would you argue that women of any ethnicity, race, or whatever need, should be targeted?

REEVE: I would, because the allocation of resources in power in our society is skewed disproportionately toward men and particularly to white men in the United States. Certainly, there are a number of native-born white men who are working along, shoulder to shoulder, with women to change that. There's no question about that. But despite their efforts and ours, that is the reality and as a result of those inequities of power, there's an inequity of access, particularly to education. And what I see frequently, before women coming into the program and in the latter part of my teaching at the Labor Resource Center, increasingly I had women of color and immigrant workers, and my last class this past spring, such a delightful group of women and men. It was almost entirely international — people of international origins. And for a variety of reasons, they had not had access to higher education, either in their country of origin or once they came here. Survival was the issue. Consequently, they would have to get themselves established and then the question would arise as to how can they produce a better life for themselves and their families, and that required education. And many, many expressed a love of learning and were thrilled that the college offered a place where they could do that without having to turn themselves into a pretzel to meet family commitments and work commitments as well. I met some amazing people at that college.

I'm remembering one woman who I actually have been planning to e-mail, she was, as she put it, roofless. She was homeless with three children. There was a whole group in a community-based project called Roofless Women [grant-funded program for homeless women who matriculated at CPCS] at the college and many of them came into the college. She has cancer, quite serious cancer. She has quite significant emotional and psychological issues but goddamn she wants that degree and literally once a week before I left, she'd come into my office, not cry but just do what she needed to do, sort of fall apart and then she'd

put herself back together again and off she'd go. And I never once felt annoyed that she would just show up without notice and do that, because I felt like she had guts. She was doing something that I knew was enormously difficult for her.

And people went through that college and our program for lots of different reasons but I absolutely feel that — I worry that we're moving back to a time that reminds me of the prewar years, where access to education or higher education in particular was a function of who your parents were, not a question of merit, or just even a conviction that equal access matters. So I worry about that.

BANKS NUTTER: Do you see jeopardy to those programs?

REEVE: Absolutely, I do.

BANKS NUTTER: And why is it that you think — financial constraints?

REEVE: People are working two and three jobs, as you know, and they have no time, they're squeezed for time. They're — many of them are not making a living wage and/or they're not making a wage sufficient to support a family.

BANKS NUTTER: So it's not so much that the university's shutting down, although there are cutbacks on that side but it's more the structural changes?

REEVE: Well, there are structural changes in higher education, to the extent that education lives and breathes according to tuition and grants. Funding streams have a great deal to do with the university's areas of expertise and emphasis. So for example, there's a move afoot in the UMass system moving towards sciences and health because that's where the money is right now, nationally. And that means that you cut back on other things. Priorities become — are overly grounded in a marketplace. That's not to say that hasn't been true before but it's especially true now. And you know, a friend of mine who was at Harvard when it was happening there who's now at UMass likens it to the creation of McIdeas. [laugh]

BANKS NUTTER: And is there still the support in organized labor, at least in this state for worker education?

REEVE: Oh, yes. I've had my difference with Bob Haynes and he with me but the man is passionate about labor education. And the labor education we have in this state, he's helped build. I can say that honestly about him.

BANKS NUTTER: Is he an alum? I know Kathy Casavant is.

REEVE: He's an alum of the MBA program. I believe he went and got his undergraduate degree in Boston State. He absolutely has been a

visionary about this. I mean, he's been smart enough to surround himself with people who can take his ideas and translate them. He's much more interested in the idea than in the implementation and you know, again, he hired Harneen. Those of us who do work in education in the Commonwealth were delighted because she's visionary, she's creative, and we knew she would make it happen, that she was coming with her own agenda and ideas, but she's skilled politically at working with them, so it has really been great.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, perhaps there's still hope, then?

REEVE: I hope so. It depends on whether labor can mount sufficient political capital to hold public higher education to its mission. But many of these problems are haunting K through 12 as well.

END TAPE 3

TAPE 4

BANKS NUTTER: This is really the chance to talk to you about sort of not so specific questions based on this organization or that piece, but more the reflective piece of the interview. And, I'll start really with a sort of personal question. You're currently the parent of a teenager, a brand-new teen, I know. How's that feel?

