

UNITE HERE Local 11 Oral History Project

Interview of Kurt Petersen

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Kurt Petersen was born and raised in Chicago, attended the University of Notre Dame, and went to law school at Yale University. After working on a farmworker organizing campaign in Washington State in 1995, Kurt took a job as an organizer with HERE Local 814. He helped lead the Miramar-Sheraton Hotel campaign in Santa Monica from 1995 to 2000, building a worker and community movement for living wages and fair treatment for hotel workers. Today he works as the director of nonunion organizing for UNITE HERE Local 11, where he continues to promote the use of comprehensive campaigns.

Interview Contents: Childhood in Chicago and Catholic social teaching — Community organizing in Baltimore during time in a rectory — Yale and HERE organizing of clerical and janitorial workers — Organizing farm workers in Washington State — Meeting Maria Elena Durazo through the farm worker campaign and winning a contract by organizing a boycott with community support — Leaving the United Farm Workers for HERE Local 814 in 1995 — Organizing workers at a Sky Chefs factory — Miramar-Sheraton Hotel campaign — Community support for campaigns — HERE's comprehensive organizing strategy — Helping people overcome their fears in organizing and developing leaders — Local 11's impact on the city of Los Angeles.

The interview was conducted on May 3, 2016 at the UNITE HERE Local 11 offices on Lucas Avenue in downtown Los Angeles. The interviewer is Vivian Rothstein, longtime activist and staff member of Local 11 and the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE). Short segments of the interview are missing throughout the video. The audio file and transcript are complete.

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The UNITE HERE Local 11 Oral History Project documents the history of union organizing in the hospitality industry of Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Long Beach, and Orange County from the 1980s to the 2000s. For more information about the project, contact the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment: <https://irle.ucla.edu/>.

TRANSCRIPT:

VIVIAN: This is Vivian Rothstein and I'm interviewing Kurt Petersen. It's May 3, 2016 and we are at the Lucas St. UNITE HERE Local 11 Office. So, can we start by you talking a little bit about your upbringing and what your family was like as you were growing up?

KURT: Ok. I'm originally from Chicago. My parents were you know, first generation immigrants or their parents were immigrants so they're first generation. My grandmother actually, her first job when she came over from Ireland worked at the Blackstone Hotel as a kitchen helper. She was probably a member of Local 1.

VIVIAN: Wow.

KURT: And then she went on to become a nanny or whatever. But her first job was working there.

VIVIAN: What year was that?

KURT: 1920 something. Someone has done some genealogical work on that but I can't remember when. So anyways, she came over. You know, it was a typical story. Family was in Chicago already so she came over. They got her a job and off she went. My mom was a secretary and my dad worked in insurance. We grew up on the south side for my first 8 or 10 years and then there was a railroad right behind our house on Hail Avenue and on the one side was African American and we were the first line of you know, whites. And soon as it started moving over, we bolted out of there in a classic white flight and we went off to the northwest suburbs where I spent you know, grammar school and high school.

VIVIAN: Which suburbs?

KURT: Arlington Heights. Anyway, so that's...and you know, went to public schools and you know, life in the suburbs was relatively you know, easy. All things said.

VIVIAN: And what did your parents want you to do with your life?

KURT: I think my parents were expecting me to go to college and then get a job. I don't know if there was any lawyer or something like that. I don't know if they were ever, so, you know, you got to do this, you got to do that. But there were expectations that we would go to college.

VIVIAN: And what did you think? What were you hoping that you were going to do?

KURT: I think I wanted to become a lawyer. That's sort of what I wanted to do. At one point I wanted to play sports but that got dashed quickly in high school or whatever so. But then to be a lawyer was probably what I wanted to do.

VIVIAN: Do you have any siblings?

KURT: I have one sister. She's a teacher. She still lives in Arlington Heights.

VIVIAN: So how did you get to college? I mean how did you choose where you were going to go to college?

KURT: So we were from the south side as I said. In spite of my name Kurt Petersen, my middle name is Patrick and $\frac{3}{4}$ of my family is Irish and they were all big fans of Notre Dame. It's like a classic subway. I don't know if you know but there's a whole culture in Chicago around Notre Dame and subway alumni. My dad used to take his mom...his mom used to take him to football games in South Bend from the south side and I grew up in Notre Dame t-shirts. That's all I had. I probably applied to two schools. One of them was Notre Dame and that was where I was going if I got in so that's where I ended up going.

VIVIAN: What about your family's relationship like to the church? Were they religious?

KURT: You know what's interesting, we were. When we were in Chicago, I remember being religious. We would go to church rather frequently. We went to the suburbs, it sort of dropped off eventually. We still, you know I think I got confirmed, or what have you, but that's sort of dissipated significantly I was a...

VIVIAN: But do you think, because you kind of, in my work with you or everybody's work with you, your faith plays a role and seems to in your beliefs.

KURT: Right, so...

VIVIAN: Well...

KURT: I mean I think probably the seed was sown when we were little and then when I went to college, it's sort of where that kind of...I mean the notion of the church as being, as having this robust tradition of Catholic social teaching where you know, where the defense of workers, the poor, you know the option for the poor. You know, there were strong opportunities at Notre Dame, there weren't a lot of us that did it but they were there and I became kind of interested in that and they had a center for social concerns and I had a rector who was a very great man who sort of focused me on that stuff. And I became, you know, it became clear to me that if you were going to become, you know, to be a Christian it meant having...Christ was a revolutionary. I did my thesis on liberation theology so I was all into all that. It just kind of felt...I majored in philosophy and theology. And at one point I was thinking about becoming a priest. I don't know if you knew that.

VIVIAN: No I didn't know.

KURT: But I spent time in a seminary and lived at a rectory for a year in Baltimore. And then, so yeah that's always been important. I don't know if I'd do this work if I hadn't had that faith experience because it's too hard. You got to have something, you've got to have substance, that's the thing and maybe I had to find something else. But it's really, you've got to have some foundation.

VIVIAN: So was that through Catholic social teachings, was that the path that led you to the farm workers?

KURT: Yes. So I went to, after the seminary thing didn't work out, because I was dating Anne at the time, who I eventually became married with, I was looking for something to do honestly and I had been teaching for a little while, which was the hardest job I've ever done. Teaching fifth graders. And then I went to law school to sort of, because there was nothing else to do. And while I was there, oh and I had been doing community organizing in Baltimore. That's where I lived for a couple of years.

VIVIAN: When you were in the seminary?

KURT: Right so I lived one year in the rectory and I spent a year teaching, trying to figure out what I wanted to do. And I applied to law school and I eventually decided to go because I was sort of honestly looking for something to do. But while I was in Baltimore, I worked with an organization that was doing community organizing and I liked it a lot and we fought for some different stuff. And there was sort of a burgeoning living wage movement at the time I was living in Baltimore. I don't know if you remember but way, way, way, way back.

VIVIAN: Yeah, they were the first ones.

KURT: Exactly. I forget what they were called...Build, I think that's what they were called. So I wasn't that involved with that but the church I was at was you know, was part of that. So anyway, so I had to figure out what I wanted to do. So then I went to law school and the school I went to right is in, at Yale where our union, UNITE HERE now was very active and they had organized the clerical and the janitorial staff. And while I was there, there were a number of strikes and all kinds of things. And I got involved in that. And there was a professor by the name of Lance Compa, do you know who he is?

VIVIAN: Oh yeah, I met him.

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: Yeah, we brought him here [to L.A.].

KURT: He's a dear friend and he was very influential. He worked for the newspaper guild, he happened to be teaching labor law. And it just seemed to make sense to me that to build real power, it would had to be...I mean community organizing is wonderful but it was sort of that problem where you know, Vivian wants the street light, Danielle wants the liquor store removed but there's sort of lack of common interest and building power became difficult to see whereas it was clear at Yale that those workers had tremendous power over this super rich corporation. And that to me was you know, impressive. And I was sort of moved by, moved to want to do something around that. So I spent time in Guatemala. And with workers honed my Spanish and then I spent a summer in Washington state, working for legal services. It was a wonderful office. They did extraordinary work but I could tell I didn't want to be a lawyer. I read novels the whole

time. And it was very disempowering I found law. Right. You had the answers, your client came in but he didn't have any say on what was going on.

It was you who...it wasn't a bad thing but it's just the way it is right? And then you win money and as we all know, winning money is like the worse thing because then people, their worst instincts come out a lot of the times because they want to fight over the money and who got more and anyway, all that. So that said, I knew I didn't want to become a lawyer at that point and I decided that I would try organizing. And in when I was in Washington State, really quickly, is this too much?

VIVIAN: No.

KURT: When I was in Washington State, there was a little office, it wasn't even an office, it was a trailer behind the legal services office. And they had a farm workers' union there, an independent union. And I was more attracted to them than I was...and everyone was great but I really liked what they were doing. They had a campaign about against a winery called Chateau San Michelle. We...I took the boycott back to New Haven and soon we had picket lines in New Haven and then blah blah blah got some money. And I went back and worked for them for a few years and we were able to win you know the first contract for farm workers in that state.

VIVIAN: So you were organizing farm workers?

KURT: So we organized them for...so I spent three years, there was a boycott, there were many, many strikes. None that we planned but workers were very active at that point in the apple orchards. So our, and this is a lesson for you know, it was a very resource poor organization, which is an understatement. Which meant that...[Attorney] Rich McCracken wouldn't be happy about this but we didn't care if we got sued because we had nothing.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: So it was like really? Sue us. And so they threatened to sue.

VIVIAN: Was it an independent organization?

