

FV: Tell me how you got into CSEA and your progression.

RW: Well, my name is Rita Wallace. I was a registered nurse and I decided to come to work for the County of Nassau. My children were raised and I was bored, really, being home all day long so I decided return to work. I went to work at A. Holly Patterson Home in Uniondale and rose from the rank of RN staff to Head Nurse and from Head Nurse to Supervisor. However, in this interim period, I became aware as a staff nurse that the salaries that were being paid by the county were barely aligned, they were really misaligned with what was being received in the private sector outside of the county. And so, I appealed to one of the board members, the shop stewards, at Patterson Home to let me attend the Nassau County board meeting in his place. And I very promptly laid out my message to the then-president of Nassau local, Irving Flannenbaum, that if he didn't do something immediately about the nursing salaries and conditions that I myself would take further action about unionization. That if I were paying dues to this union called CSEA that I expected this union to represent me fairly. Which point in time, Irving told me that he would like to see me in his office the following day. And I went over and he said, "Exactly what did you mean when you said you were planning on having a different union?" And I said, "That's not what I said. I said that I wanted a union that represented me. And that meant that you had better get up and do your thing for nursing." And he said, "Well, we've never had nurses that volunteered to serve on the board." And I said, "Well, I'm here and I will serve." And I started to serve as a member of the board of directors of Nassau local representing healthcare issues. I was not put on to represent nursing per se but rather the broader spectrum of healthcare issues. I remained on that board for approximately about three or four years and then when the next elections came up I ran for office and was elected. I then really began to consider myself as a union activist. And I learned so much from Irving Flannenbaum, as did most of the people in Nassau. He really was the great old man of unionism here. He knew how to achieve easily what we considered a big hill to climb. He knew that to go politically and solve the problem was sometimes far easier than to try to fight it at the base level. He taught us to be patient and that was a big job because, I guess, all of us were much younger and all of us had ideals that said, "Do it now." We learned that it takes time to achieve what you want and to achieve it in its totality rather than in small segments that usually hurt you. Irving then introduced us to the concept of various regions. And he became regional president. I can say that there are very few people today working in Nassau local that do not remember

Irving as a great leader. I also know that in tutoring people, he was a hard taskmaster. If he gave you a job to accomplish, and I began accomplishing jobs, or tasks as he put it, your task was to get it written on paper first, show it to him. Then he would tear it apart, show you all the flaws and send you back out again to devise another approach. It was like being a schoolchild and having a teacher. A teacher who taught me well and prepared me for a role that I never intended to aspire to.

FV: Now what was your first elected position with the union.

RW: Third vice president.

FV: Of the region?

RW: Of the local.

FV: The local. And how did you progress from there?

RW: Then I went to second vice president. Then to executive vice president. And then because of the de-certification I became president. My goal was never to achieve presidency. I was far more comfortable in being the executive vice president, moving paper, doing things, running an office. But when push came to shove I had to accept. There was nothing in my union orientation that would allow me to walk away from a challenge. And so, the first de-certification in Nassau County brought in our international union, AFSCME, and with their arrival all of the members of the local suddenly began to realize and state that they were glad that they saw in person the union that part of their dues was going to. And that the results that they were having, because the entire D-13 hit every and all counter-corners in the county, they practically met every member. During this period of time, Danny Donohue had become regional president and then moved up to statewide president. How did Danny get to be region president? Irving Flannenbaum died.

FV: What year was that?

RW: I can't tell you right now.

FV: Just approximately, I'm just looking for...

RW: In the 80's.

FV: That's close enough.

RW: He had been regional president. Danny was executive vice president, so Danny moved up to regional president and then was elected shortly after that as president of statewide CSEA. Now, Danny was in the position then to basically know the local, know the area, know the person who attempted the de-certification and know the person who had assumed the presidency. Danny also knew that I would be screaming mad and howling on the telephone if he didn't give me everything I felt I needed and wanted. I think Danny and I have always had the sort of a relationship where he would say, "What's your problem. What do you need? Let me see what I can do about it." And when this de-cert occurred I said to him, "I've never handled the de-cert. I've never been involved in one. I've never been president. If you expect me to remain in this position, then you're going to have to send me the people that know how to handle and deal with such a situation. He sent me CSEA people: Mullins, Ron King came in, and we survived it. We won well.

FV: All right now. Tell me all the players in this battle, okay? You're up against who?

