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Interview with Grace Smedstad 5
By Isobel Grossner
December 18, 1970

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C O N T E N T S

Early recollections of father. 1-5

Illinois Federation 5 -7

Federations conventions 8-10

Organization of mine workers, sailors 10-12

Father's illness 12-16

The effect of World War I War I on organizing 16-18

Political endorsements of the Federation 18-20

Relationship with father 20-23

Views of women 23-25

Gangsters and the unions 26-30

Harry Bridges and Communism 3 0 - 3 6

Having children 37-38

Problems in the union 39-46

Welfare agencies and labor unions 4 7 - 5 5

The Building Services International 56-60

Fathers death 60-63

Father's court experience 6 3 - 6 5

Black vs. White 65-67

Conclusion. 67-68

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I. I guess we 'll talk mostly about your father, but I want to hear somewhat about yourself, as well.

R. I really don't know where to begin. I suppose we can begin as far back as I can remember: when my father was working for the sailor;; In my earliest: recollection, my father was a very important person in our family. I'm always kind of amused when we talk about the father isn't home enough; he doesn't spend time with his children. I can tell you that it depends on how he spends tile time when he is home. My father was very rarely around, but when he was he made his presence felt. Even as very small children, instead of bedtime stories, we had stories of what he was doing in Washington, why he was on. the coast. He did practically all the negotiation for the Great Lakes and a good deal of it on the east coast.

Andrew Furuseth, who the the international president. of the seaman"s union, was primarily involved in Washington and on the west coast. As years went on my father also became active in Washington, in the enactmenet of the seaman's acts.

I. You're talking now about what year?

R. Well, let's see I'm 66. Let's say 60 years ago. I suppose I was maybe 6 or 7.

I - At that age your father was telling you what he was doing?

Always, this is right. I suppose in his own mind he was excusing himself for not being home very much although we never had this feeling. He was very emotionally involved with his work, felt very strongly about it. When he came home he would tell us, for example, why he fought for the sailors, for the seaman's act, which was signed if I remember correctly, about 1915. At that point my father had been away for months. He kept saying he was coming home; he'd. give us a train, but he didn't show up, until finally the president signed the act .

We learned that sailors were, for all intents and purposes, slaves aboard the ship. In some cases even worse than that, because the captain didn't have to answer to anyone really, if someone died aboard the ship. At 5, 6, 7, I can remember my my father telling about the worms in the food that the sailors got, dead and sometimes alive. Meat that smelled, scurvy that they acquired because they had poor food. I think they now have to have citrus fruits. One of the things they had to have was lemon pie, which I can still remember because I like, lemon pie very much. But this was to get the lemon juice into the men.

He worked hard. He was what was called a walking delegate, a term that I think has been out of fashion for a' long time. Actually he would walk from pier to pier checking on the ship, talking to the men, seeing what was wrong and trying to enforce the law, and also, of course, whatever rules and regulations the union had.

In 1914 he became Secretary-Treasurer of the Illinois State Federation of Labor. He still maintained an office with the sailors although his primary job was the Secretary-Treasurer

of the Illinois State Federation.

We always lived in Chicago. My mother's home had been in Cleveland and my father had occasionally sailed out of that port, which is how he met my mother. But then my mother decided she didn't want to marry a sailor. She didn't like reading the shipping news and wondering what happened to the ship, so my father ran for office in the Sailors Union and became, as I said, a walking delegate.

In order to win your mother in marriage?

Yes. I think if my father all his life had done exactly what he wanted to do he would have stayed aboard the ship. He was very fond of the water and, poor soul, my mother couldn't stand the water and neither could I. We took lots 'of trips on the lake boats and my sister too, who died when she was nineteen. The first thing we did was head for the stateroom and stay there till we got to dry land again. We liked boats. We were interested, but we got sick very quickly.

I. Do you know how your parents met?

R. No, I don't. Now Wait a minute. Yes, occasionally when my father was ashore he'd board somewhere in the neighborhood in which my mother lived, not far from the lake front in Cleveland. My maternal Grandfather was a custom tailor, made pants, and he had a tailor shop in conjunction with his home. It was a poor neighborhood. It was an immigrant neighborhood--boarding houses, rooming houses all around. My father would stay in one, but just exactly how they met I don't know. My father was somewhat

shy and certainly an extremely reserved man and probably always had been. Kind of a miracle; really, that they got married, My mother was the other way around. Mom had no inhibitions. She talked to everybody till the day she died. She was extremely friendly with everyone, which used to worry us sometimes. Then father came into the Illinois State Federation of Labor, which was not really a very important organization at that time. In fact no unions were. He was a very brilliant man. He had a very quick mind. You never had to explain things to him more than once. Sometimes you only had to give him a hint. My father, I

a tremendous library. When I was very young there were all second hand books. I remember my mother had something of a problem trying to keep the house clean with the books sitting all around. As a matter of fact, I finally cleaned out the library last year sometime when I moved.

No, no. I wouldn't be surprised if my father had taken some correspondence courses while aboard ship, but you know, ships' libraries in those days frequently had a lot of books people threw away, not books most people would be interested in. But Papa read everything he could get his hands on. He was very familiar with different religions around the world, how people lived. He had never been out of the country as far as I know. He was interested in everything and, as I say a great reader.

In the Last 25 or 30 years he became extremely involved with the 13th amendment. He wrote a great deal of criticism on it, what it really meant, and not only with reference to black slaves but to working people. I ran across a record yesterday that my father had made, "Labor from Slavery to Freedom." I'd like to listen to it some day. He made it in 1931 or 1932. For awhile, he and McCormack of the Tribune with whom he had nothing in common, had a running series of articles on the 13th amendment. It was the only thing they agreed on, the importance of the 13th amendment relating it to working people rather than merely to black slaves.

I want to ask you about the Illinois Federation. You were telling me it was not very large.

R. No, no it wasn't. It wasn't very large and it wasn't very important. Largely I think because they had never had anybody who could really pull the thing together. The miners were, I think, the most important single organization in there. The miners were always in somewhat of a turmoil. They quarreled among themselves. There were at least two miners' organizations. The conditions in

the mines, of course, were unspeakable. My father worked pretty closely with John L. Lewis and a couple of other men whose names escape me now who later became important in the Steel Workers Union when they left the AFL.

I'm not sure how many people really liked my father, but everybody respected and admired him. They would almost take his unsupported word for anything.

- I. You indicated he did not have many friends.
- R. As I say, he was extremely reserved. He had absolutely no talent for small talk whatsoever. He simply didn't know what to do with it. He had a very puritanical sense of morality for himself.

But he had sympathy and understanding for people who didn't have it. He hated the things men did but he didn't hate men. He didn't speak lightly. When he had something to say it was as a result of very careful consideration and thought. Apparently this got across. In the Federation conventions the delegates would sit and listen to him for hours. And his language, I would have thought that never soaked into them. They were uneducated, pretty badly treated in whatever areas they worked. They were rough men and pretty tough men, as a matter of fact, who in those days came to the Federation meetings in work clothes, clean and sometimes not so clean--blue work shirts. Yet they sat and listened to these very erudite speeches and whatever Papa was telling at the time they understood.

He was a good organizer. He was a perfectly marvelous administrator. These two abilities don't go together very often you know. In addition he was a very competent negotiator. It

is very rare that you find these three attributes in one person. I have known some others, of course. John L. Lewis was one.

There was a new president came in from the miners, John Walker, and they served for several years together before there was a split in the miners, the progressive and something else down state, and Walker decided to throw in his lot with the miners and so he left the organization.

Then the teamsters became the dominant group in the Federation and my father worked very closely with them.

- I. Are you saying that the miners left the AF of L?
- R. One group did. They split among themselves downstate. I don't remember too much about it except that it was a very violent split. I remember my father going to Herrin with my mother and he locked her in the bedroom while he was gone. She wasn't allowed out of the room, because things were very dangerous there. I was quite young at the time, 10 or 12. I knew these things were going on. Papa talked about them at home. Many people came to the house to discuss these matters and so we learned about them.

My father was violently against violence. He said it never really solved anything. Yet, when he was a sailor he broke his hand--now he didn't get that tripping on the sidewalk. By the time I knew him he was already pretty well shaped, I would say, and he already had a good deal of confidence in himself. He stayed with the sailors quite a long time although his main job was with the State Federation, partly, I suppose because of

his personal interest in them and partly because the man who took over after him, Thomas Hanson, had four girls and the two men had been friends for a good many years. The wives were friendly and we girls were more or less brought up together. When Hanson died two of his girls were working in the office and my father stayed on to see that everything was alright with them. After I was married, the girls got married and Dad left the sailors, I can't remember when.

There was some trouble on the west coast. There were some lawsuits. There was also some trouble with some reds within the labor movement in Illinois, Foster--W.Z. They had a real battle at one of the conventions. There was never any taint of this within the Federation, only unions belonged. Foster was active within the local unions, pretty largely, as I recall it, downstate. Some of the delegates were adherents of Foster, and some of the unions, I assume. And Foster himself came to more than one annual meeting, the convention. That must have been a long time ago because my memory of those conventions were of men in work clothes.

I Do you think that was in the thirties?

R. Yes, it probably was in the thirties. I began going to conventions when I was 16. 1920 was my first one and it was certainly after that. I would assume it was probably in the early thirties, '31 or perhaps '32.

I. What about these conventions?

R. Well, I'd gone to conventions off and on pretty regularly more for

fun, and it was away to get out of the house.

In those years they used to take the conventions to cities that were considered to be needful of having a convention. They used it for organizing because the delegates wouldn't stay in a non-union hotel or eat at a non-union restaurant. If the convention were to be held in Quincy, for example, it would be known ahead of time and all the unions would begin organizing. Of course, the the hotels cooperated because they wanted the business. It was also considered a good way to educate the people of the town as to why the Federation was in existence and that its main purpose, always, was to affect legislation. Conventions were open to the public, a good way to instruct the population, and so they were taken all over the state. The Convention went to Streator once, which I remember very well, where it finally became necessary to get the townswomen to come in and make sandwiches for the delegates. The local restaurants just couldn't handle the mob scene that descended on the little town.