KURT: We were an independent farm worker...we were called The United Farm Workers in Washington State, but it was an independent farm worker union. And they had done, they had been around for 20 years or whatever, and kind of bounced around, gotten foundation money. You know there were some tensions around the foundation stuff. But anyway, we decided you know, collectively that were going to focus on this campaign to win a collective bargaining agreement because everything else was kind of like "what are we doing here?"

And so we...because we felt like that would really build power so we...Laser like focus, the company was owned by a company named U.S. Tobacco, which did the skull and the smokeless tobacco. And they owned this winery. And we organized the workers; we had many, many fights, we brought farm workers to go to Connecticut to go to the shareholder's meeting several times. You know the nuns would bring up the big banners and there would be chaos in there.

And the CEO knew us by name by the third time and then the eve of the third, the shareholder meeting that we were going to, they called and they said enough was enough, we want to settle.

And we ended up settling and we had an election, which is where I met Maria Elena [Durazo]. Because the election was run by, it was because there was no law for farm workers right? And so therefore not only were we judgment proof, but we could do anything we wanted to, like secondary, tertiary boycotts. Whatever we wanted to do, we were doing it. And we had a very vibrant campaign in Washington State with tons of community, not tons but probably 7 or 8 committees that were boycott committees that would have you in, lovely people doing incredible work, all volunteers. And so we ended up settling with these guys and part of the settlement was an agreement where we had...and frankly the bishop there was very helpful. Bishop Francis George, who was, later became cardinal of Chicago. And he just passed away. I saw him right before he died. He was a wonder; I think he really transformed our thinking. He was a very conservative guy but on the worker's stuff, he kind of became an advocate of some sort. Anyway, we...Tom Foley, he was the speaker of the house at the time in Washington State. It's called the Foley Commission. And he oversaw an election on these ranches. And Maria Elena, we got to choose someone on the commission, and the other side got to choose someone on the commission, and we chose Maria Elena

VIVIAN: How'd you know about her?

KURT: You know what, I don't even know how I knew about her. But we chose her. She came up, I met her there and we, you know she was wonderful and she was...and you know there were problems. She helped to resolve them and what have you and she oversaw the election. And we won. And then we won a collective bargaining agreement. And at that point it became clear to me that we weren't going to put in the resources to do more organizing because we...I should say, in the middle of this we had affiliated with the United Farmworkers.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And so that kind of gave us credibility right. They kind of, we were like the wild and crazy union.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And they didn't really like that so we needed a little credibility. They actually tried to get FLOC to affiliate with us. You ever hear about them? Farm Labor Organizing Committee?

VIVIAN: Oh yeah.

KURT: I won't say anything bad about it in the interview, but let's just say they were not a...

VIVIAN: Where were they?

KURT: They were in North Carolina and they brought them in as the company union. And we had a big problem with that. And they had to actually...and you know the vote was interesting because of that.

VIVIAN: So it was between the two unions?

KURT: Well yeah but it was really between the company and their union and us and the other union. So anyway, that was a great experience. It wasn't clear that we were having resources. It wasn't clear that we were going to...you know, I could've gone and do the strawberry organizing in Watsonville but I had a family and we were sort of choosing between Chicago where I'm from and Orange County or Los Angeles where Anne's from. So we...and I was looking to be asked to be in Chicago and they had wonderful stuff and it looked good and I wanted to be in Chicago. And then the other one was HERE. I met with Karl [Lechow] at a Denny's outside of Sea-Tac (Seattle-Tacoma) Airport and.....you know, he was trying to scare me or whatever.....We're getting thrown in jail.....they call us everything. You know we're communists or whatever they call us. So I took a job with them. With HERE I had an opportunity to go to Las Vegas. We chose not to go [there]. We were walking down on a July day and it felt like you were walking through a hair dryer. It was just awful. So fortunately they gave us an opportunity in L.A. I came down, I met Tom [Walsh] and Jennifer. I'm sure others but those two I definitely remember. Fred Pascual, Tom [Walsh], Jennifer [Skurnik] and we...I took a job here to work for Local 814.

VIVIAN: And what was your job? What were you supposed to do?

KURT: I was supposed to...it's an organizing, I don't even know what my title was. But maybe a lead organizer to turn around Local 814 which had been trustee which I'm guessing Tom probably talked about that.

VIVIAN: Yeah. But like from your point of view, what were 814 and Local 11 like at that point? What year, that was like 199-

KURT: It was 1995.

VIVIAN: 5?

KURT: Yeah. We settled in '95 I think and I came down there shortly after. The contract is still in effect and cohesive. That's all good but they don't have any more contracts, that's the sad part.

VIVIAN: They stopped organizing.

KURT: Yeah, it's just hard. So we came down and yeah, my assignment, my first assignment was to work with Sky Chefs. I remember Karl told me how rational that place was and it was going to be a great assignment. It was the craziest thing I've ever done in my life.

VIVIAN: Really?

KURT: Sky Chefs, it's you know, the flight kitchen where they provide food for the airlines and it was in the middle of this deregulation that was being...you know, I didn't understand at the time but in retrospect I get what was going on. Where these good jobs, and they were really good jobs, you know for thousands of workers across the country because they originally worked for the airlines and then when they deregulated, well they separated the companies and the Southwest and what have you started cutting food so then the...it used to be, you know Danielle before you were, long before you were born, and the food was you know, regular and good.

VIVIAN: It was edible.

KURT: Yeah and it was regular. You'd get food.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: You wouldn't pay for it or whatever. And that was all these jobs and they were really good jobs. And it just became horrible because it became, bottom feeders started entering, you know, food started being cut. And these workers were just in this awful place. Still awful. I remember still trying to dig ourselves out of it. And so that was my first assignment. It was really...you know, I had done farm work organizing so I understood the fields. Although we didn't get in the fields very much, right. We'd get arrested if we go in the fields and I never really was in the fields. Except in the end when we had access. And then the election agreement at the farm workers thing was fascinating too because we had captive audience meetings that we would give to the workers. I was talking again about the...

VIVIAN: You were here?

KURT: Yeah, they let us in because again, and Loraine didn't...so we could do it and we had all these things. It was an election at the end of the day and there was no neutrality so the company was not neutral. But then moving back down here, so I was all farmworker stuff but this was like a factory, right? And a really awful factory. And so I remember doing that. And then got the, the next assignment was the Miramar Hotel which at the time was owned by a Japanese company and they were decertifying the union. And that's where you know, I met a lot of people from Santa Monica. At that time there was an awful contract. There was a very old contract. There must have been, I don't know, 30 or 40 years old, the contract. But the contract had very few rights for the workers. No seniority. But the biggest...no seniority, very low wages, no benefits. But the very worst part was that they had, it was not a closed shop. And so...

VIVIAN: So they had non-union?

KURT: 12 out of 200 people were paying dues.

VIVIAN: Oh that's what, oh I thought it was just that they didn't have...

KURT: It was the strangest thing.

VIVIAN: They didn't have to do check off. I didn't know it was an open shop.

KURT: Yeah they didn't. These people weren't paying dues. So we didn't...so anyway, it was a nightmare. And they were decertifying us. It was for the workers and I don't know how much you want to go into this but it was a very hard fight. We have ultimately prevailed after many, many years.

VIVIAN: Was it kind of a signature fight for you in terms of, like reflective of how the local was changing? Because in that way it might be worth talking about. We have a lot of documents. You have so many documents from the Miramar fight. It might be good to talk about it a bit.

KURT: Ok. It was an extraordinary difficult but rewarding campaign. I don't know that I could go through many more of those. It was grueling. It was emotionally draining. It was you know, watching workers just get you know, humiliated. You know, ridiculed, isolated, and then you know, ultimately fired right? And then we didn't have any power in that contract. Our backs were up against the wall. The Local was a joke. I mean, Tom and I remember, I think we went in...I was there, I don't know if I was there the day that we took over but I was definitely there while we were dealing with the staff that was still there and going, rummaging through papers and stuff. It was just a disaster, that whole place.

And the Fairmont contract was just no different than that. And meanwhile, as you know, Santa Monica had had a number of hotels built around then. So the Fairmont one time might have been you know, 50% of the...I'm making it up but 25% of the hotel rooms, now it became one of 20 hotels or something or whatever it was in Santa Monica. So our power in that hotel had shrunk. Our power in that industry had shrunk. They were going to wipe us out. That was what they were going to do. There was no question. The de-cert [decertification of the union] was sponsored by the hotels as we know and they paid workers, it turned out \$7 an hour to pass the de-cert petition. That came out years later.

VIVIAN: I didn't know that.

KURT: Oh yeah and on the wall there, there's...I think it's up there. I can't remember if I put it up there but there's a, you may have it where they...I got a notice that the NLRB was going to post something saying they'll no longer give Deborah Macron, was the name of the, and the other guy, I can't remember, Edwin something, raises, and literally the notice came years after the fight was over. And the hotel, the company that owned the hotel at the time called and said "What is this and what are we supposed to do with it?" Because they had nothing to do with it. And I'm like "Yeah, it moves slowly doesn't it?" So, you know, there were a number of people that got fired. You know Delmy Falla, but I don't know if you've heard that story.

VIVIAN: No we haven't.