RW: This is going to be difficult for you to put into perspective. There was a Jerry Donohue, who was the Nassau local A30 president, who attempted the de-certification with other officers in the local. And there was a Danny Donahue who was statewide president.

FV: Mm-hmm.

RW: Now, you can imagine in a de-cert how you could misspell the names. One was Donohue and the other one is Donahue. And how the literature was flying.

FV: So, was there a faction in CSEA that split? One Donohue to another? Or what? What happened?

RW: I would say that there was a percentage of the people who felt there was a need for change just for the idea of change. Not for valid reasons. They had been egged on by the correction officer, Donohue, who was also the president of Nassau local and who felt that he would rather see all the dues money go to him for his use as opposed for it going to Albany or to Washington for anybody else's use. There was less concern for the services that were being rendered by paying CSEA dues. They didn't even have an idea of how they would really structure what they were hoping was a new unit, a new local. The correction officers were in favor of going with Jerry Donohue and the correction

officers also were stationed over at Nassau University Medical Center to take care of some of the prison inmates. So they began indoctrinating some of the workers at Nassau University Medical Center. There were other dissidents. Some in DPW. But that was the main grouping of people.

FV: Okay, good. Good. Now, you said Mullins and King, Danny Donahue sent them in to help.

RW: He sent Mullins in in the first de-certification.

FV: Okay. And what did he do?

RW: Well, I think he began working structurally with AFSCME in terms of: these are the units, this is where they're located, this is the unit presidents, this is where you basically need to go to talk to people. And that was the first chore. What nobody was really aware of was this local covers all of Nassau. So you ran from the borders of the city all the way out to the borders of Suffolk. You ran from the Atlantic Ocean northward to the Sound area. And there were people to be seen in some instances on some of the large estates that the county owned and used as a preserve or an exhibit area. There might be as many as ten people there to take care of the area and yet they might be out on the outermost limits close to Suffolk. The AFSCME people went out with the list of names and came back, honestly telling us their feelings, what we had to do and how best they thought we could accomplish it.. And we listened. We didn't like all that we heard. We heard that there had to be a greater presence felt and that there had to be publications from a local that contained local news that had to go out to the membership. They weren't interested in what was going on up in Schenectady or in Rochester. They wanted to hear their local news. And although they had received bulletins and flyers, that really was not enough. They wanted to know what was going on throughout the entire county.

FV: Okay. So that was Mullins telling you what you needed and...

RW: It was Mullins telling the group what he felt, he knew intimately the structure of CSEA. AFSCME does not have...they have locals, but they don't have units. Units that have their own autonomy. And these were things that he felt that the de-cert team had to know before they stepped on toes. And who the people were to meet within the areas who they had problems with, who they didn't have problems with. So, he gave them that

information before they went out. Now, all of the time this de-cert team is doing their work you have to understand that I am trying to run a local with people coming and going in and out, each one with different questions about different locales and each one needing questions answered and I am finding that there are not enough hours in the day. They were in at 6:00 a.m. and I was always in at 6:00 a.m. I've done that because it was part of the nursing framework to be in and up and ready at that time. But they stayed, and so I stayed, until 7 or 8:00 in the evening. And I think that we all reached the point where we were getting exhausted. But at the same time there was a very solid bond created between the officers of the local who were seeing firsthand how AFSCME and CSEA worked together. And who were relaying it to the members who were eating it up by this time and as I would go out to the county exec building, I have to describe this to you because we were stationed in the old court building on Old Country Road. Approximately two blocks down is the county executive building. And so on a regular basis I would be going over there for a variety of reasons. But people were very accustomed to seeing me in a scooter, shooting down Old Country Road with John Aloesio or with Jim Mattei and we would go over to the county exec building. On my way over to that building I would be stopped as frequently as 10 times in a two block radius and told that Joe was upstairs in the assessor's department and he was doing a good job. They were now defending the AFSCME and the CSEA workers because they were afraid that I was coming out to check on them, because on one occasion, very foolishly I reeled into the county clerk's office and the de-cert team were there and I said, "You're not working fast enough." That was my greeting to them. And my own membership there thought that I was correcting them. The AFSCME team knew I wasn't but...

FV: Okay. So, you were definitely in favor of AFSCME joining, or you being part of AFSCME, or however you want to look at it?

RW: Very definitely.

FV: Yes. Why is that? What was what?

