

Interview with Flo Trippi

FT: Okay, well, my name is Florence but I always go by Flo Trippi. I serve as now the region six president. I have been active in CSEA since the mid-70's, which I don't like to admit. In the mid-70's I worked for the Monroe County Health Department. In fact, I started with the health department back in 1968. I was a real kid then. And I ended up in the early 70's finding out about CSEA. I had started with the Health Department in 1968 and no one had ever talked to me about CSEA. Someone had come to me and said, "Sign this card"-which I did, and that was it. And I didn't know much about it. And in the mid 70's there had been a problem with one of our employees. A woman who worked as a 10-month school employee ended up taking a trip to go pick up her son in Virginia. And when she went to pick up her son she was killed in an auto accident. Her family ended up having a tremendous amount of problems. The retirement system refused to pay the annuity because she was on a no-pay day. She took it unauthorized, and so on, and so on. And so they gave her a real hassle about her family. And she left a husband and five boys. In fact, one of her sons she had gone to pick up from college. And they were all in the accident. And so this, Bob Foley his name was, called me up and said, "I don't know what to do. And I know you. Can you help us?" I said, "I don't know." So I started making some phone calls. Well this turned into... I mean I had to call everybody but the governor at that point, and I probably would have called him because I thought this was so unfair. One phone call led to another, and to another, and to another. It took me about a week and a-half. But I finally got through to people where they reversed the decision and this family was then able to collect the money that was then due them for this because she was in the retirement system. Well, all of the things as I was going along and generating one phone call, which generated another, I just started getting interesting. So, once I finished with that, all of the sudden people knew what I did and they said, 'Can you help us with this?' and "Can you help us with that?" So, one thing led to another and I got the fever. And I really call it an eternal fever because once you do something like that and you see an end result that you really helped someone. And so from there I contacted the people in the union who at that point was a person by the name of Martin Konig. And he was newly elected. He worked for probation. And he says, 'Oh, yes, we'd love to have you join us.' And so I went in and started going to some meetings and immediately got on a social committee because I think that's what they did with all the women in those days, you put them in social committees. From the social committee I started going to their local meetings and looking at training and I got into Cornell. And at that particular point our health department in Monroe County did not have its own CSEA. We were part of the Department of Social Services. And so at that particular point I took the bull by the horns and said, 'That's it. We're having a health department (at that point) unit.' And we did. We formed one and I became the president of that and I think the rest of it is sort of history. We had a tremendously active group. I started getting involved in negotiations then and long about the end of the 70s, right around 1979, towards the 80's the president became very threatened by me and felt that I was just doing too much. And so he started putting the kibosh on what I could do and where I could go and if I wanted to go to a training, I was not allowed to do that. And so I ran against him for the next election and I beat him.

FV: Who was that?

FT: His name was Martin Konig. He was an eight-year incumbent. He was also the board rep for Monroe County. He was the local president and did some very good things. Brought CSEA out of the association phase, into a union. Made sure that our contracts which at that point were handshakes over a table were written

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contracts. And so he did a very good job, but when he turned on me a little bit I didn't like it and I ended up beating him. And then I became the unit president in 1981 of the Monroe County local and unit and, actually, it was the unit at that point that I became the president of. Because the local and the unit split off. And at that time I ended up being the president until I became region president. And so what happens with you is what I said, the eternal fever gets you and then you just want to know more. I went to Cornell, took the labor studies course in the certificate program and graduated from that. And that really opened my eyes and my mind to a labor community up there. The carpenters, and other public employee unions, and the teachers, and the building trades, and some of the CWA and so on were in my class and we started talking. So, I became very interested in the labor community at that point and then went to the local and said, "We need to join this AFL- CIO group." Which we did. And we have been active in there ever since and very much a part of the direction of the labor movement in Rochester. So, then I became a region officer under Bob Lattimer. His first VP for many years. And that sort of acclimated me to the region and to the fourteen-county area that we represent and so when Bob decided to retire, then it was my turn, I felt to really take over the reins. And that's what happened.

FV: Now, was there ... do you come from a family that is part of labor?

FT: Weil, interestingly, I have two sides to my family. My mother's side of the family was very business oriented. They owned a little grocery store and the Republicans had been very good to them, especially during the depression and all that and so they were very much business oriented and not union oriented at all. My father's family were immigrants who came and belonged to the, at that time it was the Amalgamated Clothing Workers. And my two aunts were very, very involved in their union and we used to trade stories because as they got older they told me about how Sam Popick, who was their business agent, used to walk in and say, "There's a union meeting tonight, you be there." And nobody dared miss that meeting. And they had hundreds of people at union meetings when they would call them. So that was the side of my family that was union oriented and when I grew up, I really grew up very ... not knowing much about unions or labor unions and really not getting involved in the labor union movement until I started working in the Health Department.

FV: Interesting. I have a very similar background.

FT: Really?

FV: Yeah. My mother's side was the grocery store and my father and his brothers were working in the factories in Troy and they were part of the same union.

