SOMETIMES, when I was a boy, my grandfather would bring me with him to a back area of his butcher shop and let me watch him work. He had a cutting room with a long metal table, and he’d bring in beef sections and trim them using cobalt steel knives that were about a foot long. The shop specialized in all kinds of meats, which he ordered and cut himself, with help from my father. He used to get pigs and slaughter them and hang them in a big freezer in the back room and every year he’d go down to Maryland to buy turkeys, which he sold to people in the neighborhood around Thanksgiving. He would take me outside and show me how to chop their heads off. This made my grandmother furious, but he’d just laugh about it because it was nothing to him.

I had lots of opportunities to observe my grandfather’s work in the butcher trade, since my parents and I lived with him and my grandmother in a two-floor apartment above his meat shop at Park Avenue and Somerset Street in North Philadelphia. This was not too far from Baker Bowl, the old ballpark on Broad Street where the Philadelphia Phillies played then. I was born in that neighborhood on July 7, 1938, at Temple University Hospital, the first of eight children of Wendell W. Young Jr. and Gladys Brenner. Even after my parents bought their own house in another section of the city, I spent a lot of time at my grandparents’, running and playing on the side streets that abutted the avenue—Silver Street, Rush Street, Auburn Street—all of which were faced by two-story
brick row houses and were so compact you couldn’t fit more than one car down them.

My father stayed on helping at the butcher shop until 1940 when my brother Joe was born. I guess my dad figured he needed a better job, so he took one as a policy salesman at a local life insurance agency. That didn’t last long, because he got involved in a unionization drive and was fired. After that he went to the Philadelphia Naval Depot in Northeast Philadelphia doing heavy lifting on the supply trucks. He kept the job through World War II and moved the family to the city’s Mayfair section, to a row house on Longshore Avenue.

Mayfair was a predominantly Irish and German neighborhood, but you also had Polish, a few Italians, and a sizable Jewish community on the other side of Roosevelt Boulevard, the twelve-lane highway that connected this section to the rest of the city. Our neighborhood was entirely white. I don’t recall a single African American family who lived in the area at that time. It was also working class. On the block where I lived, there were firefighters, housepainters, men in the various building trades, bus drivers, machinists and mechanics, police officers, and a few who worked at a nearby municipal sewage treatment plant. Others had clerical jobs in downtown Philadelphia or with insurance firms, and they rode the elevated train every morning to get to their offices. It was not unusual for men to have two or even three jobs so that their wives didn’t have to work outside the home. My father only had one job, but my mother was a stay-at-home housewife. He wouldn’t think of her working.

The neighborhood we lived in was known as Mayfair, but if you asked me where I was from, I probably would have said St. Matt’s. This is because my family were congregants of St. Matthew’s Parish, which had a big stone church over on Cottman Avenue not far from where we lived. We were devout Catholics and our religion and the parish we belonged to played a big part of our identity. For Catholics, in Philadelphia and across the United States, the parish defined the boundaries of an urban world, the church being the hub around which most social activities were structured. Sunday masses were packed with everyone dressed in their best suit and tie or dress. Next to the church were the parish grade school and the convent and rectory where the priests and sisters lived. The religious who were in charge of these institutions were respected leaders of the
community, overseeing a whole range of social, athletic, and recreational programs. Catholics could be very insular, having their own schools and hospitals and a range of other organizations, all funded through money collected each week in church services or through annual charity appeals. To give a sense of the way many Catholics viewed the world, I wasn’t allowed to join the local Boy Scouts of America chapter because my father considered it too much of a Protestant organization.

When I was growing up, the head of the Philadelphia archdiocese was Cardinal Dennis Dougherty, a very conservative cleric who for over thirty years was one of the most powerful figures in the city. Dougherty was originally from Pennsylvania’s coal country, but, instead of going into the mines like his father, he studied to be a priest and was ordained in 1890. He rose quickly in the church leadership and in 1918, he was named archbishop in Philadelphia before he was elevated to the position of cardinal by Pope Pius XI a few years later. Until his death in 1951, Dougherty oversaw a period of growth, with the construction of dozens of schools, new churches, and other religious institutions built to serve an expanding Catholic population in the region. His views on the world were extremely conservative and antisecular. He was against the integration of Catholics into mainstream American society, refused to cocelebrate ecumenical religious services, was an enemy of the labor movement, and, in the 1930s, called on Catholics to boycott the movie industry until producers made efforts to purge sexual immorality and criminal activities from the screen. His power was considerable, as the archdiocese, which included all of Philadelphia and nine surrounding counties, represented just under a million Catholics.

