

Interview with Judy Burgess

JB: I'm Judy Burgess. Starting from the beginning, I guess, I would say I was a local president in a school district and then I became a board member here a long time ago. Almost at the same time, I also became the secretary of Region 6, which is, was, I think, for about 17 years. And then, I ended up being the executive assistant to McGowan. And that was the chain of events that led me to this big house that I left in 1983; I left CSEA. I went to work for the Governor.

FV: The Governor of New York?

JB: Right.

FV: Yeah. Mario Cuomo.

JB: Right.

FV: Then you can tell stories about that too. But let's go back to...How did you get into CSFA in the first place?

JB: I got into CSEA in 1967 shortly after the Taylor Law became the Taylor Law. A friend of mine who was at the time the president of the Ontario chapter of the CSEA, Frank Taloiny, God rest his soul, he's no longer with us. We were colleagues in the Republican Party up there and started chatting and he knew that I worked in the school district and he encouraged us to get together a group for CSEA and that I would be the person to do it. So that began my career in CSEA. I organized the Geneva City School District unit of CSEA and worked very closely with Frank. Because of that relationship, he was already on the board here in Albany, came to board meetings and the next thing I knew, I was on the board and it just was a great experience for me. My involvement in CSEA was actually my backbone of where I am today. It got me where I am. It was just a great experience.

FV: You know, just imagine the people in the future who are going to be looking at the history of CSEA. And you say you helped organize the unit. What does that entail? What do you do to organize something like this?

JB: Well, I think it's proven, at least in my case, that this organization is there for the common people, for the little people and it was proven at least in Geneva, New York when it culminated into a, we had, what I think is still to this day the most successful one-day strike in the history of state employees or political subdivision employees. We had a strike in the city school district on October 13, 1976 and I'm very proud to say that we had 100 percent representation and that came about because people saw that with CSEA's backing, we could make strides that would make it comfortable for employees with their employer. We just had great success. And we were able to do many things at the bargaining table because we were organized with CSEA and working within the guidelines of the Taylor Law and all those things. We put the union to the test and we came out ahead, we were the victors. We took the city, we closed the school district. Not only did we have all of our members out but we had a good portion of the teachers who picketed with us prior to the start of the school day and at the end of the school day. We also had some of the administrators helping us so it was a great strike in terms of the showing of strength and showing what can be realized when you all work together for a common cause.

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FV: Let's talk about some of the personalities. When you first joined CSEA who was the president?

JB: Theodore C. Wenzl. And it was like a social club almost. That's what I think it was. It was a lot of older people. I was a pretty young member at the time so everybody...Now I wouldn't say they were old but at the time they seemed old to me. Well, Dr. Wenzl was always looking down over his glasses. There was a tough time, there really was. There was a struggle because there were people who wanted to break out and become, like me, activists and make this union the union that it was supposed to do to represent the members and to get things for US. Get better salaries; get better benefits, those kinds of things. But there was a struggle and there were a lot of people who were willing to just like take that chance, take that extra step and we finally succeeded but it was a real struggle. There were two different factions. There were the old and the new. And the new finally, you know, took over. It was, I don't you know, it's hard for me as we sit here doing this, I don't remember the date so well but I remember when Bill decided to challenge Ted Wenzl for the presidency.

FV: McGowan?

JB: McGowan, right. And that was just an emotional roller coaster and he won the election by three votes. So it was just a struggle. And also, you know, it was sad in a way because a lot of these people who were Wenzl loyalists, it was a divisive thing and it was just uncomfortable.

FV: Well, two philosophies. Clashes, right?

JB: Right but I do say that when Bill McGowan became the president, that's when this union really took off and became the union of the people that it truly represented. And I don't think we can ever lose sight of that. Bill McGowan really was what the membership of this union was all about.

FV: Where did he come from?

JB: He came from West Seneca; from western New York.

FV: How did he get into CSEA?

JB: I don't know. I don't recall all that. I just know that Bill and I became friends when I started going to the regional meetings, the Region 6 meetings with Frank Talomey and then the next thing I knew, I was elected the secretary of Region 6 and Bill was the president. We worked together for a long time and then Bob Lattimer became president and I was still the secretary so I really actually worked under both of them. So it was interesting. We were a very active region. Very active.

FV: We talked to Bob twice and also to Ramona. You knew these people pretty well. Why don't you give us a like a biographical sketch?

JB: Oh! I can't. I mean...

