

An Interview with
Sister Barbara Jennings

at *The Historical Society of Missouri* St. Louis
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interviewed by Maureen Zegel
transcribed by Valerie Leri and edited by
Josephine Sporleder



Oral History Program

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PREFACE

The interview was taped on a placed on a tripod. There are periodic background sounds but the recording is of generally high quality.

The following transcript represents a rendering of the oral history interview. Stylistic alterations have been made as part of a general transcription policy. The interviewee offered clarifications and suggestions, which the following transcript reflects. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Physical gestures, certain vocal inflections such as imitation, and/or pauses are designated by a combination of italics and brackets []. Any use of parentheses () indicates a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation, or laughter. Quotation marks [""] identify speech depicting dialogue, speech patterns, or the initial use of nicknames. Em dashes [—] are used as a stylistic method to show a meaningful pause or an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech or when indicating a court case title. Particularly animated speech is identified with **bold** lettering. Underlining [] indicates a proper title of a publication. The use of underlining and double question marks in parentheses [(??)] denotes unintelligible phrases. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Josephine Sporleder.

Bronwen Zwirner: My name is Bronwen Zwirner.

Maureen Zegel: And you grew up where?

Bronwen Zwirner: I grew up in Windsor, Connecticut which is a small town just north of Hartford so it's central...north, near Massachusetts.

Maureen Zegel: What was your family like?

Bronwen Zwirner: Two older sisters who are six and eight years older than me so, once they got to college, I was still in grammar school or junior high and so I was essentially an only child for those years, when my sisters were in and out but I was there all the time. I was actually born in Rochester, New York which is where my mother's family was all from, but we moved to Connecticut when I was still an infant. It's a small town, 5,000 people but right next to Hartford so a bedroom community for Hartford and the insurance industry especially but it is still, to some degree, a farming community and they grew shade grown tobacco which, I don't think people know that the Connecticut River Valley has a big shade grown tobacco industry that is the outer wrapping of cigars. That's what they use those leaves for. To skip ahead, that was one of the unique things about living in that area, is that you got, at age 14, to go work on tobacco in the summer and for reasons, I'm not sure I remember why, my parents didn't let my sisters work on tobacco when they were 14 but I got to do it. So that was one of those cool things to do.

Maureen Zegel: What did you do, pick it?

Bronwen Zwirner: The kids worked out in the fields at the very beginning of the summer. The plants were really low and you had to tie the plant and then reach up and tie the string to a wire so the plant could grow up the string and then the rest of the summer, the kids would work in the sheds attaching the leaves to laths to hang to dry then because the leaves had to dry for months at a time. So it was a great thing to do, getting really dirty and as I said, we're skipping my real young youth but at age 14, I was sneaking cigarettes behind the shed and doing things like that.

Maureen Zegel: So talk a little bit about your early life.

Bronwen Zwirner: As I said, I was the littlest, I was the little girl and I had two older sisters in Windsor and I went to a little kindergarten right across the street from

my house that I remember really well. Then the John Fitch Elementary School, which doesn't exist anymore, was where I went for elementary school. It was a pretty wonderful, easy life. My family wasn't wealthy by any means, but we sure had plenty, lived in a kind of neighborhood where there were a lot of kids and we just went out and were gone all day and there were some woods and a hill and a railroad track and that kind of thing. So it was a pretty idyllic...I was born in 1950 so it was the '50s.

Maureen Zegel: What was the boy/girl ratio and how did you play?

Bronwen Zwirner: It's interesting, there were more boys than girls but I was the one who, I could throw a ball over my house and none of the boys could. There were a couple of girls. My best friend, Melissa, was exactly my age and lived a few houses over but she was never interested in throwing balls or running. So I was the tomboy girl in the crowd of boys when we were pretty little. It's still a pretty nice neighborhood. I've been back to visit a bit and looked around.

Maureen Zegel: Junior high school?

Bronwen Zwirner: Junior high, Windsor High School. In those years, junior high was part of the high school and that was just a couple blocks from where I lived. I'm not sure I remember much about junior high school, that adolescent time of my life. One of the clear memories is, I was in junior high when Kennedy was assassinated and I remember the news sort of rushing down the halls of school. It was sort of almost a physical thing, coming down the hall. I remember that and being 7th and 8th graders in the high school, you're surrounded by the older kids that you could be in awe of or whatever. Then I ended up going to the local...there's a girls private high school in Windsor that has now become a boarding school but then it was just a day school and I did not go to Windsor High School. I went to Chaffee and left the high school kids and went to this private girls school.

