CHAPTER ONE

They called it "ballooning." Starting before dawn on that day in 1988, dozens of volunteers set off on foot with clusters of balloons trailing aloft. Others bound for distant places piled into vans carrying helium tanks and boxes of rubber balloons, inflating them as they went. At designated places they jumped out of the van and tied strings of balloons, two or three in a group, to any object to which a string could be tied. They tied them to railings, door handles, lamp posts, and shrubs, to metal stakes that held ropes strung around plots of newly planted grass, to the wrought iron bars on gates leading into Harvard Yard; even to the granite book lying open on John Harvard's granite knee on the pedestal in front of University Hall

Harvard University awoke that day to a startling sight. Hundreds of gaily colored balloons were bobbing on their tethers along city sidewalk: and everywhere on campus. Harvard Yard, a fenced-in area of twenty-two acres, might have been rigged for lighter-than-air flight—or decorated for a party. Either way, the effect was to lift spirits if not buildings, to lend a sense of ease and fun, perhaps even liberation, to an event of overwhelming importance, not for students (for this was not a student stunt), but for university workers who served the students. It was to be a festive occasion as the women leaders saw it, not a grim ritual capping a conflict. If the balloons also seemed to mock the stuffy solemnity of the men who laid down all the rules and made all the important decisions, and who knew them selves to be at the center of the universe—so be it. A little light-hearted mockery can be a civilizing force.

In springtime, dawn usually breaks hard and brilliant over Massachusetts Bay. In one great leap across the water, it is suddenly in Boston, splintering against skyscrapers and church spires, forming airy, interstitial shadows. It strikes sparks off the glistening Charles River, running between Boston and Cambridge. Two miles up the Charles, in the university area, racing shells slice through shreds of mist, the crews bending and pulling, bending and pulling. Joggers already are plying the paths on both sides of the river. Cyclists wearing crash helmets and backpacks whiz by, dark-goggled and tight-lipped. The pathways skirt the river, interrupted only by bridges and a few boathouses with wharfs slanting into the water. These are the recreation grounds of America's intellectual elite: students, teachers, researchers, poets, scientists, musicians, lawyers, medical experts, economic luminaries, Presidential advisers, and academics who know all there is to know about organizing human energies (most efficiently, most equitably) in the workplace—and earn huge fees by advising others how to do it.

This section of the Charles runs through one of the world's premier centers of learning and research. Boston University, with more than 25,000 students, stretches along city streets a few blocks south of the river. On the Cambridge side, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the nation's leading scientific and engineering school, sits in a clump of massive academic halls just beyond the Charles. Farther upstream and around a ninety-degree bend to the north, Harvard University straddles the Charles. Harvard Business School, the fountainhead of strategic studies for corporate management (and, consequently, the recipient of massive corporate beneficence), sits on the left bank. A bridge spanning the river here feeds directly into Cambridge's oldest street. Once a path into the wilderness north of Boston, it is now JFK St., named after an illustrious Harvard graduate. The university's academic buildings and residence halls occupy huge swatches of property extending more than a mile north of the river.

At the approximate center of this urban campus is Harvard Yard and the adjacent Harvard Square, both of which are historic landmarks of breathtaking age. Puritan farmers were pasturing cows here within a decade after the Mayflower landed at Plymouth. In 1636 the leaders of Massachusetts Colony chose a "cow yard" just north of the present-day Square as the site of a college which would become the first institution of higher learning in North America. Indeed, one historian calls it "North America's oldest non-governmental institution." The first class of thirty-one young ministerial students entered Harvard College in 1638.