RW: I think that I never felt that CSEA was not doing a good job in representing me. But I felt that AFSCME saw a broader picture to representing unionists in many more ways. If I called for some data I would have it faxed to me in hand. If I called for, but you have to understand when I say I would have it faxed to me in hand that I would have to go through Danny as the statewide president to get his permission to get the

information and he might say to me, "Rita, call this number, speak to this person and they'll give you the information." So that the right hand knew what the left hand was doing. They had a really good political action structure in position. They were able to keep tabs on the votes of all the legislators throughout the country on any of the issues that affected labor. They had a lot more educational material than we basically had at that time. And they were willing to work with us. Meeting McEntee at our first convention was a real experience. I think that all of the delegates that went felt that they saw larger numbers than we ourselves were. We prided ourselves on being the largest public sector union in New York State. And now, while we still are the largest public sector union in AFSCME, we were miniscule there as compared to all of their locals that they represented. And yet, we found a commonality of interests that went right across the country. We were attempting to perfect a process here that they had already worked on and solved in Wyoming. And you know what they say about the wheel? Don't re-invent the wheel? We learned there that we could gain many insights into solving our own problems. And we found that Danny was as receptive as Irving was to being in AFSCME.

FV: Now, lets go back to that beginning in getting with AFSCME. Was it Irving that saw that it had to be done?

RW: Oh yeah.

FV: Why? What led up to that?

RW: When I tell you that Irving was the grand old man of labor, he had chronological age but in his mind he saw things that only somebody in this day and age with new technology would think of. He saw the needs for the union and its expansion. He saw the areas where we had deficits. He saw the areas where we had greater needs. And he acted on it. I don't think he ever stopped thinking about the union and how we could better it. and he died at a board of directors meeting where we called 911 to come and until they came I was the one that gave him artificial respiration. Now I'll take a drink. Okay?

FV: Now we're back on. All right. We're talking about the need for AFSCME back then and what led up to that.

RW: I think the need for political action at the federal level became a necessity and we, even with all the dues increases, would not be able to muster sufficient funds or bodies to basically make a big indent in what we needed done. If you were

to deal with any of the big pieces of labor legislation, that could pass through the House or the Senate, you couldn't rely just on your local congressman or senators to carry the piece of legislation. You had to have more than one state or one region doing this. I think he saw that. And he felt that the merger would be good. The biggest feelings were that CSEA would be eaten up by AFSCME. But he felt that enough safety checks could be put into the agreement to ensure that that would not happen. I think it was important in selling AFSCME that CSEA retained its own identity. Because, there was a greater need for service that AFSCME could provide and yet there wasn't an outcry of rage to get rid of CSEA. So they didn't want CSEA just to become nothing.

FV: Well, CSEA's history is interesting, I think, because it, and you probably know how it happened and why, it turned from an association into really a union. I mean, that's maybe a long time ago but what's your take on that? What do you know about that early history in CSEA?

RW: I don't. I don't know that much about it.

FV: I mean, do you know some of the names? Some of the...

RW: No. Not really.

FV: So, where do you start in the history of CSEA?

RW: I start in 1968.

FV: Okay. Well, that's pretty early, considering.

RW: That's when Irving got his first threat. Nobody had ever threatened him at a board meeting. And I really didn't consider it a threat. I just felt, you have to do something, that's it.

FV: Right. So, you confronted him first.

RW: Oh, I was determined that I was not going to continue working in the county when the salaries were about \$10,000 below what was being paid outside, when there was no shift differential that it was based on hospital workers' hours—not everybody else's. But there were no yearly health exams. A whole slew of...no uniform allowances, no hazard pay when you're working with some of the really psychotic patients. There were a whole variety of issues.

FV: So you fought for all that and you got all that?

RW: Got it. Absolutely.

FV: How did you do that?

RW: I asked Danny to amass some of the state contracts for me out of the mental hygiene institutions. And then I went hospital by hospital to their personnel department and sent nurses in to apply for positions and ask for what they received and what their benefits were and then walk out and not sign up. Just go in as an interviewee. So that we covered the hospitals in New York City and the hospitals on the Island. And we decided that the hospital that most closely represented the services that we were providing were New York Hospital with their burn unit, New York University Medical Center, Mount Sinai and then we came out here and we went to Northshore and we went to Stonybrook but Stonybrook was really poor, so we didn't use it. And we had all these facts and figures and then Irving said, "Now, Rita, if you really want to make a change, I'm going to tell you how you're going to have to do it. You're going to have to meet with George Caso accidentally in the supermarket one day.