KURT: Ok. So she was the key leader or one of the key leaders, but really the top leader in the shop. She was a housekeeper. She was tough as nails. She was a remarkable committee leader. And she was fired for...after a delegation [to hotel management], we had done a delegation, we had done lots of delegations, a very active campaign and there was something going on all the time. We had done a delegation inside looking for the general manager guy named William

Wooster and couldn't find him for the fifteenth time. So she leaves the hotel. She walks down, I think that's 2nd Street, and heads down in the employee entrance. And they're filming us. It's not like a camera like this but it's a big camera you know. Back then, I know you don't remember this but there were big cameras back then and it weighed like 25 pounds. And this big security guard was holding it and he was holding it, and Delmy walked down the stairs, and I was behind Delmy, I didn't go in but I was behind her. And she put up her hand to block the camera. You know sort of like a paparazzi thing, stop taking my pictures. And she went in and she went in, she came out, we left, whatever we went to do. And the next day she walks in and they have her paycheck ready. Her last pay stub and they tell her, "You're fired." And she says "Why?" And they say "Because you hit the security guard last night when you were going into the hotel."

VIVIAN: Whoa.

KURT: Just like Vivian hit that right there. Are you ok cameraman? Because Vivian just did...

VIVIAN: Plus she was like...

KURT: Vivian, Delmy weighed you know, 92 pounds. She was a very strong person but she was not, she was not physically intimidating or large at any, I mean at all. So right. So and the security guard was 6'3", you know, big guy, and he got hurt by Delmy in front of us when we didn't know, none of us saw it happen. He didn't make an "ouch." He didn't say "oh." He didn't say, I guess he was stoic, he took the blow and just kept on doing his job.

So they fired her right there. You know, it was a big, a huge set back to our campaign because she was such an important leader. So we had to, you know, that was a really dark moment. Like "What are we going to do?" So we scramble, we decide she becomes a volunteer organizer. She's living in Rancho Cucamonga or whatever that is, oh my God. So she's commuting every day. Her husband wasn't very supportive of what she was doing. And she was nevertheless there every day doing house visits and she, I can't remember the exact words but I know she made it clear to all of us that she wasn't going to give up. And so she eventually, because we had a contract there which made this a complicated situation, went to arbitration and we...at the arbitration, it was like the O. J. Simpson days, we brought in an expert, a forensic expert to look at the video of the camera where she allegedly hit. And the video ...I'll never forget that, found him in Culver City, I worked with him, you know I felt like I was, you know. Again, this is like nothing like today but, and he showed up, much to their chagrin, and he, the expert said "No, there's no...it does not appear that the camera was touched by a finger." Because it's like you know, that would be the part she'd hit, would be right there. And they're alleging we broke his glasses and he had a black eye. I mean it's just like I'm not kidding you. So the...and so she, we won. And the arbitrator, Fred Horowitz, who is now one of the premier arbitrators, lead arbitrators in the country, he actually did the Alex Rodriguez case recently. And he's a one, I should be careful, but he's a very fair man but he, you know, I think he understood what workers were facing at that point. He has done dozens of arbitrations since then. Wonderful man. He issued the decision, we won.

While she goes back in and they say...and in the meantime she had been an organizer. We said "You're going to become a volunteer. You're going to take access. You're going to be an

organizer. That's what we want you to do.” And she may have come on staff at that point. And when she went back in to reclaim her job, we're still in dispute with the company, the company fired her again. And said “Had you been...the reason we're firing you is that the decision says that you should've been never fired. So our position is that you, what you did when you shouldn't have been fired, and that activity that you caused and the ruckus, the disruption that you caused in our hotel, we're firing you for that. Because had you been an employee as the decision says, we're going to fire you for the activity that you did.” I know, it was like “Are you kidding me?” And this was like, our brain was like splitting.

So we go to the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] this time. We file another arbitration. It's clear they're never going to let her back in that hotel ever as an employee. And they were just bound and determined. Years later, before I forget this story, I met, I'm with a different organizer who was on that campaign at Denny's again. I do a lot in Denny's apparently. In Santa Monica, on Lincoln and whatever the...Colorado. And there's...I'm going to pay my bill and it's late, you know, we're probably doing something around Loews, and a guy comes up to me and says “You're with the union.” And I say, this is years later, I say, “Yeah.” You know, I'm a little worried that he's going to say I didn't do the grievance for him or what did I do wrong. And he goes “Well I remember you.” And I go “Ok well I don't remember you. Who are you?” And he says “I was a security guard at the Miramar Hotel.”

VIVIAN: Oh wow.

KURT: “And I want to tell you, and I'm so glad I'm seeing you right now, I want to tell you, I'm really sorry.”

VIVIAN: Oh, he was the one that...

KURT: He wasn't the one but he was with him.”

VIVIAN: Oh God.

KURT: And he said “I'm really sorry. I'm so sorry for what we did to you guys. Delmy never hit anyone. We did horrible things to you and I'm just really, really sorry and I want to apologize.” And it was like 10:30 at night at Denny's so of course we accepted his apology and you know, I think he felt better walking away. I mean there's another guy, a guy named Isidro, who I go now and have dinner at the Miramar because they have 50% happy hour, you should go. 5-6, it's incredible. Have you been, Vivian?

VIVIAN: No, not in years.

KURT: The entire menu is 50%.

VIVIAN: Really? 5-6?

KURT: You must go. 5-6 every day. You could get...I'm not kidding you. And so I go there and Isidro is there. He's always very...he's lovely. He was in the fight. Isidro I remember going and,

Isidro wasn't the only one. During the middle of this fight, we would...I'd knock on his door, you know, probably about the 50th time, he wasn't a leader but we needed him. He was in the front of the house and he pushed me out of his house and said "Get out of here." and was like aggressive and Isidro, again, is like the Delmy equivalent. He's like 5'4 , he's as thin as a...you know, he couldn't really push me. But he pushed me out. I'm like you know, what's up? And then he wouldn't talk to me ever again. And then the day after we win, which we eventually won, he comes up and he apologizes. And he says "You know what, I was just scared out of my mind."

VIVIAN: Oh wow.

KURT: "I couldn't help myself." And now when I go to the restaurant, he's like the most gracious, lovely person.

VIVIAN: So how...you walked into this hotel. The Local was a mess. You had 12 members in the hotel.

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: How did you, what motivated the workers at the Miramar to engage in this fight with you, with the union and...? What was it that they wanted?

KURT: Right. So, I mean, I don't remember exactly what they wanted. I mean I remember that we, people knew the union could be a very good thing. People knew that the company was very bad. The H.R. director was an ex-priest of all things. His name was Raphael. It was weird situation. And he was not a good man. He was a nasty guy. And they were just...so workers had a sense the union was good.

There was no reason to believe it was good because honestly, the contract was barren of rights and what rights there were the boss had them. And we just, I think we just you know, let people believe that, or not let people believe, but convince people that we could do much better here and that there was vision for you know, creating a larger movement of workers. And it started with them. And we found leaders one by one. And eventually we built this committee, led by Delmy. And you know, a whole bunch of other people. And Ramon, I remember Ramon one time was in a captive audience -meeting and they brought in Lupe Cruz, Cruz and Associates [anti-union consultants], and what they spent there, I can't even imagine. I should look back but in today's dollars was millions of dollars. They created videos about us. Did you see those videos?

VIVIAN: Do you have the videos?

KURT: I have them in there.

VIVIAN: Oh I want to make a copy of it.

KURT: I think I have them in there. They did a video where it was about house visits and they had Fidilino and another one of our committee's look- alike visiting with someone with an

organizer. They you know, they made some mistakes right. They had the Nazi poster [of Kurt as a Nazi] where the community just became enraged.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: They had a full cut out, a life size cut out of me in shorts with money coming out of my pockets.

VIVIAN: I didn't know that.

KURT: When you walked in the hotel you would see, yeah.

VIVIAN: Oh gosh.

KURT: They would really personalize it. They were nasty. And Ramon, they knew he couldn't read. He was, you know, he didn't have a lot of education. He was a great leader in there. And he, they, one time in a captive audience meeting, made him, you know, what is the union telling you? Well, you know Ramon says something you know good. He says "Well read this and you'll see really what the Constitution says."

VIVIAN: Oh to humiliate him.

KURT: And of course he couldn't read. That's right, and to humiliate him. They went up to people and they told people "We know you have a drinking problem." and "You are done if the union wins." And they individually had a plan for... Gale Escobar who was a server there, who eventually came on staff with us. She, I spent hours visiting her, convincing her to go forward. She never let me drop her off at the hotel. I would have to drop her off three blocks away because she was petrified what they were going to do to her if they knew that she was part of our union. So a lot of people were like you know, closet supporters.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: There was some courageous groups and, you know, I think people eventually you know, they grew through this fight too. I mean people took steps and you know, became stronger and stronger. And then we did, you may recall, we had delayed the decertification vote because by the time we got in there, we were in trouble. The decertification petition had been filed. We had delayed it because of all of the stuff that they [hotel management] had done. Then we did a community election and that was the other part that was so remarkable about then. I've said it before and I'll say it again. In my career there has never been, I wish this wasn't true, but that was the, I wish it wasn't true because I would like to see it more but there has never been anything like that, community, political, less political. But community worker alliance. I mean we did it right. I mean it was amazing. I know we probably have some like hyperbolizing about it but workers and community [members] used to meet together right. I remember community members knowing the workers. And then the groups [worker and community] would separate and go do their meeting/discussion, you know whatever their particular stuff right. But there was a constant worker contact.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And when we put the politicians and the community in front of the boss all the time and the boss spit in their face and made them just as angry as the workers were. Right?

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I mean it was nothing short of remarkable what we were able to achieve. Out of that came all of the organizing we did in Santa Monica. All, I mean not all but clearly there was good politics there before but you know, we were able to compliment SMRR [Santa Monica for Renters Rights] and progressive politics based on what has happened. I mean people were touched for life, I really feel like.

