their head down. Then they had developed good leadership, there was Sara, Adolfina. Good strong people, and they functioned effectively as Stewards. So when anything happened, they would stop work, go with the employee into the office of the boss and confront the boss. And usually not just one, but two or three.
Q: You were talking about how strong the Calliope Design workers were when they went back to work after the strike, even though they did not have a contract?

A: Yes.

Q: You mentioned that Fina Hernandez had some problems at work. Can you describe what happened to her?

A: You know, I do not have a clear memory of this but, there was--here is the way I remember. Some issue of those in the shop. Fina actually suspected that they were trying to intimidate her into quitting, like a boss would drop a box that just missed her, stuff like that. I remember, and she went in to complain about the way she was being treated, and other workers went in too. Maybe Mario; there were two or three at least, who confronted the bosses about the way these supervisors was acting. And something or other. Fina got so upset that she had some kind of--she either fainted or...she got ill physically and she actually had to leave work. And she was off work for a while when she came back. And I think that she and one or two other workers were disciplined for the way they had confronted the boss over Fina's treatment. There was an unfair labor practice charge, and they got like, I do not know, a three day disciplinary suspension or something like that, maybe a ten day suspension. And I filed a new unfair labor practice charge. And, I do know what the up-shot was. By the time that case went to the hearing, I was not representing the union any more. The union did get the hearing without a lawyer and...

Q: Who represented the workers then?

A: Well, you have to understand. The Labor Board has both its own prosecutors and its own judges. So when the Labor Board decides to issue a complaint, a Labor Board attorney acts as the prosecutor. So it is all they had, they had a Labor Board prosecutor. I did get the Board to issue the complaint at the meeting, but somehow I was not involved in the hearing, so it must have taken place after I got butted. And, they lost that case. They lost that
case. The company lawyer persuaded the judge either that the workers had been insubordinate or somehow that the company had the right to discipline them, which was not important practically. I mean, they only lost a few days wages. But it was a bad blow to morale.

Q: The workers called you at home to inform you about the suit results?

A: That was way down the road. They went back to work in October. I think that incident did not take place until the Spring, I think in March. And then the hearing would not have been until September. You know, it takes a long time. We are talking about September, 1990. I was long gone. Now, I did have continuing contact with Paulina and Fina.

Q: Because you were able to win Paulina’s case?

A: The fact is that I won every case I did for the union.

Q: Did Fina ever have a case with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)?

A: Only about, I think that they did not actually try to fire her, they gave some bull-shit about taking her back, saying that her doctor had not released her because after her illness...she had some kind of minor heart attack or strock. And her doctor released her and they would not take her back. And we put pressure on the company to take her back because her doctor--she could not, and they did, they did. They could not get away with firing her. But she did, I think leave voluntarily after a certain point. I am sorry I do not see them. Let me say one more thing about Calliope Designs, which was that, they did have some degree of victory. When there is an impasse in collective bargaining, which was the situation when the strike ended, the company can implement its last offer. So they did go back in with somewhat better terms than they went out [with]. So from their point of view, they were really clear in their minds that this was not a defeat. This was a victory, which is pretty amazing. These were amazing compañeros. (comrades)
Q: You had worked with Latino workers; you had represented them in different labor cases, so this was not your first time. How did you view the strengths, weaknesses, etc., of these workers?

A: It is hard to generalize, but I think that they were a remarkable group of people. They were very brave. Some of the workers, not so much at Calliope Designs but at PSGF, were undocumented, so they were brave. They were taking tremendous risks. I thought that they had great solidarity and self confidence. You know, in ten days of hearings of the PSGF objections, they were never intimidated. They were not intimidated by being cross-examined by the company lawyer or by being in front of the judge, nor by saying something the boss said was a lie. They were just not afraid to stand up for the truth. And they were also very surprising, because I have worked with workers my whole career, but they were very sophisticated.

Q: How so?

A: When you talked about tactics or strategies, whether it was legal tactics, whether it was about tactics in the struggle. They grasped what they were being told. They took in that information, and they would do what they had to do with it. And really, it is very hard for, like you were saying; "for Mexicano workers to come to grips with how lop-sided U.S. labor laws are. And they did not like what I had to tell them about that, you know. It was all a one-sided proposition, stacked in favor of the bosses. But they came to grips with it. You know, they figured out what they needed to do within the context of the imbalance of power. So to me, really it was a privilege to be in that struggle.

Q: We hear everywhere about Mexican women being docile and quiet. And that they do not have the strength nor the knowledge to struggle to better themselves. We know that women comprised the majority of the workers in both places, Calliope Designs and PSGF. How did you see them in the struggle? Were they quiet? Did they give the power to men? Or did they take the power from the beginning and organize themselves?
A: At meetings I did not observe any unusual deference of the women towards the men. I definitely observed sexual structure. The women were the ones who took care of the children, always. And very few of the men dealt with the babies, and children in the room. But apart from that, I think that the women were not afraid to be in leadership roles. While they were not disrespectful to the men, I saw lots of times when a man would put down a woman's ideas in a meeting. And the woman would not stand for it. She would talk back and say—you know; "You cannot talk disrespectfullu to me. This is what I think, and still I think I am right." Basically, she would be saying; "I am not scared by you." So I do not believe any of that stuff about Mexicana women being subservient. I think that at home...I think that my own observation was that they separated these domains. That at home they are willing to be more traditional and responsible to the children's well-being and their care, more than the men. Not the demand of the men that they do the shit work, the so called shit work. But out in the work force, I did not see that.

Q: You saw them as equals?

A: Yes, I would say so. I think that they were what you were suggesting. They were more than equals, they were in leadership roles, and I think the men accepted that. I also did not see...I saw hardly any disrespect of the man for the women in leadership.....Well, that is the bitter irony of the struggle, really, that all that potential dissipated because there was tremendous potential leadership and empowerment in those workers....Look, Latino workers are the invisible industrial base. So what was so exciting about this was that this was a spontaneous movement of Mexicano, largely Mexicano workers, who could have built a democratic independent union, and could have...I mean, my dream was that they could have led the way towards unionizing a lot more of Sonoma County. And the people as individuals were certainly capable of that. They were really bright; they had lots of energy. Look at all the hours, and time and effort they put into building this union.

Q: What do you think stopped them from building a strong democratic and independent union?
A: I think that the problem was the kind of leadership exerted by Newman Strawbridge and Alicia Sanchez. I think that they tended to operate on charisma and on impulse, instead of always looking at tactics and strategies. Because it is a class world, there is no mistake about it. In the world you have to look at tactics and strategies all the time. They would often operate on intuition and on impulse. So that was their own style. But a more profound problem was that they never really cultivated and developed leadership from the workers themselves. I never saw any of the workers take on Alicia and Newman--challenge them.

Q: But how would the workers challenge Alicia and Newman if they were supposed to be the ones with the knowledge?

A: Exactly, exactly. That is just the problem. That if a different culture or a different democratic culture had been cultivated, and if gradually Alicia and Newman had self-consciously moved to the background as the indigenous leadership came forward they would have been in a different situation. That is what you really have to do. I mean, lets face it. If you are an alien intellectual, I do not care what color, I do not care whether you are Sanchez or Strawbridge, you basically come to this situation as the top-down intellectual. You are not living the workers' life really, you know. But if you spark it, you get it started and then have the good sense and the smarts to withdraw as the workers are empowered. Then you really have a base of people whose capacity for struggle is unlimited. It does not depend on whether Newman and Alicia have a break-out, whether Newman kicks out the lawyer or the translator. You know, it does not depend on all those individual decisions because the workers are really in command. And that does not mean that they cannot give good advice about things they do not [know a lot] about. Sure they can. But I think that was the basic flow of this organizing effort that the charisma and the leadership was never transferred to all the natural talent from below.

Q: You were also mentioning earlier that the workers were not put in a leadership role to negotiate with the employers. Do you think that it could have been a way where the leadership could have
been turned over to them? If the workers could have been prepared about tactics and strategies and knowing how to read a contract proposal, etc. do you think that could have helped the workers?

A: Yes, workers on the negotiating committee at Calliope Designs were ready to participate directly. They were a little intimidated by, you know, being comfortable in English. So the conversation always had to be translated, and parts of the conversation unlike court, did not get translated.

Q Why?

A: Well, because it went so fast. You know, the bosses would make a long speech in English and Alicia would summarized it...or someone would summarized it, or I would in two or three sentences for the workers. Well, that is very alienating when you do not really know what the other side is saying, so that was one problem. Another problem was that there was not a planning preparatory meeting with the negotiating committee--ever. When we got together, and we would say here is what the union wants to accomplish at this meeting, the bargaining meeting. Here is what the company is probably going to say: Here is what we should counter. There never were those preparatory meetings...

Q How did you prepare for your meetings then?

A: We just showed-up. We would be lucky if the union side would have actually reviewed what the company had presented, not always. Never mind if the union side [would have] prepared a coherent response to what the company had presented.

Q Who was in charge of preparing the union responses?

A: It would be Newman and Alicia, and I would be in the side lines pointing out: "This is a problem, what the company is asking for--you Know--This is something in our proposal we probably won't get, but we can cut loss...

Q At that point, did you have access to a computer? This may sound stupid but, if the union had an office, a computer and other
office materials. could not your negotiating committee have met and worked on your proposals, and responses, make copies for people and brain-storm about your tactics and strategies?

A: Well, all my work was done on a computer, yes. And I think other people helping the union were also using computers.

Q: Who was in charge of putting the packages together?

A: I have to say that Newman and Alicia could not care less about papers, proposals, files. You know, the nitty-gritty of preparation. They just did not do that shit.

Q: Did they have anybody doing it for them?

A: Not that I know of, I only know the part I did. I do not know what anybody else did. I did not know what Kim or Rick [community volunteers] or other people did or Paul [President of Service Employees International Union (SEIU)]. I never saw any paper being generated by anybody but me. Except for the leaflets, the leaflets, yes.

Q: As I understand, they ([Newman and Alicia] were never worried about papers or files. I also understand that people offered assistance to set-up a file system? My understanding is that they never said no, but they never set time aside to have people help them.

A: See, that would have required delegating some power. I think wherever there was an issue of people taking a little delegated power, Newman and Alicia always opted against that. They did not want anybody organizing the office files. They did not want somebody--whatever--writing leaflets. Did anybody write leaflets except them? [No that I know]. I would have involved workers in writing a leaflet. In fact, some of those workers could easily have learned the word processing skills to do something like that. [Maybe leading a meeting?] Yeah, leading the meetings, very important, nobody but Alicia and Newman ever chaired the meeting. That is a key place where workers [could have] see the two intellectuals withdraw, and they step forward and run the meeting.
Who ever decided what the agenda for the meeting was? There was never a sense of agenda in those meetings. Nobody who came to those meetings would know: "This is probably what we are going to discuss, this is the order of... No, it was all like whatever Alicia thought of next to talk about. And that is what I mean about all depending on charisma. You cannot build an organization based on two individuals. You cannot.

Q: Let's put this analysis on the side for a while. By the time the collective bargaining came to PSGF, Were you already gone? Or were you still working?

A: No, I was there just to the point before they signed a contract with PSGF. So I do not recall when that happened, but I was there.

Q: Who prepared the workers' proposal at PSGF? Because PSGF and Calliope Desings were unique to the extent that both workers worked at piece rate.

A: It became clear when the Board certified the union, that the company was going to accept that result, and that they were really willing to negotiate an agreement. And I think that the company took much more than an initiative, they put out a proposal... I think the union never put out a proposal of its own to PSGF management, but rather, just reacted to the company's proposal.

Q: Why? You said previously that the way you won the elections was clear, that most of the workers wanted a union. The company was fighting you in the legal way for more than a year. Why, you actually had that time to prepare yourselves. You did not prepare a proposal in the event of being certified by the NLRB?

A: It could have happened during that year, of waiting for certification. It also could have happened in the month or two right after certification. It could it have [been] a series of meetings with the-- I mean, that would have been a point of high momentum-- he workers had this legal victory. The company was
saying; "We won't stall anymore; we will bargain. That would have been a great time to hold meetings and develop a contract package from the workers' side. I do not think that happened.

Q In your own view, why do you think you, the union, did not write the contract you wanted to have?

A: I tell you, I do not think that Alicia and Newman were interested in the bureaucratic aspect of organization building.

Q But writing a contract is not bureaucratic. Writing a contract is securing the workers rights, no?

A: Yes, the first contract is the most important.

Q Yes, and despite all the actions the employer had taken against the workers, you were still strong. Workers continued participation in the union activities. Writing a contract collectively would have been a strong push to their morale, don't you think?

A: I could be wrong about this, but I do not recall ever seeing a union package proposal to PSGF. I do not have a file on it. But I just do not remember seeing something the union put together based on the workers' desires. Here is an interesting note: "May, 1991, and it must be from PSGF from the timing. A note of mine saying; "Alicia tells me that the company had rejected the union's proposal, they were going back into negotiations, June 18 and 19 and she wanted a particular clause drafted by me to take back to the bargaining table in June of 1991.

Q You were still working with the union until 1991?

A: Oh, sure, I must have been.

Q When did you leave the union?

A: It must have been within three or four months of this. Because the contract did not take long to settle. At PSGF the
negotiations maybe took two months, the company wanted an agreement. I think the workers were mostly interested in pay and vacations, those were the big issues.

Q. Do you recall some workers who were active in the union and they were laid-off?

A: I remember they fired Carmelo because he operated a fork-lift in a kind of reckless way. Was not that his case. Oh, he got pissed-off, and he did some kind of macho acting out in the yard, like racing the fork-lift around at thirty or forty miles an hour. And they said: "That is not safe; you are fired." I think that was an unemployment appeal that Michelle handled. [Michelle was the new union lawyer].

Q. One more question: Why did you leave the union? Did you leave before or after affiliation to the SEIU or after?

A: Just after the affiliation vote. I basically left because I got in an argument with Newman, and I did not think it was possible to continue with the union while Newman was so antagonistic to me. And Alicia would not--You know, Alicia would basically silently siding with Newman. I had been critical of some of their work: Not maintaining paper work, not paying attention to things I pointed out in the affiliation election process, so that the ballot that got drafted was not... running the risk that the employer could refuse to recognize the union. I think they never took advantage of that; the union was lucky. Anyway, I left certainly not from my own desire. I would have stayed and struggled as long as possible. But I left because I got into a personal, near physical altercation with Newman. And just because of the style of leadership, it was impossible. Not withstanding my close ties with several of the leading workers, it was impossible for me to keep on being part of the organization, if I had a beef with Newman.

Q. After you left the union, did you keep in contact with the workers?
A: Only some, only some. Workers will call me if they have individual legal problems. There were a few cases going on, like Paulina's and Fina's cases. Actually, I would have been okay with continuing to do legal work for the union. The only thing I said to Alicia and Newman was; "If affiliation goes through, and if SCIU becomes part of SEIU, and if SEIU Local is going to have legal help and pay some union lawyer, then I want to be paid. I am not going to work for free if SEIU lawyers are getting paid. I even offered to accept some ridiculous low amount of money for the legal work."
Alicia Sanchez, union organizer,
Sonoma County Industrial Union

Q: How did you come in contact with Calliope Design workers, and how was Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU) organized?

A: I think what happened, I am not very good with dates, [is that] before we even started SCIU, a group of us came together, and we thought that one of the ways in Sonoma County we could probably get...

Q: Who was “a group of us?”

It was a group of people who came together [to organize workers]. In a sense, we really did not have a name [for our group]. It was called the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC), and Newman [Srawbridge] was one of the [people] who knew [how to organize workers, because] he had been a Labor Commissioner. [Newman] knew the labor laws and the wage and hour regulations [set by the Labor Commission]. He came to all of us and [asked us to organize workers into a union]. [We were] a group from the community; I guess you could call us progressive [people] in Sonoma County. We thought that we should form a union. Workers' rights [were being] violated at their workplace, [and] they [sought assistance from the] Labor Commission, in a sense, for a short term remedy [to their working problems]. [Actually,] not a remedy at all because during this time we had the Republicans [in power], and they were in control of the Labor Commission. As a group, we decided [that we] should help workers in the long term, and that [meant to us], to form a union. A [union] predominantly [composed by] Latino workers. Because, in Sonoma County, this particular group of workers were the ones that were the most neglected. They were the ones that other unions felt were unorganizable. And the reason was because those unions did not have a Spanish-speaking agent that would be able to communicate with those workers.

Q: What were other reasons? Lets say, if they were to have had Spanish-speaking union organizers, would they have been inclined to organize Latino workers?
A: No, [not] at that time. I think you are right, unions, even in 1995, I will say that unions are barely starting to realize that they have to organize new workers. But in 1988, I do not think [that organizing Latinos] was on the agenda of any of the unions. They were still trying to maintain their membership. [They were] not inclined to go out and organize new shops. Maybe once you interview Newman, he will tell you that he himself went to other unions and tried to solicit [their] involvement in organizing latino workers, being that they [Latinos] were the majority, [of] the composition of the workers in Sonoma County.

Q What were the unions' responses when Newman approached them?

