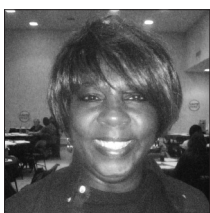




Worker Rights, Workers Write

Stories From SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana



SEIUHealthcare.
United for Quality Care

real**conditions**

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About SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana

With more than 85,000 members, SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana is the largest and fastest growing union of healthcare and child care workers in the Midwest. SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana was founded in 2008 as a voice for quality care and quality jobs for home care, health systems, nursing home and child care workers across two states. In 2009, SEIU HCII formed the Missouri and Kansas division of our local and became a voice for low-wage healthcare workers in those states. Together, the members of SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana and SEIU Missouri & Kansas are fighting to raise standards across industries, to strengthen the political voice for working people and for access to quality, affordable care for all families.



About the Community Writing Project/Real Conditions

The Community Writing Project offers writing workshops to people who ordinarily do not consider themselves to be writers and publishes their reflections on everyday life in the magazine Real Conditions. Because only the collective efforts of ordinary people can make a better world, we are particularly interested in the creative expressions and unique understandings of those who have been relegated to the margins of society, including the poor, the oppressed, immigrants, and those who risk their privilege to join them.

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About the UIC School of Public Health

The School of Public Health provides education and training on worker health and safety issues to unions, worker centers and community organizations locally and around the country. Our training programs aid organizations in building leadership skills through a model of peer education and training. UIC has had the honor of working with SEIU on several peer education projects to advance the health of their members, including protection against blood borne pathogens and pandemic flu prevention. We are pleased to continue our collaboration with the union and the Community Writing Project, which began in the spring of 2010.



The Writers

Jacquie Algee
Flora Johnson
Annette Jones
Bonita Rodriguez
Cornelia Sims

Introduction

The stories you are about to read were written by members of SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana who participated in a writing workshop in the spring of 2011. The workshop was sponsored by the union and facilitated by UIC School of Public Health in collaboration with the Community Writing Project. SEIU HCIL has been holding writing workshops for members since spring 2010. This publication represents the work of the third group of writers.

Writing group members meet once a week for four or five weeks. They share stories about their work, their families, their union. They write of obstacles and victories in bringing about change to improve the circumstances of their own lives and the lives of others. By writing, sharing, and publishing stories based on their experiences, participants have the opportunity to reflect together on their lives, recognize and celebrate the wisdom and creativity that reside within them, and make heard in the wider world the voices of people whose concerns and struggles don't receive enough attention or respect in American society. We invite you to share their sense of pride and accomplishment in facing life's challenges and wisdom from lessons learned.

Joe Zandoni & Marsha Love,
UIC School of Public Health Facilitators for the Community Writing Project

Jaquie Algee



Taking Action

Today we did an action on Boeing. They were chosen because of being one of the corporate giants who do not pay their fair share of taxes. As a matter of fact, Boeing owes \$1,400,000 in back taxes for 2010.

Now if that was a working class citizen behind in their taxes; guess what would happen? They would get harassed by the IRS, penalties and fees would be tacked on and possibly a garnishment against their pay.

What happens if it is corporate America? Nothing, they don't even get a slap on the hand. As a matter of fact, they get tax loopholes which enable them to avoid paying taxes while continuing to increase their profit.

Well, I would like to think that Boeing did not know or see us coming today. For you see there were organizers working behind the scenes planning this rally.

The rally included labor, mostly SEIU, community organizations and corporate watchdogs. There were five speakers, each giving their personal opinion about Boeing and them being the "tax dodgers" they are. All of the speakers spoke from different perspectives; including "corporacity" or corporate tax breaks and the need for America to have a fair tax system.

There was talk about jobs with good wages and the disgrace corporations have brought upon America. This was so passionately pointed out by a World War II veteran who practiced medicine for 45 years throughout the City of Chicago. When all the speakers were done we marched to the steps of the Boeing building to deliver an over-sized tax statement. We were met by four policemen who refuse to let us enter the building. The policewoman to us a Boeing representative said we did not have an appointment. When we asked could they deliver it for us, we were told no.

Now we know what to do the next time make an appointment.

Do you really think that is all it will take to get in the glass fortress called Boeing? Not really!

Flora Johnson



Door Knocking for the President

I was in Indiana going from house to house giving out flyers. Some people were not happy about this Black man running for President. Some people let their dogs out on us. Also they were very rude. But that didn't stop me from doing my job. I knew what I had to do to get this man elected President. I had to keep door knocking, giving out flyers, talking to people, no matter if they wanted to listen to what I had to say or not. I began to meet people that were nice, and I went back to some of the same people who did not welcome me the first time. They were in a different frame of mind. My mother always told us to be kind to everyone no matter if they are not nice to you. God loves all of us no matter what state of mind we are in.

This race was not given to the swift nor the strong, but we held out to the end and kept the faith in God that Senator Barack Obama would become the President of the United States of America. What a victory!

My Trip to Shelby, Mississippi

I went to Shelby Mississippi to attend my cousin's funeral on Saturday April 23, 2011. I left Chicago at 3 AM on Friday April 22nd. I rode in the van with my brother, nephew and two sisters. The travel to Shelby, Mississippi was a sad occasion.

You see, it is nine sisters and brothers of us. We all were there. We had a very good home going service for my cousin Rev. Johnnie Seaton. It was like a family reunion. We went on a memory lane tour. We visited the church where our mom and dad took us to worship. We also went to grade school at that church. Also my mom, dad, and grandfather are buried at that church. We went to the 180 acre homestead which we once owned.

Further up the road we visited with Clarence and Bessie Archie. They were very surprised and happy to see us. Their remarks were: "I thought you Seatons had forgot about us." Clarence showed us his garden and offered to give us some greens to bring back with us, but we didn't have any space for them.