If Cardinal Dougherty represented a more conservative side of the Catholic Church, many in my family held views that were aligned with what was considered a liberal one. My father had three sisters who joined religious orders that were very progressive, and they were influential in shaping our understandings of the world, and the role of the church in society. My Aunt Florence—whose religious name was Mother Mary Benedict—took vows with the Society of Roman Catholic Medical Missionaries and eventually became head of the American Province of the order. She graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1939 and joined the missionary sisters right away. After she earned a medical degree, she joined a hospital administration in East Bengali Province and was stationed in Dacca in the 1950s where she performed thousands of
surgeries and worked closely with the Holy Ghost Fathers opening hospitals in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. She was a trailblazer in so many ways and through my life remained one of my most important role models.

Along with my Aunt Florence, I had two other aunts who were also Catholic nuns. My Aunt Virginia—Sister Mary David—and my Aunt Jane, who went by the name of Sister Florence Marie, both took vows in the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament Order. This society was established in 1899 by Catherine Mary Drexel, a woman who was born into one of Philadelphia’s most affluent families, to minister to poor African American children and Native Americans. I met her numerous times when I was a little kid when my parents took me to visit my aunts in the order’s headquarters up in Cornwells Heights, just outside Northeast Philadelphia. She used to pat me on the head. Sister Mary David eventually ran Xavier University of Louisiana, the only Catholic historically black college in the nation, established by the order in New Orleans. All of my father’s sisters were dynamic women who had an important influence on me. They showed me that women could hold leadership positions and take on public responsibilities that made serious impacts on social conditions. Because of their example, I never understood any viewpoint that assumed women were not as capable as men. All of my aunts proved otherwise.

My uncle Henry S. McNulty, on my mother’s side, was a priest who was assistant rector at St. Matthew’s parish. Because of him, and my aunts, I felt that joining a religious order was something to aspire to. When I was a boy, I used to pretend to say mass in the basement of the house with my brother Joe, who was the second born beside me. We set up a table as a kind of altar, and my brother was the altar boy and I would mumble the words like I was speaking Latin. All the way up until college, I wanted to become a priest and a medical doctor to dedicate my life to working with the impoverished as my Aunt Florence had done.

Because of my aunts’ connections with the Medical Mission Sisters, and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, everyone in my family was very conscious of the wrongs of racial prejudice and committed to speaking out against it. My father had zero tolerance for any kind of racism. I always remember an incident that happened between my Uncle Henry and my dad. Sometimes, Henry and his sister Annie would take a bus to visit my family on Sunday afternoons for cookies and ice cream. One time during one of these visits when I was in the fifth grade, for some reason
Uncle Henry started making comments about black people. I don’t remember what he was saying, but he actually used the N-word. My father says, “Henry, get the hell out of my house. Nobody uses that word in my house.” He wasn’t joking. He made them get up and leave, and I think my uncle was a little shocked. Aunt Annie was all upset and crying all over the place. My father explained that he had two sisters who had committed their entire lives to educating minorities and another sister over in India working as a doctor. Later, all of us kids were talking upstairs in one of the bedrooms, saying, “Man, I’ll never use that word, ever. He threw Father Henry out of the house.” That left an indelible mark on us.

Uncle Henry didn’t come back to the house for about three weeks. Then, one Sunday, all of us children were upstairs looking out the window and we see Uncle Henry and Aunt Annie coming down the street. I remember we yelled, “Hey, here comes Father Henry!” My father said that he was no longer welcome in our house and gave us a big lecture again about why. But in came Uncle Henry and he says, “Could I speak to everybody? I want to say in front of all you, my family, that I was 100 percent wrong last time I was here. I am a Catholic priest, and I should not talk like that.” He apologized, and that impressed everybody. He and my father shook hands and I remember all of the kids were upstairs talking later, “See, Father Henry admitted he was wrong. Even a priest admits when he’s wrong.” So that was that; he made up with the family. I actually think that incident changed my uncle, because he became very outspoken for civil rights when he served as pastor of St. Columba’s parish in North Philadelphia, one of the largest in the city and with a sizable African American membership. I was very close to him, so much so that I took Henry as my confirmation name.

