

BOOK 32

OLA KENNEDY

THE 20th CENTURY TRADE UNION WOMAN: VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

OLA KENNEDY

United Steelworkers of America

Elizabeth Balanoff

Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

University of Michigan - Wayne State University

Ann Arbor, Michigan

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INSTITUTE OF LABOUR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Tile University of Michigan - Wayne State University

PROJECT ON "The Twentieth Century Trade  
Union Woman: Vehicle for Social Change"

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## VITAE

### OLA KENNEDY

Born in Madison, Arkansas in 1936, Ola Kennedy was the oldest girl in a family of thirteen. She had a great deal of responsibility, within the family as the oldest, and was always known for "speaking her mind." Her mother was a day worker and her father a share cropper. They both got jobs in heavy industries in 1943 when the family moved to Gary, Indiana to escape the racial oppression they felt in the South.

Kennedy worked after school hours in a local drugstore and completed high school in Gary (c. 1954). She worked in a laundry which paid very low wages and gave her interesting insights into racial prejudice. In the early 60s she began working for Hammond Valve Company where she first became involved in union activity; she has worked there ever since.

Kennedy has held many positions within her union, -the United Steel Workers Union of America (USWA): Financial Secretary, Recording Secretary, Treasurer, and as a member of the Civil Rights Committee, the Negotiating Team, and the Women's Caucus. She has worked through the union to eliminate job discrimination on the basis of sex and for equal pay for equal work at Hammond Valve and throughout the industry.

She has remained active despite the fact that she has run into conflict within the USWA where she feels women and blacks are not well represented on a national level.

Since 1968 Kennedy has been active on the Ad Hoc Committee, an organization of black trade unionists within the USWA who are working towards a greater representation of blacks in the union.

She was active in the formation of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) and the National Organization of Women (NOW), and has also been on the executive council of the Black Trade Unionists..

Kennedy feels that the labor movement is dying because the leaders of the movement, like industry executives, are not responsive to the rank and file. She encourages people to become active and involved at the grassroots level as a means of returning the focus of the labor movement to the needs of working people.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Life .....	page 1
Work at Hammond Valve Corporation .....	19
Ad-Hoc Committee of Black Steelworkers .....	26
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists .....	30
Work with Women Trade Unionists .....	32
Community Activities .....	37
Family Activities .....	41

Oral History Interview

with

OTA KENNEDY

October 29, 1977

by

Elizabeth Balanoff

INTERVIEWER: Maybe you can start by telling me a little bit about your early life, your childhood, and your family background. Where were you born?

KENNEDY: I was born in Madison, Arkansas, the land of opportunity they told me. I grew up and started to school. Well, I didn't grow up in Arkansas, I started to school in Arkansas. I left Arkansas and we moved to Gary, Indiana in 1943 when I was seven or eight years old. My life in Madison was my father worked as a share cropper and my mother worked by the day. At that time we had a large family to which three more was added once we came to Gary, Indiana.

INTERVIEWER: How many children altogether?

KENNEDY: There was ten. My mother had thirteen children. I had a brother that passed in Arkansas when I was very young. I remember his death.

INTERVIEWER: How old was he when he died?

KENNEDY: He was twelve. There was one other child that lived for maybe days and passed and one that was stillborn. That was in Gary. So there were ten of them, really, that grew up together.

INTERVIEWER: What position did you have? Were you one of the older or one of the younger children?

KENNEDY: I was the oldest girl. I have one brother that's older than I am. When you're on a farm and even in Gary, when you're the

KENNEDY: oldest you usually take the weight of everything. I was the baby sitter- and I was the mama when mama wasn't there. It's just as though I've been responsibility to death, you know, by the responsibility I have always felt just being the oldest girl. And life in Arkansas was like--I can remember you hear stories about workers and share croppers and black people, you know when I hear people talk I can remember some things about it and I can really relate to many truths about it. 'We lived on a farm and there was a man by the name Mr. Vartama. His relatives are in the history books they originally came from Mississippi. We sort of sharecropped on his farm and I remember him riding a white horse around. That's the way he got around from one field to the other to check on the workers. There were the kind of tensions that we read about and some find it hard to believe but it was really there. I can actually say that I have heard of lynchings and I've heard the night riders, you know, like in the night and we'd know the next day that something had happened. It was fear, you know, and I think about it now and it kind of makes you angry. At that time it wasn't so much anger as it was hopelessness and fear. Now when you think about it it's not that; it's anger. We left Arkansas--my father first left because we felt the pressure of change and there had been incidents where families had sons who had been beat up, you know. My mother began to fear for our safety because she was like I am--very out-spoken. I think she got away with a lot of it because she was one of the kind that could pass. And it was true that if you were the kind that could pass, you got by with more, but then you know it kind of gets to you when you have children so she decided that we had to leave. She come to visit her uncle in Gary and they said that they would put us up and help us find an apartment if we came. So she came back home. And this all had to be done under cover because when you work on a plantation, the man that you're really sort of working for, it's\_ easy to find so many indebtments that you just don't leave, you know. I remember the feeling that going North seemed like the land of the promise. We were going North but we couldn't talk about it, and we knew we was going to get away and oh my God what a feeling it was, just like going to Christmas land. This particular year most of the Blacks had got kind of restless. They had a commissary. Everything came from the commissary and you're on the book. So when your crop was in at the end of the year, end of the harvest, you settled up. And most of the time you'd just break even, you know. Matter of fact the land-owner would say, "Well, you didn't quite break even but we'll call it even." This year I think he had the feeling well, I'd better let them have a little money. I remember my father made \$396.00 and oh my God, \$396.00 in 1942 was big money! That was our

KENNEDY:           getaway. So my dad packed his suitcase the day that he got the money from the settlement of the crop. He packed his suitcase and left that evening. We had it all planned; and he came to Gary. We moved to a small place called Madison where I was born. I was born in Madison because it was during the high water when I was born. Where we lived was in the lower land and when the water came we had to move to a higher ground; so that's why I was born in Madison. So we moved back to Madison and stayed there for about three months. My father came to Gary to get a job in the steel mill and he started to sending money in preparation for us to come. Finally in the first of '43 we come to Gary just a couple of days before my birthday which was February 26. We came to Gary and stayed with my uncle for about a week or so and then we got an apartment right next door. In fact they made an apartment for us. It was a basement and it was so hard to find apartments because no one wanted to rent to children. So the fellow who lived next door, he fixed his basement and put an apartment there and we lived next door to my uncle.

Then the war had came so my mother went to work. She worked at Standard Oil. It amazed me how easy she could get a job at Standard Oil, you know, and it was one of the jobs that had never been done by a woman. Well, women just wasn't at Standard Oil. She got a job there and she worked all during the war at Standard Oil and we accumulated enough funds to buy a house. After the war she had to go, they laid her off right after the war. My father was still working at the steel mill where he worked for thirty years as a mortar maker's helper. He worked all those years as a mortar mixer's helper and I think that's about what he was hired at, you know.

INTERVIEWER:       Never really got a promotion?

KENNEDY:           Never really got a promotion and he trained all those who went beyond him.

INTERVIEWER:       Was that at U.S. Steel?

KENNEDY:           That was at U.S. Steel, uh-huh. My father was so much different from my mother because he didn't challenge many things. He just accepted things, you know, and he was good-hearted and quiet and appeared to be unconcerned. I'm sure he was concerned but he was just a hard worker and e never really--but my mother would take off after anything. She was a natural born fighter. So he retired as a mortar mixer he per. My mother never worked much after that. She worked on jobs but they were just maybe in a restaurant or something, just as temporary help.

KENNEDY: We went to school. I attended grade school at Pulaski School and I remember we had at that time what you-call East Pulaski and West Pulaski and the black children went to East Pulaski and the white children went to West Pulaski.

INTERVIEWER: On the same grounds wasn't it?

KENNEDY: On the same school grounds. One building set on the east end of the school grounds and the other building set on the west. That went on because the neighborhood was still a mixed one at that time. It was beginning to sort of break up when I was finishing because Pulaski was a grade school and when you finished the eighth grade and passed to the ninth grade you had to transfer to another school. At that time when I left most of the whites were beginning to try to move out and the blacks was beginning to kind of move into West Pulaski, not in the same room but in the same building. Right in Gary, Indiana we had everything different. We didn't have gym at the same time or the playgrounds at the same time. Our recess time was different, you know.

INTERVIEWER: But the neighborhood, you said, was pretty mixed in the beginning racially?

KENNEDY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did the children play together outside of school?

KENNEDY: At home they did.

INTERVIEWER: In the neighborhood?

KENNEDY: Yes, where we lived and grew up we lived right next door to a Polish family and we played together.

INTERVIEWER: Then the school was the artificial environment where you were segregated?

KENNEDY: Yes, when we went to school we'd go down the same street and then we'd go one way and they'd go another way.

INTERVIEWER: Did the adults socialize together or not?

KENNEDY: No, there wasn't much socializing with the adults. I don't remember too much. Just the children played together sometimes. We were right next door neighbor may be you'd talk over the fence or something like that. Or the lady next door would have something that she might give my mother, you know. It was just over

KENNEDY: the fence type of communications. We children played together, fought together. When the children got larger I know this to be a fact down South--but when the children in the neighborhood got older they went to another school, too. And we really went our separate ways when you got out of grade school.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go, to Roosevelt?

KENNEDY: I went to Roosevelt, yes.

INTERVIEWER: What school would the white children go to?

KENNEDY: They would go to Froebel. The whites were going to Froebel at that time or Emerson. It was just about a couple of months or maybe it was a year after I went into high school that Emerson had that whole thing about black children going to Emerson school because I had some sisters that did go to Emerson. But there were not other places for me to go at the time when I entered high school. I could have gone to Froebel but I wasn't in the district. That was the only school that was really kind of mixed at that time. But I felt that Roosevelt was fine for me. I didn't meet that district and I preferred going to Roosevelt anyway.

INTERVIEWER: How did people in the neighborhood feel about the quality of the two schools? Did either Froebel or Roosevelt have a reputation as being a better school than the other? Or were they about equal in people's minds?

KENNEDY: I always thought that Roosevelt, to me it was the only Black school, Roosevelt was well equipped with everything. As a matter of fact Roosevelt had things that other schools did not have, things that Froebel did not have. We've always had all kinds of video and visual aid and things when they were new on the market. Roosevelt wasn't lacking in anything as compared to Froebel.

INTERVIEWER: That's the impression I've had from other people. That's what I wondered--there was no particular reason not to go to Roosevelt. It was the school quality, unless you wanted particularly to go to an integrated school.. As far as quality was concerned you didn't have a difference, or if you had a difference Roosevelt might be the better of the two.