My brother and nephew did all the driving to Shelby and back. We told them they were driving Miss Daisy and seniors. On our way back home we were in a bad rain storm. We thank God for keeping us safe there and back home.

Thank you Lord.

My Visit to Oprah's Show

My daughter Floretha took me to the Oprah show. It was very exciting. Oprah Winfrey is such a down to earth woman. When you look at her it's like looking in a mirror. You see so many different images. Each one is so incredible. She's caring. She's giving. Each one of her guests left with a \$1,000 Visa (gift card) to give to the "charity of your choice, not your cousin Bobo."

I gave \$500 to the Coalition for the Homeless and \$500 to the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO). I sat in her audience and just asked myself what kind of woman gives of herself to millions of people.

When she comes on stage, she's calm. She walks out, smiles, turns, looks around at her audience holding her shoes in her hands, saying, "I wear a size 11 shoe. There was a time I would not have told anyone what size shoe I wore." Oprah puts her shoes on, but after she sits on the stage with them on for about 15 minutes, she says, "They are tightening up. They feel like a fat 10 to me."

I want to tell everyone looking at Oprah on TV is fine, but nothing like being at her show and seeing her in person. We are going to miss you Oprah from being at Harpo Studio. I thank you Oprah for being who you are.

A special thanks to my daughter Floretha for taking me to see the show behind the scenes.

Member Leadership and Action Conference in Los Angeles, California March 25th-28th

We had classes on how to build a strong union, building support when we're communicating with the general public through our actions. We did actions on Bank of America and Chase Bank in California.

We had two busloads of SEIU members from Chicago and other states. We got their attention after we started chanting "We are fed up with the budget cuts and foreclosures. We won't take it anymore." We were dancing to the tune of "We Won't Take It Anymore." We left them with this message, "We will be back. We will be back."

We loaded the buses and went back to the hotel for more training on how to deal with the big banks and our allies. This was a very educational experience for me.

My Trip to Springfield

My trip to Springfield with Jaquie Algee and Paula who took a bus load of seniors to tell their stories about how they feel about the cuts.

Cutting funding for seniors

People with disabilities

Child care

Schools

We talked to State Reps. Will Burns, Ken Dunkin, and Barbara Flynn Curry. We asked them to stop the budget cuts please! Be concerned about the welfare of people. Put programs in place that will keep the budget from being cut.

Their response to me was, "You know we are with you in your struggle to keep the budget from being cut." That was the response from each one of the state reps. My response was, "We really need your support, just like you need our support when it's time for re-election. We are for each of you 100 per cent and hope the same applies to you and you will do all you can to stop the cuts."

A Tribute to Rose

Who worked so hard to get the writing group up and going. Rose never gives up. She keeps calling people to make sure they would come out on Monday nights.

As the time went by less and less people came.

Rose would always say, "Let's give it one more Monday." But it just didn't work.

I would like to say to you, "Rose, you did a wonderful job. You gave your all to this writing group."

R = Real

O= One of a kind

S= Someone you need to know

E= Electrifying woman

Annette Jones



Taking Care of People

When I woke up I needed something to do and taking care of myself was natural to me. At the age of nine I asked my mother if I could try to fix the entire Thanksgiving dinner. She said yes, she was in the bed, giving me instructions as to what to do, and I did it.

I started taking care of my little brothers, when I was around 10 years of age. My mother who was a single parent had to work, she was a self taught practical nurse, so that's why I had the job of taking care of my 2 brothers as well as myself.

So I guess that's my calling, taking care of people, my children, my mom, my aunts and uncles, and a lot of non-relatives. I do love taking care of people and I guess that is why I have been a caregiver for the past 17 years. I can't think of anything else I'd rather do, other than the work I do with my union. I guess one could say that's taking care of people too.

Bonita Rodriguez



Taking Care

Who would know when I took on a husband I would take on the responsibility of a sick mother-in-law?

I had never been familiar with schizophrenia. This was all new to me. I had to learn quickly the different attitudes and mood swings and how to deal with them. It was like having a sixth child with special needs. I had to literally take care of her like a child—bathe her, not because she couldn't, but because sometimes she just wouldn't.

I had to make sure she took her medication like a warden, because if you let her be responsible, she wouldn't take it. We could tell when that was, because she would have conversations with persons not there and would become really violent. If that got bad we would have to hospitalize her.



Cornelia Simms



You Must Go Find Your Own!

This past week one of my brothers came home to visit from Charlotte. He hasn't been home in about 10 years. He has a new baby girl which is now 3 years old. He has older children by his first wife, so she is basically home alone. She was so elated and amazed at the joy, let her tell it, of all the cousins that was here. She went home that Monday. Now she wants her dad to call all her cousins at night before she goes to bed, which at times can be a lot of phone calls!

You really don't know how important you are to someone else. She told everyone in her school and at the church about the many cousins, how some are big, little even know how to do grown up things like shopping, driving, crossing the street, etc. It was even so amazing that even her aunts and uncles she called Cousin #1 and Cousin #2.

She even asked her dad, "So where are our cousins?" He then pointed out his cousins and she replied, "Daddy, you can't have my cousins. You must go find your own."

She put all the pictures in her suitcase, and as my brother told it, rode all the way home showing him and her mom the pictures and told the story of every cousin. She had a good memory.

She knew everyone by their name. Aunts and uncles were no longer Cousin #1 and 2.

THANK YOU!

The Community Writing Project would like to thank Myra Glassman and Rose White for embracing the workshop, for creating a warm, welcoming environment for our meetings, and for their enthusiastic participation. Thanks also go to the Executive Board of SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana for their willingness to explore a new format for the workshop in order to expand its horizons. Special thanks to James Muhammad for his hard work in putting this edition of Real Conditions together!