As time went on the delegates began to be more particular about the towns they chose. They voted for the large towns that could offer better facilities. By this time, of course, the delegates were getting a little more money. They, were younger men, they had a little more education, and they weren't about to live in rooming houses. Now there are only two places downstate to go. Springfield or Peoria; although neither is really equipped to handle the convention with ease. It now runs somewhere around 3,000 delegates and guests which is a pretty good sized group for anyplace but Chicago.

Legislatively, my father was, of course, very much involved with the women's eight-hour day--all kinds of protective legislation. He did feel, however, that the legislation for which they fought was not primarily for the unions. His theory was, what one legislature gave, another legislature could take away. Union contract gains were more difficult to lose.

- I. But he did fight for legislation?
- R. He was the legislative representative for all the unions during the years he was in office. When Mr. Soderstrom became president, he was a very young man, comparatively speaking. He had been in the legislature and they worked very well together. It was my father who held the Federation together and it was my father who was the leader in the legislature.

- I. You were telling me something about the mine workers .
- R. For example, after the mine workers left, or the CIO left, Papa still was their spokesman in Springfield. He never openly admitted that there was a CIO. He said that a union man was a union man and had the right to all the services my father could provide. I don't know much about the miners' breakup. Certainly as Lewis became more powerful and the mine workers became better organized and a more cohesive group, he began to take in other kinds of people, rather than merely those who worked in the mines. The AF of L was pretty backward in this area. They prided themselves on the skilled labor that belonged to the AF of L. They were undoubtedly the leaders in raising

wages and improving working conditions. They were by and large the better educated people. In fact in all cases they were educated people.

They had to be in order to be skilled. On board ship they had both unskilled and highly skilled men so that Papa was always accustomed to working with both grades of people.

I. Were the seamen organized well?

R. Oh yes, no question about it. There was a cohesiveness among the sailors and other Maritime unions that didn't exist in other organizations, I suppose because the men were confined for such long periods all together. There was no way really to shut off one group from another, to ignore them, or even to figure-- "you take care of yourself."

I didn't know a great deal of what happened to the miners except, as I say, I knew Jack Walker and I knew Lewis and Abel. It doesn't seem possible. It certainly wasn't the Abel in steel now. But there were a pair of brothers at any rate, who were originally mine workers and then became very influential in Steel. I didn't really know these people. I met them at conventions. They came to our home. My father used his home for business quite a lot.

I. How large was it?

R. We had a little five room bungalow on North Avenue--two bedrooms, a living room, a dining room, and a kitchen. My mother liked company and she liked people for dinner. She also liked her husband and one way of getting him home was to have people come

to our house.

I was married when I was 20 and left home. I still lived in Chicago. The day I found out I was pregnant my sister died and I returned home and I stayed for about two years. During those years I was pretty largely occupied with trying to learn to run my own home and take care of my kids.

The depression hit us at this point. It struck the advertising business, in which my husband worked as an artist, months before anyone else was really affected. Our struggles began in my own home and I didn't see nearly as much of my father as I had before.

My father was blind for about 8 years so it must have been around 1917 that it began. He had cataracts. He also became ill. He was working very hard during the war years, traveling a great deal for the war production, everything that was involved with keeping the men working during the war.

When the war ended he became quite ill. He was losing about three pounds every day. He was a big man, an enormous man and came down to a skeleton. He went away for about six months to Florida. They never did find out what was wrong with him. He just fell apart. He was off for six months and then came back and took up where he left off. His eyes continued to get worse. My mother or sister or I used to walk to the elevated trains with him and his secretary met him at the other end. In the evening the arrangement was reversed.

At that time he needed more than my mother or I could give him. He needed someone who knew exactly what he was doing from

day to day. Miss. Hibbard, his secretary, read everything to him, she traveled with him. Somebody had to look him over when he got dressed to see that his clothes were clean and in order. My father could never have gotten along without Miss Hibbard, there's no question about this in my mind. He felt this way too.

- I. Could you tell me a little about her?
- R. She was not a very likeable person and I think nobody would disagree with this. But she did give up her entire life for the job. She finally moved to a hotel near the office so she wouldn't have as far to go home. Or if Papa wanted her in the morning she could get up and come to the office quite quickly and did this.. She sat until he got ready to go home. When he left, she left. I suppose she knew as much about everything he did as he did himself.

He had the first operation for cataracts in 1924, on one eye, and it was quite successful. The next year the other one. He had it done in Niles, Michigan. I can't remember the name of the doctor, but he was not considered a legitimate doctor. The medical profession had no use for him. He had a series of "hospitals" he called them, in town. They were just homes. The women who ran the homes and owned them were trained under his direction. The operation took place, I assume, in a hospital, I really don't know. The patient was removed to one of these homes. Then he sat or lay for a month in the dark in one of these homes eating mush. No chewing was allowed, nothing hot and nothing cold. No drafts, the room was extremely warm. It must

have been hell to live for a whole month like this. Then, as time went on he was permitted to have a little red light in the room. When he finally came home he had his eyes bandaged but he could get out of bed occasionally. Periodically during the day he would take the bandage off and was able to sit in a rather darkened room. I don't recall how long this took but I would suspect about a month, perhaps, after he got home. But then his eyes were fine. Before Papa went to this doctor the other doctors said they could do, nothing for him. There was a very famous doctor in Milwaukee, Schmitt I think his name was, who said he thought an operation could be possible at some later date. I suppose Papa was impatient. But good God! Impatience isn't the word. He had a family to support; he had a good job in which he was terrifically involved. He just couldn't sit and wait for someone to decide this is the time. In any event, he did go to Niles and the doctor did the two operations. They were both very successful. Papa had no problems with his eyes, although he wore very heavy glasses. It made quite a difference in our lives I may say. When he was blind even such a little thing; such as cleaning the house was difficult. My mother could never move a piece of furniture. Everything had to be precisely in the same spot.

My father was really quite a remarkable man. Those years that he was blind, very very few people except those intimate with him knew it. He had an arrogant manner, and of course was very reserved. So when people would come see him in his office he would rise and hold out his hand and wait for callers to

come and get it. In this case his arrogance really served a very good purpose.

He never ate in public. Miss Hibbard used to bring his lunch and lay it on his desk and tell him where everything was and go out and shut the door. No matter who you were you didn't get in until Papa had finished his lunch. Then Miss Hibbard would come in and make sure he hadn't dropped anything on himself.

I remember one speech he made, I think it was at the Saks Memorial meeting. Dr. Saks committed suicide in protest against political involvement in the treatment of tuberculosis patients in Chicago. They had a memorial at the Auditorium and my father made the address. My mother and I were in the audience and Papa got carried away with what he was saying and he moved away from the little podium and stepped forward. We thought surely he was going to fall off the stage into the pit. His secretary was on the stage with him and she took out a piece of paper from her purse and handed it to him. He looked at it and frowned at her and shook his head and she walked away but what she had said to him was, "You're at the edge of the platform, two steps back and three steps over," or whatever it was. He stood right there and continued his speech and very carefully stepped back and put his hand on the podium and then never moved.

The policeman at Michigan and Wacker Drive used to lose his mind because Papa would wait just so long for the traffic to stop and then he'd walk right out into it. Of course, we didn't have traffic lights. He marched along the street and carried a cane but he didn't use the cane as a blind man does. He walked

along precisely as you or I, as fast and sure as if he knew where he were going, but of course he didn't go anywhere alone. He always had somebody with him. In later times a cab used to come and pick him up. That was not for his blindness but for time. He never owned or drove a car, although mother did.

He retained everything. His secretary could read a letter once and he could immediately dictate from it. Read an article in a newspaper once and he had it forever. He was very fond of quoting from philosophers, poets. And I suppose he'd only read the things once.

He was a particularly considerate father, I think. He was marvelous to my children, as many grandfathers are not. He took them with him whenever he could, trying to help them to see why what he was doing was important. To have a real feeling for learning, for example, not for how many dollars it would get you, but for your own development. For awhile he and my daughter corresponded in verse. He was particularly fond of my son. My daughter's interests weren't with people. She liked animals and was determined to go into veterinary medicine but my son is, very much like my father. I often say he's got the best of both my mother and father. He's got my mother's personality and charm and my father's brains, a very good combination. He went into labor law and is now a United States Federal Mediator.

I suppose most of Papa's time was taken up in legislature. Oh, I got to the depression when the rackets began.

- I. Before you go into that, you had mentioned 1917 and your father's

impending blindness at that time. You were on the eve of World War I, of course, and there was within the labor movement some division. I wonder if you remember some of the controversies around it.

R. Not really no . In 1917 I was thirteen years old. I'm sure I would have known there was something disturbing Papa and would have heard something and seen, something and seen people coming to the house.

I. He didn't discuss the war at home--the question of pacifism or patriotism?

R. I'm sure my father was not a pacifist. Philosophically he felt that violence didn't accomplish anything. On the other hand he was a strong defender of home and country. He had been working very hard. In fact that's why we felt he had this nervous breakdown, because he had been traveling all over the country talking with working men and he was trying to keep the men working before the war effort.

I. I don't understand that . Was there some question of strikes?

R. Oh yes, a great deal. On the other hand my father felt that there ought to be strikes even in war time. He was not about to let the employers gather in their big profits at the expense of the workers. If the men weren't well cared for he thought a strike was not only proper but necessary. He felt that it was not only up to the workers to keep the war effort going , it was everyone's responsibility. He was a patriot certainly, but probably

a world patriot. He did feel that as long as we were at war, we had to keep the machinery moving, not however at the expense of the guy who was working in the shop, or certainly no more at his expense than that of everyone else.