A: I think that they were not interested at that time. They were not organizing, and they did not have the resources, one of them being the fact that they did not have Spanish-speaking organizers.

Newman came to [our] group and said: 'Look I think that we [need] to find out what the [working] conditions are for workers and, [based on that, we need to see if] there is a need for a [Latino] union in Sonoma County. We need to develop a flyer that [investigates] wage and hour violations.' Newman developed a flyer. If [the person] answered 'yes' to any of the questions, the person may have some money coming to him or her. The flyer asked about violations [in relation to] wages and hours, non-paid overtime work, [and coffee] breaks. Those kinds of questions.

Q So, it was a questionnaire?

A: Yes.

Q Who was in your group? were any Latino workers members of your group?

A: There were two Latinas. Everybody else [in our group] was white, [and] educated. They were workers in a sense, but workers in professions, not [manufacturing] jobs. This was a group of people who felt it was very important to try to remedy some of the injustices that were happening against Latinos at their working places.
This was a group of wonderful people, very hard-working people. When we decided to do this, Newman said that people could call with questions. We answered some of the [workers'] questions in relation to [working] violations. Newman taught us some of the [labor] laws, so [when we] returned the workers' calls [we knew how to answer their questions]. When workers made [the first contact] calling us, they [had to leave a] message; we had an answering machine.

Q: Who wrote this questionnaire?

A: At first all of us [brainstormed together]. Newman was predominately doing it, [writing it]. It was Newman who got the leaflet out, and [rented] a place so that he could [receive] mail and [have] a telephone number and an answering machine.

We got telephone calls from people, [and] we called them back, and answered their questions. But the final question we would ask...

Q: Who was paying for your expenses?

A: At that time Newman. And [the reason] was because he was trying to [create a job for himself], since he was, like I said, a labor-law investigator. [In this] way, he was developing a job for himself. Newman felt, it was important for him to be the one to [cover all the expenses]. At the same time, we were developing a political agenda. This particular group of volunteers, was trying to find out how we could help Latino workers in Sonoma County. And we [thought] that [forming] a union was the way to do it. [We saw the need to] form our own union. But before we said we want a union, we had to find out what the [working] violations [workers were experiencing in their workplace] were. Who was this group of people? [In which factories] were these workers [experiencing working violations]? [In] what industries did they work? It was not true that [only] Latino workers [were experiencing working violations]. We felt we could answer all these questions by first [distributing] a flyer [to workers] and having [them] call, [or write to] us. This [work] took [several] months. And, as I mentioned [previously], we would [try to] answer [correctly as many] questions the person had, [in relation to] the particular [working]
violations the person encountered [at the work site]. [However, before] we completed the [conversation] with that worker, we would ask the person [if] there were other workers at [his or her] work site that were as angry and pissed-off as he or she was. [We asked the worker if] he or she thought of forming a union. Or joining a union. [We usually asked that question to people] after we had answered all their questions. It was [quite] interesting [to hear the] anti-union sentiment people [expressed in our conversations]. They would respond immediately, "I do not like unions!" [Many of us in the Center] had previous experience organizing workers, [thus we were aware of a general adversion to unions]. I think this adversion was because people were not well informed about unions, [and they did not know about union history]. We did not [become] defensive or upset. On the contrary, we asked them in a [friendly manner] if they had any [awareness] of what kind of services and protection from employers unions [provided] for workers.

Q Why were these Latinos so anti-union?

A: It was not so much Latinos; the people who [expressed] anti-union [sentiments] were predominantly white.

Q Then your questionnaire was being distributed to everybody, not only Latino workers?

A: [The questionnaire] was in both languages [English and Spanish]. The calls we [received] came [from] both groups--native [English] speakers and Spanish speakers.

Q But the anti-union sentiment was coming mostly from white people?

A: [Yes], predominantly whites, they had an anti-union [sentiment]. [However], as we started talking to them, we found out that [often] people did not know about unions. It was lack of information or a misconception they had [about unions]. But we took time talking to them, and after [our conversation] many [people] had a better [understanding] about unions.
Q. When you were talking to people on the phone, at the end of your conversation did you ask them confidential information, such as their name, place of work, etc.?

A: The questionnaire included a place for [the worker's] return address, a telephone number, and his or her name. [Therefore], the worker, [if he wished to call], could just call [our telephone number] and leave his or her telephone number and name. We distributed the questionnaire in areas we thought working class people [lived or worked]. [For example, we distributed the questionnaire at] the unemployment office, K Mart, different grocery stores, and social services buildings. [When] we [gave out] the questionnaire we told workers, [that their answers to the questionnaire] were confidential. We [also] explained the confidentiality issue [at the beginning of our] telephone conversations. We also told people that we understood [their position], and that we were not going to say anything that would [compromise] them because we did not want them to risk [their employment]. So people felt very confident to let us know their working site. It was interesting; they trusted us.

We [Newman and I] were surprised at the number of telephone calls [we received]. That is how the Calliope Designs workers contacted us--from what I remember. They found out about us from the questionnaire. I am not sure just exactly [how they contacted us]. I think they just called [our telephone number], and we talked to them. Newman probably talked to them [before I did], [because] one of them spoke a little bit more English.

Q. Calliope Designs employed mostly Latino workers, and most of them did not speak English?

A: Yes, there were twenty-one Latino workers [employed] at Calliope Designs. The first [step they took] was to call us. [Then they talked to Newman and said: 'we have so many [working] violations; so we would like to talk to you about [them]. If you can help us, we would like to set up a meeting [with you].'] They did not want to [discuss] the working violations through the telephone. I think they [were more interested in] having a meeting.

Newman and I met with them at an attorney's [office]; she is a friend of ours--Colleen O'Neal. [At O'Neal's office] we talked to
all of them. [Well], almost all of them came --twenty workers; the other one was on maternity leave. So I think she did not come to the meeting.

Out of the twenty people, or twenty-one, there were five couples, husband and wife who showed up. We met with them. I went there to translate, even though Newman knew a little bit of Spanish, to make sure. And it was interesting because they didn't know until our fifth meeting that we were actually husband and wife.

They told us all the violations that were going on [in their workplace]. Their [health] insurance was bad, they talked about wages --not getting the wages [they felt they deserved] [Workers were] being asked to do detailed [ornaments]. Workers at Calliope Designs made Christmas ornaments from a dough [paste], and the [ornaments] were very detailed. The required a lot of work and time [to make]. These [people] worked piece rate. Often, they were not being paid [according] to the detailed work. [Several] of them had been working for Calliope Designs for many years. Some of those workers started [working] when the company [owners] were working out of their own kitchen. They [workers] had been with this company for a while now, I would say [at least] ten years.

Q: What were the workers' expectations from this meeting? Were they expecting immediate results?

A: Exactly. Let me go back now that I have remembered. Now I remember! The workers had gotten really upset, they were so fed-up with the employer that they walked out. Before we had the meeting. They walked out! And they went to California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) to talk to Christina Briano. Christina told them go back to work, and she contacted Newman. They were real lucky to be accepted back [to work].

Q: When did they walked out from their jobs? On Martin Luther King Day --1988?

A: Oh, that is right! That is right! Yes because in fact at one point we were considering naming the union, --the workers thought about naming it MLK's union. Instead of SCIU because it was on his anniversary that they walked out [their jobs].
Q: What was so significant about Martin Luther King Day that the workers choose that day to walk out?

A: It was a mere coincidence that they walked out on that day. Later on, I think when we met with them, we talked to them about the significance of that day. They were aware of Martin Luther King, but it was not like they chose that day [because of Martin Luther King]. They just happened to choose that day because it was on a Monday. They were just sick, they were sick of all the work they had to do. I think they probably were pissed-off not to even have that day [as a paid-holiday]. They just completely walked out, and they were sent back by Christina.

On that [Monday], in the evening, they called Newman. and we met a few days later, like two days later. And that is when we talked to them. What you said earlier is true. They expected us to provide legal advice, [to explain] their rights. And that is what we [did, we] talked about [their choices]. We said: ‘If you want a short term remedy, this is what we can do: ‘You can file at the labor commission [your complaints] and you can get a [short] remedy. Maybe you can get an attorney, but you do not have a recourse in law.’ Or we said: ‘you can think of a long term remedy], and it is going to be a hard struggle, and that means forming a union. You can think long term, and that means forming a union.’ It was interesting because they were [asking]: ‘what do we have to do to form a union?’ We proposed to them; ‘you can even think of going to the labor commission and talk to somebody there. The fact you are not even being paid over time, or breaks, or whatever. Because you have to work piece rate so fast. There is some remedy there.’ Or we said: ‘you can think long term and fight to remedy this situation by forming a union.’ And on of them said, ‘what do we have to do to form a union’?

Q: Had any of them been involved in any union organizing? Did they have prior experiences, or was this the first time they had heard of union organizing?

A: We talked about what a union meant: All of them coming together, [and] being able to decide that they were going to change their lives by coming together. What was interesting, [was that] one of the women asked: I do not even know if she will remember
this, but Angelica is the one that asked the question: "What do we need to do? What does it take for us to form a Union?" And Newman said: 'All you have to do is make a motion.' That is when I turned around and, translating, I said to the woman: 'Lo que tienes que hacer es una mocion para decir que quieren la union.' What I meant is you have to make a motion to form the Union. --We were all in a circle. She sat there for a few minutes without saying anything. I kept thinking 'Why in the world is she taking so long just to say I move to form a union?' What she did is that she lifted her arm in a fist and said: 'Me siguen --would you follow me?' And what happened is that everybody started saying 'yes, yes, yes, --si, si, si.' Of course, I almost started crying. And I always look back, and I go: God! It was a beautiful day, because it was the first time I saw all Raza, Mexican united in strength. And what [happened] was, the woman, when I had translated: 'you have to make the motion,' she felt she had to make a movement, a sort of physical movement. So that was when she raised her fist, thinking that was what I meant for her to say: 'I move to do this or that.' So that day, I remember all those workers yelling 'si, si, si.' And what she said was: Do you follow me? do you follow me in forming the union?' I think for all of them this was the first time they have been involved in a union. Or even know about a union. I remember when we later on talked about wearing a button or whatever, none of them knew what a union button was. They kept thinking it was a regular button, so they did not understand why we wanted them to wear a boton --you know.

For me it was an incredible moment in my life because I had been working before with the United Farm Workers, and I knew what it was like for Mexican workers to be so oppress. With the United Farm workers, I did was indirectly organizing [workers]. I was doing legal work for the United Farm Workers.

Q: Were you a lawyer already?

A: No, at that time I had just come out of law school, but when you practice with the NLRB you need to be licenced.

Q: But you had experience working with Latino workers, regardless they worked in the agricultural or manufacturing industry.
A: What happened with me; what drew me to work with the United Farm Workers, [was] because I saw from my own --my parents were farm workers, and I saw what kind of conditions they had to work under. [What kind of conditions] Mexican workers have to work in the United States.

To me, that is why that particular moment [was special]. When this group of workers said: 'We are willing to come together and together we are going to change our lives. We are going to change our living conditions here. Together, not individually, or anything else, each of us thinking [it is] our own labor case with the labor commission, but [one] as a group.' To me that was such a historical moment, not only in my life, but in the history of Sonoma County. Because it was this particular twenty-one workers who decided that they were going to change their lives by doing something that is not common --working together as a group. In my personal life, I got to see workers like my parents, and I was probably around their same age, as they [the workers] were. In a sense people who have been suffering a lot, finally take a stand and say that they are going to change their lives, [that is historical]. But I also think it was historical for Sonoma County because we now had a group of workers, who on their own, decided that they were not just going to join a union, they were going to form their own union. They were the first latino workers in this particular kind of industry [who formed a union], because we still had the agricultural workers [who were not unionized yet by the Farmworkers Union]. In Sonoma County, these were the first Latino workers who stood up and said: 'we are going to form our union.'

Q: It was the first time, to your knowledge that Latino workers in the manufacturing industry were organizing a union in Sonoma County?

A: Exactly, and [they] were forming a union, which was unique, they were not just going to join a union, they formed their own union.

Q: Were they informed about the existence of other Unions?

A: I think we did talk about [it] during the whole discussion. We said, 'if you are interested, you could try to go and talk to other
unions and see if they are willing to organize [you].’ I think that Newman also mentioned that he had gone and talked to other unions. He had gone and talked to other unions, and right then, those unions were not interested in organizing latino workers because they did not have the resources -one of them being an organizer, meaning a Spanish speaking organizer.

After the [workers] said yes, we want to make our own union, we talked about what they needed to do to protect themselves. We were concern that things were moving sort of fast, because these workers were lucky that when they walked out their jobs, they were not fired. I think they were not fired because this is a skilled work.

Q  Why do you think they were not fired?

A: I think because all of them walked out. And this was a skilled work that took a lot of training for people to do it, and you have to not only learning how to do this Christmas ornament, but be fast enough to make it profitable for the business. These workers were already trained in this kind of job, and for all of them to walked out --the employer would have [had] to be really dumb to say: ‘you are all fired.’ He would have been without a labor force. This was a small employer; this was the only business he had. He had worked out of his home with his wife, and developed his business, and he did not have [the] experience [to deal with] a complete walk out of the workers.

We felt that we better do something to protect the workers, and the reason was because more than likely this employer was going to do, was what most employers do -they end up calling an attorney, saying, ‘Look I have this kind of situation.’ I have workers [who] walked out, or workers demanding certain things, what are my remedies?’ So we said to the workers: ‘What we need to do [is] for you [to] declare that you want to form a union, that you are organizing [a union]. The NLRB protects workers from getting fired, or from being intimitated, if they are interesting in organizing.

Q  To whom they were suppose to declare, the employer?

A: To the employer, you could just do it [in any way]. You could
do it by a petition, [or] by a delegation. What we decided to do [was that] we told all the workers, 'What you need to do is that the next day when you go to work is to wear buttons. We did not say [exactly] the next day, I think it was [within] the next two days or something, because we had yet to make the buttons. We said, 'All of you have to wear buttons,' and that is how I remember one of the workers saying: 'What do you mean we have to wear buttons?' They thought we meant a regular button --shirt button, [or] blouse button. To me, the reason that [question] stayed in my mind, is because eventually that particular worker --which was Sara Ochoa. Sara would eventually will learn so much about law, and boycotts and labor law --she became an active member. I always remember that first meeting and seen someone like her because she did not know what a button was, and later, [she] became one of the union leaders in our union. [She] became so knowledgeable and active.

Q: Was anything done in writing besides the buttons to protect the workers from the boss?

A: The law simply says: 'if an employer has knowledge that someone is organizing, and by [the worker] wearing a union button, all of [the workers] wearing union buttons. That itself is a sign of organization of unity of the union --that is why we made buttons.

Q: How did you make your buttons?

We made our first buttons on the following day --one of the workers had a son [that helped us]. We put [down] a glass and we cut out [a piece] of like cardboard. We used round big ones, a round piece of glass. And so, I wrote on a piece of paper --so the [worker's] son could print it. We put: 'We want the union/Queremos la Union.' I think we did it in both languages, [and then] we decided --I could not tell you if it was the next day, we said the night that we made the buttons, that we would meet [the next day]. Or it was two days later? They went to work at 7:30 a.m. We decided, [for] all of us to met the next day, at 7:00 in the morning. Outside the worksite. And we met at 7:00 a.m. Newman and I, and all the workers. One worker gave the buttons, to each one of them, and they all pinned them to their clothes.
Q: How were the workers doing, were they nervous, scared, etc.?

A: This was interesting, they were all very, very nervous, but they were very determined to do it, it was not like they were afraid or anything [like that]. They were just nervous because this was a new thing and they did not know what to expect.

Trutfully, Newman and I were terrified. We were like: 'Oh my god, this is incredible! We do not know what is going to happen, we do not know how the employer is going to react.' We did talked to workers about that. We said: 'The employer may go berserk [crazy], he may fire all of you. Even though you have remedies in court, if you get fire. More than likely, [if] he is a typical employer, he is going to call a lawyer right a way, the lawyer is going to say: 'do not touch these workers any more because they are protected under the law right now since they want to organize.' So we gave all these information to the workers. That morning, I remember it was kind of dark, [and] we all met outside [the factory].

Q: How did they respond when you warned them about the employer's response in terms of firing them? Were the workers familiar with the United States laws and institutions?

A: No. I do not think so, but my experience has always been that workers just in general, regardless if they are White or Latino. Is that they have this incredible trust for the Unites states laws and in lawyers withoutrealizing that the United States laws are not [interpreted to necessarily] protect workers: Their first instinct is to trust that the laws are going to protect [them], that the legal system is going to protect them, that these lawyers are going to be like god. Then later on they discover that is not true [all the time].

Q: That may be true for Anglo people, but speaking strictly of Mexicans that come from a very corrupt legal system. Do you think they trust the United States legal system?

A: My experience has been that Mexican workers, when they come to the United States, they believe that the law here is different, that is different from their country, that there is more just and that [law] is going to protect them. It really does come as a shock to them later on when they find out how limited the
protection actually is. We said to them: 'The law does protect you in one way. If you want the union, it will protect you.' I always tell workers you can still get fired, but at least the difference is that now you have a remedy, but before, you would not have a remedy. Now you can at least go and file charges saying that you were fired because of union activities and that protects you.