REEVE: You know, it's funny. Sometimes I still find myself thinking, do I really feel like a mother? I'm not sure what that means to be a mother. I know there was a point when Laurie came into our life, it felt like I was trying to fit a round peg into a square hole. It felt so inorganic to who I am, which sounds strange given my caring about mentoring and organizing and education, but it's just one of those things you find out, I guess, when someone has to do it. Your instincts aren't always the right things to go by in parenting. But I'm amazed sometimes by how much love I feel for her, that just, you know, wells up. I think a lot about what her life will be like and what will be available to her. I try to be conscious, to the extent that I can be about how I relate to her, coming out of my own experiences. It feels really important to me to tell her every day that I love her. That seems crucial.

BANKS NUTTER: Beyond that, I mean, what do you see or what would you like your legacy for her to be? What would you — what do you want to give her in a sense, intangible —?

REEVE: I've actually given this some thought and I've produced something for her. Periodically, I write her a book on the computer and give it to her. And the last one I wrote her was talking about the values that mean a tremendous amount to me. It wasn't didactic in a sense, a clobbering over the head. It's always written from the vantage point of a young girl. So, just thinking about what does it mean to be a person of integrity, to be a person of honesty, kindness, those are things that really matter to me. I'll forgive just about anything in somebody but not unkindness. That's really — like a bedrock principle for me, and that's important to me, I don't want her to be a pushover but I want her to be respectful of other human beings. That's important to me. I've struggled with the fact that she's not someone who you can bring along politically. She was a formed human being when I met her.

BANKS NUTTER: How old was she?

REEVE: She was 6. Now the experiences she's had, well as she gets older, I think, lend themselves to her understanding issues of fairness. She has an acute sense of what's fair and what's not. She has kind of an inarticulated understanding of how structures impose on people, the foster care system, and so I trust that by continued exposure and talking, and even her own experiences, she'll learn that stuff. And the truth is, I

didn't have a coherent political viewpoint growing up. I had a very clear set of values growing up in a Catholic household. But, Debby and I are very explicit about our values, and recently I was saying to Debby that I felt guilty that Laurie had no organized religion because that was the place where I learned values, and she's not like a lot of the kids that I know through their parents, someone who gets involved with, Children Against Sweatshops [organized at the Brookline Workmen's Circle], that kind of thing. I mean, in Boston, there is a fair amount of that but, Debby said, "Well, there are things you want her to learn and you need to teach them." And that's what got me to write the last book. And she loves those books. I'm touched by it. I'll try to write one — we have a little ritual. She sits on my lap, even now, I read it to her, she takes it to school, she reads it to other people. We were just talking about it recently. I told her I had an idea for a new book, and I wait till I really have the idea down, so it feels like I've really got what I want to say in this thing. And she was real excited. She said, "Yes, yes, you owe me one." [laugh]

BANKS NUTTER: That's lovely. And anytime I ask anything that you don't want to talk about, you can just tell me. But around the adoption, as a same-sex couple, were there structural challenges to that?

REEVE: Oh, yes. Debby's sister Jody and her new husband John, at that time, he was new, were fostering a sibling group, actually the daughter from a sibling group and some other folks were taking care of the boy, and Debby and I just fell in love with them, and really threw our hat in the ring in a big way. That's as close an experience I've had to a miscarriage I'd have to say. It was very sad. The DSS worker for that region decided that she wanted a straight couple, even though we had a previous relationship with her kids, it would have meant continuity for the kids because they knew Jody and John, it didn't happen.

BANKS NUTTER: And it was plainly that?

REEVE: Oh yes, plain as the nose on your face. It was sad, and the problem we had was that if we had fought it, we would have been blackballed, and we knew that.

BANKS NUTTER: By DSS.

REEVE: There's a lot of regional variation, DSS, around this issue. Ultimately it wasn't DSS who put us together. It was some contracting agency — DARE. I don't remember what DARE stands for — it's not the drug group. But DARE subcontracts for kids who need specialized mentoring, it's called. It's ironic, because Governor Dukakis is the one who prohibited it through executive order — adoption by single women, single parents, and gay and lesbian people. Then, it was Romney strangely — Celluci? Oh, Weld — but, in any case, for a variety of

reasons we decided to adopt. We wanted to adopt domestically and wanted to adopt through DSS. We were clear about that. There's a required MAP training as they call it, and it's basically a several-week course that introduces you to sort of the fundamentals of the system, what you can expect from the kids. It's greatly changed, when we adopted Laurie, they still at that point were glossing the severity of the issues that a lot of the kids have. So we were quite unprepared for Laurie's issues to say the least. But in any case, as I said, we were trained by the Boston office and the two children we were interested in were through another regional office who quite explicitly said they — they broke the law. That's the bottom line. They broke the law. But there was certainly no way we could prove it or make it stick without cost to us. And it took a while for us to sort of come back from that.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, you likened it to a miscarriage.