VIVIAN: But do you think that, because you were really key to that, seeing that there was a purpose in engaging in the community, you know. Do you think that it was because the union was completely powerless that you saw that as so important to the campaign? Because when the unions have more power, they can use the political process.

KURT: Right.

VIVIAN: They don't need priests and rabbis.

KURT: We had a lot of that going on too.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: Reverend, I mean Rabbi Neal Comess-Daniels was amazing. You know, part of what I think, I'm just, that's a really good question, is that when I worked for the farmworkers, it was very simple.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: We had nothing.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And so the community and community volunteers and boycott committees, I mean as wacky as some of those were, and they were, were the backbone of our campaign. We couldn't have done it without them. And the workers got it. And the workers, we'd go to picket lines, we'd drive four hours over the mountains, over the you know, the mountains to get to where the winery, where they sold the wine right? The field. And we'd bring van loads of workers but there were 50 community people there as well. So there was this notion of, you know, it was one fight and there really wasn't much difference. I feel like maybe that was what I was you know, maybe that was only what I knew at that point.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I mean I also think the community in Santa Monica, I mean it was, it is a special place right? And you know, then we had this wonderful community organizing staff, Stephanie Monroe, who's really talented. And I don't know whose idea it was to hire her or have her there. But even the fact that we decided to have a community organizer whoever came up with that idea, sort of set the tone about how we knew to win. We needed that component and that component was, it wasn't just a extraordinary component in terms of like enriching and you know, watching people grow and Richard Bloom jumping on tables and doing "Sí se puede" even though he's not helpful, but let's make sure that goes in the record. But it was also, it actually, I think, it had, you know if we needed 100 points to win that place, the community was probably you know, 30 points or something. You know what I mean? It was really important. I think it really made a difference. It made a difference for the workers, it kept them going. It made a difference to that hotel because they didn't like being, even though they tolerated it, they hated being you know, the bad guy and the pariah. And then it led to so much more. I mean it really did led to so much more.

VIVIAN: So what did you take from that campaign? What did you learn? That was like your first big campaign.

KURT: Here.

VIVIAN: In L.A.

KURT: What did I learn? I learned that the committee is the most important part of the campaign. That our committee learned how to deal with firings, which wasn't as, I mean it happened in Washington State, but this was, I don't know, for whatever reason, because it was under the context of [an NLRB] election, it was more dramatic. I learned how to do, you know, how to knit as best, you know, try to knit together the different components right? We had a very vibrant, it wasn't just a community, but we had a you know the CLUE [Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice] leaders; I don't know if they were CLUE back then. We had a good research component even though it was Japanese owned. I mean, there's a building in Santa Monica, which there's nothing in the archives about, that's on 7th, no Lincoln and Wilshire. And, I don't even remember this Vivian but it was owned by the same company that owned the hotel. Miramar Hotel and it was torn down, there originally was a gas station on that corner.

VIVIAN: Oh yes, I remember this.

KURT: They tore down the gas station. But one of the conditions, crazy Santa Monica, was that they had to replace the gas station. And they did. If you go by that building now and you peer into the parking garage, there are pods there that should have a gas station in them. But of course it was ridiculous. Who's going to go to a gas station, go in a parking lot, get gas and come out. It's not...but they did it just for show and so we protested something about that building trying to get something [researcher] Roxanne Auer , figured out. There's something we could do around that building and.....we actually found the guy who owned the gas station before and he was promised a new gas station. And he shows up to the city council and says "They did not let me

have my gas station.” And we won. And they refused to give this building, whatever it was that they were doing. So we had all kinds of dynamic research and political work as we know. So how many of those politicians, Kevin McKeown [Santa Monica City Councilmember] and others were sort of born in that campaign.

VIVIAN: Created them.

KURT: Richard Bloom was born in that campaign.

VIVIAN: Right.

KURT: Again, I've been a little bitter about that but...

VIVIAN: And communications.

KURT: And communications, my God.

VIVIAN: Well the partnership with LAANE [Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy].

KURT: Yeah. I mean communications, back then there were like several, as you've seen in archives, several newspapers. I mean we'd go to the bathroom outside and they'd cover us right?

VIVIAN: Right.

KURT: I mean it's just like anything we did, they would be like “Oh hey, the union.” So we did a good job of exploiting that, I think most of the time.....Even like the, I feel like the reporters like Jorge...

VIVIAN: Casuso

KURT: Yeah. I saw him the other day and without question I could tell in talking to him that that period of time where he was a reporter, it was like...

VIVIAN: It was formative.

KURT: Unlike anything you've ever seen before.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: The battle was so stark and clear. Who was right and who was wrong. I mean I like black and white. I just like, right, no gray and that's the job we do. In a lot of ways it's like that.

VIVIAN: Well there hadn't been union organizing since the 60s in Santa Monica. I had actually learned that there was a garbage worker strike in 1968. And no, what was the year? Anyway, Martin Luther King was supposed to come there.

KURT: Really?

VIVIAN: He was in Memphis.

KURT: Oh.

VIVIAN: I met a woman who was the wife of a garbage worker.

KURT: No kidding.

VIVIAN: Martin Luther King. And he was supposed to come there after he was in Memphis.

KURT: Wow.

VIVIAN: And he was killed. Yeah, I don't think there had been union activities since then.

KURT: I mean, Mike Feinstein. I mean we won that election for him. Again, I don't know if that was a smart thing. Vivian, you probably

VIVIAN: He's still with us.

KURT: I know.

VIVIAN: With hotel workers.

KURT: Right.

VIVIAN: Still with us.

KURT: I remember the day after the election, people were like "What happened?" and you know we were like the old fashioned way, you know, we walked precincts the day of the election, we brought it home for him. The skateboarding, green party, marijuana smoking, you know. Anyway,

Vivian: He told me he only gets [wakes] up...he has never gotten up except when his body was ready to wake up.

KURT: You're right, you're right.

VIVIAN: In his whole life.

KURT: But God bless him. He was a supporter and he believed, he was transformed. And everyone who came in touch with those workers. I remember. So we had the committee election, which was a, you know, a...not a fake [union recognition election but a election run by the community. We won it.

VIVIAN: Informal. Informal.

KURT: Right. And then three weeks later or something like that, we decided to pull the trigger on the real [NLRB] election. We got beat by seven votes or something like that. And then they committed so many [labor] violations during that day. I mean they were escorting people into the shop and they were doing all kinds of you know, making workers walk through gauntlets [of hotel management] to vote and that night, the night we lost, I remember, you know that was a hard night. We had to gather back at the office. I don't know if you remember that. And try to, kind of console one another. And I don't think I was much for talking that night. And that was a really hard, hard blow. But as a credit to the workers and to our union, we were not done. I mean, you know, the next...because you had to file charges within ten days so the next day we're out, we're collecting you know, whatever, you know, anything we could. We put it all in. We had a long hearing. In the middle of the hearing we had a turn, one of their managers turn, do you remember this?

VIVIAN: No.

KURT: Oh this is an amazing story. So...

VIVIAN: The blue ribbon thing?

KURT: Well that but for that NLRB trial, and you'll see in the transcript, there's a guy named Ulysses Black, he had the best name ever. He was from New Zealand or Australian. He was a food and beverage manager in there and he reached out to us after the election because they had fired him. And he said, "You know what..." And for a second I remember this story, Carlos Ramos, we were after Carlos Ramos and he was one of our leaders in room service. He lived in Palmdale and you know, he was one of those guys who bought a house and he's probably still there. And Carlos got really scared during...and I think he, you know, he voted the right way. I think stopped being a committee because they did something to him. Ulysses, he knew about this and other stuff. Ulysses calls and says "I want to help; I hate the company. You know, what they did to you and whatever, it was just horrible and I want to do something." So we said "Great!" So we meet with him, and I'm like Ulysses Black, what a name. And we're keeping it all silent though. And he then, then he disappears on us. He gets cold feet right? He's thinking "What's my next job going to be? How's this going to look?" right, then it dawned on him in the moment of his anger that he's going to have to do this. And so we...so then Francis and I.....We find out where he lives and we got a.....We follow the lawyer's advice on how to subpoena him. We need to get the subpoena served, because if we get the subpoena served, he has to come to the trial.

And so we find out where he lives. We can't...on Sunday morning, Francis, you have to ask him, Francis has better recollection. But we were like double teaming, trying to get him. And he knows we're after him. He knows because he won't answer his phone and whatever, his beeper, or whatever he had back in the day. So then we find out that his girlfriend lives in [SM City Councilmember] Ken Genser's building.

VIVIAN: Oh wow.

KURT: In Genser's mom's building. And you remember his mom?

VIVIAN: Yes I remember his mom.

KURT: She's kind of...at the end she was a little bit out there. But she's a lovely woman. So she lets us in and Ken lets us in.

VIVIAN: Oh.

KURT: And so we eventually, I think...I can't remember, Francis knows exact. But I'm pretty sure we get up, coming out of his, in the parking garage. And later we subpoena him.

VIVIAN: Subpoena him.

KURT: Yeah and he has to come. And when I get him and he's like "Ugh." And he knows we got him and he's like...you know kind of his conscience takes over and then he goes "You know I'm going to do it. I'm going to do it." I'm like "You don't have a choice, you're going to do it."

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And later Ken [Genser] says "Oh Kurt, my mom got lots of trouble with the..." because he was in like a high end condo on the, near the water.

VIVIAN: Oh, that you got let in.

KURT: Yeah because we were like roaming around the building you know. So...

VIVIAN: Ken was great...