I remember that they were all very, very nervous. It was a little dark, they decided to walk in together. They usually came at different times. [But that day], they all decided to be there exactly at the same time, and they all gathered together. One of the women, then passed all the buttons to all of them, and then all of them pinned them to their clothing. We all held hands and I said a Prayer. I said: 'I asked god to protect these workers that they have been so courageous and to continue having the courage they have potraited.' We knew that we were doing the right thing. I do not remember exactly the prayer, but I just asked for protection of these workers throughout the day.

They all walked in and Newman and I stayed outside in the car waiting to see if any of them could come out. Newman and I took turns, he stayed there for a little while, and then I stayed out for a little while. Just throughout the whole day, to make sure [we were there] in case something came up. So the workers would feel safe. We told the workers that someone would stayed outside the whole day. At lunch [time] they came out and we met, we checked with them to see how they were doing, and they said 'they were fine that the employer was really shocked and asked them: 'Why they were wearing those buttons and everything else,' and they said, 'Because we wanta union.'

Q: Do you know if the employer had any experience with union organizing?

A: No, I think what shocked him even more was -- this employer [was] what you call a small employer, a family oriented. He was so shocked that his workers would go against him. He was more than anything else hurt, hurt at the fact [that workers were organizing]. That made the struggle harder because he took it so personal, he did not take it like a businessman, he took it more personal. That
[attitude] makes the struggle harder when you are trying to deal with somebody that takes it personal, because they become really stubborn.

Q. After that day, did you meet again?

A: At first we were meeting everyday or every other day, then later on, we would meet weekly. Because from then on, we were developing what we wanted, what we want to do. We said that we wanted to file for an election.

Q. What was your second legal step?

A: The next step was to go and file in San Francisco for an election. We had the workers sign cards, a petition that says we want the union because we had to show that the majority wanted it. The workers signed a petition, and everything was bilingual. At this time it was mostly Newman and I working with them. And then we met with the rest of the group from the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC). As we started moving on the struggle, as we started working out the details. We met with the other group and we said: 'Now we have a union, and these are some of the things that we have to start doing.'

Newman went to file the petition for an election to San Francisco at the NLRB office because I was working, and the workers all signed it. You have to show that the majority, well not the majority that certain percentage [of them] wanted [the union]. There were of course a few inside who said no, they did not want [the union]. But ninety to ninety-five percent of the workers did.

So we filed the petition, and what we continued to meet during this whole time --before the NLRB gave an election date. We kept meeting with the workers and talking to them about the laws and what kind of campaign the employer was going to do to try to discourage them from voting for a union. We had to wait a month or so. I think in those days it was a little less time.

By now the LLEC had became SCIU. In a sense SCIU, one of the things I can say is that the philosophy was that one of the strategies that we had as a union was that we felt it was very important for the community to be involve. That it could not just be labeled by itself but one of the strategies was that we called
labor and community strategies, which means that you have to involve the community. We started to let the community in, to become aware. That there was a group of workers.
Q: During our last interview you said that your group decided to include community groups to support the union. You also started describing the necessary steps to file a petition for an election. Can you elaborate on that?

A: Usually when you file a petition for a union election [with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)], the NLRB notifies the employer. [At that point], the employer starts his [anti-union] campaign trying to discourage the workers from voting [in favor of] the union. We [also decided to] have a campaign. [We] involved the community to come and support these workers. We [also] started to have [rally-type] lunches at Calliope Designs at noon when the workers came out [for lunch]. [We had them once a] week, sometimes we would [have] them on a Friday, every Friday, or sometimes every Tuesday.

As I remember, we started [having] a small group of people, --fifteen to twenty people came to have lunch [with the workers], and then [the number of community members supporting us] kept increasing [as weeks passed]. These lunches became really popular because people knew that they could come and there would be a pot-luck, or people [simply] brown bagged. We ended up having a lot of people coming. We ended up having a lot of people come. At one point we had a priest come and do a mass during lunch. So these lunches became real popular and they ended helping the moral of the workers too. One of the things that we would do after the lunch, and this usually were like half an hour lunches only. So we used to do lots of things within the half an hour. I would usually give them a little up-date, and we would do a pep talk to the workers and the community. Then at the end of the lunch we would all go in a circle hold our hands and have a moment of silence, not prayer because there were so many people from different beliefs, some with religious beliefs, and other with no religious beliefs.

Then we will have moment of silence and then we all would start clapping hands cheering, the workers would walk in. We would cheer them on, as they walked on, we clapped because they went in.

This helped the morale of the workers, I think the workers were sometimes a little embarrassed. But I think as a whole it helped them to keep their spirits up during that time.
Q: What other strategies did you use to help the workers win the election for collective bargaining? Did you contact the media? Did you visit workers at their homes?
A: We did [everything], we also visited other organizations.
[However], during the organizing campaign we did not [rely as heavily] on organizations as much as much as we did [while] we were on strike. [Our main strategy was to] talk to the community members, [to inform them about the struggle].

I gave certain workers, who knew English, a list of telephone numbers and names of community people, and I gave them a [script]. In other words, I would [write] a little script [for them] telling them what to say: 'Hi I am Fina and I am a Calliope Designs worker. I am calling you to invite you to a lunch on Friday from 12 to 12:30pm. If you can, [please] bring your own lunch, but we [will also] have some [food to share]. [Please] come and support [our struggle]. They [would say] something like that. The workers would make [the telephone] calls to the community people.

Then two months after, we had the election. We won!--Two months after. The vote was:--I guess, twenty-one [workers voting] in favor of the union] and two or three [against the union]. But twenty-one was the original group [who sought union representation], and they all voted solidly for the union.

The employer did not object to the election, [and] we were certified. Immediately after, we started the [contract negotiations] campaign.

We negotiated for [approximately two months], but then negotiations broke down. --At that time, we were [already] meeting [with the workers] at the labor center [on Corby Avenue]. During the time we were negotiating with Calliope Designs, the Point Saint George Fisheries (PSGF) workers [were simultaneously meeting with] us. [They] asked us to join the union, I will talk about that later. Let me just finish with Calliope Designs and [how we organized the contract negotiations, and subsequently the strike]. During that time, we had those two struggles happening simultaneously, [Calliope Designs, and PSGF].

The negotiations [with Calliope Designs] broke down, [and] the workers decided that they wanted to do something more dramatic [to have a fair contract]. One of the things that they wanted was to go out on strike. Newman and I kept saying "no, a strike is very hard". We were trying to discourage them. We felt that there were other ways [to
negotiate] a contract. Maybe [we could] just have informational picket lines, a boycott. We could find some other [avenues], instead of going out on strike.

But the workers insisted on going out on strike. [Let me explain that] our union was real democratic and the workers were the ones who ruled, and they were the ones that had the vote. [After several discussion], we had a secret ballot vote. Newman and I did not vote because we were the [union] organizers, only the workers [were allowed to vote], and they voted twenty-one [in favor of a strike] to zero [against]. [It was clear], they wanted to go out on strike.

Q: What were the employer's tactics to win the workers back?

A: This particular employer did most [of his anti-union tactics] before the election. After the election was won and the employer saw how strong the workers were --his particular employer did not pressure the employees as much as I have seen other [employers]. He did not try to change the [workers wishes to form a union]. Before the election the employer's campaign consisted in having a big lunch. [Well] one or two big lunches, like a party [for the workers]. [The employer] also sent a letter to [the workers] saying: 'We are shocked at these [events] happening because we [have] been like a family; we have been at your baptisms, parties, birthdays, etc. [The letter mentioned things] like that. [The letter also said that 'we are really shocked that you [the workers] did not let us know about these [problems], and that you were unhappy.'] That was basically the employer's campaign, [two parties and a letter].

I think [what] helped these particular workers...[Despite the pressure they had after the strike], because there was a lot of pressure inside the [factory] after they went back from the strike. I think that when you interview those workers you will find out that there was lots of tension inside. [However, the tension at Calliope Designs] was not as severe as other places I have seen.

Q: Are workers more exploited when they work piece rate than when they work for a wage? Or because they are "more specialized " do they earn more money?

A: I do not know. Both in PSGF and Calliope Designs [there were] piece rate workers, but in PSGF [there were] also hourly wage workers. But I do not know if it is more specialized because look at PSGF. It is
true that a filet worker [is] more specialized [and is] paid piece rate. I guess in a sense you are right, you have to be more specialized in order to be paid piece rate.

Q: But you have to work faster because you earn your money by piece not by the hour?

A: Exactly, that is why the workers knew they were being exploited because there were some ornaments that took a lot of work. When they looked at how much they were getting paid for that piece, they found out they were working for less than minimum wage, or [for the] minimum wage. Even if they worked really, really fast, some of those [ornaments] took a lot of time [because] they were very, very detailed [pieces of] work. I guess in a sense if you work piece rate you are more specialized than if you for work for hourly [wage].

Q: Going back to the strike. Do you think they had a clear idea of what a strike was all about?

A: I do not think workers truly understand the implications [of a strike]. Nobody actually knows what a strike is like and whether you can sustain it. I mean, if you are a worker, if you never had gone out on strike, you have no idea what it entails, and these workers themselves did not know. Newman and I were really worried because we kept thinking that a strike creates disunity, divides [us], [and] makes us break-up as a union. We said to the workers: 'you have to [make] three commitments: you have to love each other, which the workers thought to be kind of funny'. We said a strike is very, very hard and you really have to consider caring for each other. You have to accept each other's differences because [of] what is going to happen. We told them that during the strike there will be some people who will be very active during this time, and they will be at the picket line all day long, everyday. Others will come only once in a while, and instead of you getting angry at that person who comes [to the picket line] only once in a while, you have to accept each other's differences. That means different people have different needs, different demands on their lives, and you have to accept it. And the third thing is that you have to finish the struggle. If you started [it], you have to finish it. You started saying that you wanted a
union, going on strike is part of that now, and you have to be willing to finish it.' Later on, for PSGF we used the same things when they wanted to join the union. But we added a fourth one. [We told the PSGF workers]: 'You have to turn around and look at the person next to you and say: I am willing to lose my job for you.'

The workers as I mentioned voted twenty-one to zero to go out on strike. I think that we went out on strike on July 13 [July 16], for some reason that date stays on my mind, then we were out on strike for 13 weeks. During these three months, I have to tell you, I was shocked, so was Newman, at the unity, the solidarity, [and] the love that these twenty-one workers had for each other. They fought together, they were against the employer, [and] they [were] committed to the strike. We did not have a single penny to sustain the strike. They went out with cans to the taquerias, to little restaurants, and asked people for donations. They [also] went to community groups and asked for donations. We got a lot of support from other unions, and even from places like Catholic Charities. [These groups] would bring us food donations, [I mean] leftovers, or whatever, they would [just] bring it to us.

We had lots of people supporting us during these thirteen weeks. We used to laugh a lot because during the strike all of us gained weight. It was funny, we knew if you were skinny, you have not been on the picket line because people would bring us donuts in the morning and sometimes lunch to the picket line. It was a very hard struggle. We thought that we were going to be on strike only a week or two, and we were shocked to find out that we were [on strike] for thirteen weeks. The reason it was so long [was] because there was a woman who mixed the dough [for the ornaments]. Her name was Lupe [Farias]. If she had not [worked], the employers would not have been able to hire others. During the thirteen weeks the employer lost a lot of money. The ornaments that scabs did for them were [of a] very poor quality. One thing I mentioned earlier about this employer is that he took it very personal [in part] because he had no knowledge of labor law, [and because] he took [the union organizing] very personal. And that is why I think he was willing to suffer through those thirteen weeks and lose lots of money.

I think that, in general, employers take it too personal prolonging the struggle [because of their personal feelings]. They end up losing more money than if they had just sit down and tried to [negotiate a contract]. As I mentioned this critical person [Lupe Farias] was just very
anti-union. She was the [only] one who knew how to mix the dough, and so, then the employer ended up hiring other people [to work], and she trained them.

Q: Was the employer, during the strike, able to produce the very detailed, fancy ornaments? Or was he producing only simple ornaments?

A: I think they were doing very simple ornaments. They were real simple ornaments, and I do not think they completed their orders as they wanted. So, finally after thirteen weeks, we decided that we would go back. We were able to gain through negotiations some other things that we wanted. A lot of the workers wanted their paid vacation. [They wanted their wage] to be based on the piece rate [wage] instead of $5.00 per hour. They were able to get other economic gains, benefits, and in general what the workers found out was that they got mostly everything they wanted except for one critical thing, and that was union security. What is, union security's. The shop is a union shop, is a close shop, and everyone who works there has to become a union member. The employer rejected our proposal and said no, that he wanted it to be an open shop. That was the only thing that kept us from signing a contract. But the workers said: 'No, we are not going to sign a contract because we will cut our own throats by signing it without probation.' Instead, they decided to go back to work, End the strike, go back to work, but without a contract, because they had everything else [they wanted] except the union security. And their attitude was: 'we will just always pretend we are a union in there.' The twenty-one workers will continue to stand strong and be there.

Q: Why if they were union members did they not have a contract?

A: They did not want to sign a contract that would bind them because they knew that the Calliope Designs would end up.

Q: How were they going to be protected without a contract after they went back to work?

A: Because in a sense we were still negotiating, even though we just ended the strike, we continued to negotiate, it was still being a union. We had been certified as a union. We just did not have a contract. And
the employer cannot change the conditions he gave you already. He cannot go back on that. So the workers whenever they had disagreements [with the employer] they would just come together.

Q: Can we discuss the strike more in detail, the picket line, how the employer responded to the daily picket line?

A: He hired scabs. He hired a security guard to keep us from picketing in a certain area. Calliope Designs is really isolated from the main stream. So it was real hard for us --for the community --for people to see that we were on strike. I still viewed it as a success considering the community knew [about the strike] only through the media but never really saw us because we were like in a building that was inside a complex. We were doing so many activities that people were surprised that we [Newman and I] were so involved in the PSGF [struggle] and Calliope Designs' strike.

Q: By this time July - October, PSGF was already organizing their union. Were they also on strike?

A: No, they were just getting ready to organize. We were meeting with them. At that time some of them --I think they ended up also doing the organizing drive --they were doing that already at the same [time]. They were already collecting signatures for recognition. So at that time both of those [activities] were giving [the union] publicity. [Returning to Calliope Desgins], the community, riding by, and people driving, could not tell Calliope Designs was on strike. We continued the [weekly] lunches, [and] as I mentioned, the community [used to] come over [to] have a regular [weekly] lunch with us. We [also] ended up having people coming and participating in the picket line --[people] from different unions [also] came and helped us out. Because we were on the picket line from 5:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., or 6:00 p.m.--a twelve hour [day]. So we had people come and help us, [they] spent time with us in the picket line. We were also having meetings with the workers [to form committees], to decide what else we needed to do, what [places] we had to go to and tell people about our strike. During the strike we ended up having a worker getting fired from Calliope Designs, Paulina Martinez.
Q: How was she fired being on a strike?

A: The employer accused her of touching the security guard with her picket sign and he got her arrested. And [later during the day] we went and got her out [from the city jail]. The next day or so, the employer came [out to the picket line] and just told her, told her that she was fired. He can do that; he can fire her. He did fire her in fact, and threw her check at her, on one of the picket lines that we had. I mean, not a picket line. We [were having] a rally, a lunch rally. So he came out there and just kind of threw the check at her and said 'you are fired.' We won the case eventually. We filed a [complaint] with the NLRB saying that the firing had been due to union activity. And it was an unjust firing.

Q: Was Martinez a very active union member?

A: Yes, she was. We ended up wining her case and after the strike she was reinstated back to work. And she got [retroactive] pay for the time she was out. [In the meantime her case was settled]. [Wining her case] was a victory for us, for the union.

Q: How much time did she spend in jail?

A: Only a few hours. We bailed her out right away.

Q: When you were talking about your union not having the time to save money for the strike fund, and you had helped, were you able to sustain people's expenses? You mentioned that you had several couples working in the same place. Being on strike, two incomes were gone. How did workers manage to survive financially?

A: We did not have funds at all because of the fact that we did not collect dues during that time. I am sorry we did collect dues, I should say. It was $10.00, the workers voted that they should have [to pay] $10.00 per month [in dues], [and] they wanted to put it into a fund. [In terms of financial problems] workers borrowed money [during the time] we were out on strike. We did not have any money. The union did not have any money to make house payments for people or whatever. People
borrowed money from relatives or whatever. The only kind of donations we were able to get were food items [or], to buy food for them, or whatever. But when it came down to their household expenses, like rent, electricity, or whatever, many of them ended up having to borrow money for three months!

Q: Could you explain how some of the workers survived financially for three months, and none of them left the union?

A: That was a shocking thing, the unity. They ended up becoming closer to each other, helping each other out a lot. Single people would end up not taking as much food and making sure that couples took more. They divided everything equally and fairly. It was really wonderful to see the love that all of them ended up having for each other. The beautiful thing was that none of them ever backed-out of this whole thing. They really stuck with the third commitment we made, and that was that they finish the struggle. They waited until the last day. One of the things that I remember is that when we took the vote, one of the workers there --Javier [Arreguin]-- I remember, was very angry at Newman and I. [He was angry] because we were trying to say no we should not go on strike; it is very difficult, and we do not have the resources [to sustain it]. 'You can never know how long a strike takes, we could be out for a long time and that does not mean that we will win.'

