

CSEA HISTORY PROJECT

BETTY COLLINS INTERVIEW

7/9/03

INTERVIEWER: I'm up here.

MS. COLLINS: All right. Betty Collins, Betty C. Collins, and so I started out, the ladies' garment worker back in the late thirties and early forties, so I was a Union person way back.

INTERVIEWER: Way back.

MS. COLLINS: In New York, West 63, 7th Avenue.

INTERVIEWER: Oh.

MS. COLLINS: Garment. I modeled.

INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible.)

MS. COLLINS: Yeah. I modeled but, look now, and then I did other work so I got involved with the Union there. Then my mom and dad came back to Troy so I came back to Troy, and I met my husband there and that was that.

I went to work in the Watervliet Arsenal, and again I was very involved, helped organize the Union, but then I got sick and I left, so my brother says to me, you know, Harriet's ex-boss over the Insurance Department and she would -- you know, she's lookin' for somebody, so I said I don't want to go. He says

please go.

So that was April 23rd, 1970. I was interviewed and when the woman that interviewed me, it was like the Assistant Director of Licensing, took me down personnel and she says, I want her, so I says I really don't want to go to work now because I had just become a grandmother and I said I don't want it. And he said, Mr. whatever his name was, he was asleep behind the desk.

This was when Insurance was on 324 State Street and they had three floors. The bottom floor was the rumpus room, finance, personnel and I think consumer service. Well, okay. So -- well, he says, when do you want her to start? She said yesterday. This was the 23rd. I started the 24th.

I came in and I was being shown around and maybe three hours later this woman came over to me and she said, listen, do you want to join our Union? I said, yeah, I guess so. What is it? She told -- never knew there was a CSEA.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And so I said okay, I'll

sign the card, and she says, now, would you be our treasurer? (Laughter.) I said what? What do you have to do? She said, well, our treasurer just went to another agency and nobody wants the job. I says what does it entail and they told me. I said all right, but when I tell this to Mary, she says that never happened. It wouldn't happen today. I says it did then.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: Well, anyways, Jim Cline, who was the deputy superintendent, was a CSEA member. Joe Smith, who was the director of licensing, he was a CSEA member, but then the minute they became, you know, they changed, why all our CSEA people that were professionals became PEF or management or nothing.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: So from that day forward, April 24th, 1970, I was treasurer and I became involved in the Union.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: But then as time went on I didn't want to stay and they said please take the test. I took the test; then I ran for

office. I was president, vice president, president again, and then I became involved with Elk Street. That's when we were there and so on and so forth, and so for all these years I have been very active.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: I have seen a lot go on. I don't know whether they told you, but I make very good cheesecake.

INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible.)

MS. COLLINS: Well, since Mo went -- Maureen went on her diet, that when I saw her at the meeting, the insurance meeting the 20th of May and I saw her put that weight back, I was ready to kill her, and so we used to meet over the Thruway Motel.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: We'd have our board of directors meetings there. I was on the board of directors for years, and I did a lot for them and I would bring our cheesecakes and Mike Curtin, John Lennon, he was president of Region 3, Irv Flamingbaum was of Region 1, and he didn't like it but they brought their wives,

so between John Lennon and his wife and Irv's wife, they used to eat the cheesecakes, and Mike Curtin.

And it was funny. When we'd come at that time -- do you remember the Thruway Motel?

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MS. COLLINS: Remember when you'd come in the lobby, if you looked in you could look right in to where the booths were and everything?

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MS. COLLINS: Well, I used to go and sneak in over that way. Everybody loved the cheesecake but Irv Flamingbaum. He loved nuts and if you'd bring nuts he could eat the whole thing.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: And that was that. And then as time went on, first -- oh, I know. We had just become affiliated with AFSCME --

INTERVIEWER: Yeah (inaudible).

MS. COLLINS: In 1978, and the following year we went to -- I don't know whether it was a Region 4 workshop or was a

delegates' meeting and we were at the Lake Placid Club. How we got in there I don't know because we found out later that it was condemned and we shouldn't have been there and we were burning wood that night. We were burning everything, it was so cold, and Jerry Wirf was there with Mildred and he gave a speech.