KENNEDY: Roosevelt was really the better. Roosevelt had always stood out. They had good teachers. At that time teachers were dedicated, more so than I see them now, so going to Roosevelt was really the place to go.

INTERVIEWER: Thinking back to your childhood, how much time did you have to play? I know you had a lot of responsibilities during the time when your mother worked. What was your neighborhood like? What kinds of games did you play? What kind of social life did you have as a kid?

KENNEDY: Well, we played on the sand hills and we played the street games. I don't remember all of them now but the regular cricket in the street and ball and hand ball and what have you. I never really had time to do too much playing because I always had some housework to do--being the oldest--and to look after my brothers and sisters, so I really didn't get too much playing. And I really felt bad about it. I always had something to do, you know. There was always a younger baby to watch. If my mother was busy I had to watch-the baby, or if she was gone I had to watch out for everything. I feel like right now I would like to be--if somebody could just take over and I didn't have to have any responsibility, but it just never worked out like that even in my marriage. I had to really be the strong one, you know. I got a divorce and later, after that, my ex-husband passed.

INTERVIEWER: Why don't we just go ahead and talk about that. How old were you when you married?

KENNEDY: I was 18 years old and I thought, well maybe this would be a way out, a better way. I had ambitions of going to school but there was no way in the world I could get the finance. All the grants and things they have now they didn't have then.

INTERVIEWER: Indiana University didn't have a branch then in Gary. did it?

KENNEDY: They had one downtown but they taught only a few things.

INTERVIEWER: You couldn't get a degree?

KENNEDY: No, no--no degree. Well, I got married before I got my diploma, which I went back later and finished. As a matter of fact I went on to Indiana University, Northwest, but working and going there was a little bit too much for me. And at that time when I went back to get my diploma and I went to Northwest, out to Indiana, I had become so involved in the union and other things that I just didn't have the time. At one time I was so involved, and I was going all the time, that's why some of the things for outstanding rank and file have been bestowed upon me. I really, at one time, was really involved. There was the Ad-Hoc, you know, and there was other groups that I was affiliated with. I was really on the move, every week-end going somewhere, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Now, did you start all this union activity while you were still married?

KENNEDY: No.

INTERVIEWER: How long did your marriage last?

KENNEDY: Eight years.

INTERVIEWER: That's quite a while. How many children do you 'have?

KENNEDY: I have four.

INTERVIEWER: All girls?

KENNEDY: Four daughters.

INTERVIEWER: Lucky.

KENNEDY: Yes, I think I'm lucky to have all daughters because I really never had a problem too much with the children, just problems that you would expect with growing children, nothing major. I have four beautiful daughters. They're not much like me but they're very much concerned. I think they're real ladies.

But my marriage wasn't all that it could have been. Right now I don't have a bad attitude towards marriage. I don't worry over not being married. Being involved in things that I like, I have more freedom. I have to have that; I just really do.

INTERVIEWER: Now, did you stay home for those years that you were married? Did you stay home with the children or what did you do?

KENNEDY: I worked during some of my married years. It's been funny how I always worked in Hammond.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, in Hammond? Lived in Gary and worked in Hammond.

KENNEDY: Yes, I worked at Chapman's Laundry.

INTERVIEWER: Was that your first job?

KENNEDY: That wasn't really my first job. Yes, that was my first job, other than I used to work in a drug store. I went to school and worked in a drug store.

INTERVIEWER: When you were in high school?

KENNEDY: When I was in high school, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about the laundry job. How did it pay and what was involved?

KENNEDY: Well, I tell you, it didn't pay too much. I remember the women working there. We had a floor lady. One of the incidents that I think about often at my stay at Chapman's Laundry was that they had separate wash rooms.

INTERVIEWER: For black and white?

KENNEDY: Yes, they really did. They had it where I'm working now at Hammond Valve. They had it there but they did away with it before I came; the company and the union.

INTERVIEWER: But the laundry had it while you were there?

KENNEDY: The laundry had it while I was there.

INTERVIEWER: Were there many white women working there? Was it equally mixed, about, or was it more one or the other?

KENNEDY: I think there was more black women than white.

INTERVIEWER: Were they paid the same or did you ever find out?

KENNEDY: I really don't know whether they were paid the same.

INTERVIEWER: Was the work hard or long?

KENNEDY: The work was not too hard. It was regular laundry work, you know. I think the pay was the most disgusting part of it. And remember the separate wash rooms, you know, right here in Hammond, Indiana.

INTERVIEWER: This would be the 50's?

KENNEDY: This is the '50's, yes. This is 1954, '55.

INTERVIEWER: By that time the Gary NAACP was raising Cain about a lot of things., or was it a bit later than that?

KENNEDY: Well, I think they started about the middle '50's or even before that. And one incident on the job--which I never had too many incidents--was one lady that come to work there, a white lady and she worked with me, she would never say anything, you know. She kind of looked at me kind of funny and then after a while she started talking. I'm very sensitive about people's expression, you know. I noticed she still didn't say very much but her

KENNEDY: expression seemed to be more pleasant. And then one day she told me, she says, "You know, I just have to tell you something. When I first started working here I really had a different attitude about black people, but since I've been working here, you know, I really don't feel that way anymore." And she said, "But I always heard and I always said--and I'd never really been with black folks. They'd pass by or I'd see them from a distance. But I just had to tell you. It's been on my mind." And I guess maybe when I noticed her expression change from sour to pleasant that she had had a change of attitude or something. So one day she said, "I just gotta tell you, I just gotta tell you." And she explained how she felt before when she first come to work there and how she felt then. But she said, "Now that I work with you and I overhear you talking you don't seem different." I said, "No, I don't think I'm any different." That woman just got to be very, very good friends. This was my first experience with people really making a change and really pouring out her soul to you about how she really felt. Well, maybe people have fear and they believe what they heard, and working everyday and overhearing people talking about their home lives and what they were about, you know she just had a change of heart;. I guess maybe communication, I guess that's the whole bit to understand in people getting along. It probably would be the best thing for race relations. We fear things we don't understand or we have no association with or no communication with. And when she, out of poverty, had to work alongside black people and hear what they talked about and be helped by them because things there she couldn't get. I'd have to help her. She just really had a change of heart. And for her to confess it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that had a permanent effect on your feelings?

KENNEDY: Yes, that really impressed me. You know, she really impressed me and when I think about that now I really think about--oh my God, if we could just kind of put people together, whatever circumstances they must get together under. Hers were poverty; she needed a job. Her dignity couldn't make her give that job up because she was going to work with black people. That really impressed me. I had had an attitude because when I was young, still in Arkansas, my grandmother--who meant everything to me she would come down and stay one month out of the year with us.

INTERVEIWER: Where did she live?

KENNEDY: She lived in Missouri. She lived in Cape Girardeau, Missouri, and she would come down twice for one month out of each year.

KENNEDY: That was my father's mother. To me it was like Christmas all over again because when she was there we didn't get hollered at as much and we got away with more and we had a lot of attention and all. Well my grandmother--we got a call that she had been shot and we all had to pack up and go to Missouri. We were very young. I guess I was five years old then. I couldn't understand this long trip. It was my first experience after my brother had already passed. This was really my second experience with death. And my grandmother, who was just like a Santa Claus in July, you know, was dead. We went to Missouri and this white man, he had shot her. He lived next door to her. It was a funny thing, they lived almost together, you know. They would always have it-- my grandmother was sort of like my mother--she would have it out with him, so he never did really like her. So one day she was taking care of a lady that lived in back of her on the next street. She went over to take care of this lady that was sick and then there was some commotion and she went to the door to find out what was the commotion about. Then there was a shot and she was shot somewhere in the stomach. This was this man who shot her, you know. They said that he said that he didn't intend to shoot her. He was shooting at somebody else, but nevertheless she got shot.

INTERVIEWER: So that was a real trauma for you.

KENNEDY: I just couldn't really understand that, you know, and when they had the trial they really didn't do anything to him. I had uncles who was pretty--well, I guess you would call them very notorious or radical. At that time they would say "crazy niggers." And they said that my uncles would probably take some kind of revenge out for her, so when they had the trial I think all he got was that he leave town and that was the end of it. And that was very upsetting. I just couldn't understand it. I could feel the loss and I just couldn't understand it. All we know is this man, that he had shot her, but nothing was done other than he was advised to go somewhere else. The Harrises was "crazy niggers" and they might do something.

INTERVIEWER: Did that have anything to do with your mother's feelings that you ought to get out of the South?'

KENNEDY: Well, that was a part of it. I think mostly our getting away was because of a couple of incidents where people were found dead.

INTERVIEWER: In your area?

KENNEDY: Yes, and the fact that--what could you do? If you talked back and someone decided to do something to you, take some kind of advantage...

- INTERVIEWER: You mean they were found dead and nobody could prove how they got dead?
- KENNEDY: Yes. And one thing was that you could catch a black child, say a white person beat him up, and you couldn't say anything about it, you know. It was not about to happen to one of us. My mother would just. . .
- INTERVIEWER: Now was Gary much different? Did you feel in your growing up years that Gary, was much safer?
- KENNEDY: Well, yes, it was different. See, all the hidden discrimination and all that, you was not aware of. Just growing up, you grew up, you know.
- INTERVIEWER: It wasn't the terror.
- KENNEDY: The terror wasn't there. You didn't fear about speaking back, like in the South. It was just a fear--we didn't have it in Gary. I felt different in Gary. And to me it represented a better life. I don't know how much better it was, but to me it did represent a better life. We went to school and we had to go to school. In the South if there was work to be done you had to do the work first and go to school, school came second,. Here we went to school the whole school year, that was it; there was no question about it.
- INTERVIEWER: Now when you were married and had children and were working, too, how did you manage to look after the children?
- KENNEDY: Well, I think I was very fortunate in that respect. I knew a lady that I had grew up around and she had no family. She only had a sister and her sister had passed so she was sort of living like with people. I knew that she had taken care of children down the street from me, but they had grown up and didn't need her any longer. I asked her if she would come stay with me, so I sort of had someone.
- INTERVIEWER: Did she move in with you?
- KENNEDY: She moved in with me and she stayed there. She was like a housekeeper, you know. I was providing her with a place to stay and she was helping me. I had that for three or four years. Then my children did get a bit larger and I had other baby-sitters that would come in. I never had to take the children someplace else.
- INTERVIEWER: That was good. So you really didn't have a serious problem.

KENNEDY: I didn't have a serious problem with the children. I always , had enough baby-sitters. Then my family--in a pinch if I didn't have anyone I always had my sisters to help me out. But I didn't have a problem with baby-sitting.

INTERVIEWER: Was your family close--you and your sisters?