We were trying to have them come with different ways [to deal with the employer], and before we took the vote, Javier got very angry at us and just walked out of the meeting and said: "Look I have had it," and I said: "Wait a second, hold on, we [should] take a vote." He just walked out for a [few moments], and then later on came back and they voted [to go on strike]. Months later [during] the strike Javier told me, --he said: "Alicia, next time I say I want to go on strike, beat me up; you were right Newman and you. Now we are the ones who voted [to go on strike]; now we are going to stick-it out."

Q: Since you had prior knowledge about strikes by working with the farm workers, you probably knew how hard a strike can be. Why did they decide to do it? Did they see the strike as a novelty thing, or did they try to scare the employer because they were skilled workers? Can you discuss how they arrived at that decision?
A: Workers viewed the strike as [irreplaceable] skilled workers, they said: 'We are very skilled workers. If we withdraw our labor that employer cannot make any money.' In a sense they were right. They could not be as easily replaced as le's say, PSGF workers who packed [fish] and could have been easily replaced. It is true the Calliope Designs employer lost lots of money, but still he was able to [meet his production demands] through scabs, even though [production] was not the best quality. The workers thought they could win the strike because they said: 'We are real talented, skilled [workers]. This kind of work takes a lot [of time to learn], and not anybody can do it.' [Workers said]: "It would take lots of training for somebody to get to our level, and truly, scabs could not do this kind of work."

The company still lost a lot of money, and I think the employers ended up working and doing some of the stuff, some of the ornaments. But still [the impact on the employer] was not enough. Because it is not the same having twenty-one workers withdraw their labor, as having one-thousand workers withdrawing their labor. But still it was a successful strike [with relative gains]. We got what we wanted. [But], like I said, we did not get the most critical thing the workers wanted which was union security.

Q: They went on strike, and did not get one hundred percent of what they wanted. That happens often in labor negotiations. But can you discuss more in detail what their demands were?

A: When we were negotiating, we asked for a union shop, respect for seniority, paid vacation, certain holidays, wage increases, [and] I think grievance process. Just what you would have in a [labor] contract. The employer was willing to give us some things, but not everything. He did not what to give us a lot. After being in negotiations for so many months, the workers,—and I do not remember how many months, maybe less than six months,—the workers finally said 'enough is enough.' In one of [our union] meetings, one of the workers said: 'I think we need to go out on strike because this will force the employer to sign a contract with us and to give us what we want.' Well, thirteen weeks later, we did return back to the negotiating table, and we had a mediator at that time, a federal mediator to help us with negotiations. We were not talking to each other. But then he [the employer] went back and forth [with his contract proposal] and got us closer to what we wanted. So at the end the workers
voted to end the strike. [Workers said]: "Now we got the majority [of what we wanted], but we are not going to sign the contract." And I know it is kind of unusual, but I think one of the things that Newman and I feel real proud of them. At least I am real proud of them because this union was real democratic. The workers controlled the union. They were the ones who had the power. We gave them information, but they were the ones who made the final decisions. So at the end [of the strike] we went back [to work].

Q: I understand that union members were paying, dues and you had the union well organized. Did you and Newman continue volunteering your time?

A: Both Newman and I were working as volunteers during this whole time, and then during the time of PSGF too. We worked for the union, I would say, a year and a half volunteering --almost two years. We both had full time jobs, Newman and I. At that time I was working for California Human Development coorporation (CHDC), and I was a supervisor. I was in charge of immigration. Newman was investigating legal cases for attorneys.

Q: How did you find the time to work full time and do all the extra union work?

A: Well, we did it. We used to get time during that time. Newman's schedule was more flexible [than mine]. He would cover certain shifts at the picket line, and I would do them on the weekends, or in the evenings. Also, [in the evenings] we would have meetings with the workers, talk to them, [we] call them up giving them reassurance, or have meetings. Later on, I even ended up helping a lot of workers with their immigration stuff, papers. But that would be after hours like at night. Sometimes I would get home at 11:00 p.m. or 12:00 a.m. at night. We [usually] worked in the union until 10:00 p.m. at night.

Q: Was all your work during those hours union related, or helping workers with immigration forms?
A: It was regarding the workers, it was for them. I ended up helping some of the workers do their papers [for immigration] because they did not have the money to go pay someone to do their immigration papers. So I would help. But we did not have time. It was a twenty-four hours thing for Newman and I—working, the union, [etc.]

Q: At this time when you and Newman were already very involved in the union. What were the other members of the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC) doing? Were they participating in the union activities?

A: Yes, some people would go with the workers to different organizations. For example, there were some people in LLEC who belonged to other organizations in the community, so they would take worker to their organization's meetings. They would help make flyers, they would be there people who did the news releases.

Q: Did you divide yourselves into committees?

A: During Calliope Designs we did not do that much. We were all of us kind of together to help each other in whatever way, be at the picket lines and arrange the rallies, or whatever. During Calliope Designs, LLEC [led] the division of work. Later on, when we started with PSGF, we ended up having different people head different committees, and the reason was because in PSGF we had a hundred-and-fifty people, almost two-hundred workers. That is when we started to divide the labor among ourselves.

Q: It was not until PSGF that you started organizing yourselves into committees? How did you divide all your activities? What happened after the strike was over? How did the workers feel about the strike when it was not what they originally really wanted?

A: The workers felt really powerful, especially because during that time Paulina's case was won, [well] a little bit later, so that gave them even more power. When they went back to work there were bad feelings for a while. There was a lot of tension among the employer and [the workers], [because] we had been out there yelling at each other for thirteen weeks.
Q: How were the relations between workers who did not go on strike and those who did?

A: There were not too many [workers] that stayed inside [working], and so there were probably only three people that stayed inside. The majority of the strikers felt strong. They did not feel like they were walking into a bad situation. But, I think, the tension was between the employer and the workers because they had to kind of soften their relationship a little bit. And they did eventually. But whenever the employer would do anything to one of the workers, all the workers would get up and go the employer's office together. So there was always that protection. The workers never let just one person just kind of go by himself [to talk to the employer]. There would be one, or two, or three [workers accompanying him]. Or, all of them would get up and go if something was difficult [to deal with]. The employer began to see that there was such unity. My feeling is that he started to be nicer and more respectful to the workers [after the strike].

Q: Even though he was nice and respectful, did he change his ideas about the union? Did he give the workers what they wanted?

A: No, we never got union security. But the workers behaved as if there was a contract. Their attitude [a positive one, they said]: "We are the union, and we already got what we wanted." Workers paid dues, although they did not have the employer deduct [them] from their checks. They used to come and bring them [to the union hall]. One of the workers was the treasurer, so they gave [the money for the dues] to her. They viewed themselves [as], "We are a union, [and] we have a contract." They viewed themselves as though having everything. In a sense it was very successful in that way.

One of the things that was also developed during this process that I thought was very good when we started organizing was [the shop steward process]. One person was like the shop steward. There was one person in charge for that week [or month] at each [working] table. The workers worked at different tables, they sat as a group. There were five or six tables in different groups. Each week or month, [they rotated a representative from each table]. If there was a worker's grievance, if there was something coming up, a problem, each table had one representative [to deal with that problem]. What was interesting, at the beginning, is that [among couples] the husbands [wanted to take over]
their wives' turn when they were the representatives for their table. [Male] workers would say: "I will do it." They were very protective of their wives, and I [would] say 'No, you cannot do that. Each person has to develop the ability to stand up and defend not only their rights but other people's rights.' In a sense, we started developing a shop steward system. In a way that helped later on when the workers went back [to work]. If there was a problem with the employer, the representative [of the person's table] would go with the person who was having the problem.

Q: During your previous interview you mentioned that workers made Christmas ornaments, and they went back to work in the middle of October. Did they have sufficient work? You also mentioned that they worked piece rate. Did they obtain a raise for piece rate?

A: They got a raise on certain ornament--depending on the complexity or the simplicity of it. The pay was raised on some ornaments. In other words, they did get a raise on some ornaments and not on others. But, they did get an overall raise.

Q: What happened to the scabs when the workers went back to work?

A: I think most of them left. They were fired or laid off by the employer. I think almost everybody was gone.

Q: Let's leave Calliope Designs for a while, and let's talk about PSGF. During Calliope Designs' organizing efforts, PSGF workers became involved. Did you invite them to participate in the union?

A: We had a victorious election at Calliope Designs. Some of the workers at Calliope Designs had family members at PSGF, and they became aware of the fact that Calliope Designs had won its election. Workers were ready to start contract negotiations. PSGF workers found out we were successful. I got to check when exactly all of these [events] happened. When did we start negotiating? I am not really sure. I just have to look at certain dates. When we were on strike, did we start organizing PSGF? What happened is that, at PSGF, some of those family members called us and said, "We would like to meet with you and find what we need to do to have a union." Celia Mendoza worked at PSGF,
and she was Fina's sister. Fina worked at Calliope Designs. There was a group of PSGF workers that called us. It was not just family members but other workers like Julieta and Francisca [who wanted to meet with us]. And we said okay. I think we just met with a few of them, maybe four or five of them. And we said to them, "If you are really interested in this, here is a [union election] petition." That [petition] read: "Yes, I want to join SCIU, and I want for SCIU to represent me in wages and hours." What [we] ended up doing, we said to the committee: "If you are interested [in joining the union] find out if other workers are willing to sign this petition. But you have to do it in secret, and you have to be very careful [finding if] they want the union or not." We were really surprised at how quickly the workers said yes. They wanted a union; they signed the petition. [After the petition was signed] we had a big meeting.

Q: Calliope Designs employed twenty-one or twenty-three workers, they knew each other, and worked in a very closed setting, and the employer had no experience with union organizing. How was this different from PSGF? What kind of industry was PSGF? How many workers were employed at PSGF? And how was the racial breakdown at PSGF?

A: PSGF is a fish and processing company, and the kind of jobs the workers did was, fileeing, cutting, packing, and storing fish.

Q: Did Mexicans drive the company's trucks?

A: No, that was another group, I think that the truck drivers were represented by the Teamsters.

Q: Were the drivers employed by the same company?

A: No, I do not think, the [truck drivers] were represented, but they --in a sense, we considered them from a different industry and we never organized them. We considered them to be part of another union jurisdiction, so we did not organized them. But they were not unionized. Because I just remember --f they were unionized, they would have help us [in our struggle] in solidarity. So PSGF probably employed a hundred-and-fifty to two-hundred workers. Ninety five percent [of the
workers] were Latinos. I would say that five percent were probably Portuguese. The supervisors were all Portuguese. There were very few other workers from other [racial backgrounds], but I think five percent would be Portuguese and that was it.

Q: You are saying that none of these workers were unionized?

A: No, as a matter of fact, PSGF had been in Santa Rosa for about forty years and, as a matter of fact. When I was a teenager in high school, I worked there during the time when they used to [process] shrimp. For me it was a wonderful thing to come back out here later, years later. I think twenty years later, to come back and organize PSGF workers.

workers at PSGF did not have health insurance, paid holidays, they were paid very bad, [and they had] no seniority [rights, retirement rights?]. They also had to pay for [their protective gear]; uniform, gloves, boots, etc. So this particular company did not provided any benefits to workers.

Q: Given all that, what happened during your first meeting after the committe gathered all the signatures?

A: I would say when we first met, we had maybe eighty people [who] came to the first meeting. We [Newman and I] were very shocked to see [all those workers coming to the meeting]. We had gotten a place were Newman and I used to live, a [meeting] room and it was packed. People had to be outside because [the place] was so packed. At that time we talked to them again, many of them had already signed the petition. But we said, we want to make sure that you understand what this means, and what it means joining the union.

Q: The workers at PSGF were not happy because they had no benefits at all, and some people had been working there for several years, is that right?

A: No [Yes], the one that was there the longest, had been twenty-one years and that was Celia Mendoza. There were others who had been there for ten or fifteen years. These were long term workers, because as I mentioned, this particular company had been in Santa Rosa for forty years or so.
Q: After you had been working with Calliope Designs workers and you had observed that the working conditions were bad. If you were to compare the working conditions between both places, what would be the worst?

A: I think PSGF probably had the worst [working] conditions because they did not have as many benefits, and also they had to pay for their [protective gear] and the working conditions [were bad] --they worked in water, and the water was real cold when they [took the fish] out, [of the bucket]. Even though they wore boots, they got wet. It still some of the workers could not afford $20.00 to $30.00 [for a pair of] boots. Sometimes they would get infections and things in their legs because fish is real dirty, the water [was also dirty] also when people got hurt [during their working hours], PSGF [management] did not care as much about people. You know, if you cut yourself with a knife, [management response was]: 'Oh well, just put a band-aid there' or whatever. Unless it was very severe, they may have taken [the worker] to the doctor. So the [working] conditions were worst, I would say at PSGF. Because workers in both [companies] used their arms so much in fast rapid movement, they suffered carpal tunnel because they used their arms so much. I wold say, yes. The [working] condition were worst at PSGF.

To go back to the first meeting, because I think we did not finish talking about that. The first meeting we got about eighty workers that came to the meeting, I remember being a lot of workers.
In our last interview we stop talking about the Point Saint George Fisheries (PSGF) workers coming to you to request that you represent them in their collective bargaining?

A: In that meeting there were about, I would say eighty workers that showed up. And what happened, by then some of them had already collected petitions because before this meeting we had already met with a committee, a group of, maybe five women at PSGF. And we said to them. If there is an interest, we would like for you to have the rest of the workers sign this petition. So the women went and got signatures, a lot of signatures. Then we called our first meeting. This is the meeting that it seemed like eighty, but they brought their families.

Do you recall who those five women were?

A: I think it was Julieta del Campo, Celia Mendoza, Carmen Mendoza. I think it may have been Francisca Bejar, and there had to be another woman. Who was the other woman? I am not sure about the last one. I do not even think Susana was involved at the very beginning. But anyway, so we had this meeting. There were a lot of people there I remember. The whole room, this was a very big room, and it was packed. People with their families. They brought their kids and everything else. Then we asked them all the questions that we had asked Calliope Designs. But we added one more [thing]. We talked about what it would take to organize. It is a long struggle, but things get changed. Then we said. "You have to love each other, you have to accept each other differences. Once you start the struggle, you have to finish it, and you have to turn and look at the person next to you and say 'I am willing to lose my job for you." So people did that and they said yes that they will do it. Then we all started clapping and cheering. It looked [like] the whole room was going [to] fall apart because it was so loud, the noise. It was a beautiful day!

Did you have the meeting at the Carpenters union? Were they lending you an office?
A: No, at that point we were meeting in a place where we used to live, like a big community room. Newman [Strawbridge] and I used to live there. We lived in a cooperative, so we borrowed their meeting room.

Q: How were the workers contacting you? Were they calling you on your private phone at home?

A: Yes, Calliope Designs workers would meet in our living room. When we had the meeting for PSGF, because it was such a big group, we used the community room at the coop.

Q: Alicia, when did these meetings happened? In relation to Calliope Designs organizing. Before the strike? During the organizing campaign for the election?

A: I think it was probably at the end, in the middle of the... no we had not yet started the strike. But we already had the election at Calliope Designs. It was after the election at Calliope Designs.

Q: Was the organizing of Calliope Designs workers so successful that PSGF workers decided to organize?

A: That is how the workers at PSGF, when they found out that Calliope Designs had won the elections and everything else, the workers at PSGF came.

Q: At that time you also had support from community members, community groups such as peace groups, and other unions in Sonoma County?

A: Yes, we had support from other trade unionists, from labor, from other unions like the carpenters, like [the laborers and], the postal workers. During Calliope Designs we mostly had community people, a little bit of labor, you know like the Carpenters, the United Food and Commercial Workers helped us a lot in Calliope Designs. But in PSGF we expanded our support because we had more workers, and we needed more help from the community and from other unions. That is when we went to the postal workers, to the, even the Teamsters--even the Teamsters [it is] true. I know that
because when I first met them, when I worked with the United Farm Workers, they used to be against us. It was interesting how we had come around. At PSGF we went and asked for more community support, and that is when we were more actively seeking support like in the peace groups, the gay and lesbians groups, women's groups, African American.

Q So you had a wider representation of groups. Were they present at your first PSGF meeting?

A: No, they were not. The first meeting we had [with] PSGF [workers], it was all workers only. It was later, when we did our first action at PSGF to ask for recognition.

Q What did you do in your first action?

A: The first action that I remember, first we had a meeting, I think we ended having a little bit more meetings. Then we said what we needed to do, is now make sure again the same thing we did with Calliope Designs, we need to get these workers protected. For them to get protected, we have to ask for recognition from the company, volunteering recognition. We were hoping that the company would recognize the union without having to go through an election. So we planned a big rally at PSGF and that is when we asked a lot of people to come. We ended up having like around maybe 300 to 400 people. Because there was about a 150 workers or so, plus their families. and then we ended up having 200 or so people from the community.