Now when he spoke, you could hear a pin drop. I grew up in Brooklyn. Can't tell, can ya? And he was talking about this. He said growing up he remembered -- he lived in Brooklyn, too, and he says, you never knew from day to another when you came home from work whether you would go into the same house because you were always being evicted, and when he spoke you could hear a pin drop because Jerry Wirf was Jerry Wirf, and we're all sitting there and we're having dinner and he starts to talk about that and I snickered and his wife looked at me like she could kill me. You know, you don't do that when Jerry's talking.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: Well, we had just met Jerry Wirf. We had met him before, but we met

him now, so all the networks around here, 6, 13 and 10, were interviewing him. He stopped his interview and he saw and he went like this (indicating) and I says hi. You know when I speak I don't like to hear people laugh or even talk. I don't even like the dishes moving. I'm thinking, oh, gee, not knowing that he was such a big shot.

So he says what were you laughing at?

I says, you know, Mr. Wirf, you grew up in Brooklyn, didn't you? He said yes. I said I did, too, and that was during the Depression. I said I went to work. When I was working at 463 I was the only one working in our house. You couldn't get a job then.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: My kid brother who passed away last year, he was 77 at the time, he would wait for me at the subway. He says we're not going to that house 'cause we had been evicted (laughter) and I -- and we moved to another house. And I says to Jerry -- he says, oh, it happened to you, too? I says so when you said that, I says so many years earlier, I said



it brought back memories and I had to laugh 'cause I thought we were the only one, you know.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: You're welfare, you know. So after that he kind of liked me, you know, as time went on, and then when we went to AFSCME, our first convention with him, that was in 1980, it was nice. I remember that. They treated us like we were gold because we were the biggest local. We sat down front and one thing about them, they knew everybody, because the hotel we stayed at, the Yankees were stayin' there, I remember, and then after they left the Boston Red Sox came in, you know --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: So anyway we'd have a lot of fun there and so Bill Lucey, right?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

MS. COLLINS: He came in to the bar -- of course, we always stayed where they stayed because they figured we're their biggest local. Naturally we have to be treated differently, which we were. And he came in and I think he had his wife with him and we would talk and we

went over and said, hello, and he says, and how are you, Betty Collins? And I looked at him. I says how do you know who I -- oh, he says, I make sure to know who the people are. He must have gone down the whole delegates' list.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: 'Cause I think we had about 132 or somethin' and Capital District had the most, you know, and so we became very good friends and every -- and we'd sit down for conventions, we'd sit down front. And this one time Joan Tobin and I, God rest her soul, had to go to the bathroom and he says where you goin', and we told him. He says you can't go now 'cause we were right down in front. He was being funny, you know, because we were the only people that really stayed.

One thing about CSEA, when we'd go any place, no matter who it where -- no matter who it was or where we were, we were always there.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: We used to go to conventions, we'd party, but the next morning everybody was out on the floor.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

(Pause.)

INTERVIEWER: We're back on.

MS. COLLINS: Okay. Well, for that convention, Joe McDermott wanted to run for, what is it, the executive vice presidents they have in AFSCME? And Irv Flamingbaum was one, but I guess he was running for re-election or something.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And I remember we were -- we were leaving Albany to go to Anaheim and Joe Dolan, talking about Joe, we were all got out of Albany. Then as we went along we met -- you know, in Chicago we picked up the Buffalo group and whatever. And I brought a lot of straw hats out because we figured Joe was going to run and get elected, but then Irv was running and I think everybody felt that Irv should have it because he was a very nice man, very nice man.

And, of course, he had a good person behind him who today is our president of CSEA, because where you serve -- where you saw Irv,

Danny was right behind him, and so that year he was elected, Irv was elected, and he was a -- he was a very peaceful and quiet man but he was a big man, big.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And he was a very good president. Then we had Sol Bendet. Did you know about Sol?

INTERVIEWER: I haven't heard about Sol.

MS. COLLINS: You never heard about Sol?

INTERVIEWER: Did we hear about Sol?

INTERVIEWER: No.

