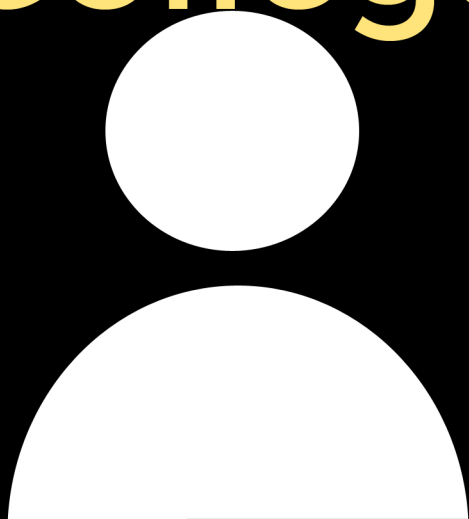


**Nevada State
College**



**Undergraduate Oral
History Project**

Oral History of Robert Nard

An Interview

Conducted by

Jessica Vigil

May 9, 2014

Nevada State College Undergraduate Oral History Project

Produced by:

Nevada State College Undergraduate Oral History Project
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The transcript received minimal editing to preserve the conversational style and content of the narrator.

This interview is from the series *Bridging the Past: Henderson through Oral History*.

Oral History of Robert Nard (Bob)

An Interview Conducted by Jessica Vigil on May 9, 2014

Biography

Bob was born in Youngstown, Ohio to a working class family. He described his father as working for the railroad and belonging to “Brotherhood of Rail workers” union. He graduated from high school and obtained an Associate’s Degree. He worked in labor jobs at a young age but left to serve in the Marines from 1966-1969. His tour of duty was in Asia and Vietnam. Upon returning from the Marines, began working for various companies, including General Motors. He served in various political positions within the union.

He worked in many different places including, nuclear power plants along the east coast, the Nevada atomic bomb test site, in Tonopah on the test site, and in Southern California. He has great pride in his union membership and has always stood up for the working class, blue collar individuals.

Robert Nard

Narrator: Robert Nard (Bob)

Interviewer: Jessica Vigil

Interview Date: May 9, 2014

Location: Henderson, Nevada

Jessica Vigil: So, my name is Jessica Vigil. I'm here with Robert Nard and it is May 9th, 2014. We're in Robert Nard's home in Las Vegas, Nevada and this is an oral history project for Nevada State College Undergraduate Oral History and it's going to be deposited at the Nevada State College Library.

Okay, so do you want me to go by Rob? I mean, Bob or Robert?

Robert Nard: It doesn't matter.

Jessica Vigil: So, Bob, tell me a little bit about yourself. Where you were born and raised and what your parents did for a living?

Robert Nard: Born in Youngstown, Ohio. My father was a railroader and he was a member of the Brotherhood of Railworkers Union. My mother was a housewife and then later on she started working at Frandy Corporation, she was a supervisor for---it was a toy company. Kind of funny, my father was union, she was non-union, but that's because she was a supervisor. And I had some various jobs, like serving gas stations and stuff and construction when I was in high school.

Jessica Vigil: Which high school did you go to?

Robert Nard: Woodrow Wilson High School in Youngstown, Ohio. Graduated in 1966 and before I even graduated I was signed up for the Marine Corps that was during the Vietnam Era.

Jessica Vigil: Did you end up serving?

Robert Nard: I did.

Jessica Vigil: And what was that like?

Robert Nard: I served from '66 to '69. And I did my tour of duty in Southeast Asia, Vietnam [pause] with the Marine Corps. I don't know if I mentioned that or not.

Jessica Vigil: You did. So you had said that your dad was a railroad worker and he was part of the union. What was the name of that union?

Robert Nard: Brotherhood of Railworkers.

Jessica Vigil: Brotherhood of Railworkers. And tell me a little bit about them.

Robert Nard: I don't know that much about them. He tried to get me on a railroad when I come back from Vietnam and got out. But I was colorblind, so you got to have perfect color vision to work on a railroad so I just went and did other various jobs.

I worked at Steel Door which was a---like a fabrication shop. I worked at McKay Machine as an apprentice machinist and I was an apprentice millwright at US Steel. And then I was driving tractor trailers as a steel hauler for Stoneys Trucking and Ohio Fast Freight. Well, actually Stoney's Trucking first and then I went to work at General Motors and when I was at General Motors, a friend and I decided, well let's run for a union office because they had---each district had committee men.

So we both ran for committee men and became committee men, which is like a steward. And General Motors this is Lordstown and it's pretty big and it was very pro-union, the whole place up there and that's what got---where I probably started all my union politics, right there at General Motors. Then I left there and went to Ohio Fast Freight hauling steel again. And during that time, I applied for the Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Union as an apprentice to get in there.

Truck driving is okay, but over the road, I had a lot of rage in me, wasn't good to be driving a big 100,000 pound rig. So I finally got into the apprenticeship and soon as I got out of the apprenticeship, that was a Plumbers and Steam Fitters; Youngstown, Ohio Local 87, now they're Local 396, they've merged in with Warren, Ohio. But they're still located in Youngstown.

Jessica Vigil: So they were 87 and now they're 1--

Robert Nard: 396.