REEVE: Oh, it was —

BANKS NUTTER: So there was a grieving process.

REEVE: Oh, absolutely there was. And then what happened is that Laurie's caseworker [Bridget Hart] at DARE, Laurie was coming up on 6 and 7 and it's a sad truth in foster care that if you're not adopted by then, you probably won't be. There's a lot of that. So she really wanted to try to make it work for Laurie and the truth is, Laurie was in a less-than-wholesome foster situation and Bridget knew that. But in any case, Bridget — I remember how she hooked us. It was pretty funny. I remember she came down to the Boston regional office to meet with us and the Boston office had sent her our home study and DARE had seen it so Bridget got it, and what she said to us is, "I thought that two people who had to deal with issues of difference would understand this child." And now, knowing what I know, I probably would have said, "Oh." [laugh] But Bridget, I can remember at one point as we got closer to the adoption process, I got panicked all over again that that was going to be a repeat of the previous experience, but I can remember very emotionally asking her and her supervisor, her direct supervisor, "Can you guarantee me this isn't going to happen to me again?" I really felt like I couldn't do it again.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, to attach to a child, to put your heart out there again in that way would be hard.

REEVE: And they were great, they were great.

BANKS NUTTER: So, it worked and she's a great kid and I've had the privilege of knowing her from, you know, the time she came into your life. And how does she relate to you and Deb as a couple?

REEVE: I think, it's both normal and occasionally strange. She, for the longest time, sort of didn't get that having two moms was unusual. And for reasons that I think she's either not sure of or may not know herself just yet, she liked the idea of not having a dad in the picture. So, someday she may know more about that. For the first time in her life, she's talking more about getting married. She used to say, "Oh, I'll never get married." I finally told her she could get married and not have children. She also said she didn't want children. "So maybe I'll get married yet." So, there you go.

But the first time we had to deal with gay-baiting was because we pick her up after school, she doesn't take the bus home, Laurie and Debby were walking from the school past the busses to Debby's workplace, and this one little boy, who's quite a character, yelled out the window, "Your mother is a faggot." He had just learned the word, he sort of knew what it meant but he didn't. And they just kept walking. "Your mother's gay." And Laurie turned around and said, "No she's not." Because she didn't know what it meant either, she just knew it was supposed to be a slur. And Debby turned her and started walking and said, "Well, actually I am and I'm proud of it. I'm fine with it. Let's talk about what it is." So the next day, we immediately called the school and they were on it right away, and in fact the boy, the next day, came up to Debby, put his hand out and said, "Hey, Debby, man, I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings." It was really cute. Hey, man.

But I think as she works out whatever issues as an adopted child she has about her birth parents, there may be a time when she wishes that she had a more traditional family. [During the spring '04 legislative hearings on gay marriage, Laurie confronted her internalized homophobia and worked hard to understand her initial discomfort with her queer moms.] There's no question she loves us and she knows we love her, and her therapist is always telling us what we mean to her. It's interesting because to some degree, she's typecast us. I'm the one she talks to about boys, clothes and makeup, and sex also. I'm the sex mom, as we call it. And Debby's the barn mom, she has sort of more traditionally male role. It's very funny. Early on, early on, I can remember Laurie jokingly calling her "dad." And there was a little bit of friendly bantering and then it got more serious and Debby said, "Well, I'm not your father, I'm your mother." "Oh, just let me call you dad." [laugh] Whatever that was about, I don't know.

But because this was such a busy week this week for me, I wasn't able to sit down and have a good conversation about how this is important, the court is saying that we can marry, what do you think about that, you know, should we think about that? We can still have that conversation actually, but we haven't taken her to any Gay Pride marches, largely because Debby just really doesn't have much use for it anymore. And it is hard to get excited about it, I have to say, it's largely bar floats at this point, corporate floats. But I would kind of like her to see that massive outpouring. I think it would be really good for her. But that's my view. It may or may not be what she needs or wants.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, you are at that golden moment of finishing up a dissertation that you've been working on. How does that feel right now? You did just leave the LRC a month ago, a little more than a month ago?