FT: When my grandpa first came over from Italy, he worked in the coal mines in Pennsylvania and then decided to move here, he and his brothers, and then they moved here and that's when they got to the clothing factories and then brought their wives over. So that was a long time ago but it's a wonderful history and thankfully my aunts both shared a lot of that with us before they passed away so that we have some history of what happened.

FV: Yeah. So, I've been talking to everybody about how everybody that's part of the history of CSEA got what you call "the fever". I call it a conviction. You get a taste of what should be done and you go and you do it and you find you've got people behind you, helping you and that's what a union is.

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FT: See, I am a member person. Even as an officer I keep being reminded that I'm a management individual now and I'll never think like a manager. I have to tell you that I am member-oriented and I will always be that way. And we did, we had a tremendous, in fact many of the people that started with me in the union were either promoted into management-type positions or MC positions or they've retired. And we still once in a while get together and just talk about the old days. We went on strike in 1977, by the way. We had a three-day strike in Monroe County and I know that we, one of our fellows who was on strike with us, figured out how far we all walked. Everybody, everybody went out.

FV: Tell me more about that. When did the strike happen?

FT: There were negotiations in the 70's. It was back in 1976 and there were some budget problems happening. And back on December 7, 1976, there was a county legislature meeting where the county legislature decided that they were going to cut everyone's salary over a certain amount, 10 percent, and then there was an interim place where they only cut it, they cut everybody else's five percent. This is without, by the way, any negotiations. And we had a legislature meeting that there were 200 of us that were there until six o'clock in the morning because they keep taking recesses, figuring we would go and we would leave because we hadn't had any supper and we had come right after work. And we all stayed there until six in the morning until they took this vote.

FV: Where was this?

FT: In the Monroe County Legislature in Rochester New York. And from there, negotiations went from bad to worse and one thing led to another and there was a strike called in August, the 22nd to the 24th in 1977. I still have a sign, by the way, that says, 'Monroe County employees will not be working today.' And it was over wages. It was also this issue of the five and 10 percent pay cut, by they way, which was deemed illegal afterwards because we did take them to court on it. They also cut home relief, which was mandated by the state of New York at that point for social service clients.

FV: Why did they think they had this power? Who were they? Who were these people?

FT: Well, you have to... these were the Monroe County Legislators who ... oh yeah, the two specifically, his name was John Hoff and many others who just joined the tanks. Joe Ferrarian. People who had been good friends of ours up to that point.

FV: What was the impetus?

FT: The impetus was that there were significant budget problems and there were starting deficits from New York State over, obviously, the Medicaid which is still prevalent now. But at that particular point, they thought the best thing they could do was just cut everything, not realizing that those were mandated programs by the state of New York. So, anyway, to make a long story longer, they ended up trying to do that, which was the impetus which caused a strike in August. We went out for three days. It was a tremendously successful strike. We have several work locations-all of them were on strike. But the biggest help we had was our pure waters, our sewage treatment plant people who went out on strike, in force, and there was nobody to monitor. And so sewage started seeping

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into the lake and the county was then going to be, of course somebody, I don't know who it was, called the Environmental Protection Agency to check that out. And when they checked it out they found out that sewage certainly was seeping into the lake and Monroe County was going to be fined significantly and that put everybody back to the table and the strike was settled within two days. So it was the time of my life. But one of our fellows ...

FV: Now, was the strike legal?

FT: No. We all went on strike. It was illegal. I still have, by the way, in my personnel file in Monroe County, the letter that tells me that I performed an illegal action. We were fined, by the way, heavily, two days pay for every day that we were off. So we lost six days pay for the three days that we were off.

FV: Did you fight that?

FT: We did, but it was the law and there was nothing we could do about it. Many times, I've tried to have that memo removed from my file and others also but they will refuse to do that. And I said, 'Well, you know something, I want it to stay there. I want people to know that I did that.' That was important for me to do that. In fact, I'm going to get a copy of that one day and frame it and put it on the wall.

FV: A badge.

FT: That's right. A badge of honor. But we did settle our strike after that and that only brought a really cohesiveness to the union after that and it was a great time in Monroe County. I think that could be, too, why I was lucky enough to win the election in the early 80's and become unit president. I did many contracts. I have done, probably, at least, where I was the president, at least six contracts and before that I was on the negotiating team for two others. We've never lost a benefit in Monroe County. I pride myself on always being very open in the negotiating process, making sure people understood and knew what we were after and what we were going for and very responsive to members. I think that's the most important thing we can learn from this union, is always respond to the members.

FV: Now, during the strike, did you have help from Albany?