In 1952, my father took a job as an insurance salesman with Metropolitan Life, which had an office headquartered in the Sears Roebuck Building at Roosevelt Boulevard and Adams Avenue. This was a real step up for him, as he was making more money than he had as a laborer at the Philadelphia Naval Supply Depot, which allowed us to move to a house closer to his office in Philadelphia’s Northwood section. This new house was in St. Martin of Tours parish, which had one of the largest congregations in the archdiocese. That same year, I started at Northeast Catholic High School, a high school run by the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales which, at that time, had 2,500 students, all boys. I think the class of 1955 was the largest incoming class “North” ever had. The school was built to
hold around a thousand but they packed more than five times as many in there and we used to go through the corridors like cattle. We took pride in how big we were, though, and North was affectionately known as “the Big House”—the largest Catholic school in the nation, we believed, if not the world.

Northeast Catholic High School brought together boys from across Philadelphia’s Kensington section—the neighborhoods of Fishtown, Harrowgate, and Port Richmond as well as Bridesburg, Juniata, Northwood, and Frankford—all bastions of Philadelphia’s white working class. Out of the class of 1956—which had over one thousand boys, I think we had maybe two black kids. The atmosphere there was not so welcoming for anyone who was not white, and this came even from some of the faculty. When I was a junior, there was a priest named Father Joseph Dunn who started talking about black people in class. He said he knew why, when it came to sports, there were so few black quarterbacks or pitchers. He’s telling us it was biological, that black people have small brains and that they can’t think right, although some might be good athletes because they can run fast. I raised my hand and challenged him. I said, “Father, you’re not right on that because my aunts work with and teach black people and they are very smart, many of them go to college.” I wasn’t expecting what he did next. He came down and punched me on the right side of the face, giving me a swollen jaw and a big black eye.

I was afraid to tell my parents what happened, because priests were supposed to be right. When I told my mother, she said, “Boy, you better not tell your father. He’s going to be upset about that.” Later that night, I’m sitting at the dining room table with my whole family and my father sees my beat up face and says, “What happened to you?” I started to cry. I didn’t want to tell him; I didn’t want to rat on a priest. It was too big a problem for me to handle. After dinner, I went to do the dishes and he comes in, looks me right in the eye and says, “I know there’s more to this story than you’re telling and you better tell me the truth, because I’m going to find out.” I start crying again all over the place and blurted out what Father Dunn had done to me. I could see my father tighten his lips. “Are you kidding me?” he said. I could see him sitting there, the look of rage in his eyes. “Say that again, Wendell. Repeat that story one more time for me,” he said. I felt better after I told him the truth.

The next day, I went to school, but Father Dunn didn’t show up for class. They had a lay substitute in there. Dunn finally walks in, halfway
through the period, all blustered up. He said, “Will Mr. Young come up to the front of the class?” I went up, and he says, “I want to say something in front of all you students. I did something yesterday that was wrong, very wrong. I was telling you about black people, and how they aren’t as intelligent as white people, and I was wrong.” He went on and on and apologized, just like Father Henry had done. I knew damn well that my father must have come down and taken care of things. A few years later, I was a teacher at the same high school and Father John Tocik, the school’s principal, told me what had happened that day. Just as I suspected, my father went down and reamed the hell out of Father Dunn. He demanded that he make an apology not only to me but also to the entire class.

THAT SAME YEAR AS THE incident with Father Dunn, I got my first job as a clerk at an Acme supermarket at Adams and Whitaker Avenues, just a few blocks from where I lived. Since my mother did not drive, my father did the family’s weekly grocery shopping, and he had gotten to know the store manager, Al Weiss, pretty well. Al must have mentioned that he was looking to take on a few more part-time clerks, and my dad came home and told me about it. It wasn’t unusual for supermarkets to look to Catholic school students to fill their part-time positions because some managers believed that we were less likely to steal. It was September 1954, and I was put on working a few hours in the afternoons and on the weekends.

By the mid-1950s, Acme Markets was Philadelphia’s number one supermarket chain with over one hundred stores in the city and surrounding counties. If you included all of the warehousemen, truck drivers, and central office staff along with the store clerks, cashiers, and managers, Acme was one of the largest employers in the region. The company traced its roots back to 1891 when two Irish immigrants, Samuel Robinson and Robert H. Crawford, opened a modest establishment in South Philadelphia. The original store sold bulk items—flour, dry goods, grains in big barrels, molasses, hand-ground coffee, as well as canned vegetables and meats, which were just being introduced at the time. The business was purely cash based and built a reputation for affordable prices and quality customer service. In 1917, they merged with four other grocery stores to form the American Stores Company (ASCO), which soon became the largest chain grocery in the United States with shops in Pennsylvania,
southern New Jersey, northern Delaware, and Maryland. ASCO oversaw the production of much of its own merchandise, making over two million loaves of bread a week in a central bakery and owning a series of warehouses from which goods were distributed. By the mid-1930s, ASCO employed over sixteen thousand employees in more than two thousand stores.