Three hundred fifty years later, in 1988, Harvard University had about 16,900 undergraduate and graduate students and 1,700 faculty members. The old Harvard College, combined with the formerly all-women Radcliffe College, still formed the core of the university. There also were eleven professional and graduate schools, including the Schools of Medicine, Public Health, Law, and Business. An institution of immense prestige, wealth, and influence, Harvard University was ranked among the very finest private research universities in the world. It had played a major role in all great events in U.S. history, by supplying research and leaders in every field of public affairs and scholarship. Six presidents of the United States had graduated from Harvard, as well as thirty-three Nobel Laureates and innumerable diplomats, war heroes, and distinguished men (and, only recently, women) of letters Wall Street and the upper echelons of corporate America swarmed with people armed with MBAs from Harvard Business School. A very short list of Harvard's alumni includes Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Thoreau, Henry and William James, Henry Adams, and Franklin D. Roosevelt

Over the decades and centuries, Harvard had faced many adversities and challenges, ranging from financial crises and religious schisms to disputes over fundamental questions of curriculum and student discipline. Dishonest administrators and a variety of scandals occasionally had blackened its reputation. There had been student revolts, even riots on occasion. In modern times, charges of racial and sexual discrimination had forced Harvard to reform its admission and hiring policies. It had been criticized for engaging in government-funded research on military weaponry, for maintaining investments in racially segregated South Africa, for tearing down poor neighborhoods to build dormitories for its elite students.

Despite this buffeting about, Harvard not only had survived and prospered but also had served the nation and society with distinction. It had done so in large part by balancing the often competing demands and interests of students, faculty, administrators, governing boards, and alumni. Each of these constituent bodies had a formal voice in governing the university proportionate to its role. Even students had forced their way into the governance process as a result of the campus revolts of the sixties. But one group remained on the outside, a group that performed vital services yet had no voice, or standing, or recognition of any sort. This group consisted of about 3,500 employees comprising the university's "support staff," nonteaching assistants and technicians of all sorts.

On May 17, 1988, these forgotten workers—originally known as "servants" of the university—would finally find a voice they would vote

on whether they wanted to be represented by a union. For fourteen years the Harvard administration had vigorously opposed organizing efforts by this union. Twice before, in 1977 and 1981, the administration view had prevailed when workers in one section of the university voted against unionization. This time, however, the election would be university-wide, covering all support staff. Even in the long eventful history of Harvard this would be a dramatic occasion, the day when "servants" would give their collective opinion of the management of one of the world's most prestigious universities.

It would be a secret ballot election ordered and conducted by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). Thousands of such elections are run every year, but this one was different in several respects from most. In size it dwarfed all NLRB elections of recent years in the United States and for this reason had attracted national attention. But a much deeper significance lay in other areas.

The union seeking recognition had been formed by women who worked or had worked at the university. It was not a union sent in by a segment of the impersonal, dreaded, male-dominated force known as "organized labor"—which, according to popular belief, had plundered industrial America. Rather, it was a union that would control its own destiny, respecting Harvard as a great research and learning institution while not being blind to its weaknesses; a union made up mostly of women who demanded equality of treatment, the traditional feminist goal, without promoting hostility toward men in general; a union that did not denigrate management as a class but simply wanted to participate in managerial decisions that affected its members; a union that promised to be very different from typical American unions; a union that employed innovative techniques based on women's ways of establishing relationships and getting things done. It was that rarest of creatures in a society of self-serving interest groups—an organization of people banding together to improve and reform the institution that employed them.

They called themselves the Harvard Union of Clerical and Technical Workers (HUCTW). They worked as faculty secretaries, library and research assistants, laboratory technicians, financial and data entry clerks, alumni recordkeepers, telephone operators, general all-around "staff assistants," animal keepers at research centers, and morgue attendants at Harvard Medical School. HUCTW had existed for nearly two years as an independent union, a wandering stray, happy but poor. By 1988 it had acquired a union parent, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), a huge national organization with about

1.3 million members in state and local governments, hospitals, and similar institutions. But the Harvard union had grown to young adulthood in her own peculiar way, developing her own values and principles out of her own experience in a rough and sometimes harsh world. AFSCME, wisely, had not tried to lay down any laws of deportment for its adopted child, or try to change its values, or impose any standards. HUCTW was an unusual creature in the world of American labor: it had invented itself.