FT: Yes we did. We had ... well, actually from the region. All of our staff from the region came in. There were people there from Albany also. Our strike captains who were at each location was a staff person. And they were moved around from day to day because at some point the law was looking for them. And they moved around from one hotel to another. But they were always there and very supportive. I can name right now, Bob Young, who was my, he's retired now. He was a field rep for CSEA, collective bargaining specialist, I believe at that time the title was. And Bob Young was my captain. It was the first time I had ever met the man in my life and he was absolutely stupendous. He did everything he could to help us and make sure we understood what we were doing, why we were doing it, made sure he really dealt with the rank and file who started to get a little bit discouraged after a day or so. He was wonderful, as was anyone else who was in that thing. I can only speak to what was going on at my work location. But we figured in two days we walked from Rochester to New Orleans and back with the number of people walking and the number of steps, the average, we had somebody who was very technical and figured out the average number of steps

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per person, and we walked from Rochester to New Orleans in three days, and back! I have to admit, I would have probably rather been in New Orleans during when this was all going on. It was a tough time. It was a tough time.

FV: Sure. Yeah, but that's good old-fashioned unionism.

FT: And, as I said, people stuck together and people really, even though they knew right up front what the penalties would be—there was no question that we were going to be penalized financially and people, some attempts were made to penalize them also through their workplace and discipline them afterwards. I'll tell you a story. When we were going on strike, I happened to be the supervisor at that point of all the clerical staff. And we had all of the records for the nursing division. I don't know how many people actually know this, but the day that we went on strike, when the strike was declared, our health director got everybody together on that Friday afternoon and said, "We know you may not be back Monday, and I just want you know, whatever you have to do, you do." And he supported us on it. But just to make sure. I happened to be the keeper of the keys. I just happened to walk off with every key to every locked file there was so that nobody could get any information on any of the patients or the clients or whatever and they were all looking for these keys for a long time. They appeared, but after the strike was over.

FV: I love stories like that. That's what makes a union a union.

FT: Can I go back to the story of the lady who lost her life, the reason that I started getting involved?

FV: Oh sure.

FT: That woman who died, Madeline Foley was her name, many years later, the son that she went to pick up, his name is Terry Foley, became the unit president of the Town of Greece CSEA, which is highway workers in the Town of Greece. It's a small suburb, actually it's a large suburb on the outside of Rochester where I now live. But Terry Foley became the unit president for many years in that particular unit that was his way, he said, some ways of paying CSEA for what they did when his mom passed away. And I always thought that was sort of a nice story and just made it all worthwhile. It sort of all tied it together many years down the road.

FV: Yeah. That's a wonderful story. Great. So, tell us about some of the personalities that you've come into contact with in CSEA.

FT: Well, when I started with CSEA, I told you about Marty Konig, who I thought really brought CSEA in Monroe County into the 20th century and really brought the Taylor law. He was a very, obstinate man and really didn't get along well with management, which I didn't think was too bad, but it really did cause a lot of problems. Bill McGowan was the first president I knew. I had heard about Ted Wenzl but I only heard about him. I really never knew him or of him. But during that era was the era Danny Donohue was president at that point, he had just become president of region one. Joe McDermott, at that point was not an officer. He was a region four president. Looking back at some of the people who sort of have been our history, that's really as far as I can go. Bob Lattimer had just become the region six president because Bill McGowan had just become the statewide president and Bob moved up. Ramona Gallagher, who was here before me, was the third VP of the region. And I will tell you a story. When I went to my

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very first meeting in Batavia, one of our ex-attorneys, her name was Marge Crow, she was doing a course or a little workshop on CETA, the CETA program which had just started in the federal government, allowing people to come in at entry level positions and work their way up. I went to a meeting in Batavia and I knew nobody. I knew no one in the room. I walked in and this room was filled and one woman came up to me and put her hand out to me and said, 'Hi, my name is Ramona Gallagher. You're new here, aren't you?' And I said, "Yes, I am. I," And I was a bit intimidated. It's a little unusual for me to be intimidated but I was. And she came over and she said, "Please join us." And she introduced me to Bob Lattimer and she insisted that I have lunch with them at their table and if it wasn't for that I don't know if I would have ever gone back to a regional-type meeting, only because I didn't know anybody and no one made any ... and I always learned from that lesson that when I go into a room and I see someone who doesn't look familiar to me or maybe I haven't seen them before, I try to go up to them always and introduce myself and say, 'Are you new? Is this the first time you've been here?'

Because it's so important that people feel some type of comfort when they come to these things, otherwise some of them won't come back. So, that's Ramona. And, of course, I've worked with some of the best. Bernie Ryan who was at that point our political action; I got very involved in the political action committee. I became chair of the judicial board, which was from its inception... Actually, I was a member of the judicial board and then two years later became the chair. And that was, from the time it started, where it's an internal process where we started an internal tribunal sort of to look at problems internal to CSEA as opposed to bringing them out, you know, keeping your laundry inside. And I became chair of that and worked with some wonderful people like Eva Katz and Bill Sole who have retired since from CSEA and long-time activists. In region six, people like Sam McGavaro and Charlie Peritore who you've mentioned. People like Dominick Spacone who was sort of an anti-anything I believed in but always was a very, very fine person to talk to and never really stopped talking to you because you didn't agree with his position was another with a long history here in region six. Many of the people, there was an assemblyman by the name of Frank Talomey who before that had been the western conference president of CSEA which was originally the western region. It was western conference. So those people, which really I didn't know from the beginning, but I sort of got involved with them somewhat. And of course, the current officers. Mary Sullivan, Maureen Malone, who at that point were chairs at the local government workshop. I got on the board in 1986, the statewide board and then became a board rep for Monroe County. And enjoyed that tremendously. Caused a lot of problems.