Jessica Vigil: 396.

Robert Nard: Yes.

Jessica Vigil: Can to go back a bit? You said that you worked at GM. About what year was that?

Robert Nard

- Robert Nard: It was during in Vegas so---let me see, '70 [pause] '73, '74 maybe somewhere in there. Yeah, because '75 was when I was accepted into the apprenticeship of the Local 87.
- Jessica Vigil: What was it like working for GM? What exactly did you do there?
- Robert Nard: I was a---I was an assembly men like most of the people there and it was a very boring job. The average age was probably about eighteen to twenty working there and it just got boring. They had a big turnover. I ran for office because I was concerned about conditions of the people and myself.
- Jessica Vigil: When you say concerned about conditions; what type of conditions do you mean?
- Robert Nard: Working conditions.
- Jessica Vigil: What exactly were the working conditions like?
- Robert Nard: Lots of overtime. It was long day.
- Jessica Vigil: Did you---you didn't get paid for it?
- Robert Nard: Oh, yeah, we got paid the overtime but just wanted to make sure that we had good conditions which we ended up---well that labor agreement they had at Lordstown was so good that I think they kind of hid it from the other GM people because it was a very, very strong, organized labor in Youngstown, Ohio and Lordstown. It was all people from Youngstown or Warren and that's a real strong labor district.
- Jessica Vigil: So, whenever you ran for community men, what exactly is---you said community men, correctly---is that correct?
- Robert Nard: Yeah, a community man.
- Jessica Vigil: What exactly is that?
- Robert Nard: It's like a shop steward. You have your notebook and all your bylaws and all your union rules and everything to go by and you just--- your grievances, there's grievances on a daily basis and then you file grievances for members. You watch them and make sure that somebody's not overworked or anything like that and you please your Cherm---I was in Cherm district. I had the whole Cherm district as a committee man.

First I was an assistant committee man and then the committee man was missing a lot of time so I kind of took over that committee man, [pause] which is just not working with the tools, it's just---I was an absentee relief man. But the committee man doesn't work with tools; he just shows up with his briefcase and hangs out at the labor center. Not that I was a briefcase carrying type person.

Jessica Vigil: And I see that you said that you said that you went to Woodrow Wilson High School; do you have any other education after that?

Robert Nard: Oh yeah, I went to Youngstown State and took Labor Studies.

Jessica Vigil: How far did you get in school?

Robert Nard: I have an associate's degree. Well I have two associate degrees; one in Science and one in Labor Studies.

Jessica Vigil: And when did you move to Las Vegas?

Robert Nard: Moved to Las Vegas [pause], oh let me see, wait a minute. Back to Youngstown State University, I was going to night school there because I was working construction at the time. Yeah, it was after I worked at GM. I was driving tractor trailer and I was in a trade at the same time doing my apprenticeship and going to school. When did I---what was your question again? I'm sorry.

Jessica Vigil: When did you move to Las Vegas?

Robert Nard: I moved to Las Vegas after I turned down my apprenticeship when my apprenticeship was through in Youngstown, I was working on the road a lot like down at the power plants around West Virginia, Pennsylvania, all around Ohio and down at the river at the nuclear power plants and stuff.

Well, anyway, I finally got my journey men's card and then I hit the road. I was working on the road somewhat with a travel card even while I was an apprentice but I came out West, I was ---my wife and I moved---went out to---we had some friends in Southern California, so we stopped out to visit them in Southern California and on the way out there I took out---I was working at the nuclear power plant, Shippingport, in Shippingport, Pennsylvania there. And I took a little leave of absence. I told them I would be gone for a while, taking a vacation.

Robert Nard

So, we left and I picked up a trailer cart for my home and dropped it down in Southern California. Traveler card in the Plumbers and Pipe fitters you can't work in another person jurisdiction unless you have an approval with a travel card. So I turned in my travel card and went to work at the Anheuser-Busch Brewery down there, construction.

Jessica Vigil: And so you said that you were working at power plants. What exactly did you do at those power plants?

Robert Nard: Welder and steam fitter.

Jessica Vigil: And what does that entail?

Robert Nard: Fabrication and ---what the welding or the steam fitting?

Jessica Vigil: Both of them.

Robert Nard: Well, most of its fabrication of pipe for heating, cooling and process piping and it has to be put together. Most of it is all welded pipe and it would be welded hangers, anchored everything, especially for seismic and the nuclear power plants.

Jessica Vigil: What were working conditions like over there?

Robert Nard: Not too bad, they were pretty good, in fact. Except, it was a lot of nuclear, you know, a lot of nuclear stuff, so you had to have your dosimeter checked pretty often.

Jessica Vigil: And what is a dosimeter?

Robert Nard: It reads the amount of radiation your body is accumulating.

Jessica Vigil: Did you ever have any issues with that?

Robert Nard: No, I peaked out a few times, but I'm okay.

Jessica Vigil: When you peak out, what do you mean by that?

Robert Nard: You can't go into containment. You have to stay out and work on a little fab shop out towards---and not go in containment of the reactor or anything because you had too much---too much---it destroys you, you know that radiation.

Jessica Vigil: So was there like a separate entity that checked you or was it the actual company itself that would check you?