Q How did you organize all the workers since they worked different shifts?

A: I do not know if there was a shift at night? Yes there was a shift at night, it was mostly men working with the shellfish. So what we did, was to plan a march. We gathered all the community people to come at certain time that we would be able to cover both shifts, you know? the day shift and the night shift. So the workers would see.

Q So it was during the day?
A: It was around noon or so, because I almost got into trouble with my work. What they did is that they [the press] quoted me, [the press] quoted me saying [things, representing my work]. They put the place where I worked, so it looked [like] that was the place that was organizing.

So what happened, we did a noon rally, and we went into the plant, walked inside the plant, all of us, community and workers. And we asked for recognition. And that was the first time the employer actually knew that there was an organizing driving going on. And, of course, they said that no, they did not want to recognize it. And that they had to talk to their lawyers and all of that. So then after that, I do not know how long after that we [went] again to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to have an election.

Q  Do you remember how many people signed the petition to have an election?

A: I would say almost 90 to 95 percent. Almost everybody.

Q  Could you describe your campaign for collective bargaining representation?

A: What we did was mostly, from the time we filed in the first rally, to the time we had the election, mostly what we were doing [was] having meetings with workers and [getting] them ready for the employers campaign. We said, the employers are going to try [to] frighten all of you. They are going to have captive audience meetings. They are going to try to buy you all, and give you benefits and all that. So we prepared the workers, and at the same time what we started to show the workers unity among themselves. So people bought buttons to show unity. They all would wear tee-shirts. Here they did not have to have a uniform of any kind, so they all wore tee-shirts that showed the fish, you know. The big fish and the little fish. And it said "Organize." We also had some noon rallies, just regular picket-lines, until the election happened. I think as it got closer to the election we also did house visits. We went and visited the workers at their homes. We tried to just visit as many people as we could. To go into their homes and ask them if they had questions regarding what it meant
to vote, what a union mean, and things like that. Because we [used] to have meetings, long meetings with PSGF, like three hours long. Also asking for support in the community being on the radio, going to churches, whatever, just to talk about our struggle.

Q: Did you form committees to go to the media, churches, etc.? Or how did you organize yourselves?

A: Right, in our meetings, we would break after we had a certain amount of general membership meeting. Then we would break up into committee meetings. By then Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC) members became more involved and people would head the committees because they had more experience dealing with committees than the workers did. There would be like a fundraising committee, one going to community organizations, one going to churches, one passing out leaflets at churches or markets, etc.

Q: Now lets change gears for a moment. If you were to compare the workers from Calliope Designs and PSGF, which group do you think would have more political experience, and in union organizing?

A: I think probably PSGF did. And the reason PSGF did is because most of them came from one state, and that was Michoacan. And Michoacan historically has been more, I guess, political or more militant, I think, I do not know. But it seemed that this particular group of people, from [that] state were much more active. They were willing to take more risk than the others, I would say. For some reason. I just think it is because they came from the State of Michoacan. And then, later on, that was the state too, that produced Cardenas. And so it seemed like the people there were more active. I do not know, if some of them, maybe a few [were] involved in unions, but still they had a little bit more experience that Calliope Designs did.

Q: According to your memories, PSGF workers were more militant, were willing to take more risks?
A: Yes, the way I would describe PSGF workers is that they came from probably a state [where] they were more oppressed. So it forced them to be more political, more militant, more involved in struggle. And they had more experience in unionizing. But I also found out that in that group many of them did not even know how to read and write. There were some people who could not read and write in Spanish. And there were] a lot more people that [were] not educated, formal education I should say, at PSGF. Calliope Designs it seemed like [the] people there even knew how to use some English. They [had] been longer in the United States, not so much longer, but they had picked-up skills here, and they also came from states in Mexico [where there was] not as much political unrest as the people from PSGF who came from the State of Michoacan. Even though they started the union they were not as militant, I noticed, and willing to take as many risks. Well is hard to say that because they took the risk of [going on] strike. But it seemed that overall PSGF were more militant.

Q: Going back to the campaign for an election, did you prepare them for the voting time?

A: One of the things that I think in Both, Calliope Designs and PSGF that we did, [was that] we spent a lot of time educating, teaching the workers, so that they knew as much as we did, so they would understand the laws here, so they would understand how the voting went. We would let them know how the campaign was going. Part of that process of informing, teaching them was that we showed them how the election process was going to happen on that particular day. We did it at Calliope Designs, but at PSGF it took us longer. What we did is that we role played. We did the whole [thing]; we did like a mock election. We got one worker to pretend he was the company, first. And then there was another worker for the company's observer. We got somebody to be the NLRB; another one was the worker's observer. We went through it exactly. We did ballots, we showed them exactly--because as I mentioned there were people who did not know how to read and write. So we had to show them what they had to look for and how to vote and all that. It took us like a few hours. We made every person vote, and we counted the votes and everything else. So we did like a mock election.
Q. Do you think that helped them to understand the electoral process for a union election?

A: It is interesting, the other organizer, Newman kept saying, we [did] not need to go through the mock election. "Let's just tell them how to vote." That this is the way you vote. But I think it was important that we went through every little thing, exactly like how it was going to happen on the election day. And I think it was really helpful; it really made people feel like there [were] not surprises. They were not scared. They realized that they did have to bring their I.D. They just walked in, voted, and walked out.

Q: I want to ask you this question, because when people read this, they will ask themselves if you were treating the workers in a condescending or patronizing way just because they were Mexicans. And, would you have the same mock election if they were white workers?

A: Yes. My attitude as an organizer is that I do that even with English speaking, white workers. I do the whole thing because I am an organizer, and I do this every single day, the same thing. [It] is the same routine with every campaign. With me whether you are [a] Spanish speaker or [an] English speaker, or whether you are born in the U.S. or not, you still, as a worker you have not had the experience of dealing in this area. I like, for people, to teach them everything I know about the law, about the way an election is held. What the NLRB means, how long [it] is going to take...I think [it] is very important for workers. By the end of the union campaign whether you win or lose an election is not as important as whether you learned something new. How to defend your rights for the next time. My attitude is to teach them. And we did not have that [condescending] attitude, I feel that none of us who were the organizers at that time, none of us, treated these workers as [if] they were less than us. And I do not think that we treated them in a condescending or patronizing way. None of that, I do not think so. I think all of us, [as] a matter of fact, [we] were learning at the same time. It just so happened that some of us had a little bit more experience and more knowledge. So we would pass it on to somebody else. Even then there were some workers who knew
about organizing in Mexico. Yet in Mexico [it] is a little different. In Mexico you do not cross a picket line. Here you do it; they were a little surprised.

Q: Your meetings were also educational. You taught them the differences between Mexico and the United States?

A: More important we were trying to make sure that they knew exactly what the company was going to do. I think [it] is very important for workers, if you let them know exactly what the company is going to do in a campaign so that they are ready for it, so that they do not think is going to be an easy struggle.

Q: What kind of campaign did PSGF use to prevent workers for voting for a union?

A: They hired Littler and Mendelson, a law firm. What PSGF did is more fight us in the legal area, by delaying the process. It took eventually one year for us to get certified. Because they made a decision to concentrate in the legal area they did not spend as much time internally campaigning. For example, they did not hire a union-busting consultant, which I sort of expected for them to hire one. In some companies they normally get together with the managers and start showing the managers, informing them. "This is what you need to do to the workers," show them different areas in how to bust the union. PSGF management did not do any of that. Mostly they were shocked. I think they were shocked that workers were so many and so unified [that] they did not do as much of a campaign, I think they once offered one or two persons money to try to change people. They gave a party or something like that.

Q: Is it not true that PSGF offered Celia Mendoza a supervisor's position, a thing that they never did before? Celia had been working there for over twenty five years, and she was active in the union?

A: Celia Mendoza who was the oldest worker there, and who was very active in the union was offered to be promoted to a supervisor, and what Celia did, she came and spoke to all of us. She brought it to the attention of the workers in the meeting, and
the other members said, "well it is up to her to make that decision." She asked me what will happened if she decided to become a supervisor. I told her that after that she could no longer be in the meetings any more. At that time we still had not voted: we still had not the election. But I told her if that happened she was out of the union campaign. So she decided not to take the promotion, even though it would have meant more money. And she deserved it because she was the oldest worker, and she knew that. So she decided not to do it.

Q Was it a key action against the union from the bosses to promote her?

A: Yes, my feeling about the reason they wanted to promote her at this particular time, she was qualified for that position, she had been qualified for years, but the reason they choose this particular time was because she was a key worker organizer for the campaign. And, if she decided to become a supervisor then they could have more control of her they could use her to follow their orders. So they probably were going to use her against her own co-workers to break the union. The reason I am saying that is because I just recently organized another group of workers, and they did the same thing. The key organizer, worker organizer, was offered a job as manager. And the only reason they are doing it is because then, in that way, they can use you against other workers. And then if you do not work out, they can fire you, and you do not have any recourse in the law.

Q By this time you had had a few meetings and how was the participation of the workers, because women were the majority of the workers, and many had husbands. How did women take the leadership, if they took it?

A: Well at PSGF there were probably, the union there, the bargaining union, the majority, I would say 75% were women. At first a lot of them did want to turn over the leadership to men, the 25 percent, and we said no. Especially someone like Newman and myself, we both felt like...I think Newman said: "This union will be 75 percent stronger or 25 percent weaker" because, if we allowed the women to take secondary roles, we had weakened the whole
union completely. So we made sure that the women took the leadership, constantly, and they did not want to. One of the things I think I felt was very important is that we involved the families. This was not just the worker involvement, it meant their husbands, their wives, their children. So they all would come to the meeting. What I would do, is that I went and spoke to their husbands. As much as I could, I went and spoke to some of the husbands and invited them to come to the meetings. I also told them they had more experience than their wives, that we needed them for support, that we needed them to help their wives out. In this way I also included them more, so that they would not feel threatened. Many of these women did not have their husbands working in the same jobs. Like [at] Calliope Designs, you had both couples there. But in PSGF for a lot of women, their husbands worked someplace else. So because of that it was very strange for the husband to find out that his wife was no longer going to be there when he got home and be cooking. Either [that or] to be cooking dinner real fast to get to a meeting at 7:00 p.m. So the husbands got to start to feel threatened. Some of these people I did go to their homes and talked to them and invited [them] to come to the meetings, to bring their wives, and all that. And there was also a lot of distrust from the husbands. Their wives would not only know more about life than they did but also...where they really at meetings or were they going someplace else? A lot of the husbands would make sure that the wives brought the children with them. So there was all this distrust, and it was very hard for the women, very, very hard. Many of them went through very hard times, but they kept going. Many of them said, this was very important in their lives. it was amazing the courage of these women. The courage of these women to have to fight at home, to be allowed to go to meetings and be involved in activities and, then, at the same time for them to be having to deal at work, you know, with their boss.

Q: When you described the women who did not want to take the leadership, was that the majority of women? Or were only few women in this situation? Were there very militant women despite the fact that their husbands opposed their union activities?

A: At the beginning--the women who were the leadership--the ones that started the committee, there was a group of them [who
were married]. And some of them were single parents, like Susana Garcia. There were some women who were single parents, who did not have husbands, and yet they were shy to take the leadership, they did not want to take the leadership. So they would say "no [when they were assigned to do a job]. Let the men do that, let the men control the meetings, let the men get up and go to talk to organizations." And we would say no! We cannot do that. We are not going to allowed that kind of thing, you have to get up and do a meeting, you have to take notes. you have to chair a meeting. I tried to get some of them to chair a meeting, or a committee, or go to organizations with me and speak.

Q How about the Mendoza sisters, and Francisca Bejar? Were they militant? Or did they want for men to do all the organizing?

A: At first, this particular group, the committee, were shying away from leadership. Even though they were the ones who started the organizing campaign. They wanted to kind of saying: "Let the men take the leadership." And these were the women who were actually the leaders of the group! And we did not allow that. So, instead, they did become the leaders of the group at the end, for example, at the end when we did the ratify vote. Years later, two or three years later, when we were to ratified our contract, the first contract, the people who were in that meeting were all women. No men. So it was the women who survived the three years struggle. And as I mentioned, even when they had the double pressuring than the men did.

Q Going back to the election vote for the union at PSGF, how were the voting results, and what happened after the election?

A: Yes it was like a 120 to 12. And it was incredible, it was beautiful. This was different from Calliope Designs. We were certified as a union right away. The company [Calliope Designs] did not object to the election. On the contrary, PSGF had hired Littler and Mendelsen, which is a very anti-union law firm. The minute we found out the company had hired them, we told the workers: 'What is going to happen, they are going to challenge the elections, even though there was a landslide, they are going to challenge it, and they are going to object to it. They are going to challenge it by
finding a lot of objection. And they did it. They filed over 60 objections. It was a lot. And what happened is that we let the workers know right away. We said, "This is what is going to happen, we are going to have a hearing and go through all these objections the company had, so it is going to be a long time by the time we get certified." And sure enough, it took one year to get certified.

Q: Did you prepare the workers about these results in advance, during the elections campaign? How did the workers respond to the company's objections?

A: Right, even though you tell a worker ahead of time that this is going to happen, that the company is going to object and appeal the legal system, it takes so long, even if you tell a worker ahead of time that this is it. I think all of us, including ourselves as organizers, we still hoped that the company [would] not do it. And that, at the last minute, they [would] not take us [down] this long road. Newman and I had dealt with this law firm before when we worked with the farm workers and so, because of that, we knew right away that they were going [to do it]. Not even this particular lawyer, we knew the law firm. And we told right away the workers: They are going to object, they are going to be in court for a long time and it will take us about a year! And, sure enough, it took us exactly a year.

Q: Can you discuss what you did to prepare the workers for the hearings, and were the hearings where held at?

A: For the hearing, mostly what we did is we would have meetings, and [we] told the workers: "We are going to have a court day, and this is what is going to happen." But the preparation came mostly from the witnesses. We had to get certain workers to testify. We ourselves in the meetings, we asked for key people. We of course went for the leaders to be the ones to give testimony. But, we also asked if people were willing to volunteer, to give testimony, and then we found out what testimony they could give. But when you prepare a witness, you usually try to find who saw what, who can contradict the company. For example, the company, well the company always says that we forced people, that the
union coerced people into voting, that we scared them and that we forced them to vote for the union. So we had to get workers up there and say "no," I volunteered for the union, I was never coerced, and all this kind of stuff. So, we had to get witnesses to contradict that allegation by the company.

Q There was also the accusation from the company that there was some type of money collection happening inside the plant to support the election campaign?

A: I think they used that. They said that we were giving the workers money, some benefits, because what happened right away we did the recognition rally at PSGF. They laid-off 20 workers, and they were predominately men. So in this way, what it was, it was trying to divide, the men against [the] women. And so what happened is that we did a funraising at that time, and we lent people money, or there [were] donations. So the company used that to say that we bought those workers, that the money that we gave to those laid-off workers was in order for them to vote for the union for us to buy votes. So we had to get those workers to say "No," we did not. "The donation was not directly to us. They did not give us the money to buy our votes."

Q Laying-off workers became a regular practice from the company to discourage them to vote for the union?

A: I think yes, not so much laying-off, but cutting hours, was one way that the company. So, this way, they would be able to discourage the workers.

Q Where was the company sending the fish to be processed, if they did cut the workers' hours? Did they have another company?

A: That particular campaign of cutting hours and laying-off workers came after the election was won. And while we were trying to get negotiations, or certification, they started to lay-off workers, or cut hours. At one point, we were following the trucks to find out where they were taking the fish to be cut and we found out that they were taking them far north, like all the way to Oregon. That is why it did not make any sense to us.
Q: Is it not true that the owners of PSGF owned more plants in Oakland, California and Oregon?

A: They had one in Oakland. That is right. They had the main one, I think, processing. And also, not the main one, I am sorry, this was the main one here. But they had another one were they packed and shipped, I am not sure, in Oakland. They also had some in Oregon. And all of those plants, but this particular plant, [Bulgaro owned] the other ones were unionized under the Food and Commercial Workers, except this one. One of the things that was interesting was that in the one in Oregon and the one in Oakland, the majority of the workers were predominately white. And this one, that was the main one here at Santa Rosa for processing, or the largest I should say it was predominately Mexican. That was one of the things that was found out that the company in many ways was racist. They did not want to allow Mexican workers to unionize because they did not want to pay them [the] same wages.

Q: Did you ever seek support from the other plants' workers?

A: We did that later, no [we] did not do it because they were so far away. The ones in Oakland were very few. But, later on, when we did our contract campaign we did talk to the workers at, I think in Oakland, a little bit-- just to try to get their support.

Q: Did they have a small shop in Point Saint Reyes?

A: No I did not know about that.

Q: The Company was then, used to dealing with unions?

A: This owner had experience working with unions, but he was still anti-union. And, definitely, the lawyers he hired had experience with unions. Where the lawyer that Calliope Designs hired, I do not think he had much experience with unions or the labor. So that means [it] is even harder sometimes. Sometimes [it] is better to deal with companies and lawyers who had experience even if it is bad experience with unions. But at least if they had experience, you know what to expect from them.
Q: How was the workers' morale after they had to wait for certification and go to the hearing?