FV: Oh yeah? What kind of problems?

FT: Oh, well, I'm one of these people that, I don't like someone to put something under my nose and say, "Vote on it." And so, whenever that happened I made sure people didn't say, 'We're going to just vote on it.' I said, 'Let's ask some questions. Let's table it to the next meeting.' And, of course, sometimes presidents don't like that because if they want something passed, they want it passed and I'm not the kind of person that does that.

FV: What kind of issues were they talking about?

FT: Well, we were talking about issues of like the financial issues of buying computers. We were talking about changing the titles of the labor relation specialists that are currently now or the field reps which had actually been

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approved by their union but we didn't know what the ramifications would be for CSEA. Those are just some of them. There was a lot of them over the years. And I was pretty cantankerous over budgets. It's funny, because now you're in an entirely different situation with those same issues, being an officer of the union, so it's sometimes a little difficult to separate that out.

FV: What was it like working with Bob when he was the region president.

FT: It was wonderful. FV: Yeah?

FT: Yeah. We never...

FV: There were a lot of different opinions about Bob.

FT: Absolutely. I will tell you that, we didn't agree on everything. We didn't always see eye to eye on every single thing, but I always respected...I have a tremendous amount of respect for Bob Lattimer. I think that he did a wonderful job as a region president. I think the past years before he left were difficult ones for him because of his health but I think that he really brought a new sort of outlook to region six. And at one point under Bob Lattimer, region six was a totally, totally united region. Very, very cohesive, stuck together. In fact, we were called the animals by Bill McGowan. This was at the time when they were, this was another major confrontation in the union, when the law firm of Roemer and Featherstonhaugh was under fire and they were obviously thinking of firing that law firm. And Bob and I stood shoulder to shoulder with Joe McDermott and so on to try and get that overturned and not have that happen, because I believe Roemer and Featherstonhaugh were absolutely phenomenal attorneys for this, and did a great job for us. So, because of that, that was a major issue that we were all involved in. And I totally just lost my whole train of thought.

FV: That's okay, your respect for Bob and...

FT: Oh, right. And at that particular point we were at a delegates' meeting. And Bill McGowan. I got up at the mic and really was challenging him about the cost and what was happening and so on and he just screamed (everybody behind me was sort of making a lot of noise), and he says, 'Oh, don't pay any attention to those. Those are just the animals from region six.' Well, of course, Bill McGowan came from region six. And we still have our shirts, by the way. In fact, I would have brought one.

FV: I would love to see them.

FT: We had a region six shirt with "all the animals" on the front part and then on the back, of course, our map and region six CSEA on it. But yeah, it was the region animals. And that became our mascot, I mean, really a mascot for many, many years. You know, somebody made me a pillow out of the T-shirt. And it just dawned on me, I'm going to bring that in here. I still have it.

FV: Yeah, we want a picture of that. That will probably go in the history book that we're going to be...

FT: That is a classic here and this was pretty much, let's see. They were fired in 1986, I believe. So, I'm pretty sure that it was just shortly before that, 85

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that this all happened. And around 86 was when we had the T-shirt made with the region six animals on it. Something we were very proud of, by the way.

FV: Sure. Yeah.

FT: But under Bob, it really was a very cohesive, very good group. As I said, whether I agreed or disagreed with him, when we left that room after we had our discussion and I was able to disagree, I always had a tremendous respect and supported what the consensus of the group was. I think he did a marvelous job as region president. The other thing about Bob, he was always ... he was never a person that agreed totally with anybody. He always brought up sort of the other side of the picture. And I thought that was good. And that's a lesson I learned from him, is that whenever anybody talks to you about a procedure or changing a policy, try to look at what the other side of that is so that you can really make an informed decision. I think Bob also was one of a breed that is no longer in the union. Unfortunately, I think people come on to our board and they come into being officers thinking that they have to agree with everything that is being said and done because Albany says it's so, and that's not necessarily true. And I think region six probably is the most questioning region, challenging region. And I like that about them. I may not always agree with them and I may sometimes get mad at the way they think but I've never... I've always respected it. And I think we need to do that. I think we need to be challenged and I think we need to have people say, 'I don't think that's the right thing you're doing' and tell me why. But, as I said, Bob Lattimer, Ramona Gallagher did a significant amount of work. We've had other officers in our region that were also very ... Terry Mulvin who is now the assistant to the president was our secretary. We had people like Candy Saxon, who's an LRS now, who was a former officer of this region. A labor relations specialist who is now a staff person in CSEA. She went on to be statewide secretary and then came back and became a labor relation specialist. And that's another thing about our region. I think we have more staff people who were part of the ranks, who were either local presidents or officers in their locals who have come on staff and I think have done a yeoman's job because of their knowledge of what the members go through and what officers sort of experience and I think that makes a big difference. Oh by the way, one of the really great things that happened to me in this union was Solidarity Day of 1981. I went to Washington on a bus and marched in 150 degrees, I think, in Washington's streets. We were waiting to pass fountains so we could just dip our foot or our hand in the fountain. That was one of the most exciting things. They actually turned fire hoses on us just to keep us cool because there were people really becoming very ill. But that was an exciting experience to see hundreds of thousands of people in their union shirts just sticking together and being there for a cause of just solidarity. I thought it was wonderful.