Robert Nard: Radsafe.

Jessica Vigil: Gradsafe.

Robert Nard: Radsafe.

Jessica Vigil: Oh, Radsafe.

Robert Nard: Radiation Safety. Those people---I don't know if they were separate entities, I think they just worked for the power plant or maybe for Schneider or somebody like that or Bechtel but anyway they maintained all the radiation safety and made you ---made sure that when you come out of containment that you different [inaudible] pads and you go undress from your coveralls and overalls and hoods and gloves and there was no---and then you went through a frisking station, you would be frisked by like little Geiger counters, sort of speak and if nothing went off, then you were okay; because they didn't want you to bring any of that stuff home to your family.

Jessica Vigil: So this was a daily process.

Robert Nard: Daily, every time you go into containment.

Jessica Vigil: Did it take long?

Robert Nard: Ten to fifteen minutes to un-suit, get back into your civies, you know your clothes again.

Jessica Vigil: So back to Southern California, you said that you had to have a travel card to work in someone else's jurisdiction. Is that something that is specific for the union or how does that work?

Robert Nard: Yes, it is. With the United Association, that's what all plumbers and pipe fitters local unions are under the main international union of United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry. And I put in with Local 760, I think it was Local 760, it's hard for me to remember Local numbers now.

That was down in Burbank, California and I went out as a welder at the Anheuser-Busch plant and I started welding down there on brewery pipe and everything and worked there for ---I was down there for probably a couple months, staying with some friends, it was like a vacation, where I could work on vacation.

So finally they had some kind of an issue down there that they wasn't paying the right travel pay. So they were going to wobble the job. In other words, picket the job. So I said, "I'm not going to picket, I'm just going to go back to Pennsylvania to other things so..." They wanted me to hang around because I was a very top notch welder coming from a nuclear power plant. But I didn't---I just told them to get my money and lay off is pay off.

So they lay me off, so I came back to Pennsylvania and then I went up to my local union because I got tired of that job in Pennsylvania that Nuke, and I had the traveling in my blood. I wanted to come back out West. So a friend of mine was in Las Vegas so I ---he said to come out to Las Vegas and put book---I was going to do it before except they were on strike, a big long strike. Well, their strike was over so I went up to my local union 87 and asked for a travel card to call out to Las Vegas and to see if there was any work and they said yes there was. They were building the MGM, the first MGM, which is Bally's now.

Jessica Vigil: So to clarify, you said that they were on strike. Who was on strike?

Robert Nard: Local 525.

Jessica Vigil: And that was in Pennsylvania?

Robert Nard: No, that's Las Vegas.

Jessica Vigil: Oh, Las Vegas.

Robert Nard: They were on strike so they came off strike and I wasn't going to come out and work when they were on strike that would be [inaudible].

Jessica Vigil: So why were they on strike?

Robert Nard: Contract, expiration of contract.

Jessica Vigil: And this is in regards to the MGM building?

Robert Nard: No, no, it has nothing to do with the MGM. But they were on strike and then they just started rebuilding the MGM because they had that fire. Remember all them people lost their lives? That was the first MGM, which is the old Bally's or it's Bally's now. So that put a lot of people to work. And I come out and I was

Robert Nard

working at Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital as a medical gas installer.

Jessica Vigil: Did you---have you done any work in Henderson?

Robert Nard: Yes. I worked at the Saguaro Power Plant for Abasco and it's on Lake Mead Drive there. It's a little cogen; little power house.

Jessica Vigil: What did you do there?

Robert Nard: I was a welder; [pause] steam fitter welder.

Jessica Vigil: And so what exactly does a steam fitter welder do?

Robert Nard: Fabricates pipe and welds it up, puts it together. I mean, it's a lot more to it, but you know, I did it five year apprenticeship to become a journeyman. I couldn't explain what they do in a couple minutes, but that's about the gist of it that ---the short version is fabrication and welding.

Jessica Vigil: What was---

Robert Nard: But it's high---it's welding on steam lines and stuff like that you know, for ---that's going to make power suds---I mean, if there's a high pressure steam [inaudible] you wouldn't be able to see it, you might hear it, but you come across with a two by four or cut one on half if you walked in front of one of them and high pressure steams coming out of that three inch thick ---three inch wall thickness pipe, cut a man right in half. So you have to make sure that it was very, very good top notch welds and they x-ray everything now and that's why those power houses are going so long without any issues because it's all put together with good union labor.

Jessica Vigil: Do you remember what the area was like whenever you were at the, you said, spell the power plant---the power plant again?

Robert Nard: Saguaro, like the cactus.

Jessica Vigil: Oh, okay, Saguaro. And what was the area like around then?

Robert Nard: Well it was after that PEPCON blast. Do you remember the PEPCON blast?

Jessica Vigil: I do.

Robert Nard

Robert Nard: Okay. It was right after that; they started building that. It was okay. It was close to home because I was living in the South still so that's real close. Five minutes and I was at work.

Jessica Vigil: Were you living in Las Vegas during the PEPCON blast?

Robert Nard: Yes. No, actually---we missed a job in between. I was working at the Nevada Test Site as an underground worker and I was welding around the site pipe, fabricating and welding and that's when they had a you know, the L-O-S fight.