KENNEDY: No, I don't say that we were too close. I don't understand why; we were together. We were always a family and we were never ever separated but my sisters and brothers--I were a little different, you know. When I say a little different, I always got the most beatings because I was always independent and I always had to speak my opinion. My sisters and brothers had more politics about it. They knew that you agree with Mama and you butter her up, that's the way to be. You crazy, you know. Instead of me wanting to give my opinion all the time of what's right. My mother would say you did this, you know. My sisters never said nothing, even if they didn't do it they wouldn't say nothing but, "Yes maam." And I would stand up to the last, "Oh no, I did not do that."

INTERVIEWER: Were all the arguments with your mother, not your father?

KENNEDY: And would I get the heck beat out of me! But I'd say I didn't do it, you know. I was stubborn like that, very opinionated. I always had to give my opinion. They were different. I felt that my mother liked my sisters and brothers the best.

INTERVIEWER: You were more left out of that?

KENNEDY: Yes, more left out of that. As a matter of fact my mother told me since I was married and away and I was, you know, just making a complaint, "You know you never visit me like you do the others." She said, "Well, you've always been very independent. One thing I don't have to worry about leaving you cause you will always make it." And she said, "You usually go where people need you." She said, "You never impressed me that you need me like the others." And I guess that was just her attitude toward me. Mama, they really needed her, too. And when she passed it was kind of hard for those who had really been so close to her cause she was like their buddy and everything. I really felt that they missed her a lot more. I missed her because I valued her, but that everyday on and on relationship I didn't have.

INTERVIEWER: And you didn't have it with any one of your sisters.

KENNEDY: Yes. And I know they were ever lost.

INTERVIEWER: Who did you feel closest to? Was it your grandmother, was that

INTERVIEWER: the one?

KENNEDY: Well, I felt not really close to my grandmother because she lived in Missouri and we lived in Arkansas.

INTERVIEWER: Did you get along better with your father than your mother?

KENNEDY: I think with my father because my father was so easy-going. And my mother, she was a very dominating individual. I would always have to take sides with my Daddy because he seemed to be so kind and I always felt like he needed me to help him. I felt close to my Daddy because he had such a good nature. He just didn't bother anyone, you know. And my mother you didn't have to worry. You wasn't going to get away with too much with her. My father is still living, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think maybe you were his favorite? Or did he have any favorites?

KENNEDY: I think that maybe he favored me because you know out of human nature--I favored him, so he might have favored me somewhat. But I think I favored him because he was kind and considerate and he just never got rough. If he had to he was rough but it was very seldom that he became angry.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little bit about your husband. Was he the same age as you?

KENNEDY: No, my husband was older than I was, about thirteen years older than I was. I think that one of the things that helped me to be really independent (I was like that anyway) is that he was not a desirable husband. He was very possessive. He really thought that you were his property. I couldn't stand that, you know. He was very jealous and it was really the lack of freedom with him more than anything else.

INTERVIEWER: Was he a good provider?

KENNEDY: He was a very good provider. That he was. He was very hard working. He worked two jobs and really provided well. I can say for my children that they have never ever known real poverty like I've known it.

INTERVIEWER: Did he continue to provide for them after the divorce?

KENNEDY: After the divorce it got harder, but I went to work shortly after. Well, I was working when I got the divorce, working at Hammond Valve and he had to pay support. But in resentment

KENNEDY: for the divorce and the separation he tried to withhold his support so we were in and out of court.

INTERVIEWER: Did he try to prevent the divorce as well?

KENNEDY: Well, he tried to at first. And then after. I guess, a year, he sort of saw it was no use So he thought, well he would go on and get a divorce, because we had legal separation, you know. 'So he tried and he tried and he couldn't we couldn't I know there was some things basically wrong that we couldn't get together. Some of the ways he had was really his ways and he wasn't going to change. So after a year he files for divorce and so I cross filed and we got a divorce. He was very bitter, very bitter, and when the children would go to visit him he would make remarks, you know. He was so bitter and so bitter that he even threatened them that someday he was going to get-even with me. The getting even with me was because I would not stay with him under his conditions at,all. I really lived for years in fear because he was the type of person who was a solo individual. He was a loner. He was subject to things that I felt he would say he would do because he had had some close calls with some violence.

INTERVIEWER: Did he have a tendency to violence that you could see or that you felt might break out?

KENNEDY: Yes, because one of the reasons why I left was because a couple of times he got angry and he hit me. He liked to beat me. I couldn't live under that kind of situation. A couple of times and I thought,well, maybe I'd try and things would get better. That was the one thing that was the deciding factor, was that he was violent and I couldn't stand that. I know that would never have changed cause he' had a tendency toward violence and that wasn't going to change. He had all this angry feeling for me because he said that I wouldn't stay. It was my fault, you know. I wouldn't stay because of his violence. It was' like being a slave, you know, with him. He had a heart attack, -he had a couple of heart attacks. He was the kind of individual, he was so cold, he was so poor in so many ways. He didn't even believe too much in doctors. He had a couple of heart attacks and when he should have been giving himself real care he didn't take no doctor. He didn't need no doctor, he didn't need no preacher. All he needed was green money. He had been told by his doctors that he would have to keep coming to the doctor and take care of himself because he really had a condition of the heart,but he didn't. And on the day that my oldest daughter was going to graduate, all day long it was on my mind whether or not he's coming to the graduation. And I said well,

KENNEDY: if he comes I'll just stay my distance. I won't get near him and if he wants to talk to her alright, you know. That was the day he died.

INTERVIEWER: Oh for goodness sake!

KENNEDY: Yeah, and from all that I learned he probably had intentions of coming, maybe, I don't know. He had made no attempt before to buy a graduation present.

INTERVIEWER: Was this graduation from high school or eighth grade or what?

KENNEDY: High School. And that morning he had worked at National Tube. He had come home from work. I guess he worked midnights. He had come by the cleaners and picked up his suit out of the cleaners and his laundry and he went to the dentist to pay their dentist bills and he came home. He was a barber also. That was his second job, he was a barber. He was going to the barber shop and he felt very tired. What had happened--he got so careless I guess his heart was beginning to get worse. He had burned himself on the leg and he didn't take care of that leg like he should and it set up an infection. I don't think the heart could deal with it. He had gone to the doctor and the doctor cut all this out; done it in his office. And it was bad cause the doctor showed me the pictures that he took of the burn; showed me what he'd done. It was a horrible looking picture and he told me how he cut all that out. Naturally he had to give him some kind of anesthetic for that leg. And he done that that day, too. The doctor worked on his leg and told him, "When have you been to see the heart specialist?" And he said, "Oh, I haven't been in two years." And he said, "Well, will you promise me today that you'll go?" "Yeah, I think I'll go down there and," cause he was in the clinic there on Grant and it was right down the hall. He said, "Okay, I'll promise. I'll make an appointment when I leave here and go." And he comes out. I don't think he made an appointment. He really didn't. He comes out and comes home and he's going to lie down for just a while and he's going over to the barber shop. He laid on the bed to rest and that's when the heart attack came. His girl friend came in to ask him was he going to the barber shop and she said she noticed he was shaking all over. She realized something was wrong with him. When they called the Fire Inhalator Squad they never could revive him. I was at work because I was working evenings and I was coming home to go to the graduation. So when I got the call, my sister . called me because someone in his family called and told her that he had passed. Then they called me at work and told me and I really couldn't believe it. I just couldn't. I just really didn't believe it that he was dead. I had feared him for so

KENNEDY: long and I had to really see him to really believe it.

INTERVIEWER: You really never stopped being afraid of him, then?

KENNEDY: No, I was--everyday I was afraid of him. I knew he was capable of doing what he said he was going to do and I just lived in fear. And I couldn't believe it, I really couldn't believe that there he was. My children never got a chance to get really close to him because he wasn't that kind that let you get close to him.

INTERVIEWER: How old was the oldest child when you first divorced him, or when you first separated?

KENNEDY: Oh, she must have been about seven years old,

INTERVIEWER: Did he show that hostility toward them, too, or did he concentrate it all on you?

KENNEDY: Well, he showed it towards them because they would go by his house, say on the week-ends, and they'd want money to go to the show or something. He wouldn't give it to them. He'd say, "Well, your mama fix it like this." Now, I was the one that fixed it like this when he's the one that filed for the divorce: And I just went through with it. He says, "So if you need anything let her give it to you. It's her little red wagon. Let her push it or pull it." And they got so that they would not go by there. Sometimes on the weekend I'd like to have one day of rest, and I would really encourage them to go, but then they wouldn't go. They would not go. A couple of times they went and he would spank them. You know they'd only go over there once in a while and they got to get a spanking just in the short time they're over there. They resented that. So I couldn't even make them go. Some-time I'd have some place to go and I thought: well if they go to their Dad's that leaves me free to go where I want to go, but they wouldn't go. If I had to go anywhere I'd have to have a baby sitter on the week-ends.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been hard, raising four children all by yourself.

KENNEDY: It was hard. I'm glad I was younger and had the energy for it because it was hard.

INTERVIEWER: Now, he contributed some financial support as long as he was alive, but then after that they were still fairly young if the oldest one had only graduated.

KENNEDY: Yes, well after he passed they received good social security.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I see.

KENNEDY: He made pretty good money, so they had good social security,

INTERVIEWER: So the money problems, then, were not the big problems,

KENNEDY: Money problems--things were better even then,because I didn't have to worry about getting it. It was a sufficient amount because I had four and with four you receive a nice amount, So my daughter was 18, but then she went on to school and social security covered it. The others--their social security continued until they all were married or out of school.

INTERVIEWER: So that part wasn't so bad. The hard part was not having anybody to leave them with.

KENNEDY: Nobody to leave them with and just having to shoulder all the responsibility. That's why I said maybe I was fortunate I didn't have any boys because I could handle the girls much better probably than I could boys. I had a boy but he was born premature and he didn't live. So the girls did not create a problem. Then my mother were living up until 1969.

INTERVIEWER: Did you live near her? Where were you living?

KENNEDY: I didn't live too far from her,

INTERVIEWER: Were you still living in the same part of Gary?

KENNEDY: Yes, we lived in the same part of Gary And they took a liking to my mother and they would go visit her sometimes, specially when they got larger, you know. She would have them down and they were really close to her. She just had a way with them that she didn't even have with me.

INTERVIEWER: That's traditional, Grandmothers and grand children,

KENNEDY: Yes, I don't know. They really got along well, They loved to go to their grandma's.

INTERVIEWER: That was good. Back to your work, now. You worked in a laundry while you were still married. Did you have any other job before you went to Hammond Valve?

KENNEDY: Well, you know, like when I was in high school,in a drug store. I worked in a` supermarket.

INTERVIEWER: Was this when you were in high school?