FV: The Woodstock of unionism.

FT: Absolutely. Absolutely. That's a great way to describe it.

FV: Let's go back to some of the other personalities. Now, McGowan versus McDermott. What happened there? What's your take on what happened between those two?

FT: I think, personally, that there was just a real total disagreement in style. Bill was basically a member person. I will tell you that I never had a lot of dealings with Bill McGowan but no matter whether I agreed with him or disagreed

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with him, Bill McGowan never took me off a committee, never stopped giving me an assignment because of the fact that I disagreed with him. I was the chair of the judicial board at that point and was very... I took that job very seriously. And many of the things we did in the judicial board didn't really agree with what the president or what the officers would want to do. I never ever once was called into Bill McGowan's office to say, 'I don't like what you did. You should have not done that. And because of that you're not going to be on the committee anymore.' I cannot say the same thing for Joe McDermott. When McDermott came into power- McDermott ... Joe is a great guy, in fact, I get along better with him now than I did when he was president. Joe is a corporation person. He really felt that the corporate level of CSEA was much more important. He spent a lot of time in the office. A lot of time with the first level managers. I think that, and Bill McGowan didn't do that. I think the major difference between the two of them was style. The second difference was their belief in what was the best for the union and how that should be accomplished. And what I meant by that is obviously the Roemer and Featherstone issue became, I think, the dividing line there. I think McGowan always knew that McDermott wanted his job and to Joe's credit, he didn't take the job until after Bill retired. But I liked Bill McGowan. I liked him for his member involvement. I liked him for his, sort of just, simpleness. You know, he chewed on his cigar and told it like it was and he came from the ranks. He came from, at that point it was the West Seneca Developmental Center where he was for many years active. Joe, on the other hand, was from DOT who was basically in the managerial structure. I don't know if Joe ever really understood the nitty gritty of the poor guy who was the laborer, or ... and I don't mean that in a negative way. I'm just saying I don't think from his perspective that people ever thought about ... where Bill came from the labor structure. And as I said, I think just a dividing of style and then the divisive issue of the law firm really just split them apart. But once Joe became president I think I argued with him more than I did with any other president in this union. I mean, not that I knew that many. I knew Bill McGowan, I know Joe McDermott, I know Danny Donohue...Joe was, as I said, I object to the corporation being the important part of this union. I think that members, and if we don't continue to remember that our grassroot membership is what counts in this union and if we don't get them active, involved in knowing about this union then this union is, as far as I'm concerned, not worth it's salt. Danny is a good combination. I think Danny Donohue, moving from Joe McDermott to Donohue, Danny is a member person, gets out with the members, but yet still feels in the structure of his managers and so on. Sometimes I'm not happy with their decisions because I don't know whether they're his or his managers, but at this particular point I have to tell you that I think there's a happier medium there of both corporation and membership than there ever has been.

FV: Good. That's a good picture of the difference in the three.

FT: I think really and truly. And I think Danny gets himself on the road. Where Danny has excelled, I think, in this union (and I think Joe started this) was the really relationship with AFSCME and the relationship with the AFLCIO and the relationship within the labor community I think has been enhanced. I think it was started by Joe and I think it has been really continued by Danny Donohue.

FV: Now the involvement with AFSCME. Did you have anything to do with any of that?

FT: No. In fact, I was just, as I said, it was around 1978. Bob Lattimer was very involved in that. He was part of that group that was locked in a room.

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And I heard the stories and I knew at that particular point that we were going to affiliate and I heard basically most of the stories later on. In fact, Marty Konig, who at that point was the president, was also part of that group that got locked in a room in headquarters and really talked about the affiliation and who came out with the ... and I think Bob, by the way, was one of the biggest supporters of that affiliation. We had lost PS&T and I was around for that. And as a matter of fact, I have to tell you, that if we wouldn't have lost PS&T I probably wouldn't be sitting here.

FV: Oh yeah.