Maureen Zegel: And what was that like?

Bronwen Zwirner: I got a wonderful education. It's a wonderful school. I was talking just recently with some friends on Facebook where you can hook up with all your old friends, about how proud we are that we went to a pretty privileged, la-dee-da high school, prep school where they made us do chores every day. Every day of that week you had to sweep a floor or

wash a blackboard or serve lunch or wash the dishes after lunch. So it's a mixed bag. I think I got a wonderful education. I think that it was...what's the word I'm looking for...exclusive enough so that because I wasn't a top student, they spent more time praising the top students than helping the students who had made it into the school but weren't getting straight A's or being brilliant or something like that. So I have some residual resentment about the school too but high school, I think everybody has some residual resentment about their years in high school.

Maureen Zegel: How about teachers?

Bronwen Zwirner: Some wonderful teachers, both in grammar school and junior high, as I say, I swear to God, I wiped it out of my memory but high school, there were some wonderful teachers. We got some wonderful education and there were a couple of teachers who I particularly loved.

Maureen Zegel: What did they teach?

Bronwen Zwirner: Mrs. Fuller, who was an English teacher and I was always an English and history kind of person as opposed to the sciences and math and she was particularly...I don't even remember what I learned from her but I remember loving her and talking to her. I think she might have been my guidance counselor for a couple of years. So she was just a supportive influence, supportive presence in my life. I was actually thinking about teachers and things. There were two very elderly teachers who lived down the street from me when I was in grammar school and they were so wonderful. I had one of them, Mrs. Prentiss, as maybe 4th grade teacher and her sister, Miss. Tryon was, and they lived together. You could go knock on their door on a Saturday afternoon and they'd let you come in and they'd give you tea and talk to you. I remember a friend of mine and I did that a couple of times as little girls. Isn't that wonderful, that they would let these little girls come and sit and talk to them and have tea, right...and cookies, but that was very sweet that they did that.

Maureen Zegel: When you were in grade school, junior high school, high school, did you ever hold a leadership position? Were you involved in organizations in school?

Bronwen Zwirner: I was definitely involved in stuff. I think maybe in grammar school I was in the student council. I remember wearing a badge on my arm to help people cross the street or something like that, the little ones. I remember

being part of groups and Girl Scouts and Brownies and things like that. I'm not sure that I would ever say I was in a leadership role. I was in plays and having speaking lines. The first leadership role I had was I was picked in kindergarten to be Mother Goose in the Mother Goose play, so I got to sit in front and have the most lines. I was never a class officer or something like that but I was always involved in groups. In high school, I was definitely involved in social change organizations in the community, support groups where we went and did things with the neighborhood and in the neighborhoods and stuff.

Maureen Zegel: And you were in high school, like, '64 to...

Bronwen Zwirner: '64 to '68, exactly, right, I graduated.

Maureen Zegel: Pretty wild times.

Bronwen Zwirner: Pretty wild times. I didn't sort of catch onto the wildness until, like, a week after I got to college and then I got it. Yeah, there was always sort of a social conscience there in my school and somewhere in me while I was also getting in trouble for sneaking out or smoking or drinking or whatever.

Maureen Zegel: Before we leave your high school years, who supported you, who nurtured you? Your parents? Your sisters? Your sisters were off to college, you said, when you were...

Bronwen Zwirner: Yeah, they were both gone by the time I went to junior high.

Maureen Zegel: Did they encourage you to go to college?

Bronwen Zwirner: You know, it's funny because I didn't grow up in a household that was what you would call traditionally nurturing. There was a lot of criticism or whatever and my mother was somebody who hated anything cuddly but there was never a question in all my life that my sisters and I would go to college and go be professional something or other and there was always a lot of reading and talking and encouraging. In that way, both my parents were...we had lots of political arguments with them but there was never a question that we would end up, all three of us...and we did, all three of us, with careers. So I honestly don't remember individual encouragement but it was always there.

Maureen Zegel: College, where did you go to college?

