

Laura Gordon

Side 1:

Laura, her husband and two children moved to Asheville in 1983 from Maplewood, New Jersey. They had belonged to the Ethical Culture group at the time and wanted to join a church for the children, as a way to meet compatible people and find spiritual fulfillment.

[24] She knew she was moving into the Bible Belt and in this city much revolves around church: She found she was more comfortable with the people here than in Ethical Culture, but people, regardless of religious affiliation, are compatible if they are open-minded and liberal.

[81] She grew up in the 50's and was influenced by the Vietnam War. She has been involved in peace movements, ACLU and is for freedom of choice (see enclosed).

[94] She was a labor organizer before the children were born and, though she stayed at home with them, was active in the SDS (Students for a Democratic Society).

[122] Her children grew up in the church. William is now 19 and in college. Melanie took her first steps in the nursery downstairs. [William Gordon, Melanie Gordon-Calabrese]

[125] In college she switched from being an education major to history. She likes working with children and has taught every grade but high school in church. While teaching she combined her church work with the Social Concerns Committee by working with students on the French Broad River cleanup, projects through ABCCM such as making "goody bags" for prisoners, marching on Peace Day, marching in the Martin Luther King Jr. parade, walking for the hungry on the Crop Walk.

[152] As a single mother she worked for 8 years with the group doing alternative prison sentencing and was ready to move on when Janet resigned. She became a temporary religious education director, deciding to do this job while looking around. [Janet Harvey]

[192] The UU Church was always supportive of projects she was involved in. She was one of the founding members of WNC Citizens for Choice, and the first meeting after the 1989 Webster Decision (which followed the 1973 Roe vs. Wade Decision) was held at church. She was on the board of the ACLU with Moore, who moved from this area 5 years ago. A long-time member, also a UU Church member, recently died. [Michael Moore, William Salenberger]

[242] UNCA funded Karen Finley to come to speak regarding freedom of speech. Later funds were cut. When there was protest about a performance planned by the Owen High School drama department, Citizens for Media Literacy and a parent's group along with the ACLU put the play on (see enclosure - Peggy Boring).

[270] Parents of a student at Asheville High School approached the ACLU regarding their son who refused to salute the flag (see Thomas_Fisher tape). The ACLU is cooperating with

attorneys in the proposal to remove the 10 Commandments engraved in the Waynesville courthouse. [Col. Al Thomas, Richard Sherey]]

[290] In the mid 80's the WNC Greens (introduced from Germany and seed concept for GreenLine (later Mountain X-press - see Jeff Fobes tape) met at the UU Church. Pack Library considered the group too controversial to house a meeting. A caravan carrying medical supplies to be sent to Cuba stopped at the church where a pot luck dinner was put on.

[341] SANE and FREEZE (to stop nuclear proliferation) merged in the 80's. The Sister Cities project is a result of SANE. She went to the City Council meeting about this and worked with a visiting Russian group from a Sister City (see enclosure). When the Green Line started she edited their calendar for 5 years.

[388] The Western [North] Carolinians for Criminal Justice, one of 12 groups across the country, working with alternative sentencing, was formed in the late 70's. North Carolina has been a leader in the movement which is funded by the State. In Raleigh, women give out tourist information. This is a paying job. They can stay with their family, receive vocational rehabilitation and therapy and have to pay back the victim and pay for court costs. She was recently divorced and took an administrative job with them.

[495] When the AFL and CIO came together, they needed to train organizers. A three-day training session is held in Washington, DC and a two-week internship, where apprentices work with trained organizers - then their names are placed on a list to be sent around the country.

[528] The old-fashioned organizer came from within a plant - now many are recruited from college campuses. Dan was originally from Western NC. A Baptist minister living in Chicago, he is working on a labor history project. His parents, who live here, were involved in labor movements in the past. He comes here to visit them, has talked at the church and worked with her during the summer. They were interested in interviewing old union members. [Dan McCurry]

[567] In the late 1800's Labor Councils or Labor Bodies were organized by districts. North Carolina had one of the oldest and largest in the country with Stepp and John Jervis (see file). [Ray Stepp, John E. Jervis]

[597] She and Dan interviewed and video taped a number of old-time union members. Labor history is not valued and early activities have not been recorded. Dan is trying to remedy this. She is secretary for the central committee and gets out the newsletter (see enclosure). [Dan McCurry]

Side 2:

She was a member of AFSCME [American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees] in New York City (New York is a closed shop state) for a city hospital. She had two jobs - a Steward (the voice of the union in her area) and Grievances (she presented problems to the management).

