Oral History Interview with Mary Jean Collins

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Midwest Regional Director of NOW 1970 and National Action Vice-President 1982-85

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Tape begins while interview is in progress.

Mary Jean Collins: [Early Chicago NOW activities involved public accommodation issues,] Bergdorf's Men's Grill in Chicago, getting them to allow women to come in to one part of the restaurant. So, and Carson Pirie Scott, women weren't allowed to come into the dining room during the lunch hour because the men had important things to do, and they weren't just shopping all day, so, they had to have that lunch hour. They had to have that restaurant available to them and we couldn't be there. So, we targeted these places and we -- we went and sat in -- I mean we --

Mary Ann Johnson: Was this in 1968 then?

MJC: It was 1968 and 1969, that's one of the first things we did, and it was, we did model -- we looked around so we obviously modeled ourselves on that, they sat-in, we'll sit-in, so we went and sat in at Bergdorf's. And we did that at Carson Pirie Scott, and, of course, we took the press with us. There's a woman, **Joanna Martin**, she actually did press by day for the Urban League; she's a white woman but she worked for the Urban League and she was very good at what she did, and she did the chapter at night.
I mean there was so much of this where people had their day job and then their night job. There was this incredible activity around the women's movement. So, Joanna was smart and she knew how to get us press. So, she -- we would go to these places -- Bergdorf's, there is still footage of us invading Bergdorf's trying to get them to change the policy, and then the same thing with Carson Pirie Scott. And then we had **Judy Lonnquist** who probably is on your list somewhere, she was the legal staff person, or legal volunteer for us.

So, she did the research and sure enough there was a public accommodation statute in the city of Chicago, so, then of course we filed complaints against all these places that prohibited women. So, we filed a lawsuit, we did the direct action, carried on and we won the law case so, I mean it actually did work, they got rid of them. And then -- then the Chicago -- we targeted the Chicago Tribune on the want ads, the want ads were segregated -- so we arrested the Chicago Tribune and we had a little paper; things that we put in front of the Tribune and we arrested them.
We had a great debate over whether that made sense, you know, whether we should actually target a media source. There was some debate within the chapter whether we were biting the hand that feeds us because we were getting all this great press on accommodation stuff and would they turn against us if we went after them. But really we just of course did it anyway, and I don't remember that it hurt us as much but, we did a lot of direct action stuff and then the person who came in on the religious stuff, **Betty Farians**, who actually is still living in Cincinnati, she was on the faculty at Loyola, and a very strong feminist. We had a meeting at my apartment.

I remember, Betty Farians was there and **Mary Daly** was there, so it was kind of like, oh my God. She wasn't as radical as she became later but, still it was an indication of how much need there was in every level of the women. NOW was kind of the thing for at least a year or two because that was where people wanted to go because that's what existed, so, NOW kind of captured that beginning. So anyway the idea was to get as much activity going as possible to make ourselves as visible as possible. So, you know taking that guidance from national, but also getting our own sea legs about what we wanted to do, and we started a newsletter, and we had to get ourselves organized and collect our dues and, whatever and whatever.

MAJ: Was there a president of the Chicago NOW Chapter?

MJC: **Alita Styers** was the president when I got there. **Kathryn Conroy** had done it in earlier days and then Alita Styers was; and she was a banker, so, we replaced her with me the next year, there was an election then. There was a little debate -- I mean right from the beginning as with any organization there are always debates about what you should do and what kind of activity. She was a banker by trade and, so, going and standing in front of the Chicago Tribune with a paper chain to arrest the Tribune probably wasn't her idea of a good time. She wasn't too keen on that, so, we had our little election and so I was elected President. So, I was the president in 1969 and then in 1970, I mean this is this enormous period of energy, in the women's movement or at least at NOW, and not just in NOW, in the whole women's movement. So then in 1970, the convention, the National NOW Convention was outside Chicago, in a hotel near O'Hare because we were so mad at Daly for beating up everybody in 1968, so, we didn't want to be downtown Chicago. So, we agreed to meet out at O'Hare.

MAJ: And at this time the National NOW was located where?

MJC: New York.

MAJ: And was **Betty Friedan** the president?

MJC: Betty Friedan was the President of it. So, a couple of things are going on. The bylaws are being rewritten. There's a lot -- Betty had a lot of concerns about the New York chapter and its spinning into a more radical place than we wanted it to go, honestly probably some concern about the lesbian presence at that point in the New York City Chapter. So she actually came into Chicago hoping that she could move the office to Chicago.

MAJ: Oh, Betty did?

MJC: Yes. So, there was a lot of politics already around a lot of things as there always has been in NOW. There was this new regional structure adopted. There were four regional directors and then a bunch more officers. There had been just four officers I think, and now there was a legislative vice president and a legal vice president, a PR vice president, and there were eight or nine executive officers. Betty was going out of office, but Betty was making her exit speech, so, she had been on an airplane with somebody who mentioned to her that August 26th was the anniversary date when Tennessee ratified the right to vote. So, she got it in her head that she would -- she gets up there, she doesn't talk to the new president coming in, **Eileen Hernandez**, she didn't talk to anybody. She gets up there and announces that there will be, this is March 31st, that there will be a national strike of women, women will leave their jobs, they will leave their kids, they will whatever they will do, and on August 26th the anniversary of women [getting the vote] -- the 50th anniversary, we will have this national strike, and we were like, what? I mean Eileen was furious. I mean a lot of people were furious, but you know what she told us to --

MAJ: Eileen?

MJC: Hernandez, she was the incoming president. She probably wanted to decide what the organization might do in the year she was president. So Betty announces the women's strike. So it was -- it was that naiveté of newness, you know, we're all like okay, Betty told us we have to do this,

I guess we have to do this, even though it doesn't sound too sensible.

So, in Chicago -- I mean Speak for Chicago, New York had a big -- they had 50,000, we had 25,000 We really did. So, anyway we all got together and tried to figure this out. We were always interested in having relationships with other organizations. We were good coalition builders and that's partly because of Kathryn Conroy. Kathryn Conroy was a labor leader, so, she was always interested in labor being a part -- trying to bring more labor people out.
Then you know, we knew Heather and some of the women from the [Chicago] Women's Liberation Union, and then somebody from daycare and somebody from this and that, so we decided to do this rally at the Civic Center before it was the Daly Plaza, and so we got the Civic Center lined up. Mary-Ann did that button, "Don't Iron While the Strike is Hot" and we did the posters and we did whatever and whatever. And very importantly Joanna did this press and the press was now coming from around the country to **Muriel Fox's**, who is a PR person in New York, and it was a convergence of people laughing at us, thinking this was the stupidest thing they ever heard and, of course, that no women would strike. So there were all these articles, "will women strike?" Front page of the Sun Times, you know, just these banner headlines in the couple of days before, and we're trying to get people to this thing.
Well, I mean never in my wildest dreams did I think that the Plaza would be filled, never, never, never. But, because of all this publicity that the press really created, they created our crowd because everybody came on their lunch hour. That was a smart thing. We picked the lunch hour and so everybody's on their lunch hours, it's a beautiful day, it's the middle of August, and here they all come and there's like 25,000 people looking at us. I got up there, I was running the program, and I just couldn't believe it. So there we were and I mean it transformed the organization, it transformed the women's movement, I think. I mean it became more of a national phenomenon.