A: It was hard because...I look back and I think how in the world did we do two or three years of keeping the campaign going and everything going. There were moments when there was not activity happening because, sometimes, I think Newman and I were involved with Calliope Designs so then sometimes we would sort of put PSGF on hold for a little bit, and then we would come back and try to do activities with PSGF workers. A lot of what we did with PSGF workers was have rallies outside and have lunches the same as we did with Calliope Designs. We never went out on strike with PSGF, but what we did was just keep having rallies and marches. We did a very big march, a very big one just before the election, so that helped the workers. And then afterwards we had to do small rallies, just to keep the morale of the workers up while we waited for the court day. And then when we had the court day, people just went and testified. It was kind of quiet not too many activities. But the main way that we kept the morale up was for us to do rallies for the workers. It is the same way that they did to unify--wear tee-shirts, wear something that said: 'We still [are] unified, we still.'

Q: How were the workers being treated by the employer after the election, besides cutting hours, and cutting down on work?

A: I do not think we had any firings. There were some firings, but I am not sure if they were union related. Because of that, it was mostly that sometimes people did something like--I remember there were some--I do not know at what point the Dominguez brothers were fired--Ruben was fired for nothing and then Carmelo. I think all of them came after the election and after we got certified. I think it was when we were starting the contract negotiations. Because what happened after we got certified...

Q: You went to the hearing, then you were certified?

A: It took a long time, months. And then finally we got the decision from the NLRB saying that we got certified. Now what the company...The next recourse the company had to do, was to appeal
to the Ninth Circuit Court. By then we already had gone to the high level of the NLRB. When they came back a year later we had now officially been certified by the Washington DC, what they called Administrative Appeal. The company had done the Administrative Appeal. The NLRB came back and said: "This election was valid, the union is certified." The company then was going to decide whether to appeal to the courts, and what we did was that at that time we decided that we would tell the company that we would do a boycott. So we went to the lawyers of the company and said: If you decide to fight us in the court we initiate a boycott of this company. We sort of threatened them with the boycott, and said that we would increase our pressure on the company, we would do more activities in front of the company, we would do it outside. We would do a boycott, and we actually did, one started out, by going over for example in front of some of the stores and telling customers not to buy PSGF to make sure, so we started that kind of campaign, so that the company would know that we were serious.

Q: Was their image becoming negative?

A: The boycott was against PSGF, never against a store. So when we were in front of the store, we told people: "yes go in and shop; the boycott is not against the store, it is against PSGF, because that is considered a secondary boycott and that is against the law." So we said: "The boycott is not against the store or the restaurant. It is against this particular product PSGF fish."

Q: In what stores were they selling their products?

A: It was Safeway and G and G market. We did one picket line at G and G market. I remember that for sure. Then what happened, we talked to the lawyers and said: "If you decide to appeal to the court and prolong this, we make sure we do a very serious boycott." So it is then when the company came back and said: "No we will not appeal any further, and so let's sit down and talk about negotiations."

Q: Do you remember the date?

A: It was probably 1990-1991. Then we started negotiations,
and we negotiated with them for a while, but the only thing is that they did give very little wages. The wages were not a very high increase. But they gave some insurance to the workers, and holidays. We won also a law suit against them for the equipment. So the company ended up paying for the equipment. They did have to pay retroactive for whatever equipment the uniform, like boots, knives, gloves, etc. So some of the workers...that was a sort of victory and that kept the morale going because they got some money, you know the workers got some money back. And then the thing that I think was the hardest was that in the contract they could not keep the union security and at the [time] we lost that one. Because of that, when we signed the contract, before we signed it we started collecting signatures to do a boycott. And we presented a whole bunch of signatures to the company showing them that, if they did not sign a contract, we will soon--I had like a big pile of sheets of petitions that I went and showed to the company, and said: "All these people are interested in starting a boycott of your fish."

Q: Who were these people?

A: We did a campaign of door-to-door talking to people in the neighborhoods like Roseland, South Park and others. We tried stores and things like that. We asked people to boycott their products. So, we were able to collect a lot, a lot of signatures. Thousands [of signatures]. And then we also had unions sign the petitions saying that they would get their memberships to boycot the products. So we presented it to the company. All these people are going out and boycotting your products. We were going to do a massive rally in Oakland and so, because of all that, it finally got to the company. We said that we were going to disrupt their business in Oakland, and so--Oh, Newman ended up going all the way to Oregon and that is when he got in contact with those people in Oregon and said that the company knew that we were very actively doing things to have a serious boycott. We followed the trucks just to get them upset. Finally it was not until three years later that the company agreed to sign a contract. On that day that we signed the contract, as I mentioned all the people who were present were all women.
And we signed it. And we voted to have a contract. So three years later. We voted among the workers, whether they accepted or not the contract. It was not the best contract because they had to come from nothing to just up. So the raises were not very high at all, as much as we would have liked to got them. But they got vacation, they got holidays, and had some insurance, seniority. There was going to be more work for the senior workers before they hired anybody else.

Q: Around this time, were you and Newman continued volunteering your time?

A: No. The last year, I would say the last year and a half, we went for a year and a half volunteering, then we realized it was so much work that we could not keep both jobs. We both had a child and then still doing full-time volunteer. So what happened at one point we [contacted or the] Service Employees International Union (SEIU) contacted us and they said that they would [be interested in affiliating]. Well Newman went to see them and asked them if they would be interested if we affiliated with them. And then SCIU came and said that they would be interested in affiliating with us. For us to affiliate with them. They said they would hire us, they had a slot for two organizers. So what we did, we brought it to the workers, and we asked them if they would be willing to affiliate and if we affiliated, we also did the secret ballot vote with all the workers, and we had a priest come in.
Alicia Sanchez. Union Organizer. Fourth Interview. November 6, 1995

Q: At the end of our last interview you mentioned that a priest had come to witness and count your secret ballot vote for affiliation with Service Employees International Union (SEIU)?

A: When we decided to affiliate with SEIU we thought that it was very important for the workers at Point Saint George Fisheries (PSGF) and Calliope Designs, because they constituted the Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU), for those workers to decide if they wanted to affiliate with (SEIU) which is Service Employees International Union, and we decided to have a secret ballot election. We invited a priest to come and conduct the election and also count the ballots, to be there when we counted the ballots. The workers overwhelmingly decided to affiliate with SEIU. SEIU had offered, that there will be two paid positions, two paid organizers. We decided that the executive boards of the two units should decide, who should be the two paid organizers. Newman [Strawbridge] and I did not want to assume that it would be us. We told that to the workers. We said: it is very important if you feel that other people should --are qualified. --By now they had met a lot of other people in the struggle. We asked if [they thought] there [were] other people [that could] be the paid organizers of the union. I [thought] it was important that the executive board interview them and hire them if they felt that is important. What happened is that the workers decided that no, it should be Newman and I because we had already given about a year and a half of volunteer work. They thought it was important that we should be the paid organizers. That is what happened. At that time we became the organizers.

Q: How did it happen that you became part of SEIU? Did you approach them? Or did they come to you when they saw that Mexican workers could be organized?

A: I do not even know exactly how it worked out. Let me see? I remember my discussions with Newman about this. --I was at first against us affiliating with any union because I felt that we would get lost in the process, and the workers would not have as much say so. They would not have as much decision-making power. Once they affiliated, at first, I was against that, in my discussions with Newman. But then after a
year and a half of us both working full time and having a child and everything else, I finally said: "We cannot do this any more. I cannot do it, both of us cannot do it. One of us needs to have at least one job only." That is what I said to him. I think it would be good if we did go and ask around. What happened is that, I think Newman [asked around], or other people had heard about SCIU and had heard about us too. I do not know how it happened, whether they came and contacted us, or Newman went and talked to them. I do not know who did the initiation of that meeting. But then Newman did meet with SEIU people and the International. He made a proposal to them, and they accepted that proposal. It was with the intention that we would get a contract with PSGF and that we would do more organizing. Which is what we did. We got a contract with PSGF, and we did more organizing, that being the Calistoga workers. We lost the election there.

Q: Alicia, looking back at the affiliation issue. Do you think that SCIU got lost within the ranks of SEIU, and that is why the union died? Or were you able to continue working independently as you were in the previous year and a half?
A: No, we did. I think for the first few years, we were still independent. We had our meetings, and we had lots of decision-making power. But then. It was interesting. At the beginning we did have a lot of say so. I would say in the first two years of the affiliation. But after we got the contract at PSGF, at that time NS had left, and so I finished the negotiations at PSGF, and we got the contract. Then at that time SEIU said that they did not want us to [any] longer be affiliated with Local 707 of Santa Rosa. They felt it would be more important for us to be affiliated with Local 87 of San Francisco. And the reason was because Local 87 of San Francisco which is predominantly a janitors local, [it] had Spanish speakers, was multiracial local, and there were Spanish-speaking members. They felt that there would be more in common with that group. And that Local 707 was predominantly white service workers. So at that time, the international decided to break the affiliation with 707.

Q: Before I ask you how the workers felt about the break, let me ask you what made the workers change their minds about affiliation, since they were so clear about being an independent union?
A: I think the workers felt that they were not going to lose. When we presented the proposal to them. We said that they were not going to lose their autonomy. And, they would have decision-making power, which they did. But we also felt that the affiliation, because we gave our opinion Newman and I, that affiliation would make us stronger in Sonoma County. And that was true because we had affiliated with the service employees, and Local 707 is the largest union in Sonoma County. And so, by us affiliating with them, we would be stronger and be able to have more power. Also, I think the key was that it was the first time that you had industrial Mexican workers being union members with predominantly white service workers. And I thought that it was a historical thing to do in Sonoma County. At the end it was going to make us stronger. The workers, I think, felt it was true, and I felt it was true until we ended up being pulled to affiliate with San Francisco.

Q: Was there also some talk about hiring Paulina Martinez for the union organizing? She was unemployed, and she was a very active union member?

A: Right. She had been fired by Calliope Designs. Eventually we won that case and got her reinstated. But, during that time when we were doing the affiliation, I was working for California Human Development Corporation (CHDC). I was the head of the immigration [program] there. So, I felt bad about leaving CHDC. I am one of those persons who is very loyal, and so I felt bad about leaving. So, at one point, I proposed that Paulina become the other organizer, and I would train her. And, I would stay with CHDC. I think she turned it down. The workers felt that it should be Newman and I. What was interesting is that one of the workers said to us that the only reason he felt hesitant about having Newman and I be the organizers was because we were husband and wife, and he felt that that was going to damage our marriage. He said: "I feel that working together all the time and everything else, that is going to hurt your marriage." And we said: "No! no, no." But it eventually did. Us working together 24 hours and not devoting time to our marriage was—I think what finally caused our divorce. It was interesting. [It] was Rafael Lopez. I remember him telling us in a meeting when they voted.

At that time we affiliated [to Local] 87. What was interesting was that it was more like a unilateral decision that SEIU International made. They did not even consider 707. They sort of just said to me: "You have
Q: How did the workers feel when you told them that they had to be represented by Local 87 from San Francisco? Was that a big difference for them? Did they feel lost in Local 707? Your rules and regulations had to change in terms of dues paying, membership, etc.?

A: None of that. That is why when we affiliated with 707 it did not make a big difference. It actually was an advantage [because] we ended up having just more [things]. It did not make any difference. We did not lose our autonomy. Also the fact that Newman and I were still devoting time [helped us], we were not as stressed out because we only had one job now. But also because we ended up getting financial help from them, so that helped us a lot. [We were] able to do things -- to buy equipment, to buy stuff that we did not have before, pay for an office, just have like a typewriter, a computer and stuff like that so that we could be able to work more efficiently. So our affiliation did not affect any of the way we conducted ourselves in our business there at SCIU. When we went to 87, it did not really had an effect, because I was the one that was assigned from Local 87 to service. Once you get a contract you service the workers. So I serviced the workers at PSGF for a while and also at Calliope Designs. I was still the one that was around so the workers did not feel a sense of loss at the beginning. But later on, it became more and more that I was pulled to do organizing. At first I was told that I would be organizing janitors in Santa Rosa and servicing PSGF and Calliope Designs workers. But then later on, the organizer from Marin from 87 left so they asked me to organize Marin County janitors. which I did, I organized a group of janitors there, and our contract took three months do it. It was incredible, PSGF contract, took three years, and the other one took three months.

Then it turned out that the organizer from San Francisco left, so then they pulled me to San Francisco. So I ended up organizing workers in San Francisco, organizing and servicing workers there. So it got to a point were I think by now I had been working for close to a year for Local 87. And at that time I was a single parent. my son was home most of the time, late at night. I used to live in a place where at least it was very safe. I used to live in a cooperative. So people took care of him. But when you organize janitors you have got to do it at night. That is when they work. It got to a point where it was too stressful for me. After a year of working for Local 87, I resigned, I could no longer work because the effect that it was having on my son and myself. So at that
time I left Local 87. I think it was then that the PSGF workers and Calliope Design workers suffered because Local 87 got another business rep[resentative]. They are called business reps, to come and service the workers here, at PSGF and Calliope Designs. But it was not the same, because the workers by now had been so used to being able to --You know. Anything that came up I was there to be with them. I was not just an organizer with them or a business representative. I was a friend. I was there for them for any kind of problems they had. So all of the sudden, it was very difficult for them to go and deal with this person.

Q: Why did they hire somebody else instead of keeping you here?

A: Because the whole thing, for me just to be here in Santa Rosa, there was not enough [money] --they could not afford it. In other words, the dues coming in from PSGF, which was the only one that was under contract, was very little. We still had the $ 10.00 a month dues structure that we had established. Even everybody paid their dues. The bad thing about PSGF, that came in the contract was that it became an open shop. So that [means] only certain members would pay dues. So it was not all of them. Even $ 10.00 is very little, compared to the janitors in San Francisco. They paid like $ 23.00. It was not enough money for me just to be caring [for the workers] in Santa Rosa. In order for them to pay me, I had to do organizing. I had to organize in San Francisco. That is when I finally resigned, because I could not do it.

They did not hire anyone new to replace me here in Santa Rosa. What they did is that someone from San Francisco, part of their additional job was to come down here and service the workers at PSGF. Not everyday, I was hoping that they would come at least once a week. But it turned out then that they would come once a month or something like that. And it was a shock to the workers who were used to having me there all the time, everyday. And so I think it was very hard for all of us. It was very hard for me to have to leave 87, and also leave PSGF.

Q: What happened to SCIU after you left and they stayed with Local 87?

A: I think it only lasted one more year because the contract was up at PSGF. But before the contract was up, Calliope Designs had already left. --closed doors here and left for Mexico. So those workers were out of a
job, and then PSGF [was] in their last year. They only lasted the three years of the contract, before the three years were up. From what I heard is that PSGF was told that they had to do a lot of renovations in their freezers and their storage because they were in violation of lots of codes. In addition, I should say, that Bulgaro [the company owner] died. I think at the end the PSGF company decided that they would just close down, I guess after 40 something years in Santa Rosa. And they closed down. What you see now is an empty lot. And it is really sad. What happened is that SCIU disappeared, no longer existed. That was it. But I think Local 87 serviced them for one year.

Q: What did you do after you left Local 87?

A: It was wonderful. For the next two months I stayed home. It was my only vacation. For my son, if you ask him, he would probably remember it as the best time in his life because I was home for two months. And he even now says: "Mom lets be poor as long as you are home." He really loved those two months.

What happened is that HERE (Hotel Employees Restaurant Employees) found out that I was in Santa Rosa. And they had wanted to get somebody here in Santa Rosa. So they interviewed me, and they hired me to work in Santa Rosa. But it did not work out, also here in Santa Rosa. So I ended up working in Oakland, which is what I was doing until I got pregnant. I worked there for three years.

Q: Do you remember the year you had to go to work for Local 87 in San Francisco?

A: It was probably 1990-91.

Q: By then, besides having to change locals, how was the climate at Calliope Designs and PSGF? What had the workers gained? How was the working situation for them?

A: I think there still was pressure. But they were able to have a little more financial security and job security at Calliope Designs. At that time I think the [working] situation had improved for them. They were able to have their benefits and job security, even though there was no contract at
Calliope Designs for some reason. I feel it was based on the strength of the workers. The owner viewed them as though there was a contract. In other words, he would not violate things, he would not fire them. So he was respectful of the union. In a forceful way, he got forced to be respectful. In other words he did not try to violate too many things. He was really good about that situation.

Q: When did he start moving his plant down to Tijuana, Mexico?

A: When the free Treaty [North American Free Trade Agreement - NAFTA] was passed. It was around then. There was a rumor among the Calliope Designs workers that they were training people in Mexico to start a plant over there. And they did open a plant over there and kept this one open for awhile. But then after a while, they finally just closed completely here and opened up the other one.

Q: Do you remember the year and month?

A: I think it had to be 1992. All the workers at Calliope Designs were still there with the exception of Paulina who, after she won her National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) case and got reinstated, went back and worked there for one day or so. Mostly just as symbolic, she returned and worked for one day and stood up in front of everyone and made some union statements and just left the job.

Q: How about Roberto Garcia?