- I. What was he doing--what we might call mediating at that point?
- R. Well, to some extent, but to a very little extent. Actually, his work was mostly with government officials, pressuring them to do the mediating, pressuring them to see that the men on the job got what was coming to them. In the shipyards, for example, he might go to a shipyard and talk about the importance of keeping the work going so the ships were built and going out. Mostly his work would be with government officials and representatives of the producers and the owners, to see that the men got as much as they could get. I can remember several occasions when strikes were in the offing. He thought this was too bad. He often got violent about the fact that he felt the people who controlled industry were using the war effort as an excuse to walk more heavily on the men who worked for them, to line their own pockets not only at the expense of the men but of the country as well. He was certainly not a pacifist.

I have no recollection of his making any speeches in favor of the war at that time. However, I do know that the walls in his office and at home were covered with citations from the president, from the governor and so on in various areas of war effort. I expect that this continued even during the second World War. He was a strong adherent of Roosevelt, of course.

And it was Papa who got the convention to endorse Roosevelt, something that no convention had ever done. They never took political positions.

The Federation did recommend voting on one simple basis and the Federation still does this to a large extent. They keep track of the legislator's voting record. Now they have little flags and a 4 flag man is an endorsed man. In those days they didn't have the flags but the voting records were always listed. I can remember the Federation and my father in particular, getting an endorsement for Stephen Day. I have absolutely no recollection of Day at all except I thought he was terrible. My father's point of view was very very pragmatic. He said we do not endorse individuals except on the basis of their record as far as it applies to labor. Because this was the only common interest all the union members had, any other course could cause a real division within the trade union movement. I was violently opposed to Day and I thought he was the devil himself, which of course was something my father would never agree with. He thought mine was a very childish attitude, which I assume it was. But Mr. Day got the endorsement of the Federation.

I. What was the matter with him?

R. I can't remember. But Papa said, "If we have a rule, we have a rule. The only thing that recommendation means is that his labor record is good." It could be as bad as poison in every other area but if it was good in labor, then they listed his good record and you couldn't deny it. I think Day was defeated. I say this with

pleasure. I used to argue with my father a lot and it was always a real pleasure if my side won. My father's side usually won. My attitude was purely emotional I'm quite sure. But this is still a very difficult thing to not want to vote for a given person, when his labor record has been an excellent one. This hasn't been the only case. There've been other cases as well. Barrett O'Hara was in the U.S. House. He had an absolutely perfect labor record and I wouldn't vote for him for all the tea in China.

My father believed in rules, and if the rules turned out to be wrong then you changed them. You didn't go one way on Monday and another way on Tuesday. He felt that to have a steady route to go down was best for everybody. He felt very strongly that within the trade union movement, as a whole, the primary basis for judgement was on how effective the men were in the shop. He was interested in everything else, and had a great deal to say about everything else but decisions were made on the basis of what happened in the shop.

You went to church for decisions of what happened in the Church. This was another area in which he was extremely involved, and very dogmatic. He was in favor of public schools. He couldn't care less about private schools. I never heard him say anything against private schools, but he felt that every dollar the country could scrape together should go for public schools, that every kid had a right to the opportunity to get the best education. I'm not sure if he thought college was for everybody. That was never a factor when my father was alive.

I think he felt no bitterness about his own childhood, or lack of it. I heard people say quite often, "Well, you made it." And he'd say "Yes, but I was lucky." He was strong, he had the ability. But he felt no child should ever have to go through his experience. The result, of course, was that we were pretty badly spoiled in many ways. Badly spoiled! Very sheltered! But we always knew where our money came from, what he was doing for a living and what it meant to the country and the people for whom he worked.

He was a wonderful father. He had a very strict sense of what was right and wrong for himself. There were no excuses. He said that for a man like himself there were no excuses for wrong doing because he knew better. He was only slightly less strict with us in this matter. He said we had had the advantages of it good home and a good rearing and we knew better. For somebody else, sympathy. Not for what they did, but because they were unable to control themselves, to be good people.

He had courage, much more than most people have, I think. But he also realized that much of this came to him because he was born with it. Everyone wasn't born this way so he had no criticisms for those who couldn't make the grade as he had done.

- I. Did his children ever cross him in this way? Ever fail to measure up?
- R. Oh my goodness yes! He would be terribly upset and disappointed. This affected both my sister and me very deeply. To have Papa angry with you was really a very serious situation. We had the

bathroom. We sat on the tub and my father sat on the toilet and we got talked to. He would really rip the skin off you without ever laying a finger on you, as he could to anybody.

I eloped, for goodness sake, which was certainly crossing my father in about the biggest way a girl could. I think my father felt unhappier about that than anything else I could ever have done. However, I had a feeling that my father was never going to let me marry anybody, a very foolish thought, of course. My husband and I had a very successful marriage but I think in a large part it was because I never could have admitted anything was wrong to my father. He would never have held still for it and my husband's mother would never have held still for this. Between the two of them my husband and I got over our hurdles.

There were other things of course. Now, I never did anything really terrible--largely because I just wouldn't let my father catch me at anything. We quarreled. We used to argue bitterly about a lot of things. I was headstrong and very spoiled, but he continued to spoil me. It was a very traumatic period for him, I think, when I went to work. He just couldn't see why his daughter had to go to work. He couldn't see why I couldn't take money from him, which I wouldn't.

- I. How old were you then?
- R. Thirty-seven! The truth is I'm a completely different person than I was at thirty-seven. I don't know, myself, how I came to the decision that I had to go to work. It amazes me to this day. I don't like to think about the kind of person I was before. I

believed that I was special. I did. My father said I was and he was always right. We all felt this way, my mother, my sister and I. Papa really thought he had the most wonderful children and the best wife. I think my father really believed it, so we believed it, too. In time it finally dawned on me that this was one place that Papa was wrong. I wasn't really all this good.

I. What was his view of what women should do--just stay home and not really know what was happening in the world?

R. I don't think he felt that this was their place. I think he felt that this was their place. I think he felt, however, that this was where most women wanted to be. He thought they had a right to be taken care of. I'm sure he felt this very strongly. His objection to my going to work was solely on this basis, that I had a right to be taken care of, and that since at that point my husband was unable to do so, he would, with all the will in the world. This would have been no sacrifice to him. My mother didn't agree with that I may say.

I. Then you were not raised to be a self-sufficient person?

R. By no means. I was raised to be taken care of, although I had to behave myself in big and little ways. I can remember once at a convention one of two brothers I mentioned before, whose name I can't remember, asked me to dance and I declined. They were little men, rather on the hefty side. My father asked, "Why?" I said I wouldn't dance with such a little man. My father said, "That's up to you, but you don't dance with anyone else. You just

sit there. These men are not asking you to dance because you're so nice. They're asking you to dance because they're paying me a compliment. These men wanted to take care of my daughter." He said, "These men have bought every article of clothing you wear." At a dance he's giving me this lecture. "Everything you've got on your back is paid for by the work of these men," he said. "You can either be polite and dance with them or dance with nobody." I sat there the rest of the evening which broke my heart . Even in such little things as this, it never entered my mind to disobey him. I disobeyed him on other occasions of course, but when Papa was there and laid down the law this is what you did.

One year I was very unfortunate in driving the car. I had six accidents in just a few months. I didn't have anything to do with them. In one I wasn't even in the car and in a couple of others I was standing still and another car ran into me. I was married and had pretty good sized kids at the time and my first thought was, "How am I going to tell Papa?" Although I knew he would have been terribly upset because I might have been injured, not that he thought something might have happened to the car.

It was rather tragic really to go on thinking you were someone special . That the people all over were there to look out for me. I really got it all the time, too, because people had such a great admiration and tremendous respect for my father and many had a deep affection for my mother. All of which dripped over onto me.

tape 2

- I. You were saying the reason you graduated from high school..

You know, I said that people admired and respected him. I remember the years that the gangsters had gotten into so many of the unions. Even they respected Papa. When Mr. Fitchie of the Milk Wagon Drivers Union was kidnapped, for example, it was my father who was the go-between to take the money and be sure that Mr. Fitchie was delivered unharmed, which he was.

Or sometime later when there was a real struggle between the retail clerks--the gangsters had gotten control and there didn't seem to be very much of anything the officers could do about it. My father simply called up and said, "Bring your books over," and they did. Nobody would believe that this could happen.

He reorganized organizations during those years by making speeches and talking everybody down, putting courage where there wasn't any.

Do you want to tell me a little more about these gangsters in the union?

Well, within the Federations there was really no danger of their taking over because it didn't have any money. The money came from union per/capita tax. But other unions that did have treasuries, the Teamsters, Hotel and Restaurant, Retail Clerks--these are the ones I know best.

I. What year was this?

R. Well, the '30's of course, middle '30's. Much of this took place when my children were in school. It went on for about two years.

It was probably around 1933-34. For a long period, for example, I never left the house without telephoning my father or mother or the office, saying, for example, "I'm going to the butcher store and will be back in 20 minutes." But if I didn't get waited on I didn't stay. I went home and telephoned and said, "I didn't get waited on. I'll have to go back again." My children were picked up in car every morning and driven to school.

I. Was this fear of your being kidnapped?

R. That's right, not for the money that the Federation could give, but because my father was held in such high esteem. Gangsters could bring pressure by stealing one of my children or me. That would pressure my father into pressuring unions to relax or give them money. They didn't want money in hand. What they wanted was officers, decisions, you know. Not in the Federation, but in local unions.

Take the Milk Wagon Drivers Union, whose officers thought very highly of my father for good reasons, had they taken one of my children father could certainly have gone to the Milk Wagon Drivers and said, "They've got my kid. They want 50,000 dollars." And I'm sure he would have gotten it. Or he could have operated negatively by ceasing to pressure union members to come to union meetings, by ceasing to pressuring the union officers to stand up, to get police protection, to work against them.