KENNEDY: Part time. That was during the time I was married and during the time of my separation, And I also had a part time job once at the school, like the supervision of the children on the two lunch hours. So that was part time, too.

INTERVIEWER: Which of those jobs did you like best?

KENNEDY : I don't know. I think I liked working with the children.

INTERVIEWER: Did any of them pay better than the others? Or were they all roughly the same?

KENNEDY: I think, considering the time, I think the two hour job I had at school paid the best.

INTERVIEWER: None of those jobs had unions, did they?

KENNEDY: The laundry had a union.

INTERVIEWER: What union was that?

KENNEDY: It was the Laundry Workers Union.

INTERVIEWER: Was it a CIO union?

KENNEDY: I think it was CIO.

INTERVIEWER: And you belonged to it, I presume?

KENNEDY: Yes I belonged to it.,

INTERVIEWER: Did you get active in it?

KENNEDY : No, I didn't get active in it. It wasn't the kind of union you got active in it. I remember the man's name. I think was Jack Edwards, or something, I think like that was his name. He was like a business agent and he would come in. At first I didn't know who he was. He would come in smiling once in a while to talk to one lady. And this one lady was a steward. That's as close as you got to the union.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't it ever do anything? Did you ever have any grievances?

KENNEDY: Never. There was no such thing as a grievance.

INTERVIEWER: Did they have meetings?

KENNEDY: Just the steward went to.

INTERVIEWER: You never had a local meeting?

KENNEDY: There was never a local meeting, nothing! Strange kind of union. You paid your union dues and I had a union card but beyond that I never heard of a grievance. Even the steward that went to the meetings--I don't know whether she went to the office. I don't know whether you call it a meeting. She never said anything about the union.

INTERVIEWER: It was sort of union in name only, then.

KENNEDY: It was a union in name only. And if they negotiated a contract nobody knew a thing about it or had any input into it.

INTERVIEWER: Now, you went to work at Hammond Valve after the laundry. Was that the next place you went to work? Well, besides the supermarket, was Hammond Valve the main place that you worked?

KENNEDY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And you went to work there shortly after your divorce?

KENNEDY: Well, while I was in the process of getting the divorce.

INTERVIEWER: Alright, tell me about Hammond Valve. That's where you still work isn't it?

KENNEDY: Yes. I tell you I got a job at Hammond Valve through a grand gentleman who was the president of the union at that time. His name was Ernest Brown. He told the company that he had met a person that needed a job and that he would like to help them get a job. He used to do things like that, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Was he a personal friend of yours?

KENNEDY: We went to the same church. He had been trying to work on hiring Blacks. They had a foundry and they hired Blacks in the foundry quickly but they wasn't so willing to hire them other places. He said he would try, you know. So he tried. He didn't get it all right away, what they promised him, but he kept going back, going back, and I got on, He was a wonderful individual. He had brought the union in there, Three or four years after I was there he retired and the local hasn't been the same since. My employment there at Hammond Valve had been one where I really got involved. I think my involvement really with people and concern about people really began with the church.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about that.

KENNEDY: I didn't say anything before about the church.' I guess maybe most black people that was their first involvement. The singers, the black singers and everything else, they always got their start in church.' It was a good starting point, you know, and I was really dedicated to the church. As a matter of fact I was the only member in my family that really was a devout church goer.

INTERVIEWER: What church did you belong to?

KENNEDY: Now, I'm not affiliated with a church but I grew up in the Trinity Baptist Church. I grew up there in the church and I worked with the church. After I got grown I was a Sunday School teacher. In all phases of the church I worked and I was really an advocate church goer, you know. I went to church maybe three times during the week and maybe three times on Sunday and that was my first field of working with people and working for people. I think my ideas of working for people and helping people went far beyond what that church was really involved in. I saw helping people in a realistic way, not to say that there isn't a soul to save. I don't know about all that but I just think that you have to physically help people as well as you have to spiritually help them. I continued for a long time and it just wasn't getting through to me that all this time and all this money I was raising.... I didn't feel I was helping nobody, you know. And my first conflict with people and how they help other people was really in the church.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about this. Was it an open conflict or just in your mind?

KENNEDY: Yes, it wasn't just in my mind. It was in my whole feeling and I've always been one to express my feelings.

INTERVIEWER: Did you express this at church?

KENNEDY: Yes, I did. And let nobody tell you that politics is not in the church. So where I was accepted, because.... I was good with people, I was working, and I raised money. [So] I started voicing my opinion: as a church what we ought to be about. If we call ourself Christian.... If you say you're a Christian, what did Christ do, you know. I really wanted to help people and I really started running into some problems. Church meetings were not meant to be to bring anything--were not meant to be innovative. The minister was chairman of everything and the deacons, well they're obedient. And you know I always read that the

KENNEDY: deacons of the church were the ones who really manages and runs the church along with those who they set aside as the trustees, Well, it was not a fact. The minister ran the church. And everybody was very obedient servants, And it just seemed to me that there were another gentleman who agreed with me and we become very, very you know, the minister started looking at us in a different way because we were challenging his authority, challenging the way he was running the church. I kind of got a little disillusioned with the church and I saw so many people that needed friends and no one was responding to them. So you said things about the welfare but the welfare was the only people that was helping them. And I just think that the church ought to be evangelistic, as they call themselves a "Missionary Baptist Church." A missionary goes out and they spread things and they help people. And I didn't find it so. I eventually drifted away from the church, because I felt that all I wanted to do that was not an avenue to do it. I wasn't a preacher or a minister and I wasn't dealing with the spiritual soul. All I could deal with was the physical person, you know.

Then I started working at Hammond Valve and I found a way to express myself through the union. It didn't take me very long because I think when you feel that there's something to do and to help people, you find whatever group there is to express yourself. And to me it was the union. I really was always excited over the union because I thought the union really represented power and change and it represented everybody. So I got involved with the union and I was elected financial secretary.

INTERVIEWER: How long after you started?

KENNEDY: Oh, I was there two years, I guess, three years before I was just able to run, you know. I ran for financial secretary and I won financial secretary over a lady who, a Lady who had been financial secretary for years. From financial secretary I went to recording secretary. I've been treasurer, I've been on the negotiating committee, on the civil rights committee, on compensation. I was secretary of the Sub-District ii2 Compensation Committee. You would never believe. it, but once upon a time when I first started out in the union and I was going to all the conferences and everything--because it wasn't all the politics in the local that there is now--would you ever believe that German0 and the gentleman that used to be Sub-District #2 director, Les Thornton, oh they just loved me, They just loved me, you know. If they gave a conference and I wasn't there they'd say, "What happened to Ola?" They thought I was really a beautiful person. Then, like in the church, I really started

KENNEDY: running up against it when I started thinking and giving my ideas and disagreeing with the-other ideas. Now here I am again running into conflicts and I think that ever since then when they made an attempt to try and tell me that I should think like they think, that it wasn't all bad and that I really could go places. They really tried. I can't say they didn't try. But I just didn't see things that way.

INTERVIEWER: How long were you active before you really began to run into conflict? It must have taken a little while before you got to know each other that well,

KENNEDY: Oh yes, well I, got involved and started going to conferences. I suppose I was two or three years being involved before I really started running into conflict.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what the issues were that first brought on this kind of conflict?

KENNEDY: I am trying to remember. I don't remember distinctly but it was like on an educational conference where I really spoke up and out on some issues. And from there I was a delegate by virtue of my financial secretary position to Sub-District #2 Council and I spoke out there, It was a shame--you know Balanoff, that's when I began to run into him, People like Balanoff and myself speaking out, after a while you get to be known as "those people," you know.

INTERVIEWER: You mean the troublemakers?

KENNEDY: The troublemakers. That's really what they were saying, And I began to not be their favorite individual, They who thought I was such a beautiful person, you know. I just couldn't believe that I really had that standing with them at one time compared to where I stand with them now. And when I started that--that was it. I would go to the Council meeting and I would, I'd see men sitting up there, presidents of locals, just going along with whatever Thornton said, It was just that way, they had no opinion, just anything. And it was only those few of us who would challenge it. And it was such a few!

INTERVIEWER: Now, were you with a group in your Local? I know the man that first got you in there went to your church and you were a friend of his, but you said he retired after you were there about four years. Did you have a caucus or a slate or a group of people who ran for office together, or was it just every individual?

KENNEDY: No, we are a small Local. We didn't have a caucus,

INTERVIEWER: How big is your Local?

KENNEDY: Now I guess we have about 170 members. At that time we might have had more, we might have had 200. And we sort of done things on an individual basis. There are always that group that follow you, you know, that sort of supports you. But they wasn't known as a caucus or anything like that. The individual that's president now and has been president for so long, when it started off I'm the one that really got him elected president. I remain back because of the attitude about a woman being president. He wasn't really the person for the job but I could work with him and for him. We did work together, I mean we worked together with a couple of more people and we really done a job. Then the threat with the company, that the union, the Local was becoming too strong. Okay, then the management comes in and takes the person that I helped become president, who's president today, to sort of divide us,

INTERVIEWER: How did they do it? How did the management work to divide you?

KENNEDY: I tell you, you have to almost work at Hammond Valve to really know how. When I expressed this to others, like Jim, but management at that time was controlled by a gentleman who just left. All these years that he worked at Hammond Valve, 34 years, somewhere between 34 and 35 years. He just left. It takes a long time for some people's ways to catch up with them. It finally caught up with him and he resigned, but he thought that he had to control the union. Okay, well being a small shop, there were favors that they could do for some and they could control the president. They couldn't control me. They felt that I was the person behind the president who was really doing all these things, so what he wanted to do was be able to call the shots. They ensured this president that he could stay in and then there was a break in our relationship. I could no longer work with him, He got power. Okay where I was working with him and we had power working together, when he broke loose and worked with another little group and with the company--

INTERVIEWER: He doesn't need you if he can get the company to cooperate,

KENNEDY: He doesn't need me any longer because the company can assure him of his victory because there are so many people there that needed favors. And who could give you the favor--the man that's manager of the plant. He was a black guy,

INTERVIEWER: The manager was a black guy?

KENNEDY: The manager--he was a black guy, He wasn't a manager at that time but in a sense he still had that kind of control, He was a superintendent at that time and he was superintendent over the foundry. He strictly controlled the foundry and whatever way the foundry went, that's the way the union went.

INTERVIEWER: Which part of the operation did you work in?

KENNEDY: Well, I've really gone all over the plant. Most of my time I'm back in that department, the finishing department, and that's where the valves are assembled and really actually put together and made into a valve.

INTERVIEWER: What proportion of women work in that plant?

KENNEDY: You'll find it about 50/50.

INTERVIEWER: And what about racial composition?

KENNEDY: That's about 50/50, too.