FT: The major leaders of our region at that point and in many cases of the CSEA across the state were the people who went with PS&T. And what ended up happening was once those people are moved into another union, it sort of left openings for some of us to move up. Otherwise, I would guess that a lot of us who are in a leadership role now and took a leadership role on from the 80's to the 90's would probably not be here. Because they were really, they were the top level. In this particular region I remember Peter Blaisdale who was very much ... but they again, and Bob and Joe (Bob Lattimer and Joe McDermott) would have both been PS&T had their job structure not been changed and moved into the CSEA bargain neither one of them would be with us. But I was right at the tail end of that, but I was at the first AFSCME convention that we held together 1980. It was in Anaheim, California. It was very new to me because I had never been to a convention with that many people and it was sort of a little bit of an obstinacy for CSEA because we had to elect at that point our international vice presidents, of which we had, I believe at that time two. And there was tremendous challenges within our own union. And, of course, we never knew this but in AFSCME conventions there is no antagonism at all. I mean, everything comes the way the president wants it. At that time it was Jerry Worth. Jerry Worth came in and you know he tells everybody what you're doing and when it came to CSEA of course he couldn't do that. So, everybody was running against everybody else for these two international vice president seats which was quite an eye-opener for me and not knowing anything about the international at that point I was not too thrilled with it by the end of that convention. The best thing that happened to me that convention was the Yankees were playing in Anaheim and I don't know if you know, but I'm a die-hard Yankee fan. And the Yankees were playing the Anaheim Angels and it was in the old stadium in Anaheim and they stayed in our hotel. The Yanks stayed in our hotel. Oh! We have a Boston fan here. I say, if they weren't so nasty to me I'd like them. So, but anyway it was a very, it was a great week because it really brought CSEA, it was the first time, CSEA we were always a regional-type thing. We always stuck with our regions. We always did things with our regions. Very few of us knew anybody outside of it unless you were on a committee with them. And it was the first time that CSEA all stayed at this Hyatt, I think it was a Hyatt at that point and when we got together, for example at meetings, when we got together socially, we would finish with our meetings at 3:00 or 3:30 in the afternoon and all of the sudden it was a CSEA function. It wasn't region six versus region one, or region two versus region four. It was all of us together. And I think that was when I started to realize that we were just part of this much bigger organization. And of course, I was local government at that point. We were in the minority in CSEA. So what ended up happening was I think it just sort of brought people together. And it gave me a knowledge of really where we needed to go. That we needed not to be local government. That we needed not to be state government. We needed to be CSEA. And I think that's the first time that I really realized it at that convention. And I haven't missed a convention

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since then. I was lucky enough to be elected to go on the ballots for the other conventions and I certainly see a much different CSEA/AFSCME relationship than I had. In this particular region, I will tell you there is an excellent, excellent relationship with AFSCME and we've worked on some community issues together. We have a new director here by the name of Russ Clemens who has really done a fine job. Not that the other ones weren't as good, but there was never a real melding of CSEA and AFSCME working together with issues. It was AFSCME's issues, it was CSEA's issues. If never the twain shall meet, well that isn't the way to operate. I think that has really come full circle since at least I've been here.

FV: Any other people that you remember, that you know?

FT: Oh, God. There's Ervin Flannenbaum. I didn't know him well but he was active. He was the region president of region one. A guy named Saul Bendette who got up and screamed and yelled not only for region two when he was the president there but afterwards when he became a retiree he was furious retirees didn't have the right to say anything and he was instrumental in getting the retirees to at least have the right to speak on retiree issues. Oh, God, there were so many people that came. Frances DuBoise who became the region president of region two, the first female and black region president for a very short period of time, died of a terrible heart attack. Pat Maccioli from region three. He was the region three president. Before that he was the Westchester County president. And I loved Pat Maccioli. He taught me a lesson and the lesson he taught me was you never forget something that happens to someone. For example, if you know someone, if there was a birthday, they got a card from Pat Maccioli. If someone had a baby, they got a card from Pat Maccioli. He always remembered that and always was very good about making sure that people were remembered at a time that was important to them. And I tried not to forget that either. He was a great guy and he ended up dying of a heart attack at the Desmond Hotel. In fact, I was just talking to the other region presidents about that. We were talking about that one night. And then Carmine DeBattista who just retired as the region three president. Carmine has been with CSEA 30 years and we were on the political action committee together. We did a lot of different committees together and then of course became colleagues when I became a region president and really got to know and really like Carmine a lot although he is very different than some of the other region presidents. I really liked him.

FV: How was he different?

FT: He's different in that his mentality, well I'll tell you something he did. When I got my car, after I won the region presidency I got a car from CSEA which is a lease car. I was so proud of my car. I had a Sable. Now, all my other colleagues have 300 Chryslers. And I said 'first of all, my brother works for Ford so I'm getting a Ford product and second of all, I don't drive anything that my members don't drive, and not too many of my members drive 300 Chryslers.' I was so excited with my car, which is out there, and we had gone out to dinner. They took me out to dinner because I was the new kid on the block. And we came back and I said, 'Come on, I want you all to see my car.' And I got there and everybody said, 'Oh, this is really nice. It's a nice car,' you know, blah, blah, blah. And Carmine just looked at it and he says, 'This would never do.' And I looked at him and I said, 'What do you mean, this would never do?' He says, 'I could never drive this car.' I said, 'Why?' He said, 'It's just too small.' Small, about a Sable! You know Carmine. So Carmine was always a little bit more affected than most of us. He loved good wine. I could care less

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about good wine, I mean Ripple is fine with me. He loved a good drink. It had to be a certain kind of bourbon or a certain kind, you know I could care less about that. And always his clothes. He was impeccable in the way he dressed, as far as his clothes. But I will tell you that he was a hardworking, very fine region president. He was hardworking when he was on committees with me. And so even though he's a little bit more fine-tuned, I guess we'd call it, with what he called the finer things of life, which are fine to him, but those are not the finer things in life as far as I'm concerned. And we loved him for it. He was just a great guy and we could always depend on him to come out with some remark about wine or something and everybody would look at him and say, 'Who cares, Carmine? Who cares?' And held laugh along with us.

