

## Lou Truskoff Interview Log

0:00:03.0 Debbie Fant introduces herself on November 18, 2013, interviewing Lou Truskoff at his home in Seattle, WA. Introduces the Washington Works Project.

0:00:34.3 Lou is in the American Postal Workers Union, Greater Seattle Area Local.

0:01:07.6 Lou was born in Passaic, NJ, grew up in Clifton, NJ until he was 15, when he moved to Wayne, NJ.

0:01:36.7 Lou came out to Seattle with his wife, Joan. They had been working and living in Chicago for four years. That was an interesting place to be, but after a while they decided they wanted to try somewhere else. They had saved some money, so they took a year and a half road trip, camping, all over the country and through Canada, down through Mexico into Central America. It was a great time for them, a good time to do that. They stopped in San Antonio, Texas, and stayed there for almost a year. They liked it, but they also were in Seattle. Thought Seattle was going to be a great place to live, so that's where they settled down finally. They've been there since 1974.

0:02:57.3 Jobs Lou has had along the way: We'll be talking about his work in the Postal Service, but he didn't start working there till he was 37. He had a couple of "mini-careers" before that. In college, undergraduate, he studied education and Spanish language. So he had a long, two-year career as a high-school Spanish teacher. Then Joan and Lou decided to go into the Peace Corps, which had formed not too many years before. They did--spent two years in Venezuela. Partly as a result of that experience, though Joan had always thought she'd wanted to do social work, they both decided to go to social work school and get masters degrees. They did, at the University of Pittsburgh. They were hired by the Catholic Charities of Chicago. They worked there for four years. Joan was doing more traditional social work, casework, with elderly people and some work with parents and Head Start. Lou was hired to be in a new experimental program where they were providing community organizers to work with certain parishes in the city, to work with the clergy and members of the parish on neighborhood, community issues. He did that for four years.

0:05:02.7 After that, when they first came to Seattle, they hooked up with the United Farmworkers Boycott Committee. They were full-time organizers for the Farmworkers Boycott for a couple of years before he went to work for the Postal Service.

0:05:27.7 Nothing really "drew" Lou to the Postal Service. He never thought that he'd apply for a job with them. But after some time working with the Farmworkers Boycott Committee, where you really didn't get paid, you got money for room and board, but that was all--they were thinking that they'd need to do some part-time work. Not knowing anything about the Post Office, Lou assumed you could get part-time work. But except for during the holidays, at Christmas when they'd hire Christmas Casual workers for 3-4 weeks, they wanted full-time people. Lou applied and took the test and was hired. For the first year or so, he worked more

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than full-time. He was in the category called "part-time flexible," where he had flexible hours. You could work a lot of overtime. He got more than he bargained for, but one thing led to another and he got interested in the union work. He got very involved with the union. He wonders if he'd not gotten involved with the union, how long he would have lasted at the Post Office. Doing the union work gave it a whole 'nother level of meaning for him.

0:07:33.2 When Lou was first hired, in 1977, the only inside job they were hiring for was operating letter sorting machines. The letter-sorting machines were at their height. There had been, from the 1960s into the 1970s, a transition from sorting all mail manually, by hand, to mechanized sorting. That was on the letter-sorting machines. They were huge machines that had twelve consoles. People would sit at the console, and a mechanical arm would drop one letter at a time in front of you. You'd have one second for each letter. You had a keyboard, had to key between one and three strokes depending on what the zip code was, where the letter was going, in state or out of state. Those letters were then sent to the machine, where they were sorted at the back. You alternated between sitting at a keyboard for a half hour, keying the mail, then you got up and for fifteen minutes either loaded mail onto a conveyor that dropped the letters in front of the keyers, or you went to the back and pulled the mail out and put it in trays or bundled it so it could be dispatched to wherever it was going. That was the job he did for about 10 years.