The membership doubled that day, doubled, people just signed up. Not that it was big to begin with, but it doubled and the impact was tremendous, and the public relations impact and the impact around the world. I mean the pictures went around the world. So, good old Betty did have an impact.

MAJ: And did people actually strike, I mean did they not go to work?

MJC: Very few. There was one woman. This was - I don't know if happened elsewhere but in Chicago. So, we're dead tired and it's almost the end of the rally. This woman comes up to the podium with her child. She has brought her child to work as Betty said, and she's been fired from the Morrell Meat Company and it's on LaSalle. So Judy Lonnquist is a lawyer, so we announced that this woman has lost her job, and that we're marching over to the Morrell offices. So here we go -- it's at the end and a lot of people have left, but I'll never forget this. So, we're marching over with this woman and her baby to LaSalle Street and now there are several thousand people on LaSalle Street. The noise of chanting on LaSalle Street with those tall buildings was deafening. I'm sure that guy was like, oh what have I done. So they marched, Judy Lonnquist and the woman with her baby march up to the guy's office. Well, big surprise, she got her job back instantly, so that was a great victory. So, it was a -- so that gave us a series of stories too. I mean all of that gets a big, bigger hit in terms of people learning about this, and then the phone rings off the hook, and you know, we don't even have the organizational structure to really handle this level of participation. So, I mean that was a big scramble to try to get more things going. I was elected the first Midwest Regional Director at that regional meeting. **Mary- Ann Lupa** took over as President.

MAJ: In 1970?

MJC: Yeah. So, I think she was the vice president. She took over as president and I became the regional director and I had a $100 budget and 13 states.

MAJ: A $100 a year?

MJC: Yes. So, I got in my car --

MAJ: And you were responsible for 13 states?

MJC: For 13 states. So, I would -- you know this is no email or anything right;? Just phone and letters. So, I just set about to start chapters in all of these cities across the Midwest. So, you know, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and --

MAJ: You would go to the cities?

MJC: I would go to the cities. I would find someone -- I would look at the national membership, call somebody up, and they would be thrilled at the idea that the regional director was going to come. They would organize a meeting and we would go there and we'd start a chapter and it did work, it did work. I don't remember ever having somebody say no because this is [what I was] waiting for, I've been waiting for this, where have you been? You know what I mean? I remember this from the letters that came in to the national office. I'm so happy, you know, I've been waiting years for this, I just can't believe this. So, it's really -- it was an amazing need for someone to articulate for women. In **Gail Collins**' book and the woman who wrote the book on Betty Freidan, I actually like that book.

Talking about these women, sending all these women to college, getting these great degrees, and then expecting them to do nothing was just an amazing contradiction, and, so, when somebody said hello there, no, no, no, you don't need to stay home, you can get out and do something with your life, something different with your life, there was a backwash of eagerness in people wanting to do that. And I mean **Ladky** and those women were all young. They worked at, they were all college graduates and some worked for Scott Forsman, or where they were working and they were so under-utilized in their jobs. They did NOW stuff all day long. I mean they did, because their jobs weren't that compelling because they were under-valued so much. I think that was part of it.

So, that's I think the difference between that very early period and then as women became more utilized then their jobs became more compelling, etc., etc. So, it's just a different -- it was like opening a flood gate of emotion and energy and intellect. The women just rushed in to try to make something of it. It was pretty amazing, pretty amazing.

MAJ: Now at that time in 1970, you were the president from 1969 to 1970?

MJC: It was 1969 to 1970 and then I became the regional director and they had really short terms, it was like a year and a half. So, in 1972 Betty was going off the board, so that opened a seat for me on the national board and that was -- the regional director was a national board position. They had an executive committee; actually it was kind of crazy. So president, vice president, two vice presidents, secretary, treasurer, four regional directors, and the vice president for legislation, and legal PR, and

maybe one in finance. So, I mean they came out with a structure that was pretty top heavy, like 15 positions that were the executive committee.

But we have **Lucy Komisar** was the PR person, **Ann Scott** who was a brilliant Shakespeare scholar, the legislative vice president. **Brenda Festow** [phonetic], Brenda Festow, I think she was under Feigan; she was the legal vice president. It was these enormously impressive women, especially in the vice president's position and the president's position. Eileen Hernandez was quite something too. She had been an EEOC commissioner. It was an amazing group of people - just to convert -- an interesting convergence. I don't think I've ever seen anything quite like it in my life. Maybe there just hasn't been a period like that where a combination of things... I'm sure the civil rights movement was like that too, it's like all this pent-up frustration.

MAJ: And people who were dying to be involved with something. There was something they could actually do.

MJC: Yes, absolutely.

MAJ: So what happened to Chicago NOW during this time? What issues did they become involved in? That was the accommodation you were talking about?

MJC: That was in the early days and that got solved basically, legally we went to court and they were told they couldn't do that and so Bergdorf's integrated their --

MAJ: And there was a law in Chicago about this, you couldn't discriminate in public accommodations?

MJC: Probably it was passed; I'm sure it was passed by the civil rights movements and somehow gender got in it. I mean that would be an interesting story of who did that because that was unusual. I mean if it there was a bill passed --

MAJ: There was the original -- the EEOC act where they put in gender at the last minute.

MJC: Yes, that was a joke.

MAJ: That was a joke? But this was a Chicago law.

MJC: This is a Chicago ordinance, 176A, I believe is the number.

MAJ: Well that's a story we'll have to look up.

MJC: Judy Lonnquist; I have her number, she's in Seattle now, but she was a labor lawyer. She worked for a labor law firm.

MAJ: Spell her name.

MJC: L-O-N-N-Q-U-I-S-T. Judith Lonnquist. She's a pistol.

MAJ: She's in Seattle now.

MJC: She's in Seattle. I'll give you the address after we get done with this. So let me think, now I'm kind of off doing the -- my organizing. Mary-Ann is in the chapter. There were a couple of things. I think at this period of time, Illinois was rewriting its constitution, so, we were involved. **Pat Polis** was with the chapter and she was active, P-O-L-I-S. She was very active on the constitution rewriting thing; the chapter, Con-Con, exactly. So we did Con-Con. I don't remember exactly what our angle was, probably some women's stuff, probably getting neutral language, or whatever the heck we thought was. I don't think we were trying to get an equal rights amendment in at that point because it kind of -- ERA passes congress on March 27, 1972, so, that becomes then a major activity of the chapter.

The chapter was very smart in the early days of the ERA campaign they did something that's considered kind of modern warfare. They targeted one or two state legislators who voted against the ERA and they organized and they backed somebody and they beat the person. So, it was very sophisticated for a young group to be thinking like that. I'm sure we had a lot help from other people, but we actually did it and we actually got -- we looked at whoever, some guy was voting against the ERA in a place where we had a lot of members and somebody else was running against him. We just organized and beat the guy. It was a pretty big deal.

MAJ: Was it a woman?