INTERVIEWER: Now you mentioned that--people couldn't quite accept the idea of a woman running for president when you first went there. Has that changed? Have those attitudes toward women in leadership changed?

KENNEDY: I think the attitude has changed somewhat. And I think we're going to see a great change now that we have new management and that same working with an individual in the union is gone. I really believe that it's gone.

INTERVIEWER: No more company-union collusion?

KENNEDY: Collusion, you know, I really think we've seen the end to that. I think it's going to be different. I tell you at Hammond Valve we were able to change a lot of jobs that were for men only even before Title VII.

INTERVIEWER: How did you do it, by pressure?

KENNEDY: By pressure. And then when Title VII came into being, we used that And I know many jobs in the foundry, many jobs on the machines that women had not had when I was the head of the Civil Rights Committee, were opened up. And I told them that I was going to the government. As a matter of fact I did talk to them but it was never necessary at that point to. So I was able to be a guinea pig in a lot of instances to change a lot of jobs that women work on now and they don't even know all the struggle that we went through to open those jobs up.

KENNEDY: We have equal pay, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Between men and women?

KENNEDY: Yes. There was a time when a woman could work on a job and got less than a man.

INTERVIEWER: How long ago was that?

KENNEDY: Well, I would say that has been changed now for about fifteen years. It was changed before we come into a job evaluation program. That finished doing away with all of it. They had a merit system and it was really bad. You could be doing the same job and somebody could be making 10, 15, or 20c more an hour. So we done away with that by on-the-job evaluation. It was completely done away with, but some jobs we changed even before that.

INTERVIEWER: Was this through the Civil Rights Committee?

KENNEDY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Which was the hardest form of discrimination to overcome-- being black or being a woman? Or were they both?

KENNEDY: I think that at Hammond Valve it was being a woman because they are skilled jobs and we've always had a problem getting blacks into the machine shop, but there were always a few that was there. Now there are more. We always had that problem but there were some. But as far as women, there were jobs that you just went ahead and laid them off, you just didn't even consider them.

INTERVIEWER: So you had to start from scratch on that.

KENNEDY: Yes, we was really starting from scratch as far as women were concerned and I think we have come a long ways against quite a few odds, Now we have a right to that job and we can do it, People have slowly accepted it in their minds whereas before some of them hollered, "Oh, that's a man's job." You have to overcome all this.

INTERVIEWER: How much pressure did you have to use? Quite a bit?

KENNEDY: Well, I tell you the last pressure that we put on the company we actually did file a suit with the Human Relations Commission, And we were able to get women in supervisory positions.

INTERVIEWER: Just by filing or did you have to have a hearing?

KENNEDY: No we had a suit and there was a hearing, We filed a suit and there was a hearing and the company agreed, They found the company really were in violation,

INTERVIEWER: How long ago was that?

KENNEDY: That was recently.

INTERVIEWER: Within a year or so?

KENNEDY: Yes, two or three years ago that we filed it.

INTERVIEWER: Now I know that you've been very much involved with a group of black trade unionists in the Steelworkers Union called the Ad-hoc Committee. Could you tell me when that began and what your role in that was?

KENNEDY: I think I began with the Ad-hoc committee about 1968 or 1969, somewhere around that period. I was very impressed with the Ad-hoc Committee just from the very start, with what it was trying to do, It had really bothered me, the lack of representation by blacks in the union, and when I heard about the Ad-hoc Committee it was really all geared to move. I worked with the Ad-hoc Committee and we've travelled all over the country to meetings trying to work with blacks throughout the country steelworkers--to promote blacks to some meaningful positions. We felt that we represented quite a number of steelworkers, We felt that we ought to have someone in a policy making position. The Ad-hoc Committee had its beginning in 1964, One of the founders of it was Rayfield Mooty who I owe everything to him because he's been my inspiration. When I was down and out in the union and they was kicking me all around I don't know what I'd have done without him.

INTERVIEWER: How did you first get to know him? He lives in Chicago doesn't he?

KENNEDY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And he's in a different part of the union.

KENNEDY: Yes,

INTERVIEWER: So how did you and he first become acquainted?

KENNEDY: Through the Ad-hoc.

INTERVIEWER: How did you hear about the Ad-hoc?

KENNEDY: I heard about the Ad-hoc Committee. I was at the Educational

KENNEDY: Conference in Angola, Indiana, and Jonathan Comer spoke to me about it. They were really busy trying to get Abel to defeat McDonald at that time. They were having meetings and I said, "Ok, I'm very much interested," after they told me what the Ad-hoc was all about, I started getting mail from Pittsburgh, you know, about Ad-hoc was supporting Abel because all the things was coming out of Pittsburgh. Some Ad-hocers had decided to go with Abel after they said they could not meet with McDonald, He just didn't seem to have time, you know. But I must confess that although I believed in Ad-hoc I did not really go with Abel. I stuck with McDonald.

INTERVIEWER: Did you campaign for him or just vote for him?

KENNEDY: I didn't campaign for McDonald. I went to a couple of rallies and things for him,.....But I really didn't ever get turned on to I.W. Abel. So after the campaign was over and all, then we really got back to working, you know, and we soon learned that Abel wanted the Ad-hoc to help unseat McDonald. So we started a series of meetings all over the country with the Ad-hoc Committee's program, which was to reorganize the Civil Rights Department, to promote blacks to the International Executive Board, and to integrate all the departments in the Steelworkers, Union..

INTERVIEWERS Were there any blacks on the Executive Board?

KENNEDY: No blacks on the Executive Board at the time, and still we feel that we haven't made very much progress, ' There's a token black there now but we still have a long ways to go, We were able to have the Civil Rights Department reorganized, They did integrate all the fourteen departments of the union and I think they might have a black head of a department, We were asking for that, but I think Rayfield said it right when he said that in the 31 years that they'd been in existence as a union they had not promoted 30 blacks in that time, And they had not! But under Ad-hoc that 28 or 29 blacks grew to something like 73 in the '70's. So the Ad-hoc Committee went along fine and every time we got a dynamic leader they'd give him a staff job with the promise that he'd no longer be affiliated with the Ad-hoc, We lost so many people that way, you know.

INTERVIEWER: You promoted their cause and then they joined up with the other side?

KENNEDY: They joined up with the other side, Right now all the people that they did promote do not took back and recognize Ad-hoc for its

KENNEDY: contribution now and that is kind of disgusting, you know, But nevertheless blacks were promoted, We disagree with them since they've been promoted, but it was a promotion so maybe we have to settle for that.

INTERVIEWER: Did their being there help the blacks in some way in the union down below, do you think?

KENNEDY: No, I really don't think so. Sometimes they would aid us, The only person that's ever really been outspoken with Ad-hoc was Curtis Strong. He kind of stuck with us and he formed the Black Caucus which consisted of the black staff men and they give us financial aid. We were able to really bring to the attention of the nation the discrimination in the Steelworkers Union with the suit that was filed in Birmingham, Alabama, that which brought about the first consent decree.

INTERVIEWER: Was Ad-hoc behind that suit?

KENNEDY: That was Ad-hoc, a group of Ad-hocers down in Birmingham, Alabama, That produced a whole consent decree, the Fairfield decision. I, right now I have a suit with the EEOC concerning patterns of discrimination in the union.

INTERVIEWER: The whole union?

KENNEDY: In the whole union. I was quite involved and I was quite concerned. We tried to file the suit as a committee but we couldn't do it as a committee because at that time the only committees that could file suits were the NAACP and some other. Even the Urban League couldn't at that time. It has changed since. But you could file as an individual. So me being so dedicated it really has cost me a lot, I filed a suit on behalf of all the blacks in the union.

INTERVIEWER: When did you file this?

KENNEDY.: The suit is five or six years old,

INTERVIEWER: What's become of it?

KENNEDY: It's still there; When the consent decree came about they sent me a letter and said my case had been administratively closed. But then when I wrote back and told them I/wanted them to define "administratively closed" because I couldn't understand it, then they wrote me a letter back and said that there had been some mistake, that my suit was still active. And the last convention that they held, I received one week before the convention, I received a letter from the EEOC out of Pittsburgh saying that

KENNEDY: they were ready to start investigating my case, And they asked the union, being that they had such a back-log, that if the union and I--they would give permission that the union and I could come to some kind of reconciliation. And the union said they didn't feel that they had discriminated in any way, and they wouldn't, That's sort of not the truth because they had admitted to a certain amount of discrimination in the Consent Decree. They refused to negotiate with me so the EEOC is still on the case.

INTERVIEWER: So it's still waiting for them to get the time to process it?

KENNEDY: Yes, Now what the end result of it--I don't know. It just takes a long while.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get any help from an organization like the NAACP or the Urban League or any of the groups outside the union?

KENNEDY: No, not really,

INTERVIEWER: Did you want any?

KENNEDY: No, well I think that they felt they were getting enough trouble in remarks about dual unionism and what-have-you, as it was. They felt that the proper government agency and the Steelworkers could probably do it themselves, The NAACP had been very much involved in the consent decree. Now that they did play a part in, you know? They even went to court saying that they were not satisfied with the consent decree, but the group itself did not seek the help of the NAACP. They were involved in the Birmingham situation and--was it Herbert Hill? Gosh, the union leadership kind of hates him with a passion because he was really very instrumental in that case.

INTERVIEWER: What's become of the Ad-hoc Committee now? Is it dissolved?

KENNEDY: No, but once Mr. Mooty retired it seemed to lose some of its fire. There were some of us that tried to keep it going, you know. But so many had been promoted and the whole thing of putting Lynch on the International Executive Board, sort of took some of the fight out of it. They thought maybe you've gained all you can.

INTERVIEWER: One goal was accomplished?

KENNEDY: Yes, but we just had a meeting in the 31 Chapter recently where we said we're going to start. We're going to expand the program and we're going to begin to be really much more active because

KENNEDY: although there are some gains, there is still very inadequate representation of women and blacks. So there's still, the job, but very few soldiers left, you know, There are a few of us that still are with it,

INTERVIEWER: There's another organization that I think you're involved in and that's the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists. What exactly is this group? What do you do with them?

KENNEDY: Yes. Well, I'm on the Executive Council of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists which is headed up by Mr. Bill Lucy. He was one of the highest ranking black elected officials in the labor movement. The coalition is a coalition of black trade unionists. They come from the UAW, the Meatcutters; the Teachers Union, all unions. Their concern is the over-all concern for blacks in the trade union movement. I think that they've been very instrumental in some of the legislation before the House. The one that we're working on now is the Humphrey-Hawkins Bill.

INTERVIEWER: Full employment?

KENNEDY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Is that their main job, to lobby?

KENNEDY: To lobby for special programs and legislation and especially those that would advance black workers.