Kristine Rondeau, the lead organizer, had met with her staff until late on the night of May 16, 1988. For days and weeks they had devoted every waking hour to preparing for the election-phoning workers, holding information meetings, drawing up lists of employees and pruning them down to only the names of those expected to vote for the union. It was too late now to convert the unconverted.

Rondeau and her husband lived in a third-floor condominium just off Inman Square in Cambridge. She awoke at 4:30 A.M. on May 17. Instead of the usual faded jeans, she dressed in a blue skirt and a black, long-sleeved jersey with the slogan "It's Not Anti-Harvard to Be Pro-Union" in white letters across the front. In the evening she would have to appear before many people, either celebrating one of the best days in her life, or lamenting one of the worst. Either way a certain formality was called for. She was of average height, five-foot-three to five-foot-four, and had flaxen-colored hair which fell straight to her shoulders. She wore little makeup, but there was no need to accent her quarry-blue eyes. She had a rather wide mouth with lines rippling out from the corners to support a dramatic, flaring smile. She smiled much of the time as she talked. On May 17 Rondeau was a few weeks short of thirty-six.

At 5:30 A.M. Rondeau and her husband left home and drove toward Harvard Square. Like many working women who came of age during the seventies, she had kept her maiden name when she married James Braude. Even in the car he towered over her, being every bit of six-foot-five, with black hair and brown eyes. A lawyer and former union official, Braude now headed a political action group in Boston. Rondeau usually referred to him in the third person as "Jim Braude (Brow-dee)", grinning wryly as she said it, not letting him forget that when they met he was a rising star in a union that treated its women in a patronizing way.

It was a short drive. Within minutes they rounded a sharp curve which brought the Square and Harvard Yard into view. The Square was awash in balloons floating gaily above a news kiosk and subway entrance. Early daylight brought out the normal contrasting colors in the Yard: the deep red of Harvard brick with daubs of white window trim set against the green of old beech trees. Today, nips of yellow, pink, red, green, and blue intruded on the traditional Harvard tableau. The sight of the balloons, Braude later recalled, created a "joyous mood, a wonderful feeling, that entered your head and soul."

This was precisely what Rondeau and her friends intended. When an employer strenuously opposes a union, as Harvard had, the resulting tension and fear will stalk a worker's consciousness even as she marks her secret ballot. A festive atmosphere would help reduce this tension. As Rondeau would later put it, "The balloons said that Harvard's antiunion campaign hasn't worked, and we are not slinking off to the polls scared and nervous." For her, however, the possibility of losing a third time at Harvard was "scary." Usually the "scarier" the event, the more resolute she became.

They left the car in a parking garage and walked to Rondeau's office. It occupied the basement of an old brick building on Winthrop St. about two blocks from Harvard Square. Braude stayed outside. The office was his wife's domain. He was there merely as a volunteer directing other volunteers. More than a hundred unionists from around Boston had offered whatever help they could give. They were men for the most part, local officials of building trades and government unions, who regarded the HUCTW women and their balloons as an aberration of sorts. But somehow these women had forced Harvard University, one of the largest and most powerful employers in the Boston area, to submit to an election. It was one of the few signs that the "labor movement" still deserved to be called a movement.

At 6:00 A.M. Rondeau called her staff together for a final briefing. During three years of furious activity and little time for cleaning, their office had deteriorated from shabby to seedy, cluttered with donated desks and partly broken chairs, overflowing wastebaskets, piles of newspapers and assorted scraps of paper, old pizza boxes arid empty soda cans. There was no large meeting room, simply an open space known as "The Area Between Kris's Office and Ralph's Desk."

Staff members jammed against one another, sitting and standing in a rough circle. There were twenty-five full- and part-time staff organizers (eighteen women and seven men) and a few employee activists. Most were

under thirty, had college degrees, and had quit their jobs at Harvard to work for the union.

