

Interview with: Stuversant  
Interview by: Danelle Moon  
Transcriber: Daniel Jarvis  
[Interview #1]  
[Stuversant interview.wav]

[1:23:16] at beginning {start at [00:00]}

**Moon:**

—you know, I have some specific questions I want to ask you but, what I'll do—what I'm going to do is—I haven't turned on the recorders yet—once I turn them on I just go through kind of a [inaudible 00:00:15] more like a conversation rather than you, you know, feeling like you have answer every single question—

**Stuversant:**

Ok.

**Moon:**

—but what I'm really looking for is trying to get you to talk a little bit about your background, how it is that you came to San Jose and how you got involved with this kind of back door politics in working with all these people like Mike Honda and you know {Egeland?} and um talking about some of [one?] the work that you've done with the Democratic party here—

**Stuversant:**

Ok.

**Moon:**

and those types of things so if there—if you can't remember or if you lose track of something that's ok, I can always come—go back and ask you to reflect on that later and we talk about it again, so—

**Stuversant:**

Ok.

**Moon:**

—so I don't you to feel pressured or anything like but lets just— you know— so I'll turn on the recorder and then just kind of go through some of these basic questions that I came up with which are based largely on just the brief biographical information I was able to uncover, you know that [laughter] you know—you know part of its just looking at it, you know looking at the newspapers kind of a place to try and find information on different political people in San Jose, so to start with, why don't you tell me a little bit about your background and how you—starting maybe from the— where you were born in and how you came to San Jose, your educational background, those sorts of things.

**Stuversant:**

Well I grew up till I was twelve in Ohio in Columbus and then moved to Southern California. My mother was always active in community affairs, she was active [inaudible 00:02:01], uh she was active when I was in high school in the Democratic party—

**Moon:**

Mm-hm.

**Stuversant:**

-so, you know I grew up with-

**Moon:**

[inaudible 00:02:10]

**Stuversant:**

—kind of rounded by that. I went to Berkeley for a semester, in college, but that was too big for me, I'd —god— been in a small community, a small high school. So I came back to Pomona College for a year and a half and then I went to the University of North Carolina where I was always interested going to [inaudible 00:02:33 ] they only took women at the main branch of the university for the last two years, so, when I got to the point of doing the last two years, then I went back to Chapel Hill, and I graduated from there during the war, during World War II. While I was there I was active in the— something called the Carolina Political Union, which brought, uh, national speakers actually to campus. We had the first desegregated public lecture type meeting on campus that was ever held. When we had the Vice President there as the speaker and the first desegregated press conference so forth- it was- it was pretty exciting.

**Moon:**

What was that like? Was there- how was- what was their receptivity there when you- that hap- that took place- but that was like around 1943 I think-

**Stuversant:**

Yes-

**Moon:**

-[inaudible 00:03:30] researched that.

**Stuversant:**

Yeah. Right. Right. Well it was interesting because, that point it was war time, we had we had a unit on campus that trained people in foreign languages. Uh, so the- the boys- the men, were in uniform- they were in the service-

**Moon:**

Mm-hm-

**Stuversant:**

-and um, because of the nature of the- the guest we invited the commanding officers at several different near by military bases. And we had a dinner before the actual lecture.

The- and uh, we had students who were in uniform who'd been, maybe when they first started Carolina were not in uniform but who were, uh, officers who are [inaudible

00:04:22 ] local organizations-

Moon:

uh-huh-

**Stuversant:**

-so we had- you know at the dinner table we had privates up at the h-head table and generals down below some place, it was-

Moon:

Uh-huh.

**Stuversant:**

-it was you know it [really?] kinda of a precedent breaking uh-

Moon:

-were there any protests against the meeting at all?

**Stuversant:**

No, no, no, it all went very smoothly-

Moon:

Oh ok.

**Stuversant:**

So, it was, th- th- the time the president the University of North Carolina was not on campus because he was on the national War Labor board, uh [Graham? 00:05:02 ] but he was very sympathetic to what we were doing, very supportive-

Moon:

Mm-hm.

Stuversant:

-which probably some difference.

Moon:

Ok.

Stuversant:

Anyway, then, I finished up in December '43 and went to New York where I worked for what was at that point the CIO political action committee. Um-

Moon:

Mm-hm.

Stuversant:

-morphed into s- AFL-CIO but at that point it was just CIO-

Moon:

Before you- um just to go back a little bit before um when you graduated um from UNC in 1943, um what was your major?

Stuversant:

Economics.

**Moon:**

Economics, ok.