MS. COLLINS: Well, he was Region 2's president and he was a lawyer in the Insurance Department, and he was another one, when he got up you listened and he spoke, but how I got involved with Elk Street, Rita Madden at that time was the president, and when I became the treasurer she wasn't very happy because, you know, nowadays when I go to workshops or something, I see the people and they are not the group when I was working. You know, they're

there to party.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: They're not interested or anything. If you ask them something about a contract they wouldn't know. They wouldn't know what you were talking about, but we had Sol Bendet and when he'd get up, he walked -- he was a short man. He was a sweetheart. He was from the Insurance Department in New York and he always walked to a side, but when he got up you can rest assure that our meeting was gonna go on because he talked a lot. He argued a lot, but that time everybody was there. Everybody read their contract.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: When they went out, I remember I was president of the Insurance Department, and I remember Bonnie was my first vice president, Bonnie Luinello, and at that time we were going out on strike. We were gonna strike and they always made sure I wasn't around because if they were gonna hand out, you know, tickets for going out striking and all that, they didn't want me. She could get it and would

be all right, not the president.

But anyway I became involved with Joan Tobin, all of us DOT people, and when we'd have a board of directors meeting, Region 4 usually sat here and our group, it was Joan Tobin, it was Marie Rominelli from New Paltz, what's her name, Toddin -- Elaine Toddy from Buffalo. We had from all over but we were a group that we were activists. Whatever had to go on, we did.

So Ted Wenzel was president then. Then he left and Bill McGowan became our president and, you know, he -- he was a tough man but that's how -- when they asked for people, like during the war they would say -- they asked for volunteers, and the poor slob, everybody would step back and he was still standing there.

(Laughter.)

MS. COLLINS: You know? So it was the same way and -- so they used to ask for help. I was there. And to me, I learned all about the Union and we got up to speak, we'd know what we were talking about. We read everything we got. I do that now with the Medicare things.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: But still, we were -- we were a very close group. But again, to repeat myself, the group they have now, they really don't care, but then after Bill left we had McDermott and Joe was a tough man, too. And then after he retired we had Danny, of course, and then we have -- we had -- another one that got me very involved was Irene Carr.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, Irene.

MS. COLLINS: I talked to her Saturday and told her what they were doing. She says, Betty, if they have a tape, do you think -- you know, she can hardly talk.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And she says  
(whispering) do you think I can have a tape? Of course, when I talk I'd say, you shut up. I don't want to hear from you. I'm doing the talking. Just shake your head. Through the telephone? And she was another one that got me very involved.

Then, of course, there's Dave Stack, who I love dearly. He -- he found out that I

was good with figures, so I was -- we were -- oh, this is another thing. We were at the Concord, a convention, and Mike Carroll who is over at Jardine now, I still say Jardine -- was the chairperson of -- to study -- a committee we had to study the group life -- to study the cost of operating group life.

Now, Travelers, because we do all the billing and the deductions and everything here, they gave -- I don't know whether I'm telling tales out of school, but that's the way it is. We would get like \$300,000 a year. For that we had to use to -- the billing, the people that worked on it here, so on, so forth, and I got on that committee.

Mike Carroll, we were at the convention at the Concord, and I remember we were in his room and he said, now, I'm leaving. I'm going to headquarters, so he appointed Mike Curtin and I to the committee. Well, then, when Mike Curtin got another job, still with the Union, I took it over and Dave Stack always used to say to me, you -- you have the best committee. You ask questions so, anyway, I'm --



I'm his special person.

So with that then, Irv was still alive then. Irv was still alive.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: Yeah, he was still alive. And then our treasurers, they were very good. Jack Gallagher, then Mary, then Barbara Fauser and then now, Mo.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: I was there. In other words, I was one of the group.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: Not because I was one of the group, but because whenever they called, wanted something, I was there. Now, Irene Carr, when she'd leave in the morning to go, like on the train --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: Go someplace, she'd call me up six o'clock in the morning. She's at Rensselaer, and she'd say, I forgot to tell, I think it was Lorraine was her person, something. Would you call and tell her, so she told everybody I was her administrative assistant and

so she helped me a lot. I wanted to know, when I went to work in the Insurance Department, when I was at the Arsenal I was in cost accounting.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: So it's -- I don't know if you're like that, but I feel this way. If you're gonna start a job, you wanna know what makes the job, so I was in licensing and I remember Dorothy Vadney saying, I want you to learn how to do that. So she says to this girl, why don't you train her, so, okay, so I'd take a pencil out, start writing. She's what are you writing? I said about the work. Oh, my mother's a school teacher. I said what's that got to do with me learning it, but it was the same way in the Arsenal. I wanted to know you become a licensed agent --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: -- and follow the whole circle around. Well, that helped me, too. And then the same way here.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: When I retired, the first thing they did was put me on the Insurance