MJC: I don't think so. I think we ran whoever it was running at the time. A lot of the women running -- the ERA campaign wasn't successful here -- produced a whole generation of new women in elected office, And Ann raised up the women who were there, **Giddy Dyer** and **Susan Catania** and whoever the other women's names were who were active throughout the ERA campaign. Catania was huge, Susan Catania, do you remember her name at all with her eight kids? She was probably the first legislature to nurse on the floor of the general assembly in Springfield and they were not happy. It was at the time we had three member districts so she was a Republican from Hyde Park.

I think it was Hyde Park -- right around -- Hyde Park or South Shore. I mean it was a unique system that Illinois had which I think was tremendous. They had three member districts and there are only two -- not more than two could be from one party. So, in the Republican district you had one Democrat, and the Democratic districts you had one Republican, but the Republican and the Democratic districts were moderate, and probably the Democrat in the Republican district was probably more conservative. But anyway it made a mellower state legislature. It got -- in the Con-Con that came later and I think Clinton was involved in that. Anyway they got rid of it which was too bad.

But going back, I think you asked in the early 1970s, the ERA -- employment discrimination -- the Chicago Chapter had -- one of the things that we got going on right away was -- and Lonnquist was a part of this and **Charlotte Adelman** was another part of this and **Mary Lynn Myers** who now lives in South Dakota, I think you might know her. We set-up this hotline and offered people -- it wasn't a dedicated line -- we advertised our phone number and would offer to go with any woman who wanted to file a complaint with any agency or, with the EEOC or with a state agency and we actually sent people with these women to take on their employer.
We helped them write the complaint. We helped them through figuring out what kind of evidence they needed etc., etc., and a lot of it was done by volunteer lawyers. It was a pretty important service

and then the agencies got to know our people. So, it gave us access to the enforcement side in a really good way. It was a really good strategy to do that. It advertised us as a group that was very helpful to women, not just feminists, but women who had job problems, and so it gave us wider access in the area -- on the issue we cared about, and it provided something helpful. We also had; Lupa might remember this more.

We represented a woman who worked for the city of Chicago, who worked for Major Daley basically, who worked for the city. I can't remember what department she worked in, but we represented her and we took the case through court, and she won and got back pay. So, we just were very diligent and moving along and trying to -- we took it seriously. You can't discriminate against women in the workplace, by God we're going to make sure that you don't do it, so, we just went about our business.

MAJ: You were all volunteers.

MJC: All volunteers. This is the amazing thing. We were all volunteers. We didn't get -- I think we started an executive director position, maybe when -- maybe it wasn't that late but, the initial stuff was all done by volunteers, and then even when we got an assistant, I can't think of the woman's name, she actually came to Rollins. She was the first staff person. You know, we had to work through that. What did that mean because we had such a strong volunteer core? People would give 20-hour -- it wasn't unusual for somebody to give 20 hours a week to the cause because they felt so tangibly what they were doing, and that what they were doing made a difference for people. That is pretty amazing, pretty amazing. I'm sure this happens in other areas of volunteer work.

But people felt they were both on the cutting edge, they were doing something really politically important and pushing the envelope, but also service oriented and also actually helping the woman who is sitting in front of them because people used to fight about that too. Do you do service, is that wrong? We had crisis, all of these services, the battered women's stuff. We had crisis centers all over those institutions that comes out of that period. There was some debate over whether we were supposed to actually just be helping people, or you know, doing the more political thing. But those were important discussions too, and ultimately I think what happened is some people did one thing, some people started the rape crisis centers, other people ran for office, or helped other people run for office. It was a sorting out eventually. You know I think why you had so many organizations develop out of -- NOE we had this big bowl of things that they did, but then people kept pulling things out because each thing -- the rape issue was enormous, the credit issue was enormous, the battered women's issue was enormous, the employment issue was enormous, and so, all of these different organizations formed. Out of the NOW flower came a lot of buds, you know, that became our Women Employed. I mean NOW wasn't -- they worked together NOW and the Women Employed worked together, but Women Employed then took on that employment issue over the last 30 years in ways that NOW couldn't do. So, it's a multi-issue organization versus the kind of concentrated, which actually has allowed for women of many political stripes to be involved too I think, that are different.

MAJ: You were talking about helping women to file those claims, who actually did that? Was that sort of a designated group or was it a lot of different groups?

MJC: Well, we had a committee and either Charlotte or Judy or whoever else --

MAJ: Mostly attorney's then?

MJC: Well, they would help us. I remember going with a woman and because they couldn't always be available during the day and they worked for -- so we would trade-off who could go and we had our committee that met and then we would get the women in and we would -- somebody would meet with them and tell them how to file the thing. But we got pretty good at it so that people could do it without the guidance of an attorney every time, but we always usually had the attorney's check and help us figure out and make sure we're doing the right things. Most of them weren't going to go to court, they were just going to -- they were going to be resolved internally in the agency, which can be a very good thing. So, it was pretty amazing, pretty amazing.

MAJ: And talk about Women Employed and that got started in 1973 was that right?

MJC: Yes I think 1972 or 1973.

MAJ: And do you know something about how that got started?

MJC: **Day Creamer** who's now **Day Piercy** -- I mean she was born Day Piercy, she was just Day Creamer at the time. You know the Midwest Academy plays a role here because we're all getting trained by the Midwest Academy, which became a controversial issue by the way within NOW, which is another whole story.

MAJ: When was the Midwest Academy started?

MJC: Right that same time, right around that same time, 1972 or 1973.

MAJ: And that was started by whom?

MJC: Heather. Heather and Paul and --

MAJ: The purpose was to train people in organizing skills?

MJC: Yes, in organizing. **Alinsky** didn't believe that women could be organizers and didn't train them, so, that was kind of the impetus for the Midwest Academy among other things.

MAJ: Do you know why he thought that they couldn't do it?

MJC: I don't know. I don't remember, I probably knew at the time. You know, his whole organizing thing was, well a lot of it was church-based, a lot of it was Catholic church-based, although **Gale Cincotta** was the leader of, I thought she was [inaudible], so don't hold me to all of this, but that was -- at the time there was a feeling that there was a need for Midwest Academy partly because the women weren't being adequately served by the tough guys in the Alinsky model. So, and they did develop a different model. It's a more organization model. I mean the Alinsky model is pretty rigid. They do the same thing now that they did 40 years ago. But it became controversial within NOW, but that's a whole other story. Where were we?

MAJ: Well, we were just talking about the kinds of issues that NOW was dealing with about the 1970s and you became the regional director and then we were talking about Women Employed and

how that -- I guess I'm kind of interested in what you mentioned there.

MJC: Well, I think -- Day was also a founder of the Midwest Academy and, so, you know I think honestly that the Midwest Academy was -- had a theoretical basis, you know, on different organizing skills and different organizing models, and Day was very interested in women's rights and in women, working class women's, or not just working class, women's equal opportunity, and so, Women Employed became a model, a kind of model to see whether some of these skills, how these skills could be organized and utilized.