**Stuversant:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

And also just one more question on the um desegregation of that. Was that mostly organized by white liberals then? Or was it more of a- was there some interaction with NAACP or-

**Stuversant:**

There were no African-American students on campus at that- students at that point-

**Moon:**

Ok.

**Stuversant:**

Uh, so it was, it was organized by our little political student organization-

**Moon:**

Ok.

**Stuversant:**

I had some interactions with unions while I was there and I was kind of a- a volunteer representative of the international union of- gosh I think it was [state time?] [municipal workers? 00:06:33]. Anyway, they had the um service employees of the university organized-

**Moon:**

Uh-huh.

**Stuversant:**

Um, custodians and food service workers and so on, and they were all black and I- I interacted with them I went down to their meetings and so forth-

**Moon:**

Mm-hm

**Stuversant:**

-down [inaudible 00:06:56 ] the other part of town.

**Moon:**

Did you- when you- um- it sounds like maybe you- before you even came to college you had an interest in unionization then? Or was that something your parents um were involved with that got you interested in working you know-

**Stuversant:**

Well that was all part of growing up with a mother who was very active-

**Moon:**

Mm-hm.

**Stuversant:**

-liberal, democratic kinds of things-

**Moon:**

Uh-huh.

**Stuversant:**

She at one point was a public affairs director for the YW in the state California- all kinds of stuff like this.

**Moon:**

Uh-huh. Where did you live when you first came to California?

**Stuversant:**

We lived in Pasadena and it was during the time that I was in school in Pasadena that they evacuated the Japanese Americans.

**Moon:**

Mm-hm.

**Stuversant:**

-and for a number of years after that I corresponded with uh, one of my friends who'd been- who was in [camp? 00:07:52 ] with her family, and I remember her letters talking about how dusty and dirty it was-

**Moon:**

Mm-mm.

**Stuversant:**

-and how you just couldn't get clean, yeah, and finally after several years we had lost track of each other-

**Moon:**

Mm-mm.

**Stuversant:**

-and have often wondered about her, but um-

**Moon:**

-so then from Pa- Pasadena you um-

**Stuversant:**

-moved to Claremont.

**Moon:**

-to Claremont, oh ok.

**Stuversant:**

Yeah.

**Moon:**

-and that's why you had- had initially gone to Pomona College -cause you were living in Claremont?

**Stuversant:**

Right, I'd tried Cal-

**Moon:**

Mm-hm.

**Stuversant:**

-you know. I had a boyfriend at home and so forth and such so-

**Moon:**

How did you end up in San Jose?

**Stuversant:**

Oh, that was- long time after- uh- after I had left the CIO job in New York I went to um- United Automobile Workers in Detroit-

**Moon:**

Mm-mm.

**Stuversant:**

-and I worked for the education department of the UAW, and-

**Moon:**

How long did you work in New York?

**Stuversant:**

Just a few months, just a few months.

**Moon:**

And then you- just went- you went from that to Detroit? So what was it like working in the- the union at that time? That was a pretty um -significant period of time for women in unions.

**Stuversant:**

Yes it was, it was. And we had um- one particular person working in the education department of the union who was- actually wrote a book about her experiences in the union and her name was Elizabeth [Haw? 00:09:28 ]. Haw is-

**Moon:**

Haw-

**Stuversant:**

She was a- a fashion designer, who became interested in women in the workplace and so on-

**Moon:**

Mm-mm

**Stuversant:**

Umm- so I had lots of exposure to- you know, her thinking and the whole idea- women moving into union leadership positions and so forth, yeah.

**Moon:**

When you were- you- when- you were pretty young when you were doing some of the work with the- the CIO and uh the the um AUW, um; were you in- in the 40's that was a

time period when the- the women's movement was- had come you know transitioned from the- you know- the- the- the- winning the vote in 1920 and creating this period of time where women really trying to develop their own political activism and one of the key ele- issues that was part of that time period was the- um equal rights amendment. Do you recall ever um- you know being exposed to that a- in your work with the labor unions-

**Stuversant:**

Well there was a period of time when all us liberals were supposed to be against [hits something] the equal rights amendment-

**Moon:**

Right, right, right.

**Stuversant:**

So, I was a liberal so I was against the equal rights- [hits something several times]

**Moon:**

[laughs]

**Stuversant:**

-without really ever spending a lot of time philosophically picking it apart-

**Moon:**

Right. Well I know one of the reasons why labor was opposed to it was because- in the same way that- that the National Women's Bureau was opposed to it was because they believed that it would take away the protective legislation that they had worked so hard, you know in years previous-

**Stuversant:**

-Yeah, yeah.