Committee and I'm the retiree on the Insurance Committee 'cause I came from the -- and I know, but there were so many people, like Bob Lattimer.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: He -- he had a loud voice. When you'd get up there, he never used a microphone. You know, I watched all these people go. We've lost a lot of our people and, to me, the Union -- now I'll tell you a funny story. I couldn't sleep last night and I usually watch the Cosby Kids, the Cosby Show.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: So I says, well, I'll get on the computer, see if I got any mail, so I get on the computer and sure enough, there's a letter. It says -- I got a message.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And I push it to see. It's my niece who lives in New York and it's a letter. Hi, Bob. How did you get my aunt's e-mail letter? Does she know you? And she goes on to tell him all about me and she says -- she said eighty-six, but I'm eighty-five. And she

says she's involved in this, she's involved in that. She's doing this, she's doing that. And I -- I couldn't imagine who was this Bob that I sent the letter to. I looked through all the names. I don't have a Bob. So, anyway, she's so proud of her aunt, that she learned how to do a comp...work on a computer.

My visiting nurse came one day and he says to me, why don't you get yourself a computer? I said what do I want a computer for? So my son had just bought a new one and this one was about six months old. He says I'll give it to you, Mom, and he went and got the desk and I love it, but that's what they kidded me about. What are you doin' on the computer now?

But, let me see, who else can I tell you about that was very nice? Oh, Al Mead was nice. C. Allen. His name is C. Allen Mead and I always call -- and he -- when we used to go to conventions, this is something they don't do any more, I hear. We would -- everybody would have a captain. This was in Region 4. Joe -- Joe was president of the region at that time and he'd appoint Al and everybody had to be out on

the floor the next morning. No matter where we were --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: -- we counted heads and all that, and we were just a knitted group. But I'll tell you something, Capital District people are very close knit, our group here in the Capital.

And getting back to the people that are there now --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: -- they are not Union activists. No. They are -- I get -- I get so provoked.

INTERVIEWER: What does it take? I mean, what --

MS. COLLINS: What does it take? It takes somebody that's dedicated, you know. All of them are in there for a party. I don't know whether they want to be recognized or something, but like we have Ellen Burke. She was the Women's Committee. Now we have a group on the Women's Committee. They don't even know what's goin' on. Poor Cindy. I feel so sorry for her.

Maybe they're abusing my brains, I don't know, but it's -- it's just a shame.

But I feel as a retiree we could go much further. There's a lot of things. I get very angry when we want something for the retirees and they say, well, you know, it wasn't voted on and this, that and the other thing. But yet, when they need people for telephones, the retirees are right there.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MS. COLLINS: And they're -- you know, then they need them when they have rallies here, the retirees are there.

INTERVIEWER: Don't give up the fight.

MS. COLLINS: Oh, I won't give up the fight.

INTERVIEWER: I want to go back to -- now, you were on the board, I think, when -- when AFSCME -- when the affiliation was considered. How -- how did that go? What were you -- what were you doing then? How did you feel about it? What did you --

MS. COLLINS: Well, a lot of people didn't want it.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: 'Cause we had a committee that go out. I think Bob Lattimer was on it, Dolores Farrell, there was quite a few that were on that committee.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: But a lot of them didn't really know.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: No.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: Really didn't know what -- what are they gonna offer us? What do we have to do? Do we have to pay them or something?

INTERVIEWER: Well, you obviously looked into it because that's what you do.

MS. COLLINS: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Well, what did you -- how did you feel about it?

MS. COLLINS: Okay. I felt good.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah?

MS. COLLINS: Because we could learn a lot of things from them.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: You know, specially that they were in Washington.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: You know, and --

INTERVIEWER: So how did it come about? I mean, what's your recollection of all of that?

MS. COLLINS: Well, it came about -- there was whispers, something about another Union, and we figured, look, we just went through with PEF and all that, and we lost a lot of good people and -- well, another thing we had by us -- for them going to management and PEF was that a lot of people were worried that had insurance and the only way -- we voted on it. The only way they could keep it, they were known as associate members. They paid a dollar a year and they kept their insurance.