Standing on the edge of the circle, Rondeau went over election day strategy for the last time. The staff referred to it as "GO-TV," the pronounceable form of GOTV, which stood for Get Out the Vote Campaign. More accurately it was a Get Out Our Vote Campaign, for nobody wanted to bring out the "no union" vote. The organizers would go to their assigned areas on Harvard's several campuses and report back to headquarters the names of prounion workers who actually voted. Rondeau and her small group at "Command Central," working with a master list of potential prounion workers, could determine who needed to be reminded to cast their ballot.

It was an extraordinary staff, unknown to other unions or even in the parent AFSCME. They didn't fit the image of hard-shelled, out-of-the-factory labor organizers. But among these young people were some of the best organizers anywhere, not in a traditional sense of persuading workers to vote "yes" because they hate the boss and want more money To organize for HUCTW had a deeper meaning. It meant to teach people to have confidence in themselves, to take responsibility for changing their situation in life, to form a community so strong that nobody on the outside could chip away at individual self-confidence and frighten members into submission.

In the two previous elections, Rondeau had experienced the power of the university-as-employer when it set out to defeat the union. The first time, in 1977, she herself had been a Harvard employee. By the second election, in 1981, she had become a full-time union organizer. In both cases the union lost the election and both times she had seen first-hand the devastating results of an employer's ability to undermine workers' faith in themselves.

As she looked around the room, Rondeau realized that only three other staff members, all former Harvard employees who had been involved in previous elections, understood how difficult this day would be. They were Marie Manna, Rondeau's second-in-command, a thirtyish woman of impressive calmness who had taken a Harvard job just so she could help organize the union; Martha Robb, restless and forgetful, but a superb organizer; and Jeanne Lafferty, a flamboyant redhead with political roots in the antiwar movement of the Vietnam era. The three had worked with Rondeau for years and all had become close friends.

When she ended her short talk, a student activist passed out beepers, walkie-talkies, and a few cellular phones and explained how to use them.

The organizers frowned. They would be going into battle loaded down with equipment. But the success of GOTV depended on good communications between Command Central and organizers in the field. So they tucked the walkie-talkies and beepers in their bags and wished each other good luck and drifted out to their posts. Voting would begin at 7:15 A.M.

Rondeau retreated to her tiny office with a sliding glass door. Deep within herself, unacknowledged to anybody except Jim Braude, she had grave doubts about the union's chances. "The closer we got to the election, the more I thought it couldn't be done," Rondeau recalled. "After the 1981 defeat, I had become convinced that some things are unwinnable. I thought maybe Harvard was one of them."

The officers and deans of Harvard had entrusted the antiunion campaign to university lawyers and personnel managers. They, in turn, had done everything they could think of, legally, to encourage a "no union" vote by employees. But they had not thought to do this one final thing: to float opposing balloons on election day. When they arrived at their offices on the various campuses that morning, they were not amused. In Harvard Yard, the presence of those novelty-store playthings hovering about the statue of John Harvard—the obscure seventeenth century minister who gained immortality as the school's first donor—seemed demeaning, even irreverent. From a distance his sitting statue looked like a balloon vendor at a zoo. It was an unverifiable likeness of a man who died in 1636, leaving behind no portrait or death mask or other likeness, but a bequest of four hundred English pounds and a library of books to establish a college.

A university lawyer named Anne Taylor, who had been put in charge of antiunion strategy, was convinced that the campus decorations had poisoned the atmosphere. In a study later written by Harvard Professor David Kuechie, she described the scene on JFK St. outside the Kennedy School of Government: "Every single telephone pole, mailbox, parking meter, anything that didn't move, had a poster on it." The overwhelming presence of posters and balloons, it seemed to Taylor, sullied the "laboratory conditions" under which, the U.S. Supreme Court had said, a representation election must be conducted. She took the union behavior almost as a personal affront, for she had tried very hard to conduct a scrupulously correct campaign. She was no union-hating troglodyte but one who truly believed that workers would harm themselves by voting in the union.