**Moon:**

-to- to help women have better opportunities but in fact it worked against them-

**Stuversant:**

-that's right-

**Moon:**

-after- after the war, right?

**Stuversant:**

"The calling" as you say-

**Moon:**

Right and so I was just curious-

**Stuversant:**

-talk about yeah-

**Moon:**

-I've been, a lot of my research is based on that time period and so its- I was just- I just had to ask you that since you actually-

**Stuversant:**

-Yeah-

**Moon:**

-worked and were living in that kind of that environment-

**Stuversant:**

-Yeah, yeah, yeah-

**Moon:**

-Now was your mother a- a suffragist also? Do you know?

**Stuversant:**

Yeah, I would say so yeah.

**Moon:**

Yeah, and she would have- and cause in 1920 she would have been living in what state?

**Stuversant:**

I was born in '23.

**Moon:**

Mm-hm.

**Stuversant:**

And I was her oldest child.

**Moon:**

And you were born in which state again?

**Stuversant:**

In Ohio.

**Moon:**

Ohio, ok. Cause Ohio had a pretty vibrant suffrage-

**Stuversant:**

-but I think she was a- more active before she married, she went to [inaudible 00:12:01].

And uh, I think it was when I heard days before she married and moved to Ohio-

Moon:

Mm-hm. That she might have been active?

Stuversant:

Yeah, yeah.

Moon:

Ok I was just curious because it just sounds- you know the women that joined the league of women voters in that time period were- most of them came out of the suffrage movement-

Stuversant:

Yeah, yeah.

Moon:

-so I just -you know- figured- I would assume that your mother might have been involved somehow in that. Ok, well that gives me a good kind of sense of where your family came from because you really came from uh- came from a progressive family it sounds like for that time period.

Stuversant:

For mother, my parents were divorced- oh I don't know [inaudible 00:12:46] That's when we left with my- mother and siblings, we all went out to California.

Moon:

Oh ok. So did you lose contact with your father after you came out?

Stuversant:

No I maintained contact with him, I was working Detroit and clo- closer physically you know- I um- went down to Ohio a few times-

Moon:

Mm-hm.

Stuversant:

-and visited. Yeah.

Moon:

Ok. So when you were working in Detroit, how long were you working there and what-  
what types of things were you doing, do you recall?

Stuversant:

Well, we did um, workshops and Summer schools for local unions-

Moon:

Mm-hm.

Stuversant:

-education [00:13:24 inaudible] on uh, collective bargaining, grievance procedures, um  
legislation, all kinds of- educational comp- component to the union.

Moon:

Right.

Stuversant:

Uh, so, put on conferences and those kind of things, so I- I did a little traveling, you  
know, came out to the coast, when I was in Chicago and Wisconsin. And the Summer  
schools were, a lot of them down in conjunction with um, a college, and on a college  
campus you know so its-

Moon:

Right.

Stuversant:

-I don't know the details [of financial arrangements? 00:14:03] but I'm sure they shared with someone a little bit-

Moon:

Yeah they probably brought some of the representatives in to promote the programming. Now um, how long did you work for um, in Detroit for the UAW?

Stuversant:

I don't know, I don't know, I don't know. I'd say maybe [sighs], maybe a year and a half.

Moon:

Mm-hm.

Stuversant:

And I can't even remember exactly why I left. Whether it was some internal problem, it just- it must not been a earth shattering kind of [Moon laughs] experience or [probably?00:14:41] something but I came out to California- back to California and that's where-

Moon:

So you probably came out to California like around 1945- '46 or so- before the end of the war?

Stuversant:

Just before- [sigh] lets see I was in Detroit, when FDR died [inaudible 00:15:01]-

Moon:

-so that would have been 1947?

Stuversant:

I couldn't remember that- no-

Moon:

I can't remember-

Stuversant:

[It was before that thing? 00:15:10]

Moon:

It was before that right- it would have been in 1940-

Stuversant:

It was before the end of the war.

Moon:

Yeah. That was 9- like 1944 maybe is when he died. I'd have to like look back in my history books-

Stuversant:

Yeah, I worked on '44 [Lexan? 00:15:25 ] the union release people to work on elections-

Moon:

Mm-hm, so you worked on his elect- his second election-

Stuversant:

-I worked- I worked on the- when I was in college at CAL, I walked precincts for FDR

[Inaudible 00:15:40] and then I worked in Detroit on the next presidential election. I

worked in an all black neighborhood in Tennessee and I was the only woman and that did not give me [Inaudible 00:16:03]

Moon:

Ohhhhh...a little tension there.