FV: And he's who?

RW: He was the then county executor. And he said, "Let him know that you live in Merrick, that you basically are a nurse and is he aware and then pull out of your pocketbook all of the stuff that you have." And that's what I did. So he had that to start out with and then Irving went in and told him that the nurses in the county were giving him a hard time. And in the next contract, we got it.

FV: Wow. That's great.

RW: But that's what I meant when I said that Irving knew how to go and solve a problem. It's one thing to write it on paper. It's another thing to know all the different nuances and how it's best to proceed and what will work with the individual that you have to deal with.

FV: That's priceless information. That's priceless knowledge. That's wonderful. Now, how many times did you use that kind of tactic?

RW: From there on in.

FV: What other things do we fight for?

RW: Then you have to realize that I became the local president after we won the de-cert. And then I was involved with contract negotiations for three additional contracts and they were excellent contracts because we learned a lot. I learned that you never go and ask for everything unless you have every bit of documentation you need. And I also learned that you don't need documentation at all. You just need to know somebody who has a very great need in that area and have them speak to the individual who's negotiating and have them put it on the table and then you ask for it and it's yours.

FV: You mean like in a hearing? That kind of thing?

RW: At the negotiating table we put demands on. The county also puts demands on. Now, say I have a friend who is an ambulance medical technician and he has a special ax to grind with the county, like there's only one AMT on a vehicle and they have to lift these heavy people into the ambulance. Now, that's legitimate. It may not be something that the county might not want to give us, CSEA, setting a precedent. But the county might say yes if they bring it up, "That'll be okay, I'll give it to you." And it happens.

FV: Make it a personal thing, right?

RW: Absolutely.

FV: I think that's where it is. I mean, you're representing people, not an organization, yeah.

RW: We realized during the de-cert that every person that was out there that was paying dues expected full representation on an ongoing basis. And that each person and each one of the different agencies had different needs and that all of these needs had to be addressed. And that some of these needs could be addressed in negotiations and that others of the needs have to be addressed after negotiations in memos of agreement. But that, yes, we are people. The people organization of CSEA collects their money to represent us in the political view.

FV: Sounds like you get value for value received.

RW: Oh yeah.

FV: Yeah. So what would you say the basic philosophy of CSEA is? It's probably the same as yours, but what is it?

RW: I think the basic philosophy is representing the people whose dues you collect and who you are there to represent. To make their lives better, far better, than when they started out.

FV: And you know, before we were rolling the tape you started to tell me when we were sitting over there about how people when they were young didn't think the health benefits were that important. So let's talk about that for a little bit then.

RW: Well, I think when you're dealing with people you have to remember that you have a diverse work population and that the younger people have entirely different needs. They want money in-hand. They want spendable money and they're not interested in benefits. They don't realize until their children are 10 years of age and hit with an orthodontia bill that having dental insurance is very important. They don't value health insurance at all because their ideation is eternal youth and "I'm never going to get sick." And optical insurance is...well, that can fall by the wayside. But as they stay in the workforce and as they go on their years of service they suddenly come to realize that they are vulnerable to illnesses and infirmities and suddenly what they didn't want at age 20, at age 50 becomes an absolute necessity because they've spent 30 years in the workforce doing hard tasks. There are a few of them that have not pulled their backs out or have carpal tunnel syndrome from working at a computer. And there are a multiplicity of illnesses they can contract. So that health insurance becomes very, very important. And it's not just health insurance. It's health insurance that is fully paid for and that does not have the co-insurance features and the deductibles. Now, while everybody is saying that we have to have the deductibles and the co-insurance in order to keep the health insurance costs within limits, the new cry is health insurance with no deductibles and no co-insurance. And for the seniors, the retirees of the union, health insurance is important. Extremely important. There are many things that Medicare does not pick up that the health insurance will. But many of the retirees would like the health insurance to stop using Medicare which is the primary insurer and building on that so that our secondary, the Empire Plan, doesn't pay what Medicare has paid and doesn't pay anything after it. So, once again, individual needs. And they change over the years.

FV: Sounds like you're still battling.

RW: Oh yeah. I serve on the Nassau University Medical Center Board of Directors.

FV: You were appointed by...?

RW: Governor Pataki. And with Tom Gulotta's assent. And I feel that my presence is needed there because the way things are today, everybody views service at a cost and that cost issue becomes the driving force in any health insurance carrier or provider.