Harvard President Derek Bok took a more benign view. He had been around Harvard, as president, dean of the Law School, and professor for nearly thirty years and had seen many a student demonstration. The pres-

ence of a few balloons was nothing compared to the angry protest marches and building takeovers of the late sixties. A university that taught reverence for the Bill of Rights could hardly condemn freedom of speech on its own campus, much less order its police force to go around deflating balloons. The battle with the union, however, had put him in an agonizing personal quandary, posing a conflict between his beliefs and what he regarded as his duty

Bok believed in the right of workers to form unions and engage in collective bargaining. He had taught labor law and had written approvingly of unions "in theory." As a scholar, he believed that it was "a good thing for America and for working people that employees have the opportunity to vote for a union." As a university president, Bok contended that the clerical and technical workers of Harvard should not have a union. A union would inhibit individual initiative and flexibility, which are "at the heart of the academic enterprise," he had said in a letter to employees. Bok had authorized the antiunion campaign but insisted that it not employ intimidating tactics. The question was, from the union's point of view, can a powerful employer not be intimidating when it calls employees into meetings and urges them to vote one way or another on an issue profoundly affecting their jobs? Administration officials, on the other hand, raised a question about union behavior on election day. How could employees not feel threatened by having to walk a gantlet of balloons on their way to polling places?

Except for the posters and balloons it was a typical spring day at the university. Endless streams of people flowed into Harvard Square, self-segregating there into three tributaries: Cambridgians descending into the T station bound for work in Boston; shoppers headed for the array of stores and coffee shops; and students, professors, and Harvard employees filtering through the many gates into Harvard Yard. In addition to thousands of students, the university attracted individuals of all descriptions—people on research grants, spending the day in one of thirteen libraries; people ensconced in various Harvard-related institutes, thinking for a living; and of course all the spouses and dependents of students and professors, pushing perambulators and sitting on benches in scattered small parks. There were always parents around at this time of year, strolling through the Yard, or standing transfixed in front of shop windows, as if to say, "No wonder she kept writing for spending money."

In the Yard, a large white banner with the words "STANDING WITH THE UNION, MAY 17 AND BEYOND" was draped across two or three windows on the third floor of Hollis Hall, a freshman dormitory. Most stu-

dents were aware of the election, though only a minority took a real interest in it. *The Harvard Crimson*, an independent student newspaper, had supported the union consistently over many years, but then student newspapers, as everybody knew, were notoriously, foolishly liberal.

Harvard University was a huge place. In Cambridge alone there were six separate campus areas, each big enough to hold a small college. At two major sites in Boston and scattered outposts elsewhere, university employees worked in some four hundred buildings. To accommodate all the workers eligible to vote in these locations, the NLRB had set up nine polling places. Board agents would conduct the balloting in the presence of management and union observers. Under NLRB rules, there could be no campaigning in the vicinity of voting areas. To avoid any appearance of misconduct, the union had ordered staff members to stay out of these buildings. They could ask workers if they had voted but not how they had voted.

Shortly after the polls opened, Joanna (Joie) Gelband had one of the nicest experiences of her life. A 1985 graduate of Vassar, she had worked as a faculty assistant at Harvard before joining the union drive in 1986. Since then she had organized scores of workers, chatting with them in their offices, or at lunch, or over a beer at the end of the day. But she had never met Margaret, who worked the night shift as a Harvard phone operator. For two years the two had chatted regularly on the phone, and Margaret had long since committed herself to the union. On election day, the two met for the first time when Margaret got off work.

"It was an enormously touching moment," Gelband said. "We were so delighted to see each other. I walked Margaret into the Yard and pointed her to her polling place in Boylston Hall. The Yard was full of balloons. She liked that."