FV: It's what we call in the advertising business brand conscious.

FT: Yeah. Absolutely. Everything had to be something that was a Gucci or something and you know something, I could care less. I just make sure it's made in America. That's what I do. But history, as I said, Carmine was...I didn't know Jimmy Lennon and I didn't know, I've heard the names since then of other region presidents, I didn't know them because I was much more region oriented or local oriented by that point. I mean, union names I can name a lot of legislators, the governors. By the way, I heard Hugh Carey sing New York, New York one night at a fund raiser. I was quite impressed even though he couldn't sing very well I was impressed that he got up and did that and asked people to dance. I wasn't one of them, but he danced with a lot of people. At that point a governor to me, or a president, that's the other thing. When Jimmy Carter was running for president Jimmy Carter came to one of our conventions in Niagara Falls and I was part of the group that ended up working to make the signs and make sure along with the Secret Service. That was very exciting to me because we were in a circle that was a real closed circle. We knew things that we couldn't say to anybody else. We knew where wiring was happening and alarms were going to be put in. Oh, they had to almost revamp the entire Niagara Falls Convention Center so Jimmy Carter could come. He was already president at that point and he was also running for president again'. And it was a wonderful experience working with the Secret Service people. And of course, since then I have had the opportunity to do that again with Hillary Clinton and Bill Clinton. But because of this union I have met and been in the company of people that I would have never, never been able to have that advantage. And Al Gore. I was one of the people, by the way, that was selected to work on Al Gore's campaign in Iowa a couple years ago. And went to Iowa, by the way which he won the state. I like to think it was something that we had to do with. Myself and President Cathy Garrison, the region four president, Cathy Garrison went to Davenport, Iowa and spent almost two weeks there working on the campaign and working with the people in Davenport, Iowa who are real rednecks, by the way. In fact, when we first got there the first thing that was said to us, "Oh, the little ladies are here from New York." Which we had to straighten out and it didn't take us long to do that.

FV: I can imagine!

FT: "We're going to have to take the little ladies out to lunch." "Well, if you ever find little ladies to take out to lunch, I hope you do it. But these two are not interested.' You know. But we had a great time. I ended up walking the streets with several of their candidates, two of whom won, and got to meet some wonderful people that eventually, when we got to know each other, really got along very, very well. I never realized this but in Davenport, Iowa the minute you put your car on the bridge, you're in Illinois. And we worked, by the way,

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with several AFSCME coordinators. Curt Anderson and different people from the different states who were also there coordinating the campaign with us. We had a great time. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience for me. And like I said, people that I never ever would have come in contact with or met. Places I would have never gone. The Californias and the Atlantic Cities. Well, I probably would have gotten there if I was interested.

FV: But not Davenport.

FT: No, not Davenport, Iowa. No. Which, by the way, the following year was when the floods came and flooded out the whole town. And I was pretty glad I wasn't there then, I'll tell you.

FV: Well good. That's some good stuff. Let me ask you a couple more questions.

FT: Sure.

FV: What are you most proud of in your CSEA experience, up till now, of course?

FT: Oh, there's so many things. What am I most proud of?

FV: Yeah.

FT: First of all, I'm really proud to be a part of this organization. I think that this organization is just a great, great voice and a great way for people to become what they want to be, or become what they don't even know they can become, actually. The thing that I'm most proud of, I think, in this particular, over the 30-year span, I think, are the contracts that I negotiated in Monroe County and the fact that I think that there was a significant mutual respect that is still there with the membership. The other thing that I am most proud of is becoming a region six president. I have to tell you that I think that that was one of my dreams for many years and did not want to do it until Bob Lattimer decided he wanted to retire. And it is probably something that I have... I didn't know if I was going to regret but when I was here a half a day I knew that I had made the right choice. So, I'm very proud to be the representative for this region. I think it's a great region.

FV: What are you most disappointed by in CSEA?