KURT: Yeah. He really was a great man. And so then Ulysses...I'll never forget the trial. It's like a three-week trial. It's like outrageous. I mean it's just crazy. Someone from Rich's [McCracken's] firm is doing it. It's just like non-stop. Everyone's going up and giving a testimony. At one point we call Ulysses Black. The company has no idea. I watched Rafael go and William Wooster to see their reaction. And their necks almost broke when they shot back to see that Ulysses Black was there. He came in, he was a spectacular witness. He, you know, we are going to win but he ensured that it was game set match. So we ended up winning the trial, overturning the election. We get another election. The company, Fujita, the owner, and the owner of the company was William Wells. And we should write a book about this because this is like nuts.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: William Wells was like the CIA, secretive, I mean it was weird. We don't know what his whole story was. We got to find this out. His main building in Santa Monica, Vivian, had no windows.

VIVIAN: Wow.

KURT: It was on Arizona and, like, 5th.

VIVIAN: Where he lived?

KURT: Where his office, we don't know where he lived.

VIVIAN: Where his office was.

KURT: His office was. He lived some place in Santa Monica.

VIVIAN: He owned but Fujita owned

KURT: He somehow worked for Fujita. He was like their L.A. person

VIVIAN: I see.

KURT: Or something. And he was just a nasty old, old man. He must have been in the 70's or 80's. He eventually passed away. And he was just nasty. But we tried to kind of figure him out and what we could do. And I remember this building. It was like, he wouldn't...anyway. So, he...so they, he decides, Fujita decides to sell the property. Why, for us or for other reasons, they sell it to a different company, Meretz Wolf, they meet with us. They come and visit us and say "We want this over." We say "Great."and then we have our election. And we win it. We have it off, the election was so bad the first time around that the board, the National Relations Board ordered that it be done in another place because so much bad stuff had happened there that people they felt would have PTSD walking back in the election.

VIVIAN: Just going in there.

KURT: So it was done at a church. We got to pick the church. It was a church, it was an Episcopal church on

VIVIAN: On Fourth Street.

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: St. Augustin's.

KURT: And we won 161 to 7.

VIVIAN: Wow, that's amazing.

KURT: Which I hope we have in the archives. It was a great, great win. A remarkable day. It took years to do.

VIVIAN: How many years?

KURT: God, '95 to 2000, 5 years right?

VIVIAN: 2000?

KURT: Yeah. I think so, right?

VIVIAN: I can't remember when it was finally won.

KURT: Good Lord. And then two other stories if I might?

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: One story, it's a Noel story. You've heard this one?

VIVIAN: Well I don't know.

KURT: Ok. So Noel Rodriguez, organizer, very tough organizer, still works with us, organizing director. He was on this campaign as many people were. He met his wife at this campaign, Robin Rodriguez. They're married and have two lovely children. I didn't realize, if I had known because I was charge of the campaign that there was some dating going on, I would've squashed it but anyway, it happened.

VIVIAN: Wasn't she dating Francis at the time?

KURT: I don't know, she was dating someone, I can't remember. So anyway, Noel was in there. Noel's tough as nails and doesn't back down for anyone. And he went in to try and get as I recall, the personnel files because by state law, you're allowed to get someone's personnel file. We're still representatives of the union even though we're in this process of being decertified. Even though they made it very difficult for us. So he goes in, he talks to them, and somehow he, he won't take no for an answer. And so he stands his ground. Their security guard, their security staff, the high level ones were all cops or ex cops and so Armando, who was the top security guy, who was an ex Santa Monica cop, came in and told Noel to leave. Noel stood his ground. They arrested Noel. Citizen's arrest. They put him in handcuffs and they put him in this room that they called "the union room," where they had removed the door and that the idea was that we were supposed to only talk to people in the union room. Of course we didn't. We went into the cafeteria. But for an hour and a half, Noel is handcuffed on his back, he's sitting in this room and there's a door where workers, it's in the common hall...

VIVIAN: Where they can see him.

KURT: All walking by and they see the union representative in handcuffs in the room. Eventually, of course, the charges were dropped and what have you. But the cops were bad. I mean they were really awful. They took him away. You know, we had problems with the

employees in the hotel, anyway Armando had the cops going after people. I mean it was really a bad scene. So that was one thing I remember as a low moment. Getting that call like “You’re where? What happened?” It was just, you’re in handcuffs. And the workers are seeing this, oh good. The other story, Vivian I’m sure you remember it, was when they did, one of the captive audience meetings, they did many of them. One of them, the general manager dressed up as Darth Vader and it was a big room, big ball room. It was near the end of the campaign and he had this script where he was, which I think, hopefully you have, where he talks about how the union thinks I’m Darth Vader and evil but really I’m not so bad. And he rips off the Darth Vader mask. On the spotlight, he’s there. And it’s like of like “Whoa, what have I gotten myself into?”

VIVIAN: William Wooster?

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: I never saw him.

KURT: Oh, see. We used to have William Wooster mask, “Where is William Wooster? Where’s Waldo?” Anyway, at the same time, I think it was the same meeting Vivian, where Martin Sheen comes in. Do you remember this?

VIVIAN: At the captive audience meeting?

KURT: Oh Martin Sheen, he was...

VIVIAN: He was in the hotel?

KURT: Yes.

KURT: Well he was in the hotel.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: So we march in the hotel, can’t remember which captive audience meeting it was but he was in that one. And the workers were barricaded in what Martin Sheen’s mind...anyway, in this room and couldn’t get out.

VIVIAN: Well that’s what I heard. They were barricaded.

KURT: That’s right.

VIVIAN: There were tables.

KURT: That’s right.

VIVIAN: Across the doors.

KURT: Yeah. I mean it may have been tables across the doors. It wasn't that there were no doors that were open but...so he sees this. I don't even know why we're in there. I don't know what crazy scheme we have going on but we go in there. He decides to go in there. We follow him in there. And he starts removing, Martin Sheen removing the tables and chairs.

VIVIAN: So people can get out?

KURT: So people can get out. It's like this symbolic...meanwhile everyone's inside, no one's coming out. And it's not like people are pushing at the doors. They're all in this meeting. And this commotion starts and they call the cops, the cops show up. And then Martin Sheen says something like "Officers, you need to arrest them because they were holding these people hostage and I was just trying to liberate them." I mean he does this soliloquy out of some movie he was in and he, you know, I don't even know what happened. I think the cops just escorted us out. But he was a remarkable...I mean David Clennon, who was another actor...

VIVIAN: Yes. Right.

KURT: Was just phenomenal.

VIVIAN: Right.

KURT: And a supporter. I just felt the depth in the communities...

VIVIAN: People were so excited.

KURT: Oh, my God.

VIVIAN: So the union must have wondered what hit them when you came and did this because there wasn't organizing like that going on in Los Angeles.

KURT: Well I don't think I've seen it again. That's the sad part. But...

VIVIAN: But what did people think of you?

KURT: I don't even remember. You, Vivian probably have a better idea than I do. I don't know. It was...I think people were, I mean, Delmy was, you remember when they did the top ten most important people in Santa Monica?

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: She was like number five or something like that. I mean her profile and her courage became very...I just think the workers were, I mean, what they went through, five years of fighting and firing. This to hundreds of...

VIVIAN: Right. But you also figured out how to use the NLRB.

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: Right? Because the NLRB wasn't necessarily an ally.

KURT: No. They're terrible.

VIVIAN: But you were able to take the most egregious cases to them where they had to rule in the favor of the union, really.

KURT: I mean we did a really good job at documenting. We had a really strong team. I mean we worked really hard Vivian. I mean I can remember being on the sidewalk at one in the morning, many nights, outside the hotel, kind of going through...

VIVIAN: Talking to people.

KURT: Yeah or making plans for the next day.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I mean it was daily check-ins for a long, long time. You know, emotionally and mentally, how many times can you do that?

Vivan: Yeah. Yeah.

KURT: And then everyone went through that.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I mean Robin. It was just like it was a moment that they all, we were all transformed in a profound way. I mean I think what it's...so yeah, I think, and we were smart because at some point right, where we said "This has to be bigger." Like we can't spend five years and only be about the Miramar [Hotel]. And so then we started thinking about Loew's and the rest of the hotels in Santa Monica. And eventually we were able to move our movement up to those hotels. So.

VIVIAN: That was a movement.

KURT: Totally.

VIVIAN: It was a movement. It wasn't just a union campaign. In fact, even the coverage wasn't necessarily union.

KURT: Nope.

VIVIAN: It was like workers and community.

KURT: That's right.

VIVIAN: It was...so...

KURT: I mean, Robert Scheer, remember he had a weekly column. I swear to God for a while we were like in, every one or two of his columns were about us.

VIVIAN: Right. Right.

KURT: And then about our movement and stuff.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I mean it's just really. I remember one time he wrote a column about someone coming to his door, who had been knocking on his door.

VIVIAN: Yes, right.

KURT: To turn him off to vote. And he was I think thoroughly impressed with this worker talking about his or her...I mean we did things, like we got involved with your friend, who's name I'm going to...got to have her face in front of me, Community Corporation of Santa Monica.

VIVIAN: Oh Joan Ling?

Kurt: Joan was wonderful and helped us.

VIVIAN: Right.

KURT: You know she didn't do anything wrong but helped us get people in the [affordable] housing.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: Remember, Jose Casias and his five children on, you know,

VIVIAN: Yeah. Right.

KURT: Had the penthouse on...

VIVIAN: Right.

KURT: That was like a glorious moment.

VIVIAN: And also, Jose when he had a loss of faith [in the struggle], we got a priest to come and talk to him and "This is what Jesus would have wanted." Remember?