A: I think Roberto might have left too. That is right, Roberto had gone and worked some place else. I think later Rafael Lopez did too.

Q: Then by 1992, workers started leaving Calliope Designs?

A: Most of the couples that were there, one would leave. Because once the rumor started that CD was going to probably close, the couples decided that at least one of them should start seeking outside work to get security for their family.

Q: That was happening to Calliope Designs workers. What was happening to PSGF workers at the same time?
A: I think at that time things were going pretty well, except there were some people who, I remember, had been fired after the contract was signed (Whom?) This was Candelaria Garcia. [She] was one person I remember because I went and did a grievance for her. She got caught I think selling stuff, selling inside, and had been already warned. She had been warned already two or three times no to do it any more, and she continued. We were not able to get her job back. At that time things were kind of slow. Nothing unique was happening. People were settling down to just working under a contract.

Q: After you did all the organizing? was there a network among Mexican and White workers in terms of helping Mexican workers find better-paying jobs?

A: One thing that we did, I think it was good in our affiliation but most important I think just being SCIU and being so out there in the force front of the labor movement in Sonoma County was that allowed our members to be able to feel competent in themselves --to start gaining confidence.

Newman and I would talk to other unions to find out if there were other jobs openings that would advance our workers out of the kind of work they were doing. So we talked to the carpenters. We talked to them about their apprenticeship program. A few of our members went through that program --Manuel Pena-- He went through that until he got hurt on his job, and then Salvador Bejar. There was also a Salvadoreno guy, but I do not remember his name. Well, he did not go through the apprenticeship program, he went through something else.

Q: Was there a movement in leaving mostly by men seeking better jobs in both plants?

A: It is interesting, I think, the experience that I saw in SCIU. What it did first of all in Sonoma County it sort of shocked the labor movement. It shocked them and woke them up. I think, in general the labor movement became aware that there was this incredible group of workers, Mexican workers, who were capable of being organized, capable of fighting, and were actually very militant and determined to better their working conditions. So other unions sort of woke up to this particular group of workers. Then even politically we also had an impact on not
only the workers themselves. They started to become more active in organizations, for example, the Interfaith Organizing Project targets more people working in the community, politically. And so some of our members became members of that group and advanced themselves politically.

Q: How about their impact in the peace community?

A: I think in other organizations started to also see that there was an invisible group of people and, all of sudden, people became aware of all these Mexican workers and that they are capable of being involved politically in the community. And we ended up helping other groups and union with leafleting. We ended up helping them with picket lines because we became very good at picket line duty. So people knew that we knew how to handle a picket line. So other unions started asking us for solidarity help and also even hiring some of our picketers.

Q: Now, if you look back, and see what impact this union had in the Mexican community, how do you see the impact among themselves?

A: I think that is the other point I was going to make. First I thought we had an impact on the labor movement, and then in general other communities, like the peace. Even the African-American people, because some of them came to our picket lines. But I think the most important thing that came out of SCIU was that, all of a sudden a group of workers and predominantly women who were never been involved [before] in their lives, who had not even gone to probably to any meetings at all, who had no knowledge of being politically active, became politically active. And the only reason is that you have to start at the work site, because that is the place they are most of the time, other than in their homes. We ended up organizing them at their point where they are most active, day in and day out. And all of a sudden this group of women became active in the schools, with their children. they became active in the community. Many of them went into trying to get better jobs, went into going to school trying to learn English. To me a lot of them learned skills that they did not think they even had, talents that they had. Like public speaking, being able to use computers and copiers for that matter. We had workers who did not even know, I remember when we did a mailing, sent letters out, some workers even did not know where
the stamp went on the envelopes. This is how incredible it was. I remember having to show them how to collate, how to do a mailing, how to pass out a leaflet, how to get people to sign a petition. All these things, I think were skills that were learned during the struggle. Even though I think that SCIU no longer exists, we changed the lives of many people. Not only the workers themselves, their lives were changed. A lot of the women [too] — it was very different for them after words, in their family. They were different. They were changed. Their children looked at those women differently. They looked at their mothers differently not just as someone who cooked for them. They viewed their mother as being on the picket lines. Now they were women who were more confident. Because of that, I think it had an effect on their children. In the Mexican community they also got recognized. Even though it was so hard, and I know that they would look back and realize that it was very difficult. And one of the things is that women themselves became known, the women and the men of SCIU. SCIU became a political entity that the community as a whole had to deal with, and they themselves viewed themselves as that. They started realizing that, "I have power. I am able to have some influence on some things." Because of that, as I said, too many of them looked back and said that it was a hard time. It was a horrible time. Many of them would think it was just so difficult, and it was. It was so difficult at their work site. They had to deal with their bosses who were so angry at the fact that they finally got united and wanted to have a voice. They had to deal with who? with their husbands. Some of them were opposed. And even some men had to deal with their wives because it was a new thing. You had to be at meetings, you had to be active. It was hard that all these activities were going on on weekends, instead of being with the children. Now you were either at a picket line or some place else, or having to go to a meeting, or whatever. It was a very difficult time. But I think, at the end, I always tell workers that even though we may have lost the overall battle; Que la lucha ya esta ganada. (The struggle is already won). Because in each of them they were changed, they became different. They could never go back. I remember one time, Javier Arreguin told me, he said -- Javier Arreguin was the Calliope Design worker who had been on strike. He was the one who was angry at us for not wanting to go on strike and afterwards he said. "Alicia, beat me up if I want to go on strike again." But one of the things I remember he said to me. "I will never be able to pass a picket line again without stopping and going and taking some
refreshments to those workers because now I know what it is like to be on a picket line, on a strike." I also remember Elena Pulido, who was a woman, who was in Calliope Designs, the oldest worker in Calliope Designs, an older woman and who we ended making her the treasurer for Calliope Designs workers. At first she collected the dues and kept track of them. You know she was a woman who never in her life thought that she could do that, and she became the treasurer for Calliope Designs workers. And then, you had somebody like Sara Ochoa, who was a woman who I felt was already a leader but just came out incredible and shining --being able to go out and speak in public and do interviews. I remember clearly in a meeting I made a mistake about a boycott, something regarding the boycott, and she corrected me [afterwards] and after words she apologized to me for correcting me. I said I felt complimented that I had taught someone so much about the law that now she was correcting me. So that was really good. And then there was Celia Mendoza who was very shy, and yet she was the oldest that had been working for PSGF, and she finished the struggle.

Many of these women three years later were still active. They brought their children to the picket lines. They were up in the mornings, did leaflets helping us out. The courage of these women and men to confront their boss! I have found in all my years of organizing that the hardest bond you can break is that of the boss and the worker. Even if the boss is abusive to that worker, that worker is still loyal to that boss. And yet, when that worker stands up and says "No more! I am not going to take this kind of abuse. I am not going to take any more being disrespected and treated like an animal," it takes so much courage. It is an extremely high level of courage. And that is something that I admire about all the workers, men and women.

Paulina Martinez went on back to school and started to learn English. Fina had already some knowledge of English. I remember Fina was doing the phone banking at the beginning. She would call people and remind them about our lunches or meetings. She was the one that would call the community. They were all these people who, even though they were really quiet and shy, they ended up doing things that they never thought they were capable of doing.
I think the reason we had a victory in both PSGF and Calliope Designs and, in general, why SCIU became such a powerful force in Sonoma County was because of the unity of the workers and their courage and their determination to finish the struggle. One of the things we said at the beginning of the struggle was that we had to finish it.
Newman Strawbridge, union organizer,
Sonoma County Industrial Union
How did you come in contact with the Calliope Designs workers?

A: We formed something called the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC), which was designed to network—at that time I believe it was called the Labor Law Enforcement Network (LLEN), at that time it was network because I remember very clearly Alicia and I talking about that there was no center, no organization. The idea was to network—actually, it came from some work we'd done in Ventura County, organizing some citrus shed workers, and also my experience at the Labor Commissioners office, where it was very, very clear that (during) the several years prior to this that labor conditions were being forced downward. Reaganomic productivity questions had really taken the kind of racist labor relations in California and pushed Latino workers below the minimum standards. That was very clear from the Labor Commissioners office in Ventura. We developed this leaflet that just basically asked, were you paid overtime, were you paid minimum wage, have you been treated differently because of your race and sex, things like that where you—that we just started using up here.

Q: Who is we, another network?

A: Originally on the leaflet in this county, I was just passing it out.

Q: In Ventura County?

A: No, here.
Q. Because according to Alicia Sanchez, you came to a group of friends and organized a network, and you developed the flyer and you were passing it to different places here.

A: Yeah, the actual flyer came to this county from Ventura County. I wrote the flyer and we were using it down there in connection with the citrus workers, because we passed it also around Latino communities trying to develop support among other workers. Now, the way the organized body got involved was that we proposed to make an analysis of how to sustain work among the working class in this county, but particularly among the most exploited of the working class, which anywhere in California until recently is almost exclusively Latino workers. What we did is, what I remember, and I'm not sure how long this took, several people from this group came together and started meeting in mornings and evenings making a study of where people worked. We literally broke down all the different work sectors, on the proposition that this might be something that we would do as a group over a sustained period of time.

Q. Were you passing this out only to Latino workers, or to every worker that you came in contact with?

A: The leaflet was bilingual as I remember, and a version of that leaflet goes out now, at the fair and at pickup centers, places like that. We just this year put out about 4,000 leaflets. After the dance, there were five on the ground. That was the phenomena then, too, workers are still forced way below what legal standards are. So anyway, this group of people were together and came from different parts of the political community, began to
meet and study the conditions of the exploited folks in the county. The employment relations here—of course, we came from out of county—are just like everywhere else in California. What you have is, you've got a base production point, a base commodity point in agriculture that's fueled by Latino labor that spills over and creates a service industry town. That's what we found here, and as it is everywhere else in California that I've worked, it is extremely productive and extremely profitable, the profit rate and productivity rates are enormously high because of the racist teeth to the employment relationships. It's like being in the South in the early sixties. The conditions basically were this: you had an economy based on racism, you had labor laws that were created in the crescendo of the labor movement in 1934 and 1937 and never taken off the books. You had conditions that were in Reagan and the Right wing Democrats' drive to "be competitive", you had a fast decrease in labor conditions, so you had a strange place in history where the labor movement was actually behind or more retarded that the labor laws. The kind of Winnebago worker, the white worker, was beginning to get a little bit afraid, and I think that's one of the bases that this group got a labor coalition, as white workers for a few years had become less insulated from the conditions of the Latino workers.

(The leaflet) was originally passed out bilingually, and the reason I digress is then as now, white workers were simply not interested in it. Now when we pass that leaflet out, the group that does it now, they just get mad at us. Then, I don't remember, but now it amazes me, I get workers that say why are you telling me this information, and I'll be telling them about their overtime rights.
Q. Paul Kaplan and Alicia Sanchez were telling me that it's true that you were passing it in different sectors in Sonoma, but that they were going to Latinos and all kinds of people, and that everybody was calling you, whites and Latinos.

A: That's true.

Q. So at this point you were the leader, you had the knowledge of the labor laws.

A: What happened is we decided to meet as a group, a lot of times and decide whether there was a real basis, a material basis for this work, and we met for several months and decided that there was. Then, what we started doing was to pass the leaflets out, and we passed them out in working class centers, like K-Mart, I remember that because I would get calls from the K-Mart managers. We set up a phone, a PO Box, and the members in this group that wanted to focus on this started meeting and learning how to explain labor laws to people. These are minimum standard laws, which as I said passed at the crescendo of the thirties movement, and they set up the floor basis for labor standards. The reason for using them is one, they were the laws that were being violated, and two, you can get victories with them, they're pretty black letter law, and you can get victories, which is really important with organizing. We started getting calls back, and what I remember is that the calls crossed race lines, I still remember them as being predominately Latino, I remember we started keeping records on them, and different people in the group would call people back, explain to them how they could go about getting their rights, and we had two levels for it, one was just to get the person—cause if you think about it, the person who is having their minimum
standards violated is very vulnerable economically, they're people that really need the money right then. So we had a service level to it, as I remember we did get money back to people. The idea was to develop some form of a working class organization. Clearly, at that point we had not made a decision to form an independent union. As I remember it, there was no real decision to form a union at that point. It was to set up a network of people that were kind of a pre-union formation, that would funnel themselves, if I remember our thought at the time, more into either the unions that existed or into the merger of the civil rights-type question with the labor question.

Q: It was my understanding that you had gone and requested from the existing unions to see if they would be willing to organize the unorganized, and they were either very busy maintaining their membership or they didn't show any interest at that time, because they didn't have the resources.

A: I don't think that's the reason, the factual thing is that I went, I'm not sure if Alicia did or not, but I went to the Central Labor Council, and each individual union that I could meet with, and they were nice, (but) they were not interested in organizing this group. The Machinists, one guy with the Machinists was very open to it, and John Hadzess with the Carpenters was open to there being a need, but they were very, very reticent about who would be organizing this effort. Their basic material relationship to it was that the incredible demise in the floor, the base conditions for the poorest workers, was beginning to have a drag on their bargaining. They were having to then bargain about lowering their collective bargaining agreements
because employers now had busted the bottom. I remember very clearly talking about that they saw this as a problem, and they would love to have a LLEC, a network available here to keep employers from being able to go very far below collective bargaining standards. My impression as to the reason they were not as a group interested in organizing the workers that would be involved into their union is that it would change the demographics of their union.

Q: How so?

A: Well, it would bring in a lot of more militant and Latino (workers), that not necessarily being the same thing, but the poor worker tends to want real representation right then, and to have problems that Unions have to deal with. I don't believe these elected leaders, who had been elected for many many years inside their own union wanted a whole group of new people coming in that they didn't know how they were going to vote.

So what happens, and the reason union bureaucracies don't really push organizing is, you have to remember, no matter how undemocratic, at some level or not they are elected, and so they get a stable work force below them, they don't want to bring in another, let's say, tenth of their local voting force, they might get voted out of office. I raised that with several people including Hadzess, and he just kind of smiled and indicated that he also believed that--well, several people believed--that there would be no place for massive--that is right, one of our agendas was a massive multi-union organizing drive.

Q: Your Network agenda, or your group?
A: Well, at this point in history I don't really remember when things became a group agenda or when they—I am positive, I mean it was an incredibly honest group, that they would have had that agenda. I don't remember it—yeah, I do, too, because I remember breakfast meetings, I remember Paul—President of the Service Employees International Union here—was talking about if we found service workers, people in the service industry, how hard it would be but that they would try to bring them in and create an organizing base inside (SEIU Local) 707. That makes me think that we must have been talking about funneling people into already-established unions, and getting unions involved in organizing the unorganized. Over the long run, we basically found that they're not interested in that. But they were very, very energized by the organizing drive that did take place.

Q: From these breakfast meetings or evening meetings, you were talking about in this county you found out there was a need, a basis for a union, mostly for Latino workers. How did you come to that conclusion?

A: The data simply confirmed what we knew when we started. I mean, I'd just spent seven years of strikes inside the Latino community in various counties. So, what you found here is the percent, the number of actual labor hours of unorganized workers in the county is very large, there's a large number of Latino unorganized hours. If you add to that the factor of the lowest paid wages, then you get—what was happening here, and part of Reaganism was to decentralize production to units that traditional unions were not interested in, and of course in California your low minimum wage
work is distributed to the isolated or more vulnerable Latino community and has been for years. So, what we found is that agriculture, which is the biggest producer in the county, is predominately Latino, and in what we call the sweatshop industry, the small twenty to thirty to forty person unit of light manufacturing, very small amount of fixed capital, that was all Latino and Asian, but mostly Latino. So that's what the study found, but that confirmed what anybody that works in California knows. It's just that we actually did it for this county and spent some time using that also as a technique to convince the group members that this was something that should be done and could be done as a basis for expressing their own political ideals and political desires, too.

Q: You were receiving the phone calls, receiving some flyers back, and you were really doing a study, writing everything down, keeping numbers? You and I know that there was the need, but if somebody who does research would come and ask you how did you come up with this.

A: Well, it didn't really come from the responses, it came from our studying each industry. We divided up the industries at the evening and breakfast meetings, and then we did studies of each industry. Number of workers, number of women, number of contacts, what unions were involved. We broke down the work in Sonoma County, and we each studied an industry. We studied different industries to determine who is in what industry, what unions were involved. Cause we also had planned to make contact with unions, so if we--you know, machine shops, small production. So we studied all that. Finally, I think we came to the point where yes, what we think exists-- and in terms of the data that
was coming from the leaflets, that was really more of a service data--in other words, we had to keep up with what we were doing and actually do what we said we'd do on the leaflet, or our ultimate organizing would not work. We'd get a bad reputation. So we did do real detailed follow-through on the leaflet calls, and the people from the group actually trained themselves in strange laws, and responded, and spent hours doing it.

Q: Two things happening with this group, the industry studies, and the leaflet.

A: No, that's not what I'm trying to say, the two were the same thing. We didn't have an idea that there was-- we didn't come to the fact that there needed to be a strictly Latino organizing drive from the group. That really emerged from the relationship of who came forward to be organized, and what unions were open to those people being organized into them. Racism ultimately defined the independent character of this union drive. It was not an agenda item, in fact it was discussed that most people in this group I believe subscribed to the idea that what in history is called dual unions are bad. There's some debate on that, I mean I don't think that, ...