Now, we were at the convention two years ago, the Retiree Convention, and Karen Gilgoff, I love her, and of course, Steve. I remember when Steve's wife -- Barb was pregnant with the boy that's goin' to college or he's all



grown up now.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: And we got to know these people. See, to us, it was like goin' to a party and standing there in the corner not knowing anybody.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And then as we got to know them, I mean, we knew Steve, I think -- I think Steve helped a lot to make us aware that they're not ogres or something and they're gonna kill us, so I liked it. A lot of people were, well, what are they gonna do for us and what do we have to pay?

Well, naturally you -- they took so much money and this and that, but it worked out very well. And then when -- of course, when Jerry died and Jerry McEntee took over, you know, when he speaks, you listen. He and Bill Lucey.

And then when our people became executive VPs on it, you know, it seemed to help a little bit, but there was still -- there's still a lot of people say, what are they doin'

for us? They're sayin' the same thing about the CSEA. What am I getting out of it?

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: You know.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: But --

INTERVIEWER: What do you say to them?

MS. COLLINS: Excuse me?

INTERVIEWER: What do you say to those people?

MS. COLLINS: The same thing. What are you doing for them?

INTERVIEWER: What are you putting in, right?

MS. COLLINS: Well, they didn't like me. A lot of people in the Insurance Department didn't like me because they would come in. I'd come -- I'd leave my house at -- I don't drive. I would leave my house at 25 to 6, go up the street, get the bus, change in Troy and then get here. Well, on our floor we had files, and in these files, they were called BC files, and these are the people of the agents that are bad boys and bad girls. Somebody -- we never locked

the office. We had eight floors in the Empire Plaza.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And so they found out somebody was touching them so I got a key 'cause I came in early. Well, I came in early. I got there at 6:30. I would start the coffee. I'd do my CSEA business and then started work at 7:30. That was called alternate; not flex, but alternate hours because we -- how it came about, we had one girl, no matter what time she came in, she was always late. If you gave her 7:30, she'd be there at 8. If you gave her 8, she was there at 8:30.

Well, anyway, so we had a lot of people that if you asked them to do something, no, I don't have to do it. It's not my job description. I says, other duties as assigned. Well, Joe Bikarian, I don't know whether you knew him. He was one of our field reps. He died. He was a sweetheart. He was our field rep. I'm gonna bring it up, a grievance.

Well, I used to say to them, you may be working for the State but you still owe them

8 hours or 7 1/2, whatever it was, and they'd say, no, you're with management. No, I'm not. You deserve to give them your day's work.

Well, when we used to talk about it, I'll bet at other unions you don't have to do it. Well, I'd know what they did, you know, and -- but they finally came, you know. I think AFSCME's done a lot, done a lot for us, but you also, you know, should expect to do something to, like giving away something and then not saying thank you, go to hell, drop dead, or something like that.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

MS. COLLINS: But --

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: When we had -- when they -- when it first came about at the board of directors meeting, there was a lot of pros and cons, you know. They -- a lot of them were afraid. Are we gonna lose our identity or what --

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: But I think it worked out good, but getting back to the people we have

now, they are not -- they are not the group because it was so wonderful. You know, in fact, I called Bob Foley. He was one of our activists. I said what was the name of the man, Bernie, from Comp Board, and he said, no, I don't think it was him. This man would get up, he was about six feet four, at our board of directors meetings --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: -- and they'd all talk and knew -- they'd have papers and their contracts or the different things in front of them and it was good. You had it goin' both ways, but now. Now March 14th we had a -- our president of Region 4, Kathy Garrison. We used to have like one workshop for one committee, well, she decided instead of having the Women's Committee she would have all her committees in the region.

Well, I sat in on most of them. I never saw such people. I said these are our members, our activists? So, but there's an awful lot. We had -- we lost a lot of good people. We had Jenn Clark in Buffalo and so

many, so many good people. Joan Tobin, she was one of our first vice presidents, and she was right there fighting for our members and so on and so forth. But a lot of people don't appreciate that.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: They say that's their job.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, but people can --

MS. COLLINS: You know, their job and then some. That's what you should do. Your job and then some. That's what I always try to do.

INTERVIEWER: Well, let me ask you something. What -- you've been a long time in CSEA. What are you most proud of in CSEA?

MS. COLLINS: Being a member.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah?

MS. COLLINS: Being a member.

INTERVIEWER: That's good.