0:09:28.5 For example, if it was in the city of Seattle, you keyed the last three digits of the zip code. For the zip code 98103, you'd key 103. If it was one of about seven or eight of the biggest cities in the state, you'd just hit one number. If it was going out of state, you'd do the first three numbers of the zip code--101 for New York City, for example.

0:10:23.8 At first, he wasn't going to put in any extra time in the training. You got paid for the training. But you could come in and put in extra time because, when you first start doing it and they slow the sorter down in the training, you think, "My God! When you get up to full speed, it's one letter per second? How am I ever going to do that?" It is difficult, so Lou went through the whole training but he wasn't going to go in for extra training. He was going to sink or swim, if he had to put his own time into it he wasn't going to do it. He had one more day to qualify, and on the very last day he qualified on the machine.

0:11:31.8 They had a way of maybe once a day or every other day, doing a random check. The supervisor was able to run a sample of, say, 20 letters. He'd get a printout of 20 letters that you'd just keyed. Or maybe you fell asleep and didn't key them! They they'd come to you and say, you did this wrong, you did that wrong. You have to do better than that. But with a little bit of time, within six months or so, it became so automatic, and you knew so many of the zip codes, that you'd sit there with headphones on--that was nice. He could listen to the radio. You sat there and keyed and it was almost automatic.

0:12:49.9 But you had to take care, since you're doing this a half hour at a time for eight hours every day for five days a week, carpal tunnel and tendonitis became very common. That was for postal workers across the country. Through the union, they tried to address it through the

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health and safety committees. The Postal Service just resisted doing much, even in the way of education of their employees. So the letters are coming through the machine, and it's your time to get up and go do another job for 15 minutes and another person is going to replace you. Ideally you were supposed to get up and they'd slide into your seat. It would be a totally smooth transition--you might miss a couple of letters, but you just picked up where the other person left off. But if he were alternating with a five-foot-tall, petite Filipino woman? Which was the case many times. Her position in the chair would not be the same as his, especially for the height (Lou is very tall). A lot of people obeyed the rules.

0:14:41.1 Lou would come, and there was a button to turn off the conveyor so that it would stop. Lou would turn it off, adjust his seat, so maybe it took 15-20 seconds, then he'd sit down and start the machine back up. He was very careful, aware that he was susceptible to carpal tunnel or tendonitis. He was aware of having the seat adjusted properly, not pounding the keys, not slouching. He assumed that helped. He was able to do that work for ten years and never had one of those maladies, but a lot of people did.

0:15:43.9 Those huge mechanized things, the great leap from manual sorting, their heyday was only 10-12 years. Then they started switching, in the early to mid-80s, to automation and optical character readers. So you went from a letter-sorting machine that required 17 people to staff it to a machine, an optical character reader, which required three people. Sorted mail much, much faster. By the late 80s into the early 90s, that change was pretty much complete. What was a revolution in the 70s became dinosaurs. Those machines were discarded and the Postal Service went into full automation.

0:16:54.9 At that point, the Postal Service reduced their hiring to a great extent. Fortunately, they had and still do have a very strong contract, which has a no-layoff provision. Not many unions have been able to get that. Even up until this day, they've been able to whittle down the workforce through attrition and not lay anybody off.

0:17:36.3 The add-on of four digits to a zip code: Lou thinks, especially in the automation process, it does make a difference. The machines can do a finer sorting. When that first came out, quite a few of the workers said they weren't going to use the extra four digits on their personal mail. They're just trying to put more people out of work! But he uses them now if he happens to have them. At this point, it's not going to affect the number of jobs that are lost.

0:18:36.0 DF: Seems the Postal Service has changed in the past 15 years. The post offices themselves, in selling a lot of extra things in addition to the simple mail service. What about that? 0:18:56.5 Lou thinks this was when the friendly window clerk started asking extra questions. It was because they were required to. Lou was in on the tail-end of that. After he stopped working on the letter-sorting machine, he started working at various stations and branches. For about three years, he was in the station relief pool, which was interesting. You filled in for people who were on extended sick leave, or just even on vacation, or for whatever reason were going to be gone for more than just a week or two. It was interesting because he got to work in a lot of different stations. Even Bainbridge Island, which was fun commuting to

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by ferry. For about the last eight years before retiring, he worked at the University Post Office (near the University of Washington).