[2/20] Years ago she worked in the private sector which is different from municipal employees and follows different laws. The laws in North Carolina differ from other states. When Hoffa of the Teamster's Union went to Charlotte, NC, the people were upset and passed a law whereby public employees were forbidden to organize. The local union of firemen and police folded in Asheville. This was challenged and 10 years later the law was overturned. Now they can organize but not negotiate a contract. This has led to a lot of confusion (see enclosure).

[2/45] In New York State contracts are spelled out regarding wages, hours and conditions. This gets tricky as there are differences in municipalities and, since this concerns budgets, the City Councils must be persuaded.

[2/60] I asked what the term "yellow dog" means - she didn't know. [Webster: "Antagonistic to labor unions"] (See enclosures.)

[2/64] She and Dan interviewed people from the large industries - Enka (now BASF) and Champion. They were unable to find any retired Pulman porters. [Dan McCurry]

[2/72] Organizing has always been a man's job because one can be sent anywhere for weeks and even months at a time, working all day and living in a motel.

[2/93] There is a real reluctance for organizers to come South. The groups are small and the violence in Marion and Gastonia, where thousands of textile workers from several mills went on strike, has not been forgotten. Some of the [Gastonia] strikers were killed in 1929 by the sheriff, and employers play on these fears (see enclosure by Sinclair Lewis).

[2/157] She feels that with time and effort more groups can be organized. Committed organizers make it their life.

[2/173] She is working in the public sector where an election is not required because there is no contract allowed. In the private sector the work is different. Supervisors threaten the workers and say they will be fired, "union busters" and "goons" can be called in. [Webster: person hired by racketeers etc. to terrorize workers]

[2/195] Organizers don't like an "open shop" because a few people have to work for all to improve their lot.

[2/200] The Central Labor Body has a strong president in Larry Sorrells (see enclosure) who is a postal worker. She is recording secretary. [Larry Sorrells]

[2/209] The air controllers strike had a dampening effect on unions. Labor laws were weak and the bill in Congress giving more power was not passed. Reagan said the employees did not have the right to strike - they did and he replaced them. City and state employees are denied the right to strike in certain areas. Municipal employees want to have the right to sign contracts. Owners of business and employers in municipalities are favored over the workers. [Ronald Reagan]

[2/244] Enka and Champion are the largest employers in this area with 1,500 to 1,600 each. They were organized in the 1920's and there were strikes in the '60's. In one vote to strike the decision was lost by 204 votes (or 224 votes, she doesn't remember which), and management had that number painted on a train car so the workers would be reminded of the defeat. [Reuben B. Robertson]

[2/270] Small companies could be destroyed by a long strike, but with companies that are multi-national in scope this is unlikely.

[2/291] We discuss a TV program of last night which, following the Republican sweep, suggested that the retirement age be moved from 62 and 65 to 70. This means a person would work all his life and die with no retirement time.

[2/319] She is concerned with the total picture - wages, benefits, pensions (especially portable pensions) vacation time and sick leave.

[2/320] The rich are getting richer and the poor getting poorer. The proposal to have a tax cut for the middle class with earnings under \$100,000 a year will hardly touch the problems she sees. The people she talks to earn \$25,000 a year or \$30,000 with overtime.

[2/344] It is impossible to live on minimum wages. At \$7-\$9 an hour (\$20,000 a year), both parents have to work.

[2/371] Some groups are working with migrant farmers (see enclosure). She hopes to see "Black Workers for Justice" develop. The group, based in Raleigh, pushed to have an organizer come down here.

[2/380] Racism has always plagued the unions. At one time Blacks weren't allowed in unions, then they were segregated. In our city the locals are integrated and working well.

[2/400] Some migrant workers or farm workers are independently organized in this state.

She had to leave early.