INTERVIEWER: Is that a national group or local?

KENNEDY: It's a national group, we have local chapters. I'm head of the Gary chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and they are all over the country.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any idea what the membership is?

KENNEDY: The membership is around 10,000. We have a convention every year.

INTERVIEWER: How long has this been in existence?

KENNEDY: Well, the Coalition has been in existence ever since 1972. They really had their beginning from the labor leaders neutrality in the 1972 election. You know they felt that they couldn't support McGovern, and Abel and Meany and all said they would be neutral, And we felt that blacks could not afford the luxury of neutrality, being that through the Democrat Party most of their gains had been made.

INTERVIEWER: Were they active in that election?

KENNEDY: They were very active. That's how they come together, We come together in 1972.

INTERVIEWER: Primarily for that election?

KENNEDY: Primarily for that election, because of the attitudes of the labor unions. So there was a conference held in Chicago where over 1200 black leaders in the labor movement came together and they've held a convention every year since then. I think it's really growing and it has out-fancied the A. Philip Randolph Institute which is backed by George Meany. Don't think that we really haven't had some pressure because our views seem to be in.... We don't intend to be in conflict with the A. Philip Randolph, because whatever A. Philip Randolph do that is good, we're for it. We realize that the A. Philip Randolph Institute is funded by the AFL-CIO and those who fund you will dictate.

INTERVIEWER: Is this financed strictly by the Black Trade Unionists themselves?

KENNEDY: Yes, by the Black Trade Unionists and those who are sympathetic to uS.

INTERVIEWER: So you say the movement is growing. Has it hit its peak yet? Is it still on the upgrade?

KENNEDY: Well, I really think that it's not reached its peak because we just had an executive board meeting last week here in Chicago. We feel that now the Coalition can be more useful than ever, because there are so many repressive legislation. The right wing in this country is on a move to take away the gains that were brought about in the 1960's. We felt that the CBTU is more useful now than ever. Some people don't realize that the mood of the country, there are really some right wing people who are doing some things that would really set progress back if you're not really up in arms. We feel this, you know. The situation before the Supreme Court, that Bakke Case, and the whole seniority bit, and affirmative action really going down the drain, you know. And unemployment, where it's at today! And who does it affect the most? The Black worker and women workers. There is really a need now and I think the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists probably will reach its peak during this struggle to try and combat it. We've really been busy to try and hang on to some of the things that we've won. And I think that Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the rank and file movement in the many different unions is the only lifeblood left in the unions because I see the labor movement as a dying institution. I can't tell the difference between most union leadership and the

KENNEDY: head of U.S. Steel or any other large corporation. They all sing the same tune. And if it was not for the rank and file movement and we have the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists-- keeping the labor movement moving and responding to somebody, to me the labor movement has just been going down hill. It's a dying institution, I think that we need to encourage more rank and file caucuses or what-have-you. If not, somebody's just going to forget us along the way.

INTERVIEWER: Is there a caucus in your local, a rank and file caucus?

KENNEDY: No, we don't have one.

INTERVIEWER: You don't have caucuses?'

KENNEDY: No, we don't have one.

INTERVIEWER: What about women's groups?

KENNEDY: We have a women's group in my local. They're not so political but yet they respond to different things.

INTERVIEWER: How long has that been organized?

KENNEDY: I think they've had that going for about four or five years, or a little longer than that, maybe seven or eight years,

INTERVIEWER: And what kind of things do they do? Was this organized when you were trying to get the changes made for women in your local?

KENNEDY: Yes, I think that really kind of brought it together. There are some of us who usually work together, you know, And we have never really thought of us as a caucus but nevertheless we work together. I mean we could call ourselves a caucus.

INTERVIEWER: But it's a women's group?

KENNEDY: In our local caucuses have not been popular, We're so small that we just have our little group that do things.

INTERVIEWER: It's not a formal organization then, it's just a little group that you get together?

KENNEDY: No, it's not a formal organization. It's a little group, Well...

INTERVIEWER: Do you have regular meetings?

KENNEDY: We have regular meetings, we meet once a month. We socialize and we talk about things. One has things to do and the little

KENNEDY: group does it. That's how we do. And I don't try to give it any title other than that because it denotes politics and things like that. As long as you've got people working together and doing things, people you can rely on.

INTERVIEWER: Do you see that group doing any of the same kind of things that the black groups are doing in terms of pressing for preserving whatever gains women have made, or does that appear to be necessary at this point?

Kennedy: Well, in my plant we don't have too much of a threat of women losing the things that they've gained. We might have an overall problem that we work towards but as far as women losing some of their gains it's just that it doesn't seem to be a threat. I think one of the reasons is because most of the officials of the local are women.

INTERVIEWER: Ah, that makes a difference.

KENNEDY: That makes a difference. You really don't have the atmosphere to try and take things from women who really run the union.

INTERVIEWER: Now that's interesting. Is your union still about 50% men? And yet most of the officers are women?

KENNEDY: Right.

INTERVIEWER: Is that fairly new?

KENNEDY: That's not new. It's been like that for a long time.

INTERVIEWER: The women are more involved in the union than the men? How do you account for that?

KENNEDY: I don't know. Women are always more involved than men in my local. If we're going to give any kind of affair you'll find women doing most of the work. It's just that way. We don't have men who are ambitious enough to take the time to take your place. It's no problem for women in my local being anything but the president. I think we'll be able to change that, too. I've ran for the presidency and I've come within six votes. It was too much for me to overcome, the company and its collaboration with certain people. They just had the card that really turned the whole thing. So I think it's going to be different now because of different management. I don't think this management is going to play favoritism or get into the union politics.

INTERVIEWER: Are you involved in any other women's groups like CLUW?

KENNEDY: I helped organize CLUW.

INTERVIEWER: Well, tell me about it.

KENNEDY: I tell you what, when CLUW was really called, the meeting was called by Addie Wyatt and Olga Madar and Gloria Johnson and they say, "Let's get together." Addie Wyatt, in turn, calls me and some others and we had a meeting in Chicago and that was the beginning of CLUW. It started off I was the treasurer. I was supposed to be one of the conveners but realizing that I was only a rank and file member. . .

INTERVIEWER: You were not a union officer at that moment?

KENNEDY: Well, I had an office. I don't have a full-time office so I yield my position to Addie Wyatt because I knew Addie Wyatt, to be fair to the whole thing, had the time. She was a full-time staff person and she could move around. She could go to the meetings. I have no funds behind me; I cannot catch a plane unless I'm paying for it and the meetings were all over the country. So I yield my position to Addie Wyatt. I was really elected. I was delighted and everything and everybody supported me but I just had to be honest.

INTERVIEWER: Realistic, too.

KENNEDY: I could not attend the meetings and get to places like Addie Wyatt could, you know. But it's a shame, all the things I had to give up because of my rank and file status. I don't regret being a rank and filer because I think I've been a lot of places as a rank and filer. So, as a rank and filer, I've had a lot of exposure and been quite involved, but then I know my limitations.

INTERVIEWER: Are you active in CLUW right now? Is there anything going on?

KENNEDY: I'm not too active. I stayed active in CLUW until they had their first convention, their first constitutional convention, since then I have no position, I was on the executive council. Getting to meetings was difficult and I kind of began to get an attitude when CLUW started meeting with George Meany and all that--I kind of drifted away. I haven't kept up with CLUW recently.

INTERVIEWER: And now I think you're involved in something in District 31, Are you involved in organizing a woman's caucus or something at the district level in the Steelworkers Union?

KENNEDY: Oh yes, we have a District 31 Women's Caucus. I think like most caucuses- and most committees they come to be because of a need. And I think with Title VII and the consent decree and

KENNEDY: and women going into the mills and entering non-traditional jobs, they met with so many problems and we found women had so many problems, so we thought that maybe we better get a caucus to deal with this, Because although the legislation states that you must hire x number of women these women were going into a place where men were not really sensitive to their needs. They had that old you-ought-not-be-here syndrome and women were really up against it. So we thought maybe it would be nice if we had a Women's Department or a Department of Women's Affairs. Maybe that was dreaming, but to deal with these problems, you know. So we started organizing and getting together and we started to getting complaints and we really got educated to the problems the women were having in the mills around this area. We got involved in the campaign because we knew that women were not on the International Executive Board; that women were very seldom ever appointed to staff. There was almost none, you know, at the time. There are two or three now. We talked to the candidates and we seemed to get from Sadlowski that if he were elected president that he would establish a Department of Women's Affairs. I really worked hard because I could just see that Department of Women's Affairs and that it would really take care of the situation, you know. That is one of the things that really make me sick now, is the fact that McBride, I don't think he's going to be responsive at all to the needs of women. He has Lynch travelling around, the Vice President of Human Affairs, and when you ask him a question you never really get an answer. He's very evasive.

INTERVIEWER: What do they do, lump women and racial minorities and everything into one department? Is that how they try to handle it from the International?

KENNEDY: Oh, I don't know whether they concern themselves with women at all, I suppose that they feel they do everything from the Civil Rights Department and I haven't seen the Civil Rights Department work yet, really work. And the director I've never seen him do anything. He really has no power to do anything, He can't even come into a district unless he be permitted by the International and invited by the District Director. We in District 31, at least we will get some attention. The director here favors a Department of Women's Affairs and promised to set one up in the district, but the real power is in Pittsburgh. And I think that's a shame that in one man in one place there lies so much power.

INTERVIEWER: Has your women's group done anything since they've been organized? Besides get involved in the Steelworkers election? Have you

INTERVIEWER: pressured for any particular kinds of things or are they still too new?

KENNEDY: No, well we had a bus load of women to go to Washington and lobby for the pregnancy bill because we were very upset over the fact that the Supreme Court ruled that a company didn't have to pay a woman any benefits when she were off pregnant. This was very disturbing. And we have been able to lobby and see our Congressmen and Senators concerning a pregnancy bill that's before the House now. It's passed the Senate and it's in the house.

INTERVIEWER: Did the union support you in this?

KENNEDY: The union did support us.

INTERVIEWER: But you put it together, the women's group put it together.

KENNEDY: The women who have put it together, we actually put it together. I had a bad back at the time and we were around gathering money. The district gave us \$500 and a lot of locals gave us \$200 and \$100 and we put together a trip.

INTERVIEWER: So you're working department or no department.

