MY JOURNEY WITH HELEN QUIRINI

I began my research paper with the simple topic of strong women in the Capital Region. My faculty sponsor, Dr. Laura Wittern-Keller, advised the Senior Research Seminar class to utilize local archives, specifically the New York State archives and the M.E. Grenander Archives hosted at the University at Albany. With accessibility in mind, I journeyed to the Grenander Archives and was advised by Supervisor Archivist Jodi Boyle to look at Helen Quirini’s collection. Once I found Helen, I knew I would have so much to share with the world.

Helen Quirini and her legacy takes up 50.89 cubic feet of the M.E. Grenander Archives with a wide range of topics, media types, and advocacy spanning her collection. I decided to dedicate my research to Quirini’s battle with McCarthyism in the United States because of her brave testimony to the Congressional Hearings investigating her labor union, United Electrical and Radio Workers of America (UERMWA) in Schenectady, New York. This web document, found on the UAlbany Library Database, drew me towards her life, and as I continued digging I found that it was not only Quirini that suffered at the hands of McCarthyism, but so many members of her union were targeted and black-mailed because of their affiliation with the UE.

I utilized the M.E. Grenander Archives and found a variety of primary source material to include in my research paper. Some of these materials were UERMWA propaganda that was sent between various Locals, articles mentioning Helen Quirini, and her own personal memoir. Perhaps the most important primary source was Quirini’s interview with UAlbany’s Dr. Gerald Zahavi, as this was a tell-all transcript in which Zahavi asked extremely pertinent questions while Quirini answered openly and honestly.

I needed secondary sources to understand the backdrop in which Helen Quirini lived. I relied heavily on Ellen Schrecker’s, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, for context on McCarthyism, as she is a distinguished author and cited reputable sources. During a PAWS appointment at the main library, I was introduced to Kannenberg’s article “The Impact of the Cold War on Women’s Trade Union Activism: The UE Experience,” which helped me understand the unions’ struggle from the female perspective. Another important article came from Dr. Gerald Zahavi, titled “Passionate Commitments: Race, Sex, and Communism at Schenectady General Electric, 1932-1954.” This secondary source overlapped perfectly with the
niche subject I was researching and even mentioned Helen Quirini in it. These secondary sources paired well with my primary sources, all of which are listed in a bibliography at the end of my attached paper.

Gathering necessary sources was significantly less difficult than I had anticipated. However, my first roadblock occurred when I had retrieved so much information on Helen Quirini, labor unions, and McCarthyism that I did not know what to do with it. I am extremely fortunate to have had a great faculty sponsor who helped me to further specify my thesis and encouraged the use of outlines for organization. Once this outline was done, I threw the information onto paper for a rough first draft. Now, I had the challenge of editing my paper for incorrect citations, formatting, and written language. Through this painstaking editing process I continued to draw vital conclusions on my research. While I put forward months of work and dedication towards my senior research paper, I know I could not have completed it without the tools of the UAlbany Libraries system and the faculty within it.