The underground---we have an underground, they would set off a bomb, atomic naturally, but not when there was anybody underground, you would just feel things out from there coming out of pipe and there would be a big test chamber. They would put things in there and then everybody would clear out after a certain time and they would set it off. And then all these fast acting closures and everything would close, but there would be enough radiation to hit the test chambers so they could study things; just to study what radiation and atomic explosions do. Although that's all done now, they don't do that anywhere, due to some kind of nuclear agreement.

So anyway, after the ---I worked at a couple of tunnels underground up at the Nevada Test Site and then I went to Tonopah. I was at Tonopah for about [coughing] excuse me, about five years on a Tonopah Test Range. And that's---they had a big airstrip up there and they had, it was all classified, a lot of classified, top secret stuff that I really shouldn't talk about it. You could probably Google it or something. Tonopah Test Range and maybe get more information that I wouldn't be at liberty to talk about. I was a steward out there for Local 525 and I watched the jurisdiction very well and made sure that, you know, policed our jurisdiction, made sure there was no non union on a job. We wouldn't have that and that all the conditions were right and done properly. That was working for RICO. So I was a steward for almost about five years out there the whole time. The steward is the union rep.

Jessica Vigil: What year was this?

Robert Nard: This would be '90-'91. Not all in '91 because part of '91 I come back I was working at Abasco Power Plant, that's Saguario Power Plant, that's what it was. That's when I come back there, then when I was at power plant at that time, I decided to run for office. I decided that I was going to run for Business Manager of the Plumbers and Pipe Fitters of Local 525, that's the highest office in that local union. And in any local union there is a business manager.

Well, I did some serious campaigning and right down to the nitty gritty of politics, knocking on doors. I knocked on doors and I was running against another guy from Henderson, who was---don't forget I'm not a traveler anymore because I was out here on a travel card. And eventually I cleared my travel card in. So I was now a local hand. But I was still considered a traveler. But there was enough people that supported me that I made that. And I was a Business Manager for two terms of that local union.

Jessica Vigil: How long is each term?

Robert Nard: Three years.

Jessica Vigil: And then you said---do recall who you were campaigning against?

Robert Nard: Yes, but I don't think I should bring that up.

Jessica Vigil: Okay. And then---

Robert Nard: He's still around and we're good friends.

Jessica Vigil: Okay. And you said that you had turned your travel card in or something along those lines.

Robert Nard: I changed the travel card to a transfer card. I transferred into Local 525 that would be somewhere around '85.

Jessica Vigil: So would something like that affect the way that somebody would view---like in the union, is something like having a travel card, is there any---the way they look at it, is there any difference?

Robert Nard: Well all local unions are different. And all international unions are different. But our is---in particular, we really focus on the UA focuses on training. Because all during this time I've been an instructor. I was an instructor the whole time up in Tonopah for apprentices and apprenticeship instructor.

And every year we went back to Purdue and then eventually because of an issue happened back at Purdue, the trustees of---at Purdue University decided to hire a non-union contractor, plumbing contractor, to do some underground work. Well, when they did that, the international got word of it because we go in there; I mean this would be probably a dozen instructors from every local in the United States and Canada. We just load up Purdue, they be a couple million dollars spent in there for the one week just for training and to teach the instructors how to be an instructor. We'll find ---the latest study I think was in the trade and everything.

Well, the international president was so pissed off at Purdue University that he pulled everybody out. This is like two weeks before everybody had already their plane tickets and everything. Well, it didn't matter, we just cancelled the plane tickets and we end up going to Ann Arbor, Michigan and started going to Washtenaw Community College up there. They had the facilities. On the [inaudible] of Michigan University, even on a Buckeye fan it's okay. And so I had three years at Purdue and two years at Ann Arbor. That give me five years when I got my certificate of completion for certified instructor of apprentices and journeymen and the plumbing and pipe fitting industry; so and that is where my heart was at, more so most of the time than instructing.

When I was Business Manager, I took a break from the instructing. So for six years there I was---I did pick up some of it because one of the instructors, he was a real good friend of mine, had a stroke and he couldn't teach anymore so, I went over and taught his first year class. I didn't take any money; I just made sure that he got his checks because he wasn't working. So, it didn't really matter to me anyway. I was down the hall most of time anyway and the school is right next door, the training center.

Well, anyway after---right before I ---this last election, I had---that would have been in '60, no '70, no, wait, wait, wait, wait, '90, '97, '98, '97 or '98, before that, the international wanted us to---business managers of about---there was a bunch of different local unions that they contacted because they wanted start this thing called BTOP, which was Building Trades Organizing Project. That's what BTOP was, it was---well, they wanted us to write a letter supporting why it should be your town they come to.

Well, some of the ones that were looking at was St. Louis, Las Vegas, Orlando, San Diego and might have been one other. I forget what the other one was, but I convinced them that Las Vegas was the----we were growing faster than any other---faster than Orlando. I think Phoenix was the other---another one---that's right, yeah, Phoenix.