FV: Like Lattimer, I mean what do you remember about Lattimer?

JB: Oh, Lattimer was tough. But I know that a lot of people think that he was difficult to deal with.

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FV: He said so himself.

JB: Yeah. But he had the organization at the best, he was, he was ... I liked Bob a lot. I always respected him. I sometimes felt like I was in the middle of a lot of things going on, you know. It was tough, it was tough for me.

FV: Why?

JB: Well, because he wasn't always real pleased with Bill's position on things and it was tough and I sort of respected where he was coming from and tried as best I could always to bring both sides ... You know, it was just tough.

FV: Yeah. Do remember like any telling incidents?

JB: From... of Bob?

FV: Yeah. Bob versus...?

JB: Not going there.

FV: What do you mean?

JB: Oh no! They were always very interesting colorful meetings.

FV: There must be some things you can tell me.

JB: I can't. Truly I can't because, I mean, I don't remember them specifically. I just know that he would become very boisterous at times and very passionate about his Position. Sometimes extremely passionate about his position. I mean, it would sometimes be very difficult to maneuver and do what you had to do.

FV: You tried to be the peacemaker, didn't you?

JB: Well, no. Well, I like to respect everybody and I know we can't always all be on the same page. And everybody has their opinions and their reason for doing things and you just have to sort of accept it or not but move on and try not to hold grudges. But there were some real heavy grudges, you know. Well, we had six different fiefdoms. It wasn't just Bob. Each one of these presidents, whether it was the Region I president or Jimmy Gripper in the city or Jimmy Lennon or Irving. And whoever it was, they were all pretty much staunch in their position, you know, and it was very interesting.

FV: The meeting of minds was kind of tough, huh?

JB: These meetings were wild.

FV: I wish I could have been there.

JB: Putting it mildly. They were very wild, screaming and yelling. There was, you know, this was a real union meeting.

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FV: That's good; a picture of that. That gives me a picture of what it was like. Fighting for what they believed in. That's what a union is I guess.

JB: It was wild. Has anybody talked about Jerry Worth? About when we decided to affiliate with AFSCME? Those were wild times too.

FV: I've heard stories about it. Give me your interpretation.

JB: It was tough. It was a struggle, it was a real struggle It caused, again, half wanted to do it and the other half didn't want to do it and it was convincing people. It was all happening about the same time that we were thinking about going on strike in the state and it was, you know, moving people around and it was tumultuous. It was wild.

FV: When you look back from today, you see how it got here.

JB: And I think in retrospect it was the right thing to do. It was really the right thing to do. If we hadn't done that I don't know where CSEA would be today.

FV: You don't know if there would be one.

JB: I don't even know if there would be one, exactly.

FV: Well what were the factions like; what was the atmosphere like?

JB: War. It was like a war. There's no other way to say it. I mean it was a verbal, I mean the battles, we would go to these meetings and...Has anybody talked to you about Celeste Rosencrantz, the parliamentarian?

FV: No. I don't think so.

JB: You've not heard her name ever? Oh my God. Actually, she was old then. I don't know how she did it sometimes. She was a brick through the whole thing. Trying to keep all of these factions and all of this screaming and yelling. It was just wild. But it all sort of worked out in the end. People would lick their wounds and walk away. I don't know how we got through some of those sessions. Board meetings were two days of war.

FV: And were you around when the problem with the in-house lawyers and the...

JB: Absolutely.

FV: Why don't you give me a characterization about that from your point of view.

JB: You mean about when they left?

FV: Yeah. What brought that about? How did it play? What do you remember about it?

JB: Well, let me see. I was sitting in the boardroom at 33 Elk Street when that firm was created. I was one of those board members that voted for that at the time. They had just left the firm that they were working with and come to CSFA with this plan to be our lawyers.

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FV: Who was in the meeting?

JB: Oh, the old board, Wenzl and company. You know, Sam Broadfield from Rochester, New York. Have you heard his name? Irving. Jimmy Lennon. Jimmy Gripper, I think. Bill McGowan. I don't remember all of them. But a lot of folks who are no longer CSEA, shortly after they left to go to I you know they left us. So a lot of those folks were in the room.

FV: OK. So they were all there.