KURT: And we went to Saint Monica's [Catholic Church]. We had Saint Anne's with Father Mike, again who...

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I have to believe if he talks about this, this would be like a moment for him.

VIVIAN: Oh yeah.

KURT: And then we had, that member in Loew's [Hotel] when they accused us of dressing up as priests.

VIVIAN: Yes. Right. What was that priest from that church?

KURT: St. Clement's.

VIVIAN: Yeah, St. Clement's. Yeah. That was Jose...I can't remember his last name.

KURT: They accused us, the union, of dressing up as priests when in fact it was really a priest.

VIVIAN: A priest talking to workers, right.

KURT: I remember going to Jose Casias' parish out on like Vermont and something. I can't remember the name of it. And meeting with his priest because there was a group of stewards, Jose being one of them, who were scared shitless, who all were undocumented. I mean, and who were just going to die and went out there to try to fortify him. And that priest, he met with them, he, then the next two sermons, like next two Sundays, he talked about the union.

VIVIAN: Really? Out there?

KURT: Yeah and I can't remember his name. He was a wonderful man. And the parish was great. But he got it right away and gosh it was really inspiring.

VIVIAN: So if you could encapsulate what it was that that campaign, what was the strategy that campaign? Here was a hotel, twelve members, a really hostile company. So what was your vision of what was needed to win or something?

KURT: I think, honestly, I think a lot of it was just our absolute unwillingness to give in. I mean I think it was just this desire, this overwhelming belief that we were going to win. This confidence that we were going to win. And that we were, relentlessness. I mean we were relentless after that. That's why it was so exhausting.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: We never stopped. Jennifer Skurnik, I'm sure was behind me much of the way, you know, telling me this, that, and the other, I mean I have vague recollections of conversations with her. But I know there were those. And we were never going to give up. It didn't matter what happened. We were going to fight until the end. I don't know that we...and then along the way, we, as you said, put together the components of the comprehensive campaign, built a strategy, decided that the strategy should be bigger than the Miramar. And we decided that eventually, at some point, we were going to organize as much as we possibly could in that city. And I think that's the story of that geography right? Which we talked about the geographical organizing. And I think Santa Monica, in my view, is the first place we experimented with that. And I don't know that there's any...I mean it's like thinking about it as a geography. It's thinking about you know, what are the pieces that we can use in the geography? What are the ideal situations? We have stuff coming from outside the geography. You know, pressure. That wasn't the case, the Miramar, we couldn't get lay a glove from this Japanese company. So it was no, except for the little thing we did in Santa Monica, blocked their building around the...

VIVIAN: The gas station?

KURT: The gas station. I mean it was all just like pure local power against this company and you know, I don't know what made them walk away at some point. Maybe they figured we were not giving up. It wasn't going away. I felt like that's what that fight was. And then we, you know, as we know, we turned it into this more ambitious, you know, program with a remarkable policy component that was you know, again, very grounded in the workers and the community. We've never done anything like that before. Or I shouldn't say never.

VIVIAN:

KURT: It was troubling to me as you know. It was like, Vivian, we can't let them decide on this stuff. We need it this way. And you're like "Kurt, Kurt, it's going to be ok. It's going to be ok." "I know but what if they decide it should be 10.42 and not 10.82?" "No, no, it's going to be ok." And so then you'd have these meetings, these interminable meetings with all these people who cared about the living wage for hotel workers. We weren't even talking about any other worker.

VIVIAN: That's true.

KURT: That's all people were talking about.

VIVIAN: That's true.

KURT: Dozens of people in this community who decided this was going to be the thing that was going to make their community different. And how did we figure out why people would give you know, hours and hours of their volunteer time, of their lives to do something, you know, so kind of remarkably, not small but you know, I mean focused.

VIVIAN: Well I think partly because people felt like they could actually win something and break down the barriers that existed in our communities. You know, by class and race. I don't

know. It's not my interview. But yeah, it was pretty remarkable. So, you had this campaign and you built this really...

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: Exhausting...

KURT: Right.

VIVIAN: So then what, where did you go from there?

KURT: So then we decided, you're going to have to help me here, but I think we decided to do it sort of the same time the Loew's, was it?

VIVIAN: Yeah, Loew's and then there was the Viceroy.

KURT: It was interesting back then. A lot of workers came forward from other places having you know...

VIVIAN: All having heard about this?

KURT:And you know, it was, there was suddenly, I think, honestly, I wish we could have exploited that moment a lot...

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: ...bigger. I don't think we understood at the time. The momentum we had and the willingness of workers because what happens, right? This is the hard part. We caught the industry by surprise there.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: They had no, they've never seen anything like this. They, you know, were not prepared for it. And you know, I think we did the same thing in Century Blvd., I think we caught the industry by surprise. Now what's in Century Blvd. that's non-union, they are ready for us right? They fix the problems. They're working with the workers. They, you know, we've improved things such that. And so in Santa Monica we had this moment, we decided to exploit it. We went after the Loew's Hotel. Hard campaign again. Lupe Cruz again. It was brutal. That was not a fun one.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And eventually,

VIVIAN: Just explain who Lupe Cruz is.

KURT: Lupe Cruz again, he's the union buster who comes out of, he eventually...or he before worked for UNITE HERE or for HERE as an organizer. He then decided to become a union buster and he had made millions and millions and millions of dollars busting particularly our union but the teamsters in other places. He's pure evil. I mean, he's the, he gives me...he...I know there's hell because he's got to go. He's a bad, bad man. So, he continues this day. As we speak, he's at a hotel telling his lies. Because what he does, he knows that workers will do better with the union yet he goes there and takes stuff away from them that could help their families, you know? So anyway, he's just a bad, bad guy.

VIVIAN: So when workers came forward, like from Loew's and other hotels, what were they looking for? Was it, did they want to make more money? Did they want to have healthcare? What do you see as the biggest motivator for...?

KURT: For workers.

VIVIAN: Workers to stand up and say no, you know?

KURT: I mean I think it's all that but as you know, the company can always improve things materially. So, it ultimately comes down to some level of respect. You know. People wanted to be treated a certain way and they don't feel that. And if you've, and I know you have been, but when you go to negotiations with workers for the first time, you know, a committee wins their campaign and we sit down with the boss for the first time, it is sort of his, and I've done it dozens of times, but it is like an extraordinary moment because they literally, and sometimes you have to point it out to them. It's like "You realize where you are and what you're doing, right now." And the people are like "Whoa." Like they're sitting down with the boss, as equals because we're at a table like this. I'm looking you in the eye. You're not telling me what I'm going to do, to make, or whatever. I'm actually telling you. And I'm doing it with a group so again you don't have me one on one.

So, I think that moment when we sit there and negotiate. And the way we do negotiations is the committee is you know, the question is you have to have all these people, that's what the boss always says. And we're like "Yeah we do." And but that moment where those workers, like that's the ultimate empowerment where workers are you know, treated as equals. I mean that's something, I think people thirst for that. I mean you, you know, we've all worked at jobs and you don't feel very powerful. And if that's ok. And maybe that's not ok but if you're there for six months because you're you know, driving pizza for Dominos, which I did for a while, but anyway, as I was gone, this is going to be my next 15 years and I'm depending on it, I really think people want some measure of self-respect and dignity. And people, you know, and I think at some point people realize when they overcome their fear, which is always our hardest thing right? It's never the boss. It's never Lupe Cruz. It's always their fear. When people overcome that, they sort of...it's like an addiction. Not an addiction. It's like "Oh my God, I can't believe I did that." And you look behind you. I wouldn't do that last weekend and now I'm wearing a button, now I'm leading a delegation. I mean. So all those moments right?

I guess negotiations for me, it's so crystal clear because it's like, visually, it's like we're in the same room but it's you know, the first time where they do a delegation on the boss and that's an

amazing moment as well. When people tell them [the boss] they're organizing for the union. And that stuff is what keeps people going, I think. The money and stuff is important but we all know the boss can always match the money and all that. What makes people want to do it is that they are going to grow as a person. They're going to earn respect and they're not going to be fearful in the job. I mean we call something we do with workers. We used to do it religiously. I mean, the other thing I would say about our organizing back then, I mean we had thought through...and I won't go into them because Paul Morrow would get mad, but many really thorough ways of organizing. And one of the things we used to do with people religiously was take them on a union tour, and we called that the "taste of the union." We take a non-union worker and bring them in a union shop and inevitably, people will walk in there and say "Oh my God," when they walk into a union shop, "I feel free."

VIVIAN: Wow.

KURT: "I feel free. I never feel like this in my place." And that is not about money. It's not about health insurance. It's about, like, freedom. I mean it's like the sense that I can talk, say, walk and I don't have to worry. In a non-union setting, I don't care what they pay people. I mean, I talk to servers who make \$90,000 a year. They're scared shitless to do anything. Because they're scared and it's like really? You're going to continue living in fear. I mean I was talking to a server the other day in a restaurant. He's like "Well..." I'm like "I'm not going to tell your boss about this." He's like "uhhh." And he's like almost shaking.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: But you know, wouldn't you like to get rid of that? You go to a union place and people don't feel that at all. To me it's the freedom, the respect. You know. Look at the Miramar workers. You walk in there...Isidro, who threw me out of his house. Now like, you know, he treats me way too good in the restaurant and not even worry about it. You know, super service because what's...I talked to a server at the Miramar the other day. Young woman, you know, lovely...I could tell she's like an actress or something like that and so you know, I'm asking her and she goes, "My mom tells me, 'never lose this job.'" She says "This is the best job you're ever going to get." And I say "Why do you say that?" She goes "Well..." And she has this lovely way going about it. She goes "Well, you know, new managers come in and they think they can do what they want and we say "This place is union. You can't do that."