FV: Sounds like you're still using everything you learned as a CSEA officer.

RW: True.

FV: Yup. That's great. So, CSEA in people will probably keep going. Right? I mean, what's the future of CSEA?

RW: Oh, I think it has a great future. I think that you're always going to have public service and a need for it. I think that, now I have been educating the people in our community here when the snow flies, and it didn't occur this winter, that they're warm and cozy in their houses while our guys are out on the snowplows in the middle of the night, early morning and sometimes straight through for sixteen or more hours, that they provide a service. And the people in the sewer treatment plants. And I sell Nassau University Medical Center as the place to go if you're ever in an automobile accident. It is a trauma I center and their emergency room is by far the best of any in the area. And they found out.

FV: Mm-hmm. Yeah, they did. They did. Well, you know, we didn't talk too much about...well, you talked a little bit about some of the personalities. Are there any other people you can remember that we haven't talked about that you would like to...

RW: Every one of the offices of statewide CSEA.

FV: Okay, let's take them one by one.

RW: Let's start with Danny Donohue.

FV: Okay.

RW: He started out here in Pilgrim State, in the hospital, and he went from there to being an officer of the unit...

FV: You're rubbing the mic.

RW: Oh. Then he went to being regional president. And then he went to being statewide CSEA president. In all that time, Danny Donohue has not really changed. Not personality-wise. He is still the same person that is always approachable with a problem. And he solves problems. I feel sorry for Irene, his wife, having to put up with him and the ungodly days he's, few days he's home. But she's a very understanding human being and she's a nurse. Um, let's go to Mary. I knew Mary through the board of directors.

FV: Mary Sullivan?

RW: Yes. I'm sorry, I never even gave her last name.

FV: That's right.

RW: And we had long chats up there. And she went up the career ladder too. I did not know her as the unit president because she represented, I believe it was Herkimer County up in the northlands, as I call it. I will say that during the de-cert and in all other phases of my presidency as the local president, she was always effective in dealing with and handling problems that I gave her or giving me, sharing with me information as to an easier way to do things. Now, who else do we have up there? Terry Melvin, he escapes me...no the other name. Well, we'll go to Terry for a time. Constitution and bylaws committee served with him. Had a lovely time learning how to be a lawyer and all the ins and outs of various problems with the constitution and changes within it.

FV: You mean the CSEA constitution?

RW: That's right.

FV: Yeah, that's right. I thought so.

RW: But, spent many hours up in the headquarters with the constitution and bylaws committee. Go off camera for a minute.

FV: We're back on. Okay. Maureen Malone.

skewed so that there are predominantly male and predominantly female jobs. The female jobs were undervalued. And in the areas where the male and the female were doing the same job, the males received promotions. The females did not. Both being equally qualified. The disparity was great, very great. And we had asked for AFSCME's assistance. This was prior to the decertification, to help us take the statistics that we had garnered in our own minds and to try to do a real scientific evaluation and they sent us Marilyn DuPuy from the women's rights area and an attorney who worked, two attorneys, who worked with Joel Klein. Jean Scott was one.

FV: Newman. Win Newman. Was Win Newman the other?

RW: No. Win Newman had started the project and then it was dropped and Joel Klein took it over. But the other attorney, oh and I can't think of his name right now. Red-haired, very slender, perhaps I'll think of it as we go along, became involved. Marilyn DuPuy, however, was the person who worked with Jean Scott, the attorney from Joel Klein's office. Primarily in releasing the pay equity statistics folder and flier, which documented the basis for our lawsuit. And it showed clearly the disparity in wages right across the county. The county denied it. It could not become an issue in negotiations because it was a matter then of litigation. The women in the county finally felt that something was being done for them. But the men felt, and the county helped to encourage them to feel that way, that their salaries were going to be undervalued while the females' salaries were going to be overvalued. So that the team had to work on conquering this sort of gossip and untrue facts. So that while the women finally felt that something was going to come in the disparity in wages, the men were not happy. The lawsuit went into federal court. We lost some. A lot. And we gained some. But no one could say that we didn't do our best in order to win what may have been politically not feasible at that point in time.

FV: So, you know where to fight your battles, basically. That's the outcome of that.

RW: That's right.

FV: Good. No when was this? It was before de-cert but what general year...?

RW: '84 maybe.