So, the Women Employed had a kind of direct action model at the beginning. The Sears campaign that started with Women Employed but then came over into -- back into NOW, and this is where these kind of ideas overlap. So, the strategies that they created and Anne was there pretty much from the beginning, she was having **Anne Ladky** involved and **Kathy Rand** I mean provided leadership. She was -- Day was the organizer but she needed public faces that were not her and so, Kathy Rand did that, Anne did that, and some others. So they picked Sears undoubtedly for the same reason that the government had picked them because they were the largest employer of women in the United States; no they were the second largest, AT&T was the largest. So, they started picketing Sears and handing out leaflets at Sears.

MAJ: For the discrimination?

MJC: Yes. So, soliciting people to come and they did come. So, this was again a source of people to participate in this filing of charges kind of thing. So Women Employed was doing that and we were doing it with them and there was tremendous overlap there, out of that experience with…. So Women Employed went on, they did a lot of direct action, I mean they had -- they called the -- they did very much Alinsky model. They got a corporate guy to come to a meeting and, that was -- it was a kind of model. So, anyway, they used that in the beginning. They don't do that at all anymore, they have a totally different method, but that was going -- so there was a merger of the direct action and the legal because I mean filing complaints, and taking cases and certainly using the system as opposed to hollering at people, so there was a combination of things, and then what happened they leave that Women Employed for a moment, then within NOW and probably with Heather's help and Anne and I were the co-chair, became the co-chairs, we sold to the national organization the idea of going after Sears Roebuck as a national target, and the government had already targeted Sears Roebuck. And Ann Scott who was a legislative vice president and she was all for this.

So, we introduced us to national organizations, so we did the Sears campaign in 1973 and 1974 here. And so there was kind of a merger of activities between Women Employed and NOW in that period, and we identified all of these women, and from identifying the women, and then we just started to study this corporation. I mean because it was a retail corporation we could send - we did this all over the country, we made a little checklist and we said to people, go to your store and put down the time of day and go to each department and count the number of women and the number of men who are the clerks in the department and the number of whites and blacks, just count them.

Well, I mean it's what we knew and what we were trying to verify -- we knew that Sears was putting the men, only men into the big ticket items; the washers and dryers and refrigerators, and the women into the socks, so, they got their percentage, their bonus or whatever they called that, so that the men got a 7 percent bonus on a refrigerator and the women got a 7 percent bonus on a sock and that's how it was. And we knew this was happening, but honest to God people go there and observe

and just write it down, I mean it's very simple; you have eyes, you can see what color they are, what sex they are; what time, what department, period, very simple.

We just fed all of this into the EOC as a way of verifying what they were seeing with their analysis. So, it was pretty cool. And it's a retail place, you know, we picked a retail place because you could see it and because it's vulnerable. It was vulnerable to public pressure in ways that somebody who makes a widget that somebody buys to make another widget, God, they don't care. But if it's a retailer, if anything the public buys they're much more vulnerable to pressure. So that's why we picked them. It was pretty wild.

So, anyway that was a good project and what was determined by that research, not the one at the store, but the one at the tower was -- I mean they leafleted -- they would go out -- this is so beautiful -- they would go out at 8:00 in the morning and they would leaflet and there were no men coming in because the men didn't come in until 9:00. So, they would go from 8:00 until 9:00 and they'd see no men. I mean this is the other thing where you can visualize at the tower that at 9:00 the men would start coming in. I mean this wouldn't be true today obviously, but then they would talk to these women who had college degrees, they all had the same qualifications as the men who were coming in at 9:00, but the men were called assistant buyers and the women were called buyers assistant, and the women had a typewriter at their desk and the men didn't.

So, it's the same qualification that they were being tracked in a totally different system within the company with the same qualifications. So that's where the government ultimately got them was that job classification which was the clearest one at the tower in the management programs. When we smashed that that was a big deal, it was a big deal; all of this stuff is a big deal really.

MAJ: So it became a national --

MJC: It became a national campaign.

MAJ: A national campaign and you and Anne were the co-chairs of the national task force.

MJC: Right. The thing that became problematic or opportunistic, however you want to say it, I was running for president of NOW and I ran on the Sears campaign in 1974. So, NOW had at that time -- anybody who came to the national convention and paid their dues could vote. So the opposition recruited, actually literally recruited Sears employees to come because they were opposing me, so they were like --

MAJ: They included Sears's employees --

MJC: Sears was actually there and voted against me. It's very interesting. Anyway, so, I lost the election by about 35 votes. It was pretty wild.

MAJ: And the president who won was --

MJC: **Karen DeCrow** and Eileen Hernandez was a Sears' consultant and so, this -- I haven't really told this story before, but Heather talks about it all the time. So, it was a pretty interesting development. It also --

MAJ: But I'm interested in whatever you feel like you could say. I do know that these things happened.

MJC: Yes, they did happen and so, at some point, we were -- I mean we were pounding Sears. So Eileen, you know I'm sure she may have a totally clear conscious about this from her point of view, I have no idea. But anyway she set us up a meeting with **Arthur Wood** who was the head of Sears so, we actually had a meeting with Lonnquist and me and Ladkey and other people. We sat across the table from Arthur Wood, who was like you have no right to ruin the reputation of this company. I mean it was serious. So our demand was that they give us an affirmative action plan in writing. You know what, they finally did it.

MAJ: They did give it to you? Were all companies required to have one?

MJC: Have one but not give it to you, not make it public. I mean what we found out about Sears, this is kind of an amazing thing and, you know we've got these books all being written on it so it's going to be good, you know, it's going to be -- people are going to know about this. But what we found was that the racism wasn't as bad as sexism. I mean it was incredible. They didn't have any [women] at the tower at the time, there were no black people even working in clean-up -- they had all Polish cleaning ladies, they didn't even have black cleaning people, they had no one. I mean it was no one. It was kind of shocking. It was pretty extreme.

And in the stores, I mean all of the -- there was this inequality between the women and the men, but there were no black people either. I mean we went down to Stony Island, I think there were two black people in the whole store. You know I mean it was shocking. It was shocking. It was shocking to see this. But anyway we tortured them. We went and testified in Congress, we went and testified -- the government was holding some kind of hearings in St. Louis about poverty in America, and we went and said Sears employees were eligible for relief which they were. You know, but I mean we just drove them crazy. It was great. It was great. It was a lot of fun. But it showed what people can do, you know, whether it can still be done I don't know, but it was -- you know to get at these big institutions it's not easy, but I think some of these methods could be gone back to. I mean I really do.

MAJ: It's worth learning about how it was done.

MJC: It is. I think it is too. I mean HRC, Human Rights Campaign did it with Target. When Target was giving money to these antigay candidates in Minnesota, we went after them in a kind of retail way, so, I thought that was interesting. But that's one of the few times that I've seen somebody actually -- and you know they backed down because Target can't afford to -- I mean anybody who sells to the public is somewhat vulnerable. But I mean it has to be an issue the public cares about too. The Sears thing went on and on, and you know, Arthur Wood was also the chair of Nixon's campaign. Isn't that wild?

MAJ: So, what was the relationship between Chicago NOW and the National NOW at this time?

MJC: Well, Chicago NOW -- because you know when Betty figured out how to move the office to Chicago, I mean first of all that happened. We were in South Shore.

MAJ: Okay and when was that?

MJC: 1970.

