

Interview with Marilyn Robbert, Marquette MI September 22, 1998

RM: Marilyn you are presently you are, what is your capacity?

MR: I'm the registrar of the university.

RM: Could you give us a little of your background in terms of how you originally came to Northern and just in a very short paragraph type statement.

MR: I first came to Northern in 1961 in the fall, as a freshmen and I graduated from Northern in 1965 with a major in History and a minor in English and Economics and certification in secondary education. I left and got my masters degree in two years later came back and taught for three years, one in the common learning program and two in the history department and at that point I went on to begin work on a ph d program and ended up coming back to the University in the administrative capacity in 1976 and I was working at that time in continuing education under Art Nizer primarily in the bureau of school services.

RM: Ok then when were you appointed registrar

MR: You would have to ask that question, actually I did it for a year as a antrum and then became registrar so its probably around '94 that I

RM: Ok now in your in the years that you were working in the continuing ed you became involved in the union could you talk a little about that How you became involved and some of the problems set the people to unionize.

MR: How we got involved in how I got involved in the union was primarily a result of a number of layoffs that I'm sure were caused by budget cuts however they were very unexpected on the part of the e the employees and also very traumatic because nobody had absolutely no idea that they were coming and most of the cuts that came at that time were in the continuing education area. It just so happened that people were called in to the office in the morning and told that their positions were being eliminated or that their positions were being drastically cut and in the afternoon we had a meeting of the administrative association which we called APSA and the president of the association was giving a talk saying about how wonderful everything was going to be for the new academic year this was like the opening meeting at the beginning of the school year.

RM: Oh so this you got the people got the information that they were being eliminated and then at the same time president Jamerich.

MR: This was not the complication with president Jamerich this was a separate meeting. Of just the administrative staff on campus which at that time was pretty much everybody that was not union or not a faculty member. So it was a pretty large group.

RM: And this was with the president of

MR: President of the association and Dr. Jamarich was the president at the time we had already had the opening convocation at the beginning of the school year shortly there after.

RM: What year was this?

MR: Either late '79 or early '80 somewhere in there.

RM: you are 2178 because that started in June of 1981.

MR: so it was probably late '79 early '80 it took a time. I'm not sure the date in the encyclopedia is the date when we got the first contract or if it was the date that the election was held. But that can be checked out. So after the business of the meeting was over and the president of the association had finished speaking a number of people got up and said well i would like to tell you what happened to me today. And they started relating the conversations that they had had either with their supervisors or with president Jamarich regarding the fact that their positions were being eliminated. And a number of people in the room stood up and most of them were from continuing education. And then a person who stood up first who had been the first person to stand up his position had been cut to half time. He then stood up again at the end after everybody was relating what had happened and he said let me tell you what else happened today. He said I was called in with? he said along with my secretary who's position was also being cut to half time because my position is being cut to half time and the provost looked at her and said well MRS. your a member of UAB 1950 were holding a job for you a full time job for you in the department of Don't worry you wont loose a days pay. It caused kind of a ripple through the meeting and shortly there after a committee that I was not involved in was organized the UAB was contacted and the first step is to pass out cards to see if people are interested in forming a union. Normally that takes several months it took several weeks before we got enough cards to actually call the union back. It was a pretty tense time because people were loosing their jobs and people were upset about that and also the thing with unionizing going on I signed my union card in fourth floor women's room which was one of the few places you could be and know who else was with you. And a lot of other people did the same thing. After that members from the UAW came and we had a number of discussions about forming a union. We had a great deal of controversy over who will be in that union. And that's normal. Obviously the administration wants to keep the numbers as small as possible and the union wants to have the number as large as possible. So there was a great deal of discussion over who will be on what list. Eventually decision was made that there was various levels of supervision and it seemed like one certain type of supervision which was the lowest form of supervision that was more likely that that group of people would vote for higher level and the higher level both groups were apart so they proceeded independently. At the same time people who became part of the NMU

FA also were in this group and they broke off started doing and organizing on their own with MEA and most of those folks were teaching so they thought they had a community of interest that was different. Eventually election was held vote for the union started contract of associations which took a very very long time. I was not involved in the contract of association but I was elected the officer of the contract of association and held the position as an officer until I became member of senior administration. I was involved in every contract after the first as part of the negotiating team.

RM: Were there any attempts to , did the administration take any I mean ...

MR: We got letters. Yes we did get letters and they were from generally signed by not the head personnel but somebody else in the office of the personnel, second command or something of personnel. But we did get a number of letters, there were also flyers things that the administration put out. Many supervisors talked to us about forming a union, people were very careful not to talk about union or union activities on company time, talk about it on breaks but you would do it on company time. Some supervisors made sure that did not do on company time. Others may looked the other way. But it was actually kind of an intense time until after the vote was in the favor of the union and then they got the first contract and once we got the first contract we sat down with each other and when you are doing negotiations or dealing with grievances pretty much the spirit has to be lived with and people try to live with it.

RM: Was that sort of the i talked to ? the first contract was the most difficult because nobody needed the union more the administration in general knew but there were no previous contracts that you could work from.

MR: That was a part of the problem although UAW does provide somebody to sit with you so you did not sit down totally alone. The other middle managers that were unionized from other colleges, union presented their what they had and kind of tried to work it into what might fit in here. But the administration had had no experience in dealing with people who were not faculty at the time. But it was difficult and it took a long time and everything as I understood done by writing. It wasn't a situation where you sat down with each other and tried to hash everything out. It was more of a okay this is our proposal see you in a week. The people who were helping the union were coming up from Detroit. If you met for an hour you met for an hour. It took an awful long time to get the first contract.

RM: It sounds like they were almost creating the written contract as it went along.

MR: Succeeding ones were easier because you had a base document there and you were working on changing a particular section of this

document.

RM: Ok why don't we end there and that's kind of