0:20:05.4 Some of them resisted asking extra questions because the whole idea was to make more money, to "up-sell." That's what didn't sit well with him. Maybe that wasn't the right attitude to have. Not that they were offering any extra or new services, they were just prodding people or reminding people. "Hey, if you want to get this there faster, you could use Priority Mail." Or, "Would you like insurance on that parcel?" Or "Would you like delivery confirmation--want a card sent back to you?" That was before, now you can get delivery confirmation by going online. It was just another way to remind people that, "Hey, we've got these services, and by paying a little extra, if you need it you can get it." I think most clerks still ask those questions.

0:21:33.4 There weren't too many differences in the Post Offices he worked at doing relief work. The people who came in reflected the neighborhood the post office was located in. Other than that, they were pretty much the same.

0:22:08.0 Lou wore whatever the standard uniform of the day was. It changed from time to time. For most of the time, he was wearing a blue postal dress shirt with a Post Office insignia on it. That was really the only requirement. Letter carriers and motor vehicle drivers had a full uniform that they wore. For Lou and other inside workers, the only requirement was the shirt. At some point, there was a tie. Some people wore a tie, but he never did.

0:23:00.2 Shoes were not part of the uniform allowance. Letter carriers get a shoe allowance, but Lou wore comfortable shoes. Especially in the warmer weather, when he was working the University Post Office, Lou would wear his Birkenstocks. That probably, strictly speaking, wasn't part of the uniform. When he was working on the letter-sorting machines in the letter processing plant, supervision was pretty strict and close. Once you were working in a station, at the window, you weren't as closely supervised. He doesn't think any supervisor particularly took notice that he might have been wearing sandals. You have some heavy parcels that you move around that you might drop on your foot, but there wasn't that much of a safety hazard.

0:24:16.2 The big processing plant was located at Fourth and Lander in Seattle. It was inaugurated during the Eisenhower years, sometime in the 1950s. It stayed operational until the early 1990s, then they moved out closer to the airport. That was an advantage. They moved into a much larger facility. They needed more room for the automated equipment. That's still where it is, out in Tukwila, WA, near the Seattle-Tacoma airport.

0:25:09.2 The mail comes into the processing plant by truck, whether from some other post office or from the airport.

0:25:31.3 There is a system around the country, it's deteriorating rapidly. There are processing plants like the one in Tukwila, he doesn't know what the original number was. The number has decreased. There are probably around 400 in the country. One in Seattle, one in Tacoma, one in Olympia that was closed last year. One in Everett was closed last year. The Tri-Cities, Spokane,

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Wenatchee. Most states had processing plants along those lines. In the last couple of years, the Postal Service has been downsizing, closing a lot of them, about half of the processing plants nationwide have been closed. It makes for a lot of inefficiencies, because now mail has to be trucked from Everett, WA, to Seattle to get processed to get sorted, then it goes back to Everett to be delivered. It's called "plant consolidation," but it's getting to the point where people are noticing a slowdown in mail delivery times. That's okay with the Postal Service, apparently. They will just relax their standards.

Up until recently, there was a standard that if you mailed within so many miles of a processing plant, it was next-day delivery was the standard. It'll just be relaxed to two days. Then to get from here, to say, Salt Lake City, where it used to take two days, now it will take three days. Et cetera. But people are seeing, around the country, that there are delays of even longer time than one extra day. In the big scheme of things, just like Saturday deliver, some people say, I can do without Saturday delivery. If mail's going to take an extra day or two, okay. But for a lot of businesses, especially those businesses that are not flush with cash, they depend on certain revenue coming in right away. If it's delayed, they're in trouble. There have been complaints about that already. Lou thinks, more profoundly, when you start to have a deterioration in service like that, especially for business customers--and business customers make up the great majority of Postal Service work. Personal mail, who writes a personal letter anymore?