My children were never allowed to leave the school. At recess they had to stay close to the building. The principle

was warned that nobody was to come and get the children except me or their driver.

I didn't go to church ever. But one Sunday I forgot about this. It must have been about 1936 or so. The children had gone to Sunday school and for some reason we all went to church. I forgot to call my Father and when I got home the police were around the building. I called my father and he was absolutely livid with fury. He said he called and no one answered so he sent a taxi over, and the taxi driver said he rang the bell and he could hear the dogs, but nobody answered the door so he called the police. They surrounded the house and we marched in. My father was terrified the whole bunch of us had been kidnapped or killed.

He did a great deal of speaking during those years to union meetings, telling them the only way these people could be kept out of the union was if union members attended regularly all union meetings. They could terrify and immobilize a single union officer or two or three, but they couldn't do this to 5,000 members who would come regularly .

I can remember many of the teamsters' officers for example, who lived for years with police in the house, with machine guns hidden behind chairs. Ray Bryant's wife said she hated to get up to go to the bathroom during the night because she knew there was a man in the next room with a machine gun. She couldn't just get up quietly and go to the toilet. She'd have to say, "I'm getting up to go to the toilet." They could never walk around in their homes without being completely dressed and had to keep their bedroom doors shut because there were always police inside

and outside the house.

We didn't have this but we didn't go anywhere without letting somebody know where we were and where we were going and when we expected to come home.

- I. How was this police protection arranged, do you know?
- R. I think people simply called the superintendent of police and said they needed police protection. They got it. It's very simple, even today. If you're a person of some public importance and you need police protection you get it. It was even simpler in those days because the role of the gangster was well known. It was no secret.

I was always kind of amused and never understood how it happened, but the man who kidnapped Mr. Fitchie was never brought to trial. There was no evidence. But he was sent to jail for not paying income tax on the ransom money. I just don't know how that happened. This isn't a secret. This is well known. It was in the papers. He went to jail for income tax evasion but not for kidnapping.

- I. They're both federal offenses aren't they?
- R. Yes, but I don't think kidnapping was a federal offense at that time. Kidnapping didn't become a federal offense until after Lindberg's baby. As a matter of fact there was apparently no way our laws could get these men except by federal income tax evasion. It always seemed to me a terrible thing that we had to get them by the back door for what I really considered to be a

relatively minor offense. I pay my income tax very meticulously I assure you, but not because I think it's criminal not to. I just want a good country and I think my taxes are making this a good place for me to live and I must carry my share of the burden. But I can't get excited about income tax evasion.

The man did a terrible thing, kidnapping--Grace Fitchie was with her father when he was kidnapped and was a pretty terrified young woman. They couldn't get him for that, but they could get him for this relatively minor offense of income tax evasion.

I. Now at some time in through here Harry Bridges emerged. Do you remember your father talking about him?

R. Yes, my father disliked Harry Bridges intensely. He was violently opposed to Communism, and we're talking about the Russian brand. In many ways you can draw a very good parallel between the aims and goals of the Trade Union Movement and religion and Communism as it's written. It's in the practice where the great changes take place.

I can remember when I first started to, work, there was a good deal of infiltration by the Communists into trade unions. And the union for which I was working had had difficulties. They were with the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store employees, and had withdrawn from that union and become an independent organization and then joined the Building Service. They inherited me, by the way. The union I was working for was falling apart. So they said, "You can have this office. Mrs. Smedstad's running it, so move in there with her."

We had lots of talks on how to run our union meetings, so that if we had any commies who were likely to disrupt the meetings or try to take over the unions, we'd know how to deal with them. We had a good deal of material from the AF of L which was supposed to be of help. But if you looked at the material objectively, everything you were to look out for was what a good union man would be doing. You know, he came early and he stayed late. He had something to say about every subject that came up. My feeling was that every union member ought to be there on time and stay until the end, that everybody ought to have something to say about the subjects under discussion. The AF of L pamphlet listed certain things the commies were for, like public education, equality for women. All these things were listed under trade union goals, something to say about how the plant is run. It depends on how you interpret these goals. We took it to mean that members had a right to say something about the conditions under which they worked. But on the whole, if you just read it superficially, every clue to recognize a commie was a clue to recognize a good trade unionist. All the aims and goals of the Communist Party were also the aims and goals of the Trade Union Movement. And we used to discuss it at our union meetings and our executive board meetings.

I. This was the Retail Clerks?

R. No, I was with the Building Services. We were organized rather hap-hazardly. We had machinists, mechanics, people who made the building go. We had opening and marketing, receiving and shipping,

everybody in the restaurants. In those days you got certification pretty much on the extent of organizing. If you organized a bit here and there in a plant, then all those actions were in the union. The places you didn't organize weren't.

It was at about this time that the organization at Marshall Fields took place. To this day we still have bits and pieces. We had the guys who worked with the women who worked at night washing floors. That's about the bottom of the list, pay wise anyway. And we also had the man who ddesigned the elevators, who was in a class by himself. We had to dream up a title for him so he'd get more pay.

I. You had a vertical organization then?

R. I never think of it in those terms. I think of it as industrial. It originally had been a CIO union and organized in that fashion.

When I came into the picture they were already set up, although not certified, had no contract, and had done no negotiating. That took place later.

I. They had come back into the AF of L, then?

R. They had never been in the AFL. They had been in the CIO. When they left the Wholesale-Retail Department Store International they were independent; they realized they couldn't really operate independently. This is nonsense. You have to have an affiliation. So the Building Service International offered them sanctuary, so to speak, and money. So they became a part of the Building Service.

- I. Now, presumably your father could see some difference, or he would have felt Harry Bridges was a very good union man.
- R. Well, my father knew the difference between a good union man and a commie. I myself would find it very difficult to differentiate. I had looked at some people I have been told are commies and as a matter of fact I don't happen to like them, but I would be very hard put to tell you why I didn't like them. But my father knew the difference very well. He disapproved of Bridges, I'm not sure wholly on those grounds. I'm sure he wouldn't have liked Bridges no matter what he was, but it was on the basis of his Communist affiliations. You see my father thought really that unions should be even purer than a church. He felt very strongly about this. He felt unions were in existence for one reason only and that was to help the man in the shop to be a better person and to live a better life, not to control them, not to manipulate them, but to let him make his own decisions and abide by them, to help them to make good decisions for the body, not one man against another. He thought the Russian brand of Communism was just one more way to tie people down, to prevent them from being individuals and living good lives.

He believed strongly in democracy, while recognizing that it's a very inefficient way to run anything. He thought everybody ought to know everything about what was going on. It was he who began listing item by item the financial records of the Federation, every dime that was spent. My first job was concerned with very minimal bookkeeping, like house records actually.

The union took in so much dues and spent so much. I knew nothing about bookkeeping. Papa said all you have to know is that those books should be kept so clear that with the very minimal explanation the least educated of your members can understand where the money came from and what you spent it for. He kept his own books this way. Many of his fellow officers disliked this. They thought there were some dangers, and there were, in letting everyone know what their finances were. Your enemies would know just how much pressure you could withstand.

When I first went with the Marshall Field union we kept our records very secret because if the company had once learned how little money we had, they would have been glad to have a strike because they could have broken it and ruined the union completely.

But by keeping it secret and throwing Mr. McFetridges's name around (his union had a good deal of money) we kept them off our backs. Later, of course, when we had settled the strike and were negotiating with Fields we did have regular financial reports that were available to everybody. We didn't print them and circulate them as my father did. We just couldn't afford it. There wasn't enough money.

May I say it was always kind of a sore point with me. I always felt that somehow we could have managed. On the other hand the president of our union was a very fine man and agreed with me as a matter of principle. I had to acknowledge the fact that he probably knew better how to spend the money than I did. It was a prejudice on my part.

At that point I was still struggling, not to fill my father's

shoes, but at least be a credit to him. In a very large sense I have lost that feeling, thank goodness. To be a credit to him in my behavior, this I could do, but for the rest I had only my own intelligence. I didn't have his. I had to do only what I could do. I wasn't my father and never could be.

I. Now, apparently he knew Bridges?

R. Yes.

I. Did he ever come to your home?

R. No. No one ever came to our home that my father didn't approve of, at least partially.

I. Do you think your father had this intuitive feeling that you have, people you don't like, you think would be dangerous to the union?

R. I think he trusted his own evaluation of people as individuals very much.

I. Do you think he would have opposed Bridges had he not been a Communist?

R. I don't think you could answer this. I suspect that the kind of person he was, Papa would have never felt complete confidence in him. It would be very difficult to say this. I know that Papa worked with any number of people in whom he had something less than complete confidence. Under those circumstances I always felt that these were people that my father felt he could

keep from going too far out of line.

I remember one period for example, when the Retail-Clerks were having very, very great difficulty, partly with the racketeers and partly because of their own ineptness. He put a man in as their chief officer, which by the way he had no right to do at all. He had no authority over unions. No Federation man does. But the unions had so much confidence in him that they let him do pretty much as he wished. At any event he gave them this man and said, "He'll be your chief officer, but no union should have as a chief officer anybody who hasn't been a working member of the union. So you keep Mr. Dahm until you get your affairs straightened out and immediately begin looking for a retail clerk, a man who works in the shop to take his place." I'm sure that he wouldn't have done this had he known he couldn't control Mr. Dahm. I mean this in a good sense. He would have not put a man in there who he thought would take over the union and run it and say, "Nobody's running against me," or who build up his own organization within the union. Mr. Dahm ran the union for I don't know how long, I'm sure not a very long period. Dahm was out of the teamsters. I've forgotten what local, Milk Driver's I think. There had been an overturn of the officers there and Dahm was a very competent men. My father felt he wouldn't build an organization of his own and take over, that we would consider himself somewhat of a trustee. An international will sometimes do this, you know, always knowing that it's a temporary situation, that eventually the union will reorganize itself and will take over its own affairs. This has happened on more than one occasion.