We were growing faster than any other city in the United States, let alone the whole world, and with all the workload we had coming up; it's a proven fact and I didn't just sent a letter on this. I made notebooks and I made graphs. I got some assistance from one of them computer geeks on how to do Excel, make pie graphs and showed them; here's jurisdiction and this is what we have and here's what we stand to lose. Because anytime there is a major boom in work what happens is that it---not only the unions, but the union contractors, they just starting building vertical. They let the flat work go.

In other words, like the residential on the [inaudible] they let it go because they all want to start building all these big casinos and power houses. They don't want to that---this little job across the street, you know, they can make more money on them---bigger casinos. So that's when labor tends to lose most of its market share because of the contractors and labors. If the guys don't want to work on the flat work, they want to get on the big high rise.

Well, that just so to speak, the way it is, but that's a proven fact and with all the information that I sent there, they decided over those five or six cities to pick Las Vegas to bring BTOP in. And---and that's Building Trades Organizing Project, they came in and they setup. There was an electrician, Jim Rudisill was in charge. He was the director of the campaign and Bobby Georgene was the president of the building trades at the time. He came in---the building trades [pause] shot a one million dollar project that John Sweeney was with---was the president of the AFLCL and they did about six or seven million.

Well, anyway we had a total of about 10 million dollars and each local---each international union was going to send lead organizers in and that would be, of the building trades, which is just not just plumbers and pipe fitters but boiler makers, carpenters, laborers, electricians, plaster and cement masons, brick layers, elevator constructors, all of the building construction trades locals. They all have lead organizers in here.

Well anyway in the meantime I---during this when they came in, I was running for my job as Business Manager again and the same guy that I run against the very first time, well they had Local 525, as an offer had a big turnover of Business Managers. It was time to give him a break and let him in there. So, he just---just knows me [inaudible] [pause] and I wasn't really all that upset because I kind of wanted to get back with the tools and get back to teaching. So I went back to teaching and then back with the tools I went to work for Quality Mechanical at fab shop.

Jessica Vigil: This might have been around '98 then?

Robert Nard: Yes. Yes it was. Well, anyway---so I'm working at a fab shop and the guy that beat me, he came out with a business agent and he says, "Hey, we want you to go over ---they want you to go over to BTOP as an Assistant Director." I said, "I don't want it." "Why, it's a big organizer campaign, you'll be the Assistant Director of the BTOP, that's the biggest organizing campaign there's ever been especially in the history of Nevada." So, I said, "I don't think I want to do that. I like what I'm doing right now. It's comfortable in the fab shop just welding away and having my lunch." On Fridays, we go down to Cheetah's and have a few beers and then come back up. But during lunch time, you know Cheetah's don't you?

Jessica Vigil: Yes.

Robert Nard: Okay, well. We weren't hanging there all day. Just go there and have a couple of beers. [pause] Well, anyway, I went over and they---the pressure come down---I really---I wouldn't say major pressure, but they asked me to do this. So I went over to---oh the organizer come up, the organizer that I hired, that was Brett McCoy, he's now the Director of Organizing for the International Union. He came a long way. The coordinator that I hired was Phil Campbell, now he's one of the Directors of Training back at the International. They're both back in DC now, around the Maryland area.

Jessica Vigil: You said Phil Cornell?

Robert Nard: Campbell.

Jessica Vigil: Okay, Campbell.

Robert Nard: Brilliant guy. That's why he's one of the directors of training and far as I'm concerned, Brad McCoy should be our next General President, but you never know, union politics---you know politics is a dirty business; union politics is ten times dirtier.

Jessica Vigil: And what do you mean by that?

Robert Nard: It's just politics---just like---[pause] what I mean by that?

Jessica Vigil: Yes.

Robert Nard: It's a dirty business. It's a cut throat business.

Jessica Vigil: Did you ever experience that first hand?

Robert Nard: Sure, you mean like fist fights?

Jessica Vigil: Just, how did you---how did you experience the cut throat business?

Robert Nard: Oh, running for office and all the rumors they start about what this guy did and what he didn't do. Well, you now the way it is, if you're not at your office, when they're looking for you, you're out on the golf course or you're out screwing around. If you're out in the field working, you should be in your office, so you damned if you do and damned if you don't. It's a thankless job, very thankless job.

And a good union rep will make decisions all the time with the---hard part is the ---you know what most people---a lot of people do, the ones that usually stay in office a long time. I never made the decisions that was going to benefit me. I made them what would benefit that local union.

So, what I meant by benefit me is, it may please ninety percent of the body if you went with this decision, but it was the wrong thing to do because you're more educated over certain money matters and everything else that you can't do that if you made that decision. You have to go to decision this way to maintain your market share and to keep your pensions up and health and welfares up. And that's what I did, I made the right decisions. And people still even say to this day, they were the right decisions. That's why we are where we are. But---

Jessica Vigil: Can you give me an example of one of those decisions?

Robert Nard: I could probably give you a hundred of them. A lot of them would have to do with voting on certain pension issues. We always put money in the pension. And another one was to put extra money in the---from including travelers to put extra money ---an extra ten cents an hour worked for anybody working jurisdiction would go into a certain fund with the health and welfare that would go into this special fund and would cover anybody that was out of work because the first thing that happen when somebody is out of work, they run out of bank hours. So that's why the contractors graph went well. They got to start paying COBRA. Well, COBRA at the time was \$1000 a month and nobody could---especially when --- them people not working, how are they going to pay \$1000 a month?