0:29:14.6 Your service starts to spiral downward, and at that point a lot of business people will say, I'm gonna look for an alternative. UPS? FedEx? Some other courier. Then you lose business. It's a death spiral. That's actually, unfortunately, what the Postal Service is in right now. Congress could do something about it, but Congress is messed up right now. There is legislation that's been pending for a long time now, some of it terrible, some of it good, but none of it is moving. It's problematical situation.

0:30:20.2 To reverse the death spiral, the Postal Service is doing a lot of cutting back on service because they have to do something--they're in a hole financially. It's been publicized a fair amount that the big reason for being in that financial hole is an outlandish piece of legislation that was passed in 2006 that required the Postal Service, from that point on, every year, to make about a \$5-point- something billion dollar deposit for retirees' health care. There's nothing wrong with pre-funding retiree health care, but this was for 75 years into the future. Whoever came up with that one wanted to do the Postal Service in. He can only speculate why. The unions try to keep on top of all legislation, and he doesn't remember the unions fighting that at all. But of course, it was at a time when the Postal Service was doing relatively well, in 2006. Nobody was too upset about it then. But not only was it projected to be 75 years into the future, but you had to do this in a 10-year period, from 2006 to 2016. You had to get that whole 75-year-in-advance payment into the fund. Now it's really the biggest thing, it's the thing that's killing the Post Office.

0:32:22.4 Two days ago, the Postal Service announced their end-of-fiscal year balance sheet. They came out in the black by \$600 million. That sounds like a lot, but for the Postal Service budget it's a drop in the bucket. But it's in the black. However, on paper, there's a \$5 billion loss

because they're supposed to make a payment. They don't have the money to make the payment. It's written down that you still owe this money. So the Postmaster General and his staff are proceeding on the assumption that they owe this money and therefore they have to do all these cutbacks.

0:33:19.0 Senator Bernie Sanders, and House Rep. Ron Weiden from Oregon, have companion bills that would address that pre-funding problem, do away with it. And they have other good things in there, like allowing the Postal Service to broaden its services. For example, to issue passports, to do banking. Lou wasn't aware until recently that up until the early 1960s you could actually do banking in a Post Office! In Japan and some other countries, they still do that. For some people, it could be a very convenient thing--people who maybe wouldn't have huge deposits or a huge amount of banking to do. Having a checking account through a post office. There are other kinds of licenses that are issued by other agencies--no reason why the Postal Service couldn't do that. That would be a way of bringing in more revenue.

0:34:58.5 Lou says the Postal Service is not totally privatized. When they set this up in 1971, after an illegal strike--that's what triggered this whole change--there were, at least in New York City, full-time postal workers who were on food stamps because the pay was so low. Unions existed, but they didn't have collective bargaining rights. It was known as "collective begging"--you went to Congress, and it had the final say in pay increases and benefits.

0:35:51.3 There was an illegal strike, it was before Lou's time with the Postal Service. It didn't take place in every city, but it took place in enough key cities, especially New York, Chicago--where the system really almost came to a halt. It was during the Nixon administration. After some feeble attempts (there's video footage of this!) where the government thought they could bring in National Guard folks to sort mail--that was a total failure! After about five days, they sat down and the unions consolidated. Lou's union has three different crafts that it represents. But before that time, they represented probably six or seven different crafts. The unions got collective bargaining and got the first contract. It's Federal law that they can't strike. But it was reinforced in the contract.