Most of ASCO’s stores were small corner establishments with a couple of aisles where people shopped with a handcart. Up until that time, most people shopped for groceries at corner stores and proprietor-owned butcher shops, bakeries, and produce stands. Around the city, there were local stores like Frankford-Unity, as well as scores of independent neighborhood groceries, that continued to operate, but, by the early 1950s, supermarkets were becoming more popular. Eventually, the small ASCOs closed and the company transitioned entirely to supermarkets, changing its name to Acme Markets.

These larger stores were more convenient, since they allowed one-stop shopping for not only food items but also an assortment of household goods like light bulbs, soap, laundry detergent, aspirin, greeting cards, and paper cups and towels. Modern home appliances like electric refrigerators made once-a-week shopping trips possible (rather than the everyday stops to the store that had previously been the norm) since most meats, fish, and dairy could now be preserved over longer periods of time. More people had cars now as well, and the new markets were designed with parking lots, which also changed the shopping experience. Bulk purchasing of food and other goods by the stores allowed for cheaper prices and competition among a range of stores. Besides Acme Markets, which was the largest supermarket in the Philadelphia region, a range of other stores like A&P, Penn Fruit, and Food Fair Markets expanded. From the late 1940s on, these stores vied for the patronage of two million shoppers in Philadelphia and the surrounding counties.

Just before I started working there in 1954, the Acme Market at Adams and Whitaker Avenues had just been remodeled with a large parking lot and all the most up-to-date technologies. The store was run by Al Weiss, who like most of Acme’s general managers, had worked his way up to the position after starting out years earlier as a clerk. I don’t know if Al had a college degree or anything, but he had a basic knowledge of how to run a store. Managers had considerable say over what was stocked on the shelves, negotiating every day with the truck driver
salesmen, who delivered goods from various firms, over the quantity of soft drinks, produce, bread, and other goods they would buy for the store, and at what prices. To make a profit, managers were very frugal with how they ran the stores, since their potential end-of-year bonus equaled 1 percent of whatever the store’s annual volume was. (See Figure 1.1.)

About forty employees worked at the Adams Avenue Acme when I first came on in 1954. The store was divided up into departments: produce, dairy, fish, and meat, each with individual supervisors who reported to the general manager. Below these management positions, Acme Markets had two employee classifications—checkers, who ran the cash registers, and clerks, who unloaded the trucks when they arrived a couple days a week and who were in charge of shelving the merchandise. In those days, operating a cash register was a very complicated process. Everything was done manually, from reading the sticker on the sale item, memorizing prices, and weighing produce to punching in and tallying the sum. Most of the employees, both women and men, were eventually trained to work the registers, since the managers needed a flexible workforce in case there was a rush of customers. Along with the cashiers and
clerks, all Acme Markets had a maintenance crew, a few men who kept the store serviced, changing light bulbs, mopping the aisles, and doing most of the janitorial work. Each store also had a meat department and deli, which had about twenty butchers who cut beef, pork, and poultry and maintained the refrigerated display.

Strict gender lines marked the jobs in the supermarkets in this period. As a rule, journeymen clerks—the ones who stocked shelves and unloaded the trucks—were men. The only jobs women had in the stores were as cashiers in the checkout lines. Men were trained to do that work too, but they were usually called up to do so only when it was absolutely necessary. Women were forbidden from doing any shelving, unless it was the very light stock in the drug and medication aisle. They weren’t supposed to lift anything over thirty pounds. All stores had a room in the back where women could lie down, under the assumption that they would sometimes need to take a rest. All of the meat cutting and maintenance work was considered male as well.

The status women had in the supermarket industry in the 1950s was a reversal of what it had been during the war years. In the early 1940s, it was not unusual for women supervisors to run every aspect of food store operations. Some of the old-timers I worked with mentioned that their stores had women managers overseeing produce and meat departments, as well as women drivers on the delivery routes for some of the local bread and dairy firms. Just as the women who took up industrial production jobs, the women in retail had proven they could take on these kinds of responsibilities and perform as well as any man did. When the war was over, these stores returned to male oversight, and the women managers either left or went back behind the counters. By the mid-1950s, no supermarket advanced women as in-store managers; they wouldn’t even think of it. They would promote boys to these positions before they’d give it to a woman.