I keep wondering about this women's lib movement. I'm sure my father would have been very much distressed about the whole thing. He encouraged my mother to involve herself in outside activities, in the suffragette movement for example, and with the Womens Trade Union League, which my father felt very warm affection for and for most of the women who were in it. Although he recognized their ability and their importance, he wasn't happy about some of the very wealthy women who involved themselves.

I can remember he was quite critical of the Robins with whom he was very friendly, perhaps friendlier than anyone I knew, who were very wealthy people, well educated, cultured people who lived in the slum area and no matter how close they stuck with it, they were never going to be. He appreciated the money and the effort put into it. Both Robins' really worked very hard. They gave of themselves as well as their money.

Jane Addams, Mary McDowell, my father deeply admired. I think my father would have preferred to see the working women fight their own battles, while recognizing it wasn't always possible. We knew these women well. They liked my mother; everybody liked my mother, frankly. They were hard years. From most of the harshness we were kept pretty isolated. We were really badly spoiled. I suppose before my father was married he missed having a home, missed a warm family life. When he got married he just thought this was all the world could ever give him. We used to laugh at him.

I. You mean he left home early?

R. Yes, his parents died when he was very young and he was on his own (more or less) from the time he was about 12 I suppose, 11 or 12, He went to sea, the Great Lakes actually. He never sailed on the ocean. Born in Chicago, and this was always his home, in so far as he had a home port. I actually really know very little, in fact nothing, about his life. He was reluctant to talk about it. He'd say it was a very harsh life and no child should ever go through it, and then he'd immediately begin talking about something else.

I can remember when I had my first baby, a girl. You'd think that I had done something extremely smart, clever, and that probably nobody else had done anything quite this marvelous. He haunted the hospital. He haunted the baby's room when we got it home. When my second child was a boy -- good lord -- for anybody to produce two such wonderful children! This is really funny but the truth is Papa really believed this.

Papa read Bundeson's books. He was the Commissioner of Health here. In the beginning he was a very good man and he published books for new mothers. You got a book every month for the first six months I think. Well, my father read them as assiduously as my mother and I did. Ours were remarkable babies and they had to be taken care of. He bought a pram for Caryl from England, for God's sake! Big damn thing -- it was like an automobile you were pushing around. But his darling had to have something nobody else had because she was a very special child. There was a very deep affection between my father and the children, more I think than with most grandparents. He treated them as equals, expected a great

deal of them. I think my father got a great deal of pleasure and a great deal of satisfaction from them, as they did from him.

- I. In the meanwhile we were talking about some of the problems of labor unions, the gangsters, your father's feelings about trade unions. You mentioned that he left the seamans union. Did you feel at that time he felt it was because he could not control Bridges that he got out?
- R. No. You see Papa really didn't have a great deal of personal influence on the West Coast. The influence there belonged to Andrew Furuseth, who was the president of the organization. Papa's influence and sphere of activity was the Great Lakes and the East Coast. I don't know what happened on the West Coast. Papa didn't talk about. It hit him very hard. For example, he paid dues all these years. His little blue book, without which you can't sail anywhere in the United States, was one of his most precious possessions. I think it's very difficult for a non-union person to understand but for a good active union man, to give up his dues card is almost like getting a divorce -- even today.

Now when Papa went out of the seamen's union, and I think very frankly he was in effect forced out both through Bridge's influence and changes in the organization. There was simply no place for Papa. He then became a member of the editorial writers. They had a little union here at the time. I think my father almost fell apart when he had to join another union. But he was no longer a sailor.

This happened to one of our men here who's since gone. Paul

belonged to the Autoworkers. In order to remain on the AFL-CIO job he had to get a card from another union. Terribly upset! The other unions; of course, were glad to give him a card, a courtesy thing.

I have such a courtesy card myself. I don't feel the way they do about it because my beginning was different.

I don't feel a real member of this union. I belong to Local #73. I left #242 when it was absorbed by another union, because I knew very well the new officers -- while they liked me well enough -- didn't want me around. I was fairly influential with the members. They knew that I was on the side of the previous president, not that I was against the others but my loyalty was the other way around. They just didn't want me butting into their business, and I'm quite sure they were right. I'm quite sure that I would have been talking and acting as I have before. I had no place there. It didn't really bother me too much and Local #73 was glad to have me. So, I pay my dues over there but I don't feel like a real member of the union. A woman who has a real card has worked for it. For her to give it up and pay dues to another union is a traumatic experience.

My father found it very hard to swallow this. The only reason I knew that it was a very serious situation, was because there was a lawsuit of some kind. I don't know to this day what it was. One day my father asked me to come home and I bought his house for ten dollars. The house was held in joint-tenancy with my mother and he wanted to get out of it so if the lawsuit was lost they

couldn't put a lien on the house. He wasn't about to let my mother suffer.

I. He was personally being sued.

R. Well, as an officer of the union.

I. His property 'was involved?

R. Apparently so. Or he or his attorneys thought so. I know that it was on the advice of his attorneys that he sold me the house. I kept the house for about a year. And then sold it back to my mother. The two transactions took place in the dining room of my mother and father's home and amazingly enough it wasn't until my father died that we realized I'd sold the house to my mother, not to my mother and father. Papa had apparently decided that he was never going to take that chance again. Everything was then left in my mother's name and my father had nothing. This is how little we discussed the matter. My mother knew nothing about it. Apparently he considered it a very serious matter and perhaps something that we had better not be involved in.

I. Might have been too painful?

R. Quite possibly. He and Andy Furuseth had been quite a pair. I think they had something that doesn't happen very often. They had tremendous admiration, respect, and confidence in one another. They were quite different men, both highly intellectual, with the same goals and in most respects the same way of reaching those goals. But Furuseth hated women. He came to our house frequently.

My mother disliked him intensely because he never even said good evening. But Papa really felt strongly about Andy, He was considerably older than my father, and except for the fact that he never spoke to my mother, he was never unpleasant. I suspect that my mother liked to listen to their conversation because at the table it was generally not business, but they talked philosophy, theories and all kinds of things, sort of playing with words. Mr. Furuseth had a marvelous way of expressing himself. My father did too. They liked to play with words, decide just which word fit the situation exactly, or as nearly exactly as possible. Of course Furuseth died just shortly after the seamen's split. I'm a little hazy about the years there.

I was busy about my own business. I had two kids to raise and housekeeping wasn't as easy as it is today. I hated it which made it more difficult. I was very busy trying to be a good mother. By this time I realized I had not been very well brought up. I made up my mind that my kids were going to be better than I, and succeeded may I say. I have two very fine children. It was hard for me. I was spoiled and very selfish. I had to turn over a new leaf in one day, with all my instincts working full-time the other way. During those years I was really quite separated. Of course when I went to work I began seeing more of my father, more or less to try to get guidance as to how I was going to proceed.

I. When Lewis took the mine workers out of the CIO, what were your father's feelings?

R. In 1936 I believe. My father thought it was terrible. He thought

it should never have been done. I'm not sure that he ever really had sympathy with industrial 'organization.

I. That sounds strange considering his origins.

R. Yes, well, you do pass in many ways from your past.' You can't understand or step into the shoes of a man who's working in the shop and be a strong influential executive at the same time. You can't do it. You can remember some things but you remember what happened when you were there. You don't know what happens today. My father was a very sensitive man, a very understanding man. But in many ways it was still a theoretical understanding. He had been out of the workers' shoes a long time. Furthermore, he had, except in his very early youth, always been a skilled top man. He ended up, for example, as a pilot. He carried the ships through the straits. That's a very highly specialized, highly skilled job. I have a feeling that he felt that even the unskilled could have been organized in separate groups..

You have to remember that during the years that Papa was an officer' he had been growing farther and farther away from the men in the shop. Now I'm not nearly in my father's shoes, but I have grown far away too. At one time I was a very good grievance man, for example. I wouldn't trust myself with a serious grievance today. You can't be two kinds of people.

For a long time father had been dealing with the Presidents of the United States. They used, to call up at his home. With governors, with heads of the Manufacturers Association. When he dealt with unions, by and large, he dealt with the men who were running them, the officers.

The historical society has just done a resume of my father's papers up to 1936. They have 38 linear feet, I remember that. Among the papers was a letter from John Walker, who was then President of the Federation, on the subject of how did my father feel about short skirts, and smoking for school teachers. In the resume the young woman who wrote it didn't say if my father had answered. He may not have, I don't know. I would dearly love to see what Papa wrote, because I smoked and I wore very short skirts. Papa didn't control my dressing or smoking. But, I don't know how he felt about it. I know that he had a peculiar feeling about women, a very protective feeling.

I. That's why he couldn't possibly have endorsed women's liberation?

I'm not sure, because he also had a great deal of admiration for women such as Agnes Nestor, for example. Of course she was a lady.

There's no question about that, but she did work. He was all for equal pay. He believed very strongly in protective legislation.

I honestly think my father would be proud of me. I'm not protected and not entirely sympathetic with some women's groups but for many women I'm pretty aggressive about women's liberation. I started to let my hair grow because I couldn't find a barber when we moved to the country, but before that I never came to work without a hat. I never took it off. To this day I won't pour coffee, empty an ashtray, or take a note if there's a man in the room. I object to being thought of as a secretary although once I was a very good one and proud of myself. I am to this day. I know that I was good, but I am no longer. You see, I know what it was to be a secretary

but I can't step into my secretary's shoes, today, not for a minute. I'm her boss.

I. You think at that time your father was that far removed at that date from the working man, from his actual problems?

R. Yes, I do. As a matter of fact-we used to talk about it after I went to work, because I was involved, for a while at any rate, for a long while, with people who worked. Although I didn't work in the shop which was a very sore point with me. The kind of work I was doing with the union was the kind my father disapproved of. He would have thought that I should be a hired hand, which I was, but I also exercised considerable influence. By the way, it was a good thing I had had his training because otherwise I might have been more active, maybe finally run for office. This is wrong. I believe, as my father did, that officers should be out of the shop.