0:37:36.1 Sanders and Weiden have a good bill. Weiden's bill in the House now has 168 co-sponsors. But a couple of years ago, a bill in the House got a majority of people. A lot of Republicans joined Democrats in co-sponsoring it. You'd think, there's a majority, why don't they bring it to the floor and vote on it? But the system doesn't work that way--it goes through committees. Darryl Issa, who may be the richest person in Congress, a Republican Representative from California, is the chair of the committee that oversees that bill, and he would not bring it out to the floor for a vote. So it never did get voted on. So there's another one up again in both houses of Congress. There are other bills--some that are so-so, some that are really bad that would go along with this idea. Lou thinks the big push among the conservatives and right-wing Republicans, and probably a few Democrats, is on the idea that the Postal Service is just a failed business model. It should be privatized. He thinks that's what the push is about, and that's why what's happening now is happening. It will get to a point where people will say, "It's failed. Let's just sell it off to the private sector."

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Maybe keep one thing--what they call the "last mile." Carriers. Because nobody else is going to deliver to every single household in the country. But do everything else--the processing, the transporting, everything else, the retail part of it could be easily privatized. Privatize everything and keep the carriers, which will be the "friendly face" of the Post Office still coming to your door. Although, they want to do away with a lot of that, too, where you have cluster boxes and you have to walk to the end of your street to get your mail.

0:40:31.8 DF: When Lou worked at the University station, what would a regular day look like?

0:40:46.6 Lou's hours were mostly 9 AM to 6 PM, with an hour for lunch. He would go in to the office in the morning, the Post Office opened a little earlier than that so he wasn't the opening clerk. There were one or two people already working at the window. He'd go in, get his till with his money and stamps, which was locked up in the safe, and bring it out and start his day. He'd deal with customers. Being in a place for eight years, and having a lot of regular customers, he dealt with a lot of people from the University, the whole business district near the University of Washington. You get to know people, and it was nice. No real pressure, except self-imposed pressure at times. In some areas, you never get the buildup, the long line. In the "U District," you did very often during the lunch hour, getting toward closing time when all the business people would bring in their mail. You'd get pretty long lines.

Lou would try his best to deal with every customer, no rush, because every customer deserves their measure of service and courtesy. The pressure didn't really come from Postal supervisors so much as just hating to see all those people having to wait in line and knowing that you really couldn't do anything about it. Except once in a while during those times, a supervisor would come out. Supervisors are not allowed to do bargaining unit work, and in the union they're always watchful about that. It's a natural inclination for supervisors to want to help out and do stuff. But some supervisors would ask if someone only wanted to pick up a parcel, and that could take 3-4 people out of the line. Then people could see there was some effort to accommodate the people standing in line.

0:44:25.7 That would be his typical day. Get a break mid-morning, a break mid-afternoon, where he would go down to Bulldog News and get a latte. After lunchtime, many days getting close to break time, he'd start to get a little sleepy. When you're doing transactions and money orders, you don't want to be sleepy! You want to be on your toes. So even though he was not a caffeine drinker, he'd get a caffeinated latte. He'd tell his wife, to her horror, that he'd come back from break real perky! He'd start telling jokes, getting a little bit out of character! But it was good to be awake.

0:45:32.0 There were always things to say about certain supervisors and what to look out for. Or just what not to pay attention to. Lou guesses there were always some problematic customers, though not many. You had to warn new people about how to deal with so-and-so when they come in. Or if this person comes in and she's acting a bit strange, don't worry. We know her and she's harmless and wants to hang around. They had a woman at the University

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Station who probably was homeless. He thinks she stayed at women's shelters. She would sometimes be found in the Post Office box section sleeping on the floor. But they all got to know her, she was a character. She had a Post Office box, she had enough money or someone had enough to pay for that. There was a sign that said by 9:30 all the box mail was supposed to be up. But there were some days they didn't get it all up. She would come in and say, "Box mail up yet?" in a loud voice! There are characters, and there were probably a few nasty people that you wanted to be aware of.

0:47:59.7 No codes or words to alert the other workers that someone was problematic. At the University Station, it was rare that somebody would come in and start arguing or being nasty.