Jessica Vigil: To back up really quick, you said bank hours. What exactly are bank hours?

Robert Nard: Bank hours for your benefits. You have to work so many hours per month to maintain your health and welfare, you know, for your insurance coverage.

Jessica Vigil: I see.

Robert Nard: So if anybody was on a bench or a retiree, they don't work any--- they don't---contribute to that until they could get onto that or COBRA, you know, Medicare or Medicaid, you know, that's a different story. COBRA is way too expensive to go to. So we never had to go ---I never had---I'm not going to COBRA. I don't have to. I've got enough bank hours, after I---when I retired, they carried me for like a year or two and then finally got on Medicare and I just paid a little bit to the local as my secondary. So I'm good. I've got three or four pension coming in because of officers' pensions and Youngstown, Ohio pension and national pension and local pension here. I'm flushed!

Jessica Vigil: What were race relations like in the unions?

Robert Nard: Race?

Jessica Vigil: Yes, race relations.

Robert Nard: No race. No---we're very diversified. Labor is --- are you talking about racial issues?

Jessica Vigil: Yes.

Robert Nard: Okay, that's what I thought. I thought I might have misheard you because I lost some hearing in this ear. They're all brothers. They'll all our brothers. Race, color, sex it don't matter. We took more females than anybody as far as the plumbers and pipe fitters; that's another thing. We had Pacific Islanders; we took---from all over the world, people that came in. We've never discriminated and labor generally doesn't. They look out for everybody.

Jessica Vigil: And did you ever experience any strikes or labor disputes first hand?

Robert Nard: As a matter of fact, when I first got in office I put up picket lines out in Henderson at---I'm trying to think what project that was---it was---geesh I can't, it's been a while back. It wasn't the power house, it was way before that power house was even started, but it was right down in the same vicinity. They brought on a contractor from Washington; it was a non-union contractor so we put up picket lines out there.

Jessica Vigil: And you say, put up picket lines. What do you mean by that?

Robert Nard: Protesting the---they weren't paying them people area standards and wages and it was just bringing in non-union people and working for a union. But when they come in here from out of state, they jungle up three or four to a room, they don't spend any money here. They shoot it right back home. And then they go home. And we don't benefit. As far as organize labor, the local labor force or the community doesn't benefit anything by having an out of state contractor come in and work non-union and not put any of your people to work. So that's why I put out picket lines.

Jessica Vigil: How long do you remember that lasting? Or maybe what the outcome might have been.

Robert Nard: It lasted for---we had picket lines out for about---it was us solely, it wasn't the building [inaudible], just us because some of the other crafts were good on it ---we weren't good on it, but anyway because some of the other crafts were good on it, we couldn't keep the picket lines up too long because we were hurting them too. That's why you got to be careful because they don't honor our picket line, you know? So we had several weeks up there and I think we got some resolved out of it, but everything passed that, everything since there has all been union; up and down that corridor.

Robert Nard

Jessica Vigil: Going back to the PEPCON blast. What do you remember from that?

Robert Nard: I remember that I was on the telephone talking to my wife. I was in Tonopah. I used to call her every morning as soon as I go to the fab shop there. Before I go, I just see how things are going. She said there was a blast and our dog jumped through the window and went out in the middle of the street and then the word got out about that blast and then we seen it on TV and stuff and how it showed the shockwaves and sound waves was coming off.

Jessica Vigil: You're pretty close to the location of where it happened?

Robert Nard: Well, enough to knock out a couple of windows. [pause] And the concussion scared the shit out of everybody. Oh, I shouldn't even say that, huh?

Jessica Vigil: That's okay. [pause] And---so tell me about what the neighborhood was like when you first moved here. And what year would that have been?

Robert Nard: I think we moved here around '84 maybe. Pretty much the same, but I think there's more Hispanics moved in, but that's---hey, demographically, let's face it---Los Angeles and Las Vegas are Mex-American bottom line. Well, the whole Southwest is, wouldn't you say?

Jessica Vigil: Yep.

Robert Nard: So there is a lot more Mexicans coming in. But I noticed we have a lot more Mexicans in our local union too. Okay, they're good workers. And they got a good heart, they follow union rules and they police union rules, they follow them and they just worthwhile out there; maybe because we give a lot of good training too on them. We stress there's three things, there's you, there's your contractor and there's your union, you know, we can't forget the contractor because that contractor's is a union contractor. He puts that money in the wallet. We ensure the conditions. [pause] So where was we at, about---

Jessica Vigil: I was going to see---what were some of the---did you every have any specific issues that you had to fight for in Las Vegas or in Henderson?

Robert Nard: No, just during negotiations we---for a while we fought the drug screening. Everybody fought it. Because the drug screening, actually the way it looks, you know, why should somebody care if Joe Blow over there wants to smoke a joint on a Saturday night? Well Monday morning, goes to work and he drug screens and he's dirty and he's thrown off the job and then he's gotta to go to rehab because he smoked a joint on Saturday night. And that's what everybody is opposed too.