I. Then if you're too long out of the shop you get this other.

R. Well, but at least you have the same background. At any rate, my father was out for a long time. During the '40's, during the Second World War, times were very, very, difficult. There were many strikes. The manpower operations, the War Production Board, the Draft Board. He was involved in all these things, and always on a high level. He didn't for example, ever deal with a local draft board. I doubt if he ever met one. He dealt on the national level. He dealt with England. There were certain co-operative ventures. There were operations that the English trade unions and the AF of L were involved in. When you've spent years, hour after hour, long hours all day,

every day in this. kind of an atmosphere, you're no longer out of the shop. You could tell stories and you could remember situations, but you're no longer one of the boys. As a matter of fact my father never was really one of the boys. He did work with them but because of his intellectual capacity, which was really tremendous he was different. There are many others like this. John L. Lewis was never one of the boys. Andrew Furuseth, Bill McFetridge were never one of the boys, not even when they were working side by side. So-once they're out of the physical edifice, they tend to drop, subconsciously at any rate, this feeling of being one of many.

- I. They're very different men from your father. I've heard John L. Lewis speak. He was very emotional. He focused on the man not so much the issues .
- R. Well, you see Lewis was a one-union man. My father. handled all unions.' This makes a big difference. Lewis thought he knew the men in the mines, but he didn't either. You grow away from this. I see it in myself and it disturbs me sometimes. I should be closer to them. When I left Local 242 the simple description of what someone in community services was supposed to do was simply not my dish of tea: holding classes, getting people to serve on boards and committees, handling specific problems. It just wasn't my dish of tea, although I could do all these things. My own opinion, undoubtedly influenced by my father, was that I could do a much better job by dealing with the people who were running things. So I deal with agency executives. I serve only on important boards where I represent the trade unions and I can present the union view

in language that's more acceptable to the top guy than somebody from the shops who might know just as much as I do. I dress well, my language is good. It's frequently a terrible shock to some people. A trade unionist? How come? Somebody like you? It's because they're ignorant. There're alot of people like me. Too many of our trade union leaders at every stage simply don't care to put themselves out to improve the image that people have of us. I think this is wrong and I'm forever yowling about it. Because I'm acceptable to our union officers I can also do this, talk to them about why they should be supporting welfare, why they should be interested in more than hours, wages and working conditions. I can tell them to forget the theory that too many of them still have, that a good man is self-sufficient. He can take care of his own problems . I can urge them to be involved in many ways to improve peoples'lives, not only in politics. I'm not saying this is to my credit only, because there are many who do this as I can do this in a fashion that I think is good for the Trade Union Movement. When I talk to agency people, they will listen to me where one or two of the others who worked here couldn't get past the front door. So I just said let somebody else hold the classes, etc.

I. Are they being held?

R. Oh, yes, even I break down and do a few.

I. I think you should give us your job title on the record. What exactly do you call it?

R. We call this the Labor Welfare Service Department, and what we do is try to interpret one to the other, agency people and trade unions, for the purpose of both of them becoming involved with and understanding what each stands for. Our classes (I don't like the term classes, it sounds like a school) are really an information sort of thing. We hold six, eight, or ten sessions at each of which some particular subject of general welfare, workman's compensation, unemployment compensation, social security is discussed. It could be welfare, Salvation Army, Red Cross, cancer, heart, protective services for children.

I. You bring in authorities?

R. Somebody from a typical agency. If someone from the Salvation Army, for example, talks about family counseling, that person is talking specifically about the kind of counseling the Salvation Army does. But the Catholic Charities, Lutheran Charities, Jewish Charities; and any number of other family counseling agencies provide much the same services. What we hope to show to these people is that everybody has family problems. Sometimes they're serious, not necessarily because the people involved are incompetent. They just need a little help.

We talk about protective services for children. Many people are completely unaware of how badly children are brought up, how neglected by their parents, sometimes parents are not even aware of this. Illegitimacy, rubbing their noses perhaps in the facts of life. Some people think such things exist only next door. They don't realize the problems are widespread. Nor do they take the time

or trouble to figure out how they're affected by, let's say, the riots on the South side even though they live miles away. This whole business of drug addiction, for example, nobody was very much excited about it when it took place in the slum areas or among Negro kids. Who lived in the slums or ever saw a Negro? People often don't realize you can't put up barriers against disease. So, for six or eight weeks we talk about these things.

I. Who attends these classes?

R. Union members. We try to urge members to come. Stewards yes, but we would prefer, if possible, just the average union member because we'd like to have somebody else in the shop who could make some referral, somebody else to whom the member can go to when he's in trouble.

I. Counselors?

R. Yes, counselors. It's a pretty big word for what they are, frankly. If they don't remember anything else, we hope they remember that there are lots of problems. All kinds of people have them, and they remember our name and my telephone number or that of the Community Referral Service. I have a few stories I always tell when we start. One is about a group which is a very highly paid group, very intelligent group. My first question to a class is, "Have any of you ever been in trouble that you couldn't handle yourself?" Nobody ever has. But in this one class we had three homicides before the class was over. A brother, a father, and a sister-in-law, had committed homicide.

We don't ever pin point. Nobody knows which class this was, unless they tell it themselves.

The first homicide really opened our eyes. We discussed the matter, how we could get help, what should be done, what their responsibilities were. It opened the eyes of these men to the fact that just because you had money and were strong physically and weren't beating up on your wife every day, it didn't mean you had your life under control.

Of course we're here to do an information-giving job to both agencies and to our own union members. But the Community Fund and the Welfare Council have been here for quite different reasons. Their representatives couldn't get into unions to talk about Community Fund giving as we do. Nobody can, I don't care who it is. Of course, when we say this it makes them very mad. It's a fact and I don't see that there's anything wrong about it. I don't even, see why they should be reluctant to admit the fact.

Tape 3

A war relief fund was set up with money collected from the trade unions, all union people, to help trade unionists in Europe to escape from the Nazis. Our own officers, in both the AFL and CIO knew we could collect money -- been collecting dues for years. But could we spend it well for projects that were completely outside the union bailiwick? What did we know about an underground? We learned fast. We developed an underground which got money to European trade union refugees for transportation, food, clothing and help to escape. A very successful operation. After the war there was quite a bit of talk, particularly within the CIO, of setting up a community fund, a welfare organization for union

members country-wide, which was a very bad idea. It, of course, scared the pants off the Community Fund and the Welfare Council. It would have been a competing organization. Frankly, we couldn't have done the job, we simply couldn't have. Welfare funds have to be for everyone.

So the United Funds and Councils of American came to the AFL and CIO and said, "Continue to raise money, but let us handle it." The next suggestion was, of course, that union people would be hired to work at the collection, talking about community funds and so on. The AF of L, and the CIO made the same answer.

They weren't just going to hand over the money for somebody to spend. They wanted to have some voice in how the money was spent, how the allocations were met, and they wanted their own members and their families to learn how to use agencies when the need arose, as well as to support them. So the UFCA said okay, although it has no authority over any of it's component parts, it would use its influence. New York would begin by hiring a group of trade unionists to work in the central organization, and then this group and representatives from the United Funds and Councils would go to large industrial cities and try to persuade them that it was a good idea to have labor representation on their payroll, both in the collection of money and also the dissemination of information. This was done. The AF of L had its office and the CIO had its office. Then, of course, when they were merged the two union offices became the same, but still on the payroll of the UFCA.

Now, some of us had already been working with the AFL Committee

for Human Rights. I forgot what the CIO called their organization and they just stepped right into the new arrangement. Time went on and there are now 180 of us around the country. There are two offices as big as this one. We have four. The other one with four, I believe, is in Los Angeles.

I. You came in when Myrna Kassel left?

R. She left the day I came in. That room next door is the CIO room and this is the AFL room. Mr. Murphy was here when I came. I met Myrna only the one day, the day I came.

I. Was that purely coincidence?

R. Purely coincidence. I didn't have anything to do with the CIO. She didn't have anything to do with the AFL. I really don't know why Myrna left. There's been a number of people in these jobs since I've been here. Murphy was here before I. Before he came here he worked for the War Production Board as a trouble shooter, which is, of course, what we do now with the Community Fund. Murphy and Ganly next door are on the payroll of the Community Fund. T h e Community Fund pays their salaries and expenses directly into the Welfare Council Fund. It's only a bookkeeping factor here. I am on the payroll of the Welfare Council. It's only been in the last four years that I've had anything to do with the Community Fund. Now I do a bit of troubleshooting and organization. We discovered that we've done quite a job here, without realizing it. More and more of our unions are coming to classes. I go to executive board meetings and talk about the Welfare Council, the Community Fund

and so on. So many unions now know something about the Community Fund. Every once in a while we'll get a batch in that doesn't like somebody. They don't like the Red Cross, or Negroes, or Catholics, or Jews. So it's one of us who'll go down to the union meeting or even into the shop, but not with management, explain to them why their own pet biases have to be ignored, that the Community Fund serves the entire community.

Agencies have specific area's of responsibility, but the Community Fund serves all those agencies that are affiliated with it. I'm a little brutal. I tell our members it isn't going to do a bit of good to say, "We won't give to Red Cross or we won't give to Salvation Army." It doesn't make a bit of difference. The money all goes into the same pot anyway and it's going to be cut up. I just heard some figures the other day. About 15 years ago the giving to the Community Fund was about 32% from employees and the balance from corporations and foundations. Today it's 62% from workers. So you see we've really done a job in fifteen years. It's not only percentages. 15 years ago the goal was very low. Now it is a very high goal and we feel it's largely due to our efforts that more and more workers contribute. While we haven't talked to all workers, we've talked to enough, and they've talked to others. There are times during the Community Fund drive when we'll make -- well, once my top figure was eight. I made eight speeches in one day. I was a wreck! It's not only eight speeches and then run. It's eight speeches and then questions. But three, four, and five is quite a normal thing to do. You run like mad.