0:48:19.7 About the "Christmas Rush." When he worked in the processing center, he knew that from about late in the second week in December on through December, you were going to be working overtime, probably two hours a day. The mail volume, especially letter mail, Christmas cards, and the packages, just increased so much at Christmastime. All the different crews, there were nine letter-sorting machines, all the crews would start to bring cookies and other Christmas goodies in to work. There was a festive atmosphere. A woman on one machine was famous for her rum balls. There would be little Christmas parties where there were gifts exchanged, so you'd get an extended break. It was a lot of extra work, but it was a festive atmosphere. At the stations, it was the same thing. Lou started wearing a Santa hat one year. Customers got such a kick out of it that he did it every year.

0:50:36.5 The only difficult situation that comes to mind for Lou was money. You were each responsible for the money that you took in. And the stamp stock that you had, which was considerable. You had to have a certain amount of every denomination of stamps. For the most common thing, the rolls and booklets of stamps, you had to have quite a bit. They did individual audits once every three months. Somebody had to relieve you from your window, and you would get all of your stock, including the extra stuff you left in the safe, and you would sit down with the supervisor and each count. Then you'd come up with a count of what you had, and it would be compared with what you were supposed to have. Quite a few times Lou came up short. Not huge amounts, but sometimes a couple hundred dollars. Sometimes less than that. You were liable for that. Any clerk who came up short had the right, under the contract, to file a grievance. If there were some extenuating circumstances that could be shown where you may have lost some money through no intent of your own. That was uncomfortable for Lou, knowing that he couldn't point to any particular thing, any one transaction that was strange. In three months, there are so many transactions you make every day, that on any one of them you could have made some slip. You might have even given somebody an extra roll of stamps, who knows? But it bothered him that he wasn't being alert enough on the job to prevent that from happening. In the scheme of things, it wasn't that big of a deal. Otherwise, he can't think of anything else.

0:53:53.2 Lou would get annoyed with the fact, especially at certain times of the year, when the lines would get long. They didn't have a good system. The clerks among them, when they had time, were supposed to go out in the lobby and make sure all the forms were there, make sure



there were enough Express and Priority envelopes. And--they don't do this anymore at the Post Office, computers have changed so many things--but IRS forms during tax time. The end of March up to April 15, the Post Office used to carry the basic forms, the 2040, the 1040A, plus the instruction booklets, plus a lot of the commonly used forms. People came to rely on that--they'd go to their local post office for that stuff. Now you can go online to print something, or go to the library. There would come a time when they'd all be very busy, they'd be running out of the tax forms. Or they'd be running out of something. And people would start coming up to them at the window, interrupting their transactions, asking, "What happened? Don't you have any more of these forms?" And they weren't going to go running back, look in a box, and get them a form.

So Lou, despite the fact that the lobby was crowded, would put up his "closed" sign, go out and take a couple of minutes to restock whatever needed to be restocked in the IRS or restock some of the other stuff so that people had what they needed. And he hoped that people would understand. But a couple of times his supervisor happened to be walking through, and she didn't like that at all. "Get back, don't do that!" It was a minor annoyance, but it annoyed Lou. He wanted to give good service, and that was part of good service.

0:56:41.2 Lou doesn't remember any dramatic "good thing" that happened during his Post Office career.

0:56:54.4 Lou retired in 2000. From the time he started until he retired, the biggest change he saw was the change from mechanized sorting to the fully automated sorting.

0:57:26.8 If Lou were going to suggest a different way of organizing the Postal Service, he doesn't think it would need that much reorganization from the way it was set up until very recently. When you think about the relative low cost of postage rates, and the fact that you can send a letter, an ordinary letter, for 46 cents, to New York or Connecticut or Florida, and it will get there in three days, right to a person's home mailbox, that's pretty remarkable. It always has been quite an efficient service, and of course, there's the express mail, which competes favorably with FedEx and UPS in terms of, if you really need to get something there fast. Because the Postal Service was not on its toes when UPS came along, it took away a lot of the parcel delivery. But Lou hears stories all the time now that people prefer to mail their parcels through the Post Office because they're getting damaged parcels from UPS. He never imagined that that was happening. It's strange, but it's working the other way.