JB: Weil, it was another one of those sessions. They made a presentation and they lobbied and it was the old versus the new. And the new won out. You know, that was sort of the beginning of this big movement. I, again, I think the best thing that happened for the union at the time were Roemer and Featherstonhaugh. They certainly had a great deal to do with developing and creating CSEA. You know, when we made the changeover from the social organization to a real labor union. And they had, Jim Featherstonhaugh, in particular, had a very keen sense about the political environment and he had developed early on his relationship with the political people. And Jim Roemer was, he was very good at the nuts and bolts of the management kind of thing and he had a good sense of that. They did a good job for a long time until ...

FV: Then they had a problem. What was that?

JB: I'm not going there. No I'm not going to go there. I prefer to stay on an even keel about that at this point. I wasn't really here when all that happened. That was sort of after I left.

FV: But you heard.

JB: Oh, of course I heard things and I've talked to both of them and I read it in the newspaper. My feeling about it is that it's very sad. And I'm sorry that it had to end up that way for whatever. It's like a divorce.

FV: Yeah.

JB: But, I mean, for a long time they were very good friends and neither one of them would have been where they are today if they didn't have each other so I mean they'll be in their lives. So I think they need to get over the warring or whatever it was and look at the good stuff and forget about all the bad stuff if they can. I mean they moved this mountain. The both of them, they really did.

FV: Jack Rice?

JB: Jack Rice and I were very, very close. He was another one of the reasons I got involved in CSEA.

FV: Why?

JB: Well, because he was young. Those guys were the only other young people here when I came in so, yeah, Jack and I were really close.

FV: Tell me about Jack.

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JB: He's a real character. I mean he was very involved in the political process. He knew lots of people, was a great net worker, and obviously had a good relationship with Nelson Rockefeller, because that's who the Governor in the beginning was when we came in. He was really good. He bridged that gap between the old and the new.

FV: He's pretty sharp.

JB: He's a smart guy. He's a good lawyer, yeah. He's excellent.

FV: Now, Steve did tell me to ask you about a certain accident?

JB: Dr. Wenzl?

FV: Dr. Wenzl.

JB: Dr. Wenzl, umm. This was towards the end of the Wenzl administration with CSEA. Dr. Wenzl did a lot of traveling, he always drove by himself. I don't recall where he was going but he got off at Exit 42 off the New York State Thruway, which is the Geneva exit, which was my home town. And, a little history, as a result of his accident there, when you get off of the Thruway now and you go under the bridges, you notice that they have these great big abutments that protect the pillars of the bridges. Well, when he had his accident, none of those abutments were there and it's as a result of his lawsuit against the Thruway in New York State that they now have them because he was saying if that was there, he would have been protected. He reached down to get something out of his shoe, some money or something, I'm not really sure what, when he was coming off the exit and he hit one of those huge pillars that holds the bridge up. It was nasty. He was in really bad shape for a long time. He was in the hospital in Geneva for probably two months or maybe longer. In the beginning you didn't even know it was him, his head was so swollen from the abrasions that he got. He was lucky he was alive. So actually for a whole period of time, the functions of CSEA sort of moved to Geneva. Well, there I was. That was another reason I got so involved in the union at such an early time because I was there and, you know?

FV: Did you have to keep any people separate?

JB: No. Well, there were people, you know, it was uncomfortable but that's life.

FV: What was uncomfortable?

JB: Oh, you had to be careful who was there, who was coming, who was going. You know different people. Yeah, people didn't want to be seen being there, whatever. And then there was always people calling to find out how he was and...

FV: So you were juggling all of these people.

JB: Yeah, it was interesting. It was an interesting time.

FV: That's all you're going to say. Can't get her to talk...

JB: No and you know why? 'Cause it's our people but it's not

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really part of CSEA's history. That's sort of the dark side of the history. His accident is all part of that, right, but who comes to see him and all that, that's another whole part of... You know, I don't want to go there.

FV: So where do you want to go? What do you want to tell me about CSEA?

JB: I just think that CSEA from my perspective anyway is a pretty important organization in New York State. I think it has been for a number of years and I think it's always going to be. I think it's unfortunate sometimes that its members and the organization don't necessarily get the recognition that we should get. I've felt that way for a long time. There's a lot of good done by the members of this union on a day-to-day basis and it's taken for granted. I was sitting around yesterday hearing our illustrious governor say, you know, we're going to have layoffs. Well, what, we've known that for a couple of years. Who is he trying to kid? And I'm sure that CSEA will really feel the brunt of it and that's unfortunate. But that's what happens. CSEA, it's really a very good tool. I can't say enough. It taught me so many things about negotiations, about networking, about learning to get along with people. It's where I got me start and respect this organization. I love it with the whole of my heart and I felt a terrible void when I wasn't here but I f let that, you know, I had to move on to greener pastures and I look back on it and say why did I ever leave but what can you do?