Jessica Vigil: So the contractors would make the person go to---

Robert Nard: Well, if you miss a drug screen, you're off the job.

Jessica Vigil: And that's union law or contractor law?

Robert Nard: Now it's in our collective bargaining agreement. At first I fought for it. That would be one of those things---that would be one of those things that, what is the right decision? Is the right decision, keep fighting it and we don't want to be drug screened or is the---- that's what everybody like to hear. Or is the right decision, hey, it's coming anyway, it's most of the big jobs have it, let's just work in a program that we can all agree with. So I started working on an agreement, a drug screen program. And we were one of the first local unions to bring a drug screen program in Las Vegas as far as our local. And---

Jessica Vigil: What did that entail?

Robert Nard: Well, drug screen testing, but it's the way that we decided. I worked with contractors and I spoke on it many times to the body. A lot of people---well, one guy in particular because he was just a super duper dooper, you know, pain in my ass. I didn't really care for the guy, but anyway, as it turned out, we did get a drug screen program in and the way it was is, before you went---once a year, everybody would get a letter and that once a year would be thirty days before their birthday.

On their birthday of every year they were due for a drug screen. Or if they went out for [inaudible] or if they go out for a new contractor, but it was just on your birthday, you take a drug screen. But you got a ---you got a letter before that. Hey, happy birthday, by the way, it's time for you to start studying for you annual drug screen---drug test, something like that.

Well, you know; if somebody couldn't stop smoking weed for thirty days, then they had a problem anyways. So what's it going to do? It's going to fix things up, you can do piping, you could do dope. Make up your mind and that's what I told them. No more drugs.

Jessica Vigil: So, what do---?

Robert Nard: And I cleaned up quite a bit.

Jessica Vigil: What do you recall about early politics or political figures in the union, specifically to Las Vegas or Henderson area?

Robert Nard: Well, early politics and not just union, what I've found out---we formed a Political Action Committee and had a PAC fund. And with that pac fund would be---not a slush fund, but a Political Action Fund. Everybody would contribute, we voted on it, so we contribute and help elect our friends, put our friends in office. So when campaign time come around and judges or state assembly or state senators or even---well, a lot of times if it was---[pause] not just a state senator, you know, the local, like the state politics, but if it was national. Like, let's say, Harry, we've always supported Harry Reid. The international is always for somebody to and they want us to go---everybody would go the same way as far as for President. We supported Obama both the last two times. And I still support it.

Jessica Vigil: So when you say friends, basically people who are union friendly?

Robert Nard: Yes. And we would give them a check, anywhere from \$250 to \$500 to more. Most of them we gave \$525 because it was a local union number. You know, if they needed some money, we give them that. It wasn't---it was just campaign or we do something in kind, that they would have to claim.

Like we build signs and we sent out people on a pac committee to put their signs up. You know, the more signs out there, the more money they had, they got elected. And that's what we did with our friends. But it was just a smidget compared to what Republicans give their---not that I'm siding one way because I will say that most of us are Democrats that are in labor, but there's a lot of Republicans too.

I would say that we're kind of in the middle, but we just lean a little bit to the left, if you know what I mean? [pause] But I never could take the stand of Republican versus Democrat or anything like that because I remember Kenny Guinn, I stood on the floor of AFLCO conference, everybody wanted to vote for somebody else so it was Joe Neil at the time. So nothing against Joe Neil, he's been a good state senator and maybe even a speaker for all I know but---Speaker of the House, no he wasn't the Speaker of the House, he as state senator; maybe senate majority. But Kenny Guinn, even though he's a Republican, was the best Governor I believe we ever had in this area and he was very labor friendly. He always did the right thing with us, guy was very intelligent and he always reasons things. Just a real good man.

Jessica Vigil: Were you ever able to tell the politics of the individual members in the union? Did they ever voice it? Talk about it? Was it something that was known?

Robert Nard: Yes, we did. I mean a lot of times, they say, well here's our ---at the union meeting, we pass out.---we made up a list and here's who we're supporting. Well, somebody would come up and say, "Well I'm not supporting them." Then I say, "Then don't." But you know, they ---every week---every union meeting here we have two meetings a month, the second and fourth Friday.

We ask for volunteers for the PAC Committee and PAC, you know, Political Action Committee is going to be interview candidates and if you want to come down and interview, then you should have a right to have a voice on the floor. I mean, even if ---not saying that you don't have a voice on the floor but you at least put your two cents in or back up your mouth, you know with---well I sat there and I was one of the interviewers, these people interview, they're my friends, that's who I'm listening to, you know, I'm ---as a Business Manager, I meet with the public, the contractor and the public which is our local elected officials on a daily basis.

So I try and tell them, you have to---I'm telling this is a friend of ours, you know, when somebody gets a ticket or something, they're going to come to me, not go to Joe Blow. They're going to come to me and say, "Can you talk to this judge down here or something." Well, not that they're all ticket fixers or had any judges in my pocket, but we had a lot of friends downtown and had a lot of friends up in Nevada at Carson City. Not just because we

give them checks, but because we supported them and we campaigned for them and we worked for them.

Jessica Vigil: What was the Local 525 Union like? How did they interact with the other unions in the city?