MAJ: Betty moved the National NOW in 1970.

MJC: Betty got them to agree to move the national office to Chicago which --

MAJ: You were in South Shore.

MJC: We were in the South Shore in 1972 in a storefront. I mean it was so much work it was unbelievable. My husband, Jim, Robeson; **Jim Collins-Robeson** and I was **MJC--Robeson** at the time, and so he -- technically I wasn't getting any money from this. I mean this was -- I was working as hard as he was, but because I was on the board it would be a conflict for me to get -- so he was -- the contractors were with him not with us, but that -- so anyway then the office moved in 1970 and there was kind of a general assumption that I would be the president and the eastern people; I mean there was a convergence of issues.

We got -- we asked -- we had -- a couple of us had gotten trained by the Midwest Academy and we were excited about it. We had the board -- we had them train the board and the board came into Chicago and we actually went and saw them at some God forsaken hotel in Hyde Park in the basement. Anyway the room was in the basement. So we had Midwest Academy come train them and Heather and whatever. Well, some of the board members jumped on that as an opportunity to say that we were a bunch of socialistic communists and so they spread that around that we were -- we weren't -- that Heather was our leader and we weren't primarily interested in women's issues, we were primarily interested in socialist, whatever.

And so they set-up that dichotomy which we sort of played into in a way, and so then we went after the Sears campaign, then some of the more corporate types didn't -- they didn't think that that was -- I guess it was class-based to some extent, they just didn't -- they wanted to do an equal rights movement, they wanted to do -- they were much more interested in the equal rights movement, gay rights, you know, kind of more purer issues than -- they didn't care that much about the employment issue. So I think it converged in a -- it was both convenient to beat me politically, but it was also reflective of their philosophy that they didn't think that's what we should be doing. So it all blew up in Houston and Karen was --

MAJ: Was this in 1977?

MJC: 1974. So Karen was elected, but all the rest of our slate was elected. Our slate was elected. So, we had Karen who was hostile, completely hostile. The rest of the people were all completely hostile to her. So it was total war between 1974 and 1975. It was awful and then 1975 was a total war. Then Mary Lynn Myers ran as presidential candidate for what had been my slate. I ran as an independent because I thought the organization was going to blow apart and I didn't think that was right. So at the time I ran as a third party person. They wouldn't have won anyway, but things was so ugly that --

MAJ: And when **Karen DeCrow** became president, did the NOW organization, the National NOW stay in Chicago or did it move?

MJC: For that one year. As soon as 1975, when 1975 happened then it all moved to Washington.

MAJ: It went to Washington.

MJC: Right then Ellie came in as chairman of the board, or whatever that -- I guess that was her title with **Smeal. Ellie** was Smeal's -- Smeal was Karen's, you know the real brain behind Karen and the real organizer behind Karen. So, Karen was technically the president, and then Ellie started a model of paid officers. So, they moved to Washington and they started having paid officers. She liked the union model where you were paid. So that was the beginning of that whole change in structure. I mean I think two things happened, one the paid officers is a different model, two Direct NOW. When Direct NOW started in the early 1970s I think, people didn't have to ask for money anymore. People didn't have to get numbers on their own. They were being gotten by the mail right, that's how most organizations function now, the national organizations is Direct NOW.

MAJ: They just made a lot of renewal requests?

MJC: And cold prospecting. It's a huge business and so the ASLU gives it's names to NOW and NOW gives it to the political caucus, and the political caucus gives its names to Planned Parenthood and they all share -- it was actually the Anderson's campaign, his third party campaign that this whole philosophy was devolved by **Roger Craver**, and so he started this business. He is Washington and he thought up this whole -- he figured out that you could actually just mail to people, and they would send you money in a more organized way and a more strategic way, and there would be a huge business for somebody and it was him, he made millions, millions of dollars on this.

So NOW started doing their mail, I mean this wasn't uncommon, but I think institutionally you don't have to -- you're getting your money through the mail, through these uninvolved people who would just write you a check. So it's just a different model of organizing and I think it's -- I think it has had some good aspects, you know, on organizations being able to get bigger but, I think it has some really down sides because the people aren't -- they don't have to do anything except write a check and they don't have to be involved. It's very different than that volunteer model we were talking about that people had to put in their --. The success of the organization depended on people actually doing the work. It really doesn't with these direct mail things, it just doesn't. You hire professionals to run the thing for you. There's just a really different model. So anyway, I think that convergence happened at that time. Anyway 1975 was a disaster, it was an awful convention, and it was anger --

MAJ: And that was in --

MJC: Philadelphia, right.

MAJ: And was there a convention every year then?

MJC: Year to a year and a half. They've changed the bylaws. I mean **Kim Gandy** was in seven or eight years. I don't know quite how that happened but they changed the bylaws so the officers could stay in longer, but they're all paid people, so they're -- now I went back and I ran for vice president and I was a paid person too, so, I shouldn't complain about it but --

MAJ: Vice president of National?

MJC: National Action. After this was -- leap forward here a long time, after the ERA campaign, I was very active on the last 1980, the last year I came here, and then I decided I would maybe run again for National NOW. So in 1982, I decided to run for vice president. I was thinking about running for president and I talked to Ellie and, not that I was running with her, well, no that's not true. Ellie was backing **Judy Goldsmith** and so she said why don't you run as her vice president? And there were slates at that time and there were four candidates. So, I won by like four votes, so, when we -- so in 1982, that was when the election was in Indianapolis and Ellie, she didn't like me any better than she ever did, but she -- there was somebody else running that she didn't want to win, **Jenny Fode** [phonetic] who was from California. So she thought I was the best person to beat Fode. She was all for my running for that. So I did run and win and that's when I moved to Washington.

MAJ: Now, Judy Goldsmith, you mentioned her before.

MJC: Yes, she was president -- she's from Wisconsin. She had become -- she was vice president with **Ellie Smeal's** second term, or maybe both terms, vice president, and then she was -- Ellie didn't -- Ellie was ineligible to serve again, or she didn't want to, I can't remember. I don't think she was eligible. So she -- she backed Judy Goldsmith to run and Judy and I ran together and the two of us were alike and then three of the five officers were, again they had changed the strategy and eliminated all of us vice presidents. So we had a structure of five: president, vice president, action vice president, executive secretary and treasurer, so there were five and our slate won three of the seats and two of the seats were run by other people. So that was my second term from 1982 to 1985 and then Ellie didn't want us to be in anymore so she ran somebody against us and that was the end of us. She's still an organizer. I kind of give her credit for that.

MAJ: And she's still president, right?

MJC: No. She runs Feminist Majority completely. It was a direct mail thing and nothing else. So, she is still active as an individual kind of -- I mean the Feminist Majority -- it is an organization but it doesn't do a lot as an organization, but it does keep her in the limelight and keep her -- she lobbies on a few things in Washington, so that's kind of where NOW is. I think NOW is pretty much run its course at this point.

MAJ: When do you think it started being irrelevant?