FV: Well, you do what you do.

JB: Yeah. But I wouldn't be where I was today if not for CSEA. And being involved and taking it seriously and I think back to the Geneva, New York to the school district and those people there. If we didn't have that local, if we didn't have that unit there, I also wonder what kind of salary would those folks have? I mean would they have the sick leave that they have, would they have the vacations. I mean all the things that we were able to achieve for them through our negotiations.

FV: So it's not a stretch to say that the world is a better place because of CSEA.

JB: Exactly. At least in New York state.

FV: In New York state. Yeah, well that's the influence that...were you around when the AFSCME-CSEA...?

JB: Yes.

FV: Well, give me your take on that 'cause that's a great part of the history.

JB: Oh, I absolutely think it is and I think it was the best decision for the union. That merger really gave us the stature and really then became a moving force because we not only had strength here in New York state but we were able to pull on resources from other places like other states, you know, all these people and we were able to go to their,, we tapped into their educational process, to their conferences, so we were able to network with people and it just opened up many doors that I don't think necessarily would have been opened for us if we hadn't done that merger. I mean it was really the right thing to do. It was just a really tough sell.

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FV: How did it happen? Who? I mean...

JB: Bill McGowan and Jerry Worth, I mean, they were...Jerry Worth was a tough guy to deal with but he liked Bill McGowan. And I think Roemer and Featherstonhaugh were extremely involved in the thing too.

FV: All in favor?

JB: Yes.

FV: That's the pro faction. Who was the anti?

JB: You know, there were a lot of people that were, again, it, so hard for me to remember those things anymore. 'Cause I was so caught up in it and so much working for it, I don't even remember the people who were against it, frankly. 'Cause I just knew it was going to happen.

FV: Well, how did it happen? What made it happen? Was there one moment in time or was there a buildup to a vote or...?

JB: I don't recall that. I think it was happening, I think they had reached out, I can't remember the term now, where unions would go after other small unions.

FV: Raiding?

JB: Raiding, that kind of stuff, yeah. And I think there was some of that happening because AFSCME had just come into the state not too long ago and they were like looking to like get more members and stuff like that and I think that was a part of what was happening and you know we weren't going to let that happen. So I think, you know, those little things are out there and people get together and "What about this?" and "What can we do for you?" You know it happens, conversation and one thing leads to another. I think that Bill McGowan was a guy who was always willing to take a chance, he was a risk taker and most of the time he was right. I mean,, people would make fun of him because he wasn't the most polished apple in the barrel but he truly had a good sense about this union and about its members and where it should go and I always, I would shake my head sometimes but he was he was always right, you know? He was really always right. And he was right to take the union in the direction it went. I think some of the officers probably weren't real happy about it but they all benefited from it, every single one of them.

FV: Beforehand there has got to be some fear that you're going to be taken over by this giant.

JB: Yeah, there was a lot of that at the time, yeah. And it was sensitive for awhile.

FV: But in hindsight, you look back and...

JB: It was the best thing that happened. It was a really good thing. It really gave this union the strength and muscle that it needed when they sat down at the negotiating table and whatever. It was good.

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FV: That's good. I mean, you were his executive assistant so you knew him pretty well. Is there anything about him that we should know to paint a picture of him?

JB: He was what CSEA was all about, he truly was. He really could talk the talk and he walked the walk of the members of this union, of the real members and I think the timing of it was right because we were ready to just burst and he was just the person who came on the scene and he was able to do it. He cared about everybody and he was never too busy to pay attention to somebody. And that used to irritate some of us occasionally but that was just Bill McGowan, he really did just really care. He cared a great deal about the people, he cared about the people.

FV: You were an activist, you did too.

JB: Oh, I cared about people; yeah I definitely cared about the people. You're not getting much out of me. But it's really hard for me to be negative about it.

FV: No, I want the positives, the activist stuff, things you fought for. I have MHA written down here that Steve said to ask you about, Mental Health Association.

JB: Oh, that's my client. Yeah.

FV: How did you get...?

JB: How did I get there? Not because of CSEA.

FV: Let's talk about the influence CSEA had on you, now when you went to work for Governor Cuomo. You had...