At about the same time, Ellen DeGenova went to the offices of University Health Services (UHS) where she herself worked part-time and had organized several employees. The daughter of working-class parents, DeGenova wrote poetry and sang jazz, occasionally performing in public. She felt particularly close to an older woman named Gerry at UHS.

"She was so sweet," DeGenova said. "Her son had been killed while jogging, by a drunk driver. She had every reason not to bother with this thing. But she and another older woman listened to what I had to say and signed [membership] cards. I was so proud, I wanted to vote with Gerry."

As DeGenova left the UHS office with Gerry, two younger antiunion women watched suspiciously. DeGenova thought nothing of it. She and Gerry walked through the Yard to Boylston Hall and cast their ballots. "That made the day meaningful for me," she said. "Those younger women

later claimed that I coerced Gerry on the way over. What a crock! Actually, I was telling her that I'd love to own a piano."

Throughout the university hundreds of prounion employees worked from the inside to get out the vote. One was Donene Williams, a twenty-five-year-old graduate of California State University who had come east in 1987 to take a staff assistant job at Harvard Law School. Cheeky and irreverent, Williams quickly became a union activist and was not afraid to speak out. When Law School administrators held employee meetings to argue against the union, Williams and other activists wore their union buttons to show where they stood. The bosses glowered at them but didn't dare say anything, not in a university.

On May 17, Williams took a personal day off. Her assignment was to get out the vote on the third floor of Pound Hall on the law campus. Early that morning she and a co-worker drove to a hospital where her best friend, Kim Neeb, was recuperating from surgery. Her doctor had agreed to allow her out for an hour. The three went to the polling place in Pound Hall, accompanied by three other workers from their office.

"One of these women asked to come, and we knew she was anti-union," Williams said. "But we weren't going to say, 'No, Mary [a fictitious name], you can't go with us.' It was such a celebratory mood that day there was no reason to leave her out. I think my other friend Sharon [fictitious name] also voted 'no' but told us she voted 'yes' because she thought that's what we wanted to hear. She didn't have enough life experience to know that working women will not get a fair deal by working hard. We were twenty-four, twenty-five, our first or second job out of college. What did we know about anything? I thought I would get out of college and make $37,000 a year. At Harvard I was making less than $17,000." Williams took Kim Neeb, feeling "very weak and tired, but happy," back to her hospital room.

Back at Command Central, voting reports were beginning to pour in by mid-morning. Three or four staff members were constantly on the phone, taking calls from organizers and relaying voters' names to people at tote boards. These were large plywood panels holding computer lists of nearly two thousand Harvard employees thought to be prounion. Three markers checked off the names of those who had voted and kept a count.

One of the markers, Tom Canel, was a transplanted British subject who had graduated from Harvard with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and worked for the university as an accounting assistant. Near-sighted, a bit portly, and humorous, Canel had never paid much attention to sartorial matters. He wore items of clothing appallingly unsuited to each other or to

the weather. A few days before the election, Jeanne Lafferty and Martha Robb decided to do a Canel make-over. They "frog-marched" him to a number of clothing stores and made him buy new duds, including a good-looking shirt with white stripes on green. He wore that shirt on May 17.

Canel had a good grip on philosophy and mathematics but little control over the red, green, and black Magic Markers used to check off names. "I had more than one in my hand at all times," Canel recalled, "and by the end of the day, I was a particularly attractive color combination." His new green and white shirt had metamorphosed into a black and red sack with arms sticking out. People stopped by the tote boards just to get a glimpse of him.

Rondeau, meanwhile, paced back and forth between the tote boards and her office along the north wall. "Give me a count, please!" she would call to Canel. She would take the number to her office and try to reconcile it with other calculations. As the morning wore on, her concern mounted. The number of people recorded as voting was increasing at a much too slow pace. What more could be done?