And that kind of power is you don't have it in any other place but in a union job. You just don't. People can say "oh I'm good, I'm fine." but you're not. You're always at the whim of your boss. And managers change, this one might be good but the next one is going to be a disaster. And trying to get people to see that, feel that, understand that that's worth it and overcome their free is the hardest part of our job. I mean fear, I'm sure you've heard this from other people, it's just so challenging. So, so challenging because it's not a logical decision. If it was logic or rationality, everyone would choose the union.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: You wouldn't want to make more. You don't want to earn more. You don't want to do this, don't want to do that. So and that's why we choose you know, leaders and we develop them and we push them. I mean, that's the only thing I would say about our job, I'm getting a little bit out here but you know, people like Lorena, who you've worked with, right? I mean do you know Lorena? She probably lied to you about her original story...I'm just kidding, but do you know what she told us in the beginning? Did she say?

VIVIAN: Well she was against the union.

KURT: It was worse than that. When we finally hooked her, what she told us, why she couldn't work with us.

VIVIAN: Why?

KURT: She was married and had three children.

VIVIAN: Which is a lie. She was like 22 or something.

KURT: Right, right. But she's so...partly out of fear.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: Partly of I don't want to step into this. I mean Lorena is a very tough person so maybe it wasn't always...but people, they know this is like...we're asking a lot from you. And people find a way not to do it. And so, you know, that doesn't change.

VIVIAN: So what do you think your biggest contribution has been in terms of transforming these two locals into an organizing local? Because you have led so many of these. You are the premiere non-union campaign strategist. What do you feel like you, you have brought?

KURT: I think one thing is you know, a focus on the non-union, that we have to grow. That it has to be seen as...not that others don't believe this but I think I've helped them make this, a real centerpiece that we need to have a union that...the only way that standards are going to go up is if we grow in density. I mean we've been talking about this since Santa Monica.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I remember doing graphs about you know, our density in Santa Monica because 10% and if we go to 40%...and it worked. I mean people were...Roselia, who's in the Viceroy, the Viceroy [Hotel] is another place we won there. It used to be this old hotel. I mean they were making \$5 an hour. She makes now \$15, \$18 an hour. I think free family health insurance. I mean, you know, it works, what we do. Both on a material level and plus she's like you know, these Oaxacan housekeepers in the Viceroy, they're all like 5 foot tall. The managers are scared to death of them. Scared to death of them.

I can remember the hot shot Brad Coors and Mr.... he was the owner, and he was like Mr. Hip and he was definitely afraid of those housekeepers. "You've got to get them to stop. You've got to get them to stop." So I think the focus on organizing, you know, it's been a big thing that I hopefully contributed, you know, the helping to develop the campaign strategies, as you put it, the notion of geographical organizing, which has been a hard notion to sort of push outside of Local 11. People don't really...I've been not terribly successful getting other locals to buy into it.

VIVIAN: Really?

KURT: Yeah. I mean I don't know what it is exactly. It'd be interesting to have a longer conversation about that but I don't think people see it the same way we do. I mean, we, you know, try to attack a market and you know, with as many different elements we can bring, including the policy. I think what people confuse it with is "Oh you have policy." It's like "nope." In Santa Monica, we never got the policy.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: But we won the workers. We lost two living wages or we won, you know, whatever, it's a long, sordid history. Only now getting it, you know, fifteen years later. It is the best one in the country but we're the only ones. But and you know, so people kind of see it like that and I'm not sure what it is that...But anyway, this focus on geography, the focus on non-union, you know. And I think a lot of us have this very strong determination to push stuff as hard as we can. And it can be hard and exhausting, and all that. And the last thing I'd like to think that I've done a decent job in training and bringing some of these people, like Lorena and Betty. Francis to some extent although I wouldn't take full credit for him. And you know, watching, especially people like Lorena and Betty, it's sort of a remarkable ride.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I mean they are top leaders in our organization and you know, toe to toe, maybe the best in what they do. Better than I am in what they do. And you know, Betty was a housekeeper and nothing wrong with that but you know, she became this leader of Arizona. Leading Arizona to become a purple state. She's like the, you know, the person doing that. And then Lorena is just this remarkably tough, hard-nosed organizer and won many, many campaigns and trained many, many people. So...

VIVIAN: So when you think about your life, and I know you're a very, you're a modest, humble person. But when you think about your life and...

KURT: Not today I'm not modest.

VIVIAN: Not today?

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: But all the people that you have created an opportunity for them to find their personal power and not only get better wages and get health coverage but get respect, like feel like they're free in their work environments. How does that make you feel?

KURT: Well it's very inspiring. I mean that's the great thing about our job is that every day it's hard but you know, I sort of used to say it's like you put your head down and there's the great wall of capitalism and you run into it and you smack it and you hope you create a little, you know, dust that falls off, but hopefully you look around and more importantly you see you know, 30 other colleagues doing it too, so the thing is maybe shuttering. So, I mean, it's really an inspiring, you know, job. I mean I don't talk as much with workers. I still do negotiations. I guess that's what I'm sort of focused on with that experience of negotiations but it is really inspiring to watch people, you know. Honestly, in my daughter, Hannah, we mentioned her, I mean she's sort of...things can change but all my kids like your kids have very good politics and tremendous empathy. And you know, she, in particular, like my girl better than my boys but you don't have to put that in, but she's almost like she's better than anything I ever was.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And that makes you feel like you've done something right, right? Because you know, you know this Vivian, some people take paths where they don't do social justice or whatever, that's a bad way of putting it, but they end up chasing the money or whatever. I think that's the more extreme thing. And I'm 50 years old. I have friends coming in right now and saying "Kurt, I don't know what I've done in the last 30 years of my life."

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: "I need to do something different." And they're coming because they think even though I make 1/10 of what they make, if that, they know...

VIVIAN: They look up to you.

KURT: Well, they see I'm happy and I can't explain what I do. That's the hard thing. I don't know if that's hard for you but like to normal people, "What do you do exactly?" and you say, people look at you like this but my good friends know what we do and what we try to do. And I just think there's real meaning in what we do. We can talk about the workers at the farmworkers up there who are still...well I still communicate, I get a Christmas card from several of them a year, right?

VIVIAN: That's so great.

KURT: Yeah, right? And then workers at the Miramar. And the kind of struggles we have, especially when I was younger and you know, had more energy, and was in the fight, you just build this remarkable...you know what I mean? It's like a, I wouldn't say family because it's not really that but it's a community of people who you share...when you go through struggles with somebody, it just transforms your relationship.

VIVIAN: You know each other.

KURT: Yeah. Oh my God. And you just...but when you win, like you said, and that's the other thing, we win. Right? That's the beauty in what we do. We don't always win but we win most of the time. There's nothing like winning to make people believers.

VIVIAN: So what do you feel like the impact has been of the union in Los Angeles?

KURT: Oh I think, you know if you look at our numbers, especially in the last 10 years, I don't know if you guys have looked at the LM's, the LM-2's, they're the reports of our membership. If you go on unionfacts.com...we've grown almost like 80%

VIVIAN: Really?

KURT: The growth of a private sector union

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And with no help from...not that we don't use the politics, of course we do. It's sort of breathtaking. We've gone from 13,000 over 20,000 members. And that's not where that merger...we did no mergers as well. So, I think you know, what we're doing is working again, I wish we're at 40,000 but you know, it is what it is. And then you look at Roselia, and as I said, at the Viceroy, whose lives, her life is you know, she's not exactly at the middle class but she's moving to it. I mean it actually works. What we do actually works. It is the best anti-poverty [program] without question and that's why they fight so hard against us right?

VIVIAN: And do you think that has influenced Los Angeles politics?

KURT: Yeah. I mean we fight way above our weight. I mean even though we have 20,000 members, there's no way we should have the power that we have. You know, we passed, as you know, the battery of ordinances on Century Blvd. Then we passed Raise L.A. [the city wide Hotel Worker Living Wage} And you know as the predecessor to the larger minimum wage. I mean I think we have...I think we're seeing, and plus we were, through Miguel [Contreras] and Maria Elena, we were in the troops who did a lot of the transformative, political work. So I think we've had a dramatic impact on Los Angeles. And when you think about it, Los Angeles is what, the second largest city in the country and among the largest in the world. I mean that is a pretty remarkable achievement.

VIVIAN: So where do you want to see the union in five years?

KURT: So, I'd like us to have, and I don't mean it's all about numbers, but it'd be really good to get to at least 30,000. I sort of feel like there's going to be a moment where our density is going to be where, I'd like to think, where we get, you know we're right at, depending how you count, right around 50%. We're probably less than that if you count every Holiday Inn and Express in the world but you know, is there a tipping point where things just start getting a little easier? I mean that's our other motto here. Things shouldn't be so hard. I mean, nothing's ever easy. I

mean those hotels in Santa Monica, every one of them was like...even though the Miramar was the hardest, Loews was the second hardest.

VIVIAN: But have the subsequent ones been easier?

KURT: Sometimes. Sometimes no. I mean I'm sort of...I mean yes, there have been easier ones for sure. Yes. Nothing was as harder as Miramar so everything was downhill from there.

VIVIAN: The first one.