JB: I got to work for Governor Cuomo because there was a whole part, you know. CSEA also became involved, but we knew we had to become involved politically and we created a political action committee of which I am one of the four founding trustees of the political action committee. That was interesting. And that was done, again, I think Roemer and Featherstonhaugh had a great deal to do with that whole political thing and it was becoming apparent that our involvement in elections was something that we really needed to do because it made a big difference in terms of our contracts, what we were going to get. In the state or in the political subdivisions. I mean in Geneva, New York, I mean the school district, it was really important to pay attention to who was on the school board. I mean, I went to every single solitary school board meeting for years. You know, my presence there haunted them because they weren't so apt to take advantage of the employees when they knew that we were there.

FV: Really?

JB: Yeah, exactly. And it really and truly the political part of it is so very important because those people across the street or in your school boards or your boards of supervisors, those people, you know, they're us and they can raise havoc with the employees. So it's really important that we be at the forefront of those things and that we get involved and that we know who those people are and we know what their positions are. And so I always thought that the political action committee was a perfect thing. It also can be a debacle, there's no question about that with the members because everybody, you know, there's always a big struggle who you're going to endorse and all that

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stuff but it really is important. It really and truly is important. And I was very happy to be a part of that.

FV: Who were the other founding members?

JB: You know, I really don't remember. I don't remember but I remember I was...I remember being asked and I said "Yeah, I'll do it" and I really didn't know what I was getting into at the time but it was like for or five of us and we would come and we would have these...In the beginning it was, it started out small, actually statewide but then it really just spread.

FV: What?

JB: The board. It was the board of directors.

FV: How many people on the board of directors?

JB: The CSEA board of directors?

FV: A lot, huh?

JB: Well, there was obviously a person from every county and then there were a number of people from the different states. It was a pretty big board. I don't remember what the numbers were right now.

FV: Well, that's big; you've got a lot of counties.

JB: Yeah, well there are 62 counties. It was an unwieldy number. It was a lot. It got to the point where it was too big to hold the meetings at 33 Elk Street anymore so that's when we started going into hotels. But for a long time we met at 33 Elk Street in the basement; that was pretty interesting. But so that's how I got eventually to go to work for Mario Cuomo because CSEA as one of the first things we did, our political action committee, we got involved with the gubernatorial elections in 1980. It was when Cuomo was running in a primary against Ed Koch and CSEA endorsed Cuomo in the primary and he won. And so then we obviously became involved in the general election and statewide campaign and did a lot of printing and raising money and all the things you do for a candidate when they're running for office. So I got to know many of the folks that were on the Governor's staff. I got to know Andrew well. And so shortly after he became Governor, I got a phone call and they needed to have somebody in the scheduling office who would primarily do Mrs. Cuomo's work but would also do scheduling for the Governor. So I bit the bullet and I went. I don't think Bill McGowan was real happy about it because I had only been in the position with him for a little over two and a half years, I think. But so I made the jump and it was funny so I had a corner office on the second floor in the capitol and I could look right across the street and look into Bill McGowan's office. And see him going crazy like this and so I would call him up and I would say to him on his inside line "What's going on now?" He'd be going crazy. He's be pacing back and forth and chewing on his ... So; I mean those kinds of things.

FV: That's a great picture.

JB: Yeah, so I could actually look across the park in the wintertime and look right in his office and I could see him walking back and forth. He always had a white shirt on and his sleeves were up. He's be chewing on his cigar and I'd

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call him up and I'd say "What are you fussing about now? What's going on and da da da da." That was pretty funny and it was wild for a while. Then Bob Gile was in my office and I could see him in my office which was right next door to Bill's. So Bob Gile took my place when I left. Bob Gile, he passed away. But he took over for me when I left.

FV: Did you have any contact other than that with CSEA when you were in the governor's office?

JB: Oh, yeah. I talked to people occasionally. But not, it was also at a time when I think, we were about to go into negotiations so you had to be...

FV: So you were on the other side.

JB: Yes and it was uncomfortable. And then everybody's like "You're a traitor" and this and that. And that part of it I always felt really bad about but life goes on and you make decisions and you have to live with them whether you like them or not. It was a 15-year job. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

FV: That part, I don't know if that's...