MS. COLLINS: And sometimes, you know, sometimes I'll say, do they really appreciate me? Now when I was in hospital in March, from the 24th to April 9th, I was at St. Mary's Hospital in Troy, and the Sisters sitting at the

desk, the information desk, she called up and she says, you know, we got some flowers here for you. And I said okay and she says we'll have somebody send 'em up. She says but they're the most gorgeous thing. So when they came up to the room, I looked at the flowers and I saw they were from The Surroundings, and then I saw the card and it was Danny, Mary, Barbara and Maureen.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And I -- I had such a feeling. I said why did they send it? And then when I was talking to Maureen she says because we wanted to because you're our Betty Collins. You're right there.

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

MS. COLLINS: You're right there. Now she had an operation and she called me last night. She says why did you send that garden plant? I said because I wanted to. But she says you haven't got that kind of money. I says how do you know what I have, you know, and she's our person for the Insurance Committee.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: And, you know, all these people, I've got to know them. Like I had one gal that came to work in the Insurance Department and she had five children, held three jobs, and she came in 1978. I fell in love with her because here was a mother. The husband was in the Navy, living with some girl in California, wasn't sending any allotment, you know. And you'd look at her. She didn't have many things, you know.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And she became my first vice president, and then after I retired she took over. She was a board member and they treated her just like they treated me, you know, and she -- but she's sickly now and she's retired, but she isn't so active. I am. I'm still -- because I think if I stop, that'll be it. I'm even active with our Waterford Seniors.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: You know, but --

INTERVIEWER: You know, let me go back now to your time of involvement with CSEA which is still going on. What do you think were the



most important events while you've been in CSEA?

MS. COLLINS: Important events?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, some of the bigger things.

MS. COLLINS: Well, the thing when we became AFSCME, when we went with AFSCME, when we got all these raises. I'll tell ya something, when I first came to work, April 24th, I came in as a GS-3 and I was making \$3000-something. By the end of that year I was making 6000. Rockefeller was the one that was giving all the big raises. And because of that, whenever an increment came due and as I got promotions, I couldn't go to the next step because I'm already makin' that money because of that 1970. Everybody got big raises back then, but the fact is that I've learned a lot. I've met a lot of people, people that are my very close friends. Even that guy up there, that Danny.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And it's done a lot for me. I try to talk to people about that but they don't wanna listen.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: I have a couple of retirees in our Center there and they're glad they're the hell out of there. They say I'm glad I'm the hell out of there, you know? And then -- see, our local, our retiree local, we have over 6000 members, and I was treasurer for that from 1989 till 1998, and the people that have it now, we have nine counties and when we were in office we used to call them, because a lot of them are like Hamilton, Schoharie County, all those counties. Now not everybody could come, so we made sure that they knew what was going on and everything, but a lot of these retirees just are retired, not for the sake of the Union, because they could keep their insurance.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: So you don't find people coming out and a lot of our activists don't care any more. They say I've had enough of it, you know.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: So -- but as far as I'm concerned, I mean, God willing, as long as I can

go on, you know.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m. But Association means a lot to you.

MS. COLLINS: Oh, it does. It does.  
But --

INTERVIEWER: Means a lot. Maybe things will change in the future. I hope so.

MS. COLLINS: I hope -- if I live that long.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, you will. I think this is what's keeping you --

MS. COLLINS: Huh?

INTERVIEWER: I think this is what's keeping you going, CSEA. And you're into -- is there anything else? Any other recollections you've got --

MS. COLLINS: Recollections.

INTERVIEWER: You've got all the people's name, you've got -- what about the future? What do you think CSEA's future is? What have we learned from the past that can help us in the future?

MS. COLLINS: In the past. In the past, my time, we had the people that cared, but

I think a lot of these people don't care. You know. It's a job. What the heck do I care. Let them do it, and that's an awful way to look at it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, but it's experience, you know? I mean --

MS. COLLINS: You know, I listen to them. When we were at the Sagamore and I saw those people, they -- well, we had like Liz Havanack and all of them that have been there a long time, you know? She's a young lady and all that, but they know. They were there fighting and everything. This one says let them worry about it.

INTERVIEWER: Well, maybe we need another good fight, huh?