Bronwen Zwirner: I went to Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, which is how I happen to be in St. Louis, Missouri now, although I left for many years. I was the first person to ever even have heard of Washington University from this little prep school in Windsor, Connecticut. It's a very funny quick story that my oldest sister's roommate in college was from St. Louis. Her parents became friends with my parents so they encouraged me to apply to Wash U and that's how I ended up here. She still takes credit for me being here. Both my sisters went to women's colleges in New England and I went to a women's high school in New England and I was bound and determined I was never going to go to another women's school. I was going to a university in some city and get away from this New England...although I miss New England a lot; I love New England. So that's how I ended up here and I did get politically active immediately upon arriving in 1968. It was not hard to do.

Maureen Zegel: And what did you do?

Bronwen Zwirner: Be clear that I did start doing some of the bad things, getting involved in learning how to smoke marijuana or things like that, got involved in the women's movement right away, not really thinking that I would do anything like a sorority when I first arrived there at Wash U. The first women I met were clearly not interested in sorority and the first things people did were trying to figure out what sorority they were going to pledge in. I figured out immediately that I was not going to be doing that at all. So, getting involved in that and the anti-war movement and learning a lot from some of the older students and getting very politically active in what was going on on campus.

Maureen Zegel: You were involved in protests?

Bronwen Zwirner: I was involved in protests from the very beginning and the first time there was a sit-in at the main hall, Brookings Hall at Washington University was the first semester of my freshman year and I didn't do that and I don't remember why I wasn't there but I remember I was on the outside supporting and my parents calling because it hit national news, saying, "Where are you and what are you doing?" in a pretty supportive way. I decided pretty early to major in urban studies which, at Wash U, was a lot of political science and history, which were all some of the more political professors. So I got immersed in the anti-war and women's movement pretty quickly.

- Maureen Zegel: Civil rights?
- Bronwen Zwirner: Civil rights, I didn't so much. It wasn't as much on my radar.
- Maureen Zegel: Right...
- Bronwen Zwirner: Yeah, right. I certainly was aware of it but that was not a topic that I...I understood so much.
- Maureen Zegel: Talk a little bit about your experience at Washington University. You were there...did you go through it in four years?
- Bronwen Zwirner: Yeah, four years, '68 to '72 and stayed another year after that. That was a good education. I liked St. Louis. I remember being so thrilled to...actually, I'm going to digress for a minute and say that one of the things that was true about my upbringing as a kid was that my parents absolutely said...we all understood we were going to have careers. We weren't going to be (not?) working after college. They also were very clear that we were independent beings from the very beginning. So at age, I think 12, was the first time I was allowed to go to New York City by myself on the train. It's, like, a two-hour train ride, with a friend. I always had to take a friend but that's pretty amazing and I can't imagine, in this day and age, any parent letting their 12 or 13-year-old go off to New York City. But we did and I was always craving the urban life and the excitement of the city. So when I came to St. Louis, not New York City by any means, especially back then, but I remember just loving getting on a bus and going downtown, just discovering and being independent, discovering the city and finding nooks and crannies and being independent. So that's one memory I have from the beginning, exploring the park and that kind of thing, but getting downtown. I think in some ways, college is sort of like junior high. I have so many gaps in my memory of what I did. I had a wonderful series of courses, doing a lot of really interesting stuff, focused on urban planning and urban studies and doing a little bit of science and that kind of thing, and the math stuff that you had to do. I got very much into dance. All my athletic stuff was modern dance, which I always loved. I did that in high school too. That was my leadership role in high school, was, I started a modern dance club.
- Maureen Zegel: So, Washington University then prepared you for your career? Your career has sort of stayed...

Bronwen Zwirner: No, my career didn't actually stay. I sort of took an odd left turn because during the whole time, especially the last couple of years of college, I started to get very involved, not only very much involved in women's groups and women's protests, the women's movement and certainly stayed very involved in the anti-war movement, but I got sucked into, happily, the Farm Workers' Great Boycott and the labor movement.

Maureen Zegel: Ohhh... and immigration...

Bronwen Zwirner: Right, and somebody just reminded me last night that that was 50 years ago and I had said, "It couldn't possibly be that long ago," but I got very involved in the Great Boycott and supporting the farm workers and doing a lot of picketing of grocery stores and so forth and so it was that piece, because I went from college to the labor movement, not to do urban planning and then, 30 years later, I came back to St. Louis and ended up in urban planning. So it was sort of a big loop but I worked after college, I went to the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America and worked on a national boycott of (Fera?) slacks which are men's pants that were on strike down in the southwest and that led to me having a full-time job for 25 years in the labor movement.