JB: I had some good experience with CSEA because of the networking and the contacts. I think being a part of a statewide organization like CSEA gives you so much better an understanding of the landscape of New York State and some of the makeup of it. And having worked on two of Bill's campaigns, and I did, them, and traveling all through the state, I had a pretty good background which helped me a great deal when I went to work in the scheduling office. But we worked long hours when we were in CSEA and every weekend. So that was another thing that was good for me because when you go to -work over there, it's not a nine-to-five job. You're working 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

FV: With CSEA, you were working every weekend?

JB: Every weekend, I was working. Well, you know the members can't go to meetings and stuff during the week for the most part so most of the regional meetings and things would be on the weekend because we didn't have it in the contract. Excuse me, the board members were allowed so many days in the state contract and then we also got those kinds of things, they sort of spilled down into the political subdivisions. Once the state got them, it was easier for us to get them in our contract.

FV: I'm getting a picture of what it was like.

JB: You are?

FV: Yes! Of what the CSEA was like.

JB: I'm all over the map here.

FV: Well, that's fine. We'll organize and rearrange it later. But I want to get all of your impressions of what CSEA was like. Let's take another personality: Danny Donohue.

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JB: Danny. I love the fact that Danny is the president of CSEA because from my little perspective he represents so many things that I feel that Bill McGowan was about back in the old Bill McGowan days. And when I look at Danny, I think about Bill's personality. Not that Danny is like Bill, he's not. But they sort of come from similar backgrounds and I remember Danny, I remember him when he was just starting out in CSEA. A long time ago. And he just sort of overnight I mean, Irving Baum dropped out. Well, bingo! There was Danny; he was thrown into the mix. And he's come up through the paces; he's had a tough time of it. But I'm really glad to see him at the helm because it feels more comfortable here for me. There was a whole period of time when I wasn't ...I like Joe McDermott but I didn't necessarily always like the way he did business.

FV: Well, some people said he wasn't exactly a warm person.

JB: He was a tough guy and that always was the rub between Bill and Joe and Jim and Jim. But I don't even want to talk about that kind of stuff and I don't want to go there because it was the bad but that's kind of some of the stuff that was out there. But I feel better about CSEA with Danny there. I really do because I think that Danny, truly like Bill, represents the members of CSEA. It's more what CSEA is truly all about.

FV: Any other things you want to talk about? Can I pick your brain? Let me ask you just a couple more things and then I'll let you go.

JB: Yeah, good.

FV: But see you're going to want to come back because you're going to remember more stuff. Yes, you will, you'll see, trust me on this one.

JB: I'm just going to be the fastest interview you ever did.

FV: Besides the Geneva demonstration...

JB: Strike. It was a strike. We got penalized.

FV: Yeah? By how much? Two for every day?

JB: Yes. And another thing about what we did in Geneva and I think a feather in my cap was that when we got the prior to us even getting the penalty, which we knew was going to come; we collected all of our dues for a year and gave them to CSEA. Prior to, yeah. So we didn't miss a step, we didn't miss a step. Yeah. That was probably the single best, for me, not for everybody else, but for me. I mean I think that was a good demonstration of lessons that you learn in what you take from being an active member of CSEA and utilizing what the union has here for you. With your field rep, we haven't talked about the staff or the field reps yet. I think I had a fairly good relationship with the staff, with the field reps. With Nelson Carlson, who was my field rep for a long time. Tom Pomodoro, Charlie Byrd. -Those were all the guys who were at the time very pivotal key people in my life because they were all my field reps. They were on the first line.

FV: So they went out and found out the problems.

JB: They were here. They were with you. No, I mean they were with you in your locals. Yeah, they were out there in the field. They were the field reps.

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FV: And they brought back the feedback you needed.

JB: Exactly, exactly. I mean they were the guys, they were in the And I credit those guys also with my dedication and @Te--termination to continue the cause. Because we worked well together and it proved that we could do it. We did it and we were successful. I mean I'm sure that a lot of people didn't always like what I was about or whatever but I really felt that the field, the guys, the staff, and when they went out on strike I was very supportive of them. Very supportive.

FV: Of the staff strike here? Yeah. When was that anyway?

JB: There was a couple of them.

FV: Oh, were there?

JB: Yeah.

FV: Always about money or were there other things?

JB: Oh, things, benefits. Issues. Yeah, yeah. But I tell you, we were a family. Say what you want to say, I don't know what goes on here today 'cause I'm not here. Its 20 years since I've been here or more. But we really had great times together. I mean we worked hard and we played hard and I'll never forget those times. They were the most memorable times of my life were always related to CSEA. I would put CSEA in many respects over things in my personal life and that's the truth. It was really, it was my ticket.