Because of the gender divisions in the stores, women got paid maybe four or five dollars less a week compared to the men. Full-time men made about sixty-five dollars a week, while the women behind the cash registers took home ten dollars less. This kind of disparity was a serious issue, since most of the women who worked in the stores did so not as a way to occupy their spare time but because of economic necessity. Some of the women were widows, and a few were divorced. Most of the women who had a full-time schedule were married and worked in order to combine
paychecks with their husbands since it was hard for families to make it on one paycheck. Many women who worked at Acme Markets had other jobs, too. A few worked across the street at Sears as clerical staff or as part-time sales ladies. I remember others were full-time nurses who took a few hours at the store each week to earn a little extra.

For many of the men and women I worked with, a supermarket job—even if it didn’t pay very much—was a better long-term employment strategy than working in the city’s industrial sector. You wouldn’t get rich doing it, but it was a regular paycheck. Although Philadelphia was still a major manufacturing center in the 1950s, thousands of factory jobs were beginning to slip away. The textile industry, which had always been one of the most important in the region, was decimated after World War II, in part because firms were relocating to the nonunion South. The typical full-time retail worker didn’t go to college. For some of the men in the stores, retail was better than construction since it was steady, yearlong employment and it didn’t demand any heavy lifting. I always said that nobody chooses to become a retail clerk as a profession; most come into it out of circumstances. If somebody’s mother or father died when they were young, it hampered their finances so they couldn’t go to college, and sometimes they wound up coming to work in a supermarket. Or they wind up taking a part-time job when they are a teenager and because they like their coworkers they decide to stay on and wind up moving up to deli manager, and next thing you know, it’s twenty years later. A lot of the people I worked with at the Adams Avenue Acme were like this.

Besides the men and women who worked the store full-time, every day, were the dozen or so part-timers—usually high school and college students—who were scheduled twenty hours a week or less and often worked as stock boys. This was where I fit in. To the full-time employees, the stock boys were at the bottom of the totem pole, but even though we weren’t as respected as the full-timers, the stores couldn’t function without us. I usually worked Friday nights and all-day Saturday. In those days it wasn’t unusual to work a ten-hour shift—divided up into two parts—a practice known as a split shift. I would be scheduled to come in the morning and would leave in the early afternoon and then return for a few hours in the evening. Almost everyone lived within walking distance of the stores they worked in, so they could come back. Most of us who had these split shifts didn’t like it, since it basically took up your whole day and didn’t give you enough time to do anything in the few hours you were
away from the store. Even full-time cashiers and clerks were sometimes scheduled for these split shifts, and they also disliked having to do it. Most just wanted to put their hours in and go home to be with their kids and family.

Just about everyone hired by Acme Markets knew how to work a cash register, in case the store got really busy and they needed people up front. That was the first thing Al Weiss taught me to do. In addition to this, they trained me to stock the shelves, and eventually I was responsible for the entire frozen foods section. I took a lot of pride in that. If I was walking along and saw something out of place, I always put it back where it should be, and I tried to have all of the items aligned. Sometimes the supervisors would tell me not to make such a project out of it.

Most of our customers walked to the store, bringing their shopping bags home with them in metal carts they wheeled behind them. Most families only had one car in those days and men would drive their wives to the stores and go in and shop with them, or wait out in the parking lot. After I had been there a few months, I knew the regular customers pretty well. There was an Irish lady, Mrs. Flaherty, who would bring her nine kids with her. I always felt sorry for her, and talked Mr. Weiss into selling her day-old bread and cake at a discount, since it was stale anyhow. One guy was always asking for cardboard boxes; I’d close down my stand and go in the back and get him some. Every Christmas, he would come in and give me a five-dollar bill, which in those days was a big deal. A boy named Tommy Spillane, a mentally challenged kid who lived across the boulevard, spent a lot of time hanging out in the store. A lot of supermarkets had someone like Tommy. He didn’t work there but would help bringing in the shopping carts from the parking lot, sweep up the front, shovel snow, or get workers some coffee. Tommy would follow me around and on occasion might help me set up the frozen food displays. Sometimes, Mr. Weiss might give him a quarter, but he would never think of hiring someone like him.