KURT: Yeah. Loews was super hard and has been...right, we have not been...and we're winning more. But it's still, you know there's still brutal battles. I mean there's just no you know, hand to hand combat in those hotels. I mean the workers have to fight for their dear lives in there. And sometimes they're stronger than others and that's the really frustrating thing about it. If we don't have the workers in you know, unify...no, that's not, when you don't have a good committee. Even though we've tried, I mean it's not like it wasn't, maybe there were some mistakes in the organizing but some places are just more ready than others. And when they're not ready, that can be really difficult. And that's frustrating because then you're like "You know we're not, you know the boss is taking advantage of it." and stuff like that. So I would like to think we'd get to tipping point to answer your question. Like could we get to this point where we go from, 40 to 50% is really hard but 50 to 60% you know, goes like that.

VIVIAN: And then...

KURT: It's possible.

VIVIAN: And then yeah, so then the other...

KURT: Then we become like big and you know, we lose our scrappiness. That's the only thing I would say, we sort of, probably shouldn't put this in, but Santa Monica, what I liked about it, and even Local 11 back at the old place was we were very scrappy.

VIVIAN: Scrappy. Yeah.

KURT: I mean now, we're...I wouldn't call us bureaucratic because that would be overestimating what we're actually capable of doing administratively but we're more, we're not scrappy anymore. We're not that union that you know, kind of, I don't know.

VIVIAN: But you're bigger and you have more campaigns going.

KURT: That's right. More campaigns, more...we're just bigger. And that brings with it some good and some, you know, lots of good stuff. I still think we have the incredible organizing spirit and I think we have a belief in training and development of people. I don't think we lost any of that but you know, I didn't have an office with a window 20 years ago, where I had an office with no window. In the old Local 814.

VIVIAN: Oh yeah.

KURT: There were no windows in the whole building right? What was that side about?

VIVIAN: I know. Well, there were those long, skinny windows at the front. I go by there and it's still there.

KURT: I mean we had a guy that'd just go back. David Bush, remember? I know you know him pretty well.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: The homeless guy who was like our...

VIVIAN: The advocate.

KURT: Right. He was marching with us as well. He was asleep at our place. We used to get him out at the picket line. We'd bring anyone out to picket lines.

VIVIAN: Yeah. Yeah. So now with...

KURT: Oh I have a thing.

VIVIAN: Yeah?

KURT: The way it has touched people, I mean I hate to go back to Santa Monica but you know, it's amazing to this day like there are you know, Mike Biskar, you know who he is? He's a...you don't know him but he's a lead organizer. I wouldn't say that in a mean way but he's a lead organizer in Seattle, Vancouver area. He went to Santa Monica High school.

VIVIAN: Oh.

KURT: And became turned onto our union and...

VIVIAN: Really?

KURT: When we were organizing Santa Monica High school.

Vivian:

KURT: John Murphy's wife, Maria. Same story. I mean, she now is an organizer. She's no longer with us. She was with us for a long time. She works with nurses. But during the Doubletree [Hotel] fight, which we're going to win this year, 15 years later.

VIVIAN: We say that every year.

KURT: Now we're going to win it. And she...but it was remarkable what people, how people...and I guess that's a lesson. Like those hard fights, you see what people are made of.

VIVIAN: Yeah and you regenerate yourself, really, with new people.

KURT: I mean, Derek, who was an accountant, First Films, or something like that.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: Remember? And I don't know how you found him or who found him, or whatever. And now he's a political director for Local 11. Came out of the Santa Monica fight.

VIVIAN: Yeah. So, now with Raise L.A., I don't totally understand the details of that. I'm not sure anybody does actually but so do you think you're going to organize more hotels with that as kind of a structure or vehicle?

KURT: I think that I've always felt that the policy, not always but...my analysis is that policies, you know, in their best moment, again, if you need 100 points to win, maybe they give you 20 or 25. So, and they do it in ways that we never foresee sometimes. People think it's like you got to organize before the law goes in effect. I don't believe that at all because I think the employer always makes mistakes with the laws. Can't figure it out. Subcontract workers and not doesn't pay a living wage. There's always stuff we can do when we agitate workers.

Tony: I'm sorry to interrupt you guys, I have to change batteries really quick.

KURT: Ok.

Tony: Can we take a pause for a second?

KURT: Are we almost done?

VIVIAN: Yeah. Yeah.

KURT: Oh God, can you believe this...I like people listening to me.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: No one listens to me like this. Who was the only person listening to me like this? I was like really happy.

VIVIAN: What's your title now?

KURT: I don't really have a title. Well, Organizing Director for Local 11.

VIVIAN: I should've said what your title was in the beginning.

KURT: Yeah.

Danielle: You know we have a lot of, we have all the stuff that you talked about. So just so you know. Like we have a Darth Vader folder.

KURT: Yeah.

Danielle: We have a Ulysses Black folder. We have all of these things. We have the invoices for Cruz and Associates.

KURT: Oh good.

Danielle: We have all that stuff. And the story about Francis and you going after that guy. Like Francis took me on a house visit with him a couple of months ago.

VIVIAN: Oh really?

Danielle: It was the same story. It was the longshoreman, I forgot his name, at this hotel that you guys are working on now.

VIVIAN: The longshoreman?

Danielle: The longshoreman, they were trying to get to testify North. I don't know, the Shore Hotel.

KURT: Oh, the Shore Hotel, Shore, Shore. You know the Shore Hotel?

VIVIAN: Yes.

Danielle: Anyway, it seemed like a...

KURT: Similar.

Danielle: Similar situation.

VIVIAN: Those are crazy guys. With Raise L.A., has it kicked in already, for hotels over 500 rooms? Is that it?

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: Can I use your pen for just a second?

KURT: Over 300 rooms was 2015. For over one hundred and...I think we compromised at 125 or 150 is this July. So, the problem with the...I mean, I don't know if there's a problem.

VIVIAN: And what about smaller ones?

KURT: Yeah, so that, no. They'll be covered by the L.A. minimum wage.

VIVIAN: Nothing under 150?

KURT: The L.A. minimum wage, right.

VIVIAN: Ok.

Tony: I have to take a call, it's rolling. It's in frame so...

KURT: Ok. No problem.

VIVIAN: And it's \$15.37 [an hour]?

KURT: Correct.

KURT: So, Raise L.A., I mean, I think, you know, it's a useful tool for organizing and for raising wages, and decreasing the differences between the union and the non-union standard. But alone, it's not going to bring home, you know, these campaigns as we all know. I mean, we did a really good job of targeting, I think, in our union because we won a lot. And now, I know we did good targeting because the next level of targets are harder. Yeah. There are these things called "Real estate investment trust," which are very challenging corporations. But, so that, we're running into a lot of that right now. I mean, the other thing about Raise L.A. versus you know, Santa Monica, Century Blvd., and Long Beach, we didn't really have a geographic campaign that was part of that. We kind of...the organizing, we didn't do a good job.

VIVIAN: Which ones? Century...

KURT: So Century, we did a great job. Century was remarkable.

VIVIAN: And you did it in Long Beach?

KURT: So in Santa Monica, Century Boulevard, and Long Beach, we had very comprehensive campaigns of which policy, community, and political were part of it. And all three of those... so Raise L.A., we didn't do it that way.

VIVIAN: No.

KURT: It was, and for whatever reasons, it doesn't really matter. But for that reason I think, we have not gotten the kind of bounce. Because I feel like in all the other three places, it was part of this organic organizing, you know. Even though Santa Monica was in my view, the best. Century Boulevard was in some ways, better.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And then Long Beach in some ways was fascinating.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And a bit challenging.

VIVIAN: And huge.

KURT: And huge. That's right.

VIVIAN: I mean, big change.

KURT: That's right. Long beach is six times as big as...

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: Santa Monica so...

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: And Century Boulevard, we had three, was it three [hotel unionizing] campaigns go public the first time? I mean altogether.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I mean, no one has ever done that.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: I mean in a...I think, I'd love to see us do it again. That was also like, I feel like we got to get that stuff out. That's the part I don't think people understand outside of L.A. I just don't...

VIVIAN: Right. Well, you need...yeah, it's hard to do in a really big city. You need these, you need to break it down into geographical areas that have some here and...

KURT: Yeah.

VIVIAN: And the best is if they have their own city council. Because it then all feeds into...anyway. Well, this has been great. I mean, one of the amazing things about you, Kurt, is that you have so much fun doing this. I mean it's

KURT: There's a lot of agony.

VIVIAN: There's a lot of agony but...

KURT: We have to laugh.

VIVIAN: Yeah, but there's just, you seem to get a lot of joy out of this work and I think that's partly why people want to do it. You know, because you don't want to do something that's not fun or satisfying.

KURT: Right. It's always fun to see the boss in a little bit of trouble and when they make mistakes. And they also are like the best organizer, that's it. I mean, you know, the boss always can't help themselves but to mess up something. Make the workers angry about something. And it's our job to figure out how to agitate around that.

VIVIAN: Yeah.

KURT: Well yeah, this has been good talking about it. I think this is a great project.

VIVIAN: Thanks.

KURT: We've done a lot.

VIVIAN: Yeah, it has really been fun. Is there anything else you want to say for posterity?

KURT: Let's talk in ten years and see where we're at.

VIVIAN: Ten years. Yeah. I can't believe you're 50 years old.

KURT: Is that old or young?

VIVIAN: God.

KURT: Good thing is though I look, when I was 25, I looked like I was in my 40's, now I'm 50 and I kind of look 40.

VIVIAN: You always look the same.

KURT: That's right. So I'm feeling like it's a good time for me. I'm just peaking right now.

VIVIAN: Yeah. So I don't know how to...

Danielle: Well thank you Kurt, it was...

KURT: You're welcome.