FV: Well, yeah, other people have talked about it as a family, as a culture...

JB: Without any question. I don't know how it is now but I can tell you that that's how it was when I was here. I would say from maybe 1969 to 1983, this was my family.

FV: Yeah. In the '60s I worked on Elk Street too, in an ad agency and I used to go with my boss to the Ambassador and to 21.

JB: Oh yeah?

FV: You guys, it that where you had your good times?

JB: Yes. And I'll tell you a little side story about the 21.

FV: Yeah!

JB: And this will put it in perspective about my relationship with those places. You recall maybe when you went to the 21 that there was a glass room divider that had etched in it, what? The Empire State Plaza? Do you remember that? It was a focal point in the 21. Everybody would always talk about it. Do you know where that is today?

FV: No.

JB: It's at my house.

Interview with Judy Burgess

FV: (Laughter). Well now, there's a story. How did it get from there to your house?

JB: Well, that's a longer story.

FV: We have time.

JB: Well, I'm not sure of all the travels that the thing took but there was a lady by the name of Holly Henry who was basically a street person. And she worked at the Ambassador, which later became Anthony's but she was on the street all the time. And she would put notes on my car: pray this, play this number, whatever, they were always religious. And she was a character. She was just one of the characters of Elk Street along with Charlie Torch. So anyway, this is sort of a long story. So I became friendly with Holly and got her off the street over the years. She worked between the 21 and people were always looking out for Holly, myself included. And I got her to come and clean for me and stuff like that. And, of course, when I left CSEA and went to work at the Governor's office at the Plaza, obviously that was an important part of my life so. For my 50th birthday, she found the etching of the Empire State Plaza, which had been stolen from the 21, sold to somebody in New York City. She went to New York, I don't know how she tracked it down and found it but she gave it to me for my 50th birthday. It's a window. I have a great big huge window in my living room. And so I have it as a part of the window. I have lights on it. So that's for the 21 Club. That's why it's in my house.

FV: We should have had the interview at your house. We are going to have to go out there and take a peek at it.

JB: No. I don't think so.

FV: Just a picture of it. That's all.

JB: Oh, OK. It's there. It's definitely there.

FV: Can we do that?

JB: Sure.

FV: That's a great story.

JB: Well, it used to be a meeting place, 21. I mean Bill met with Governor Carey.

FV: Really? In those days?

JB: Bill had a good relationship with Governor Carey. They met privately lots of times.

FV: There?

JB: The Mansion. People's apartments and places. He had a lot of rendezvous with people. It was very colorful and interesting.

Interview with Judy Burgess

FV: Oh! I didn't know that! Nobody's mentioned that!

JB: Well, they wouldn't. They weren't his executive assistant. I was. But it was interesting. He really and truly tried really hard to do the right thing for this union and the people it represents. So we spent a fair amount of time in the 21 or in The Ambassador, which later became Anthony's and a few other watering holes around town.

FV: But those were so convenient. They were right down the street.

JB: Yeah. They were too convenient sometimes.

FV: (Laughter). Yeah. My boss was still boss and he used to go and have a martini every night after work at 21.

JB: Yeah. That's the other side. The whole social networking and drinking and partying. As I sit here I don't know how I survived it. I don't know how I survived it. We would start, we would work all day and you would go over to Anthony's or something after work and you'd be out until 1:00 or 2:00 or 3:00 o'clock in the morning and be at work the next day. How did I do that? I don't have a clue.

FV: Youth.

JB: Youth, exactly. It had to be but I could never do that today.

FV: No.

JB: I could never. I mean I think about all the things and I think about our conventions down at the Concord Hotel.

FV: Yeah. Give me a picture of that.