KENNEDY: No department makes no difference as far as the struggle is concerned. Like I said if it wasn't for the rank and file moving things now I don't know where it would be. We put in together that bus and they went and talked to the senators, They went before the Committee and they spoke at the hearings and I think they really were able to convince some of the representatives to support that pregnancy bill. When a bus load of women comes to Washington somebody's going to listen. It was beautiful! And we've been constantly writing and sending letters to representatives to move the bill, it kind of got hung up in the House. We're going to have to start again; we're having a meeting Sunday and this is going to be the main emphasis. We'll have to do it all over again, we have to start writing them again and send a delegation to see their Congressperson and their Senators and tell them to move. I think for not having funds and not really having the backing of the International. I think we're going pretty good. I don't know how they fare in other districts. As a matter of fact I only heard of one other district where they've had something concerning women, District 29.

INTERVIEWER: Where is District 29?

KENNEDY: That's in Detroit.

INTERVIEWER: They have a group of women?

KENNEDY: They have a group of women that come together and they had a Women's meeting.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever meet with them? Is there any connection between the two groups?

KENNEDY: No, we have not met with them.

INTERVIEWER: You just know of them.

KENNEDY: But I have a feeling that maybe what we started here will spread other places because I had never heard of anyone in any of the other districts having a Women's Committee until after we got moving. And this was one of the campaign issues. And you know some people take your ideas and they adopt them and carry them out. We were very vocal in the campaign about this is what we wanted, so District 29 went right ahead and did it. And we're going to do it. I think it was our idea. District 31 was the first to hold a Steelworkers' Women's conference. But nevertheless I really believe that the idea was conceived here.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any other organizations or activities that you've been involved in that were very important in your life that you'd like to have included in this biography?

KENNEDY: Well, I don't know. I've involved myself in the community and I'm usually with issues in the community and in the election, in city elections, you know, and I work with other women's groups.

INTERVIEWER: Take them one at a time and tell me a little about them. What was your role in the city election? Were you a Hatcher supporter?

KENNEDY: Yes. I was part of a putting together a labor group for Hatcher, and I think we were very successful in his election. I think we've been very successful because he's in his third term.

INTERVIEWER: Were you involved in all of his elections?

KENNEDY: I was involved in all of them.

INTERVIEWER: As a labor person or just as a local supporter?

KENNEDY: As a labor person. I really did it with other labor people. We developed groups of people, what we called a Labor Committee for Hatcher. We were quite successful.

INTERVIEWER: Alright and what else have you been involved in?

KENNEDY: I've been involved with the Gary Commission on the Status of

KENNEDY : Women.

INTERVIEWER: What have you done with them?

KENNEDY: We made the Commission a Department of the City. At first people just went on there who were appointed by the Mayor and we acted, but without any official title, just under his administration and his direction. But then we became a part of the city who had to be approved by the Council. Now they have funding, they have staff, and they have a project called the Women's Project. It's working on the appointments of women. They help women get employment; they help women on the job having problems in their non-traditional roles. Under the Gary Commission on the Status of Women, it could help our Women's Caucus and they have pledged to help us. That's one of their purposes, to help women in employment.

INTERVIEWER: Was your role as a Hatcher supporter in any way involved in this? I mean did you feel that as a result of getting Hatcher elected this was possible? Or might this have happened independently?

KENNEDY: Oh no, I don't think so.

INTERVIEWER: You think this was all of one piece.

KENNEDY: I think it was all because Hatcher was committed to doing something for women in the city and he just carried through. Now it's one of the departments.

INTERVIEWER: Would you say it's an effective one?

KENNEDY: Yes, and I don't know the number of staff they have now but they get very powerful funding, revenue sharing and other grants and what-have-you. And they carry on projects. They had one of the ladies at the meeting Sunday to talk about the commission.

INTERVIEWER: So you can work together, maybe?

KENNEDY : Yes, so we can work together.

INTERVIEWER: So really your women's groups are more the local ones that people have developed here rather than the national organizations.

KENNEDY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: They're grass roots kind of organizations.

KENNEDY: Right. I think that we're going to be very successful right

KENNEDY : here. Whether or not we'll be able to make some change at the International level I don't know, but Jim Balanoff said that he would really bring it to their attention on the International Board. We're hoping he has some success. We'll be behind him 100%, whatever's necessary, the kind of pressure to use. I don't know how they're going to respond. I'm not optimistic at all.

INTERVIEWER: Are there any other things that you've been involved in? Things that you think are important that you'd like to talk about?

KENNEDY: Oh, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Are you still active in church? Are you active in NAACP or any of those groups?

KENNEDY': I'm a lifetime member of the NAACP and I'm active in the Fight for Freedom dinner that they give every year here. I've been very active the last four or five years in that. And I'm active in the Ovington Awards dinner.

INTERVIEWER: You were a recipient of an Ovington Award, weren't you?

KENNEDY: I was a recipient of the labor award.

INTERVIEWER: Was that last year or the year before?

KENNEDY: The year before. I involve myself in things that I think are really going to do something or are doing something for people. The NAACP moves slow but it moves. I think it has been the backbone of some of the major changes in the country. Not to say anything about an organization that came out of a need and filled that need and they no longer exist. I still think that they were very instrumental, too. The NAACP with its very slow way of doing things, it finally does the things that is needed and it remains. The others, some of the organizations that come about in the '60's, you know, I think they were dynamite and they really affected change and they're no longer with us. It kind of upsets me when I hear people in the NAACP put the NAACP in this light. "Look at H. Rap Brown and, "Look at this, and look at that." They came and where are they now?" But those organizations really done something in their time. And I think you can't put down those who helped make change. A lot of the things that they pressured and caused people to move for, the NAACP got credit for it. But sometimes it takes some of those groups that seem as if they didn't have the patience to wait to really set the fire to the thing.

INTERVIEWER: Two groups play different roles, but both are necessary.

KENNEDY:

Both are necessary. And I really feel kind of upset when I hear people say that those are radical rabble-rousers. And they don't know really some of the things that moved things in the '60's. They really just don't realize that those people moved very fast. They're gone now but they were really a burning movement at that time and you just don't say, look at them now. We ought to say we're grateful to them for they came in a time of need and they satisfied that need and they're no more.

INTERVIEWER:

Some of them were shattered by the pressures that they were fighting against.

KENNEDY:

That's right. They just couldn't stay around too long. I'm grateful that they were here because I think they moved things. Some people think of the NAACP as very old. People involved in it, they don't think fast. They don't think like some of the younger people think. Some young people thin-k too fast, I agree, but some of them don't have the fear and the slowness. But the NAACP, I work with it and I'm sure that it'll be around for another hundred years. Somebody will need it.

INTERVIEWER:

You don't see the need disappearing that soon?

KENNEDY:

No, they're going to need it.

INTERVIEWER:

Do you think those women's organizations are still going to be needed a hundred years from now, too?

KENNEDY:

I really don't think it's going to take us that long. I really think that we're going to accomplish what we set out for. Nobody ever gets everything they want but we're going to reach that kind of height that we can live with. Maybe whatever change is needed we can gradually change it. I think that like the Civil Rights Movement--look at all the things that was done in the '60's. They were done, they needed to be done, and they were done while it was the thing then, because sometimes you can drag things on too long and they dilute themselves. Some things you must move right now and move it to change and not drag it out over the years.

INTERVIEWER:

So you think the Women's Movement is going to move faster?

KENNEDY:

I think it's going to move faster and I think women can really move things. The hardest thing is getting women together, you know, really getting them together. There are those that don't want change but I think when women really get involved they can really change things. They don't just give up. The big job is getting them involved. I know I've found that to be the situation.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think most of them are involved now or do you think most of them are still not?

KENNEDY: No, I think most of them are still not involved.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little about your daughters now. What are they all doing?

KENNEDY: I have two daughters that work for Bethlehem Steel. One is in management and one works in the plant, and I'll tell you a story about that. You hear them talk about the Bethlehem situation and how they do women. This one daughter, my third daughter, Diane, she works for Bethlehem in production. She started working at Bethlehem, she had worked there about 29 days, and the things that they do to women.... One thing that really turned me on to the women's caucus is what happened to my own daughter. They let you work so many days and just before you get in the union, they dismiss you. They have a way of dismissing them very cute. They write you up and have you sign it as if you dismissed yourself. So my daughter within a month was very involved in the union and when they presented her with that paper it was 28 or 29 that they gave slips like that to. She looked at it and says, "I'm not going to sign that." She called me up from work and said, "Mama, are you going to be home? Stay right there, And I thought, oh my God, what's wrong, you know. She comes and she shows me this paper where they wrote her up that she couldn't do this job and she couldn't do that job and blah blah blah. It said she agreed that she couldn't do these jobs and when the company finds a job she can do that they'll rehire her back. And she says, "There's nothing wrong. I can do the job, I'm doing the job." So she and I, we worked out a little strategy. I said, "Look, you can't really hardly go to the union because you're not in the union yet. And the first thing the union is going to say is, "Well, there's nothing much we can do because you're not in the union." I say, "You go in and you holler loud and you tell the union, I know there's not much you can do but you going to listen, alright? You're my witness, you know.'" Show them the paper and tell them where you're going when you leave there, that I am going straight from here to the government. And at that time Bethlehem had had a few cases that they were trying to settle. The consent decree was up, you know, trying to settle it. And here she talked like going to the government, She went and she called the Chairman of the Civil Rights Committee, she called some more union people to just listen, and she told them she wasn't going to sign that paper. At that time I had been in the union 15 years. She said, "My mama been belonging to this union 15 years and very involved and I know that I shouldn't sign this paper. I'm not going to sign that paper. I'm leaving here and if you fire me, you going to fire me. I'm not going to sign to fire myself. I'm leaving

KENNEDY: and going straight to the government." The union people were just before Paul administration got in, that was the other administration. And they said well, go talk to--they sent her to talk to somebody. The man said, "I tell you what, we're probably going to regret this but we'll send you somewhere else." Another department. She said, "No you're not. I'm going to stay right on that job or you're still going to fire me." So she stayed right on that job. You see that's what I meant. Women is courageous enough to take them on!

INTERVIEWER: And they back down.

KENNEDY: They really back down. They put her back on that same job. And did she catch hell for a while! But she know she had to walk the chalk line. They were really on her case, you know. As a matter of fact they did--well, she got in the union.. They gave her a couple of days off for something. It was nothing, you know. But then she was all they had sometime because she knew that she had to be at work every day on time, work all the overtime and everything. She has made as high as \$23,000 at Bethlehem Steel. It's because she worked overtime. And do you know that she have really--they wouldn't dare bother her now, She's one of the best workers they got, but all she went through just to keep that job! And to think that 28 others was dismissed! It's really a situation that somebody need to look into. And that was one thing that really turned me on to the Women's Caucus 'cause I knew her experience with Bethlehem Steel. And just because she threatened them, just because she said I'm leaving here and going to the government. I said sometime maybe it's good to have some big mouths around. "Now I am going. My mother been in this union 15 years and she's taking me to the government because I'm not going to take this. I can do that job and you're not going to write me up and I fire myself." Now she's been there about four years.