MS. COLLINS: We need something. We need something. And like I was just telling George, the man that brought me, I said I'm a Republican but only Republican. And I said -- he keeps saying the war's over, Bush, and every day I -- you know, I have two sons that work in the Arsenal.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: And every day -- in fact, one son went to Egypt on Sunday for his -- his department became privatized and the doctor from Switzerland that bought it, whatever they're doing, it's the chrome something --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: -- still does business with Egypt because they're doing the same thing and Charles has to go over and make sure and, you know, I get so provoked to think that he says the war is over and you hear so many more were ambushed, this one was -- and, you know, you talk to them and people -- I find that people don't read.

Now we were down at the Center yesterday, we're playing Bingo, and I said something and she says, oh, I can't wait to go home. I said why? She says I gotta watch my story.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: I looked at her, what story, General Hospital or something, and she's a retiree from CSEA and all that. In fact, she was one of the secretaries in the local and due

to the president she got out because he's the only one that does anything. If not for his group he wouldn't have anything. But anyway, I said aren't you ever interested in what's goin' on with CSEA? She says no, you tell me or somebody will say you read it.

Now, when I used to go away and room with Susan --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: -- I'd read everything. The minute we got the packet I'd read everything. Don't you want to read it, Susan? You read it and tell me about it. Same way with Grace Vallee. She and I -- there's another lady that was very active and her husband John was a very active person and he was the type, when he got up, he knew what he was talkin' about, knew the contract backward and forward.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: And, you know, these are Union people. I think you have to be -- of course I started back with Ladies' Garment Workers, so -- and I remember right before the war we went to the Manhattan Opera House on

30 -- 30-something Street and you had all your movie stars, all you people that used to be involved in Unions were there, 'cause they knew something was goin' on and I used to go to them.

I lived in Brooklyn, but it was in New York. Then you could ride on the subway any hour of the night and nobody'd bother you.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: And -- so I became fascinated with the Union and then we were talkin' in 1966 about organizing at the Watervliet Arsenal, we did.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And I was glad. So -- but all in all, from the first day I was fascinated with the Union.

INTERVIEWER: Good. Well, Betty, we want to thank you. It's been really a pleasure to talk to you. I hope you keep on being an activist because, God knows, we need people like you, you know? Just keep on being -- I think you'll see a turnaround. I really do.

MS. COLLINS: You think so?

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. I think it

cycles. I really do.

MS. COLLINS: But if -- I don't know. This newer generation that's coming -- joining the Union. They're joining it because they can get insurance.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: And they can get this and they can get that, but one thing I really don't like is, like The Work Force, the paper. We never used to have all that advertising, you know. It's good. It's good for the members, but there's a lot of people, you know -- and another thing. The new people that are coming in are of a different age, you know, a lot of them coming out of school, although we haven't been hiring anybody, you know.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, that's a problem.

MS. COLLINS: But the -- oh, AFSCME now. I'm looking forward to going to the convention next month. I'll see my friend Steve, and I'll see my Karen --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: All I can say is that I've seen a lot happen.



INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: A lot happen. People have come and gone and we've lost a lot of our good activists. Look at Irene, Irene Carr. She, you know, I'm so glad they have the Irene Carr Award for her because she -- she's a lady.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: She's a beautiful lady. I love her. And like I'm crazy about Maureen, 'cause we all -- she would eat my cheesecakes, and Mary, Mary Sullivan and Barbara. I'll tell you about Barbara.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

MS. COLLINS: We were to the AFSCME convention in 1988. My husband had passed away in '87 and I went as a guest with Susan, and we were -- the hotel we were at, I think it was the Hyatt, and right across the street was the Universal, and we were wondering. From our room we could hear the shooting and the whatever, and they were doing Miami Vice, so that was the year that we had Tuwana Brawley going on.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, yeah.

MS. COLLINS: And Morton Downey, Jr.

was at our hotel and Jack Cassidy was from Region 3 and he was loaded early in the morning and he sees Morton Downey coming over and the next thing he says, if she was a white girl would you do anything? You know, he's goin' on and he starts to fight with him. Now here it's in the morning and we're gettin' ready to get on the bus to go to the convention.

(Laughter.)

MS. COLLINS: So anyway, we had more fun there, you know, and he was told, you know, and of course AFSCME was at the hotel with us, and you have to behave yourself. After all, you never know who's gonna walk through, and that time was so great. We had such good memories and it was just like, what should I say, I hadn't seen Bob Lucey in two years and when you see him, you know, he hugs and kisses you. You know, how are you, Betty, and this and that and the other thing.