MJC: Well, I mean I think -- I think once it decided, and I certainly served during this time, but following this time, once it decided to do the ERA and the great intensity that it did --

MAJ: It became the main issue of --

MJC: It became almost the only issue really at NOW National it did. So that was over in 1982 and that's when I came in, and the direct mail guy, **Roger Craver,** he wanted us to reintroduce the ERA and keep going as a fundraiser on the ERA and I was like no way, I'm not doing that. So, it was really hard. First of all they had bankrupted -- I mean the organization was depleted of resources trying to pass the ERA, so and no issue, which was why from his point of view, it was probably legitimate to say look you've got to raise some money around something, and if you don't raise it around the ERA, everybody else has taken the other territory, other organizations, so I said no we should raise money around abortion and we should be activists around it, so, that's what we did.

And I mean we didn't do terribly financially, but I mean NOW has never been the powerhouse that it was during the ERA. The ERA was a pretty intense campaign. I think by the last year. I mean if Ellie -- if they had been willing to kind of -- after they lost in 1980, when it was clear they were never going to get it, but she kept it going until 1982. Oh my God it was exhausting.

Anyway so I think, at least from my point of view, I couldn't think of a way to really make a transition to where NOW could take on another issue that would make it prominent, so we worked on -- we worked on a bunch of issues. We had a pretty good lobbying operation and at that time congress still cared about NOW. I mean NOW had enough members and the national secretary was **Kathy Webb**, who is from Arkansas. She's the first openly gay elected official in the state of Arkansas, and still is in NOW, and she was into organizing and she tried to get members active around legislative issues that we were doing. So we had a fairly active membership at that point, but I don't think it ever -- I don't think after the end of the ERA it had ever gotten itself back into a place of prominence, and I just think it kind of goes on and a lot of people respect the name and but --

MAJ: Do you want to talk about ERA in Illinois? Were you involved with it?

MJC: Yes, I was a co-chair with **Linda Miller** in the 1980 campaign. I came back and I become president of the Chicago Chapter in 1979 because I wanted to be involved in the ERA campaign. I had worked at the Illinois Nurses Association from 1975 to 1979. So, I went back to do the ERA. Ellie was running the campaign and she came into the state to run it and raised a lot of money and stuff. You know, I mean it was a big campaign. It was a big noisy campaign.

I think if we hadn't had the three-fifths we might have been able to do it, but with the three-fifths we just -- there was no way. We were, we came close but I mean **Phyllis Schlafly** is also a very good organizer. She was amazing. I mean in that she found our biggest weakness was abortion, but that wasn't so much here, it was the draft. I mean the military and I remember there was a hearing on the ERA and Phyllis Schlafly brought her troops. She had one draft age girl from each county and the way she used her testimony time, each girl got up and said I'm from Cook County and I don't want to be drafted, sit down. I'm from LaSalle County and I don't want to be drafted, sit down. I'm from hmm, hmm, hmm county and that was it, that was the whole thing. I thought it was one of the most powerful things I've ever seen. We had all these high lawyers and whatever --

MAJ: Decided to protect the girls.

MJC: It was very effective. Anyway, it was -- it was a great campaign in the sense that a lot of young women got a lot of political training, a lot of as I said, a lot of women ran for office, a lot of women went to Springfield and saw the caliber of some of the people that were sitting in those seats and decided that maybe they could do that too. So, it did educate a lot of women about politics and about the importance of being involved in stuff, so, I would never say that it wasn't worth the time and effort, but it led NOW down a single path. So it was pretty wild, it was a wild campaign, and a lot of money was raised, a ton of money was raised.

MAJ: Well, one of the things that we're interested in in the project is what makes Chicago unique or different in terms of the women's movement? So much has been written about the coasts in my shelves of books. You know, writing's generally about the women's movements are usually about

New York or LA, or whatever. Very little about Chicago and so that's the purpose of our project is to document what went on here and one of the questions that we ask is how is this different? Do you have any ideas about that?

MJC: Yes, I think Chicago is different -- the Chicago Women's Movement is different in some ways the way Chicago is different, but the history, a lot of the history of America in Chicago is a history of struggles for opportunity, the labor movement, The Hull House, the Settlement Movement. A lot of the public health initiatives came out of here. Very practical objectives; a lot of it rooted in people and work-a-day people, ordinary people. I felt that about the efforts that we made around the employment issue and the Sears campaign and the AT&T campaign that we were trying -- irrespective about whether that woman who was working at Sears, whether she was a feminist, or believed in whatever three things she wanted to believe in; if she was a women and she was sitting at her desk, and she was qualified for a job then we ought to be with her, we ought to be on her side. So we cared.

I think there's an initiative really that is more based on the practical impact and the actual -- it's just -- I mean I think the employment based, and I'm saying that and I'm thinking about **Frances Perkins'** biography, certainly she did -- a lot of the settlement people in the east did that as well. But I think it was more rooted here in -- the labor movement here and the women's work movement, I think it's just really kind of the basis of -- we just sort of grounded ourselves in the same thing that was the reality of our city, and our town, and the community around here.

So, we tried to do stuff with the labor movement, the civil rights movement, you know, there was a lot of consciousness about having it be a multiracial movement right from the get go even if we didn't always succeed there was certainly a sense of that. So, I think it's different in the way that -- we're kind of different in different parts of the country. I mean I would guess some of the initiatives in the southern states, the feminists were different, you know, because of where they lived and what they had to cope with, and what they learned from their own experiences. So, I think in the Midwest, I think in Chicago particularly, the other part of it is the political, being very political, very -- political and political not in the pie in the sky way but in a practical way, trying to actually get people into office and trying to get things done.

I think it's interesting the Chicago Chapter on the ERA campaign they chose as one of their strategies to actually get into the political process and actually try to beat somebody who was against them, and try to elect people for them. So, they -- it wasn't just going and giving speeches, or trying to teach people about the issue, which we certainly did too, but we wanted to, we went right to the practical of trying to actually change the guys in the seats, which we would actually achieve our goals; not that we were successful everywhere, but --

MAJ: And in terms of that strategy how did that evolve, who sort of pioneered that in Chicago?

MJC: Well, I remember that Lonnquist decided to run herself. She was very much -- I wasn't originally for the political strategy as much, I was more a little -- I was more -- isn't that funny because I've been doing politics all my life, but I was a little nervous about you know getting involved, kind of being taken off our basic issue campaign But then Lonnquist -- some of the political women like **Pat Polis** joined NOW and they came in and they argued for that point of view -- that strategy of being more political and getting more politically involved. And when we got involved in Con-Con at first I was like why should we do that and then, you know, began to see --

and it's the difference of being willing to sit at the table and being a part of the decision making and trying to be a part of the governing or the -- going inside the government, trying to do something practical, as opposed to just always standing outside. I mean God knows we have these fights every day in the Democratic Party about purity and whether or not somebody is good enough and whatever. So I guess I feel like Chicago was more inclined toward the practical and maybe that's my personality too but.

MAJ: So there was the labor movement and Kathryn Conroy you mentioned was an important figure and what was her influence on NOW do you think?