FT: Hmm. Well, I think one of the things I am most disappointed in is that we, even though with all the work we've done and all of the kinds of things that we have worked at, that we're still not the greatest union that there is. Because I really feel that there's things we need to do more of. And I think sometimes we put our energies in the wrong place. And what I mean by that is I really think we need to do more with our rank and file and with our grass toots. And I think sometimes we have a tendency to bring it to the higher level and let our decisions deal in the higher level. And I think we need to really get down to the basics. I learned a lesson a long time ago and it's you never forget from whence you come. I was a clerk in the Monroe County Health Department. I will always be a clerk in the Monroe County Health Department because I think it's important always to remember that in this organization. You need to remember where you came from and what those people are experiencing all the time. The only other thing that I think is really important and I think we need to always remember is that we have other things besides union. We have family. I have a very large family. I'm from a very close-knit family. Many of them are

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spread out all over the states now, my nieces and nephews, but I think it is awfully important for people to recognize the fact that when people become active in this union that they have other responsibilities besides just being a union representative. And they need to remember that family and the kinds of things that they need to do for those families are important also. I think we have a tendency to push our people so much that, 'Oh you need to go to that meeting even though it's your son's birthday, or it's your son's first soccer game, or...' And one of the things I have always remembered, I had a steward once who told me, "I'll give you anything you want, 100% during the day, but when I comes five o'clock I've got to be home with my family.- And I said, 'You know, Rachel, I appreciate that.'"

FV: Okay, you may have answered this in other ways, but let me ask you this way: What do you see is the most important event during your time of involvement with CSEA?

FT: Solidarity Day 1981 is one. The delegates' meeting when I had a fight with Bill McGowan over the law firm was the second thing that I think is the most important. And the, oh there are so many. I think this union taking a stance on the Bill Clinton election was an extremely important turning point for this union politically. Thirty years, it's like a reel that just keeps swinging. Oh, there's probably so many that I can't think of right now.

FV: You make a list and we'll come back.

FT: Okay. I will do that. I'll start thinking about that. If I had known that, I would have started thinking about that before then.

FV: There's lots of things that are going to start bubbling up now because you haven't thought about them for a while.

FT: Absolutely. And you know, I drive a lot because I'm in my car all the time.

FV: Oh yeah. Do you use a tape recorder?

FT: I don't. I have one in the car that I could use, but the other thing, too is I do a lot of my thinking when I'm driving.

FV: Oh good. You don't forget what you thought. I can tell. All right. One more question: What lesson does CSEA's history hold for its future?

FT: Wow. Well, I firmly believe that without the history we aren't going anywhere and we aren't moving into the future because have we made mistakes? Yes. And we can learn from the mistakes we have made. And also, the fact that this union, I believe over the last, and I really think 30 to 35 years has had a growth and development and it's because of what we've done, how we've done it. Has it always been right? No. But can you learn from what you did wrong? Yes. And I think without that history you can't really move forward into the future because now we can look back and say, "You know, we tried that at one point and it didn't work then, but maybe it'll work now." We are moving into a time in history that's very... I think we've been through a time in history that's very bad for unions and especially for CSEA and the Public Sector. We're moving into the private sector. We're moving more into an organizing mode, We're moving into taking the development that we've had and really bringing it into a huge leadership role within the state and within the country.

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I think the affixation with AFSCME was very smart to do. I think the affiliation with the AFCIO is one of the smartest things we have done and can only enhance our future as far as being a very powerful union. So that's what I think. I think our history is going to sort of mentor where we're going.

FV: Yeah, in relation to developing from a social organization to a union, Ramona used the phrase 'sleeping giant' and I think it's going to happen again.

FT: I do too. I do too. I'd like to also be a part of that. I think that when you've worked in an organization the way you have and believe in any organization, and I do believe in this organization, I have to tell you that very strongly, I would not do what I do if I didn't believe it. I firmly believe that CSEA is a great union. I believe that CSEA gives its members and its grass roots the opportunity to do just as I did, come from a clerk in the health department and become a region president and who knows, maybe someday something else. Not for me; this is where I want to be. I'm not interested in moving. But becoming a statewide president, I mean look at Danny Donohue who was a transport person in one of the mental hygiene facilities who became president of this union and who has become a major force in our state and in our government. I think that it affords people something that they have no idea but they need to believe. And some of our members don't.

FV: Anything else you want to say? We're rolling.

FT: Oh, I don't know.

FV: Well, you've said a lot.

FT: I know, I always say a lot!

FV: No, it's a lot of wonderful stuff. Just giving you an opportunity.

FT: You know, it's just, I can't even begin... it was a new career when I started with the union and I never realized it was going to be a career. I thought it was just going to be a passing fancy. And like you said, you get the conviction, or you want to call it a fever or whatever you do. And you just get that and you ... every day is a challenge. And I think when I was a clerk in the health department and became a supervisor, every day was the same. And with the union every day was different. I still say in the last 30 years there hasn't gone one day that I haven't learned something about unionism or about people. And I think that's what keeps you going. You just wake up the next day saying, "I wonder what today is going to bring?" And every day is different. I drive from Rochester to Buffalo and I plan my day and by the time I get here, the plan has gone by the wayside and you are into something completely different that is just as interesting, just as exciting, just as challenging and it is just... it is a way of life that I think people really need to take a little more seriously. I just have fun doing what I do every day. Do I get tired? Sure. But the next day it's again renewed and you're willing. It's just something that is an incredibly, incredibly satisfying thing. I love what I do.

FV: Good.

FT: Okay. I'll have to think of history.

FV: Whatever you think of, you let us know and write it down or roll a tape.

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FT: Oh, okay.