Q: What do you mean by dual unions?

A: Dual unions basically emerged in the thirties, and the history of the union in this county is considered a dual union, that is a union organized by the left with a much more rank and file power base organized with a much more political rather than a narrow economic agenda.

Q: Where you will have more minorities?
A: Right, they started these a whole lot when they carried women into manufacturing. Basically, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of the thirties, the teens and the thirties, began—they would be thrown out of the AFL, and so they would organize unions, and they were considered dual unions. They were some of the most effective unions in the country. That's where Foster and that group came in, that whole "bore from within" is a rejection of dual unionism. Now, a lot of good left people are making $80,000 as union bureaucrats, "boring from within". So anyway, the data from the leaflets was not just service, because what we were looking for, and I remember really clearly talking with the workers that would come forward with a labor problem, and seeing if they were interested in an organization, a meeting with other workers, or whether they just wanted specifically to handle their overtime problem. That's how Calliope came about, basically Calliope workers had a rest break problem, and a lunch break, but mostly I believe a rest break problem. It was a wage and hour problem, and they went to CRLA.

Q: You were talking about getting a reputation when you were passing the leaflet out. Reputation among workers, and also community members, like lefties, people who were concerned?

A: Yes, we came here—we had an experience in Ventura County where it appeared that—I have to back up here. For a long long time, Alicia and I were involved very specifically in the farm worker community, and as we got out of the UFW-type community, which is really very isolating in a way, we began working with shed workers, and what we found in the Oxnard-Ventura area was that progressive members of the community had really
been discriminated against by, in a sense, the Farmworkers Union, and they were really really wanting to associate themselves with a labor organizing drive. It was a desire to have their politics really productive, feel useful, a wonderful, beautiful feeling from within, not to be disregarded because they were humanists, because they were "already left", or "already progressive". That happened here, I don't know when it became an agenda, but we definitely from the beginning saw the power and the idea of a labor-community coalition. I would like to talk about what forces came together here to allow this thing to happen, but one of them definitely is that this community, Sonoma County, has a large number of left-of-center to left people who have various agendas, but there's nothing around which there is a lot of common work. The left for so long has been discriminated against by trade union organizing because of the kind of sellout-- it's very hard for a union bureaucracy to sell itself out the way it wants to if it's got a lot of organized idealists relating to it. So that's why unions have always pushed off leftists, because the leftists constitute a check on the union ultimately selling the workers out. When I went with SEIU after this for the short time I was with them, I was literally asked--none of my units gave up any money in the city, because we did leaflets about city manager (inaud. word) salaries--everybody above me in SEIU put a jacket--they basically wanted you to negotiate a contract that was below minimum standards.

Q So that you could have the dues paid?

A: Yeah, 'all we want is a checkoff and a contract'. A first contract, doesn't matter if the contract goes below state law.
Q: Well, the first contract always has to be the best, otherwise you are setting the standards too low.

A: Well, not in the history of labor relations since the passage of the NLRA. There’s a lot of the community people here....

Q: Paul (Kaplan) and Alicia (Sanchez) have mentioned the fact that the community got involved, and the fact that there was a need to form a coalition, but none of them really discussed the fact that unions had pushed, for whatever reason, the community left to the side. And now you are saying that the community wanted to participate, in whatever way they could, not everybody, but that there were people...

A: I think if you interview some of the people who did (participate), I think they will say that that’s some of the nicest experiences of their (inaudible). And I think it comes from the honesty of the left and the history of being isolated--if you think about it, all right, those of us--people don’t have a common thing to organize around. If you think about what is common among us, and it’s work, but we’ve been pushed out of labor organizing, or class organizing, by class collaborationists. I think that’s why there’s such a deep chord of reaction once people start including themselves, because what they see is, this is something we can all get together around. Also, it is something that in its essence the remedy is not paternalistic. The remedy for organizing minimum standards workers is not a welfare check, it’s a higher wage. That family takes that higher wage and spends it like they want to spend it. They get dignity with it. That’s something the left is interested in. So it’s
not that little step in the road, that kind of half-stepping remedies that liberal democrats say is the answer to poverty, which the left can never quite get behind. They can get behind taking a worker from a $4.25 an hour worker to an $8.00 an hour worker. So one of the factors, one of the streamlets that allowed this to take place ultimately was that Sonoma County—and it was one of the things we studied in this group, I remember this now—was how many, what liberal organizations and progressive organizations existed. This group of people, who are much more indigenous to Sonoma County than myself, knew these people, knew them here and these, these organizations, we know we can get them involved, if we ever get something going. The other part, that’s kind of jumping ahead to how it got organized, the first organized response was a group of Calliope workers went to CRLA, and they interviewed a woman there named Cristina Briano. We had talked with Cristina, I’d talked with her a whole lot about using, getting CRLA more involved in labor questions with the Labor Commissioner’s office, and quite frankly, ran into a significant amount of resistance (from Cristina). That meant, because of what CRLA was at the time, in terms of the Latino community, that meant CRLA, because nobody else there—there was just this kind of delegation to Cristina to make the decisions about the Latino community.

Q Which, she is a secretary, or something like that?

A: She was a community—I forget what they call that now, it’s basically a community organizer for CRLA. So, a couple (workers) called, and then I set up a group meeting, and I remember we had to call that meeting off, cause I remember worrying all
weekend. I was involved in a pesticide investigation, and a witness came up, and so I had to go see the witness, we had to call this meeting off. I remember worrying all weekend how these workers were going to respond. I'll never forget....(end of tape).
Paul Kaplan, community activist and President of Service Employees International Union

Q  How did Sonoma County Industrial Union (SCIU) start?

A: Yes, it was January 15, 1988. It was Martin Luther King's (MLK) birthday and a group of workers, most of them Mexican workers at Calliope Designs which was a Christmas ornament manufacturing facility in Santa Rosa walked off their jobs. And they walked out their jobs because they were sick and tired of the over-time violations of working more than they were being paid and being taken advantage of. And they wanted to do something about it, and they felt that doing something on MLK's birthday would be significant because of how they viewed MLK, as someone who stood up for what was right for all people.

So, they walked off their job, and my recollection is that they talked to someone in California Rural Legal Assistance (CRLA) office who referred them to Newman [Strawbridge] and Alicia [Sanchez] who were actively doing work to provide workers recourse in terms of overtime violations and labor standards violations and things like that. So to be able to pursue organizing workers, [it] is when you have people who are pissed-off--you know, at been taken advantage of their job. Like could some of them going to the next step to organize the union. [It is] greater than when you have people who think that nothing could be better, nothing could be finer.

So that is how it started. and that is how Newman and Alicia were put in touch with the workers at Calliope Designs; I think Christina Briano was working for CRLA, and she knew that over time stuff had been solicited [by the workers] so that is how she put the two [Newman and Alicia and Calliope Designs workers] of them together.

Q According to Alicia there was a group of people who were trying to organize workers in Sonoma County. she said long before SCIU was organized, a group of progressive people in Sonoma County formed the Labor Law Enforcement Center (LLEC), which you were part of, a questionnaire was distributed at different working
sites, to see if there was in fact the need to form a union. So Calliope Designs workers did not receive the questionnaire. They came to your group seeking help. Can you discuss how it happened?

A: I know; they did not respond direct to the LLEC. LLEC was a group that really came out the [Communist Party] CP group that was in Sonoma County. In the late 1987 and 1988 the CP group decided that we needed to focus on something were everyone could participate in affecting a significant part of the working class struggle. And the need to organize unorganized workers was seen as kind of the pivot and particularly brown workers, Latino workers, because of the composition of Sonoma county being at the bottom of the rung; the organization of those workers represented a strategic work in terms of the ability of the entire class to unify them. So the idea of a vehicle to get in touch with unorganized workers, measuring their interest in terms of organizing, and what prospects there were was something that came out of the work of the CP. So LLEC was kind of the flying paper so to speak, to attract [the] unorganized—you know, pissed-off workers interested in making some kind of change or affecting their employment situation.

Q: I have two questions: First: According to Alicia, it was Newman who was the main organizer of LLEC and all its works—she was not specific in who was responding to the phone calls—Did you train the people in your group to call the workers back?

A: Newman did most of the work. You have to remember that most of us were working full time jobs. Alicia was working for California Human Development Corporation (CHDC) at that time. I was working at the county schools. Newman was not working, so he had more time than anyone else. and, what he did was that he trained some other people who worked part time or had more of an interest to provide them with some basic information and some basic skills to follow up some of the stuff as well. But, the bulk of the follow up was done was done by Newman. One, because he had the time, and, two, because he had the experience. His experience in terms of enforcing labor laws goes way back in terms of all
forms. So that's who responded. And—you know—there was a number of important things that were pursued which won people back pay, stuff like that. It was mostly back pay.

Q: Do you remember if people obtained some over-time, etc. pay from their employers by receiving assistance from LLEC?

A: Oh, yeah.

Q: And some to her things?

A: There were some discriminatory things, I am not sure on how those resulted. Most of the issues had to do with discrimination at work, mainly sexual discrimination at work, and overtime violations in terms of workers getting stiffed from working more than eight hours a day and not getting time and a half. So those were the two main areas that I recall, that [they] were the areas of complaints, and there were a variety of different kinds of places.

Q: you were doing this kind of work at least six months before the Calliope Designs workers came to your group seeking assistance?

A: It was enough time to gain a reputation amongst people in the community, that [these were] the people who were dealing with these kinds of issues. And it was pretty clear amongst the progressive activists [about] the reason why this activity was going on—why people were seeking information in terms of labor law violations. Was to look for labor organizing facilities.

Q: this reputation you gained, was mostly among progressive people in the community and not the workers.

A: No, no, in terms of who—the information was distributed at different work sites and in different neighborhoods, but people would be asked to help distribute the stuff, not just in terms of party people, but other progressives in the community. It was known within the larger progressive community what was going on, and people were asked to help in terms of variety [of] things.
Q. After the questionnaire was distributed, people called you and you helped. Do you remember how many people were helped?

A: Newman will have a better recollection of how many cases produced a back-pay settlement and how many cases did not--what the ratio was. Like I said, he was more on top of it that anyone else.

Q. To your recollection, the workers at Calliope Designs chose MLK Day to walk off their jobs. According to Alicia it was a mere coincidence.

A: Yes, January 15, 1988, which was his real birthday, and not the holiday.

Q. Can you discuss, to your best recollection how the workers came to your group, and how some or all of you, helped to form a union? And, if you remember more in specific detail what was happening during the strike because that is a very important component of their struggle.

A: They walked off their jobs. Then they went to CRLA. They were referred to Alicia and Newman. Newman and Alicia met with them. And they talked about all the options of what they could do in terms of filing a claim for overtime violations to meet the immediate abuses. Or, they could organize a union to go for the long howl and [to] fix the situation in a long-standing way. The workers unanimously opted to go for the long howl, organize a union, and win justice for once in the workplace. And the specific day of that I do not know. But, I think the woman who made the motion was Angelica--Fina's [Adolfina Hernandez] sister. And it was the way Alicia described it. I was not at that meeting. Alicia and Newman said a very emotional kind of thing in terms of moving with the fist, that is, how you make a decision to do something, so you have to move. So she raised her fist to move that they form a union and everyone voted at that time. And, that is how the union was born.

Then there is a process that you go through in terms of filing for election for representation, which was initiated. The union was formed. It was decided to be independent. The name was
Sonoma county Industrial Union (SCIU), and the reason why it was to be independent was because the workers essentially mistrusted other unions that they saw, either [having had] themselves or their family members being a part of it--namely the Teamsters union, the local in Sonoma County. The other place were people worked, either had worked or worked part time that was organized by a union was the canneries. and the conditions of work were really bad, the level of justice at the job was non-existent and people really questioned the value of that kind of union. And, they saw affiliating to a union as being that.

That is what they did, they did not want to have anything thing to do with it. So that is why they decided to [be] independent. They went to [through a] process of signing the petition to request the NLRB to hold a representation election which [did] happened.

Q: Alicia mentioned that Newman had previously gone to different local unions to request the organizing of the unorganized, particularly brown workers, and she said that unions did not have the resources at that time: One the workers mistrusting other unions, and two, unions not being willing to organize them. Is that how it happened?

A: I do not know how extensively Newman's searched for other unions was, but I know that in my union, for instance, people are hesitant to make broad general statements without the specifics. Unless you have something on the table, the unions are not going to talk about it. Once it started, once the people started the representation campaign and once they won the election, I think it was in March, in the middle of March. Once the vote came in and was successful, then all the other unions that had paid lip service in being interested in organizing the unorganized workers, but had problems with resources. [Unions] came around to help, to sniff, to see what they could do, all that kind of stuff. We had the carpenters, and the retail clerks, and people from my union, which is SEIU and different unions from the labor council, and [there] were [the] hotel and restaurants, workers that wanted to see what was going on. Organizing brown workers with an independent structure was kind of the idle opening thing, and it happened so quickly and so successfully in terms of the vote, and with no
resources. What was the money spent with this? No money, and these people were not used to seeing anything succeed in this kind of way and they were very interesting in looking around.

But in the beginning, no. It was not that people were against it, but people did not know how to do it. When you got people within the structure of the labor movement who had never participated in the organizing effort, they would say politically that they agreed with organizing workers, but because their experience level was so low they did not have the foggiest ideas of ways to go about it. So that was the situation. It was not like people were against it, but people did not know how to do it. This really showed people that it can be done and provided some avenues for people to do it. Now in terms of the vote, I remember...

Q: Before you move into the elections, can you discuss the election campaign your group organized to have a successful election, and what campaign the employer organize to defeat the election?

A: I do not remember about the employer. I remember going out and visiting workers at their homes, talking to them about voting for the union.

Q: How about the rally-lunches the union organized?

A: I think we started having every Friday afternoon rallies, lunch rallies, with community support to show the company that white people supported these workers and to show these workers that support went beyond just people at work. And they were very successful in engaging other union activists, other community groups peace groups, the political groups to come together to rally to support around this organizing drive and the election. So it helped focus the work of lots of people in terms of concentrating them on the success of this organizing effort. I guess it must have started in February.

Q: The home visits, who would conduct them, who would talk to the workers, what was discussed?
A: I went to one woman's house with Newman, and she was a baker and kind of ambivalent. I think that she ended up voting against the union. She worked on a different shift than everyone else; she did not work in terms of immediate production, but she baked the dough for people to use. So she was not that tight into everyone else in terms of their jobs. She did not work directly with them; she worked different hours and stuff. So she was very susceptible to the employer’s line about what the union was going to do, what the union was for. It was not all the brown workers who worked at the plant. There were white workers too, who worked in different aspects, and I think that the vote came down along the racial lines. The majority, the way that the union was won is that the majority of the people who worked there were Latino workers, and so that is how the union was successful. In terms of bridging that gap, the employers were very successful in using people’s racial identity to divide them up.

Q: There were brown and white workers working side by side?

A: White workers did the painting, shipping, boxing and things like that. I do not think that the clerical people were part of the unit the way it was determined. So the people who worked in the office were not included in the vote. But there was a minority of white workers who did jobs other than making the ornaments. Brown workers were the production people. They were the people who took the dough, who made the ornaments according to the specifications and who did all the final detail. These were intricate pieces of work. It was not like [they] were slapped together from the machines. They were all doing it by hand.

Q: do you remember if there were any differences in terms of wages between white and brown workers?

A: I do not have the specific recollection, my feelings is that there was a piece rate—the production workers, were paid a piece rate. In other words, depending on how fast you were determined in how you much made an hour. Whereas the white workers who worked in none-production, in production but not in an assembly-type of stuff, were paid an hourly rate. So it did not matter how fast or hard they worked for the same rate. People who were
really good, at what they did, were able to work very quickly and do very good work and get a high rate because of how they worked. But there were a whole different rates of pay. Those were all the specifics which got into the overtime stuff, those which initiated the thing. But specifically, what people made, you should ask some of the workers.

Q: I will. Going back to the campaign, can you describe it more in detail?

A: Wearing buttons at work was important for people to identify at work as union supported because it is against the law for the employer to treat people who support the union any differently that anyone else. So the key thing in terms of making those kinds of charges is that the employer did not know that so was a supporter. So to protect the workers and their rights to organize, which is federal protective right, it was important for people to be identified as supporting the union. And the easiest way to do that was to wear a button.

Q: You were also holding regular meetings with the workers.

A: What do you mean? In terms of the CP group?

Q: Well, yes?

A: No, not at all. The people in the CP group were involved directly with the workers. Everyone in the CP group helped build the support around the lunches and the support of all the activities because people in the CP group were involved in any other areas of struggle. And what the CP was doing at that time was focusing all of its energy on the question of organizing these workers. So every time that the CP members were involved in, was oriented towards this. And there were all these different avenues for people to channel their political work in this direction and to convince people of the importance of organizing the unorganized workers in relation to either the struggle around the world, in Central America, or in terms of peace, in terms of labor groups, or in terms of electoral stuff. All tied together in terms of this.