Maureen Zegel: And what kind of things did you do?

Bronwen Zwirner: The Clothing Workers Union, after the first few months, I got offered a job up in Chicago in the Education Department, education and political action and that meant...what unions did and do are have people inside the unions who help train the leadership of the rank and file and so I ended up teaching, which I never thought I would do, but I taught union stewards how to argue grievances and I taught union rank and file leaders how to organize their shops so that people would support the union or understand what the union was about and taught labor history and labor politics to get people involved in issue politics and electoral politics and I did that in Chicago and then New England for 20 years or more.

Maureen Zegel: With various unions?

Bronwen Zwirner: Well, the clothing workers for most of the time. The clothing workers then became the Clothing and Textile Workers Union and as they merged, sadly, these industries are basically gone now. All the men's clothing is overseas.

Maureen Zegel: [Inaudible 23:48].

Bronwen Zwirner: Right, exactly. The clothing workers is the union that represented the people who made men's clothing and the International Ladies Garment Workers were the union that represented people who made women's clothing. It's funny that it was separated. The two unions finally merged several years ago but I always worked for the men's clothing industry.

Maureen Zegel: And were the people who worked in the industry men or were they women?

Bronwen Zwirner: Both, absolutely. Actually, interesting how these issues permeate every part of our lives. The men were the elite. They were the cutters who cut the cloth. That was the most elite part of the job or the tailors who, in stores, would tailor the men's clothes after they were made. The women were the ones in the shops who were stitching the clothes together and they were considered lesser skills. Not by any means was it a lesser skill but it was certainly considered that. I certainly spent some time helping the union and helping the union leaders understand that women should be leaders in the union as well as men.

Maureen Zegel: Were you successful?

Bronwen Zwirner: That union was probably one of the most progressive back in those days and moved forward pretty quickly. There was a lot of good, strong leadership. By the time I was there, there were a lot of women who were involved but by the time I left, it was clear that the culture of the union had improved some. In those days, it was pretty exciting to be part of the labor movement. There was the Coalition of Labor Union Women which was a national organization that got started in order to support and work toward getting more women leaders in the labor movement and a lot of the male leadership in the AFLCIO and some of the more conservative unions didn't like it at all and I was very much involved in the beginning of that.

Maureen Zegel: Can you talk about that?

Bronwen Zwirner: I was at the founding convention but one of the women, Joyce Miller who was a leader in the Clothing Workers Union was very much a leader in starting the Coalition of Labor Union Women and so she encouraged me and other women staff in our union to get involved so we were locally

helping to organize people and helping people learn about CLUW, Coalition of Labor Union Women and to organize unions to send people to the foundation convention which was in Chicago which was where I was living and so I was very involved in helping to organize it and it was a delegate, I think, that got elected to be a delegate from my union to the national steering committee after that first convention. That was a long time ago.

Maureen Zegel: And you said you started in Chicago and you went to New England.

Bronwen Zwirner: Right, yeah, I got actually offered a job to be the director of the Education and Political Action Department in New England which was a wonderful opportunity, to go back to my original stomping grounds, although I loved Chicago and Chicago has that lake, that Lake Michigan almost makes up for lack of an ocean. So I went to New Bedford, Massachusetts, was the regional headquarters of the New England regional joint board of the...

Maureen Zegel: Is that on the water?

Bronwen Zwirner: It's right on the water. It's on Buzzard's Bay, southeast Massachusetts, right between Providence, Rhode Island and Cape Cod so it's right on the water, a really interesting working class town, all Portuguese. So that was the regional office and included all of the New England states. So I did a lot of traveling and did the education and political action that I had been doing in Chicago only.

Maureen Zegel: And so that was the '80s?

Bronwen Zwirner: Yeah, that's right, I moved there in 1980, exactly and by the end of the time I worked for that union, which was the early '90s...I can't even keep track. I think I worked for them for about 10 years and, for a variety of reasons, internal politics and things like that, I decided I needed to move on and I did move on, into the labor movement. But by then I was also a business agent which means I was going into shops, a couple of different shops and helping the local leadership, the union rank and file negotiate contracts and deal with day-to-day grievances in the shops. It was interesting because, even though we were the Clothing and Textile Workers Union, two of the places I actually was the business agent, was a parachute factory in Connecticut and Bonwit Tellers in Boston, very chichi, high end women's department store but all the retail, everybody who worked there was part of the Clothing Workers Union, which is very

interesting to go in there. A lot of the women were terrific supporters. Some of them weren't really sure what this was all about, but to go in there and go from department to department and look at these clothes and the perfumes and the accessories and be the union supporter was really fun, really bizarre.