UPS and FedEx are actually giving the Post Office some of their business. It's like the "last mile" thing. They're processing their parcels, transporting them to, say, Seattle, and then they're delivering them to Post Offices or the processing center here in Seattle. The Post Office is delivering them to the homes. They just don't want to be bothered with delivering all of those. The ones that are easily on their brown-truck routes, okay. But some of the out-of-the-way places, they'd just as soon have the Post Office deliver them.

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1:00:30.0 Ideas of expanding what a Post Office can do (answering machine comes on in background): There could be other services that the Post Office could provide. By law, the Postal Service has been restricted from doing certain things because of not wanting to compete unfavorably with the private sector. Even at that, you notice that over the last few years, all of a sudden you started to see retail products like cards and little trinkets, Postal toys, whatever, appearing. There's been a limited amount of that. But there's no reason why, if you're going in and you forgot to pick up a Happy Birthday card for somebody, that you shouldn't be able to get it at the Post Office.

1:01:46.4 There's also a proposal that beer and wine be acceptable. Lou is sure that people have mailed liquor and alcoholic beverages over the course of the years. But by law, that kind of stuff is prohibited from being mailed through the Postal Service. The Bernie Sanders legislation includes legalizing that.

1:02:22.7 Along the way, Lou had different measurements of what he considered to be a good job. What were those? 1:02:37.7 His own personal judgment of that? What he felt he needed to do? It would be the same as when he worked anywhere else, or when he'd work in retirement with organizations or committees. Do the best job that he could do, be responsible. Don't look for ways to slough work off on somebody else or leave a mess for somebody else coming in on the next shift. Brings to mind one veteran postal worker, when he was first starting out. Lou was working in his section, helping to sort the mail. It was for the 98108-118 zip code, the Georgetown area. The fellow worked there at night so that in the morning, the carriers would be able to get the mail sorted and get it out in the Georgetown area. The fellow said, "Leave it looking nice. Leave it looking neat, at least. So that people will know that you weren't leaving a mess or you intentionally left some mail unsorted. So the people would know you did your best." It involved looking out for other people on the team or on your crew. You had to work together.

1:04:47.4 Lou became a shop steward early on. He eventually was elected to three terms as president of the Local. But when he was a shop steward, and he doesn't think anyone else did this: On the letter sorting machines, up front at the supervisor's station, there was a meter. When the supervisor turned on the machine, it was set at 60 letters per minute. But sometimes the machine would creep. OR, in some cases, the supervisors would creep—"Oh, I'll get a little extra production, I'll put it up to 61." Now, that might not seem like much, but Lou would notice that. A lot of others wouldn't, but Lou would definitely notice that there was something wrong, it was going too fast. When the supervisor was off doing something else, Lou would tap the button to bring it back down to 60. Lou, more than most people, was looking out for the well-being of his team members. As far as the window job went, he thought it was his job to give the people who came to the window the best service possible, to answer any questions they had. If they came in unprepared, strictly speaking, you were NOT supposed to lend out your scissors or tape! Now it's more cut-and-dried, "We have tape for sale over here, ma'am." But that was before we started selling tape. People would come in with their packages they thought were prepared well, and some people would bring in some pretty shoddy stuff. You knew the package wouldn't make it through the system and needed extra reinforcing tape. He'd give

them the scissors and tape, and "You don't have to wait in line, just come back up." If it were a woman carrying a child, they'd sit the child on the counter! He would just tape it for them in that instance. It took a little extra time, but he never got any flack for that.

On that job, the supervisor is supervising the carrier operation, the delivery operation, and they're not worried too much about the window. They know the clerks know their jobs and what to do. He never got reprimanded for being helpful to customers.