INTERVIEWER: And she's well situated?

KENNEDY: Well situated. They send her to school now. She's not really working, she's going to school. She's in the apprentice program.

INTERVIEWER: Very good. Is she active in the union?

KENNEDY: I can't get her too active in the union. She will support them. If there's something coming up she'll go out to the meetings.

INTERVIEWER: Maybe later.

KENNEDY: And even after that, the only way for her to get a promotion, she had to call the Civil Rights Department. I didn't want to tell Jonathan Comer that she was my daughter. She was saying, "Mama

KENNEDY:

this man comes down from Pittsburgh that sits in on this meeting, I've seen him somewhere." "What did he look like?" "He's a black fellow and he got white hair." And I say, "Is his name Jonathan Comer?" She say, "Yeah, that's his name." Then after it was all over with and she got that situation straight, one foreman got fired or something. I forget what it was. Something about promotion and favoritism and everything. She was able to bring it right out on the table. So one day I saw Jonathan at the union conference, I said to him, "Jonathan, you remember out at Bethlehem, the situation out there that you were out?" And he said, "Yes, I remember it, yeah, yeah, got that situation taken care of, you know." And I said, "Well, you know that person that was involved named Diane Smith?" He said, "Yeah," and I say, "That's my daughter." "Doggone it, I ought to have known that was your daughter! She sat there, you didn't have to do nothing. Everything they said she had an answer for. When I got through with that case I told her she ought to get involved with the union, get on the Civil Rights Committee. Matter of fact I asked the Civil Rights Committee didn't they have a place for her." They wanted to put her on the Civil Rights Committee, too, but she just said that everything is farther away from home. And she had one boy, you know, she didn't have time to go back that way, come to Gary and go back to Burns Harbor to union meetings. She wanted to be involved.' But in the campaign she was involved; she carried all the leaflets into her department. She was in one of the departments that Sadlowski and Balanoff, it wasn't his people. It was foreign territory. Boy, she had so many arguments with them. And they would say, "Now Diane, I'm going to show you," and they tried to show where Sadlowski and Balanoff were really radicals, you know, and they would bring her all this mess, this slander they were putting out before we even saw it. Somebody was getting it out there. And she argued a point with them. And my sister that passed was very instrumental at Blaw Knox, because she worked at Blaw Knox. She'd wear her stickers and they would get after her to support the incumbent. Then they'd say, "You're supporting that Polak!" And she'd say, "Yeah, I'm supporting all the Polaks," and she'd start calling all the Polish names she knew. One day she looked up and saw her foreman. His name was on his cap and she called his name. She was about to go to a safety meeting and her and a fellow got into it over the election. He slammed a door in her face. "And you have nerve enough to slam this raggedy door in my face and I'm already on my way to a safety meeting!" You know, I can't get them involved to the extent that I am involved but whenever there's an election they will. My brother never got too involved. He worked at Inland but he'd get his local together whenever there was an election. I'd tell him, "Balanoff really needs your help. You have to do so and so." And he'd say, "Oh them goddam union folks.

KENNEDY: None of them worth nothing. And anyway, you run around acting like a fool. What they going to ever do for you? Well, I'll go out anyway." And then he'd do it. "Well, I voted for them. Now I'm just going to see what they do." But they will do at a time when they're needed.

INTERVIEWER: But they're not active in between. Well, that's the way most people are. What do your other daughters do? You have two working in the steel mills.

KENNEDY: The other one works in the office. She works for one of the superintendents. She's kind of like an executive secretary, you know, that's her field. She works at Bethlehem. Then I have one who *is* a R.N. and she works at St. Catherine's Hospital. Then my youngest daughter, she's not working now. She has a young baby. She's still with me because they're still trying to find an apartment.

INTERVIEWER: So you're a grandma, too?

KENNEDY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Two of your daughters?

KENNEDY: They all have children except my oldest daughter. The one daughter, the one that's a nurse, she has three. And then the others have one, so I have five grandchildren.

INTERVIEWER: How do you feel about their lives? Do you feel they got off to a better start or an easier start than you did when you were their age or just about the *same*?

KENNEDY: Oh yes, because there was never a question of whether they would go to school. There's so many things. My daughter that's a registered nurse, she got married and then went to school. She got married early. She had money 'cause they got some money from their dad. And then every kind of grant they wanted they applied for. They qualified for some. Their daddy had been a veteran. So. they had no worries. Those that wanted to go to school could really go. If I had had their start I think of where I would be today. I don't think that they're wasting opportunities but I would have made more of the opportunities than they. That one daughter, the one I said worked in production at Bethlehem, she just didn't care to go. She could have but she just didn't care to go. So she went to work and now she's going to modeling school. My youngest daughter, she went for a while. I don't know if she'll ever go back and finish or not, but she went for a while. Institutions of learning are for some people, she said, and some they're not. She felt that they was not for her.

INTERVIEWER: But they all lead productive lives and they're all doing well.

KENNEDY: Yes, my daughters, they do very well. My oldest daughter who works in management at Bethlehem, she and her husband, they live very well. He works at U.S. Steel and he's an apprentice. They live a very good life. And my daughter that's a R.N., her husband is a writer for the Post Tribune and they live very well. And the daughter that works in production at Bethlehem, she was married but then she got a divorce. But she had worked continuously all that time and like I said she made \$23,000 because she's ambitious. She worked the holidays and she worked a lot of overtime, you know. She makes a very good living because she has support for her one boy. So that gives her a pretty good income. My youngest daughter, she's the baby and always was kind of spoiled and we can't seem to get her off. Her husband was working at Standard Oil and he got dismissed. He was in an apprentice program and they dismissed him because he failed a test or something. He filed a grievance with his union and they've been to arbitration. I don't know when he'll get the answer back from arbitration. He's been off over a year.

INTERVIEWER: So they've been living with you.

KENNEDY: They've been living with me. He should be getting his award. I think he's going to win the case because if they weren't satisfied with his grades they were supposed to send him back to the job he was on before he went in.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, and they just cancelled him out?

KENNEDY: They just sort of like fired him. So he filed a grievance with the union and it's gone to arbitration and they've been waiting for an answer.

INTERVIEWER: But things in general are going well with your whole family.

KENNEDY: Yes. To think that I really kind of brought them up myself I kind of feel good that it all turned out well. Because sometimes I really thought that, oh my God, will I ever see the end. Now I don't have no regrets. I think they had a good life and I tried to substitute for their not having a father. They had so many uncles and everything around them that they haven't really missed anything, and they didn't have that kind of feel for their father anyway. He kind of turned them off. I never noticed anything different because they didn't have a father around.

INTERVIEWER: Well, it's not that unusual anymore. If you were to think that a number of young women are liable to read your interview for guidance, what last bit of advice would you give to young women in

INTERVIEWER: today's world?

KENNEDY: In what way, in what relation?

INTERVIEWER: In how they should handle their lives in this kind of transition period we're in where women's status is a little confused and it's obviously changing. Women are still having problems. What kind of advice?

KENNEDY: I would just advise them to really be involved. A person must be concerned and then be involved. I just feel that you got to contribute something to living and I don't feel that people should just live and not contribute. I just feel that you should be involved. If things need to be changed you ought to be a part of that change or try to aid in it. I think one should really live out his potential. There's too many people who don't care. Things suffer because people are not involved. That silent majority who knows things are wrong but they remain silent; I could never do that. I don't know what it is or where it started from. Maybe it started from a long time ago when I saw so many things that ought not to be and I saw people who ought to be doing things about them and not doing it. I used to tell my mother, "When I get grown I'm going to do this." And she said to me, "When you get grown things'll seem different. You just think you can do all this." I told her how I could make money go farther and do more and everything. And I don't think that I was dreaming because I have lived and I have lived pretty good and I've made it off of what I had. And you've really got to know how to do things with money and really to make things better. Some people make a hundred thousand dollars a year and wind up with nothing. I just think that managing your life, and not even in a financial way, is a reflection on you. The way a person manages his life, his or her affairs, life style, his morals and all. It makes the person. That's why some people say you could find better things to do, you could be doing this, you could be doing that. "Well, you're not the ugliest lady in the world. Why do you have to live that kind of life out there fighting and struggling and everything? You ought to be doing something for yourself." It's what you can deal with in your mind and the way you see things. That's what I would advise people to do just contribute. Get involved! Always be complaining. I complain but I complain because I want to do something about it. You find a lot of people that just complain, that's all they do. They're the World's greatest critics but they don't have a solution. They don't even have an alternative to what they're criticizing. I just feel people should put their best foot forward and do whatever is right and whatever is necessary. That's life.

INTERVIEWER: Good advice. Ok, thank you.

OLA KENNEDY INTERVIEW INDEX

A. Philip Randolph Institute, 31

Abel, I.W., 27, 30

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, AFL-CIO, 31

Bakke case, 31

Balanoff, Jim, 22-23, 39-43

Bethlehem Steel, 41-43, 44-45

Black Community 2-5, 20

See Also: Race relations; NAACP

Brown, Ernest, 19

Brown, H. "Rap", 69

Child care, 7, 11-12, 16-17

Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, 30-32

Coalition of Labor Union, 33-34

Comer, Jonathan, 27, 42-43

Congress of Industrial Organizations, CIO, 18

Democratic Party, 30

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, EEOC, 28

Family background

early work experience, 7-9 ,

education, 4-7, 11

father, 1-3, 10, 12-13

grandparents, 9-10, 12-13

mother, 1-4, 6, 10-13, 17

siblings, 1, 10, 12-13, 15

Hammond Valve, 13, 17, 19, 21, 23-24

Hatcher, Richard, 37

Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act, 30

Johnson, Gloria, 34

Lynch, 29, 35

OLA KENNEDY CONTINUED

Lucy, Bill, 30

McBride, Lloyd, 35

McDonald, David, 27

McGovern, George, 30

Madar, Olga, 34

Marriage

Kennedy and, 6-7, 11-17, 19

Meany, George, 30-31, 34

Mooty, Rayfield, 26-27, 29

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP, 8, 28-29, 39-40

Ovington Award, 39

Periodicals

Post Tribune, 45

Race relations, 8-11, 19, 25-35, 40

Religion, 19-21, 39

Sadlowski, Ed, 35, 43

Standard Oil, 3, 45

Thornton, Les, 21-22

Title VII, 24-34

Unions

Laundry Workers, 18-19

American Federation of Teachers, 30

Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, 30

United Auto Workers, 30

U.S. Steel, 3, 32

United Steelworkers of America

Ad-hoc Committee, 26-29

Black Caucus, 28

general, 29, 36, 41-44

District Kennedy's 31, Local, 34-36 21-24, 32-34

District, 29, 36-37