Robert Nard: Pretty good, except for some of the locals that would---have work that might be close because there would always be some jurisdictional disputes. Like if they had---we would have jurisdiction disputes with the sheet metal workers and also with like with walk-in boxes, core boxes and stuff on flues for boarders and stuff, some kitchen equipment, stainless-steel kitchen equipment. And with the boiler makers on power houses; that goes back in the thirties and forties from the blue book of jurisdictional disputes but we always worked things out. We used the plant, the plant for settlement of jurisdictional disputes and things work out.

Jessica Vigil: So when you mean jurisdiction, so each union is supposed to stay within a certain area, geographically?

Robert Nard: No, no, not geographically. It would be the jurisdiction, work jurisdiction.

Jessica Vigil: Oh, I see.

Robert Nard: In other words, the type of work. Such as---let's say that the sheet metal workers were fabricating up some kind of exhaust hoods for stoves or something and they happened to throw a sink in there; well they don't do sinks. That's our work. The plumbers do the sinks. And some exhaust hoods that's when the sheet metal workers will do the duct work and stuff and on heating and cooling, we run the piping. If they're going to run the duct work then fine, run the duct work, don't touch our piping.

Jessica Vigil: I see.

Robert Nard: Sometimes the sheet metal worker will do the piping. Well, they're crossing jurisdictional lines.

Jessica Vigil: I see.

Robert Nard: And we wouldn't approve of that. We finally realized that we can't let---that's why we lost a project down here at Bullhead City. Actually, Bullhead City was---Laughlin, the power house down there, I wasn't out here at the time, but they had so many strikes and wobbles. Wobbles is when they just walk off the job.

If the boiler maker was doing some pipe fitting work, they say okay, we're walking and the fitters would leave.

Well, they kept on wobbling off the job so much that the contractor called the international and the international president came out. And the day that he went down there, he wanted to see a steward and him and the business manager went down there to Laughlin, well the wobbled the job. So it wasn't good, so he come back and he was so upset that he give the jurisdiction to Local 250 in Los Angeles and they picked up the jurisdiction, but they had to keep so many local guys from Nevada working on it so they had kept the apprentices.

Jessica Vigil: So, where is the international union that you're speaking of located?

Robert Nard: DC. Most of them are in DC.

Jessica Vigil: And so they just travel out throughout the country for these different disputes?

Robert Nard: No, they really don't. The disputes are mainly---that particular one, it was so many problems, it wasn't really disputed, it was just so many wobbles on the job. And that's just walk off. But it got out of hand and it went too far. It was way beyond that, but we actually---I learned something from that because I heard about it and I figured, I'm never going let that happen in our jurisdiction, wobbling a job for no reason at all, better have a damn good reason before we put up a picket line. And especially if we're already on the job, you know what I mean? Why try and give it up?

Jessica Vigil: What has your union experience taught you?

Robert Nard: Patience. [laughter] [pause] Awww, man, that's such a tough one, I don't know if I can answer that. That really caught me off guard. Patience is one thing; you gotta be patient with a lot of stuff. Anger management, I guess, I mean, it bailed me out of some of that.

Jessica Vigil: And when you say that, how did that help you? Like how did the union help you with your anger management?

Robert Nard: Well, it didn't. I had to help myself on that. They had things for that, but I was certainly wasn't going to use the health and welfare to go down there and take an anger management course or anything like that but---let me see, in 2003 I had a stroke. I don't know if you can say it, well it could have been due to stress, maybe not. Who knows? You never noticed. And the VA says it's from Agent Orange.

Jessica Vigil: And I know we're speaking about unions right now but just to touch back on your service. Is there anything that you want to share in regards to your time in Vietnam?

Robert Nard: No.

Jessica Vigil: And then, is there anything else that you like to share with me about your experiences in general in union?

Robert Nard: Well there's the union bread and butter on my table---on our table all my life and union bread and butter has supported this household, my father's household, my brother's household, my whole family's household. So, I'm a firm believer in organized labor and I know there's some people that say, "Oh, the union served their purpose, they don't need them anymore."

Well, that is such a ridiculous statement, that's like saying you don't need cops anymore. That's the way I look at it. You're always going to need somebody, some union leadership, people look after---we were the ones that increased the minimum wage believe it or not. We're the ones to get the military all their increases; not just us, but us along with the Democrats. Always vote for increases for the military. Now why the military always [pause]---why the military always---most military people that I know are all Republican probably because of all the officers and stuff, that doesn't---I don't know. We're getting into that---left, right thing.

The other thing is ---I would say one thing, when my daughter was---when the culinary workers were on strike, the Frontier strike, my daughter come home one time and she says, "I have some new shoes, I got to break them in." I said, "Put them on, I'm know just where we're going to go." So we went up on the strip and grab some picket lines and walk pickets for a couple of hours. And she broke in her shoes.

Robert Nard

Jessica Vigil: Anything else that you like to share?

Robert Nard: Give me a good living [pause] and our whole family. Like I said, I got several pensions and I'm pretty flush right now, I'm not scraping the bottom and, you know, we're doing okay.

Jessica Vigil: Well, I really appreciate your time. We're going to go ahead and conclude our interview. And this is May 9, 2014, interview with Bob Nard.

[End of Audio]