I. We haven't discussed when the CIO came back, when the merger occurred. What were your father's feelings?

R. My father was dead. The merger was in 1955. Papa died in 1949. I think he would have been very happy about it.

I. You referred to some of the things he did in World War II. He was then still Secretary-Treasurer of the Illinois Federation?

R. Yes, for exactly 34 years.

I. It was in that role that he became nationally prominent?

R. I suspect-his first exposure was because of the seamen, because that was an international matter. It included the shipping in Great Britain, and other places as well. So this is where he was first exposed to Washington. The Illinois state activities are solely in Illinois. But, he was already familiar with Washington as a sailor and then became quite active in the AF of L and was secretary of the Resolutions Committee for some years when it was really a very powerful committee. So he became known. These people are picked out. There aren't many but wherever they are, even in a small town, their work and value becomes known. As I say, Papa mixed with all kinds of people. He was deeply interested in religion, had a number of very close friends, priests. My father was a Christian Scientist, more or less, I guess, in his later years. For some time, as a matter of fact, we were not a church going people, but my father had very definite feelings, which I think is a fair indication of the kind of training my father gave to us. We were to do the best we could with what we had, to make

up our own minds on the basis of good thinking, and go our own ways. We're really a very close family. As I say, my daughter goes to church regularly. Her little boy goes to Sunday School.

Sometimes this situation leads to problems. One Thanksgiving my son and his family came to Chicago and stayed with me for the holiday. My daughter took my son's oldest little boy, who's five, home for a few days with her. When he came back he started to say his prayers when he went to bed. He had shared a room with Robert, my daughter's son. Victor said, "Hey, what did they do to my kid over there?" It's very funny, now, I'm not quite sure how funny it'll be later on.

- I. You can probably tell from my questions, Mrs. Smedstad, that my knowledge of labor history is only very general. I know nothing about the Illinois Federation, really. There may be things I should have asked you that I didn't.
- R. I couldn't think of any and I probably wouldn't know the answer. Do you know Irvin Klass?
- I. No .
- R. He's the editor of the Chicago Federation News. Irv isn't as old as I am but he has been around a long time. He's a very intellectual guy, and extremely interested in Labor History. Irv knows a very, very great deal. He's over at Marina Towers. He might be willing to do something for you. He certainly is worth talking to. He said to me the other day, "When I die, nobody's going to know anything."

I. You mentioned organizing Marshall Fields, tell me when and what it was.

R. My part in it began about 1943. I had been working for a small local union in the office as an office girl. The union began to lose members and was going down hill.

I. This is the Retail Clerks now?

R. No. Building Service. At that time, 1943, the group who had been trying to organize Fields and who had belonged to the Wholesale, Retail, and Department Store Employees Union had withdrawn because of some internal disputes largely based on Communism. They tried to make it independent for about a year. They discovered they couldn't. The Building Services offered them a home, so they came in. Since they had no money, Mr. McFetridge said, "Use this office and Mrs. Smedstad will take care of you." The officers, then, used to come over to the office and talk. They'd have their meetings there. Frankly, I hung around. I was interested. It was something I'd heard a lot about but had never had my fingers in.

Shortly thereafter they got a man who had once been their president. He'd left and was working for the State of Illinois. McFetridge put him on a salary. He never did have a title, but he was like their organizer. His name was Martin Heckmann. He had everything. He was cultured, well educated. He was deeply involved in organizing. He had a marvelous feeling for all the people in the union with whom he really should have had no community of interest at all. He was a hard worker. I became extremely devoted to him. And he was very generous. He'd discovered, as I

had then, that I-learned a lot by osmosis. I was a pretty good writer, so I began to write some of the organizing leaflets. I would type them up, grind them out, and be out on the street at 7:00 a.m. distributing them.

Then as the organization went on, more and more of the working members began to come to the office. I began working with them. I'd have to learn what their gripes were before I could write about them. Martin wrote, he was a very good writer, as a matter of fact, an excellent writer. He began bouncing ideas off me and I bounced mine off him. We became quite a pair. Eventually, of course, the union won certification and began to negotiate. In the meantime we were still organizing at the State Street store. The stewards would come up, we'd help them tell people why they should belong to the union.

I . Was another union trying to organize also?

R. No, not at this point. There was just ourselves. Finally in 1945, we'd been negotiating until we were blue in the face. The vice-president in charge of operations, a man by the name of Austin Graves, called a meeting in his office. He said, "Well, the shoe is on the other foot." What he meant was, "We needed you before. Now the war is over, the men will be coming back and you'll be damned lucky if you've got a job at all."

I. What was this certification? Was it NLRB certification?

R. Yes .

R. Well, the rule is you have to have 30% authorization cards. The cards are counted, and if 30% of eligible employees have signed a card indicating their desire to have an election, one is set up by the NLRB. Local 242 won the election. In those days the extent of organization decided who you were going to get. So we didn't ask to have the clerks and sales people included because we had maybe a handful of them. They weren't organized at all. We chose those sections in which we felt sure we had a majority of the vote. Those people then were allowed to vote. This is no longer the rule.

Local 242 won certification, but the company protested, We had to go to court. We were in court for three months, for a labor hearing to prove that we actually did have these members. The signatures on authorization cards were checked against the employer's payroll as of a certain date.

Then Mr. Graves made his famous remark. I don't know if you can appreciate the courage it took for these men who, making sixteen dollars a week, without a word to one another, without a sign from anybody and without anyone's knowledge they got up and walked out of the office. They had a strike, a very bitter strike. Mr. Graves lost his job and, by the way, he never got a good job after that.

I. Who was he?

R. He was vice-president in charge of operations. Fields then hired a man by the name of Ralph Bowers. He came out of Pope and Ballard, which is probably about the best known anti-union firm in the city.

The company never spent better money. Mr. Bowers was definitely a management man but he was an honest man. When he agreed to something you knew this was exactly what he'd agreed to and he'd see to it that everybody stuck with it. So the contract was signed and the union got going.

I was in the office but Mr. Heckman gave me a good deal of latitude. I spoke at union meetings, I kept the minutes, I did all the financial reports.

- I. What did the strikers win?
- R. Quite a few things, substantial increase in pay, night differentials which they'd never had before. We got equal pay for equal work but in the sense that they made smaller equipment for women to handle. For example, a man who ran a 48 inch broom was paid more than the one who ran a 24 inch one. Women ran the 24 inch brooms. They got a cut in hours, with no cut in pay. They got time off to wash before they went home'. I think the next contract they got a shower room. Very important. They got a clause in the contract that paid triple or quadruple pay for all time over 24 consecutive hours worked. Once they had had 48 consecutive hours work at straight time. They were willing to work but they thought they ought to be paid for it. Vacation schedules were improved. For a first contract, I thought it was quite an amazing one.

Then of course after that there was the problem of organizing the shop, of electing section stewards.

- I. Did you have the check-off?

R. No. Many of the members wanted a check-off. I am still firmly opposed to a check-off. I think, from the union's point of view, it's a very dangerous thing. When a guy has to pay his dues to a steward, or bring it into a union office, he is bound to say something about conditions or about his attitude about conditions.

Now they may not be very important, but if you get a minor complaint out of the same section that's repeated a dozen times and you're smart at all, you know there's some fire there and you better look at it. It is always so much better for everybody, for the worker, for the union, for the plant to catch these grievances, these complaints while they're still minor, where nobody's really hot and bothered about them.

If it's a check-off, members become simply names to you. Unless the grievance is a big one, and gets to be a big one in the cloak room or toilet where it can very easily be blown out of proportion, the union officer or the grievance man who had to handle it won't get it until it's a big deal. I feel very strongly. I've been in many an argument in my day about this. For the extra work that's involved the rewards really, pay off. They tell me in some places it's just not possible to get along without a check-off, but at Fields I knew it was. It meant a lot of extra work for me and a lot of overtime.

I'll tell you a funny story about that -- overtime. I never got any overtime and I once asked for a raise. I didn't get it. The executive board said I had a husband who was working! If the company had said that to a member, the board would have had a fit.

- I. Do you remember when the United Mine Workers Union staff people went out on strike?
- R. Sure. The AFL-CIO staff did not so long ago. I was in Washington at the time it happened. It must have been last year -- the staff of the AFL-CIO. Of course, I fixed our executive board. I got the money in a different way. I didn't like it very well but at least I got it. It's what I said before. You can't be a man in the shop and top executive too. In this particular case the fellows on the executive board got a little too big for their britches. They were looking at their union funds exactly as the company looks at its funds. They weren't about to give more money to anyone, unless they had to.

A while back you mentioned that you were with your father in court. He was calling the shots and I don't really know what the case was. I told you he had no authority over any union, but his abilities were well known. This particular case had something to do with the airline pilots. How I happened to be in court with him I have no idea. He sat at the attorney's table and was constantly writing notes and telling him what to do. By the way, they won the case.

This leads to another funny story. When my father was very ill, his secretary had arranged to have a cot, or a couch in the back of the platform at the convention so Papa could go back there and-lie down. I had the job to walk around after him from the time he got up in the morning until he went to bed at night. The night the judge handed down his decision in this case we were in Rockford. The pilots called and said, "The case has been settled

in our favor." I wanted some information. He said, "No, we're not going to give you any information. We're coming down to Rockford in a group. We'll report to Mr. Olander ourselves," which they did. They picked Papa up about dinner time and I said, "Well, he can't go anywhere without me." My father said, "Oh yes I can." They said, "We'll watch him very carefully. We won't take him out of the hotel."