JB: Oh, those were wild times. I mean, my God, we lived from convention to convention, I mean just wild. Just wild times. I could tell you a Jack Rice story, a funny story. And a judge, what was his name? A judge that was a lawyer. But anyway, I had just gotten a Monte Carlo. I think it was the first year that Chevy put out a Monte Carlo and I got it. And we were having a convention at the Concord. Judge Jacobs...I went down Route 17 to get there. I can remember my husband saying to me "Be careful with the foot" because they have radar traps. That's when they had those tripod things they put on. So I had the music cranked and I was tooling down 17 and I was going 100 miles an hour. I'm not kidding. True story. Of course, I got picked up. Well, I'm traveling like I was all the time. I had taken a \$50.00 bill and I folded it up, it had been in my license for a long time. I totally didn't even remember that it was there. And of course when I handed the trooper my thing, he thought I was trying to bribe him. So I got a big time ticket. So I got to the conference and I said, at some point to Jack Rice, I got this ticket that somebody needs to deal with. I can still hear him screaming as he's walking up the big red stairs. I can't even repeat what he said. I think it was Judge Jacobs. It was a retired judge that Jack had working as one of his ...My God, it's so embarrassing, I can't remember a thing. Anyway, Jack gave him the ticket to stop at the JP cause he was going that way home. He had just bought a new car, an Oldsmobile or something. So he goes in to talk to the JP and while he's in there, his brand new car catches on fire.

Interview with Judy Burgess

FV: (Laughter).

JB: True story. It got resolved but those are the kinds of things that ... And I think it's all those kinds of things that just kept you like going to this thing. It was all the stuff around it, the socializing, the networking, the people. I mean I had a group of people that I traveled around with from Hornell, New York. Phil...I... you probably never even heard his name. Worked for the Department of Transportation, a whole group of people from that. We just had the best times together. A whole group of us. We would take two tables at these conventions and we would just party, party. We would go to the meetings and we would be actively involved in what was going on and then we would just party our brains out afterwards. And you know what? Those people were so important in my life and I have no idea where they are today. That's the sad part. You know, you just don't see these people anymore.

FV: ?

JB: Whatever.

FV: Wonderful. I mean I think this is great. See, you started remembering things that you didn't think...

JB: I know. But it's not good stuff. You see it's all the other stuff.

FV: You've got to remember more stuff.

JB: Oh no. I remember all the other stuff, the meeting and stuff like that. It was all tough stuff and I don't remember it.

FV: No, we don't need that. We want the atmosphere. The facts are there on the record. We need the atmosphere of the smoky rooms and the...

JB: And they were all there, the smoky rooms and the parties and...

FV: Paint a picture for us. That's what history should do, not just cold facts. It's people. People make CSEA what it is. It's grown to 255,000 now, you know.

JB: How many is it?

FV: 255,000.

JB: Is that what it is now?

FV: Yeah.

JB: That's great.

FV: That's very impressive.

JB: I'm not at all surprised at that.

FV: You played a part in that growth. So I think you've covered what you're most proud of, what you see as the most important event during your time involved. Is there anything you're disappointed by?

Interview with Judy Burgess

JB: Uhhh. At my time?

FV: Yeah.

JB: No, there's nothing. The thing that somewhat disappoints me is people just not letting go of their idiosyncrasies and just saying put it behind you and move on because that kind of thing, the...forever. And your life is so short. I'll tell you one thing I'm really sad about. I'm really sad about how Bill McGowan ended up being treated in the end. That really pisses me off. I will say that on tape. For what he did to this union and the way he was treated when he passed away, I can never, ever forgive McDermott and his administration for that.

FV: What happened?

JB: There was nothing they...just totally...just basically ignored the man. You know, people weren't allowed to go to his funeral. No. It was nasty. And up until maybe a year or so ago, I think you would walk into this building and never even know that Bill McGowan was ever here. I mean there is really no testament or tribute to the man for everything that he did and where he brought this union. That I am very, very, very disappointed in. Yes, I don't think he got his due. And it was all, again, because of a personality conflict between him, you know...who took over after he left and all that kind of stuff. Get over it. You know, life is so short.

FV: I think there should be a national get over it day.

JB: Yeah. Move on. Everybody has their good things and their bad things. We all do. There's no perfect person. But I always say, God, I must be such a special person because all these people around me are so perfect. You know?

FV: Yeah, right.

JB: And all these people are so perfect.

FV: Sure they are.

JB: But that would be my single most disappointment, the way he was treated in the end. I really don't like that.

FV: Well, getting back to positives. What lessons do you think CSEA's past holds for its future? What have we learned from the past that we can use as we go forward?

JB: Well, we're experiencing it right now with what's happening in the country and the state with the budget and all that. I mean we have already been down that road in New York State before. We need to look at what happened before and we need to do basically the same thing again and we'll succeed. If we stay the course, if we're true to our convictions about what this union really is and why we're here and what we represent, it'll work. And if we do it as a team, that's the other thing. Can't have factions. Have to work together for the good of the common cause. Amen.

FV: Amen. Thank you very much. Wonderful.