Maureen Zegel: [Inaudible 30:49]. So when you left New England, what did you leave for?

Bronwen Zwirner: St. Louis. I had left the union but I was still in New Bedford for several years after that, a wonderful town. I loved New Bedford and I actually worked for another union and for myself. I worked for the union that represented all the workers at WGBH, the public radio station in Boston and at that point, they were unionized. They had unionized themselves many years earlier creating an independent union and they decided they needed a part-time staff member. So I got hired to be their part-time staff. So going from the Clothing Workers Union where it was a dying, very old-fashioned industry to WGBH with high tech and very highly skilled workers who were doing things like editing Masterpiece Theater and things like that was pretty interesting, especially once I realized that the owners, the bosses, the people who I was negotiating with for the workers were exactly the same at WGBH, the same as the parachute factory or the clothing manufacturers. They didn't want to give people raises and they didn't want to give people any say in their work life and they didn't want to give people the healthcare or vacations and it was the same, just with a different industry. And in those years, I was really involved in labor education work with the universities too. The University of Massachusetts has several labor education departments on different of their campuses and while I was working for the unions, I was on the advisory board of the Labor Education Center in Dartmouth, Massachusetts where there's a university branch and then after I left the Clothing Workers Union and worked part-time for the WGBH union, I became a part-time staff of the Labor Education Center at the university too, so I always kept my finger in in the labor ed stuff. I loved that.

Maureen Zegel: Did you ever teach outside of the unions?

Bronwen Zwirner: No, I never did, just at the university only for union members and helping do the classes and so forth, but no, I never was interested in anything outside of the labor movement.

Maureen Zegel: And then you came to St. Louis?

Bronwen Zwirner: And then I came to St. Louis. I came back to St. Louis because I re-met this guy that I had known, I'd had one date with in 1972 and we had a second date in 1992 and here I am, back in St. Louis because he wasn't going to move to New England. It's funny, it's a first marriage for both of us, when I was in my late 40's and he was in his mid-50's...nice, I like St. Louis. I miss the ocean.

Maureen Zegel: And what have you done in St. Louis since you got here?

Bronwen Zwirner: In St. Louis, I got a job working back in my original career choice which was urban planning, urban studies by becoming the director of a fair housing agency. The Equal Housing Opportunity Council educates people about their rights in terms of housing discrimination and files suits against landlords or realtors or banks that discriminate against people for rental, purchase or mortgages. I was very lucky in that I was looking for a job just when this organization was looking for their first executive director. Some people here in St. Louis had just gotten the money, a grant, to open a private not-for-profit fair housing agency. So I was the first executive director and we were able to mold an organization into something. They're still growing strong, I gather. I left about seven or eight years after I got the job, again, deciding it was time. I was burnt out. It's a very, very wonderful organization, some wonderful people here in St. Louis who had a lot of years of working on these issues that were here to support the founding of the organization.

Maureen Zegel: Any of those cases stick with you?

Bronwen Zwirner: Actually, it's very interesting. We did one very large...one of the things that we did in the agency, and most fair housing agencies do this, is send out testers. If you get a complaint, you send out testers who match the complainant's situation, whether it be race or family situation or a disability and then send somebody as an opposite to see how they both get treated by the person that's been complained about. So we did a, based on some complaints and some activities that we did, we sent out a lot of testers to North County, Ferguson and Florissant. This was in the late '90s. The basis for the testing was to see if black home seekers, people who are seeking to buy a home were steered to particular neighborhoods and we ended up with a lawsuit and a settlement of a

lawsuit so I can't say more about that but the surveys, the testing we did really showed a pattern in an area that's blown up recently of people being steered so that this subdivision is going to be mostly African American and this subdivision is going to be mostly white or their neighborhood and so, it was very interesting that patterns have shown that kind of steering and that kind of involvement by realtors and others in St. Louis for generations, but it was no surprise, I think, to those of us who were involved in that kind of survey, that kind of research, that there's a lot of racial tension in all of St. Louis. So I feel very proud that we did that kind of work. There were a lot of individual families or individual people who came to us and said, "I think I was just denied this apartment" or whatever "because of my race" or "because of my having kids" which is also illegal, or "because of my disability" and I think we helped a lot of people solve their individual problems. I think that we also, to some extent, helped the community understand that these kinds of issues are really important. There were a lot of realtors and banks and landlord-tenant associations or landlord groups who, in fact, invited us to come and teach classes and help people understand the law too. So there's some good people out there as well. It's pretty important.