REEVE: I feel like I've been enormously productive for the last month. I'm pretty tired. I was really ready to leave so I'm not grieving that in a sense. I've been really amazed, as I said to you earlier, that I've settled right into a writing routine. It's not at all arduous to do it. My rear end gets sore and my back gets sore but I need to get more exercise. But I'm committed to finishing this. I don't know what's on the other side for me. I've always been a human being who is drawn toward the world of ideas and the kind of asceticism around that and the world of being up to your eyeballs in issues and topics and I don't know how to reconcile that. Because unfortunately there aren't that many places like the Labor Studies program, so I don't know where I could end up. I've thought about "Facing History and Ourselves," that kind of a thing would be very appealing to me. But we'll see. And, meanwhile, in terms of the connection of the dissertation to who I am as a political person, I'm excited by the opportunity to explore an idea that suddenly dawned on me in this work, which is that in focusing on the right to bodily defense and integrity for working people, one of the things which, of course, reflects my feminist thinking on reproductive rights, what I realized is that because organized labor has always privileged the idea of the right to free association, and the right to organize and the right to bargain, they've never looked at the fundamental issues of the right to determine your own bodily instrumentality, and that's at the bottom of all those rights. So I'm interested in sort of really pushing that idea and seeing where it goes. That's something that has real critical implications, and I don't pretend to understand it just yet.

BANKS NUTTER: In your biographical statement, you wrote, and I'll quote: "My goal in life is to balance the lives of the mind, activist and heart, an enormous challenge for me." Could you talk about that a little bit? I mean, the three pieces and really, the challenge of balancing?

REEVE: I'm at my happiest when I'm with friends and family, when I'm making art, and when I'm involved with the world of ideas — and that includes political ideas, and the involvement can be a dissertation, it can be organizing. But, in part I meant by heart, the activism, and at 50, I still have trouble reconciling the fact that you only have so many hours in the day, and life is about choices. So this period of time in my life is learning not to be a workaholic.

BANKS NUTTER: Do you feel like you've been?

REEVE: Oh, absolutely, I have been. Absolutely.

BANKS NUTTER: Why, do you think?

REEVE: Just driven. I mean, it's part of an immigrant legacy you know, so. I can't tell you how many times — I mean, like many people I grew up with, if you're going to do it, do it right the first time. And my mother would just push and push and push till she collapsed. And then she'd do it again. And my sister and I have long talked about that we both have that load.

BANKS NUTTER: You think there's gender piece in that as well?

REEVE: Yes, I do. Although I observe it in my brothers, too, sort of this drive. It's not ambition in the traditional sense of ambition. It's drive, you know. It's almost got a life of its own. So I feel like I wore myself out, I've worn myself repeatedly in jobs and the old chestnut is really true: you're no good to anybody else if you're not taking care of yourself. And I'm really determined to figure out what I need every day to be happy every day as opposed to deferring pleasure because I'm working so hard. There's a way to have pleasure and hard work and I have to figure out how to make that happen. And I'll be using this next six months to figure out what kind of environment I want to work in next. And doing what? I have an interest right now in at-risk kids, because of my daughter, and I certainly worked a lot, particularly in the last year at UMass, with people with significant learning challenges. And in my last class, I had probably every learning challenge under the sun documented and a number of mental illnesses — people with mental illnesses — and I loved it. It was challenging. I just loved trying to figure out where they were at as learners and work from that, and there was recently a job posting for labor and politics, American History and Politics, I'm sorry, at Curry College, which has, you know, a definite focus on people with challenges. And were I further along, I would have applied, because that's exactly what I've envisioned for myself is a place like that. I think I could be happy in a place like that. Because it's a service mission.

BANKS NUTTER: You also stated in your bio statement that — and you've brought it up more than once in our conversation today about — that you're passionate about art and creating it. How has that passion reared up in your life in the past?

REEVE: When I've had time, I take classes. When I don't have time, I find ways to have things like texture and color in my life whether it's knitting or crewel work, um, or flower arranging. Um, anything that allows me to — there's a place I go when I do that work that's — it's not cerebral? It's problem solving but it's not cerebral, and it's just so good for me, but one of the things I promised myself when I left the job is that I would paint. And, you know, I took the class, it was an adult ed class that only met — I made half the classes, but, I'll try to do better about

that at the next one because that really makes me very happy. I don't even know if I particularly care whether I'm that good.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, if I'd been thinking, I would have worn the earrings you gave me [laugh]. Do you see it as an outlet, too?

REEVE: Yes, I learn about myself by doing that. I really do, in the same way that we learn about ourselves when we write.

BANKS NUTTER: So much of what we've talked about in, from the beginning of your life, is about change, making change happen, personal change, social, political change. At this point in your life, I guess, to speak more maybe to social or political change, what's the magic formula for making that change happen?

