

We need the

Employee FREE CHOICE ACT NOW!

‘Mom, Don’t They Believe In Unions?’

Tammy Smolinsky is an AT&T service technician in St. Augustine, Fla. Knowing the value her parents and grandparents placed on union membership, she feels lucky to have a job with a union contract that provides a good income, benefits and protects her rights. This is her story, and why she is fighting for the Employee Free Choice Act to become law.

My father, a disabled Vietnam veteran, worked three jobs to support six children. I remember all my dad did was work, pass out from exhaustion, then back to work. It wasn’t until he started working for the Post Office, a union job, that he could he work just one job. He was also finally able to purchase his first home.

My mom was a hairdresser for most of her life, barely making minimum wage and never had benefits. Then at age 49, she started working on movie sets in California, as craft service. She worked long hard hours, but said it was worth it because once she accumulated so many hours she would be able to join the Actors Guild which meant better pay and benefits. But that never happened. One day, she complained of chest pain. She didn’t want to go to the hospital because she didn’t have insurance or sick pay. She died of a massive heart attack while loading her truck.

I am a jack-of-all-trades. I’ve been trained in culinary arts, painting and

decorating, as a cosmetologist, optometry specialist, pharmacy tech, bartender and gym instructor. I worked two or three jobs at a time through high school and in my early 20s. By, 26 I was working 75 to 90 hours a week — a doughnut shop in the morning, a country club where I waitressed and bartended during afternoon and some evenings, the same at another bar on other evenings. I also helped a friend in cleaning houses when ever I got a few hours off during week.



Tammy Smolinsky

My life changed one night at the bar when a coworker told me that AT&T Long Lines was opening a call center in my hometown, Cape Cod, Mass., with great pay and benefits — and a union. I got the job. My dad was so excited for me, He emphasized that the best part was that it was a union job, and that the great pay and benefits were because of the union.

After starting work, I found out about other benefits, such as money for school. It was the first time I had an opportunity to take college classes. I had my third child and for the first time, got maternity leave. I actually got to recover and enjoy my new baby. Shortly after going back to work, I began a full year of weekend classes that the union put on to prepare members for the technician’s test. I had no background in electronics and electricity or even in computers. I passed the test.

I applied for jobs all over the United

States and got offered one in Jacksonville, Fla., with a \$15,000 raise. I was nervous to leave my hometown but it was the opportunity of a lifetime. And the union there. CWA Local 3155 welcomed me like family.

Three years later, after a merger, I was laid off. But the union helped us from the minute the announcement was made, offering all sorts of training. Although I wound up once again working three jobs for a while, thanks to the union I had medical benefits for a year and still got my tuition paid, so I continued to go to school.

I finally got the call that again changed my life. A union job with Bell South (now AT&T) as a service technician. I realized all that the union had done for me and my family so I volunteered to help. First I was a steward for CWA Local 3110, then I got involved with organizing, benefits, the safety committee and political action. I appreciated all that I have because of the union and know that it’s because others — like my grandparents, who were union members — fought hard and made sacrifices.

My children have learned from listening to me. They see what having a union job has done for our lives. I was in a local convenience store on Christmas Day and I let the cashier know we appreciated the store being open and asked a few question about holiday pay and vacation pay. The cashier complained about poor pay and terrible benefits. As we walked out, my daughter asked me, “Mom, don’t they believe in unions?”