Stuversant:

Hum, anyway for whatever reason I left the UAW ( OAW?) or the UAW left me or whatever it was, I think maybe, maybe it had to do with some internal problems because of the UAW moving around.

Moon:

Right!

Stuversant:

Yeah I came back to California and the food back home agricultural workers where conducting an organizing drive in the canneries. The canneries at that point, the cannery workers where represented by the teamsters. It did to much of anything for them so it a kind affected some grade in the way but we didn't think of ourselves that way. Now I had to work in the canneries and did volunteer works organizing.

Moon:

What canneries did you work in, do you recall?

Stuversant:

I worked at CAC and this was in San Jose. I worked in CPC3 with [Richmond Chase?] I worked with Richmond Chase the longest, then the teamsters, you know to ware my union card I had to [Inaudible 00:17:28 ]. So then I [snack?] in on the night shift at CPC3 and that took them quite a while before they found me.

Moon:

So were you actually doing some of the cannery work then when you where doing that?

Stuversant:

Yeah

Moon:

So you were working as a cannery worker and then also trying to agitate for representation.

Stuversant:

I worked for at least 10 hours a day, six day a week.

Moon:

Now what was they, hum, do you recall what the ethnicity, hum, ratio was like in the canneries at that time? Was it mostly Hispanic or where there a lot of white women working in the canneries as well or?

Stuversant:

A lot of Italians. There may well have been some Hispanics but I don't remember them per say but I remember...

Moon:

Could this would have been in the 50s when you were probably doing some of this work or a little bit earlier?

Stuversant:

It was earlier.

Moon:

Like just post war?

Stuversant:

I was married in, hum, 46, because I had my first child in 47, 48, 50, 52...

Moon:

So when you got married you were actually in California you were working in the canneries...

Stuversant:

Right I met my husband at the Union.

Moon:

So your husband was also working in the canneries at the time?

Stuversant:

No he worked full time for the Contra Costa CIO-- it was a, some kind of convention. It might have even been a political convention or something like that.

Moon:

OK, right! And then you had your first child at the same time that you were working in the cannery?

Stuversant:

No I stopped working in the canneries. I got married and when I got married I stopped working in the canneries.

Moon:

Ok. So you were working there for maybe...maybe a couple of years between?

Stuversant:

Yeah... it would be a year and a half.

Moon:

And then what did you do after...I mean obviously you had kids after that point so what sorts of activities were you involved in? Did you continue to do some union volunteer work at that point or?

Stuversant:

Well, I had, hum, I have 4 children. I had one in 47, 48, 50 and 52, so I was busy.

Moon:

You were very busy my goodness!

Stuversant:

Hum...Somewhere in there I did run for a Richmond school board but I was not successful.

Moon:

What was that like running for the school board then?

Stuversant:

Well of course looking back now I did know anything about I should have known to be running for the school board but, huh...I was kind of a liberal in that in the race. I would have been OK. I would have learned what I needed to learn gradually. Hum... it was...

Moon:

Where you then only woman running at that time?

Stuversant:

Yeah, I was running and there was a very active girl [woman] from San Pablo who was connected in some way with the law enforcement or the fire department, I can't remember the details of the members of that views, don't know whether [Inaudible 00:21:31]...people were in line still waiting to vote, you know, and [a big argument drops out of the poll in place to vote whether this people could vote or not ?], so, anyway I lost.

Moon:

Oh OK, and look back after your kids were in school age when you run for-

Stuversant:

No, that was, they were still little because when we moved up to Lake Tahoe, my oldest- my oldest was either in kindergarten or first grade.

Moon:

Ok. So you were in Richmond for awhile and then you-

Stuversant:

Yeah-

Moon:

-moved to the mountain-

Stuversant:

Right, right.

Moon:

How long did you live in Tahoe?

Stuversant:

Gosh.

Moon:

(Now?) all this time was your husband still engaged with the um- the union sort of work?

Stuversant:

No, he went back to work as a carpenter, which was his trade. And then, he took a course in community college on repair of televisions and radios. And when we went up to Tahoe he went into business with somebody up there, uh in installing televisions, which was a fairly new big thing happening.

Moon:

Yeah I would imagine.

Stuversant:

Now the other guy climbed the poles and my husband did the technical part of it. But it, we couldn't make a real living out of it.

Moon:

Uh-huh.

Stuversant:

So we