1:08:16.6 To work for the Postal Service, for most of the jobs, you don't need any special skills. He would call it semi-skilled work. For most of the jobs in the processing plant, it was just stuff that you learn on the job. You learned what to do. There are electronic technicians who service the machines, they need to know about that. In the scheme of things, there are some small percentage of jobs that are listed as "best qualified." Most of them are "senior qualified," which means you put in a bid for this job with these days off and these hours, you're the senior person, you get it. Sometimes it involves passing some training. But there's a smaller percentage listed as "best qualified," meaning whatever you have on record showing that you possess certain skills, or whatever you have shown on a particular test you've taken, then you don't have to be the senior person. In terms of a level of education, there are minimal requirements. Even though he went in with a master's degree.

There are a lot of immigrant workers in the Postal Service. In the 1970s, there was a wave of Filipinos that came in. In the 1980s, Koreans and people from Taiwan, Vietnam. This was in Seattle, also other big cities around the country. A lot of them, you find out "I was a nurse in the Philippines, or I was a teacher. . ." A lot of times they were people who had a fair amount of education, and they come here and it doesn't translate. The Postal Service is one of the last remaining bastions of a place where you can actually get a union job, you can get a living wage with good benefits and job security. That's a strong reason to fight for the survival of the Postal Service. If it all becomes privatized, those jobs will not be unionized, they'll be lower wages. People will not be treated as well.

1:12:03.7 One thing, because it's current: Last year, in April of 2013, after a long negotiating time, Lou's union at the national level--and most of what they're governed by is in the national contract. It covers everybody. Locally, each area does its own bargaining for certain specific things about the job and working conditions that are applicable to that locality. But for the most part, they're governed by the national agreement. It was a concessionary contract. They gave up a lot of things, and members were dissatisfied when they saw the draft proposal. But their union leadership went out to various locals and aggressively sold the contract. They understood there was grumbling, but they sold it as the "best we can get at this time, given what the conditions now are with the Postal Service being threatened by privatization." They thought they should do their part and try to help them out. But it was the wrong approach.

Lou is so proud of the Boeing machinists recently for turning down the terrible proposal from Boeing. They did the right thing. Lou's union did not do the right thing. There was a lot of grumbling, he went to the state convention in Everett where the national president came out to

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give them a sell job. The day before he arrived, people were really complaining about the contract. But the next day, after hearing from the president, people were saying, "Yeah, well, I dunno. I guess so." So they ratified it, though Lou voted no. It was ratified by 70-75%. As soon as it went into effect, people started noticing myriad problems. Not the least of which was a three-tier wage system. That, coupled with the fact that the national leadership seems to run out of ideas about what to do to combat the attacks on the Postal Service, the only strategy was lobbying Congress. They've done that many times. They had no other answers.

So an "insurgent slate" of people from locals who had been very active for many years at the local level decided it was time to challenge the incumbents. They challenged nine executive board positions, including president and vice president. They won seven out of nine. They got a completely new leadership, two of whom are personal friends of Lou's--the president and the clerk craft director. Good people. It's an uphill battle right now to save the Postal Service as they'd like it to be saved. But he's confident that they'll take a whole different approach. One good thing, which is hard for people to fathom, at a time when the Postal Service has been under attack, the two biggest unions, Lou's and the Letter Carriers Union (NALC), are not even on speaking terms. They're not working together. It's absurd. One of the things that slate campaigned on, they were going to reach out to the NALC because they have to work together. And they're doing that now. How could you not be working together when your very future is at stake? That's a good thing, and we'll see what happens.

Some places around the country have fought on a local level against the plant closures, and they've been able to put them off. They've been aggressive, they've done some sit-ins, civil disobedience, rallies, they've gotten their local congressperson to be on their side and speak to the Postal Service. But that's been sporadic. They need a coordinated plan coming from the National, and he thinks that's what they'll see. That's one thing in an otherwise depressing scene that's a cause for optimism.

(Thanks!) Sure! I enjoyed talking about this stuff more than I realized!!

END OF INTERVIEW