Maureen Zegel: Let's talk about some of the influences throughout your career. Who influenced you? You've had a lot of work in the labor movement and Cesare Chavez out there.

Bronwen Zwirner: Definitely, right.

Maureen Zegel: Did you ever meet him?

Bronwen Zwirner: I did meet him once in a crowd situation so I can't really say I've ever had any big conversations with him or anything. Delores Werta who was his lieutenant...she was the second in command really of the Farm Workers, I met her a couple of times and she was very inspiring. There were several women, I think mostly women in my life, in the labor movement, this woman named Joan Suarez who was my very first boss. That very first time I worked for the Clothing Workers I was sent down to San Antonio, Texas to work with the strikers of the factories that were part of the national Fera boycott and she was definitely an influence and a woman who pushed me to take it seriously and really learn the labor history and learn how to work with the strikers and how to be a support to the organization. There was then an organization of labor educators that

were sort of a bunch of radical troublemakers throughout the labor movement and I used to go to their meetings all the time. I don't think that it exists anymore. But being in labor education and having some really interesting and important people who were trying really hard to help the unions see their job as helping the workers, not just...with any institutions, there are and were a lot of unions who were just interested in the sort of status quo and not getting politically active beyond the status quo. So the labor educators, as a group, were a big influence in helping me learn how to do what I wanted to do, which was not support the status quo.

Maureen Zegel: Any awards, recognitions?

Bronwen Zwirner: In Massachusetts, I don't think there was anything in Chicago, certainly nothing here. I was this youngster here in St. Louis. Just some recognitions that I'm proud of of my work in labor education and I think there was a proclamation by the state legislature once when I left the Labor Education Center and then here, back in St. Louis, with the Equal Housing Council, there were several times that I got an award from local organizations for doing the work that we were doing in fair housing.

Maureen Zegel: Unions probably are not noted for recognizing...

Bronwen Zwirner: No, no.

Maureen Zegel: And you're not going to get the status quo to recognize that...

Bronwen Zwirner: No, no doubt about that.

Maureen Zegel: [Inaudible 44:40] strike.

Bronwen Zwirner: Right.

Maureen Zegel: Union work was oftentimes violent. Were you ever involved in any kind of violent or were you...

Bronwen Zwirner: No, I can't say that I was. I think over the years I've been at protests and demonstrations around, more recently civil rights demonstrations, Black Lives Matter demonstrations and maybe some women's rights demonstrations. But no, never had to face tear gas. There's certainly been some of the years but I've never had to be involved in that. All my years in the labor movement, there were plenty of times when we were

part of demonstrations, either marches in Washington or picket lines and demonstrations in support of a particular battle that workers were fighting and I would be certainly part of that but never any violence, thank goodness. I'm lucky.

Maureen Zegel: Picket lines its all part of it... this is all very different from what the other women talk about and demonstrations. Talk a little bit about that. What was that like?

Bronwen Zwirner: I guess I've always been drawn to be out there on the streets and make a little noise. Picket lines, of course, workers go out on strike and part of what you have to do is to keep the...picket lines are both to keep the message out in front of the public and the owners of the companies or the bosses of the companies but also to keep people from crossing the picket line to go take the jobs. So it's always important that...every strike I've ever been involved with as in the Clothing Workers or WGBH, you have to...and they're the most boring things in the world in some ways. You just have to organize people to be there, to walk around in circles and most places, the laws are that you have to keep moving. You can't just stand there or sit there and you have to feed the picketers and you have to find a place where they can use the facilities. So there's a lot of practical day-to-day stuff that you have to do as well as keep the spirits up of the people who aren't working so they're not getting paid and in the Clothing Workers especially, a lot of those jobs were very low wage, relatively speaking, more than minimum wage but still low wage. A lot of marching in Washington during those years of the labor movement. We'd take busloads of people to Washington for a variety of...some of those big marches.

Maureen Zegel: In Washington.

Bronwen Zwirner: It Washington, right, and Springfield, Illinois when I was in Chicago and Boston when I was in Massachusetts. There were plenty of times when you had to...I was always a good organizer. I was always standing in front of a bunch of union members waving a hat in the air or something so they could see where they were supposed to be.