Interview with Rita Wallace

FV: Yeah. OK. Early 80's.

RW: Yeah.

FV: Okay. Just wanted to put that in perspective. Good. Do you want to talk about the region one people now?

RW: Oh yes.

FV: Okay. Starting with Nick...

RW: Our relationship from a local worked with having Nick Lamorte as president. He's a good president. He gave me what I needed when I needed it. He was available. He came into the county. He was seen by the county workforce. He was known by name in the county. Tony Justino is his executive vice president and is the local president of Nassau local. He was my choice of candidate to replace me when I retired in '95. And I can truthfully and honestly say that Tony has lived up to my expectations. By profession he is an attorney but he has a heart of gold and he has a very fiery temper. So he's in a good position.

FV: Comes in handy.

RW: That's right.

FV: Good. Carol?

RW: Carol Guatiano is the first vice president and I worked with her on committees and also at both the local and the state level and I know her well as a regional officer. She was very, very competent in the acts and actions she undertook. And she was especially good at travel arrangements.

FV: Liz Piersall.

RW: Liz Piersall I know probably by name more than by interactions.

FV: Les Eason?

RW: Les Eason I know well. Les Eason is the president of A. Holly Patterson home unit. He succeeded Helen Dupre who was the president of the A. Holly Patterson unit and he was basically my pick for president of that unit. He's a young man with a lot of

aspirations. A very willing worker. And a person who truly represents workers.

FV: Kathy Pepitone.

RW: Kathy Pepitone, I do not know.

RW: _____ officers now. Former...

FV: Want to start with Wenzl?

RW: Ted Wenzl. Sure.

Unknown Speaker: We're rolling.

FV: Okay, tell me about Wenzl, yeah.

RW: Can't go through just the statewide offices and the region offices without mentioning the prior presidents, statewide presidents, that I have worked with. Ted Wenzl. I remember him primarily as being a college professor. Very tall, slender man. But I really never considered him (and maybe I was too new to the union to consider him) as being approachable.

FV: Did you...Let's stay with Wenzl for just a minute. I mean, you must have heard things about him that made you think he was not approachable.

RW: Remember my contacts with him were basically limited. Very limited. It would be at a delegate convention because I was new to CSEA then when he was president. So that, to me that was the image that he projected.

FV: I've heard some other people that...he sort of represents the association part of CSEA. And the union part happened...

RW: McGowan.

FV: With McGowan. So let's talk about McGowan.

RW: McGowan was an entirely different person. Far more approachable. Always had a cigar in his mouth. Would talk with the cigar in his mouth. Made a lot of sense in the things that he was saying and in his vision for CSEA and, I guess, in his feeling that there had to be a transition from the phase of association into union. And there was a battle that I have some memory of on his concept of becoming a union and people feeling

that they could no change the CSEA seal which said Civil Service Employees Association. So, while he was talking union, their concern was "don't change the seal." I think Bill began moving in the direction of a union and was effective in the era in which he was leading the union. I think Joe McDermott walked in different shoes and knew that if this union was to continue, a lot of changes had to be made. And his vision altered what we had and brought about more changes in order to keep current with the changes that were going on and the new technology around us. Joe listened but he also had a mindset of his own as to what he wanted and where he was going. He was an international vice president of AFSCME.

FV: Now how did we get from Wenzl to McGowan. Tell us what was this process.

RW: An election.

FV: Yeah. And who was against who? Who ran against whom? What's the...

RW: I couldn't tell you because at that point I was still too new to CSEA.

FV: All right. Then how about the McGowan to McDermott? What happened there.

RW: There was a lot of feeling that we had to move faster in order to keep up with the changes that were occurring in the outside world and you had an organization now that was being fed by younger people who were willing to accept change where formerly you had an older work force and change came very hard.

FV: All right. And how about from McDermott to Danny Donohue?

RW: There was an election. And there was a retirement. And Danny was perceived to be the person who could best represent the people. Joe was considered to be somewhat aloof at times. And Danny was considered to be more a person of the people.

FV: It's an interesting progression when you look at Wenzl, McGowan, McDermott to Donohue. It gets more and more to a man of the people, I think at each step.

RW: Well, let me tell you that Danny has never lost his ability to be a worker. He can put himself right in the position of a worker.

FV: Good. That's a nice...that's a nice progression. Now, you wanted to talk about the AFSCME nurse _____?