MJC: Well, she started the first Chicago chapter and then she was always active in the chapter and she, you know, she was both active in the chapter and always -- she did two things, she tried to try to pull labor people into being sympathetic to NOW, but she also tried to get the NOW people to understand the importance of the labor movement. So, in January of 1970, before we had this national conference, we had a conference on employment, and we did it -- she helped us do it and we put together -- we had **Shirley Chisholm** was our speaker and so, we knew enough to do that politically and that was interesting. So, we did this employment conference in Chicago and 300 people came. So I mean it was reinforcing of our --

MAJ: Why do you think they came?

MJC: They came from -- some of them were from labor unions, some of them were our members, some of them were from other women's groups you know, and we did these workshops on how to --

MAJ: Which is early, so real early in Chicago NOW was involved in this whole employment issue. And that was even before CLUW and everything.

MJC: Totally, oh it was before CLUW. I was at the CLUW founding conference here. But then I think a huge piece of that is Conroy's influence and --

MAJ: And Conroy was from Wisconsin?

MJC: She was born in Milwaukee and she was CWA and then she -- she got this regional position and then she ran for vice president, which is an elective position and the men beat the crap out of her -- of CWA. She didn't win. Well, we tried hard. We tried, you know, we worked with her and tried to -- we made her buttons and so. She was amazing. She is an amazing, amazing woman. And she was so -- there was so few -- she came out of the Catholic Workers movement, Dorothy Days and there was Catholic Worker people in Milwaukee and that's how she got involved in the labor stuff.

MAJ: And she was Catholic.

MJC: She was Catholic and so she, **Father Blydern** [phonetic] was active in the Catholic Worker movement, Father Blydern was also the pastor of Father Groupy's church. It's just how these things you know just segment together. So, she grew up in Milwaukee, and then came down here and then ran for vice president, but she spent a lot of time with us, and she spent a lot of time with the women's movement. I mean she was very dedicated to the women's movement. She also was a very

big influence on me and everybody around her I think because she never gave up on anybody. She wouldn't follow -- she tried hard not to have people fall into these, I hate the other side kind of positions. She was very -- tried very hard to create understanding, not in a wussy way but in a really, no, you need to see the other side and find solutions, you know when everybody else is up and railing about what's wrong with the other person's position, she was always the one coming in and looking for the solution. How can we word this differently? How can -- and these crazy fights with the congress on the floor, she would always be there with her pad and try to rewrite something, trying to come up with a compromise. She was older than we were so that helped but she was also very -- it was her instinct to be.

MAJ: So she was involved with Chicago NOW until when?

MJC: She went back to Milwaukee. Let's see Chicago NOW, she wasn't -- I don't think she was at the 1974 convention, so she was already out of -- I don't think she was. I don't remember her being there. So I think she went back to Milwaukee and that's where she retired, but I think she worked for a while. I think after she ran for regional director maybe they shoveled her back to a state position, I can't remember exactly that, what the sequence was -- because I think it was that same period that she ran for vice president.

MAJ: And then she was probably near retirement at that time.

MJC: Yeah, that's what I think. She went back there and then she worked with a lot of the young women, in the labor movement there. I mean she had all of her little mentors there. One of them **Annie Crump** [phonetic]; I just saw her last weekend and she became -- she got Kathryn's old job with the CWA and she had it for about 20 years, but she grew-up with Conroy.

MAJ: Did you know **Addie Wyatt**?

MJC: Yes.

MAJ: At what point did you connect with Addie Wyatt, do you know?

MJC: Well, see I think we connected with Addie Wyatt through Conroy because she was Meat Cutters. So, I think Addie Wyatt was at that January conference, that employment conference. **Clara Day** was -- Clara Day of teamsters, did you ever hear her name? She was at the Teamsters Union. Clara Day, black woman, she spoke at our 1970 convention -- I mean our Strike Day, women's strike day. Clara Day spoke for the women's movement, she was a teamster. Now Conroy pulled that off. Now that was pretty amazing.

We had somebody from the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, we had a bunch of -- you may know this woman -- **Patty Molder** [phonetic]. She spoke that day on child care at the big rally, the big women's Strike Day. You know she spoke on childcare. We had seven or eight speakers on different issues, but we were coalition-oriented. I mean that was a little bit of a fight too and NOW had to beat Uber Alles and that isn't how we approached it. We loved our organization but we also wanted to win. I mean you don't win by fighting with everybody all the time. At some point you have -- you can see I'm a Barak Obama supporter.

MAJ: Were you always a Barak Obama supporter?

MJC: Always from the time I saw him speak. That was the first I'd heard of him. I was just, oh my God. Now I didn't support Hillary over him, I supported him.

MAJ: Well, I'm just trying to link-up some things here. You know the big CLUW conference, Coalition of Labor Union Women, was here in Chicago in 1974, and you were there, and --

MJC: Olga Madar; UAW, head of it, first head of CLUW I think, Olga Madar, I think she was --

MAJ: And Addie was --

MJC: And Addie was the vice president.

MAJ: Tell me something about that conference. How did you happen to go to that?

MJC: Conroy, you know, she was part of organizing that, definitely. I mean she was always organizing the women inside of the labor movement and, they were -- some of were a sorry lot I must say, the people that made it to the top and were like don't talk to me about this feminism. So, she -- but she identified the people, few women, very few. Oh my God. I mean the labor movement was as bad as -- it was worse than the corporations in terms of the involvement in the presence of women. It was terrible.

So Conrad was part of organizing CLUW definitely, and I mean this is the other thing that you may know or it might be in the annals somewhere. The first office of NOW - NOW was organized in 1966, the office was at 8000 Jefferson in Detroit, MI, which is the national headquarters of the United Auto Workers. And I have a secret belief that the head of the UAW at the time, and **Caroline Davis** was the national secretary of NOW, and she was an officer of the UAW in Detroit. So Davis -- so **Dorothy Haner** and Caroline Davis were founders of NOW, Olga Madar wasn't a founder but she was there. The UAW was the most liberal union and had the most women in prominent positions and they were very prominent in getting NOW off the ground definitely. **Walter Reuther**, I think Walter Reuther helped get NOW started but somebody else will have to tell that story because I don't know it. But I mean the first -- why did they have the office at 8000 Jefferson in Detroit? That's where the first NOW office was.

MAJ: And that was national? That's amazing.

MJC: Now it could be just coincidental that Caroline signed up at the same time and said I'll be willing to take the membership checks, maybe it's that coincidental.

MAJ: Now how about **Kathryn Clarenbach** -- was she --

MJC: Kathryn Clarenbach is an amazing person too. She was the head of the Commission of -- she was on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and she was the head of the Commission of the Status of Women, and she may have started the Commission in Madison, in Wisconsin. Then I think at some later time she was the head of the Coordinated Commissions on the Status of Women from all over the country. She was really smart, very committed to women's issues. She was at that founding meeting and when Betty Freidan was chosen to be a president, they created the position, chair of the board because they knew Betty couldn't organize herself out of a

bathroom, so they wanted somebody in charge who was, and again, this is another thing, the Midwesterners kind of took over the organizing of this. Clarenbach, Conroy and there were two other people here in Wisconsin. But anyway the Midwest people sort of took over the paperwork, you know, getting the thing actually organized while Betty's off making speeches.