But it was so nice. It was so nice to see all these people. Then in -- of course, a lot of them were beginning to fail then. We had elections that year of VPs and, I guess, Mary

was elected and then -- but the first one we went to, that was wonderful. They treated us like kings and queens.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: Although they were very good. Then another time we had the convention at Niagara Falls and that was the year Jimmy Carter was running for re-election and from my room at the hotel you could look over to where the convention center was and you could see them working.

Do you remember the firm of Roemer-Featherstonhaugh?

INTERVIEWER: Sure. Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: Well, Mr. Featherstonhaugh was very funny. We'd sit there and watch, 'cause we knew Jimmy Carter was coming in and Jerry Wirf was still alive then and there's chairs on the stage and he would run behind each chair and then he'd say well, Jerry's sittin' there and that's -- you know, and went on. I think Bill was still our president and it was a circus to watch all these things, you know.

Jerry Wirf and -- Jerry was -- you know he was lame and everybody, you know, would look at him sometimes and, you know, they'd pass it by.

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And they had to seat him in the right place and Featherston was running and you'd see the FBI, all the security people coming in and they had the guns down from there and we're just sitting in the audience waiting, and he was gonna meet Jerry and all that.

There's so many stories. They're funny and they're sad. And then if we were someplace else, that was in '88, that was another affair. We've been to so many things --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: -- and some of them are sad and some of them are, you know --

INTERVIEWER: M-m h-m-

MS. COLLINS: Like when we went in '88 we were at the hotel. Liz -- Lisa Minelli came down in the hot weather with the big white mink coat in the lobby talkin' to everybody. Grace and I went over to the Universal -- of course,

Flo Trippey's cousin is -- he's a trumpet player, little Italian man was Flo Trippey's cousin, so we went over and then Grace and I got locked in the studio. We're waitin' for the bus to come and pick us up and finally Security took us home and at that time it was Diane Lucasy, Al Mead, Billy McMann, John Goeway, Carm Bagnoli. They all went to Disneyland. They were comin' back and here we are getting out of the Security. What did you two do?

(Laughter.)

MS. COLLINS: That was another thing, but the one I'm talkin' about in '88 where our hotel was, it was on top of the hill, so if you were on top of the hill and you wanted to go down to the bottom to a restaurant, the cab will take you back down but they wouldn't bring you back, so that night there must have been about 20 of us in this restaurant. Charlie Statt, do you know him? Well, he's from Social Services, and he was a big man. We're waiting for a cab, waiting for a cab, and there was about eight of us. I don't know how the others got home.

So Barbara Reeves and Bud Bunki were

coming out and they said, what are you guys doing here? I said we can't get a cab to take us up the hill, so they had a small car. All you can imagine is, you know, in the circus with the clowns (laughter), they all keep comin' out of the little car? Well, we got in that car and Charlie Statt and Dolores Farrell and Joan Tobin. There was a whole bunch of us. We got in that car and lots of times I'll say to Barbara, Barbara, will you remember that night? She says, yes, I'll remember that night.

But there's so many things that we have that we can laugh about, and like Kathy, who is Danny's secretary now, when I came to the insurance meeting in May, she came in and, oh, it was a hug and kissing and we had new people on the committee, so she says, Bett, do you remember those -- and she's lookin' and she wondered, these people, is that what they do?

But, again, we partied and we worked. We were there the next day. Otherwise Mr. Mead would come looking for us, so all in all, I can say my 33 years and a couple of months have been a lot. A lot of sad things, a lot of happy

things, and I've made a lot of friends. They're lifetime friends.

INTERVIEWER: M-m-m.

MS. COLLINS: And I hope we can do more. But I hope we can do more for our retirees.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

MS. COLLINS: Because I -- when they vote on a contract we only get the pittance, you know. We can't get this, we can't get that, and I don't know. But it's been a wonderful, wonderful time.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. All right. I think we're --

MS. COLLINS: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you, Betty. It was really great.

MS. COLLINS: Yeah?

INTERVIEWER: I really enjoyed it. I really did.

(Whereupon, the interview of Betty Collins was concluded.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, JEANNE M. CARPENTIER, do hereby  
certify that the preceding is a true and accurate  
transcription of the taped proceedings held in  
the above-entitled matter to the best of my  
knowledge and belief.

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Sworn to before me this

\_\_\_\_\_day of\_\_\_\_\_

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My commission expires

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