ONE DAY, AFTER THE FIRST few weeks I was at Acme Markets, Al Weiss called all of the new guys into the back room and told us to stand behind some stacks of toilet paper boxes. He told us not to come out until he said it was okay. None of us knew what was going on, but we did what he told us. One of the old-timers saw us standing there behind the
boxes, and he understood what was happening. He told us that Al was trying to keep us from joining the union. We didn’t know what he was talking about. Leo A. McKeever, the business agent of the Retail Clerks Union was in, making the rounds of the store. He was supposed to introduce himself to new members and get them to sign union membership cards. As soon as Mr. McKeever left, Al came back and told us it was okay to come out. “Listen kids,” he said, “the reason why I did this is I want to save you guys some money. I don’t think you should have to pay those union dues.” He told us we could still work there, even though the union didn’t know we were on the payroll. We thought he had done us a big favor.

That night, I was sitting around the dinner table with my family and everybody was talking about their day. I started bragging about how nice Mr. Weiss was, how he hid us behind the tissue boxes so we wouldn’t have to join the union. “There’s a union called the Retail Clerks and you have to pay dues. I’m not sure what it’s all about,” I said. My Dad was sitting at the head of the table listening to me and he spoke up and said that unions are good for people. He got out the phone book and looked up the Retail Clerks Union office. He got out a pencil and wrote down the address. “Tomorrow, after school is over, you’re going to go down to this office here and you’re going to join that union,” he said. He told me how when he had worked for the insurance firm, he got fired for trying to get a union in. “You go down and you join that union no matter what it costs.” After dinner was over, I called up some of the other new guys who had come in with me at Acme and convinced them to go down with me the next day. We met up and took a bus down to the Local 1357 office and joined.

Once I had joined up with the union, I was a little worried that I would get into trouble with Mr. Weiss. I must have mentioned this to my Dad, because the next time he went over to get his order filled, he called Al over to talk to him. You could see Al rolling his eyes. He said, “Okay, Mr. Young, but I was just trying to help the kids out.” I remember my Dad saying, “Well Al, this is going to help the kids. You are a good manager and the conditions with you are good, but you never know how long you’re going to be around, Al.” He gave him a big lecture about unions.

My father looked through the literature the union had given me and saw that there were membership meetings once a month. He told me he wanted me to attend. “You don’t just join something just to join it, you
participate,” he said. “You go down there and you get involved because you are a member of the union. I wish I could have been a member of a union, but I got fired.” I remember I absolutely didn’t want to go and started arguing with him about it—but it was a done deal. Again, I figured that instead of going down to these meetings on my own, I would convince some of the other part-timers to join me. It was around Thanksgiving 1954, and about five of us, all high school kids, went down to our first union general membership meeting at the ballroom of the Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, one of the fanciest in downtown Philadelphia. We got to the meeting, and, of course, there were all these old farts there. We really stood out. Everybody was looking at us funny. I’ll never forget, Henry Highland, Local 1357’s president came over to us and said, “Kids, what are you doing here?” We told him we were new members and wanted to see what happened at the meetings. “Well kids, welcome to the meeting. You better be good members,” he said and started laughing. Little did I know that only a few years later, I’d wind up defeating the guy to become president of the union.

Highland called the meeting to order and the very first thing he did was to have a motion from the floor to increase the union officers’ salaries an extra twenty-five dollars a week. In those days, that was a lot of money. As a part-time clerk, I was making just $1.10 an hour, and I thought the union officers were getting plenty already. I didn’t speak up, though. When I came home, my dad quizzed me on what went on and I told him about the pay increase. He told me that that was the kind of issue that I had a right to oppose as a member and that I should have spoken out, to let the people know I disagreed. I followed this advice at the next month’s meeting when there was a motion to spend several hundred dollars for an office Christmas party. My friends and I again felt this was too much money, and I told them what my father had said, that we had a right to oppose a measure we didn’t agree with. None of us stood up to speak against it, but when the vote was put to the membership, all five of the part-time high school students shouted “no!” President Highland looked up surprised and said, “What are you kids doing down there? What are you saying no for? This is something the office is going to do for the executive board.” We all sat there and didn’t say anything back. “Are you sure you want to vote no?” Highland asked.

“Yes, sir!” we said in unison.
I went home and told my dad about what happened at the meeting and he said it was a good thing that we did that. He said that sometimes you’ve got to get up and give a speech about why you are doing it. “Don’t ever be intimidated by people in power. Everybody puts his or her pants on one leg at a time,” he would tell me. I must have heard that speech from him a thousand times.