So, I went off to a party. My mother went to a party. She got home before I did. When I got in she was packing up and down. She said, "Papa isn't here and I don't know where he is." This was about two or three in the morning. So I called the hotel and asked if there were any parties going on in the hotel. No parties. They hadn't seen my father or the pilots. We called a couple of vice-presidents and they didn't know where he was. So we sat there. At 7:30 my father walked. "What were we doing out of bed at that hour of the morning still dressed in our evening clothes?" He said he was quite able to take care of himself and would thank us to mind our own business. He went to bed and at 9:30 the next morning he was on the platform running the convention as he always did. When the convention adjourned we drove back home together. When I got him home he asked me if I wanted to go to the Victory party being held at one of the hotels downtown. I said sure I'd like to go but he couldn't go. He told me he'd make up his own mind and I should pick him up, which I did. It was really quite a party with everyone drinking toasts to him. I suppose it was three or four in the morning when I finally brought him home. I was exhausted but he was just fine.

Up to that point my mother and I had done-everything for him. I didn't leave his side. We cut up his food, we hung up his clothes so he wouldn't have to exert himself. Mother laid out his clothes. He wasn't allowed to lock the bathroom door. By the way, he began to improve right after that.

He had several periods of this kind where he would go down rapidly, lose a good deal of weight, was really a sick man. Then, out of the clear blue sky, he would begin to pull himself together again. As a matter of fact, this is what happened when he died. He was not feeling as well as he should for a few weeks maybe. Nothing for us to be terribly excited about, but we were a little concerned. Then my mother called me one morning and said that Papa looked very funny to her. He was cross with her when she spoke to him, which he never was. I flew over and went into his bedroom. He said I should give him a hand, he wanted to get up. I said no, I was going to call the doctor. He blew up at me and said he didn't need a doctor, when he wanted a doctor he'd say so. I called the doctor in anyway and he died a few days later. He was a terrific man.

- I. You told me also the other time he was in court.
- R. Oh yes, I've often thought of that particular case. It was the Newspaper Guild. It had to be a union matter or my father wouldn't have been involved. He was never involved in anything else. He was conducting the case. The attorney of course, was the spokesman because my father hadn't passed the bar. But it was Papa who called the shots. He passed notes, or told him what to say, and

the attorney would get up and say it.

It had something to do with the Everly sisters, who had conducted a tremendous bordello here in Chicago, apparently for very wealthy people. They exhibited some pictures of the house. The furniture was very ornate and beautiful and the women very well dressed. Why they and their call girls of many years previously were involved in a union matter, I have no conception at all.

And I don't know what the airline pilots case was about either, except that it went on for a long time and was a very difficult case. My father ran that as well. That was when it first really dawned on me that he was a very good attorney. I always knew my father was an important man, but primarily he was my father. He was the guy you always went to when you had a problem. He never solved the problem for you. He'd keep pressing you to explain, why did you feel this way, what were your reasons. We never got away at the table with making a flat statement like the pencil's yellow. Why is it yellow? We were taught to examine our reasons. More often than not Papa was the devil's advocate which would irritate us no end. He could always speak so much better than we could.

He could argue so effectively, and you knew darn well he didn't believe a thing he was saying. We couldn't even agree with him lightly. We had to say why we agreed. God help us if we disagreed! Then we were really in for it.

It did help us, for me particularly in this kind of a job, to step away from myself and the problems that come across my desk here and try to look at them with some objectivity, recognizing

there are other opinions and a different point of view quite as valid as my own. It doesn't mean that I have to accept them but it's wise to know how the other guy feels. Life has to be a great deal of compromise. Papa once said "One doesn't compromise principles, but one had very few principles." Most things are more or less temporary. You can afford to give in for good reasons. But when it was a matter of principle then you couldn't.

I've learned to try to live my own life like this. It makes me a little schizophrenic once in a while though. I'd like sometimes to get home and think about how my side is the right side, not even have a glimmer of a thought that somebody else might have a different opinion with validity.

I often wonder what my father's position would be with this black and white situation. This was not really a recognized problem during his lifetime. We had Negro members, of course, in the unions, particularly in the sailors' union. But they didn't kick up a fuss, I guess. They didn't demand the things they're demanding now. I don't like violence either. I'd like to live a nice pleasant life, a few arguments maybe. The truth is until you make a fuss, unless you're violent in one way or another, no one's going to pay any attention to you. It is impossible to start violence and go only so far. Most people who are involved don't think very deeply. Like in a strike, you have to encourage members to vote for a strike. You have to give some evidence that they're going to win the strike. You hope that they know why they're striking. Once they've struck, you have to be careful that they don't strike for too much, that they don't believe all the

rhetoric they've been hearing or that they've been giving out themselves. This I think has happened in much of the Black communities.

A couple of years ago I was making a speech to some white people who were very much opposed to the Black militancy. They were trade unionists, and I said, "Look, they've been reading our book." In a good well disciplined organization most members don't get out of line. But in some cases one or two may. They'll drop some sand in the machinery. Nobody approves of this but what you've got are people who are so angry and so convinced of the rightness of their own cause, that any means seem allowable.

I was talking to a very dear friend of mine last night. I wanted her to come to dinner. She's a writer, very busy, and I set a date. She said, "I'd love to come but I don't like to be out after dark." She's afraid. She's a Negro. She lives on the south side. She asked if we couldn't just meet for lunch. So we compromised. She'll come out and spend the day, I'll serve an early meal, and she can go home. She's a woman whose reputation is quite well known. She's fought her own battle, she's fought for many other Negroes. The people who'll attack her couldn't care less.

- I. They're petty criminals, they're not part of the movement.
- R. That's right, but it's very hard to separate the movement at this point from militants, because every movement has them, including the church. Church militants may not set bombs but they do things just as bad. Read a very casual history of the

Jesuits two hundred years ago. They didn't have bombs, but they were pretty violent and in ways that we would consider quite unacceptable now.

My father was always afraid of strikes. He'd always say, "They're very dangerous, they can get out of hand, become a mob." And they have. The steel strike at Republic Steel began with the sight of a few policemen shooting into the crowd. I think there were only about six shots. Those 6 shots found their mark and caused I don't know how many other deaths. The strikers were furious. There was no controlling them at that point. I wonder where the world-is going now.

- I. A young revolutionary told me you don't have to do much fighting. All you have to do is state the issue and wait for the other side to be stupid.
- R. That's right No question about it. I can tell you we'd never have had a strike at Fields if it hadn't been for Mr. Graves speech. One little speech. I don't suppose it took him more than 15 seconds to say it.

The men felt he considered them less than dirt. They knew they were as good as Mr. Graves, which of course they weren't, as they could never be operating managers. I think if you pinned them down they'd say, "Yes but that's different." And it is different. These men knew they were contributing to the welfare of Fields, and had a right to a fair share of it.

Those were very happy years for me. I enjoyed them. I enjoy this job too. I like traveling. Every once in a while

I've had a chance to speak at a meeting for Meany or McFettridge.
I like it. Sometimes though my memories get in the way. I get
on the platform and thank, good God, this is Grace up here!

- I. I think that's a good note on which to end. I want to thank you
for all your time and wonderful stories.
- R. My pleasure;

I N D E X

	Page
Addams, Jane.	37
AFL.	6-7,10,31-2,50-2,54
AFL-CIO. . . . .	.61
autoworkers.	40
Bowers, Ralph.. . . .	58
Bridges, Harry.	30,33,35,39
Building Service International.	31-2,56
Catholics	53
check-off.	59,60
Chicago Federation News.	55
C h r i s t i a n S c i e n t i s t s	54
CIO. . . . .	.10,32,42,50-2,54
Communism. . . . .	.30,33,35
Community, Fund.	50-53
Community Referral Service.	49
Day, Stephen. . . . .	.19-2-
depression, the. . . . .	.12
Draft Board, the	45
Foster, W.Z.	8
Fritchie, Grace . . . . .	.30
Fritchie, Mr..	29
Furuseth, Andrew. . . . .	.1,39,41-2,46
Graves, Austin . . . . .	.57-8,67
Hanson, Thomas.	8

Heckmann, Martin.	56-57
Hotel and Restaurant Workers Union.	26
Illinois State Federation of Labor.	2,4,5-7, 8-10,19,26,33-4,54-5
Jews. . . . .	.53
Kassel, Myrna.	52
Klass, Irvin.	55
labor conventions.	8-9
Labor Welfare Service Department.	48
legislation for women.	10,44
Lewis, John L.	6-7,10-11,42,46
Local #73.	10
Local #242. . . . .	.40,46,58
McCormack, Mr.	5
McDowell, Mary.	37
McFetridge, Bill. . . . .	.34,46,56,68
Manufacturers Assoc.	43
Marshall Fields. . . . .	.32,34,56
Meany, George.. . . .	68
Milk Wagon Drivers Union . . . . .	.36
mine workers. . . . .	.5,7,11,42
National Labor Relations Board	57,8
Negroes.	53,65-66
Newspaper Guild.	63
O'Hara, Barrett.	20
Pope & Ballard . . . . .	.58

Red Cross.	48
Republic Steel Strike. . . . .	.67
Resolutions Committee.	54
Retail-Clerks Union.	26,31,36
Retail, Wholesale & Department Store Employees Union.	30,32,56
Franklin D. Roosevelt	18
Salvation Army.	48
Seaman's Act.	1-2
Seaman's Union	11,39
Smedstad, Mr.(father).	1-7,10,12-28,33-45,54,62-65
Smedstad, Mrs. (mother). . . . .	.3-4,7,11,15
Soderstrom, Ruben . . . . .	.10
Steel Workers Union.	6
Teamsters Union.	7,26,28,36
Trade Union Movement.	30
United Funds and Council.	51
Walker, John	7
War Production Board . . . . .	.45
Welfare Council:	51-52
Women's lib.	37,44
Womens Trade Union League	37
World War I . . . . .	.17-18
World War 11. . . . .	.45,54