"Get those people to call in," she would say to the phone handlers, and they would work through their lists of beeper numbers. A few times she went outside to do TV interviews or give a pep talk to the volunteers stationed in the Lutheran Church on Winthrop St. across from the union office. The union had rented the church basement for the day, and dozens of people were busily engaged there. Some inflated balloons from eight helium tanks, others set out and replenished a buffet lunch for all the staff and volunteers, and still others worked on more phones.

Jim Braude never stopped moving. In normal times, he talked fast and walked fast, but today he stirred up cyclonic whirls of dust as coordinator of the GOTV drive. He and two other union spouses, Martha Robb's husband Bob Metcalf and Marie Manna's husband Mac McCreight—all paid-up members of the HUCTW Ladies' Auxiliary—had taken the day off from their own jobs. McCreight worked on phones in the church basement, and Metcalf stood in the middle of Winthrop St. using a walkie-talkie to keep in touch with volunteers driving cars and vans. They had rented for the day two blocks of parking spaces on nearby JFK St. and, with the permission of friendly police, had sealed off Winthrop St. to other traffic. The quick response motor pool provided transport for prounion workers who lived or worked far from the polling places, or who needed a ride from doctors' offices or bus stations. Two or three vacationing workers flew in from far places, one even from the Bahamas, to vote on May 17. Braude arranged for them to be picked up at Logan Airport, driven to the polls, and deposited back at the airport in time for a flight out. He had a

physician on hand in case of illness and even a midwife. Two or three prounion workers were known to be pregnant and approaching term, though they would not give birth this day.

When Rondeau went outside and saw the frenetic activity, she had to laugh with delight. Back in the office, she grinned at the sight of multicolored Tom Canel. But her smile faded when he gave her the latest count. She kept thinking, "Could it really happen again?" They had learned so much from the first two defeats. But the chances of victory seemed again to be slipping away. It came down to this: The NLRB had certified about 3,400 workers as eligible to vote. More than 60 percent had signed cards saying they wanted an election. A 60 percent prounion vote would be quite comfortable, but Rondeau knew there had been slippage in the three months since she had filed the election petition. A good many prounion workers would have left Harvard for one reason or another (the university had a high turnover rate). Some would have changed their minds during the antiunion campaign; the weaker ones would have been "turned" just by hard looks from bosses.

In the week preceding the election, Rondeau had told her organizers to be ruthless in purging the prounion list of uncertain votes. By election day, 1,700 names remained on the list, slightly more than half of eligible voters. If all 1,700 actually voted as expected—more precisely, as hoped—HUCTW would win, but by the thinnest of margins.

Out in the field, staff members were getting worried by what they saw and heard. One of these was Bill Jaeger, a twenty-six-year-old Yale graduate who had joined the staff in 1985, even though the union, then independent, could pay no salary. Now he was making his rounds in the Divinity School area, reminding people to vote. He came across a young engaged couple who worked together in one office. They seemed upset and wanted to talk. "The man in particular had gone through a number of cycles of doubt and confidence," Jaeger said. "I could recognize by his expression that he was in the doubt cycle. They had heard a rumor that if you form a union, you have to go on strike. I talked it over calmly with them." The couple went to vote, but he never asked—and never knew—how they voted.

It was disturbing, but not surprising, that workers could be influenced by such rumors so late in the game. Jaeger, in fact, discovered that a number of employees on his list of prounion votes had not even come to work that day. "My gut feeling was, they stayed home because they were afraid," he said. "The big thing that freaked people out was why the university was against the union. Even when they discovered the employer

was being deceptive, that raised a new contradiction. 'My God, Harvard cares so much about this, they'll do anything.' That makes people not want to get out of bed."

Organizer Stephanie Tournas also had quit a Harvard job to join the union staff, without pay, in 1986. She had noticed in the week before the election that Harvard's campaign was having an effect on undecided workers. When she approached them, "the look was, 'Here she comes again!' I could see they were exhausted by contacts from the university and the union. Our job was to keep it happy and positive and dispel tension But it was getting very tense. That was exactly what the antiunion campaign was designed to do."