So that's kind of how they saw the distinction I think. Clarenbach was the chair of the board, so she would try to keep order in these crazy meetings, so, she did that -- she was in for the first three years the same as Betty. She had a big impact in -- she and Conroy in getting bylaws, getting them printed, getting them distributed, getting some measure of organization within the organization.

MAJ: Was the president or the president of the board elected at that time by the members?

MJC: By the board. Initially, they didn't have any members. But then -- but they quickly -- but then I went to the 1967 convention, which is where they hammered out all their positions, not all of them, but the initial positions. So, they took a position and Betty was the president -- they took a position on abortion. **Alice Rossi** was the person who made the argument and so you know, a bunch of people walked out. Then they considered the position on the equal rights amendment, and so they took that position and then the labor people walked out, except Kathryn, of course. So, it was this defining of all these principle positions, but they were losing -- I thought is there going to be anybody in this room by the time we get done here? So anyway it was funny but that's how it worked.

I mean they -- there's always been that tension, there is always that tension and maybe I think that there isn't any movement between taking the principle position and being actually able to win anything because she can't organize anybody. If you lose anybody, you can have your most principle position, but if nobody follows you then, you know, you're not going to win. So, I think it was right in that case. I mean they took a position on abortion that was to the left of Planned Parents position on abortion. I mean it was pretty amazing. I mean people weren't talking about making abortion legal in 1967 and they took that position; no laws governing abortion, that's pretty wild. And then the ERA, I had never heard of them, I had no idea what they were talking about.

MAJ: You know I read something, a little thing on Betty Freidan, it was a little quote on not [inaudible] and it talked about Kathryn Clarenbach and it said that originally she was made the president, but that the east coast people and Betty Freidan had such a fit that they got together and worked it out and it ended up that she was president of the board.

MJC: Oh, I never heard that, but it could have happened.

MAJ: I just thought that was kind of interesting that the Midwestern people really made it so that doing it.

MJC: No, I think, right. It's true.

MAJ: That Betty wanted to have the main position.

MJC: Well, I don't think Midwest people are as bigoted against the east as the eastern people are against us, I really don't, or the western people. I think they all think they're a bunch of, not they all, but I mean that's an exaggeration but I mean I think there is a sentiment that the Midwest is not

where the cutting edge ideas are and that's -- I don't think that's true. I don't know if it's true or not. I think it's true. I mean I think a lot of --

MAJ: But that's what we're interested in looking at whether the roots, I mean if the idea of the women's movement doesn't take seriously the employment issues then they're not going to see the work that was done here.

MJC: Well, that's why I wrote up this – Mary-Ann and Kathy and I wrote up this proposal for the [inaudible] thing and it's all -- we wrote it about employment issues because I think it's the most under represented area of achievement. I mean just this one example that we talked about, of this one job description at Sears Roebuck; the fundamental idea that a corporation can take college graduates and put them in the men's room and the women's room track and that that's not -- can't happen anymore, not that NOW did that by itself, the government needed to reinforce it, but we encouraged that. I mean that little picketing that the Women Employed NOW people did that could really get the goods on what was actually happening from the individual employees, really get an understanding of how that tracking was deliberately, intentionally being done, that was pretty amazing. I mean it's sort of like, my friend **Lois Herr** who wrote the book on AT&T. I mean reading her book --

MAJ: She was head of NOW, DuPage County, was that it?

MJC: Right, she was founder of DuPage County NOW. She was out at Bell Labs. She and her husband were at Bell Labs, and when I talked to her and read her book and stuff, the treasure trove -- when AT&T -- when the government came to AT&T and said turn over your documents, they were like fine, and here's documents that say they pick women for operators because they have smaller hands, they didn't notice anything wrong with this. They didn't even know that was something they shouldn't be doing. So the fundamentals of some of this work in the AT&T case, I mean it was a government case, but we went on, you know we picketed at AT&T, and Illinois Bell, and Grace Allen. All of that -- both were directed towards the management but it was also directed toward the employees, toward the women to begin to help the women surface their own dissatisfaction with what they were being offered and to let them see --

MAJ: Consciousness raising.

MJC: Totally, that there could be another way.

MAJ: Well, is there anything else that you feel like that's important -- that you feel is important to talk about in terms of your experiences in Chicago NOW specifically?

MJC: I can't think of anything.

MAJ: Tell me about the organizing conference for CLUW, for Coalition of Labor Union Women. You said that you were there, what was it like?

MJC: Well, it was pretty amazing. I mean it was the first time that women had -- I remember there was a lot excitement, there were a lot of people, I can't remember how many, but it was at that hotel down at the lakefront that we used to have all of our meetings at, but a lot of great speeches, a lot of great workshops, and people coming from all over. I can't remember whether the labor unions

were kind of forced to send their people; I think they might have been, so that the women got their way paid to be able to come, I think that happened. I mean I think CLUW happened -- the labor guys were smart enough to know that they shouldn't let this get out of hand, so I think they paid so there was quite a large contingent, more than you would get if people had to spend their money to come from wherever they came from. I think they tried this sanction, CLUW, so that it didn't get away from them, so it was a pretty big convention.

MAJ: I heard 3,000.

MJC: I think that sounds right.

MAJ: And they didn't expect anywhere near that number of people, I mean this was way, way beyond what they thought.

MJC: You know and the labor women have made progress. Unfortunately, the labor movement is not hanging together as much we we'd like it to. But we have two major unions with women presidents, at least two, the CIU and AFT. So, I mean at least we have NOW women present in some unions that are enormously women. I mean the teachers. I mean NEA had a women president a couple of years ago. But I mean those barriers they were tough to -- watching this thing in Wisconsin where **Scott Walker**, when he put in his repressive collective bargaining bill, he excluded the cops and the fireman because he knows they vote Republican and fortunately they said no, they wanted to be included in the labor movement.

So that was a big switch, but I mean that's the trades people, were a tough nut to crack, you know the fireman, they were terrible to the women who were hired at the beginning, terrible. So this is progress. This is progress. But it's -- these are failing institutions. I mean had the labor movement been able to actually open up more generously to women at that critical period in the 1970s maybe they would have got more members, I don't know. I always felt it was unfortunate that they were not -- they kind of fought this stuff every step of the way too. Remember the IBEW was on the other side of the AT&T case.

MAJ: Okay, well this has been wonderful. Anything you want to say in conclusion?

MJC: I think Chicago's contribution, I'm grateful to you for the work you're doing with other people to raise up this contribution that Chicago and the Midwest has made toward the women's movement because it's really, really important and there are women like the women in the labor movements here, everywhere. You know there are women in New Jersey or New York who have the same needs that were attempted to be addressed here and some of them were and some of them weren't. I mean I also have friends in the east who did a lot of work on the employment issue, **Noreen Connell** in New York. There was a woman in New Jersey who was the head of our taskforce on equal opportunity. So it's not that there weren't isolated people, it's just that the milieu of really hard work toward the economic issues was just reflected more in this part of the country period. The practical, shoulder to the wheel kind of hard work, and compromise that would bring about actual changes, I think was very in evidence here. So, I'm proud of the work we did. I'm proud of the work.

[*End of recording.*]

RT/Mary_Jean_Collins_Int/01/30/12