RW: Yes. One of our biggest victories, I think, in the healthcare field that AFSCME really helped to accomplish was the UNA (United Nurses Association). It gave nurses right across the spectrum the voice they needed to have their concerns heard and met. And the concerns that they were feeling were beginning to show in the workplace. Those concerns were by far not limited to the beginning of the erosion of the delivery of good healthcare and instead were governed by the almighty dollar cost containment that was placed on the delivery of service. The nurses began to realize that it wasn't just being felt in the public service areas that serviced the mental hygiene patients but it was being felt right across the board in the private as well as the public sector.

FV: Now, a lot of that started here? I mean this...

RW: Yes.

FV: How did you get involved with it?

RW: I went to the convention and we began hearing about the fact that AFSCME had set up a nursing group and that they were looking for people who would be involved and who would give them more statistics. Now, I became active in it as a nurse leading the largest local. Sue Duff, who was one of the officers at Nassau University Medical Center involved many of the nurses over there in becoming involved in it. And Les Eason, who was a licensed practical nurse, became active in delivering a message at A. Holly Patterson. So you had our two very large institutions bringing into UNA a wide diversity of people.

FV: So, what's the outcome?

RW: The outcome is that nurses not only feel that they have a voice and someplace to go, but they can call their regional office, their local office and get the latest literature that is being put out, the latest statistics that they need. Documentation on issues that affect nurses. Latex gloves was one. The use of powder in the gloves was another. Disposal of needles as the AIDS crisis became far more of a national emergency on the island. The island has one of the highest rates of AIDS patients in the country. And that's why A. Holly Patterson Home has a 30-bed unit that is dedicated only to AIDS

patients for long-term care. And CMC has a very large ambulatory care AIDS population and an in-care service when it's needed. So that they had a reference point to go to to get information through the local or the region. And nurses that were willing to come out and come into each one of the areas to deal with the nurses and meet with them and tell them what they were doing on the issues.

FV: Well, have we left anything out? Have you got other memories? What about... what about some of the (I know you guys all worked hard—you must have played hard) there must be some stories about...

RW: I think we played hard at the Desmond Americana at board meeting after board meetings. Um... and we played hard at the conventions. And as the conventions moved and they're going back to Las Vegas I can remember the last convention we had in Las Vegas. And I wish I had been on board for the convention to Honolulu but I wasn't. To California. To Florida. Going to Disney Land in a group and being hilarious. Eating Belgian waffles. Having all the cooler drinks in the pool at the Fontainebleau.

FV: What about CSEA's state convention?

RW: Some of them... all of them have been held within the state. The ones up at Lake Placid were very, very enjoyable and very good in terms of having a location for workshops because the place was big enough and you had time to walk around and just enjoy the scenery up there as well. I think, for the most part, as an officer you were up early to eat breakfast and to get to the first workshop at 8:00 and then to go from there all through the day until about 4:00 or 5:00. And my memory is coming back with loads and loads of information and material in the briefcases they give us so we could pass it out and ask who wanted more of this literature or information when we got back. And then to order after you give it out. Flo Trippi I remember from up at the board meetings. You know who I remember most? I often think of him and I think of Kathy Green at the same time that I think of Mike Curtain for political action out in the region. And the wonders we accomplished when we really got involved.

FV: Yeah? Like what? What did he do?

RW: Mike was a no-nonsense person who came up to you eye-to-eye and said to you, "This is what I want and this is what I have to

have because it's important" and gave you the reasons and then said, "And I've got 60,000 members who will back me on this. And if you value your election, you will listen to me." And that was his approach. And it worked. It worked. Cathy was kinder. A little more gentle. But the message got out.

FV: I like this. I like this fighting for the people. I mean it's, it's what you do.

RW: It's the only way. It's why you're elected. And what you do for them, in terms of fighting for them and their benefits, you reap in your benefits in retirement. How well I know it.

FV: Great. Well, did we leave anything out? Have you got anything else we can pull out of there?

RW: Not that I know of.

FV: I think we've done pretty well...

RW: I'll probably think of a thousand things later.

Unknown speaker: I'll come back.

FV: We'll come back.

RW: You're welcome.

Unknown speaker: Thank you.

FV: Good, we will.

RW: Won't you please share a bagel with us before you go?

Unknown speaker: Will you split a bagel with me?

FV: Sure.

Unknown speaker: Okay.

RW: Good.

FV: All right. This was wonderful. It's great. So we will, we probably will come back because we do...