The tensions of election day exacted a toll on most of the staff organizers. "The atmosphere was incredibly charged," recalled Jana Hollingsworth. "We knew it was going to be really, really, really close, and we had to keep going back to people and asking if they'd voted. If you pushed them too much, they'd get angry." Bob Rush had been seeing faces in his sleep for nights on end, the faces of people he had organized. "It was like a slide show with a projector, just faces looking at me, one face at a time." Jeanne Lafferty, who worked with Tom Canel on the tote boards, had been through the two previous Harvard elections and was "reluctant to invest myself emotionally in the possibility of winning this time. I thought we were going to lose "

In late afternoon Rondeau saw that the prounion count was falling short, not by a few votes, but by a few hundred. The question was whether people were not voting, or whether the reporting system had missed them. Rondeau recalled, "I looked at the numbers and said, 'It's not there, do anything, get other people in to help with calls.' We pulled out all the stops. It was very high energy those last few hours."

Sue Dynarski, working on the phones, remembered those last minutes. "Only fifteen minutes left, and Kris got this desperate edge to her. She went into the hole [where the tote boards were] and started yelling out names from the lists. People would run to the phones and try to call the person."

A constant ringing of phones, people shouting, curses, cries of dismay. Field organizers, their work done, were trickling in, craning their necks into the tote-board area. There stood Tom Canel, a bedraggled mess of red and black Magic Marker.

Ralph Vetters, a Harvard graduate who joined the staff in 1986, returned to the office feeling ill. He was sure that three or four of "his people," older women, had turned against the union. They hadn't wanted to

talk to him. Standing in an alleyway outside the office, he burst into tears. "I cried openly," Vetters said. "I felt I could count on those women, but they must have thought, 'I can't put so much of my life on the line for this young man. I am twenty years older than he is. He's young enough to go some place, I'm going to be here.'" Vetters asked himself, 'Did I give them enough sense of security to allow them to take a leap in the dark?' Maybe I didn't."

Suddenly, it seemed, time was up. The polls closed a t 5:30 P.M. "A hush came over the room," Lafferty said. "It was like hitting a brick wall. We had been running as fast as we could and we hit that wall, and it was dead still. You want to do more, but you can't cross the line back into time."

She and Martha Robb pushed through the crowd and out into the alleyway to smoke cigarettes. They came upon Vetters. Robb hugged him, but neither of the women said, "Don't cry, Ralph." Both knew he had to cry. A few minutes later, Rondeau called the staff together. They jammed into The Area Between Kris's Office and Ralph's Desk. Some found a chair, some flopped exhausted on the floor. Rondeau told them they had done a "wonderful" job. But her face was grim. She held a piece of paper but didn't bother looking at it. Many staff members would recall her next words. "We don't have it," she said. Backing off slightly, she added, "It's too close to tell. But it's very likely we didn't win." She reminded them that the ballots would be counted that evening in Memorial Hall. Hundreds of people would be there, including workers, reporters, TV crews, and Harvard managers. "Whatever you do," she said, "don't cry in front of management and don't cry in front of the cameras." She tried to look at all their faces. "Whatever happens, we're going to be okay. We'll be together. We're going to keep working on this because it's the right thing to do."

The meeting broke up with a feeling of dread. People wandered off in small groups, some to eat, some to have a drink, some to break the news to their most loyal activists, before going to Memorial Hall.

Jim Braude and Manna's husband, Mac McCreight, joined their wives and walked in a foursome across the Yard. Rondeau kept thinking, "'What am I going to say if we lose? What are we going to do tomorrow? Should we try again?' I cared a huge amount about the life we had built together, and I wondered, 'Is this really impossible? How did I get into this?'"

Losing was such a wearisome business. She might have been better off if she had followed her initial impulse when a man named Ross came to see her twelve years ago.