REEVE: That is the \$64,000 question in general, but for me, I feel like this is a period of reflection for me about politics. I've spent many years now working with labor and its various manifestations, really since 1970s with the exception of two years that I can think of, and I've watched other friends who go through this who were older than me, and it's right about now when they went through it. It's interesting, it must be something about 50. And you see how little that's changed, and you know, I look around and I look at just how pervasive capital is and it's just very depressing. And I look at the ways in which mainline labor shoots itself in the foot. I find that equally depressing. So I don't have that sort of *joie de vivre* about the work of politics that I had in my twenties and thirties and even my early forties. It could be a case of knowing too much? But part of it, also, I think that I need to sit back and figure out where I want to put my energy, and to figure out where I could feel that *joie de vivre* again because, political work matters to me, not because it's a way to be self-aggrandizing. You know, there's some people to do it because they want to be player, whatever that might be for them. That's never why I've done it, and so I trust my gut will tell me what the issue or campaign or organization will be. But I suspect I'm going to be broadening out. I do worry a lot about the fact that labor's base and power is being chipped away because it's really one of the few mass movements in this country, as small as it has become, that stands between totalitarianism and this country. It's really one of the few organized groups that's fighting what Bush has done, for instance, and it frightens me to think it might disappear or be made feeble.

BANKS NUTTER: In very general terms, I mean is there some kind of formula, the ingredients for change that you see that need to be there?

REEVE: I feel a fair amount of humility about what I don't know about that. One of the things that comes with middle age is hopefully a certain amount of wisdom. My way of answering that question is that I don't know what it would take to achieve some of the social lens that I would have

liked to have achieved, other than to continue to do what I do, is to trust that if you give people the skills, the power, and the resources to direct their lives, shoulder to shoulder with other people, they usually will make the right decisions. And what's happening in this country and elsewhere is that people increasingly are not being given the tools, the resources, and the information they need to do that. So I think it makes for a much more difficult organizing context. I also think that there is something about living in an information technology age where people are just so dispersed, creating any kind of solidarity or community really is going to take some new creative thinking. Move On, the organization Move On, I think, has done some phenomenal stuff online around antiwar. They've moved out from that and they're really refreshing because they're very out there about saying, "Wow, we tried it and it worked. Let's try it now on this." And I love that. I mean, as someone who's fifty, looking at people sort of coming up through the ranks, that's great. I don't have the technological prowess to figure out how to use cyberspace to organize, but they've figured it out and it's truly quite remarkable. I'm watching sort of new directions, see what happens, and how people sort of achieve community. They've created an online community. It's interesting.

BANKS NUTTER: If you could project the second half of your century, what would you like to have accomplished at that point that you haven't already?

REEVE: That's a very difficult question for me, for reasons I've thought about. I consciously, like many people who have lost a parent, thought I would die when I was in my early forties, and I didn't know that till I got closer, so I was a maniac about achieving my goals, and I had to reconstruct my sense of what was next for me when I realized I was going to live longer than my early forties. And I'm still not there. I still don't have a sense that I'm going to do this and this and this. I've done many of the things I wanted to do. I'm a parent. It would be great to be a grandparent, but I'm not going to impose that on my daughter.

BANKS NUTTER: No hurry.

REEVE: Well, yes. It matters to me to be part of a thriving community of people and friends. It matters to me to be part of an intellectual and learning community — not just an intellectual community but a learning community that really takes life seriously. I'd like to be part of my community in an active way, not passive, and I would like to think that I could make more time for the parts of me that are creative in nontraditional ways, again, the painting. I mean, my fantasy actually is that if we ever lived here long enough, I'd love to blow up the top of this house, because it's a walkup attic and put skylights up there and make a studio. That's a fantasy. I have a loom in my basement. It'll probably stay in my basement for many more years. I envision not an insular life, but a more inward life for myself, to be honest. Not

apolitical but more introspective than it's been, and I think that's probably what the writing and the art give me, is an opportunity to tap into myself. Not be self-absorbed or self-obsessed but to work from who I am out. And I haven't done as much of that as I want. So I don't have big plans. I mean, one of the first things that occurred to me was that it would be nice to write a book. It would be nice to have a published book. I'm not sure what that represents for me. I really am not somebody who envisions having her name up in lights.

BANKS NUTTER: Any last words or thoughts or things that didn't –

REEVE: No. This has been incredibly complete.

BANKS NUTTER: Well, you've made it that way.

END TAPE 4

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