Maureen Zegel: I remember one, it was the late '90s, it was the Grocer Workers Union here in St. Louis, the one on strike.

Bronwen Zwirner: Mm-hmm.

Maureen Zegel: I was a big supporter of that.

Bronwen Zwirner: Right, yeah, right.

Maureen Zegel: I got to learn all the little grocery stores in my neighborhood.

Bronwen Zwirner: Yeah, right, you had to go find a way to find food and not cross the picket line, right.

Maureen Zegel: What about 50 years, you taught history. Here you are teaching labor history so you know probably better than most people who are asked that question, what's the life going to be like...what would it have been like 50 years before you were born. Had you been born in 1900, what would life be like?

Bronwen Zwirner: It's a fascinating question. It really is hard to believe. My grandmother was born in 1890 and she always told me that we were lucky that our birthdays were the 0 years because we'd always remember how old we are based on the year that we were...and I remember talking to her and, as you said, I do know a bit of labor history anyway. The family that I grew up in, in my life, wasn't wealthy but we weren't really poor so I'm not sure I would have been working but can you imagine the lack of technology and just how hard life must have been for people no matter what, all the things you had to do to just keep life together day-to-day. My grandmother was a widow at age 29, I think, with four children and she always worked so I can also think about her and think about what it was like. She was a bank teller and a single working mother all her life after her husband died of the influenza epidemic in 1919. So based on those things, I can picture my life being similar to hers. I certainly can imagine that I would have been married and had children as opposed to being off on my own. I hope that, since ingrained in me is this desire to go out and demonstrate and picket and that I would have been doing that. I would have hoped that if I had been born in 1900, I would have been 20 in 1920 that I would have been part of the suffragette movement. It is amazing to think about the changes that have happened in the world, in general, but for women in particular in the last 100 years. So, yeah, it's an interesting question.

Maureen Zegel: And not nearly as much as you think.

Bronwen Zwirner: Right. Things have changed and have not changed, that there's still a lot of change that needs to happen, absolutely.

Maureen Zegel: Italy and France didn't pass women's right to vote until the 1940's. Switzerland was, like, the 1970's.

Bronwen Zwirner: Which is just unbelievable, right, and then you think about Middle Eastern countries and it's just a whole different world.

Maureen Zegel: Do you think there's anything we missed?

Bronwen Zwirner: Oh, my goodness, my life...I don't know. It's interesting to sit here and talk about my life because a lot of things that I haven't thought about in a long time have been popping up.

Maureen Zegel: On our way here, you talked about growing up on the water.

Bronwen Zwirner: Oh, yeah, that's true, right. That's a whole part of my childhood that we haven't really talked about. My parents bought a sailboat when I was 12 years old, a 32-foot catch and that meant it was big enough for all five of us to go sailing for weekends and sleep on board. We never had any vacations because vacation was sailing and I always loved the ocean. I always loved being out on the water. I think the whole family always loved it, when we got far enough out into the ocean so you couldn't see land. I think that, again, the family culture was that my sisters and I would have careers and we would be independent adults who would take care of themselves. The sailing that we were expected to know how to sail and when we were old enough, we were allowed to take the sailboat out by ourselves, which is a huge amount of money that my father and mother trusted us not to ruin, not to sink or something. So I think that that's another undercurrent of always understanding that I was an independent woman who was going to have responsibility for my life.

Maureen Zegel: There are young people today who would have a hard time thinking about being out in the middle of the ocean without any technology. What did you do when you were out there?

Bronwen Zwirner: Sleep, when somebody else was at the helm of the boat; sing, we sang a lot and talk and read and look at the birds and the ocean. I love that, I still do love that sense of being completely out of touch. It's a good feeling, the memory of being out there in the middle of nowhere. Of course, I

didn't know I was missing out on YouTube or Facebook or texting or whatever but I didn't want it.

Maureen Zegel: We just have a few minutes. Do you think there's anything more you'd like to say?

Bronwen Zwirner: I've enjoyed it immensely, talking about myself. I can think of a lot more things to talk about in terms of details about being a woman in the labor movement, being a woman in fair housing agencies but, no, I can't think of anything to add. We've covered it all as much as we could. I've enjoyed it though.

Maureen Zegel: Yeah, great.

Bronwen Zwirner: Good.